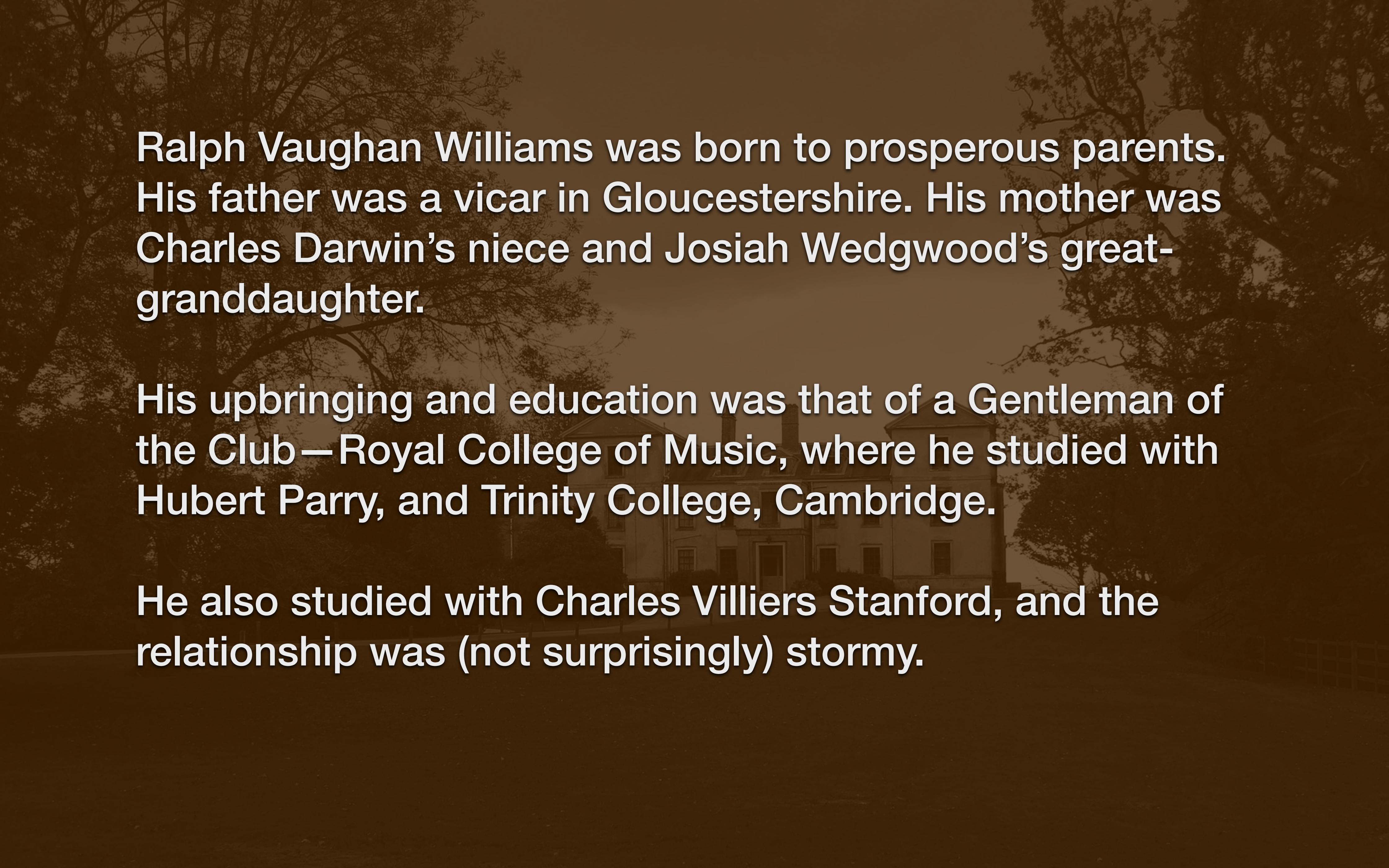


The British Muse

6 - A New Wave

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)





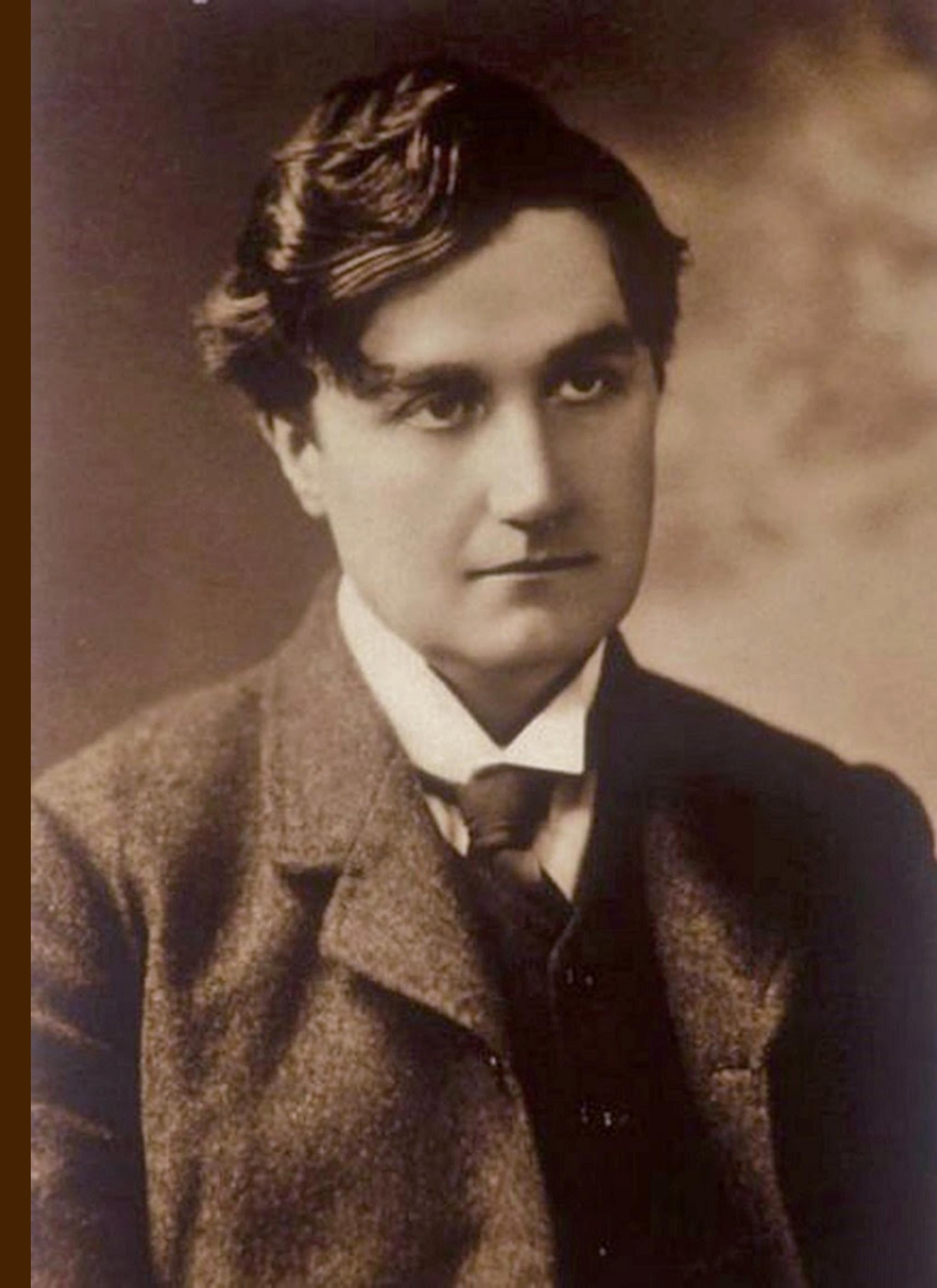
Ralph Vaughan Williams was born to prosperous parents. His father was a vicar in Gloucestershire. His mother was Charles Darwin's niece and Josiah Wedgwood's great-granddaughter.

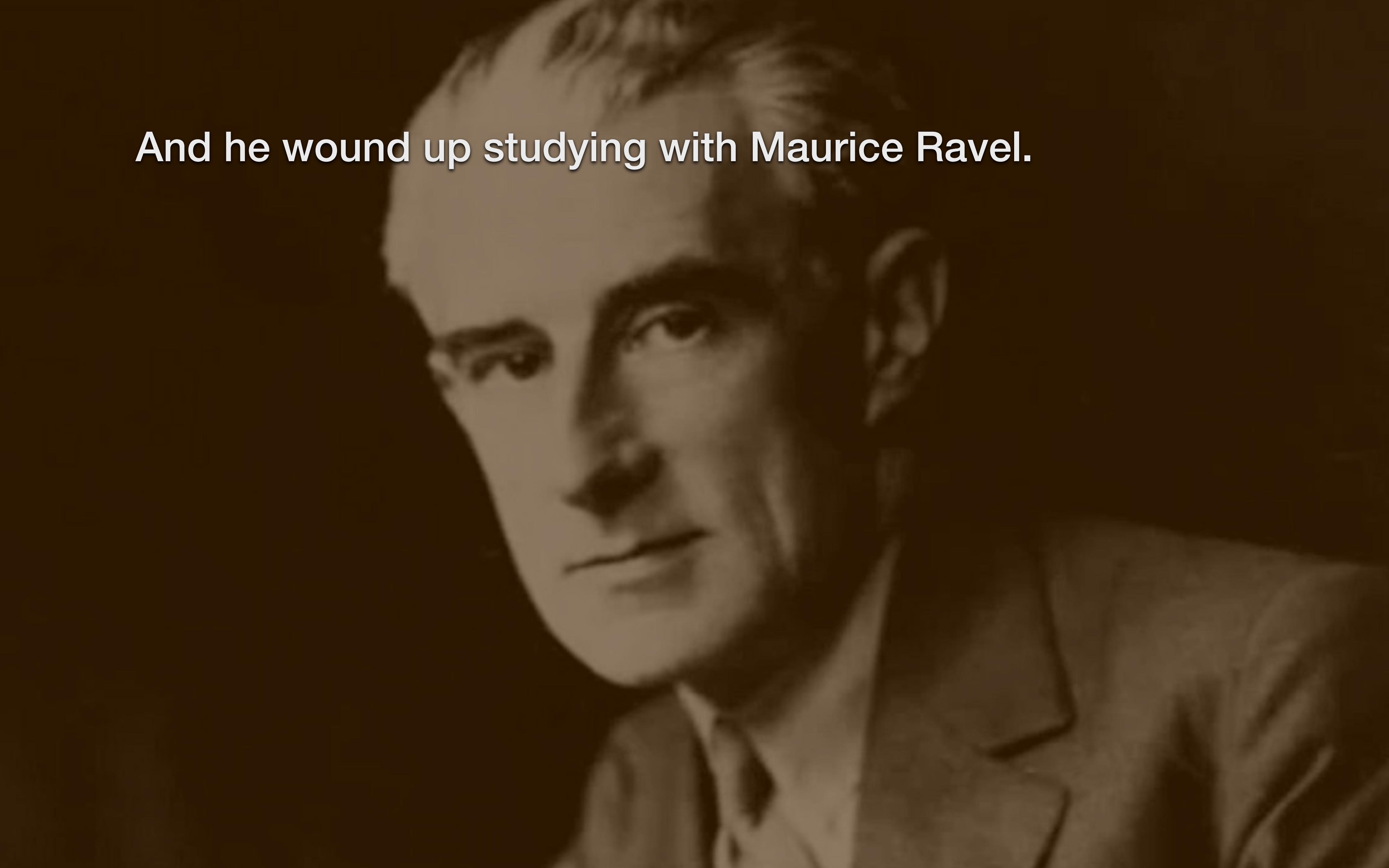
His upbringing and education was that of a Gentleman of the Club—Royal College of Music, where he studied with Hubert Parry, and Trinity College, Cambridge.

