

■ *Nantwich Choral Society* ■

DVORAK

MASS IN D

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION

PARRY

BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS



**SATURDAY 29th JUNE
1996**

**The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30pm.**

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Andrew Mildinhall ~ *Organ*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman

NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF MUSIC SOCIETIES



BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS

Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

Hubert Parry belonged to that group of composers that we readily recognize as being quintessentially English. This group included such famous names as Stanford, Elgar and Vaughan Williams.

Parry's background was very academic: he studied at Eton and Oxford. He went on to teach at the Royal College of Music from 1883; becoming that institution's Director in 1894. In addition to this, Parry was made a Professor of Music at Oxford University in 1900. He was particularly noted for his work on J.S. Bach and the history of musical style.

BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS was composed in 1887, some time before his more famous settings of 'I was glad' and 'Jerusalem'. It is a setting of Milton's ode 'At a Solemn Musick', and was composed for the Bach Choir, under Stanford's conductorship, for the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Parry's BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS was held in the highest regard by Elgar, and later by Vaughan Williams. Throughout the piece Parry displays a special regard for the text coupled with a strong lyricism. It is not difficult to see why it has long been a favourite of choirs.

ORGAN SOLO

TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

Vaughan Williams studied composition with Parry, Wood and Stanford at the Royal College of Music and Cambridge University. He had further lessons from Bruch in Berlin, and Ravel in Paris. His formal training combined with much research into the musical genre of the folksong created a highly successful exponent of the English visionary tradition. This background has made the association of Vaughan Williams' music with the poetry of such writers as Blake, Bunyan, Herbert and Whitman particularly powerful.

Walt Whitman had little formal education. He started work as an office boy, and was subsequently employed as a printer, wandering schoolteacher and contributor to and editor of various magazines and newspapers. He entered politics in 1848. Despite his achievement, and his efforts at self publicity, Whitman was disregarded by the public at large.

TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION was composed for the Leeds Festival of 1907. Whitman's non-religious but ethically inspiring poetry appealed to the emotional and visionary side of Vaughan Williams' character. The fervour and sense of elation of this work are inspiring to audiences and performers alike.

~ INTERVAL ~

MASS IN D MAJOR

Antonin Dvorak (1841 - 1904)

Dvorak was particularly noted for his teaching and his composition. He came to the attention of Brahms who secured a publisher for some of his works in 1878. Following publication there was a marked increase in foreign performance of his compositions. Dvorak was particularly popular in England; he composed pieces for the Birmingham and Leeds Festivals and the Philharmonic Society, and in 1886 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Cambridge University. He was director of the National Conservatory in New York (1892 - 1895) where he taught composition as well as producing some of his best known works. Dvorak received many honours and awards, but he remained a modest man of simple tastes who was loyal to his Czech nationality.

The MASS IN D major was commissioned for the consecration of the family chapel at the home of the architect Josef Hlavka. The Mass was completed in June 1887, and the composer was delighted with the piece. The Mass of Dedication took place in September 1887. Dvorak conducted the first performance himself. The inspiring simplicity of the work reflects folk traditions which influenced the character of a great composer born to a humble butcher in a Czech village near Prague.

The majority of Dvorak's output is on a much larger scale than this modest Mass. Novello & Co. refused to publish this work until the composer provided it with a rich orchestral accompaniment, the original accompaniment was for organ alone, it is in this form that the work is to be performed this evening.