

# Vaughan Williams

Fantasia on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune

The Lark Ascending

Piano Quintet in C minor

Romance for viola and piano



Mark Bebbington piano  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Hilary Davan Wetton conductor

Duncan Riddell violin  
Abigail Fenna viola  
City of London Choir

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Piano Quintet, The Lark Ascending  
Romance for viola and piano &  
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**Piano Quintet in C minor**

- |                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Allegro con fuoco           | [9:09] |
| 2. Andante                     | [9:50] |
| 3. Fantasia (quasi variazioni) | [9:48] |

4. <b>The Lark Ascending</b>	[13:21]
for solo violin and piano (original version of 1914)	

5. <b>Romance for viola and piano</b>	[7:13]
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6. <b>Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune</b>	[15:32]
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Total playing time	[64:56]
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**Ralph Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune, Piano Quintet in C minor, The Lark Ascending, Romance for viola and piano**

Between 1904 and 1906, Vaughan Williams worked as the musical editor for the English Hymnal, first published in 1906, and several of the tunes he included in this hymn book were to provide inspiration for his own works. Among its first significant creative outcomes was the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* which took Tallis's 'Third Mode Melody' (No. 92) as its main theme. The tune 'York', in the harmonisation by John Milton (father of the poet), formed the opening of his 1906 masque, 1943 radio score and 1951 'morality' all based on John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Another English Hymnal tune, Thomas Ravenscroft's 'Old 104th' (No. 178: 'Disposer supreme, and judge of the earth') had first appeared in Ravenscroft's revised 1621 edition of Sternhold and Hopkins's *Whole Booke of Psalms* as the musical setting for Psalm 104, 'My soul praise the Lord / Speak good of his name'. Vaughan Williams selected verses from the Psalm for the text for his **Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune**. It was completed in 1949 and a private performance (with string quartet and piano accompaniment) was given on 20 November 1949 at Vaughan Williams's home in Dorking. The

finished work in its full orchestral form had its premiere in Gloucester Cathedral on 6 September 1950, with Michael Mullinar as the solo pianist and Vaughan Williams conducting the London Symphony Orchestra and Three Choirs Festival Chorus. Just over a week later, on 15 September, it was performed for the first time in London, at the Proms, with Mullinar again the soloist, the Royal Choral Society and BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. Reviewing the Gloucester performance, the unnamed *Times* critic (Frank Howes) wrote:

Dr Vaughan Williams conducted the first performance of his new work composed for the festival. This was a Fantasia on the 'Old 104th' Psalm tune for piano, chorus, and orchestra in a form for which the only precedent is the Fantasia in which Beethoven anticipated his own Choral Symphony. Here we have a splendid paean in the form of variations on a noble tune from Ravenscroft's Metrical Psalter in which the choir is represented as an accompaniment of the solo piano. But some lack of balance in the performance caused the piano part to be submerged in the choral variations and the logic of the piano writing from one variation to the next thus to be obscured.

One reason for the balance problems may have been the resonant acoustics of Gloucester Cathedral, but Howes's comparison of the *Fantasia on the Old 104th* with Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* is a reminder of just how unusual this combination of instruments and voices is: Howes could have mentioned the choral finales of the piano concertos by Busoni and Alan Bush, or even Constant Lambert's *Rio Grande*, but works for piano, chorus and orchestra remain few and far between.

The *Fantasia* comprises three solo piano cadenzas alternating with variations for piano, chorus and orchestra. During the first cadenza, Ravenscroft's tune emerges gradually from some rather Lisztian figuration before a fully harmonised statement of it leads to the entry of the chorus, singing the first verse of the Psalm with a decorated version of the tune. The second cadenza shifts from the triple time version of the melody to a reworking of it in 4/4 time, taken up by the chorus in unison for the second verse of the Psalm ('With light as a robe'). This gives way to the next verse ('How sundry, O Lord') where Vaughan Williams treats the tune in fugue-like imitation. After another piano cadenza, a broad unison version of the tune ('To this Lord and God') eventually leads to a modulation into D major

and the resplendent coda ('Praise ye the Lord's name') in which choir, orchestra and piano end the work with triumphant 'Amens'.

