RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

ASCENDING ASCENDING

Romance for violin & orchestra

Full Score

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

INTRODUCTION

Vaughan Williams composed the first draft of *The Lark Ascending* in 1914. Borrowing the term from Beethoven, he called it a Romance for violin. The title comes from the poem by George Meredith (1828–1909), with twelve lines of which Vaughan Williams prefaced the score. The work probably existed only in a version for violin and pianoforte before he put it in a drawer, along with his opera *Hugh the Drover*, when he enlisted in the Army in 1914 after the outbreak of the First World War. The autograph score shows that he had originally quoted four more lines of the poem:

He is the dance of children, thanks
Of sowers, shout of primrose banks
And eyes of violets while they breathe;
All these the circling song will wreathe . . .

When Vaughan Williams returned to composition in 1919, *The Lark Ascending* was one of the first works he revised. He altered the initial tempo from *Andante sostenuto* to *Lento*, but changed it back again. He made a few cuts, elaborated some of the violin part, and considerably re-wrote other parts to make them simpler for the soloist, at the same time striving, long before Messiaen, to capture the bird-song. The first performance was given in Shirehampton, Gloucestershire, on 15 December 1920 at a concert of the Avonmouth and Shirehampton Choral Society. The performers were the violinist Marie Hall, to whom the work is dedicated, and the pianist Geoffrey Mendham. Marie Hall was again the soloist in the first performance of the orchestral version at a concert of the second congress of the British Music Society in the Queen's Hall, London, on 14 June 1921. Adrian Boult conducted the British Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1919 from professional musicians who had served abroad during the war.

Violinists welcomed the work into their solo repertory and it was several times recorded in the pre-LP era, notably by Frederick Grinke who often performed it with the composer conducting. 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 rarer 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 2004

INSTRUMENTATION

2 flutes, oboe, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, triangle, and strings.

Parts and scores for both this original version and the composer's own version for chamber orchestra (1 fl., 1 ob., 1 cl., 1 bsn, 1 hn, tri., and str.) are available on hire from the publisher.

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 aërial rings In light, and then the fancy sings. (George Meredith, 1828–1909)

The Lark Ascending









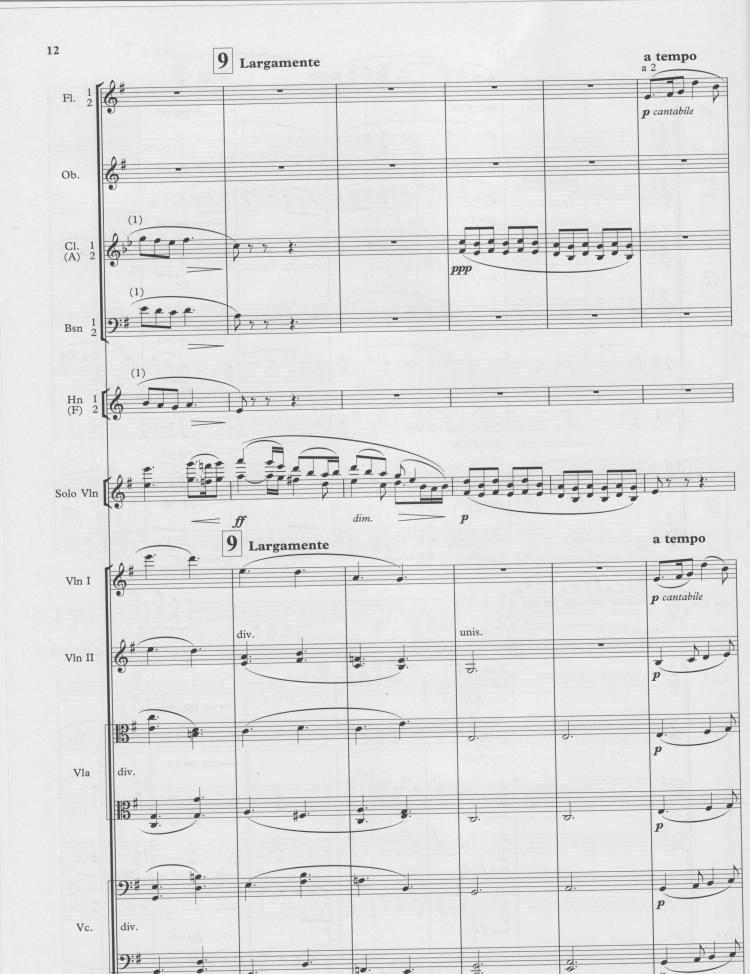












pp

















[*] pp in previous editions of the score; changed to match other woodwind















