He also studied with Charles Villiers Stanford, and the relationship was (not surprisingly) stormy.

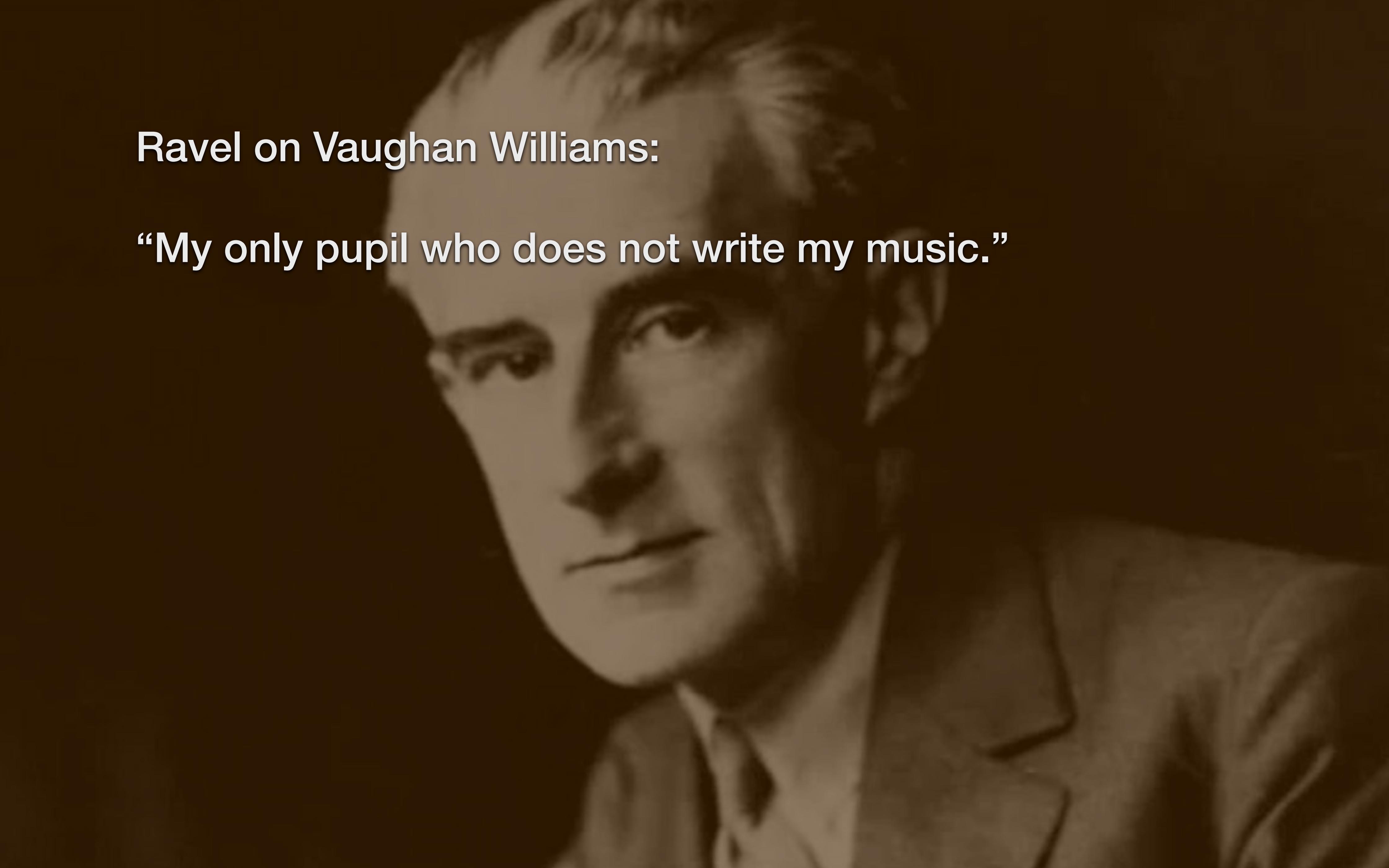
His career was well under way by the early 20th century, but he wasn't satisfied with his technique.

So he did something *very* unusual for a British composer: He sought a teacher in France.



A sepia-toned portrait of Maurice Ravel, a French composer. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie. His hair is dark and wavy, and he has a thoughtful expression, looking slightly to his left. The lighting is soft, creating a dramatic effect.

And he wound up studying with Maurice Ravel.

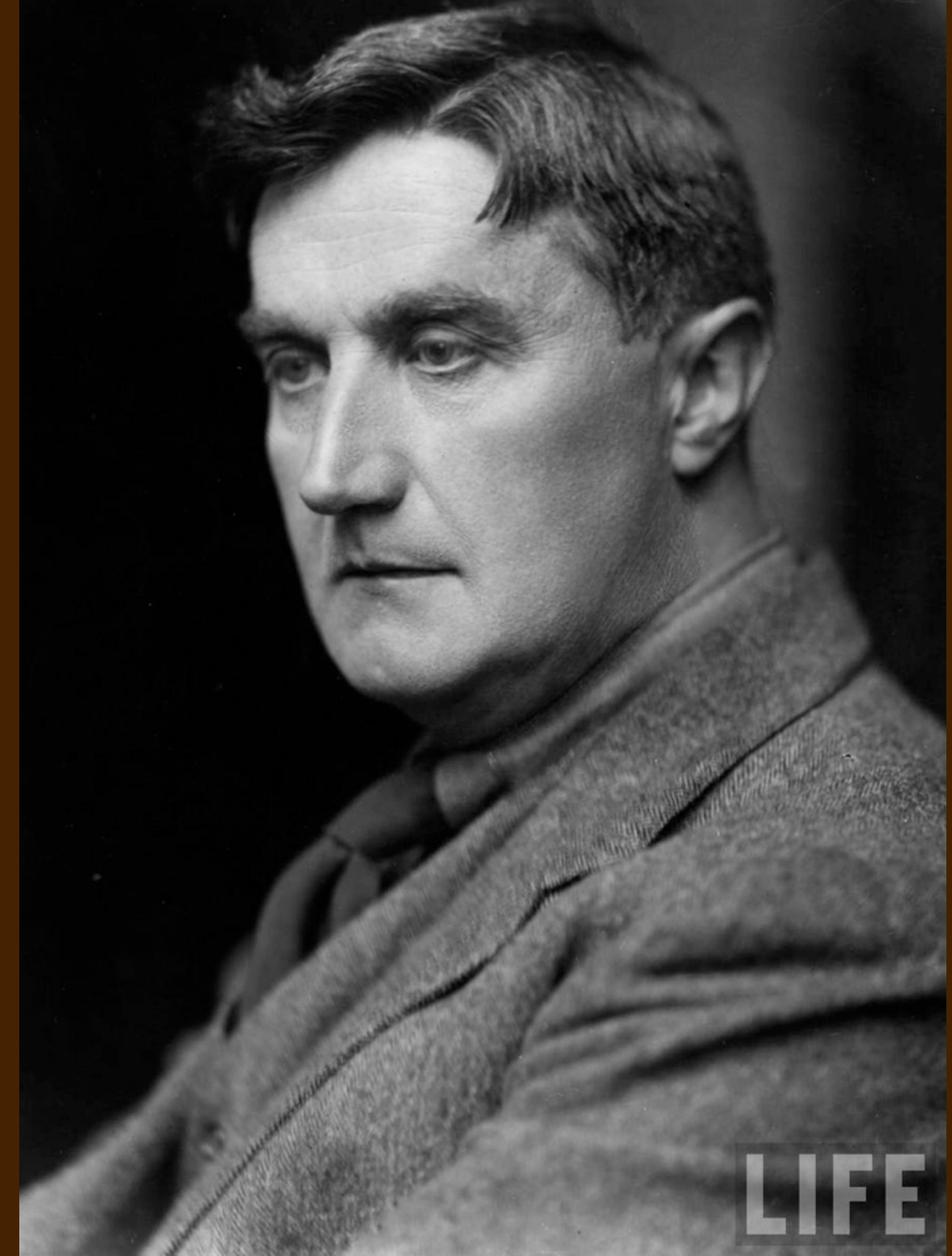
A sepia-toned portrait of Maurice Ravel, showing him from the chest up, looking slightly to his left. He has dark hair and is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt.