But there is more to the *Fantasia* than this brief outline of its structure might suggest. While the choral passages offer a 'public' and ultimately celebratory presentation of the tune, in the solo piano cadenzas, we find something richer and darker: intimate musical soliloquies that explore the melody in ways that are more questioning. Perhaps it is far-fetched to suggest that these solo passages express something of Vaughan Williams's well-documented agnosticism, but the result is a work of fascinating ambiguity – an absorbing mixture of uncertainty and assurance. That, coupled with the unusual scoring of the work, reflects the innovative aspects of Vaughan Williams's music from the last decade of his life. This found expression in several different ways: works for unusual solo instruments (tuba and harmonica), use of exotic percussion (in the *Sinfonia Antartica* and Eighth Symphony), turning to a trio of saxophones (in the Ninth Symphony), or – as in the *Fantasia on the Old 104th* – taking a familiar sacred melody and not only treating it with considerable inventiveness, but also using it to express moments of unease alongside the

affirmation with which it ends.

Though Vaughan Williams was a prolific composer, he wrote relatively little chamber music. However, shortly after his death in 1958, his widow Ursula gave the manuscripts of several early, unpublished, works that the composer had withdrawn during his lifetime to the British Library. These included an early string quartet and a quintet with clarinet and horn (both from 1898), as well as the **Piano Quintet in C minor**, scored for the same combination of instruments as Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet: violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano. Mrs Vaughan Williams placed an embargo on performances of these early pieces until the 1990s when she agreed to their publication. Of all these works, the Piano Quintet is the most ambitious. It was completed in October 1903, then much revised before its first performance, at the Aeolian Hall in London, on 14 December 1905. The opening *Allegro con fuoco* is imposing and discursive, dominated by a broad, swaying theme first heard on the viola before being taken up by the whole ensemble. As the movement progresses, it moves through several changes of tempo and into some remote keys, before eventually coming to rest in C major. The main theme of the slow movement is introduced by the

piano, marked by a hesitant, syncopated rhythm which generates much of the music in the outer sections, while the central part of the movement is more agitated. The third movement is called *Fantasia (quasi variazioni)* – an early example of Vaughan Williams's fondness for writing fantasias. It is a set of free variations on a theme first heard on unison strings alternating with solo piano. Though Vaughan Williams withdrew the Piano Quintet in 1918, he certainly didn't forget about this melody: the last movement of his late Violin Sonata (1954) – his only sonata for any instrument – is based on the same theme.

After the Piano Quintet, Vaughan Williams produced his String Quartet No. 1 in 1908 and a Phantasy Quintet (for two violins, two violas and cello) in 1912, both of which reveal a flair for string writing that can be heard at its most glorious in the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910). But in 1914, Vaughan Williams turned to writing for a solo string instrument when he completed the first draft of **The Lark Ascending** in a version for violin and piano. He put the work aside during his military service in World War One, returning to it in 1919, when he made revisions and also created the more familiar version for violin and orchestra. Subtitled a 'romance', it was dedicated to

the violinist Marie Hall, who gave the first performance of the violin and piano version with the pianist Geoffrey Mendham on 15 December 1920 at Shirehampton in Gloucestershire. Six months later, on 14 June 1921, Marie Hall was again the soloist for the premiere of the definitive orchestral version at the Queen's Hall in London, conducted by Adrian Boult. A review of the concert in *The Times* praised the timeless quality of Vaughan Williams's score, noting that it 'showed serene disregard of the fashions of to-day or of yesterday.' The music has unusual rhythmic freedom, with the improvisatory musings of the soloist eventually soaring into the heavens, reflecting the lines from the George Meredith poem which inspired it: 'Till lost on his aerial rings / In light, and then the fancy sings.'

Another work for a solo string instrument – much less well known than *The Lark Ascending* – probably dates from around the same time. While it is not possible to establish a firm date for the **Romance for viola and piano**, it is likely to have been written just before the First World War, probably for the British viola player Lionel Tertis. But Tertis never played it and Vaughan Williams may well have decided not to have it performed. Two

manuscripts of the Romance were found among the composer's papers after his death in 1958 (one in his own hand, the other by Adeline, his first wife). It was first performed on 19 January 1962 at the Arts Council in London by Bernard Shore (viola) and Eric Gritton (piano), and published the same year. Over quiet, oscillating piano chords, the viola unfolds an eloquent, song-like melody which works up to an impassioned climax. A more turbulent central section leads to a return of the opening idea, as the music subsides into calm tranquillity.

