

Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

This collection of essays on Vaughan Williams, the first major body of new research on the composer to appear for many years, brings together leading British and American scholars and covers a wide range of topics and approaches, exploring musical language, cultural context, biography, manuscript sources, and reception history. Despite Vaughan Williams's seminal importance in British music, international stature as a symphonist, and wider significance as an icon of Englishness, very little new research on his life or music has been published since the mid-1960s. The ten essays presented here, some of which draw on sources that are either newly discovered or have never been discussed before, examine diverse subjects such as the place of Vaughan Williams in the construction of English national identity this century, the role of rhythm in his symphonies, music for propaganda films, and his unpublished early orchestral pieces; major works such as the Tallis Fantasia and the Fifth Symphony are analysed in depth.

Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS STUDIES

Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Vaughan Williams Studies

EDITED BY ALAIN FROGLEY



Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1996

First published 1996

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data applied for

ISBN 0 521 48031 0 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

SE

Contents

List of plates [viii]

Bibliographic abbreviations and score references [ix]

Preface [xi]

- 1 Constructing Englishness in music: national character and the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams [1]
ALAIN FROGLEY
 - 2 Coming of age: the earliest orchestral music of Ralph Vaughan Williams [23]
MICHAEL VAILLANCOURT
 - 3 Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy principle [47]
ANTHONY POPE
 - 4 Vaughan Williams, Germany, and the German tradition: a view from the letters [81]
HUGH COBBE
 - 5 Scripture, Church, and culture: biblical texts in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams [99]
BYRON ADAMS
 - 6 Vaughan Williams's folksong transcriptions: a case of idealization? [118]
JULIAN ONDERDONK
 - 7 Vaughan Williams and British wartime cinema [139]
JEFFREY RICHARDS
 - 8 Rhythm in the symphonies: a preliminary investigation [166]
LIONEL PIKE
 - 9 'Symphony in D major': models and mutations [187]
ARNOLD WHITTALL
 - 10 The place of the Eighth among Vaughan Williams's symphonies [213]
OLIVER NEIGHBOUR
- Index of Vaughan Williams's works cited* [234]
Index of names [237]

Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Plates

Plate 6.1 Vaughan Williams's transcription of 'Fare Thee Well';
British Library Add. MS 54190, f. 199^v [132]

Plate 6.2 Vaughan Williams's transcription of 'The Captain's
Apprentice'; British Library Add. MS 54191, f. 74^v [133]

Bibliographic abbreviations and score references

Throughout this book the core literature on Vaughan Williams is referred to using abbreviations as follow:

- Kennedy, *Works*: Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1980)
- Kennedy, *Catalogue*: Michael Kennedy, *Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- R. Vaughan Williams, *National Music*: Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, 2nd rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- R. Vaughan Williams and G. Holst, *Heirs*: Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, *Heirs and Rebels: Letters Written to Each Other and Occasional Writings on Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst*, ed. Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)
- U. Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*: Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)

The two volumes by Michael Kennedy represent a subdivision and revision of the author's original one-volume study *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). *National Music and Other Essays* remains the most accessible source of writings by the composer; citing it poses several problems of chronology, however, as the collection constitutes a volume of selected (certainly not complete) writings spanning some fifty years, some of which have been reprinted a number of times, some of which appear, in the 1987 edition, for the first time outside the organs that originally published them. References to individual essays will include the original date and other details of publication where

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS AND SCORE REFERENCES

specifically relevant to the matter at hand; this information can also be found in Peter Starbuck's 'Bibliography of the Literary Writings of Ralph Vaughan Williams' that appears in Kennedy's 1964 volume, and, in slightly expanded form, in Kennedy, *Catalogue*.

Dates of composition and first performance are taken from Kennedy, *Catalogue*, unless otherwise stated. References to specific passages in Vaughan Williams scores use bar numbers for shorter pieces such as songs, and subdivided rehearsal numbers or letters for longer works such as the symphonies, e.g. '4.1' is equivalent to 'the bar at Figure 4', '4.2' two bars after Figure 4, 'C.7' seven bars after Letter C and so on; note, however, that the bars *before the first rehearsal number/letter* are referred to by bar numbers alone, e.g. 'bars 1-6'. References to works by earlier composers such as Mozart and Brahms use bar numbers.

