

Composers of Great Band Works
by Dr. Brian Harris, Bandroom.com Publications

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

Lifeline

- born in small village of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, England.
- was the second son and the youngest of three children.
- came from a prestigious, upper middle-class family.
- at age of 6, was given piano and theory instruction by his aunt.
- began violin lessons at age 7.
- at 18, attended the Royal College of Music in London.
- earned a Bachelor in music from Cambridge University at 22.
- married at age 25 (his wife, Adeline, was two years his senior).
- earned a Doctorate of Music from Cambridge at age 29.
- at 31, began collecting English folk-songs with college friend Gustav Holst.
- was music editor for the 1906 revision of The English Hymnal, contributing several original hymns and his own financial resources.
- at 35, studied composition with Ravel in Paris for three months.
- at age 42, enlisted as a Private in the Army (WWI), serving first in a field ambulance unit in France and later as the First Army Director of Music.
- after the war ended, he was appointed professor of composition at the Royal College of Music.
- made several tours of the United States, conducting and lecturing at several universities (Michigan, Indiana, California, Yale, Cornell).
- widowed at age 79, he remarried a year later to poet and writer Ursula Wood.
- remained active as a composer and conductor throughout his final years.
- died unexpectedly yet peacefully in his sleep, aged 85 years.



Anecdotes and Trivia

- his father, the vicar of Down Ampney, died when RVW was two years old.
- his mother's uncle was Charles Darwin.
- his principal instrument was viola.
- insisted that his surname be pronounced *rafe*, not *ralf*.
- was by nature left-handed, though he learned to write with his right hand.
- outdoor interests included tennis, cycling, ice skating, and nature walks.
- was a tall, broad-shouldered man, imposing in appearance and often in manner.
- hated for music to be used as background "noise" during meals.
- his first published composition was the song *Linden Lea* (1901).
- wrote a concerto for solo harmonica with orchestral accompaniment.
- creative musical output was over 350 works, including nine symphonies, six opera, music for 11 films, numerous choral and solo voice pieces, and much chamber music.



Works for Military Band

English Folk Song Suite - first performance: 1923
Sea Songs - first performance: ca. 1924
Toccata Marziale - first performance: 1924
Flourish for Wind Band - first performance: 1939

Suggested Readings

Vaughan Williams by James Day (1961)
RVW by Ursula Vaughan Williams (1964)
The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams by Michael Kennedy (1964)