

*The*  
RALPH VAUGHAN  
WILLIAMS SOCIETY

Photograph © Peter Bull

*Dedicated to widening the knowledge,  
understanding and appreciation of  
the music and life of  
Ralph Vaughan Williams*

[www.rvwsociety.com](http://www.rvwsociety.com)

Registered Charity no: 1156614



ALBION RECORDS

PORTRAITS  
*of a* MIND

Ian Venables  
Ralph Vaughan Williams

Portraits of a Mind  
On Wenlock Edge  
Four Hymns

Alessandro Fisher *tenor* The Navarra Quartet William Vann *piano*

# PORTRAITS *of a MIND*

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams: On Wenlock Edge**

*Song cycle for tenor voice, string quartet and piano*

- |   |                                 |      |
|---|---------------------------------|------|
| 1 | On Wenlock Edge                 | 3'52 |
| 2 | From Far, From Eve and Morning  | 2'05 |
| 3 | Is My Team Ploughing?           | 3'52 |
| 4 | Oh, When I Was in Love With You | 0'49 |
| 5 | Bredon Hill                     | 7'51 |
| 6 | Clun                            | 3'48 |

## **Ian Venables: Portraits of a Mind Op.54**

*Song cycle for high voice, string quartet and piano*

- |    |                           |      |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 7  | The Lark Ascending        | 5'23 |
| 8  | Man makes delight his own | 4'11 |
| 9  | From a Railway Carriage   | 1'53 |
| 10 | Echo                      | 6'20 |
| 11 | A Clear Midnight          | 3'37 |

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams: Four Hymns**

*Arranged for tenor voice, string quartet and piano by Iain Farrington*

- |    |                                 |      |
|----|---------------------------------|------|
| 12 | Lord! Come Away                 | 3'58 |
| 13 | Who Is This Fair One?           | 4'25 |
| 14 | Come Love, Come Lord            | 3'36 |
| 15 | Evening Hymn (O Gladsome Light) | 3'23 |

*Total recording time: 59'03*

Alessandro Fisher *tenor*

William Vann *piano*

The Navarra String Quartet

*Benjamin Marquise Gilmore, Annabelle Meare,*

*Sascha Bota, Brian O'Kane*

This album centres on *Portraits of a Mind*, a song cycle commissioned by The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society from Ian Venables to celebrate Vaughan Williams's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday on 12 October 2022. The first performance was given at the Oxford Lieder Festival on 21 October 2022 and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Given a relatively free hand, Ian Venables chose to compose a song cycle for tenor, piano and string quartet – the same forces as for Vaughan Williams's celebrated cycle of Housman poems *On Wenlock Edge*. These two works thus became natural companion pieces both for that first concert and this album. It was then discovered that a version of Vaughan Williams's *Four Hymns* – normally for tenor, viola obbligato and either a piano or a small string orchestra – had been made in 1925 for tenor, piano and quartet; Stuart Wilson performed it with Anthony Bernard and the Snow Quartet. We do not know who made that arrangement – it could well have been Vaughan Williams – but it did not survive. The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society commissioned Iain Farrington to make a new arrangement in this format so that the album can be completed with the same artists.



The first performance of  
*Portraits of a Mind*, Holywell  
Music Room, Oxford

### Ralph Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge*

A. E. Housman's 1896 collection of sixty-three poems, *A Shropshire Lad*, mythologised and romanticised Shropshire - but it was its emphasis on the brevity of life that drew readers to the poems. Vaughan Williams's song cycle, setting six of the poems, was first performed in 1909. Showing some signs of the composer's 1907/1908 period of study with Ravel, its 'atmospheric effects' include a tolling bell in *Bredon Hill*. The cycle broke new ground to such an extent that we should not be surprised that its early reception was mixed – and it remained controversial for some years. In 1918, the great critics Edwin Evans and Ernest Newman conducted an extraordinarily personal battle over the piece in the pages of the *Musical Times*: Evans the strong supporter, and Newman the antagonist. Meanwhile, the tenor Gervase Elwes, who had given the first performance, adopted the work and performed it repeatedly from 1912 up to and through WWI, until it was first accepted and finally "popular". Today, it is recognised as an early masterpiece by Vaughan Williams and one of the greatest song cycles in English.

John Francis

**1 ON WENLOCK EDGE**

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble  
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;  
The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger  
When Uricon\* the city stood:  
'Tis the old wind in the old anger,  
But then it threshed another wood.