Preface

Vaughan Williams is universally acknowledged as a seminal figure in the development of British music and in the history of musical nationalism. He is recognized as an orchestral composer of international stature. His music has a wide appeal; in this corner of the USA, hardly a day goes by without the local public radio station broadcasting one or more of his works. In broad terms of cultural identity, his music and person have played a significant role in defining one particularly influential version of what it means to be English. Yet when I first began Vaughan Williams research some ten years ago, the possibility of bringing together a book of this kind seemed to belong strictly to the realms of futuristic fantasy. With barely a handful of exceptions,¹ no substantial writing on Vaughan Williams had appeared in print since the authorized life and works volumes were published in the mid-1960s,² a few years after the composer's death. In the academic sector there was a clutch of American masters' dissertations, and a few British counterparts, but not a single Ph.D. on either side of the Atlantic. Precious little work seemed to be in progress. Remarkably, what research there was

- ¹ Most notably Hugh Ottaway's brief but perceptive *Vaughan Williams Symphonies*, BBC Music Guides (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), and the same author's entry on Vaughan Williams for the *New Grove* (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1980), vol. XIX, pp. 569–80). The only substantial monograph to appear during this period was, somewhat ironically, in German – Lutz-Werner Hesse's *Studien zum Schaffen des Komponisten Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung 134 (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1983). Despite their critical acumen, none of these writings involved significant new research into musical or biographical sources or background. The only major contributions of this kind dealt with the composer's folksong collecting; see Roy Palmer, ed., *Folksongs Collected By Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: J. M. Dent and sons, 1983), and Rosamund Strode's cataloguing work discussed in Chapter 6, n. 7 of the present volume.
- ² Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

PREFACE

had left the enormous autograph manuscript collection in the British Library virtually untouched. Even the record catalogue was dominated by material from the 1960s and early 1970s. I received much encouragement in my work, and many clearly felt that it was time for a reappraisal of Vaughan Williams – but the harvest was potentially huge and the workers very few.

A decade on, the landscape looks markedly different. With that curious synchronicity that seems so often to characterize cultural phenomena, around the mid-1980s a fresh interest in Vaughan Williams research and performance began to emerge independently from a variety of different directions, a movement which gathered pace in the first half of the 1990s. One important practical stimulus was the establishment in 1985 of a fellowship, offered by the Carthusian Trust and Charterhouse School, which enables American and Canadian scholars to spend time in Britain working on Vaughan Williams projects. Two contributors to this volume, Byron Adams and Julian Onderdonk, are former holders of the award (Byron Adams was the very first), and it continues to facilitate a steady flow of new research. The boom in the recording industry that followed the advent of the compact disc, which has made accessible so many neglected areas of repertoire, has paid handsome dividends for Vaughan Williams (although much remains to be done in this area). Works such as *Hugh the Drover* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* have re-entered the catalogue with both old and new recordings, several new cycles of the symphonies have been recorded, and examples of traditionally ephemeral genres such as film scores and radio incidental music have found a home on disc.³ Several new books have appeared, including Wilfrid Mellers's major study and a Garland Research Guide devoted to Vaughan Williams, and more are set to appear.⁴

³ Naxos have recently begun a large-scale recording project involving Vaughan Williams's film music. In the realm of orchestral works, the advocacy of conductors from outside Britain, particularly Leonard Slatkin, Bernard Haitink, and Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, has been a particularly significant development.

⁴ Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989); Neil Butterworth, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1990). Butterworth's guide is useful in many respects but has severe shortcomings: see my review in *Music and Letters*, 72 (1991), pp. 308–10. At the time of writing, a similar guide, by Alison McFarland, is shortly to be published by Scolar Press; also in preparation are a new book on the symphonies by Lionel Pike and a monograph on the sketches for the Ninth Symphony by the present author.

PREFACE

Significantly, important work relating to primary sources is in progress or at the planning stage, including Hugh Cobbe's edition of the composer's correspondence, and a critical edition of selected works, some previously unpublished.

