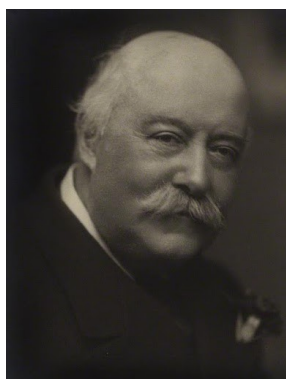


Vierne 150

A programme of French and British Music

Concert 1

Fantasia and Fugue in G Major, Parry
Prelude De Profundis, Howells
Symphony no. 1 in D Minor, Vierne



Fantasia and Fugue in G Major

Hubert Parry (1848-1918) was an English composer and teacher, who held positions both at Oxford University and the Royal College of Music. His early musical experience was shaped by two organists he encountered at Twyford Preparatory School in Hampshire: S.S. Wesley at Winchester Cathedral, and Edward Brind at Holy Innocents Church, Highnam. Wesley imparted to his student an enduring love of Bach's music, which according to *The Times* "...ultimately found expression in his most important literary work: *Johann Sebastian Bach, the Story of the Development of a Great Composer* (1909)". After Twyford Preparatory School, Parry went on to study at Eton and, while still at school, successfully sat the Oxford Bachelor of Music examination, becoming the youngest person who had ever done so.

Parry left Eton in 1867 to read law and modern history at Exeter College, Oxford, and after graduating worked as an underwriter at Lloyd's of London from 1870 to 1877. However, he continued his musical studies, and soon his compositions began to gain public attention. At the peak of his success, Parry received a number of commissions for works such as the *Ode on Saint Cecilia's Day*, the oratorios *Judith* and *Job*, and the psalm-setting *De Profundis*, which all met with popular success, but with varied reviews by the leading music critics of the time.

Ultimately, Parry's music received mixed reception during his lifetime, but his impact as a teacher is undisputable. Elgar studied his articles in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and his students at the RCM include Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav

Holst, Frank Bridge and John Ireland. Much of Parry's music has sadly been forgotten, but a number of his choral works have become staples of Anglican repertoire, including *I Was Glad*, the *Songs of Farewell*, and *Blest Pair of Sirens*, as well as *Jerusalem* and the hymn tune *Repton*, set to the words of *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*.

Parry first started work on the Fantasia and Fugue in G Major in 1877, and returned to revise it in 1882 and 1913 when it was finally published by Novello. The Fantasia is unmistakably inspired by the music of J.S. Bach, and bears certain similarities to Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor*, BWV 542. These similarities, and Parry's neo-Baroque take on the North German style of organ writing, are especially apparent in the early 1877 version, but are tempered with the addition of nineteenth century chromaticism and dissonance in his later revisions, giving the music a more contemporary feel. Parry dedicated the work to Sir Walter Parratt, organist at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and a renowned recitalist dextrous enough to meet the considerable technical demands of the fugue.



Prelude De Profundis

Herbert Howells (1892-1983) was a prolific composer of orchestral, keyboard and choral music, whose anthems and Canticle settings form an important part of services in churches and Cathedrals across the world.

The *Prelude De Profundis*, based on Psalm 130, was written in 1958 and published in 1982.

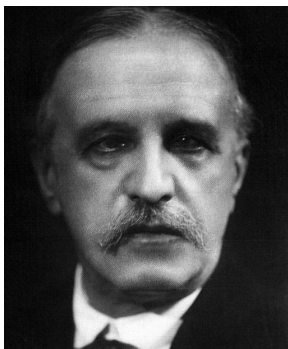
“ Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice.
O let thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint.
If thou, LORD, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?
For there is mercy with thee; therefore shalt thou be feared.
I look for the LORD; my soul doth wait for him; in his word is my trust.
My soul fleeth unto the Lord before the morning watch; I say, before the morning watch.
O Israel, trust in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. ”

An outline of the themes and theology of this Psalm will help better understand and experience the events of the music:

This Psalm is associated with the Day of Atonement. The use of the word 'LORD' in capitals almost always stands for the personal name of God, the Tetragrammaton

'Yahweh'. This name is symbolic of mercy, judgement and holiness and, in the context of this Psalm and in combination with the most profound Hebrew word for sin, highlights the vast depths to which the Psalmist had sunk. Therefore in the first three verses, the Psalmist cries from the depths of his sin, but quickly turns from his fear to entreat God's mercy. His waiting is not hopeless or desperate, but is founded on God's word. God's promise engenders the expectation of mercy, and the Psalm concludes with an exhortation to trust in those promises.

