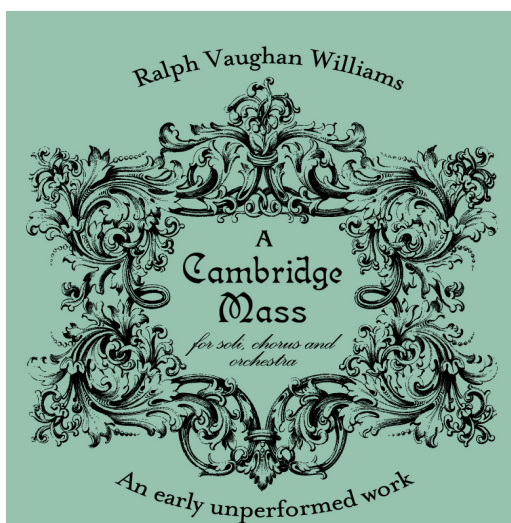


**RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: "A CAMBRIDGE MASS".
ABOUT A NEWLY DISCOVERED MANUSCRIPT AND A WORLD
PREMIERE, IN CONVERSATION WITH MAESTRO ALAN TONGUE**

BIANCA ȚIPLEA TEMEȘ¹



SUMMARY. Acknowledged as one of the most prominent figures of British music history, the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams is well known to the world for pieces like *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, *A Sea Symphony*, *The Wasps* and many others. Recently, the conductor Alan Tongue discovered at the Cambridge University Library a manuscript signed by Vaughan Williams: a *Mass* for soloists, choir and orchestra, written in 1899, with the academic purpose of obtaining the title of Doctor of Music. Professor Alan Tongue edited the score, conducted the premiere in London, on March 3rd, 2011, thus delivering a youthful masterpiece of the English composer to the international concert life.

Keywords: Vaughan Williams, *A Cambridge Mass*, manuscript, world premiere.

Ralph Vaughan Williams is acknowledged as one of the most prominent figures of the British music panorama, an important name of the lineage that unfolds in the span between Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, Frank Bridge, Gustav Holst and Benjamin Britten, William Walton or, closer to our days, Harrison

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Birtwistle and James MacMillan. His works are constantly played, being highly rated, both in substance, message and form. Even though in the constant focus of musicological and performing interest, this composer is still to be discovered; I am referring to the newly found piece "A Cambridge Mass", which, even mentioned in the most reliable sources, such as the New Grove Dictionary², was never publicly performed. What could you reveal regarding the discovery of the manuscript?

Ex. 1

Vaughan Williams - Manuscript page of the piece A Cambridge Mass

The image shows a handwritten manuscript page for the beginning of the Credo section of 'A Cambridge Mass' by Vaughan Williams. The page is titled 'Credo' and 'Andante maestoso'. The composer's name 'R. Vaughan Williams' is written in the top right corner. The manuscript is written on a single page and includes staves for various instruments and voices. The instruments listed are: 2 Flauti, 2 Oboi, 2 Clarinetti in Bb, 2 Fagotti, 4 Corni in F, 3 Trombe in F, 3 Tromboni, 1 Fagotto, Timpani in G. A. D., Organo, Violino Primo, Violino Secondo, Viola, Coro Primo (Sopranos, Alto, Tenore, Basso), Coro Secondo (Sopranos, Alto, Tenore, Basso), Violoncello, and Contrabbasso. The music is written in a single system with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Andante maestoso'. The manuscript shows the beginning of the Credo section, with the first few measures of the music written for each instrument and voice part.

² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, London, second edition, vol.26, 2001, p. 358.

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- There was an exhibition of manuscripts from the Cambridge University Library which I attended more out of a sense of duty than expectation. Imagine my surprise when I saw a page from an early Vaughan Williams work, scored for full forces. I knew I had never heard this piece, and so I looked it up in reference books. There were a few mentions (you just named an important one) but it had clearly neither been published nor performed. The work was written for his Doctor of Music examination, and had to be deposited in the University Library. After the exhibition closed I requisitioned the work in the Manuscripts Room and sat enthralled. I decided there and then that I wanted to hear the piece, and that moreover I wanted to conduct it.

- *Which you already have, thanks to your perseverance and determination. But, let's start from the beginning, because your name will be related from now on to the discovery and the world premiere of this piece. All the long way from the starting point of seeing the manuscript to the concert performance was at the same time challenging and rewarding and I would very much like to reconstruct this trajectory in our dialogue. I assume that there were also legal obstacles to overcome, regarding the author rights issue.*

- That's true. I obtained permission from the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust, the body that holds the copyright, and obtained a CD-ROM of the score. Using the *Sibelius* music programme I transcribed the 155-page score, taking three and a half months.

