

The Memorial Church of Harvard University Music Notes for Sunday, November 13, 2022

This morning's service of remembrance and commemoration begins in the Memorial Room, whose centerpiece *Sacrifice*—by the American sculptor and author Malvina Hoffman—pays tribute to Harvard's First World War dead. To commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the dedication of the Memorial Church—on November 11, 1932—composer in residence Carson Cooman has composed a new introit which sets words from Laurence Binyon's famous poem *For the Fallen*, penned just after the outbreak of the First World War.

The English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams—whose 150th birth-anniversary occurred last month—studied with Parry, Wood, and Stanford at the Royal College of Music, London, before traveling to Europe for further study with Bruch in Berlin and Ravel in Paris. A gifted conductor and church organist, he was the musical editor of *The English Hymnal* (1906), and throughout his life remained an authority on hymnody and the folk music of the British Isles. Although not a churchman himself, Vaughan Williams sought to reflect the prayers of a nation in the aftermath of World War I by setting a text that presents both faith in, and dependence upon, God. Psalm 90 is presented in its literal translation (sung by a semi-chorus) and in the familiar metrical paraphrase, “O God, our help in ages past.” The organ enters towards the end (alongside a trumpet) to reaffirm the confidence in God's purpose, and the work concludes with the rousing proclamation, “Prosper thou our handywork.”

George Thalben-Ball was born in Australia but spent almost his whole life in England, where is remembered for his nearly 60 years as organist of London's Temple Church. *Elegy* is his best-known organ work: it originated as an improvisation that he played at the end of a live BBC daily religious service during World War II, when the service finished a couple of minutes earlier than expected. After a flood of calls from listeners inquiring as to the name of the work, Thalben-Ball wrote down the improvisation for publication. A devoted teacher, Sir Hubert Parry was Director of the Royal College of Music from 1895 until his death in 1918. The Great War had an enormous impact on Parry, who lost many of his beloved students to the battlefields of Flanders. *Elegie* is Parry's final work: written in March 1918, the unpublished manuscript is housed in Oxford's Bodleian libraries and was edited in 2018, the centenary of Parry's death.

Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge (Ralph Vaughan Williams)

Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth
or ever the earth and the world were made,
Thou art God from everlasting and world without end.
Thou turnest man to destruction; again Thou sayest:
Come again, ye children of men.
For a thousand years in Thy sight are
but as yesterday; seeing that is past as a watch in the night.

*O God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come.
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.*

As soon as thou scatterest them, they are even as asleep,
and fade away suddenly like the grass.
In the morning it is green and groweth up,
but in the evening it is cut down and withered.
For we consume away in thy displeasure,
and are afraid at thy wrathful indignation.
For when thou art angry, all our days are gone,
we bring our years to an end, as a tale that is told.
The days of our age are threescore years and ten:
and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years,
yet is their strength then but labor and sorrow.
So passeth it away, and we are gone.
Turn thee again, O Lord, at the last.
Be gracious unto thy servants.
O satisfy us with thy mercy, and that soon.
So shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.

Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth
or ever the earth and the world were made,
Thou art God from everlasting and world without end.

And the glorious Majesty of the Lord be upon us.
Prosper Thou, O prosper Thou the work of our hands upon us.
O prosper Thou our handy work.

Psalm 90 and Isaac Watts (1674–1748)