Ravel on Vaughan Williams:

“My only pupil who does not write my music.”

Vaughan Williams was back
in England by 1908.

In the years between his
return and the outbreak of
World War I he established
himself as a major force in
English music.

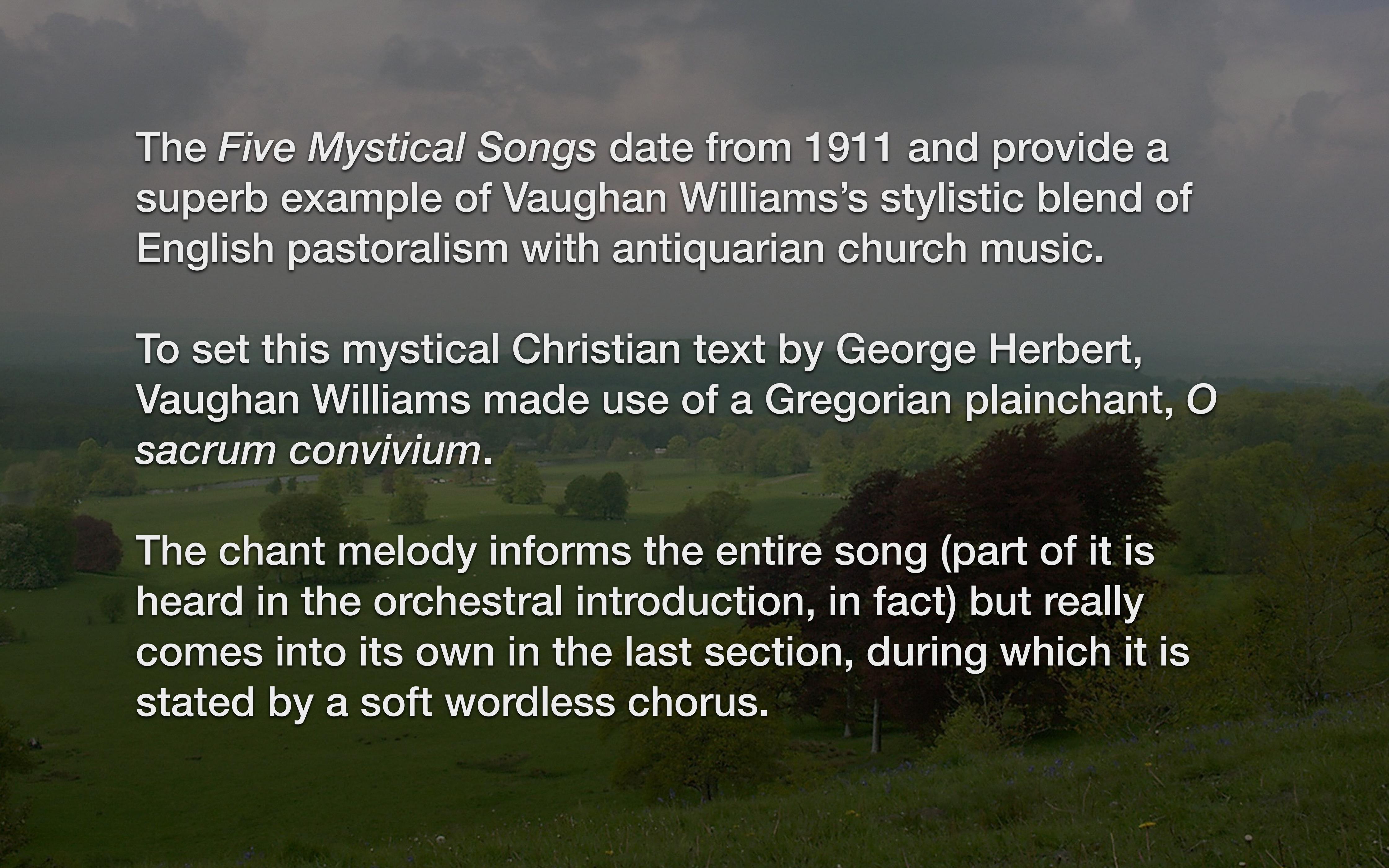


LIFE



Five Mystical Songs: Love Bade Me Welcome

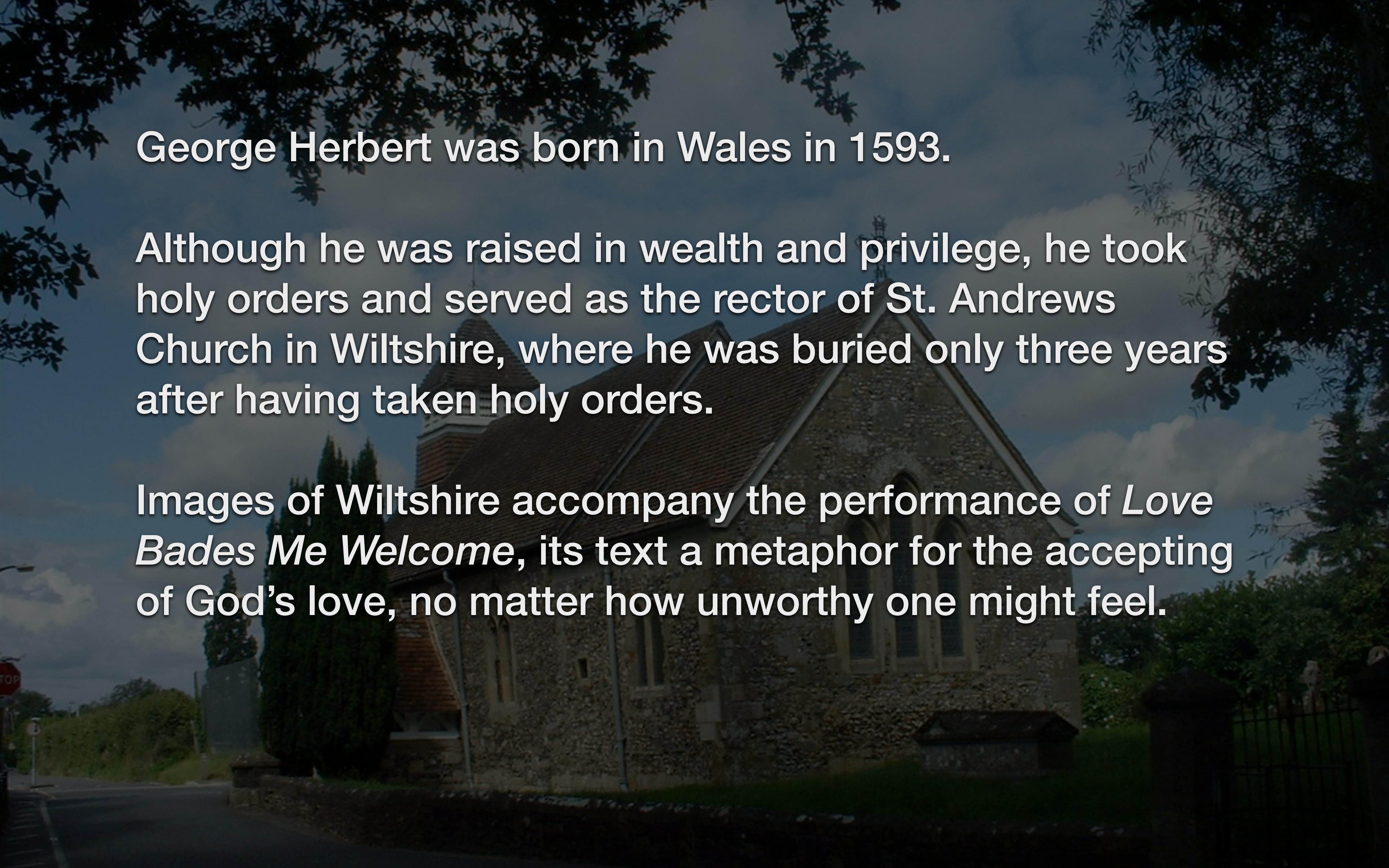
John Shirley-Quirk, baritone / Sir Thomas Beecham / English Chamber Orchestra



The *Five Mystical Songs* date from 1911 and provide a superb example of Vaughan Williams's stylistic blend of English pastoralism with antiquarian church music.

To set this mystical Christian text by George Herbert, Vaughan Williams made use of a Gregorian plainchant, *O sacrum convivium*.

The chant melody informs the entire song (part of it is heard in the orchestral introduction, in fact) but really comes into its own in the last section, during which it is stated by a soft wordless chorus.



George Herbert was born in Wales in 1593.

Although he was raised in wealth and privilege, he took holy orders and served as the rector of St. Andrews Church in Wiltshire, where he was buried only three years after having taken holy orders.

Images of Wiltshire accompany the performance of *Love Bades Me Welcome*, its text a metaphor for the accepting of God's love, no matter how unworthy one might feel.