But it would be premature to interpret such positive signs as a fully fledged revival, and important questions remain; above all, why the long neglect, and why the current thaw? While the full answers to such questions, if recoverable at all, are bound to be complex, I believe that certain elements in the equation can now be identified with relative confidence, and that they are symptomatic of forces that go well beyond the reception of this particular composer. One central factor in the rise and fall of Vaughan Williams's critical fortunes has been his co-option to the narrow image of English national identity – parochial, pastoral, and emotionally reticent, if not repressed – that predominated for so much of this century (I shall have more to say on this in my chapter below). But international trends have also been influential, and here recent developments have proved particularly favourable to Vaughan Williams. The last decade has seen an extraordinary breakdown of musical and musicological hegemonomies, paralleled, of course, by a comparable fragmentation of established models of authority in society at large. In the area of 'serious' music, one of the most striking developments has been the final dethroning of the idea (already much weakened by the rise of minimalism and neo-romanticism in the 1970s), that avant-garde modernism is ultimately the highest path to which new music can aspire, and of the historical scaffolding that went with that, namely, a master-narrative of musical evolution centred on the Stravinsky – Schoenberg axis. This narrative marginalized a whole host of composers and national traditions, especially those maintaining an explicit allegiance to a traditional conception of tonality, however broadly conceived: its erosion has led to a reassessment of many different composers, both living and dead, whose work was deemed unacceptably reactionary in the 1960s and 70s, ranging from Franz Schreker and Erich Korngold to Howard Hanson and Jonathan Lloyd. And as younger figures such as John Adams and John Tavener have begun to exploit tonal harmony, memorable melodic materials, and opulent orchestral sounds with fresh confidence, and even Pierre Boulez, the doyen of post-war modernism, begins to re-admit tonal elements into his

PREFACE

music,⁵ so the map of earlier twentieth-century music has begun to take on different perspectives. Furthermore, as the boundaries of serious and popular music have become more and more blurred, and the label of 'accessible' has ceased necessarily to be a stigma for the contemporary composer, so the stars of figures such as Copland and Vaughan Williams have begun to rise again. As with the break-up of the Soviet bloc, not all the results of this fragmented pluralism have been welcome, and the driving forces have sometimes seemed more commercial than artistic, not least in the crude stylistic pigeon-holing so beloved of marketing executives. Nevertheless, we have surely been hearing in the last few years a far wider range of composers than ever before, and of musical styles and philosophies.

The world of musical scholarship has both reflected and helped to shape these trends, not least by reflexively examining the biases enshrined in its own apparently disinterested narratives of music history. But perhaps the most important development has been a widespread re-engagement with a theme on which Vaughan Williams preached throughout his long life: the impossibility of separating music from people, the necessity of relating music to the social conditions in which it arises.⁶ True, he would no doubt have been out of sympathy with some of the directions research of this kind has recently taken. Yet current preoccupations with the idea of music as a language of social signification, with cultural history, issues of reception, and the roles of gender, race, and nationality in shaping discourse about music, have set the stage for a reappraisal of Vaughan Williams that goes well beyond a simple revival of scholarly interest and an increase in the number of performances and CDs. Simply put, there now exists the right climate in which to grapple head-on with the neglect of recent decades, and to attempt to understand this in a wider cultural context:

- ⁵ See, for instance, Gavin Thomas's discussion of the apparent softening of Boulez's attitudes in 'Work Not in Progress', *The Musical Times*, 136, no. 1827 (May 1995), pp. 225–9. It is worth noting also that a conception of rhythm more traditionalist than Boulez had previously allowed himself to embrace surfaced earlier in the decade at important points of *Répons*.
- ⁶ For a useful introduction to recent thinking in this area see Philip V. Bohlman, 'Viewpoint: On the Unremarkable in Music', *19th-Century Music*, 16 (1992), pp. 203–16; Bohlman's essay was part of a special issue of this journal entitled 'Music in its Social Contexts'.

P R E F A C E

however complex the phenomenon may be, it is no accident. As I shall argue in the opening chapter of this volume, Vaughan Williams's reputation has been distorted – at times blighted – not only by the international musical politics of this century, but to an even greater degree by the special ideological tensions of Britain's long decline as a world power; developments both in musicology and in the humanities as a whole place us in a better position than ever before to understand this phenomenon. And the central issues involved remain with us still, both in responses to Vaughan Williams and well beyond, as Britain agonizes over its relationship to the rest of Europe, and across the globe questions of cultural identity become ever more explosive. Indeed, Vaughan Williams offers an unusually rich field of study for anyone interested in the place of art in the politics of national identity, and the complex interplay between the individual artist and the community in which he or she works.

