



What is RVW150?

On **Saturday 26 February**, the **Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust** announced in broad outline plans for **RVW150** – a celebration of Ralph Vaughan Williams 150 years after his birth. The launch took place in Manchester at the opening concert of the Vaughan Williams symphonic cycle, ***Toward the Unknown Region***, presented over 11 weeks by the **BBC Philharmonic** and the **Hallé** and broadcast by **BBC Radio 3**.

True to RVW's life's work, the events that make up RVW150 range from performances of his symphonies, ballets, and operas to travelling folk concerts with cathedral choirs, from amateur groups to international soloists. In May alone there are more than 45 concerts that feature RVW's music which start with a performance of **Variations for Brass Band** at the **European Brass Band Championships** held in **Birmingham** and the **Chamber Ensemble of London**'s performance of **Concerto Grosso** at **Kings Place**.

As one of the 20th century's leading orchestral composers, RVW150 celebrations naturally feature a great heft of the composer's symphonies and concertos, fantasias, serenades and tone poems. In May, ***Toward the Unknown Region*** continues in **Manchester**; the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** performs **Symphony No. 4** at the **Barbican** and the **Newbury Spring Festival**; the **Sea Symphony** will be presented by **Constanza Chorus** with the **London Mozart Players** as well as the **City of London Choir** with the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra**; the **Oboe Concerto** by **Leicester Symphony Orchestra**; the **Tuba Concerto** by **Charterhouse** students past and present; and the **Wasps Suite** at the opening concert of **Pennine Spring Music**. In June, **Symphony No. 5** will be performed by the **Symphonia Verbum Orchestra**; and ***In the Fen Country*** by the **Thornbury Orchestra**.

From Pub to Pulpit draws on RVW's legacy as an ardent collector of folk songs. Opening in **Down Ampney** where RVW was born, ***From Pub to Pulpit*** ends at **Gloucester Cathedral** as part of the **2023 Three Choirs Festival**. ***From Pub to Pulpit*** brings together an a cappella folk group with a classically trained instrumental trio and, in collaboration with the resident organist and church choir, creates different programmes for each venue, bringing to life the musical journey of folk songs RVW collected, and later 'borrowed' for hymns when editing ***The English Hymnal*** in **1906**.

RVW's editorship of ***The English Hymnal*** also embodies his commitment to choral music. In May, the **Carice Singers** perform ***Silence and Music*** and ***Mass in G minor*** at **Chiltern Arts**; and ***Five Tudor Portraits*** is performed at the **Norfolk and Norwich Festival**, where it was premiered. In June, the **Hereford Chamber Choir** perform ***Five Mystical Songs*** and ***An Oxford Elegy***; and ***Mass in G minor*** is repeated, this time by the **City of London Choir**. **Make Music Day** are developing a choral marathon based on the music of RVW, with over **30 choirs** expressing interest so far. Choirs will select from a repertoire list and



record their chosen piece, which will then be stitched together into videos for release on 21 June.

While ballets occupy a smaller section of RVW's list of compositions, the big hitters are no less highly-revered among ballet lovers than his symphonies are by opera fanatics. At the end of May, the **BBC Concert Orchestra** perform **Old King Cole** at the [English Music Festival](#) and the [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#) perform **Job**.

Bringing together various strands of RVW's compositional style, a number of festivals are adopting an RVW focus for this season's programme, including the [Investec International Music Festival](#) based in the **Surrey Hills** where RVW grew up; the [English Music Festival](#); the [Norfolk and Norwich Festival](#); the [King's Lynn Festival](#); the [Three Choirs Festival](#); and the [Lake District Summer Music Festival](#). More festivals programming RVW include the [Leamington Music Festival](#); [Newbury Spring Festival](#); the [London Festival of Contemporary Church Music](#); the [Whittington Music Festival](#); and the [Ryedale Festival](#). [Make Music Day](#) are developing a choral marathon based on the music of RVW. The over **30 choirs** that have so far expressed interest will select from a repertoire list and record their chosen piece, which will then be stitched together into a number of videos for release on 21 June.

