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■Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

■Symphony No. 5 D Major (39')

Ralph Vaughan Williams was a British composer, his active career spanning the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries (Incidentally, Vaughan is not his middle name but a part of his surname). While influences of the late Romanticism developed by German composers can be observed in his works, Vaughan Williams in general attempts to break off from the tradition, tirelessly exploring English sounds. He was born in a small village in Gloucestershire, about ninety miles west of London. He and his mother along with his siblings, however, had to move to a rural area in Surrey, a county in South East England, when his father suddenly died in 1875. At the age of five, Vaughan Williams received his first lessons on piano but soon discovered that the instrument was not for him. A year later he switched to the violin. Meanwhile, he became interested in composing. In 1890, Vaughan Williams matriculated at the Royal College of Music in London, studying composition with Hubert Parry, who encouraged Vaughan Williams to write choral music, an English tradition that had been passed on since the Renaissance period.

Vaughan Williams wrote his Symphony No. 5 in D Major between 1938 and 1943. Much of the piece was derived from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an opera he worked on prior to the completion of his Fifth Symphony. The piece was dedicated to the Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius, who was highly regarded by a number of British composers at the time. The first performance of the symphony took place in London at a Proms Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on June 24, 1943, with the composer conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

The overall mood of the Fifth Symphony is serene and tranquil, making a sharp contrast to his previous Symphony No. 4 (1934), which is often regarded as one of the most

aggressive, violent, and powerful compositions of the early twentieth century. The calmness that occupies much of the Fifth Symphony may have been the result of the composer's reflecting on the terrible conflict that had begun with the Invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. The piece comprises four movements. The opening movement, marked *moderato*, begins with a soft drone note played by the cellos and double basses, which immediately created an eerie mood. It is followed by optimistically sounding horns, which are immediately followed by the violin's somber melody. The second movement is a *scherzo*, but the atmosphere here remains relatively placid. The slow third movement begins with a quiet tune played by the English horn, accompanied by the strings. There is also an agitated middle section. The last movement is marked "passacaglia," a type of variations that became popular in the baroque period. Unlike the last movement of Brahms's Fourth Symphony, however, Vaughan Williams introduces new ideas in the middle of the movement. Towards the end, Vaughan Williams' hymn *Sine Nomine* appears to conclude the piece.

[Akira Ishii]