In planning the present volume, then, it seemed important that the nationalism 'problem' be analysed rather than merely set aside, and that questions of social and cultural context be given detailed attention. In addition to my own contribution, four other chapters deal in one way or another with such issues, but all from very different angles. Jeffrey Richards brings his expertise in film history and the shaping of a British national self-image to bear on Vaughan Williams's contribution to wartime propaganda films. Drawing on the composer's letters, Hugh Cobbe examines Vaughan Williams's attitudes to the German musical tradition, the benchmark against which every composer of his generation had to define him- or herself. Julian Onderdonk examines the assumptions underlying Vaughan Williams's folksong collecting, a crucial element in the composer's vision of his own musical heritage, and reveals how these informed the most minute issues of transcription. Byron Adams traces the development of Vaughan Williams's spiritual outlook, and the manner in which this intertwined with his nationalist concerns, from the perspective of the intellectual milieu in which the composer grew up.

Yet giving due weight to reception history and contemporary contexts should not divert us from advancing our understanding of Vaughan Williams's works in terms of more intra-musical concerns. One may well argue that detailed musical analysis should ultimately be grounded in historical and social context; but the argument can also be turned around the

PREFACE

other way, that context is of scant use without a sophisticated understanding of text. Vaughan Williams's music has received little close analysis of any sort. This has undoubtedly fuelled the dogged persistence of fundamental misconceptions: indeed, some of the critical clichés that have grown up around the composer cannot stand the test of even a rudimentary examination of his scores. Here again the time is opportune. The methodologies that came to dominate music analysis in the 1960s and 70s, in particular the strict application of Schenkerian methods and of set theory, were ill suited to music that diverged from the norms of tonal practice up to Brahms, but which did not espouse full-blown atonality. The more pluralistic climate that has characterized music theory during the last few years has brought an interest in extending existing methods, and in developing new ones, to embrace the large amount of music from Debussy to Reich that treats tonal materials in non-traditional ways; and also in paying close attention to parameters other than pitch relations. Such developments are reflected in the three analytical contributions to *Vaughan Williams Studies*, all of which break important ground for future work in this area. Anthony Pople adopts a variety of different approaches, as well as evidence from the autograph manuscript, in his study of Vaughan Williams's first undoubted masterpiece, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. Lionel Pike concentrates on the composer's use of rhythm, that Cinderella of the musical elements, as a structural force in three of the symphonies. Tonality is back centre-stage in Arnold Whittall's essay on the Fifth Symphony, but as a problematic element whose instability seems inevitably to throw open the extra-musical dimension, and the question of meaning in instrumental music.

This last topic stands at the centre of Oliver Neighbour's panoramic essay, in which Vaughan Williams's far-reaching growth as a symphonist, and with it his philosophy of musical expression, is reassessed as a backdrop to the specific case of the Eighth, the composer's penultimate work in the genre. At the other end of the composer's career, Michael Vaillancourt examines Vaughan Williams's early formation as a composer of orchestral music, surveying the important legacy of substantial and largely unpublished orchestral works that preceded the composer's first symphony. This is one of a number of essays that draws heavily on the collection of the composer's autograph scores and sketches now in the British Library, and it serves as a vivid reminder of just how much basic research remains to be

Cambridge University Press
0521480310 - Vaughan Williams Studies
Edited by Alain Frogley
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

P R E F A C E

done on many areas of the composer's life and music, and on the surviving sources of his work – this despite the pioneering and invaluable efforts of Michael Kennedy and Ursula Vaughan Williams. And, along with Jeffrey Richards's account of the film music and with a number of other essays here, Vaillancourt's study underlines both the size and variety of Vaughan Williams's extraordinary output. In many ways, the work of Vaughan Williams research has only just begun.

Many people have helped to make this book possible. My thanks go in particular to Penny Souster, Oliver Neighbour, and Stephen Banfield for encouragement and advice, especially in the initial planning stages; to colleagues at Lancaster University and latterly the University of Connecticut; to the staff of the British Library; to the University of Connecticut Research Foundation, which awarded me a summer fellowship to work on the project and funded a research assistant; and to Sean Flanagan, who assisted so ably on many fronts, and well beyond the call of duty. Thanks are due also to Oxford University Press for allowing quotation from Vaughan Williams's published music and writings; and to Ursula Vaughan Williams for permission to quote and reproduce extracts from the composer's manuscripts – a gesture entirely characteristic of the generosity that Mrs Vaughan Williams has shown over many years to countless admirers of her husband's music, from specialist scholar to enthusiastic amateur.

Alain Frogley
Storrs, Connecticut, September 1995