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman  
At yonder heaving hill would stare:  
The blood that warms an English yeoman,  
The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

*\* Uriconium was the Roman settlement on the site of present-day Wroxeter in Shropshire.*

**2 FROM FAR, FROM EVE AND MORNING**

From far, from eve and morning  
And yon twelve-winded sky,  
The stuff of life to knit me  
Blew hither: here am I.

Now – for a breath I tarry  
Nor yet disperse apart –  
Take my hand quick and tell me,  
What have you in your heart.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,  
Through him the gale of life blew high;  
The tree of man was never quiet:  
Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:  
To-day the Roman and his trouble  
Are ashes under Uricon.

Speak now, and I will answer;  
How shall I help you, say;  
Ere to the wind's twelve quarters  
I take my endless way.

**3 IS MY TEAM PLOUGHING?**

"Is my team ploughing,  
That I was used to drive  
And hear the harness jingle  
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,  
The harness jingles now;  
No change though you lie under  
The land you used to plough.

"Is my girl happy,  
That I thought hard to leave,  
And has she tired of weeping  
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,  
She lies not down to weep:  
Your girl is well contented.  
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,  
Now I am thin and pine,  
And has he found to sleep in  
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,  
I lie as lads would choose;  
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,  
Never ask me whose.

**4 OH, WHEN I WAS IN LOVE WITH YOU**

Oh, when I was in love with you,  
Then I was clean and brave,  
And miles around the wonder grew  
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,  
And nothing will remain,  
And miles around they'll say that I  
Am quite myself again.

5 **BREDON HILL**

In summertime on Bredon  
The bells they sound so clear;  
Round both the shires they ring them  
In steeples far and near,  
A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning  
My love and I would lie,  
And see the coloured counties,  
And hear the larks so high  
About us in the sky.

The bells would ring to call her  
In valleys miles away:  
"Come all to church, good people;  
Good people, come and pray."  
But here my love would stay.

And I would turn and answer  
Among the springing thyme,  
"Oh, peal upon our wedding,  
And we will hear the chime,  
And come to church in time."

But when the snows at Christmas  
On Bredon top were strown,  
My love rose up so early  
And stole out unbeknown  
And went to church alone.

They tolled the one bell only,  
Groom there was none to see,  
The mourners followed after,  
And so to church went she,  
And would not wait for me.

The bells they sound on Bredon,  
And still the steeples hum.  
"Come all to church, good people,"  
Oh, noisy bells, be dumb;  
I hear you, I will come.



Ian Venables with William Vann

6 **CLUN**

In valleys of springs and rivers,  
By Ony and Teme and Clun,  
The country for easy livers,  
The quietest under the sun,  
We still had sorrows to lighten,  
One could not be always glad,  
And lads knew trouble at Knighton  
When I was a Knighton lad.

By bridges that Thames runs under,  
In London, the town built ill,  
'Tis sure small matter for wonder  
If sorrow is with one still.

And if as a lad grows older  
The troubles he bears are more,  
He carries his griefs on a shoulder  
That handselled them long before.

Where shall one halt to deliver  
This luggage I'd lief set down?  
Not Thames, not Teme is the river,  
Nor London nor Knighton the town:  
'Tis a long way further than Knighton,  
A quieter place than Clun,  
Where doomsday may thunder and lighten  
And little 'twill matter to one.

*A. E. Housman 1859-1936*

**Ian Venables: Portraits of a Mind**

A song cycle for Tenor, String Quartet and Piano, Op.54

*Commissioned by the RVW Society to celebrate Vaughan Williams's 150th Anniversary*

The music of Vaughan Williams has been a constant companion throughout my life and so I was especially delighted when The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society offered me a commission to write a work to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. The commissioners were generous in giving me the freedom to decide what kind of work I would like to compose and I immediately suggested a chamber song cycle. Over the past twenty years I have written many cycles with different instrumental combinations but only once have I composed a cycle for piano quintet and tenor: *Songs of Eternity and Sorrow* based on poems by A. E. Housman and commissioned by Finzi Friends in 2004. Whilst I was composing this work I was mindful of RVW's masterpiece *On Wenlock Edge*.

Indeed it is this work that, in my opinion, put the chamber song cycle on the map in England: composers such as Ivor Gurney and Peter Warlock would later add to this wonderful genre.