Owing to the universal appeal and popularity of RVW's music, RVW150 celebrations extend across the globe. In **America**, [Vox Philia](#) programmes RVW in May and June as does [Opus One Berks Chamber Choir](#) in May. In the same month in **Japan**, [Kyushu Symphony Orchestra](#) performs the **Tallis Fantasia** and **Symphony No. 3**; while [Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra](#) performs **Symphony No. 5**. Looking to July and as far afield as **Australia**, **Vasily Petrenko** conducts [Melbourne Symphony Orchestra](#) in a performance of **The Wasps: Overture**.

Upon establishing VWCT on RVW's death, **Ursula Vaughan Williams** said, "I would like you to apply the proceeds of such covenants primarily for the purpose of the advancement anywhere in the world of the education of the public in the knowledge understanding and appreciation of the life and works of the late Ralph Vaughan Williams and of other British composers of music." In line with Ursula's wish, a new programme, initiated and supported by VWCT and produced by the [Music Teachers' Association](#), was announced to provide resources for the teaching of various aspects of RVW's work across all levels of education. Development of the initiative will begin in May and be rolled out in schools across the UK from the start of the next academic year.

With characteristic generosity, in **1956** RVW set up the **RVW Trust** to support the work of his fellow composers. In the last 20 years it has given around **£6 million** in grants averaging **£2,200** each. To celebrate RVW150, the Trust has supported several special projects which are inspired by or respond to RVW's music, ideas, or life. **Saints Triumphant: variations on Vaughan Williams's hymn tune 'Sine Nomine'** was composed by **Philip Wilby** and commissioned by **Brass Bands England**, and will be premiered at the [European Brass Band Festival](#) held in **Birmingham** around the start of May. [Thaxted Music Festival](#)



and [Music at Paxton](#) have co-commissioned **Sarah Cattley** to compose a song cycle on the themes of travel and nature to complement Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel*, performed at the festivals in July. July also sees the premiere of *Looking West* by composer **Julian Phillips** and librettist **Rebecca Hurst** commissioned by **Nova Music Trust** for the [Ryedale](#) and [Presteigne Festivals](#).

The publication of RVW's output is shared between six publishers, all contributing to the promotion of this special anniversary year. **Oxford University Press** has said, "In his 150th anniversary year, Oxford University Press is proud to continue its long and honorable association with the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams and add to our catalogue the *Concerto for Tenor Tuba (an arrangement of the Concerto for Tuba)*, *Scott of the Antarctic – The Composer's Cut* (for live performance with the 1948 film), and a new critical edition of *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*." **Stainer & Bell** adds, "Stainer & Bell celebrates RVW150 with publication of **The Future for Chorus and Orchestra**, a major unfinished score now completed by **Martin Yates**, a new edition of **A Sea Symphony**, and an **Anniversary Choral Collection**, an exciting and comprehensive programme of materials enabling choirs to present their own tribute to the composer." In addition, **Faber** is publishing a new orchestration by **David Matthews** of the *Romance and Pastoral* while **Boosey & Hawkes** is publishing a new edition of the **Horn Sonata**. Oxford University Press and Boosey & Hawkes kindly supported the launch event in Manchester.

As part of the launch event, **Tasmin Little**, illustrious violinist highly regarded for her interpretation of RVW's music, spoke as RVW150 Ambassador. To quote Tasmin, "Often thought of as the father of modern British music, his works remain a firm fixture on the concert stages of the UK, as well as abroad. But *why* is his music so enduringly popular, resonating with people of all ages and nationalities? Is it perhaps because there's an emotional honesty to his writing which audiences respond to? I remember, as a young girl, being intensely drawn to his music – the distinctly personal style, the imagination, power, beauty. His language is one which can be appreciated on so many levels."

The launch focused on the events between May to the end of the season. We will give an update about plans surrounding **12 October 2022**, RVW's 150th birthday, at the start of summer.

The launch was held in memory of **Joyce Kennedy** who was a much-valued Trustee of VWCT from its inception in 2008 and Vice-Chairman from 2015 until her death in 2021.

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