- *Obviously, the new project absorbed your time and energy completely, but a good piece just came to public notice, after more than a century (111 years). This way, Vaughan Williams harvested even more posthumous glory!*

- Yes, indeed. I put a halt to all my overseas conducting during this period to concentrate on the work in hand. Showing the work to the Trust I then obtained their permission to conduct it. I asked that I be the sole conductor for its first two years. Next I thought about performers. As far as the choir is concerned, the score is full of intricate fugues in eight parts, so I approached one of our best choruses, the Bach Choir, which in fact Vaughan Williams had sung in, then finally conducted for seven years in the 1920s. For an orchestra I approached the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, whose players from the London orchestras come together on instruments of the period (1899) and play on gut strings.

- *We must admit that the piece could not have been better presented nor better integrated into Vaughan Williams's universe. A "Cambridge Mass" was not the original title. For Cambridge he composed later on the incidental*

music for “The Wasps” of Aristophanes. I know it was actually your idea to personalize the Mass according to the name of this amazing place of Eastern England. Was your intention supported by the fact that Vaughan Williams studied for three years at Trinity College in Cambridge (1892-1895), having the chance to be guided in his composition training by some of the most representative musicians of that time, Charles Wood (at Cambridge), then Parry and Stanford (in London)? Or were you influenced mostly by some other titles of his oeuvre, such as “An Oxford Elegy” or “A London Symphony”?

- Only the individual movements are entitled in the manuscript: *Credo* etc. I at first called it *Mass in G Major*, but with his only other *Mass* being in G Minor it was thought confusing, so the publisher asked me for another title. *A Cambridge Mass* was the result.

- *He started to work on this piece in 1898, the year after he went to study abroad, in Berlin, with Max Bruch. Can you trace down any elements that he might have borrowed from German Romanticism while fashioning his own piece? Besides, it must be kept in sight that in 1896 he also went to Bayreuth and listened to Wagner for the first time.*

- In the 1890s it was largely music from the European mainland that made up the repertoire in England. Now that it's had its first performance I can list the composers who came to mind as the reviewers listened: Bach, Haendel, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Brahms and Dvorak!

- *A whole collection of notable influences that he assimilated, yet without giving up his own artistic personality. Let's open the freshly published score and have a look at the music. What is the structure Vaughan Williams adopts for his Mass; does it mould its content according to the standard parts chained together?*

- He opens with a *Credo*, I think because the many words appealed to him for the varied possibilities of word painting and climaxes. In a letter to his friend Gustav Holst, just before embarking on the piece he says “I'm going to write a mass – they're such fine words and you get such good climaxes out of them.” He follows the *Credo* with a movement for orchestra alone, the *Offertorium* (one of the requirements was to write a movement for orchestra in first movement form). A *Sanctus* follows, totally in canon between the two choirs, again because he had to show examples of fugue and canon. Finally, a *Benedictus*, for soloists with small orchestra, and a repeat of the *Hosanna* with which to end.

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Ex. 2

CREDO

Ralph Vaughan Williams
Edited by Alan Tongue

Andante maestoso

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- It is true, the piece seems to take into account the recommendations of the University Ordinances containing the requirements for those who aspired to the title of Doctor of Music³;

³ University Ordinances, Cambridge University Library, 1892, p. 204.

University Ordinances, Cambridge University Library, 1892

Examina-
tion for
Mus. Doc.

204

Students of Music.

A. II.
Degrees.
Sect. 15.

Schedule.

The Board recommend

B. That [(2)] the Exercise be a composition on a sacred or a secular subject, written for the occasion; that it should occupy [not less than forty nor more than sixty] minutes in performance, and fulfil the following conditions:—

- (a) That it comprise some portion for one or more solo voices, and some [considerable] portion for a chorus of eight real vocal parts.
- (b) That it comprise some specimens of Canon and of Fugue.
- (c) That it comprise an instrumental Overture, or an Interlude, in the form of the first movement of a Symphony or a Sonata.
- (d) That the whole (except some single piece be for Voices alone) have an accompaniment for a full Band.

That the subjects of Examination [(1)] be as follows:—

- (a) Counterpoint in not more than eight parts.
- (b) The highest branches of Harmony.
- (c) Canon of various kinds in not more than four parts.
- (d) Fugue and Double Fugue in not more than four parts.
- (e) Form in Composition.
- (f) Instrumentation and scoring of Chamber and Orchestral Music.
- (g) The Analysis of some Classical Composition, the name of which will be announced by the Examiners at least six weeks before the day for Examination.
- (h) The Art of Music historically [and critically] considered.