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#### Text for Fantasia on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune

My soul praise the Lord, speak good of his Name:  
O Lord our great God, how dost Thou appear,  
So passing in glory, that great is Thy fame:  
All honour and majesty in Thee shine most clear.

With light as a robe, Thou hast thee beclad,  
Whereby all the earth Thy greatness may see,  
The heavens in such sort Thou also hast spread,  
That they to a curtain compared may be.

How sundry, O Lord, are all thy works found;  
With wisdom full great they are indeed wrought:  
So that the whole world, of Thy praises may sound.  
And as for Thy riches they pass all men's thought.

The praise of the Lord, for ever shall last;  
Who may in His works, by right well rejoice,  
His look can the earth make to tremble full fast.  
Likewise the high mountains to smoke at his voice.

To this Lord and God, I will sing always:  
So long as I live, my God praise will I.  
Then am I most certain my words shall Him please:  
I will rejoice in Him, to Him will I cry.

Praise ye the Lord's name, speak good of His name,  
My soul praise the Lord, speak good of His name.  
Amen.

*Selected verses from a metrical version of Psalm 104  
by Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins.*

#### Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Patron: HM King Charles III  
Music Director: Vasily Petrenko

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's mission – to enrich lives through orchestral experiences that are uncompromising in their excellence and inclusive in their appeal – places it at the forefront of music-making in the UK and internationally. Typically performing approximately 200 concerts a year and with a worldwide live and online audience of more than 60 million people, the RPO embraces a broad repertoire that enables it to reach the most diverse audience of any British symphony orchestra. Whilst artistic integrity remains paramount, the Orchestra is unafraid to push boundaries and is equally at home recording video game, film and television soundtracks and working with pop stars, as it is performing the great symphonic repertoire.



### Mark Bebbington (piano)

Internationally recognised as a champion of British music, Mark has given premiere performances and recordings over recent years of major works by Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Arnold Bax and Frank Bridge.

His last seven releases on Somm label have been awarded consecutive sets of five-star reviews in *BBC Music Magazine*, and his first Poulenc CD in a new series of French music on Resonus Classics was a *Gramophone* 'Editor's Choice' and *Gramophone* Award Nomination in 2020.

Mark has toured widely as a recitalist at International Festivals and, as concerto soloist, he has appeared recently with the Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Buffalo Symphony, Czech National, London Mozart Players and Israel Camerata Orchestras.



### Hilary Davan Wetton (conductor)

Hilary Davan Wetton has enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a conductor of both choral and orchestral ensembles. Principal Conductor of City of London Choir since 1989 and Artistic Director of the Military Wives Choirs since 2019, he was also conductor of Guildford Choral Society 1968–2008, Artistic Director of the Leicester Philharmonic Choir from 2009–2018, and Founder/Conductor of the Holst Singers 1979–1993. Currently Associate Conductor of the London Mozart Players, he was Principal Conductor of the Wren Orchestra of London for ten years, and Artistic Director of Milton Keynes Orchestra 1975–2008. He has worked with most of the major London orchestras as well as orchestras in Europe, Australia and the USA, and has an extensive and highly acclaimed discography. He has been awarded honorary degrees by the Open University and De Montfort University, and is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.





### **Duncan Riddell (violin)**

Duncan Riddell founded the Roth String Quartet in 1982 which won international prizes and performed extensively around Britain, in Europe and on BBC Radio 3. Following five years as principal in the North German Radio Philharmonic in Hannover, he took up the position of co-leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and from 2001 until his appointment as Concertmaster of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 2010 he was the leader of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Having worked as leader, director and soloist with all these orchestras he made his North American debut in 2008 directing the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. In addition to his solo and directing work with the RPO he continues to be in demand as a guest leader with many of the major orchestras in the UK and as far afield as North America, Europe and Japan where he has regularly appeared as guest leader of the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo. He has also performed as leader in collaborations with the Israel Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa.

### **Abigail Fenna (viola)**

Abigail Fenna graduated from the Royal Academy of Music with first class honours and the Foundation Prize, having studied with Garfield Jackson. She was later invited by Nobuko Imai to join her class at the Conservatoire de Genève, and with the generous support of The Leverhulme Trust she graduated with a Diplôme de Soliste and the Prix Pierre Vidoudez.