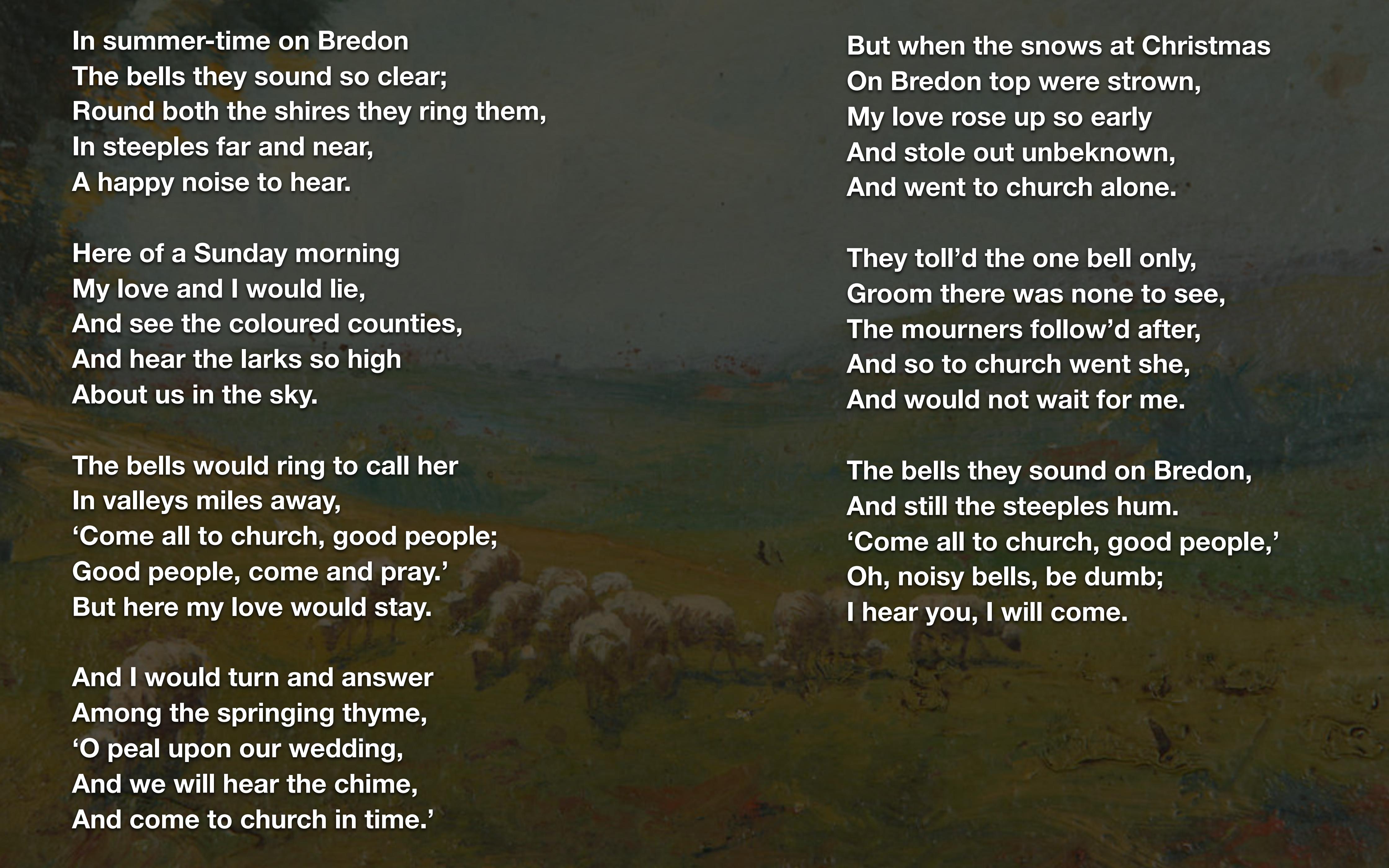


Bredon Hill

Ian Partridge, Tenor || Music Group of London (rec. 1971)

Review: the version by Arthur Somervell





In summer-time on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them,
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky.

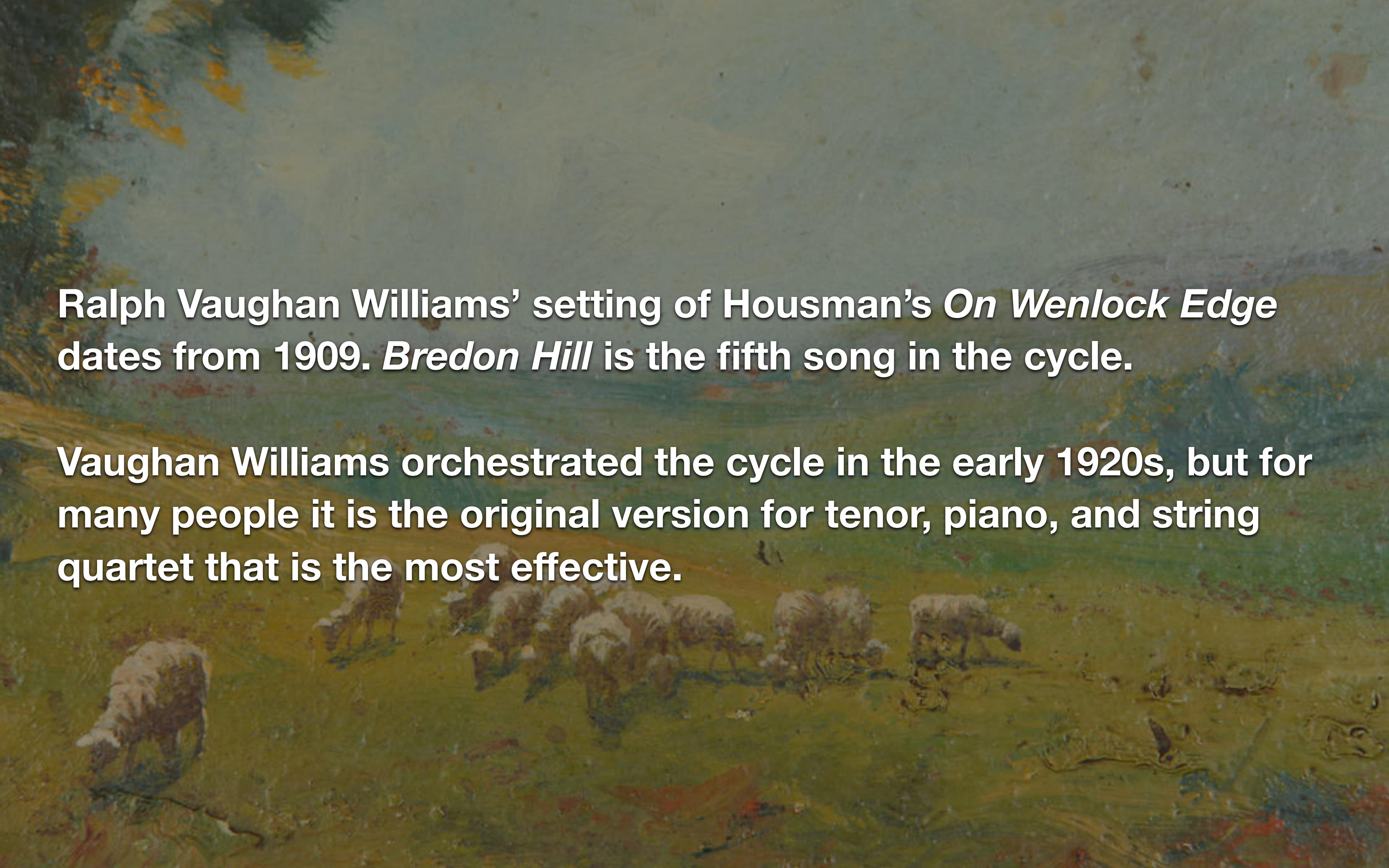
The bells would ring to call her
In valleys miles away,
'Come all to church, good people;
Good people, come and pray.'
But here my love would stay.

And I would turn and answer
Among the springing thyme,
'O peal upon our wedding,
And we will hear the chime,
And come to church in time.'

But when the snows at Christmas
On Bredon top were strown,
My love rose up so early
And stole out unbeknown,
And went to church alone.

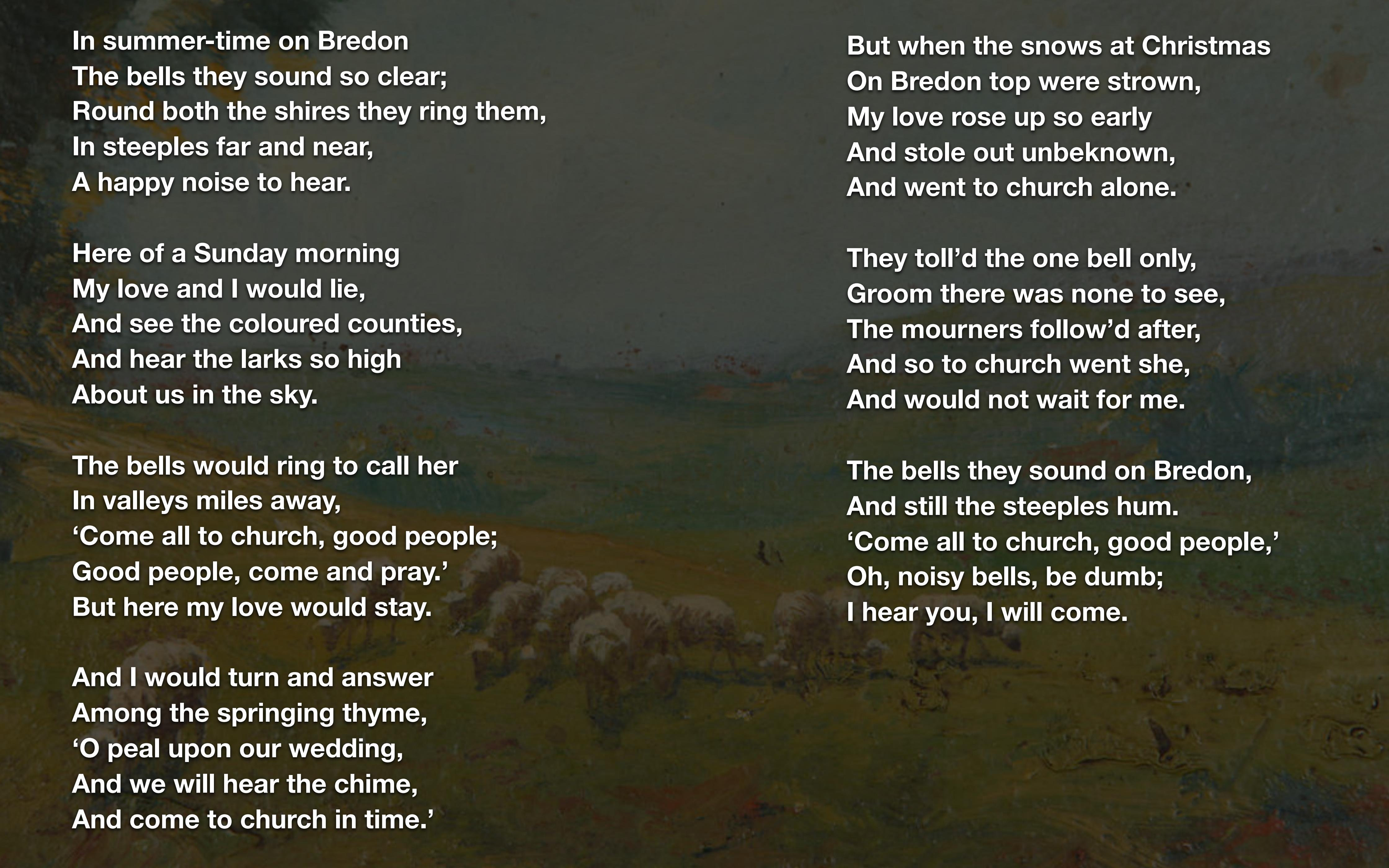
They toll'd the one bell only,
Groom there was none to see,
The mourners follow'd after,
And so to church went she,
And would not wait for me.