Besides, the language of his piece summarizes the knowledge he had acquired during his student years. Apart from a strict polyphony, he also employs tonal, exuberant harmonies. What about the melodic aspect? Are the tunes of the Mass original or are they quotations from English Hymnals?

- All the themes are original, and in a positive style, more like the hymns that he was to write a few years later. In his mid-twenties he is in an optimistic frame of mind, with none of the bleakness that later creeps into his music. The work is also written before his interest in folk music, or in writing in some kind of English style. The 'English Musical Renaissance' was in its infancy, indeed could be said to start from Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, first heard in 1899.

- Polyphony turned out to be an important constitutive part of Vaughan Williams's discourse. It marked his oeuvre from the early pieces up to the Fifth Symphony, where the fugal epilogue identifies with the climax of the entire work. Which other titles of Vaughan Williams show the inclination towards the contrapuntal style?

- Many of them, but after writing this work the composer came across folk music, and this influenced him for the rest of his life. As the English musical renaissance was taking place he tried to incorporate elements of English

folksong and Tudor music into his own music. His *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* is the best known example of these trends. Counterpoint remains an important part of his musical canon, but never again to the extent used in this Mass, apart from the later Mass.

- You've come across the score of the newly discovered piece in many ways: from the fascinating first contact with the manuscript, to the score printing and revising, together with the Stainer and Bell publishing house, then to the final translation in sounds of the abstract score. In one word, no one could possibly know more about this music than you. Therefore, I am asking if Vaughan Williams was in search for his own style while writing down this piece.

- There are many fingerprints of his style already in the work, which he composed aged 26 and after several periods of study: two years at the Royal College of Music, three years at Cambridge University, a further year at the Royal College of Music and finally six months in Berlin with Max Bruch. But as a young man I think he just wanted to write something that would fulfill the requirements. A search for style came later. His love of juxtaposed chords, a consequence of his interest in modal music, is shown very early on in the work, when the soloists announce the words *Qui propter nos homines*. This passage could only be by Vaughan Williams. His use of striding bass lines is prominent in the work, also the use of brass fanfares.

Ex. 4

Vaughan Williams – A Cambridge Mass (Qui propter, piano reduction)

Qui propter

The image shows a piano reduction of the 'Qui propter' section from Vaughan Williams' 'A Cambridge Mass'. The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It features a piano accompaniment with strings and solo voices. The lyrics are: 'Qui propter nos homines et propter nos - trams sa - lu - tem'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the strings and the solo voices entering with the words 'Qui propter nos'. The second system shows the continuation of the piece with the solo voices singing 'homines et propter nos - trams sa - lu - tem'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and a striding bass line.

- In this case, an exhaustive research on Vaughan Williams should not disregard this piece, even if it was composed with an academic purpose. His "Cambridge Mass" is now well known in England after the premiere that took place in London on March 3rd, 2011. Is there any resemblance between

this piece and its older G minor “sister”, which only resorts to the potential of the “a cappella” choir and soloists and which was also premiered in a privileged place (Westminster Cathedral, in 1923)?

- The two *Masses* meet in the *Benedictus*, in fact the themes share the first four notes:

Ex. 5

The image shows two musical staves in G major. The first staff is titled 'A Cambridge Mass' and shows the first four notes: G4, A4, B4, and C5. The second staff is titled 'Mass in G minor' and shows the first four notes: G4, A4, B4, and C5. The lyrics for the first staff are 'Be - ne - di - ctus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni'. The lyrics for the second staff are 'Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do mi ni'.

Although they are 20 years apart in composition, the two movements with their gentle counterpoint inhabit a similar soundworld. Otherwise, this early *Mass* is much bigger, written for soloists, double chorus, orchestra and organ, whereas the later *Mass* is unaccompanied and a deliberate throwback to the past.

- Looking for the stylistic connections within Vaughan Williams's music, I would raise another question; being completed only a short time before the turn of the 20th century, in 1898/9, to be more specific, could one detect some common traits with the writing technique of the choral "Sea Symphony", composed only a few years later?

- There are passages that remind one of *A Sea Symphony*, for example the very opening of the piece, just as there are pre-echoes of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Sancta Civitas*, *Toward the Unknown Region*, *The Tallis Fantasia* and other pieces. And there is evidence of the optimistic tunes of his hymn writing period shortly to come. But this work sounds unlike any other of his works, owing to two factors: the requirements specified that he had to write using examples of canon and fugue, as we have previously showed, and the fact that he had recently heard the Verdi Requiem for the first time. Also, fairly soon after writing this work a bleakness creeps into his music.

- Could you explain that? Was it an assumed artistic choice on behalf of the author or was it triggered by some personal events in the composer's life?

