

NAXOS

# VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

## Sacred Choral Music

A Vision of Aeroplanes

Mass in G minor

The Voice out of the  
Whirlwind

The Choir of Clare  
College, Cambridge

James McVinnie and  
Ashok Gupta, Organ

Timothy Brown



# Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

## A Vision of Aeroplanes • Mass in G minor • Motets

<b>1</b>	<b>The Voice out of the Whirlwind</b>	<b>5:23</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Valiant-for-truth</b>	<b>5:32</b>
	<b>Mass in G minor</b>	<b>22:35</b>
<b>3</b>	Kyrie	4:00
<b>4</b>	Gloria	3:42
<b>5</b>	Credo	6:16
<b>6</b>	Sanctus & Benedictus	4:47
<b>7</b>	Agnus Dei	3:50
	<i>(Harriet Colley, Soprano • Jessica Wallington, Alto • Nicholas Morrell, Tenor • Stefan Berkieta, Bass)</i>	
	<b>Three Choral Hymns</b>	<b>12:55</b>
<b>8</b>	Easter Hymn	3:35
<b>9</b>	Christmas Hymn	5:56
<b>10</b>	Whitsunday Hymn <i>(Jonathan Langridge, Tenor)</i>	3:24
<b>11</b>	<b>Nothing is here for tears</b>	<b>2:14</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>A Vision of Aeroplanes</b> <i>(Raphaella Papadakis, Soprano • James McVinnie, Organ)</i>	<b>9:31</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The souls of the righteous</b>	<b>3:19</b>
	<i>(Maud Millar, Soprano • Alessandro Fisher, Tenor • Dominic Sedgwick, Bass)</i>	
<b>14</b>	<b>A Choral Flourish (Exultate justi)</b>	<b>1:42</b>

**The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge**  
**James McVinnie and Ashok Gupta, Organ**  
**Timothy Brown**

## Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

### A Vision of Aeroplanes • Mass in G minor • Motets

Among my earliest musical memories is that of singing, as a very junior chorister, at the interring of the ashes of Ralph Vaughan Williams in Westminster Abbey in September 1958. It was impossible, young as I was, to be unaware of the act of national mourning in which I was participating. Performing Greene's *Lord, let me know mine end*, chosen by Vaughan Williams to be sung on this occasion, and hearing the exquisite strains of the *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'* played from the organ loft, was a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Amongst the orchestral music before the service was the Galliard from *Job*; little did I know then that fifty years later I would direct the choral version heard on this recording. Over a long life Vaughan Williams had endeared himself to a nation through his humanity as much as the music that the world had come to regard as quintessentially 'English'. His association with the *English Hymnal*, with the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and with amateur music-making, principally through his connection with the Leith Hill Festival, were characteristics that marked him out from his contemporary composers. Yet none of this was to detract from his seriousness as a composer of symphonies, film music and opera. It had been with the *Sea Symphony*, first performed at the Leeds Festival of 1910, and the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* that Vaughan Williams had had his first major successes, revealing not only his skill as a symphonist and composer for voices, but his fascination with the modal harmony and melodies of sixteenth-century English music. His last orchestral and choral works, including *Symphonies Nos. 8 and 9*, were written in his eighties. When he died, aged 85, his interest in contemporary music and in professional and amateur music-making remained undimmed; there was a very real sense of losing not a forgotten hero but a dominant figure in the world of arts – albeit one that strode the English rather than the world stage.

After the appearance of the *Mass in G minor*, which so strikingly demonstrated his skill in writing for

unaccompanied voices, Vaughan Williams produced a steady flow of secular and sacred choral music, often intended for amateur choirs, such as the evening canticles in C (the *Village Service*). Much of this music entered the repertoire of cathedrals and parish churches immediately; by the time I ceased to be a chorister, four years after his death, I was familiar with much of it. For the present disc, however, while presenting the *G minor Mass* as its centrepiece, we have concentrated on recording some of the lesser known pieces, ranging from the simplicity of *Nothing is here for tears* to the astringent harmonies and sophisticated counterpoint of *The Vision of Aeroplanes*. I hope the disc demonstrates the enormous range of Vaughan Williams's choral output, his ability to spin beautiful melodies, as well as his gift for word-setting and for evoking, as in *Valiant-for-truth*, the power and evocative range of the texts he set. Above all, it shows how a self-confessed agnostic can respond with total integrity to the strong imagery of religious texts.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire. On his mother's side he was descended both from the Darwins and the Wedgwoods. From them perhaps he inherited his sense of social conscience and, despite his patrician heritage, an affinity with ordinary people. A Charterhouse and Cambridge education was enriched by studies at the Royal College of Music. He studied under Sir Hubert Parry, and later Stanford. During these formative years he became friendly with a talented host of emerging artists, including Gustav Holst, who became a lifelong friend and a fellow enthusiast for the preservation of English folk-song. His early career was as an organist and teacher. During this period he accepted the editorship of the *English Hymnal* (he was later associated with the *Oxford Book of Carols*, for which he wrote a number of arrangements), an experience that had a profound influence on his appreciation of the rich heritage of English music in all its forms, be it folksong, madrigal, or motet; it was also at this time that he first met Cecil