The bells they sound on Bredon,
And still the steeples hum.
'Come all to church, good people,'
Oh, noisy bells, be dumb;
I hear you, I will come.

A landscape painting showing a hillside covered in green grass and scattered with large, light-colored rocks. In the background, there are more hills and a cloudy sky.

Ralph Vaughan Williams' setting of Housman's *On Wenlock Edge* dates from 1909. *Bredon Hill* is the fifth song in the cycle.

Vaughan Williams orchestrated the cycle in the early 1920s, but for many people it is the original version for tenor, piano, and string quartet that is the most effective.



In summer-time on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them,
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
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And hear the larks so high
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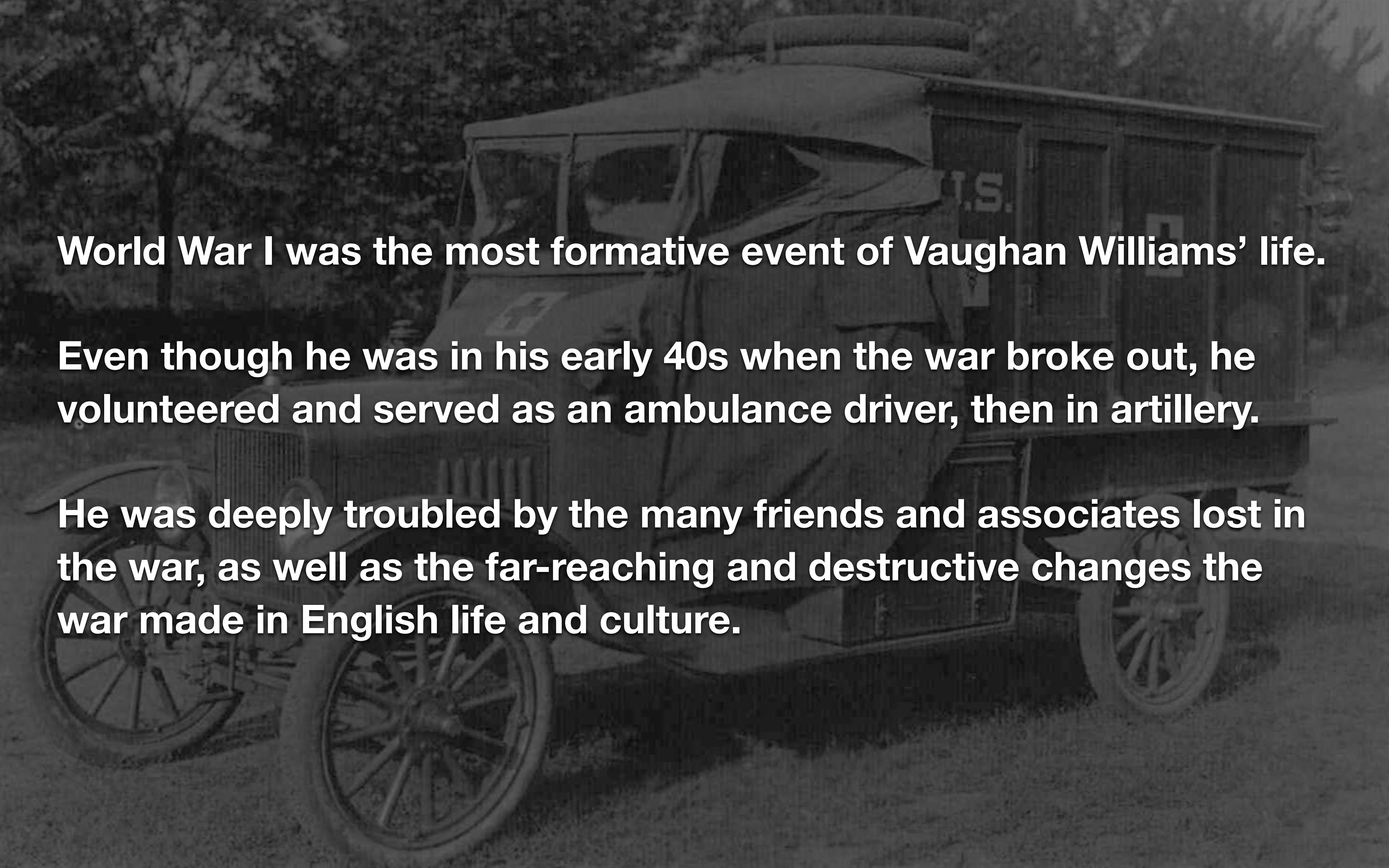
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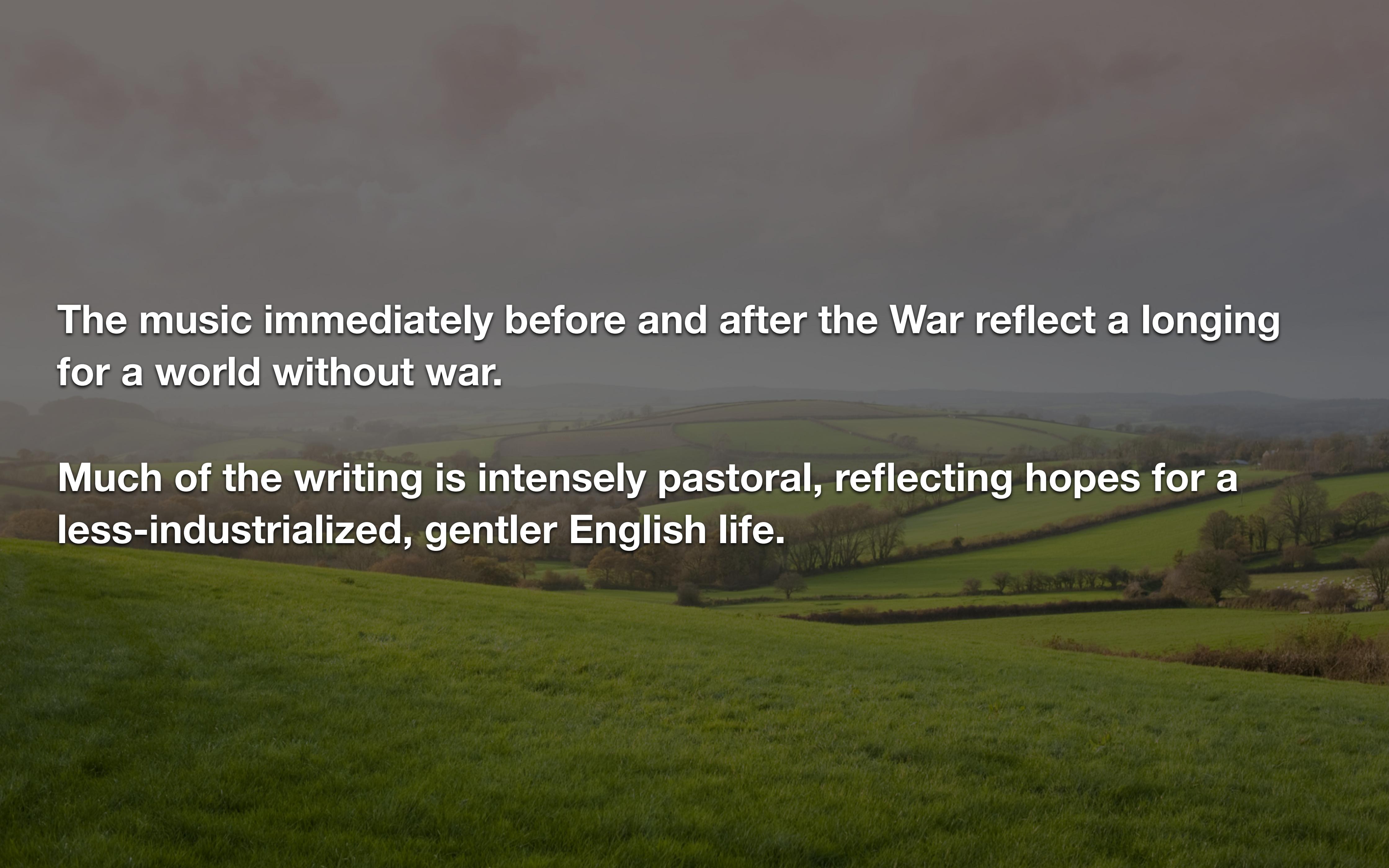
The bells they sound on Bredon,
And still the steeples hum.
'Come all to church, good people,'
Oh, noisy bells, be dumb;
I hear you, I will come.



World War I was the most formative event of Vaughan Williams' life.

Even though he was in his early 40s when the war broke out, he volunteered and served as an ambulance driver, then in artillery.

He was deeply troubled by the many friends and associates lost in the war, as well as the far-reaching and destructive changes the war made in English life and culture.



The music immediately before and after the War reflect a longing for a world without war.

Much of the writing is intensely pastoral, reflecting hopes for a less-industrialized, gentler English life.



