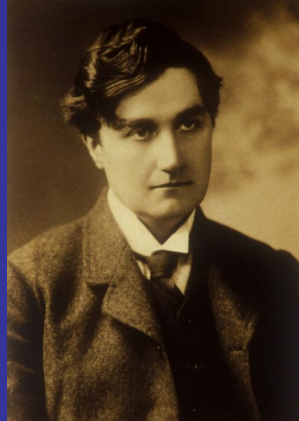


Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group
November 2010

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*



and experiences of singing in London Choirs

- 1 London Choirs, and how the recordings are done**
- 2 Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony***
- 3 Memorable experiences**

LONDON CHOIRS

PHILHARMONIA CHORUS

LONDON SYMPHONY CHORUS

LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

**BBC SYMPHONY
CHORUS**

**ROYAL CHORAL
SOCIETY**

BACH CHOIR

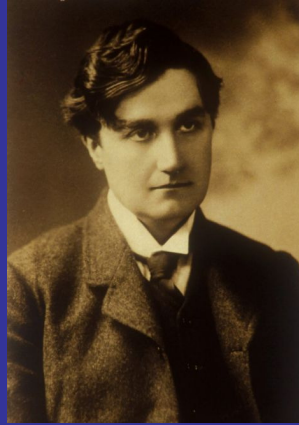
LONDON CHORUS



Making the Recordings



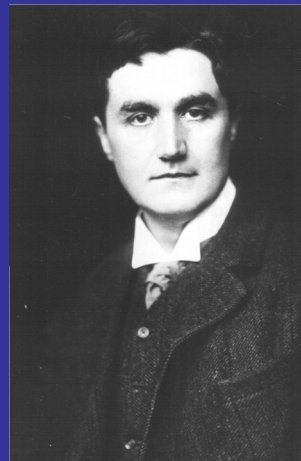
Vaughan Williams



A Sea Symphony

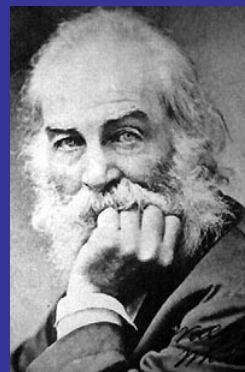
Ralph Vaughan Williams

- 🎵 Born 1872 in the Cotswolds
- 🎵 Died 1958 – his ashes are interred near Purcell's in Westminster Abbey
- 🎵 A very English composer
- 🎵 Studied with Stanford and Parry at Royal College of Music, with Max Bruch in Berlin and with Maurice Ravel in Paris.



Genesis of *A Sea Symphony*

- ♪ The sea and the poetry of the American poet Walt Whitman were popular subjects at the start of the 20th century
- ♪ These were both inspirations for the first of Vaughan Williams's nine symphonies



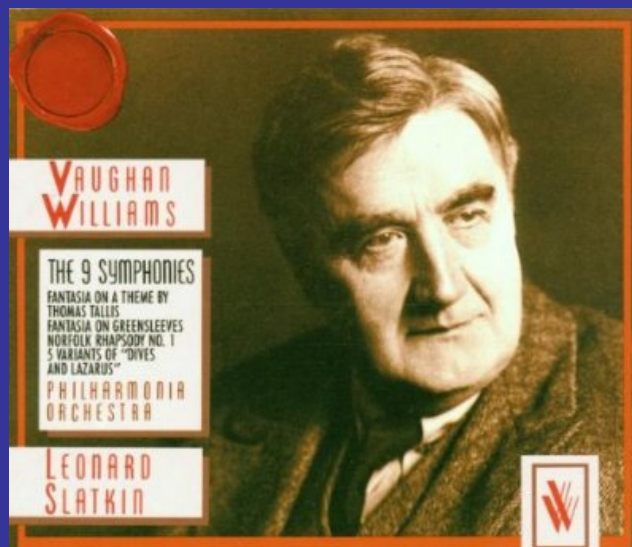
A Sea Symphony

- ♪ It is on an epic scale with soprano and baritone soloists and a full orchestra and chorus
- ♪ Vaughan Williams began work on it when he was 31, and conducted the première on his 38th birthday at the Leeds Festival in 1910
- ♪ It established him as the leading English composer in the post-Elgar generation.

A Sea Symphony

- ♪ Much of the symphony is descriptive of the sea, particularly the third movement, The Waves.
- ♪ In other movements the sea becomes a metaphor for man's voyage into eternity.

This performance is by the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus





Conductor: Leonard Slatkin



Baritone: Thomas Allen
Soprano: Benita Valente



I. A Song for all Seas, all Ships
Moderato maestoso

- ♪ A brass fanfare leads to an exultant chorus.
- ♪ The baritone soloist introduces nautical and sea-faring images.

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless heaving breast, the ships;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the
wind, speckle the green and blue,
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming
in or out of port,
See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants
of smoke.
Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless heaving breast, the ships.

Today a rude brief recitative,
Of ships sailing the seas, each with its
special flag or ship-signal,
Of unnamed heroes in the ships - of
waves spreading and spreading far as
the eye can reach,
Of dashing spray, and the winds piping
and blowing,

And out of these a chant for the sailors of
all nations,
Fitful, like a surge.
Of sea-captains young or old, and the
mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom
fate can never surprise nor death
dismay.

**Sailors of all nations are remembered,
especially those lost at sea**

Token of all brave captains and of all
intrepid sailors and mates,
And of all that went down doing their
duty,
Reminiscent of them, twined from all
intrepid captains young or old.

II. On the Beach at Night, Alone
Largo sostenuto

This is a mystical, atmospheric nocturne for baritone and chorus, pondering the unfathomable universe.

A vast similitude interlocks all,
All distances of space however wide,
All distances of time,
All souls, all living bodies though they be
ever so different,

All nations, all identities that have existed
or may exist,
All lives and deaths, all of the past,
present, future,
This vast interlude spans them, and
always has spanned,
And shall forever span them and shall
compactly hold and enclose them.
On the beach at night alone.

III. Scherzo: The Waves – *Allegro brillante*

The chorus describes the different moods of the sea and the ships on it.

After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,
Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,

Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,
Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,
Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant with curves,
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the surface,

Larger and smaller waves in the spread
of the ocean yearnfully flowing,
The wake of the sea-ship after she
passes, flashing and frolicsome under
the sun,
A motley procession with many a fleck of
foam and many fragments,
Following the stately and rapid ship, in
the wake following.

IV. The Explorers – *Grave e molto adagio – andante con moto*

**This movement, on VW's own admission,
owes much to Elgar's *Dream of
Gerontius*.**

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Covered all over with visible power and
beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming
spiritual darkness,
Unspeakable high processions of sun
and moon and countless stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters,

With inscrutable purpose, some hidden
prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thought begins to span
thee.

**Visionary in mood, it reaches the
emotional core of the symphony**

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and
shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.
After the seas are all crossed,
After the great captains have accomplished
their work,
After the noble inventors,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his
songs.

**The end of the voyage is near. The music
recedes like a ship disappearing over the
horizon – perhaps out of our world.**

**Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee,
and thou with me,
For we are bound, where mariner has not
yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and
all.**

**O my brave Soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the
seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!**

Memorable Experiences



Audience Hall at the Vatican - seating 6,300



**Opera stage of the Theatre Antique -
Orange, Provence**



**Jenny (right) on stage at the Theatre Antique
with Monserrat Caballe in *La Gioconda***



**Turbine Hall, Peenemunde -
home of the Usdomer Festival**



“Slava” Rostropovich