In view of this sesquicentennial commission, it seemed appropriate that I should return to this combination of instruments for my new cycle. The search for suitable texts to set is the most rewarding part of the process of composition and as the focus of the work would be Vaughan Williams himself, I wanted to explore the principal elements that informed his creativity and so 'paint' a musical portrait in which each song reflects a different aspect of his creative mind. To discover these elements one need go no further than Vaughan Williams's aesthetic creed: *'the object of art is to reach out to the ultimate realities through the medium of beauty. The duty of the composer is to find the 'mot juste'. It does not matter if this word has been said a thousand times before, as long as it is the right thing to say at the right moment'*. After many months spent reading a wide range of poetry I eventually found several poems that drew upon the subjects I wished to present, namely: Nature; The Meaning of Art; Love; Death and Transcendence.

The work began to take shape when Martin Murray (a fellow member of the RVW Society) sent me a poem by George Meredith that he thought I might wish to consider. I was not aware, until I looked at the score of RVW's famous work **The Lark Ascending**, that it had been inspired by Meredith's poem and that Vaughan Williams had placed three stanzas at the head of the published score: he never set the poem, simply because it was too long and I, too, put the poem aside for the same reason. However, I wonder whether a poem finds me rather than the other way around and, as it turned out, this one was no different. When I looked at it more closely, I began to realise that it might be possible to cut it down to a more manageable size while keeping the essential narrative intact. Of course, this is not

something I normally do: after all one only has to remember A.E. Housman's reaction to RVW's abridgement of his poem, 'Is My Team Ploughing?!' Nevertheless, I made the cuts and ended up with a text I felt I could use. I also kept intact the opening lines that prompted RVW's work: *He rises and begins to round / He drops the silver chain of sound / Of many links without a break / As up he wings the spiral stair*. Vaughan Williams's inspired idea of using the violin as a musical metaphor for the skylark's song also inspired the instrumental opening of *my* cycle and so provided an intentional aural 'link' in the 'chain of sound' between RVW's work and my own. Meredith's poem is a pastoral evocation of nature in which a lone skylark symbolises nature and the human spirit, freed from its earthly concerns. Soaring high above the contours of the landscape the lark observes the spectacle of the world below and sings for humanity its song of the earth. For those who are willing to listen, it is the 'love of earth that he instils'. The song is dedicated to Anne Renshaw.

The subject of Ursula Vaughan Williams's poem **Man makes delight his own** is the immutable nature of artistic creation. Written the year before her marriage to RVW in 1953, the poem is a loving tribute to her future husband. The text's ruminative narrative is established in the opening lines and mirrored in the long-breathed vocal melody: *Man makes delight his own / endless creation of his labouring days / captures for human terms of all he has known*. The introduction's contemplative mood gives way to a contrasting section where a rapt vocal melody is supported by a flowing accompaniment. This passage reaches an impassioned vocal climax on the words *unchanged for ever stays*. An instrumental *tutti* follows, that echoes the poet's ecstatic realisation, before winding down in both tempo and dynamics in preparation for the final stanza, ending with a reprise of the meditative opening music. The song is dedicated to the memory of RVW.

As a song composer, RVW was naturally drawn to the poets of his age: early songs include settings of Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne and, in particular, the Pre-Raphaelite poet, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. These philosophical and inward-looking poets were later replaced in his affection by the pastoral imagery of the Scottish poet Robert Louis Stevenson. This new poetic discovery produced 'Songs of Travel', composed in 1904 and, given the importance of this work in RVW's output, I decided to see if I could find a poem by Stevenson that could be included as part of the cycle. The third song, **From a Railway Carriage**, proved to be an ideal setting, as it acts as its energetic *scherzo*. Written in 1885, it comes from the poet's collection 'A Child's Garden of Verses'. Viewed through the eyes of a child, the poem arouses all the excitement of a rapidly changing landscape as seen from a moving train. Stevenson sets up a constant rhythmic flow that provides the impetus for his spritely narrative: *Faster than fairies, faster than witches / Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches / And charging along like troops in a battle*. To create a sense of exhilaration, the animated vocal line is underpinned by a brisk *moto perpetuo*, full of semiquavers and alternating time signatures: the music's tritonal harmony adding to the magical and bewitching atmosphere of the text. The song is dedicated to Eric McElroy.

