

Ralph Vaughan Williams

BORN 1872, Down Ampney, England. **DIED** 1958, London, England.



HIGHLIGHTS

1. Ralph Vaughan Williams was born October 12, 1872 in Down Ampney, an English village in the county of Gloucestershire.
 2. Vaughan Williams was a modest, earthy Englishman, gentleman, and scholar, with a patriotic love for the history and traditions of England.
 3. Vaughan Williams' aunt taught him to play the piano. He took violin lessons, and he enrolled in a correspondence course in music theory, all before he was 9 years old. He composed his first piece when he was 6. When he was 10, he wrote an entire opera for puppets.
 4. He first studied at the Royal College of Music in London. Then, when he was 20, he moved on to Cambridge to obtain his bachelor of music degree.
 5. He saw loyalty to one's roots as essential not only to artistic progress but also political progress.
2. The words used most often to describe his works are ones like "noble," "strong," "reserved," "stout," "restrained," and "tasteful."
 3. He studied orchestration with Ravel and later expressed gratitude for what the French composer had taught him: "As far as I know my own faults, he hit them all exactly and told me to do exactly what I half felt in my mind I ought to do."
 4. Vaughan Williams' *Fourth Symphony* is probably the most controversial piece he ever wrote. At age 60, he had finally begun experimenting with the dissonant sounds that defined what was called "new music."

began to integrate folk music in his own compositions. "The art of music," he said, "is above all other arts, the expression of the soul of a nation."

4. Like Sibelius in Finland, he stopped using the actual melodies of folk tunes and instead absorbed the melodic shape, the rhythmic patterns, and most importantly the atmosphere. It became a natural and innate part of him.

UNIQUE INFLUENCE

1. Vaughan Williams is known mostly for his nine symphonies. His fans say he was the greatest symphonist of the 20th century, but they would get a good fight from the fans of Sibelius.
2. Vaughan Williams collected and catalogued 800 folk songs with such titles as *Bushes and Briars*, *The Dark-eyed Sailor*, and *The Lover's Ghost*. Many of those he discovered while listening to the songs of shepherds, farmers, and housewives. During a lecture he stated: "The evolution of the English folk song by itself has ceased but its spirit can continue to grow and flourish in the hands of our native composers."
3. When Vaughan Williams was 62, he wrote what is perhaps his most famous piece, *Fantasia On Greensleeves*.

INNOVATIONS IN STYLE

1. Vaughan Williams is England's leading nationalist composer, the first to research its folk songs and use them as inspiration for his music which was both modern and distinctively British.
2. He was a composer who approached his field as if it were a craft. He invested years in perfecting his technical skills before beginning his own experiments.
3. He is famous as one of England's leading experts on folk music. He wrote articles, gave lectures, collected and edited traditional works, and

BACKGROUND & TIMES

1. Ralph Vaughan Williams is called "the grand old man of English music," a name the public conferred on him even before he was an old man. He's also been called the "English gentleman's composer" and "the English country composer."

MAJOR WORKS

SYMPHONIES

No. 1 (Sea); No. 2 (London); No. 3 (Pastoral); No. 4; No. 5 in D; No. 6; No. 7 (Sinfonia Antarctica); No. 8; No. 9.

OTHER ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis; Lark Ascending; Fantasia on

Greensleeves; In the Fen Country; Overture to The Wasps: Flos Campi; English Folk Song Suite.

SACRED MUSIC

Mass in G Minor: Magnificat.