Sharp and began to emulate Sharp's interest in the collecting, and subsequent arranging of folksongs. Later in his life Vaughan Williams served as President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society that Sharp had founded in 1911.

Vaughan Williams's war experiences affected him deeply, and unquestionably it had, for all the bonhomie that he exuded in life, a bearing on much of his subsequent music. In his later life he became very much the 'grand old man' of British music, yet he refused a knighthood – he did, however, accept the much higher honour of the Order of Merit, the personal gift of the Monarch. Writing in *The Musical Times* after his death, Sir Arthur Bliss wrote of Vaughan Williams: '[He] was always a searcher, an explorer. It was so characteristic of him to start his career with a work called *Toward the Unknown Region* and to write in his old age a symphony commemorating Scott of the Antarctic.' Michael Kennedy, his biographer and lifelong friend, wrote: 'What a rich harvest this wonderful man has left us, a musical testament of beauty of a breadth unrivalled in English music. He is part of the fabric of our nation, with Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Hardy and Elgar.'

The fun of devising a recording programme is, in part, the discovery of neglected works. Such a piece is *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*, an anthem for mixed chorus and orchestra or organ, adapted in 1947 from 'Galliard of the Sons of the Morning', from *Job, A Masque for dancing* (1930). The verbal imagery in the choral writing is strikingly powerful, and the ending is particularly evocative. *Valiant-for-truth* (1940) belongs to a series of works on Bunyan's Christian allegory that Vaughan Williams wrote during his lifetime, beginning in 1906 with incidental music to a play and concluding over forty years later in 1951 with the opera *Pilgrim's Progress*. The motet, which has a zeal and fervour about it that is indeed almost theatrical, tells the story of Mr Valiant-for-truth's journey 'to the other side'. The optimism expressed in the final choral trumpet calls constitutes a remarkable piece of choral writing. Although written after the death of a friend, the choice of text was especially apt in that dark year of World War II.

The *Mass in G minor* dates from 1921–22, a fertile period for Vaughan Williams that produced *The Shepherd of the Delectable Mountains*, *Symphony No. 3 (Pastoral)*, and *O vos omnes*. It reveals the composer's absorbing interest in the modal harmonic language and contrapuntal textures of the English late Renaissance; the music abounds in the 'false relations' – alternating major and minor thirds – that are the trademark of Tallis and Byrd. Although steeped in that tradition, the music's scope goes beyond that of a 'distilled' sixteenth-century style. Using a variety of textures – solo voices, solo quartets, single and double choirs – he achieves a huge emotional and dynamic range. There is something about the way the mass is written, with the gently rising and falling motif that begins and ends it, that gives a sense of it being through-composed. Certainly the mass works as well in concert as it does liturgically. Though dedicated 'to Gustav Holst and his Whitsunday Singers', in its early years it was associated with Sir R. R. Terry's new choir in the recently-built Westminster Cathedral.

The *Three Choral Hymns*, with words by Bishop Myles Coverdale, were composed in 1929 for Division I of the Leith Hill Music Festival. Originally composed for orchestra, the present performance uses the organ for the first time in a recording of the work. There are three movements: *Easter Hymn*; *Christmas Hymn*; *Whitsunday Hymn* (the words of the second and third movements were translated by Coverdale from Luther). *Nothing is here for tears* was composed in 1936 on the death of King George V, using a text drawn from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. It is typical of many short songs that Vaughan Williams wrote for unison voices or an optional mixed-voice chorus. He had an uncanny skill at spinning a tune that was at once grateful to sing and rewarding as a melody to enjoy, and his unison songs and choruses were performed throughout the land in the days when every village seemed to have its group of amateur singers, as well as its Women's Institute.