The Lark Ascending

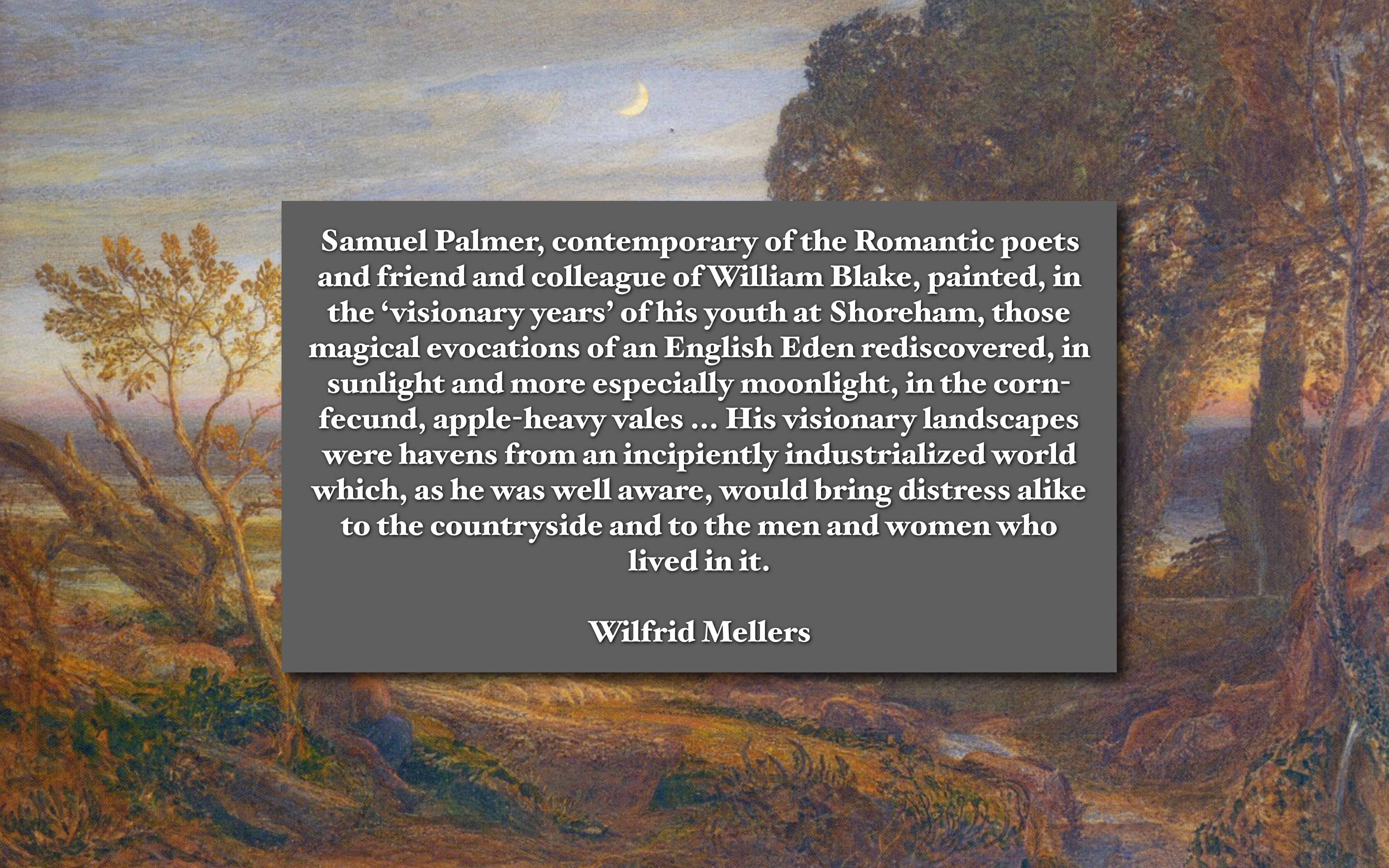
Hilary Hahn / Colin Davis / London Symphony Orchestra

English Romantic Landscapes

- Some similarity to the 18th century pastoral style.
- Nature becomes transcendent.
- A view of an idealized world.
- Nostalgia for an England that was rapidly disappearing in the Industrial Revolution.

Samuel Palmer

- 1805 – 1881.
- Landscape painter.
- Many paintings are allegorical.
- Some based in Italy; most are English.

A landscape painting by Samuel Palmer. The scene depicts rolling hills covered in dense vegetation, with a prominent tree on the left side. In the background, a crescent moon hangs in a hazy sky. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and evocative.

Samuel Palmer, contemporary of the Romantic poets and friend and colleague of William Blake, painted, in the ‘visionary years’ of his youth at Shoreham, those magical evocations of an English Eden rediscovered, in sunlight and more especially moonlight, in the cornfecund, apple-heavy vales ... His visionary landscapes were havens from an incipiently industrialized world which, as he was well aware, would bring distress alike to the countryside and to the men and women who lived in it.

Wilfrid Mellers



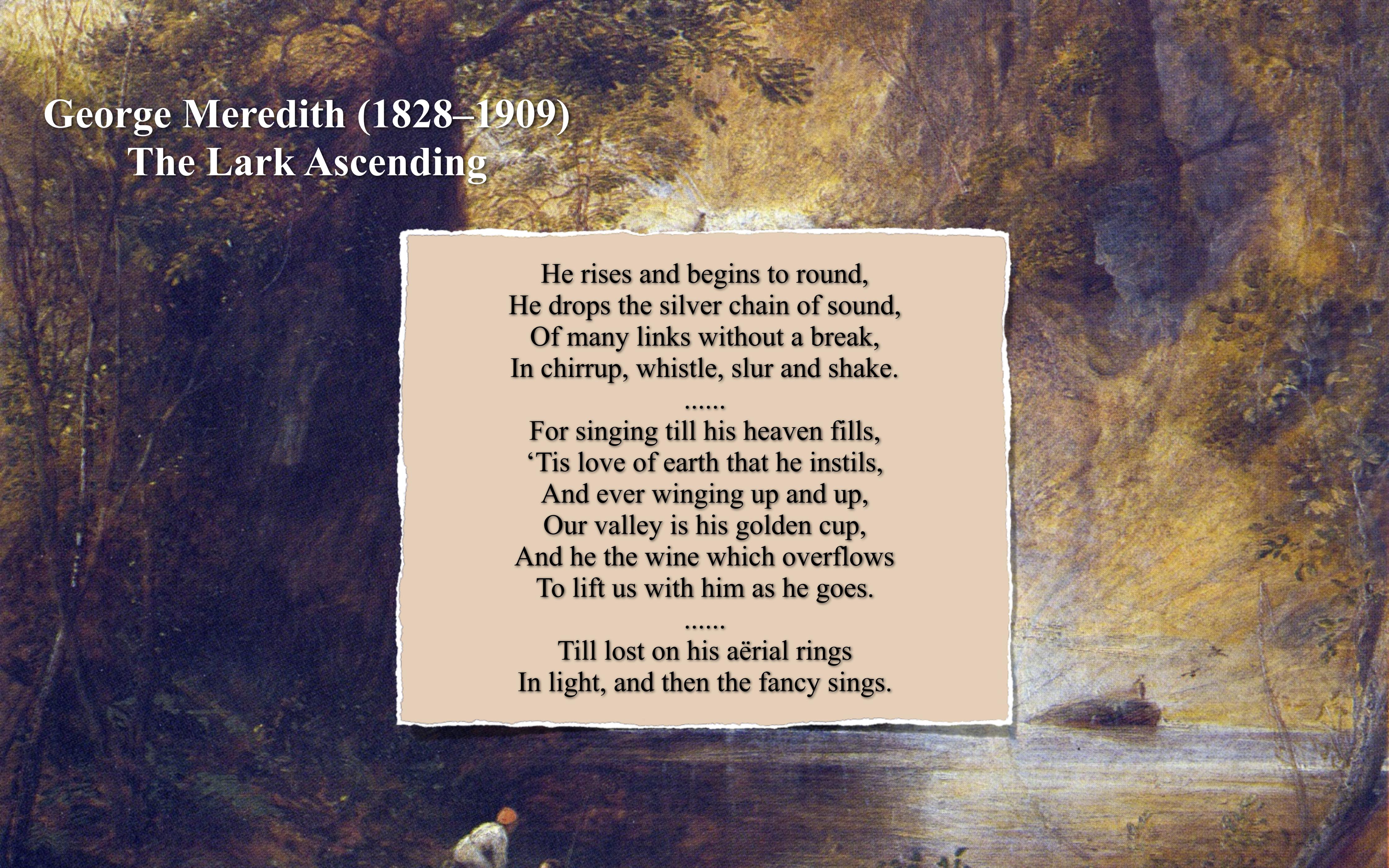


The Rising of the Skylark

- In many ways, the ultimate English romantic painting.
- A shepherd stands on the road at dusk, with his dog.
- He looks up into the sky...







George Meredith (1828–1909)

The Lark Ascending

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
 Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

.....
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
 And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
 And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes.

.....
Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

The Lark Ascending

- VW wrote the first version in 1914, for violin and piano.
- After WWI, he returned to the work.
- He revised it in 1919; it was premiered on December 15, 1920

When *The Lark Ascending* was written, the sound of the lark in the clear air was a feature of the summer landscape. Nearly a century later, with the decline in the bird's population and the destruction of much of its habitat, it is a rare joy. Perhaps the increasing popularity of this work is symbolic of a nostalgia for an England that is vanishing, for a time when, in the words of Siegfried Sassoon, "everyone was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done."

