

Choral Treats 6

In this edition of Choral Treats we explore two composers whose lives overlapped during the 20th Century: Ralph Vaughan Williams and Morten Lauridsen.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

More than just a box of chocolates:

Sweet Day, 2:18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAYvC9j29Qc>

Next, Vaughan Williams enriches the narration sections of his *Hodie* (This Day – the Day of Christ’s birth) by using ancient modes and ones of his own invention, according to Paul James Etter, in his thorough [analysis of the composer and the cantata](#).

The effect to my ear is to set firmly the Christmas story in the “Orient,” and yet in other sections universalize the narrative for western audiences. The text comes from both sacred and secular sources, including poems by his wife Ursula.

It may well be that I’ve sung *Hodie* as many times as any other work including *Messiah*. I’ve had the pleasure of presenting the baritone solos within the work several times. Singing “The Oxen” at a benefit concert in Newbury, VT, was even more special. A farm lad needed funds for numerous medical procedures after his bout with a tractor. He was there, immobilized in casts and a wheelchair, but he was on the mend. “I should go with him in the gloom, hoping it might be so.” The Oxen is not included here because I’ve held strictly to choral music in all the Treats, but I encourage you to find a recording of it.

From *Hodie* (excerpts below from a 1965 recording directed by Sir David Willcocks comprise approx. 31 min)

I. Nowell, Nowell, 3:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8qTby5Auy4&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg>

III. It Was the Winter Wild, 4:42

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em-Wufx_cUI&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=3

V. The Blessed Son of God, 2:34

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys-WyG-eSrK&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=5>

XI. Sweet was the Song the Virgin Sang, 2:49

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znff9IT0P-U&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=11>

XIII. Now When Jesus Was Born, 3:10

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCVk3rVofk8&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=13>

XIV. The March of the Three Kings, 7:47

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_UiHoh63bE&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=14

XV. Epilogue: In the Beginning was the Word, 6:18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve1m1wKqeEY&list=PLxunpNEJeaQ4cLh21rWkbVXyaSG4eIekg&index=16>

One other personal reflection: When Aunt Claire and I married, I relocated from very flat Bucks County, PA, and enrolled at Plymouth State College, NH, to earn my teaching credential. I began my studies making frosty January drives through the foothills of the White Mountains with snowy Mount Moosilauke in view to the North. I must've had a cassette tape of the Shakespeare Songs, and listening to the one about cloud-capped towers made me feel rather small and vulnerable; nevertheless, I was welcomed by and became successful in the Math Department of PSC, both as a student and later, as a lecturer. "These are the things that dreams are made on."

Three Shakespeare Songs, 7:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8ViwS73X08>

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

Morten Lauridsen is a contemporary composer. The long phrases in O Magnum Mysterium require every last breath of a singer, but giving that breath deepens my involvement in the performance.

O Magnum Mysterium, 6:55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn5ken3RJBo>

O great mystery and wondrous sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in their Manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia!

O Nata Lux, 4:28

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAArA36cgWU>

O Light born of Light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world
with loving-kindness deign to receive
suppliant praise and prayer.

Thou who once deigned to be clothed in
flesh for the sake of the lost,
grant us to be members
of thy blessed body.