Undoubtedly the most technically demanding work of the programme, for the choir but most particularly for the organist, is *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, a motet for mixed chorus and organ composed for Harold Darke 'and his St Michael's Singers'. Darke, a renowned

organist and friend of Vaughan Williams, had been organist of St Michael's Church, Cornhill, for forty years; *A Vision of Aeroplanes* was composed in celebration of that anniversary on 4th June 1956. For this commission there was no need for Vaughan Williams to tailor his music to an amateur choir, but the professional singers that Darke had at his disposal were certainly stretched. Fundamentally, however, the work is a *tour-de-force* for the organist.

In the contrastingly simple yet effective introit, *The souls of the righteous*, Vaughan Williams set words from *The Wisdom of Solomon*, chapter 3. It was composed for the Dedication Service of the Battle of Britain Chapel in Westminster Abbey on 10th July, 1947. Beginning with a single soprano voice, the piece

gradually unfolds with further solos for baritone and tenor above sustained chords, until a final outburst for the chorus, '*For God proved them and found them worthy for himself*', brings the motet to a triumphant conclusion.

*A Choral Flourish (Exultate, justi)*, for unaccompanied SATB chorus, was composed for a large choral event in the Royal Albert Hall in 1952. Although simple in construction, it displays the confident, semi-contrapuntal style that Vaughan Williams had learnt in his student days, and which infuses all the music heard on this recording.

**Timothy Brown, 2009**

## The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge

In addition to its primary task of leading chapel services, Clare College Choir gives frequent concerts, both in the United Kingdom and abroad. It tours throughout Western and Eastern Europe, the United States of America, Russia, and the Middle and Far East, frequently performs in Britain's major concert halls with many leading British orchestras, and regularly contributes to the Choral Evensong broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. Under the direction of Timothy Brown it has become world-renowned for the range and for the breadth of its repertoire, including works with orchestra, and for the flexibility of its choral sound. Clare Choir became the first mixed-voice choir from Cambridge or Oxford to perform at the BBC Proms, singing Bach's *St John Passion*, and made a further appearance at the Proms in a performance of Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with the Monteverdi Choir. It has sung under the direction of many leading conductors such as Ivor Bolton, Andrew Davis, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, René Jacobs and Sir Roger Norrington. It has toured with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, appeared in the Innsbruck, Potsdam and Salzburg festivals, and performed at Spitalfields and most other leading United Kingdom concert venues. The choir's discography stretches from Allegri to John Tavener. It regularly commissions new music, and has become particularly linked with the work of Tarik O'Regan, Giles Swayne, and Clare alumnus John Rutter.

### Sopranos

Eleanor Caine  
Harriet Colley  
Kate Conway\*  
Antonia Lyne  
Maud Millar  
Raphaëla Papadakis  
Naomi Scott  
Cressida Sharp  
Joséphine Stephenson  
Rosemary Taylor

### Altos

Imogen Carr  
Grace Durham  
James Henshaw  
John Lattimore\*  
Jessica Thomas\*  
Jessica Wallington

### Tenors

Peter Aisher  
Jonathan Langridge  
Nived Lobo  
Justin Meyer \*  
Nicholas Morrell

### Basses

Stefan Berkietta  
Adam Drew  
William Marsey  
Nicholas Mogg  
Dominic Sedgwick  
Tillmann Taape  
Tsai Wen-Hao\*

\* guest singers



Photograph:  
Jet Photographic

## Ashok Gupta



*Photograph: Jet Photographic*

Ashok Gupta is in his final year at Clare College reading Music. He attended Dean Close School in Cheltenham, where he was organ scholar for three years, from 2003 to 2006. He studied organ with Robert Houssart and piano with Philip Martin. As organ scholar at Clare College, he accompanies the chapel choir under the direction of Timothy Brown. Since coming to Cambridge in 2007, he has had the privilege of studying under David Sanger, Nigel Allcoat, Douglas Hollick and John Wellingham. He has given organ recitals on all the major Cambridge organs. In 2009 he played principal continuo in the *St Matthew Passion* with Clare College Choir and the Manchester Camerata, and chamber organ in a performance of Haydn's *Creation* with the BBC Philharmonic under Gianandrea Noseda. In November 2009 he accompanied the choir of the Chapel Royal in a service of evensong, broadcast live on BBC Radio 3.