We can discern the transition from despair to hope in Howells's music. He establishes a mournful tenor from the outset with the *Quasi lento, tristamente* tempo, and the predominantly downward motion of both the pedals and manuals - a musical 'story-telling' technique employed by composers for hundreds of years, one famous example being the falling figurations in John Dowland's *Flow My Tears*. The piece begins softly, and gradually crescendos as the Psalmist's cries from the depth become more and more insistent. As the music progresses, an ascending motion is introduced and the pace becomes more urgent and animated, perhaps representative of the Psalmist turning from fear to hope. However, the thick texture and intensity of this middle section could also be interpreted as the most anguished cry thus far. The zenith of the piece is reached at a *fieramente* D major chord, after which the dynamic falls away fairly rapidly, returning to the quiet intensity of the opening. Throughout this closing section, Howells writes an articulated F# pedal point. Perhaps the stability of this repeated pitch is representative of the trust in God's word? However, the Prelude does not end with a bright, hopeful F# major chord, but with a false relation (A and A#), leaving the listener with a sense of uncertainty.



Symphony no. 1 in D Minor

Louis Vierne (1870-1937) was a French organist and composer who, despite being born almost blind, displayed an exceptional talent for music from a very early age. He first heard the piano at the age of two and, after hearing a Schubert lullaby, is reputed to have been able to pick out the notes of the melody on the piano. He went on to study at the Paris Conservatoire and, from 1892, served as assistant to Charles-Marie Widor at the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. He was appointed organist of Notre Dame in 1900 and held the post until his death in 1937, where he famously died at the console.

Vierne's music is characteristically elegant, romantic, and harmonically rich. Composed between 1898-99, the *Symphony no. 1 in D Minor* is dedicated to Alexandre Guilmant and is made up of six movements:

- I. Prélude
- II. Fugue
- III. Pastorale
- IV. Allegro vivace
- V. Andante
- VI. Final

Rather than following the established Allegro (sonata form), Adagio, Minuet/Scherzo, Allegro format of an orchestral symphony, organ symphonies take their name from the imitation of orchestral tones and textures, and the sheer scale and complexity of the composition. The genre is inextricably linked to the French Romantics, beginning with César Franck's innovative *Grande Pièce Symphonique* composed in 1863. Charles-Marie Widor, organist at St-Sulpice from 1870-1933, and Franck's successor as organ professor at the Paris Conservatoire, wrote ten organ symphonies which can be grouped into three sets: Op. 13 (numbers 1-4) which exhibit his earlier style, Op. 42 (numbers 5-8) which demonstrate the experience he had accumulated writing his first organ and orchestral symphonies, and the far more pensive Op. 70 and 73 (numbers 9-10), named the *Gothique* and the *Romane*. Finally, Widor's student Vierne wrote six symphonies, transforming the genre and pushing the harmony and counterpoint to its limits.

The Prelude and Fugue which form the opening two movements of Vierne's Symphony no. 1 are the only example of this form across the entirety of Vierne's musical output. Although the symphony as a whole is not cyclic, the opening notes of the Prelude are hinted at in the Pastorale, and become the foundation for the Final's main theme. The Fugue's subject is a stand-alone melody, and is made up of two parts: a playful opening section, and a passage of scalic quaver movement. The first two bar melody, characterised by large intervals and scattered staccato, makes the appearance of the subject clear throughout the fugue, especially in inversion and effervescent stretto. Towards the end of the Fugue, the influence of the strict North-German style of writing falls away, and Vierne concludes with a brief fantasia. The lyrical ternary form Pastorale references the falling interval of a fourth established in the Prelude, but weaves it seamlessly into a beautiful oboe melody with the result that it is only discernible if one purposefully listens out for it. This is followed by a haunting and ethereal minor section, before returning to the opening material. The Allegro Vivace which follows contrasts the gentle Pastorale with frenetic semiquaver movement, punctuated with off-beat, staccato chords. The middle section features a canon between solo trompette and pedal, and the movement concludes in a flurry of semiquavers and a delicate perfect cadence. The Adagio alternates between feelings of heartfelt wistfulness and whimsical freedom, with much of the music's movement or stillness written into the note values, rather than in directions to the performer. Finally, the Symphony closes with a magnificent and powerful Final, characterised by a thundering pedal melody underneath broken chord figurations in the manuals. This movement became so popular that Vierne arranged it as an independent work for organ and orchestra in 1926.