

Program Notes

The Spirit of England, Op. 80, is a work for chorus, orchestra, and soprano/tenor soloist in three movements composed by Edward Elgar between 1915 and 1917, setting text from Laurence Binyon's 1914 anthology of poems *The Winnowing Fan*. The work serves as a requiem for the dead of World War I and is dedicated "to the memory of our glorious men, with a special thought for the Worcesters."

The first of Binyon's poems used by Elgar was published within a week of Britain's entry into the war. Its title, "The Fourth of August," marks the date of the declaration of war on Germany. The second, "To Women," and the third, "For the Fallen," were written before the end of 1914, after British troops had suffered the first of many great losses during the conflict.

Elgar conducted the second and third sections in Leeds in 1916. The complete work was first performed in Birmingham on 4 October 1917, by the soprano Rosina Buckman, with Appleby Matthews conducting his choir and the New Beecham Orchestra.

The *Requiem* by Frederick Delius was written between 1913 and 1916, and first performed in 1922. It is set for soprano, baritone, double chorus, and orchestra, and is dedicated "To the memory of all young artists fallen in the war." The *Requiem* is Delius's least-known major work, not being recorded until 1968 and having received only seven performances worldwide by 1980.

The reasons why Delius, an avowed atheist, started work on a *Requiem*, a decidedly Christian (specifically Catholic) form, are obscure. (*A Mass of Life* from 1905 also has a title suggestive of religion, but with an apparently anti-religious text.) He started work on the *Requiem* in 1913, after a holiday in Norway. The dedication "To the memory of all young artists fallen in the war" was clearly not in Delius's mind at the outset, as there was no war happening at that time. He had substantially completed the work by 26 October 1914, barely 10 weeks after the start of the First World War. Prior to the outbreak of the war, both Henry Wood and Sir Thomas Beecham had showed early interest in presenting the *Requiem* during the latter part of the 1914 season. The war made those plans impossible, and Delius used the opportunity to make some minor revisions. By 15 March 1916 he was able to tell Phillip Heseltine that it was completely finished.

Delius's nephew was killed on active service not long before the war ended, but the dedication was already appended at the end of the score in the spring of 1918.

The *Five Mystical Songs* are a musical composition by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), written between 1906 and 1911. The work sets four poems ("Easter" divided into two parts) by seventeenth-century Welsh-born poet and Anglican priest George Herbert (1593-1633), from his 1633 collection *The Temple: Sacred Poems*. While Herbert was a priest, Vaughan Williams himself was an atheist at the time (he later settled into a "cheerful agnosticism"), though this did not prevent his setting of verse of an overtly religious inspiration. The work received its first performance on 14 September 1911, at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, with Vaughan Williams conducting.

Like Herbert's simple verse, the songs are fairly direct, but have the same intrinsic spirituality as the original text. They were supposed to be performed together, as a single work, but the styles of each vary quite significantly. The first four songs are quite personal meditations in which the soloist takes a key role, particularly in the third – *Love Bade Me Welcome*, where the chorus has a wholly supporting role (quietly and wordlessly singing the plainsong melody *O Sacrum Convivium*), and the fourth, *The Call*, in which the chorus does not feature at all. The final "Antiphon" is probably the most different of all: a triumphant hymn of praise sung either by the chorus alone or by the soloist alone; unlike the previous songs, a separate version is provided for a solo baritone. It is also sometimes performed on its own, as a church anthem for choir and organ: "Let all the world in every corner sing."