In 1904, RVW composed the 'House of Life' cycle: settings of poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. At the same time, Rossetti's sister, Christina, inspired RVW to compose a *Symphonic Rhapsody for Orchestra* based on her poem **Echo**. In a programme note for the first performance in March of that year, several lines from the opening stanza were printed. *Come to me in the silence of the night / Come in the speaking silence of a dream / Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright / As sunlight on a stream / Come back in tears O memory, hope, love of finished years*. Sadly,

the manuscript of the *Orchestral Rhapsody* has since been lost. Her deeply moving poem recalls the memories of a departed loved one whose presence can only be experienced in dreams. The poet's exploration of the conflict between longing and joy; reality and memory; and life and death, provide an inner tension to the poetic narrative. It is these tensions that I have attempted to capture in my setting, principally by alternating tranquil and reflective passages with intense and more passionate ones. In the second stanza beginning, *Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet / Whose waking should have been in Paradise*, the poet intimates that dreams can be sweeter than memories. But even this is illusory as the poet's dreams quickly turn from sweetness to bitter sweetness. To express the poignancy of these words, the vocal line is accompanied by a mesmeric ostinato figure in the piano, with sustained harmonies in the strings. At the climax of the final verse on the words, *Come back to me in dreams*, the passionate music, heard in the opening stanza, returns and ends the song in a resigned mood of sadness and longing. The song is dedicated to Gary Morris.

Of all the poets that inspired RVW, it is perhaps Walt Whitman with whom he had the closest spiritual bond. Whitman's deep humanism and belief in 'cosmic unity' helped to shape RVW's own creative vision. I too, have been drawn to Whitman and in 2019 composed a song cycle to commemorate the bicentenary of the poet's birth. For these reasons, it seemed fitting to set a further poem by Whitman that would conclude the cycle and 'frame' these portraits of Vaughan Williams. For me, the short lyric **A Clear Midnight** captures the essence of RVW's spiritual convictions and brings the cycle full circle: the freedom of the human spirit symbolised by the lark's ascent in the first song, now mirrored by Whitman's faith in the Soul's transcendence.

The song opens with a short introduction before the singer intones the opening line, *This is thy hour O soul, thy free flight into the wordless*. On the final word, ‘wordless’, the chant-like music gives way to a forward-moving piano accompaniment, built from alternating groups of quavers and not dissimilar in sound to the introductory music heard in the cycle’s opening song. This tranquil music evokes the reflective but affirmative vocal narrative, *Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done / Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing*, as it moves towards the return of the introductory music over which the vocal line ponders, *the themes thou lovest best / Night, sleep, death and the stars*. The song is dedicated to Nick Pritchard.

*Ian Venables*

7 **THE LARK ASCENDING**

He rises and begins to round,  
He drops the silver chain of sound  
Of many links without a break,  
As up he wings the spiral stair,

A song of light, and pierces air  
To reach the shining tops of day,  
And drink in everything discern’d  
An ecstasy to music turn’d,

He is, the hill, the human line,  
The meadows green, the fallows brown,  
He sings the sap, the quicken’d veins;  
The wedding song of sun and rains,

He is, the dance of children, thanks  
Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks,  
And eye of violets while they breathe;  
All these the circling song will wreathe,

Was never voice of ours could say  
Our inmost in the sweetest way,  
Like yonder voice aloft, and link  
All hearers in the song they drink.

*George Meredith 1828-1909*

8 **MAN MAKES DELIGHT HIS OWN**

Man makes delight his own:  
endless creation of his labouring days  
captures for human terms all he has known.  
From far-sown grain his gathered joy has grown  
and turned to sound or stone,  
perpetual and unchanged for ever stays.

So, though he sleeps or dies,  
his music wakes like Beauty from her night,  
his words still cry his heart, for seeing eyes  
his work declares how a bright landscape lies  
untouched by centuries,  
living beyond his perished, short delight.

*Ursula Vaughan Williams 1911-2007*

9 **FROM A RAILWAY CARRIAGE**

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,  
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;  
And charging along like troops in a battle,  
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:  
All of the sights of the hill and the plain  
Fly as thick as driving rain;  
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,  
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,  
All by himself and gathering brambles;  
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;  
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!  
Here is a cart runaway in the road  
Lumping along with man and load;  
And here is a mill and there is a river:  
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!

