

Ralph Vaughan Williams 1872-1958
Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus (1939)

As is well known, Vaughan Williams was an avid collector of folk music and also an editor of *The English Hymnal* (1906). 'Dives and Lazarus', the inspiration for Vaughan Williams's *Five Variants*, is mentioned in sixteenth-century literature but could be earlier. It retells the parable of the rich man and the beggar, from St Luke's Gospel, chapter 16: 19 to 31. The same tune had been arranged by Vaughan Williams as *Kingsfold* for *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*, (574 in *the English Hymnal*). Kingsfold, West Sussex lies a few miles south from Vaughan Williams' home at Leith Hill.

Five Variants was a commission for the 1939 World's Fair in New York. It was first performed there by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, who conducted the British premiere in Bristol later in 1939. The sumptuous string writing and sweeping melodies recall other Vaughan Williams works such as *The Lark Ascending* and the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*.

For more information about the composer, his long life and his music see the comprehensive website of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society: rvw.com

Programme notes by R J Manuell

Gabriel Fauré 1845-1924
Pélleas et Mélisande Op. 80 (1898)

1. *Prélude* Quasi adagio
2. *Fileuse* Andantino quasi allegretto
3. *Chanson de Mélisande*
4. *Sicilienne* Allegretto molto moderato
5. *La Mort de Mélisande* Molto adagio

Fauré's musical talents were recognised in his youth. He studied with Saint-Saëns. Later Fauré was an important teacher himself, becoming head of the Paris Conservatory. He was appointed organist at La Madeleine church in Paris in 1896. Fauré made a significant contribution to French music, respecting tradition but also composing music notable for its harmonic daring. Some of his works, such as his *Messe de Requiem* and his *Cantiques de Jean Racine*, have become staples of the repertoire.

Now rarely performed, the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlink's drama *Pélleas et Mélisande* (1895) a symbolist tale of forbidden love, had a sensational impact in its day. Fauré, Debussy, Schoenberg and Sibelius all wrote music drawing inspiration from the play, in Debussy's case creating his only opera. Fauré was commissioned by Mrs Patrick Campbell in 1898 at short notice to write incidental music for the London premiere of *Pélleas et Mélisande*, given at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket. Subsequently Fauré prepared a suite from his incidental music, as performed this evening.

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Ludwig van Beethoven 1732-1809
Symphony No.6 in F Major
The Pastoral or Recollections of Country Life

1. *Allegro ma non troppo*
Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande
Joyful feelings on arriving in the country
2. *Andante molto mosso*
Szene am Bach *By the brook*
3. *Allegro*
Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute
Peasant merrymaking
4. *Allegro*
Gewitter, Sturm *The Thunderstorm*
5. *Allegretto*
Hirtengesang
Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm
Shepherd's song after the storm

Beethoven composed the Pastoral Symphony at the same time as the Fifth Symphony. Both strongly contrasting yet emotionally powerful works were first performed at the same concert given in Vienna in 1808, four hours long. Beethoven was fond of nature, enjoying walks in the Vienna Woods and country life. Exceptionally for Beethoven, the Pastoral Symphony has a programme, with Beethoven's descriptive titles. His own comment was "More the expression of feeling than tone painting." Perhaps the symphony can be seen as a tribute to and a celebration of nature and its Creator.

Much has been written about the Pastoral Symphony, which remains a favourite among the nine symphonies. Beethoven wrote of it in a notebook in 1807, before its first performance: "It is left to the listener to discover the situation . . . Anyone who has the faintest idea of rural life will have no need of descriptive titles to enable him to imagine for himself what the composer intends. Even without a description one will be able to recognize it all."