Abigail now holds the position of Principal Viola with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London and has been a guest principal with many of the UK's leading orchestras as well as those in Sweden, The Netherlands and Switzerland. She has performed as a soloist with the RPO on several occasions and as a chamber musician, she has been invited to give concerts throughout Europe and the USA. Abigail has performed at major chamber music venues in London such as St John's Smith Square and the Wigmore Hall, and features regularly as an artist at Cadogan Hall.

### **Richard Harwood (cello)**

Since his concerto debut at the age of ten, the English cellist Richard Harwood has performed in major venues throughout the world including the Royal Albert, Wigmore, and Carnegie Halls, Musikverein, Concertgebouw and Alte Oper.

As concerto soloist, Richard has worked with conductors such as Mark Wigglesworth, Stanislav Kochanovsky, and Yehudi Menuhin, and with numerous orchestras including The Philharmonia and Auckland Philharmonia. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with the Jerusalem and Endellion Quartets, Benjamin Schmid, Martin Roscoe, Peter Donohoe and Julius Drake, among others. Richard's discography includes an album with pianist Christoph Berner (EMI), *Composing Without The Picture* (Resonus Classics) – a solo album of concert works written by film composers – Christopher Gunning's Cello Concerto and Beethoven's Triple Concerto, both on Signum and with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Richard was appointed principal cellist of the RPO in 2018. He has also been a principal of the John Wilson Orchestra and guest principal at the London Symphony, BBC Symphony and RTÉ Concert orchestras.

### **Benjamin Cunningham (double bass)**

Co-Principal Double Bass of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Benjamin Cunningham is from the North West of England where he began his bass studies with the local peripatetic music service. Scholarship studies followed at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester, the Royal Academy of Music, London and the Juilliard School, New York. Benjamin has been a member of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra since 2006 and plays on an instrument made for him by the Birmingham luthier, Martin Lawrence.

## City of London Choir

The City of London Choir was founded in 1963 and has an enviable reputation for its distinctive youthful sound and the quality of its performances. It undertakes a busy annual programme, performing regularly at the Royal Albert Hall (including its recent BBC Proms debut), Royal Festival Hall, Barbican, Cadogan Hall, St John's Smith Square and St Giles Cripplegate, with leading professional orchestras, instrumentalists and soloists. The choir's repertoire is broad but, thanks to the inspirational direction of conductor Hilary Davan Wetton for over thirty years, it has a particular reputation for English music of the twentieth century, and has recorded a number of 'lost' works to critical acclaim.

### Sopranos

Anna Bayley  
Léonore Béjanin  
Caroline Clarke  
Maddie Gordon  
Hettie Hocknell  
Zoë Judge  
Harriet Orbell  
Ruth Rooke  
Judith Schröter  
Helen Walsh  
Phoebe Clapham  
Hannah Davison

Shehara de Soysa  
Bethan Dean  
Bronwyn Faleiro  
Katherine Harnett  
Rozzi Hufton  
Millie Lawrence  
Caroline Rayson  
Rebecca Rickwood  
Naomi Sunderland  
Carol Sweeting  
Seow Boon Tay

### Altos

Celia Clark  
Elena Greally  
Kristina Greally  
Claire James  
Christel Liasi  
Hannah Meldrum  
Ailbhe Rees  
Jenny Robinson  
Katy Rogers-Davies

### Tenors

Edward Catmur  
Michele Chiappa  
Peter Hann  
Chris Matthews  
Jakub Modrzejewski

### Basses

Mike Bolton  
Lewis Brooke  
Daniel Mansfield  
Stefan Ward-Caddle  
Paul Young

Jessie Whitehouse  
Sibylle Christ  
Lindsey Griffiths  
Jo Hutchinson  
Tiggy Sawbridge  
Ruth Taylor Bell  
Susanna Winter  
Natasha Worsley

Rupert Venn  
Alex Davan Wetton  
Erwin Li  
Rhys Madigan  
Daniel Tomkins

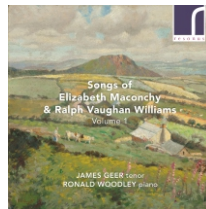
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Adam Binks (Romance & *The Lark Ascending*)  
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