*Robert Louis Stevenson 1850-1894*  
*From A Child’s Garden of Verses.*

## 10 ECHO

Come to me in the silence of the night;  
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;  
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright  
As sunlight on a stream;  
Come back in tears,  
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,  
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,  
Where souls brim-full of love abide and meet;  
Where thirsting longing eyes  
Watch the slow door  
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live  
My very life again tho' cold in death:  
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give  
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:  
Speak low, lean low,  
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

*Christina Rossetti 1830-1894*

## 11 A CLEAR MIDNIGHT

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,  
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best,  
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

*Walt Whitman 1819-1892*

## Ralph Vaughan Williams: Four Hymns

Arranged for tenor voice, string quartet and piano by Iain Farrington

*Four Hymns* was written between 1912 and 1914 for performance by a tenor, viola obbligato and string orchestra. It was in the programme for the 1914 Three Choirs Festival at Worcester, though the advent of war delayed the first performance to 1920, when it went to the Cardiff Festival. In that year the composer also published a second version, replacing the string orchestra with a piano, to enable smaller groups to perform it. In the course of doing so, he re-worked the viola part, so that the piano and the string orchestra are not the simple alternatives that you might expect. The attraction of varying the accompaniment again so that the work could be performed with identical forces to *On Wenlock Edge* must have been apparent early on, and Stuart Wilson performed it thus in London in 1925, accompanied by the Snow Quartet and Anthony Bernard at the piano. The score may well have been made for the occasion by Vaughan Williams, but its current whereabouts is unknown. Accordingly, The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society commissioned Iain Farrington to review the two published versions and make a new one, with a quartet.

Vaughan Williams was fond of the viola, using it as a solo instrument in numerous symphonic works. Its dark and husky timbre is ideal for certain characteristics of Vaughan Williams's music. In the 'piano' version of the *Four Hymns*, the viola adds an extra dimension to the piano part, amplifying the melodies, adding textural patterns, as well as soaring passionately alongside the singer. However, it does not play throughout, often giving way to the singer. The piano part seems to evoke orchestral textures, especially in the highly sustained third song. In the version with orchestra, the viola is much more integrated with the string texture, playing in most of the ensemble passages. In this new

arrangement for the same combination as *On Wenlock Edge*, much of the orchestral string writing is taken by the quartet, with the viola taking a dual role of soloist and ensemble player. The piano fills and supports the sound, to create a rich chamber score, both intimate and passionate.

*Four Hymns* was Vaughan Williams's first setting of an anthology, here embracing four different poets. The intimate and ecstatic style builds on the earlier *Five Mystical Songs* (1911) and was described by the composer as 'much in the same mood as the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*' (1910). The choice of symbolic poetry, which is essentially meditative, was described by Ursula Vaughan Williams as being 'romantic poems of divine love and longing'. This allowed full expression to the mystical and contemplative side of Vaughan Williams' musical character. This style was explored in later works such as *Flos Campi* (1925) and the Prison Scene from *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951).

*Iain Farrington and John Francis*

## 12 LORD! COME AWAY!

Lord! Come away!  
Why dost Thou stay?  
Thy road is ready; and Thy paths, made straight  
With longing expectation, wait  
The consecration of Thy beauteous feet!  
Ride on triumphantly!  
Behold we lay our lusts and proud wills in Thy way!  
Hosanna! Welcome to our hearts!  
Lord, here Thou hast a temple too; as full as dear  
As that of Sion, and as full of sin:  
Nothing but thieves and robbers dwell therein;

Enter, and chase them forth, and cleanse the floor!  
Crucify them, that they may never more  
Profane that holy place  
Where Thou hast chose to set Thy face!  
And then, if our stiff tongues shall be  
Mute in the praises of Thy Deity,  
The stones out of the temple wall  
Shall cry aloud and call  
"Hosanna!" and Thy glorious footsteps greet!

*Bishop Jeremy Taylor 1613-1667*

## 13 WHO IS THIS FAIR ONE?

Who is this fair one in distress,  
That travels from the wilderness,  
And press'd with sorrows and with sins,  
On her beloved Lord she leans?

This is the spouse of Christ our God,  
Bought with the treasures of His blood,  
And her request and her complaint  
Is but the voice of ev'ry saint:

'O let my name engraven stand  
Both on Thy heart and on Thy hand;  
Seal me upon Thine arm and wear  
That pledge of love for ever there.

Stronger than death Thy love is known  
Which floods of wrath could never drown,  
And hell and earth in vain combine  
To quench a fire so much divine.