Michael Kennedy

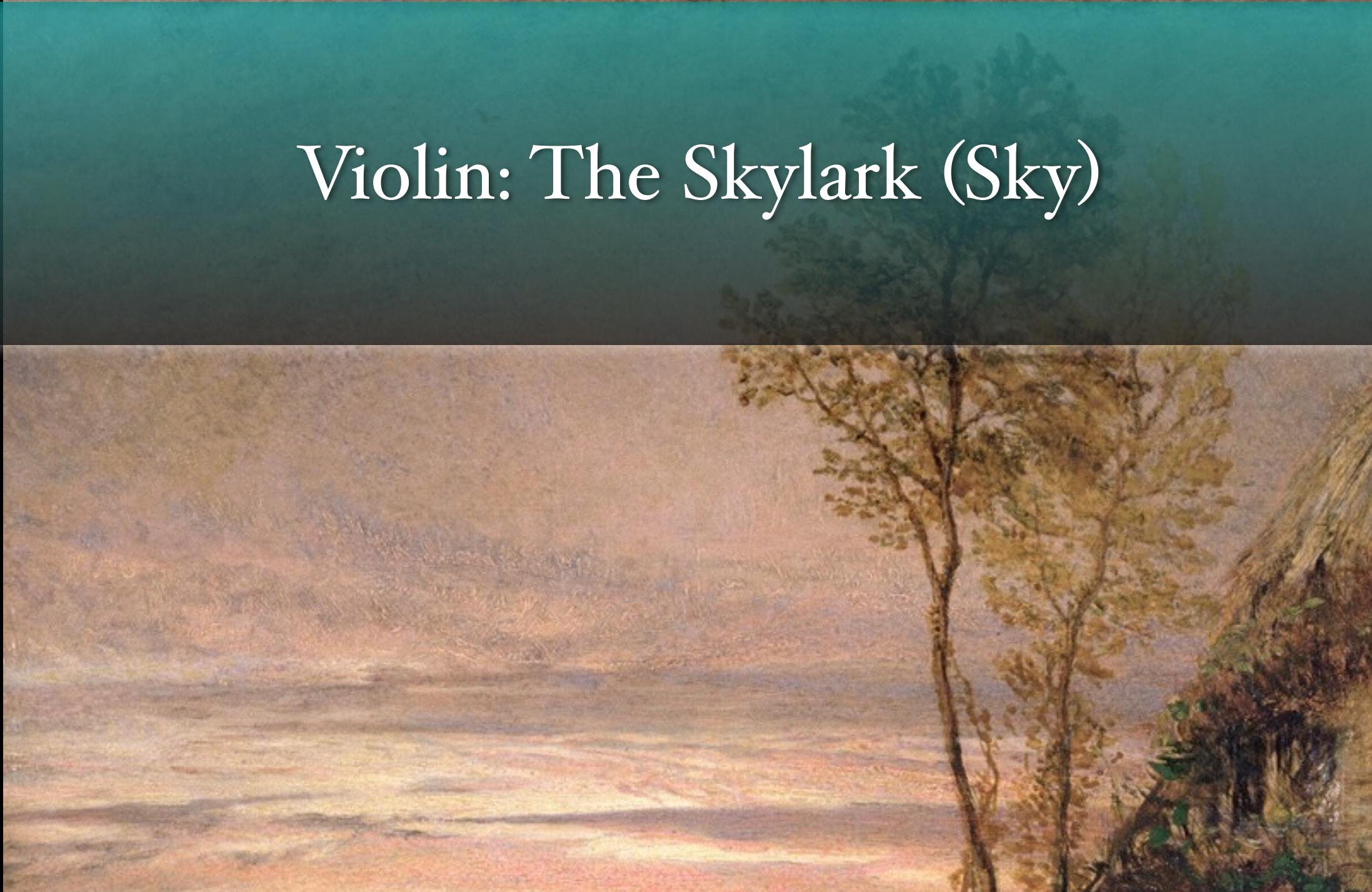


Conjuring a Dream of a Lost Eden in Sound

I - The Orchestration



Violin: The Skylark (Sky)



Orchestra: The Earth

Conjuring a Dream of a Lost Eden in Sound

II - The Roles

Chords / Blocks / Substance



Orchestra: The Earth



Melody / Unfixed rhythm / Transparency

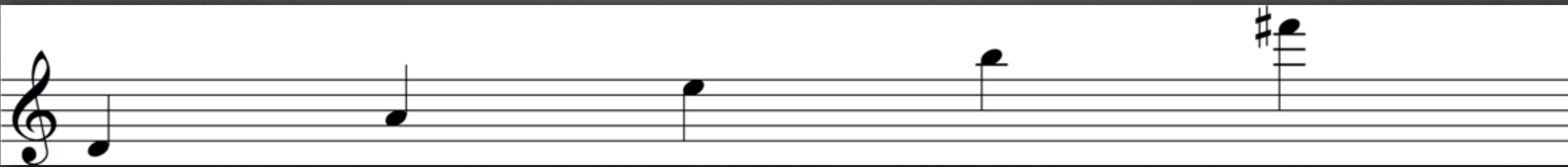
Violin: The Skylark (Sky)



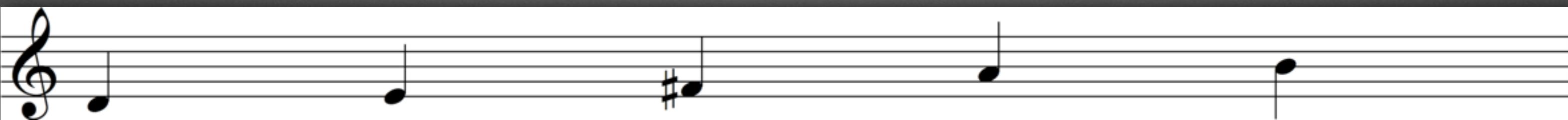
Conjuring a Dream of a Lost Eden in Sound

III - The Modes

The Pentatonic Scale



The Pentatonic Scale (Used in Parts 1 & 3)



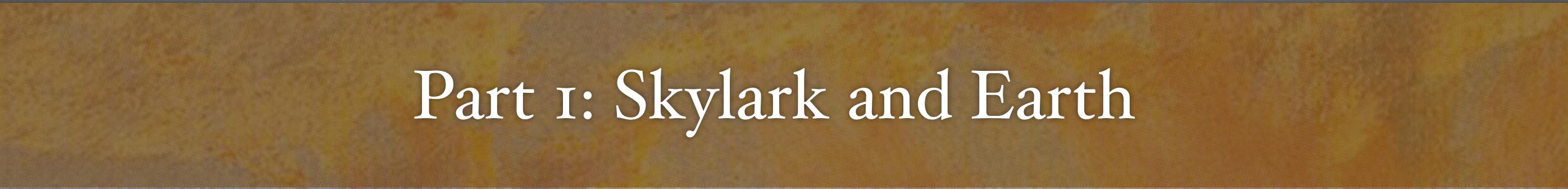
The Aeolian Mode (Used in Part 2)



Conjuring a Dream of a Lost Eden in Sound

IV - The Structure

(Exposition)



Part 1: Skylark and Earth

(Development)



Part 2: Skylark and Humanity

(Recapitulation)



Part 3: Skylark and Earth

The chart for *The Lark Ascending* is a selection
of paintings by Samuel Palmer.

Labels indicate the current position within
classical sonata-allegro form: Primary Theme,
Secondary Theme, Cadence, and such.



A Pastoral Symphony: III

André Previn / London Symphony Orchestra

About the Pastoral

- Often thought of to exemplify the English countryside.
- However, V.W. himself told of it as a response to his service in France in WWI.

It's really wartime music - a great deal of it
incubated when I used to go up night after night
with the ambulance wagon at Écoivres and we
went up a steep hill and there was a wonderful
Corot-like landscape in the sunset

Ralph Vaughan Williams, in a 1939 letter to his future wife Ursula

The Scherzo

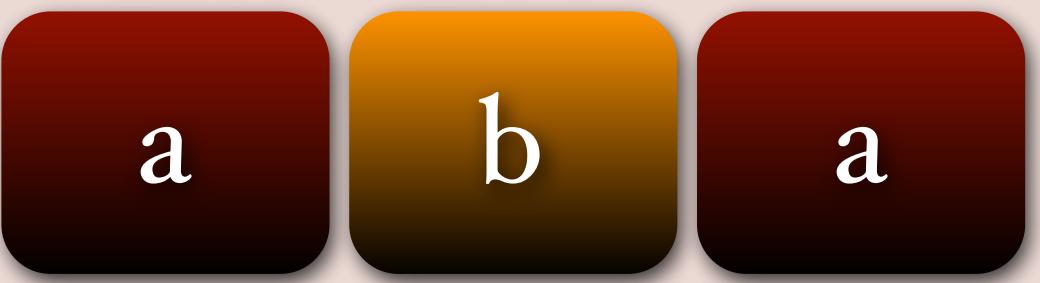
- Displays numerous elements of the mature Vaughan Williams harmonic and melodic style.

Antique modes: Dorian

Antique modes: Pentatonic

Anglic folk tunes
(real or invented)