## James McVinnie



*Photograph: Gorm Shackelford*

James McVinnie is the Assistant Organist of Westminster Abbey. He held organ scholarships at St Albans Cathedral and Clare College, Cambridge (where he read music). In 2006 he became Organ Scholar and then Acting Sub Organist of St Paul's Cathedral where he played for regular services and many great state occasions. He teaches the organ at Dulwich College and Tonbridge School and is also Director of Music at St Andrew's, Holborn. He has an increasingly busy schedule as an organ soloist and continuo player in the United Kingdom and abroad. He takes a keen interest in new music and has had pieces written for him by Nico Muhly, Graham Ross and Robert Walker. In summer 2009 he made his solo debut in the Salzburg Festival with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra under Ivor Bolton. He studies the organ with Thomas Trotter and Hans Fagius.

## Timothy Brown



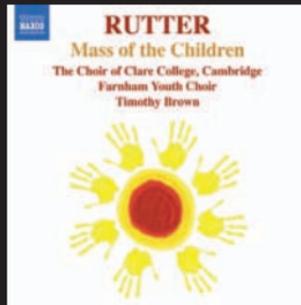
*Photograph: Jet Photographic*

Timothy Brown, who has been Director of Music at Clare College, Cambridge since 1979, began his musical career as a chorister at Westminster Abbey. This was followed by membership of King's College Choir, Cambridge, under the legendary Sir David Willcocks, and by some years as a professional counter-tenor, including a spell as a founding member of The Scholars Vocal Ensemble. His work with the choir of Clare College, Cambridge, and with his professional chorus English Voices (of which he is the founder/director) has earned him an international reputation as a choral director, renowned both for his attention to technical detail and for the breadth of his musical interpretations. With Clare College Choir he has toured extensively and has constructed an extensive discography. He is much in demand as a chorus master around Europe, and has worked on a number of opera projects with René Jacobs and Ivor Bolton, in Germany, Austria, Holland and Belgium. In 2008 he assisted René Jacobs in a production of Handel's *Belshazzar* in Berlin, Aix-en-Provence and Innsbruck. He is a popular choral clinician, leading workshops around the United States and Europe. He is an Affiliated Lecturer in the Music Faculty at Cambridge, and is a contributing editor to the William Walton Edition, published by OUP.

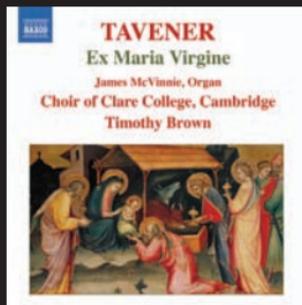
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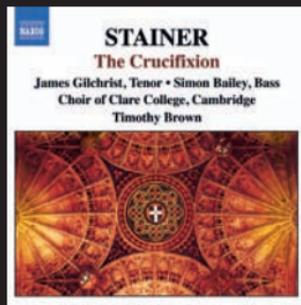
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Playing Time  
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Ralph Vaughan Williams's sublime *Mass in G minor* reveals the composer's absorbing interest in using the modal harmonic language and contrapuntal textures of the English late Renaissance to achieve a huge emotional and dynamic range. Undoubtedly the most technically demanding work on this disc is *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, a virtuosic motet for mixed chorus and organ. Several neglected works also feature here, including *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*, an anthem for mixed chorus and orchestra or organ, and *Valiant-for-truth*, one of several works based on Bunyan's Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Ralph  
**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**  
(1872–1958)

- |      |   |              |
|------|---|--------------|
| 1    | <b>The Voice out of the Whirlwind</b>     | <b>5:23</b>  |
| 2    | <b>Valiant-for-truth</b>                  | <b>5:32</b>  |
| 3-7  | <b>Mass in G minor</b>                    | <b>22:35</b> |
| 8-10 | <b>Three Choral Hymns</b>                 | <b>12:55</b> |
| 11   | <b>Nothing is here for tears</b>          | <b>2:14</b>  |
| 12   | <b>A Vision of Aeroplanes *</b>           | <b>9:31</b>  |
| 13   | <b>The souls of the righteous</b>         | <b>3:19</b>  |
| 14   | <b>A Choral Flourish (Exultate justi)</b> | <b>1:42</b>  |

**The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge**  
**James McVinnie \* and Ashok Gupta, Organ**  
**Timothy Brown**

Recorded in the Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge, UK, on 16th July, 2009  
and the Chapel of Jesus College, Cambridge, UK, on 17th July, 2009

Producer and Engineer: Thomas Hewitt Jones • Editing: Thomas Hewitt Jones and Adam Binks

Please see the booklet for a detailed track and artist list

**Sung texts are available at: [www.naxos.com/libretti/572465.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/572465.htm)**

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