But I am jealous of my heart,  
Lest it should once from Thee depart;  
Then let my name be well impress'd  
As a fair signet on Thy breast.

Till Thou hast brought me to Thy home,  
Where fears and doubts can never come,  
Thy countenance let me often see,  
And often shall Thou hear from me:

Come, my beloved, haste away,  
Cut short the hours of Thy delay,  
Fly like a youthful hart or roe  
Over the hills where spices blow'.

*Isaac Watts 1674-1748*

**14 COME LOVE, COME LORD**

Come Love, come Lord, and that long day  
For which I languish, come away.  
When this dry soul those eyes shall see  
And drink the unseal'd source of Thee,  
When glory's sun faith's shades shall chase,  
Then for Thy veil give me Thy face.

*Richard Crashaw c.1613-1649*

**15 EVENING HYMN (O GLADSOME LIGHT)**

O gladsome Light, O Grace  
Of God the Father's face,  
The eternal splendour wearing;  
Celestial, holy, blest,  
Our Saviour, Jesus Christ,  
Joyful in Thine appearing;

Now, ere day fadeth quite,  
We see the evening light,  
Our wonted hymn outpouring;  
Father of might unknown,  
Thee, His incarnate Son,  
And Holy Spirit adoring.

To Thee of right belongs  
All praise of holy songs,  
O Son of God, Life giver;  
Thee, therefore, O Most High,  
The world doth glorify,  
And shall exalt for ever.

*Phos Hilarion, unknown author, 3rd or 4th century  
Translated from Greek by Robert Bridges 1844-1930*

opposite: Alessandro Fisher in  
discussion with Ian Venables





### **Ian Venables**

Ian Venables studied composition with Richard Arnell at Trinity College of Music, London and later with John Joubert, Andrew Downes and John Mayer at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Described as 'Britain's greatest living composer of art song' (*Musical Opinion*) and 'a song composer as fine as Finzi and Gurney' (*BBC Music Magazine*), Venables has written over 80 works in this genre, including eight song-cycles. Beyond the world of art-song he has written many chamber works that include a Piano Quintet Op.27 and a String Quartet Op.32, as well as smaller

pieces for solo instruments and piano. His most recent large-scale choral work is a Requiem, which has been recorded by both Gloucester Cathedral Choir and Merton College Choir Oxford, the latter in an orchestral version. Venables is President of the Arthur Bliss Society, a Vice-President of the Gloucester Music Society, Chairman of the Ivor Gurney Society and an Honorary Fellow of Exeter University. His music is published by Novello (Wise Music Group) and has been recorded on the Regent, Somm, Signum, Naxos and Delphian labels. For information about his music please visit [www.ianvenables.com](http://www.ianvenables.com) or [www.wisemusicclassical.com](http://www.wisemusicclassical.com)

### **Iain Farrington**

Iain Farrington has an exceptionally busy and diverse career as a pianist, composer and arranger. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London and at Cambridge University. Iain has performed as a soloist, accompanist and chamber musician at all the major UK venues, as well as in the USA, Japan, South Africa, Malaysia, Hong Kong and all across Europe. Iain has



accompanied a number of leading musicians, including Bryn Terfel, Willard White, Lesley Garrett, and gives frequent broadcasts on BBC Radio Three. He performed at the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics with Rowan Atkinson, the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle. He has composed orchestral, choral and instrumental pieces, including several orchestral works for the BBC Proms, including *A Party with Auntie* (2022), *Beethoveniana* (2020), *Gershwinicity* (2018). Iain has arranged hundreds of works in many styles, including opera, instrumental and choral, African songs, cabaret, klezmer, jazz and pop. He has arranged and performed most of the Mahler Symphonies for piano solo. His chamber orchestrations of the symphonic repertoire are regularly performed around the world, and he is the Arranger in Residence of Aurora Orchestra.



### **Alessandro Fisher**

Alessandro Fisher read Modern and Medieval Languages at Cambridge, where he was a Choral Scholar at Clare College, furthering his studies at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. After winning First Prize at the 2016 Kathleen Ferrier Awards, he was a member of the BBC New Generation Artist Scheme between 2018 and 2021. He holds a 2022 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, and is an Associate Artist of The Mozartists. Operatic roles have taken in the Glyndebourne and Salzburg

festivals, Garsington Opera, and Covent Garden. A keen recitalist, Alessandro has performed at the Wigmore and Stoller halls, as well as giving multiple performances at the Oxford Lieder Festival, the Leeds Lieder Festival, and the London Song Festival. He has collaborated with Graham Johnson, Iain Burnside, Roger Vignoles, Anna Tilbrook, Joseph Middleton, and Simon Lepper.