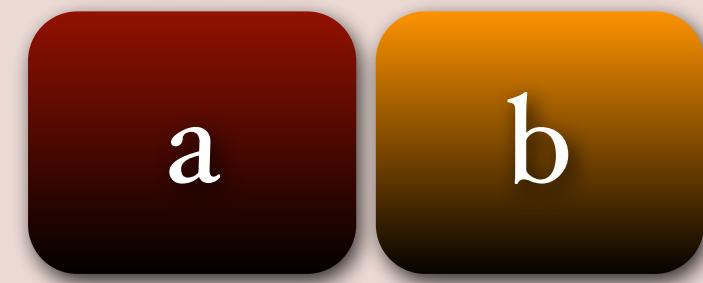
Dance: Part I



Part 2



Part I



Trio



Dance: Part I



Part 2



Part I



Trio

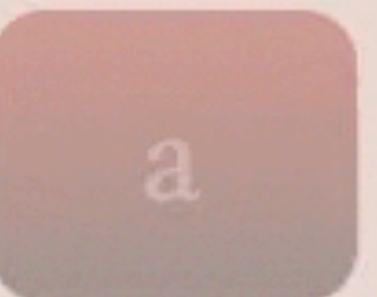


Dance



trans

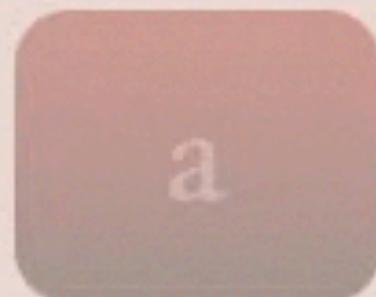
Dance: Part 1



Part 2



Part 1



Trio



trans



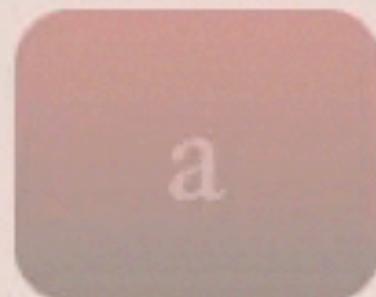
Dance: Part 1



Part 2



Part 1



Trio



trans



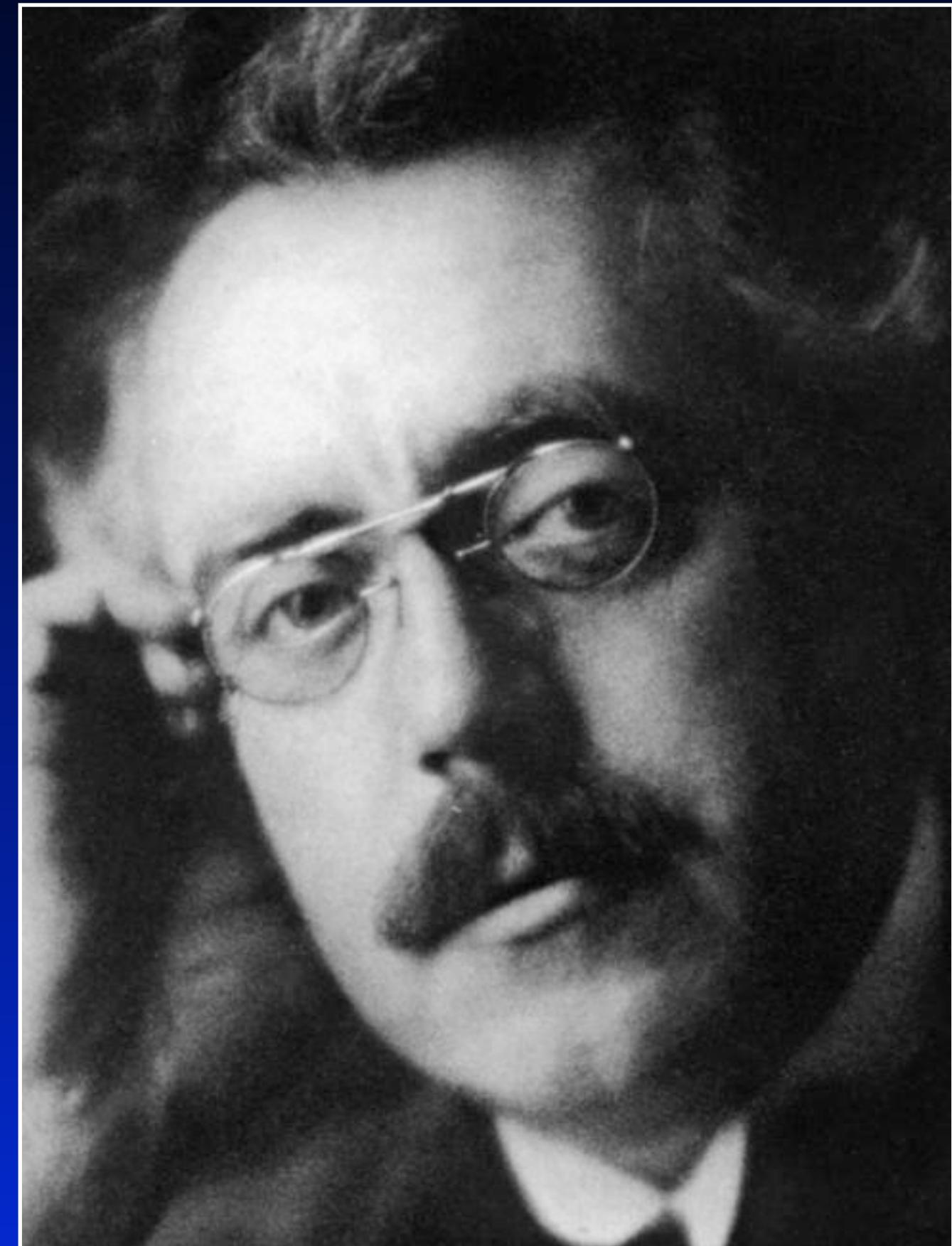
Dance



trans

Frank Bridge

The Sea (1912)



Frank Bridge

- 1879–1941
- British violinist, violist, conductor, composer
- Well-rounded, highly polished musician and a technically immaculate composer
- Probably best known nowadays as Benjamin Britten's teacher. He exerted a powerful influence on Britten's style (and pacifism)

The isolation of English musical life from far-reaching developments abroad was an obstacle to the recognition of Bridge's later works. After his death his music fell into almost complete neglect, though interest was subsequently revived. The poetic insight and consummate technique of his work promise it a permanent place in the repertory.

Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians

The Sea

- Seascape
- Sea-foam
- Moonlight
- Storm

II - Sea-foam

Introduction

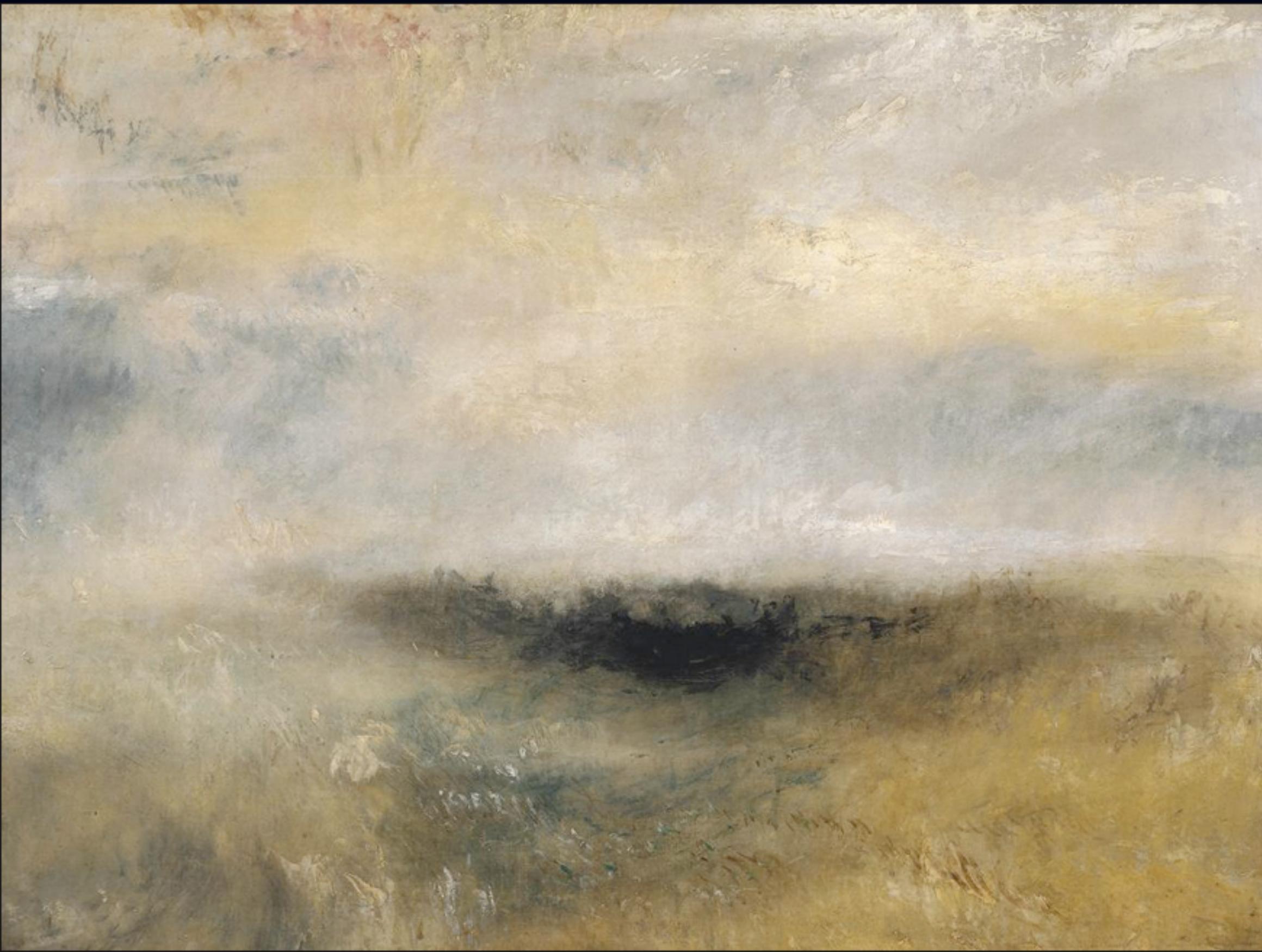
Reprise
Primary Theme

Light, scurrying

Episode
Secondary Theme

Expansive

Reprise
Both Themes



Bridge:The Sea II - Sea-foam
James Judd / New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

The slideshow features prints of fish by Hokusai



Hodie

A Christmas Cantata

David Willcocks
London Symphony Orchestra
Westminster Abbey Choir

Soloists:
Janet Baker, soprano
Richard Lewis, tenor
John Shirley-Quirk, bariton

About the Hodie

- The phrase “Hodie, Christus natus est” introduces the Christmas vespers service.
- Vaughan Williams wrote his 16-movement setting at age 81.
- It’s a mix of New Testament passages and poems by British poets — Welsh, Scottish, English.

The *Aeolian* mode is a commonly-heard sound
in Anglic music.

It's very similar to the modern *minor* mode,
except that it doesn't raise the *leading tone*,
or the note just below the tonic (main note)
of the scale.

That one change makes a lot of difference.



God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

in regular old minor

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

in Aeolian mode

The Text

- The last movement (*Epilogue*) of the Hodie consists of:
 - An Introduction from John I: 1 - 14
 - Three stanzas taken from John Milton's *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*

Introduction

Orchestra: Horns

Baritone:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Tenor:

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Soprano:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Orchestra: Violins, winds, horns

Chorus:

Emmanuel, God with us.