- Writers have detected a bleak element in most of his music, even beginning with the works at the start of the new century. His wife became crippled, and the experience of the Great War unsettled him. *A Cambridge Mass* has no sign of this bleakness.

- *The premiere of this newly discovered piece belongs now to the past. How did the contemporary audience receive the piece and how were the musicians (singers, choir and orchestra members) enjoying it?*

- I sensed that the performers were riveted by it from the first rehearsal. In the words of some reviewers, it was 'great fun and highly enjoyable, full of good tunes and dramatic sonic juxtapositions. It's big, it's ambitious';⁴ 'an often attractive work with more character than its academic function might suggest'⁵; 'qualities that are unmistakably Ralph Vaughan Williams: a boldness of declamation, striding bass lines that suggest a vigorous ramble, deft handling of large forces, and sympathetic treatment of voices, (including a solo quartet). The spirit of the future giant is there, even if his unique language is as yet unformed.'⁶ And the *Sunday Telegraph* announced: "fifty-three years after the composer's death, it's not often we get to hear world premieres of Music by Vaughan Williams. Especially not of works as substantial as *A Cambridge Mass*, a 45-minute score that counts as a missing link in the evolution of his early style. Edited by Alan Tongue, who conducted this first performance with the Bach Choir and the New Queen's Hall Orchestra in Croydon, it shows as clearly as anything what the composer was capable of before he found his personal *open air voice*"⁷.

- *It definitely turned out to be an enormous success, I am sure you expected it and you fully deserved it. Who were the musicians "in charge" of delivering an unknown masterpiece to the concert life? We already know who the Choir and Orchestra were, so please tell us also a few words about the soloists mentioned on the poster, who had the privilege of such an artistic mission.*

- I chose four soloists who were members of the BBC Singers, our professional body (Olivia Robinson – soprano, Rebecca Lodge – mezzo, Christopher Bowen – tenor, Edward Price – bass). They are very experienced, and they were able to cope with the range of dynamic required. I would still focus on the choir, which *The Times* referred to as 'an assured premiere from the superb Bach Choir.'⁸ The playing of the New Queens Hall Orchestra sound was described in the *Daily Telegraph* as 'a soft graininess to the string sound and a clarity and transparency to the brass, which suited both the melancholy and the uproarious good humour of the Elgar'⁹.

⁴ Webber, Christopher, *Vaughan Williams "Cambridge Mass" World Premiere*, "Zarzuela" March 4th, 2011, London.

⁵ Whitehouse, Richard, *Vaughan Williams "A Cambridge Mass" – World Premiere Performance by Bach Choir & New Queen's Hall Orchestra*, "Classical Source", London, March 5th, 2011.

⁶ Morrison, Richard, *Review*, "The Times", London, March 6th, 2011.

⁷ Allison, John, *A Cambridge Mass. Review*, „Sunday Telegraph", London, March 13th, 2011.

⁸ Morrison, Richard, *Idem*.

⁹ Hewitt, Ivan, *Vaughan Williams, Fairfield Hall, Croydon, Review*, "Daily Telegraph", London, March 4th, 2011.



Photo taken at the end of the premiere in London, on March 3rd, 2011

- The impact of the discovery and then the effect of the world premiere have collected many positive echoes, so vividly reflected in the London media. Still, I think your mission has not finished yet with the applause on March 3rd, 2011; you have a two-year exclusivity for conducting this piece. Moreover, this project has to be carried on and presented to more admirers of Vaughan Williams's music. Is there already a plan to promote "A Cambridge Mass" in other cities, in Great Britain and abroad?

- In October I take the piece to my home city of Bath, where as a schoolboy I heard Vaughan Williams conduct his own music, in Bath Abbey. Then in January I conduct the North American premiere.

- The outpouring of musical inspiration defines this Vaughan Williams piece from the first note to the last, even if it echoes some academic requirements. What else impressed you in this score that would determine you to recommend the piece to other orchestras and choirs in the world?

*- I believe that every bar of the work has the hallmark of a great composer. The Amen chorus in the *Credo* is the centrepiece of the work, a highly inventive and inspiring piece of fugal writing. The *Offertorium* is a delightful movement for orchestra alone, beautifully crafted, even if sounding more like a tribute to Brahms and Dvorak than anything by Vaughan Williams. The *Sanctus* has a breadth and dignity about it, and scored only for brass, timpani and organ. The *Benedictus* is an inspired movement for soloists and small orchestra.*

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- *What about taking the "Cambridge Mass" to Romania, a country you visited as a guest conductor many times in the past?*

- I await the pleasure that would be a real thrill for me. I have been described there as the "Badea Cârțan" of English music.

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