## The Navarra String Quartet

The London based Navarra Quartet has built an international reputation as one of the most dynamic and poetic string quartets of today. Selected for representation by YCAT (2006-10), they have been awarded the MIDEM Classique Young Artist Award, a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, a Musica Viva tour, and prizes at the Banff, Melbourne and Florence International String Quartet Competitions.



The Navarra Quartet appears regularly at major venues throughout the world including the Wigmore Hall, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Sydney Opera House, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Esterházy Palace, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg, the Lincoln Centre and international festivals such as Lockenhaus, Aldeburgh, Bath, Lammermuir, Presteigne, Bergen, Grachten, Sandviken, Schwetzingen, Rheingau, Heidelberg, Aix-en-Provence, Bellerive, Harrogate Chamber Music and the BBC Proms.

## William Vann

The pianist and conductor William Vann is recognised in particular for his acclaimed revivals of neglected works of British choral music and song. He was a Chorister at King's College, Cambridge and a Music Scholar at Bedford School. He read Law at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he was taught the piano by Peter Uppard, and studied piano accompaniment at the Royal Academy of Music with Malcolm Martineau and Colin Stone. He is a Trustee of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, an Associate of the RAM, Director of Music at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, founder and Artistic Director of the London English Song Festival and Musical Director of Dulwich Choral Society.



William Vann, Annabelle Meare, Benjamin Gilmore, Ian Venables, Brian O'Kane, Sascha Bota, Alessandro Fisher

## **With Grateful thanks**

### **Gold supporters**

Chris and Adie Batt, Simon and Anna Coombs, Robert Field,  
John and Sharon Francis, Julian C Ochrymowych, Stephen Smith

### **Core supporters**

Keith Anderson, Hiro Baba, Neil Bettridge, Eric Birznieks and Carol Dean,  
Raymond Bradford, Chris Brown, Arthur and Cathy Bryant, Linda Clark,  
Trevor Clinch, William C Davis, Lowell Dorman, Len Evans, Andrew Gausden,  
Ronald and Lynn Games, William Greenwood, Richard Hall, Alistair Jones,  
Benjamin Knibbs, James Korner, Mark Lewis, Trevor Lockwood, Jan MacNicol,  
Neil Marlow, Sean McCaul, Richard Merritt, Kim Miles, William Moreing,  
Martin Murray, Andrew Neill, Benjamin Nossiter, Michael O'Keeffe,  
Thomas Render, Philip Robson, Philip Thijsse, Dr Colin C Tinline,  
John and Muriel Treadway, Arthur Tyson, Robert Weltzien,  
John Wilkinson, James C Williams

## **Production credits**

Musical director: William Vann  
Executive producer: John Francis  
Producer: Andrew Walton  
Engineer: Deborah Spanton  
Recorded at St. George's Church, Headstone, Harrow, on 14-15 November 2022  
Graphic design: S L Chai (Colour Blind Design)  
Cover image: Based on a 1954 picture by Howard Coster, licensed from the National Portrait Gallery.  
Proof reading: Martin Murray and Simon Coombs

## **About the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society**

President: Sir Andrew Davis CBE  
Vice-Presidents: Stephen Connock MBE, Hugh Cobbe OBE, Roderick Williams OBE  
Chairman: Simon Coombs  
Membership Secretary: David Aston

Since its formation in 1994, The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society – a registered charity with more than 1,000 members worldwide – has sought to raise the profile of the composer through publications, seminars and sponsorship of recordings. The Society's Journal is published three times a year.

## **About Albion Records**

Directors: John Francis FCA (Chairman), Malcolm Riley  
Web-Master: Tad Kasa

Albion Records was formed as the Society's recording label in 2007 and is devoted to recordings of works by Vaughan Williams. Two recordings were nominated for a Grammy award, and many recordings have spent some weeks in the UK's specialist classical chart.

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society:  
[www.rvwsociety.com](http://www.rvwsociety.com)

Albion Records:  
[rvwsociety.com/albionrecords](http://rvwsociety.com/albionrecords)

