

# program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

## Symphony No. 5 in D major (1942)

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS ■ 1872- 1958

John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* was probably more widely read for the two centuries after its publication in 1678 than any English text except the Bible. Vaughan Williams first treated Bunyan's words in a hymn setting of 1904, *Who would true valour see, let him come hither*. Two years later, he provided music for a dramatization of the story at Reigate Priory, Surrey, and in 1922 completed a "pastoral episode" titled *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* based on a scene from Bunyan's book. (Vaughan Williams' interest in Bunyan's writing was not theological but historical and societal. Ursula, his second wife, said in her biography of her husband that by his later years he had "drifted into a cheerful agnosticism: he was never a professing Christian.") In 1925, Vaughan Williams returned to *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* with the intention of incorporating it into a full-length opera based on *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He sketched various episodes of the work over the next dozen years, but apparently decided nothing would come of the project, and put it aside in 1936. (Vaughan Williams eventually finished his opera, or "Morality," as he called it, in 1949, and gave its premiere at Covent Garden in 1951.) In 1938, he began to draft the successor to his Fourth Symphony of 1935, and noted at the head of the new score that

"some of the themes of this Symphony are taken from an unfinished opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*." A year later, Britain was at war, and for some time Vaughan Williams devoted himself largely to writing background music for films such as *49th Parallel*, *Coastal Command* and *The People's Land*, and serving in the local fire brigade. The Symphony No. 5 in D major was largely written in 1942 and premiered on June 24, 1943 at the Albert Hall, London.

More than just thematically related to the operatic version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Fifth Symphony grows from the peaceable vision of the Celestial City that is the object of the journey of the opera's title character, Christian. It opens quietly, as if from a distance, with a sustained note in the low strings above which the horns intone a tiny, misty fanfare whose rocking, long-short rhythm figures prominently throughout the movement. The violins introduce a brief, lyrical arch-shaped phrase that grows into a longer melody embedded in a subtle yet luxuriant contrapuntal fabric. These motives are treated at some length, become hushed, and are followed by a radiant modulation to the second theme, a melody of warm emotion that is among Vaughan Williams' greatest inspirations. Rather than a traditional development, the center of the movement is occupied by a contrasting section in quicker tempo based on a scurrying motive initiated by the strings. The mood and themes of the first two sections return before the movement closes quietly.

Some commentators have found in the following Scherzo evidence of the “hobgoblin and foul fiend” that bedevils Christian in Bunyan’s allegory. The first of the movement’s two trios begins with the trombones discussing the opening theme of the Scherzo. The Scherzo proper returns in a mysterious setting. The second trio is an energetic, brilliantly scored passage in duple meter.

Above the score of the *Romanza*, Vaughan Williams inscribed these lines from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: “Upon that place there stood a cross, and a little below, a sepulchre. Then he said, ‘He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death.’”

The finale is titled *Passacaglia*, an old variations form based on a repeating melodic fragment. The theme, presented by cellos, is joined by a flowing melody in flutes and violins that comes to dominate the movement. In the final pages, a grand statement of the horn theme that opened the first movement fulfills the Symphony’s formal cycle. A sweet coda floats above a long-sustained pedal note, the goal toward which this magnificent symphonic pilgrimage has progressed.

## **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 14 (1939)**

SAMUEL BARBER ■ 1910-1981

The 1939 Violin Concerto, with the warm lyricism of its first two movements and the aggressive rhythms and strong dissonances of its finale, is a microcosm of the stylistic evolution that Samuel Barber’s music underwent at the outbreak of World War II. The idiom of the works of his earlier years — *the Overture to “The School for Scandal”* (1932), *Essay for Orchestra* (1937), *Adagio for Strings* (1938), those pieces that established his international reputation as a 20th-

century romanticist — was soon to be augmented by the more modern but expressively richer musical language of the Second Symphony (1944), *Capricorn Concerto* (1944) and the ballet for Martha Graham, *The Serpent Heart* (1946), from which the orchestral suite *Medea* was derived.

The Concerto’s opening movement, almost Brahmsian in its nostalgic songfulness, is built on two lyrical themes. The first one, presented immediately by the soloist, is an extended, arching melody; the other, initiated by the clarinet, is rhythmically animated by the use of the “Scottish snap,” a short-long figure also familiar from jazz idioms. The two themes alternate throughout the remainder of the movement, which follows a broadly drawn, traditional concerto form. The expressive mood of the first movement carries into the lovely *Adagio*. The oboe intones a plangent melody as the main theme, from which the soloist spins a rhapsodic elaboration to serve as the movement’s central section. *Moto perpetuo* — “perpetual motion” — Barber marked the finale of the Concerto, and the music more than lives up to its title. After an opening timpani flourish, the soloist introduces a fiery motive above a jabbing, rhythmic accompaniment that returns, rondo-like, throughout the movement.

## **Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town* (1944)**

LEONARD BERNSTEIN ■ 1918-1990

In April 1944, Bernstein’s ballet *Fancy Free* was introduced to great acclaim at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The plot, according to the composer, concerned three sailors “on leave [in New York] and on the prowl for girls. The tale tells of how they meet first one,

then a second girl, and how they fight over them, lose them, and in the end take off with still a third.” The ballet’s setting and characters were the inspiration for him to try a new piece in a form that he had not then broached — musical comedy.

Bernstein enlisted two old friends, the singer-dancer-lyricist Adolph Green (“old” is relative — Bernstein was not yet 26, but had known Green since they were teenagers) and Green’s creative collaborator, Betty Comden, to write the book and words for the show, which they titled *On the Town*. They devised a story, perfectly suited to those war years, about three sailors in New York who are determined to see everything in the city during their 24-hour leave. On the subway, one of the sailors falls in love with the poster picture of Miss Turnstiles, and the boys set out to find her. Their efforts take them all over the city until they finally discover Miss Turnstiles in Coney Island, where they learn that she is not a glamorous lady but a belly dancer.

*On the Town* had a two-week tryout in Boston before opening at New York’s Adelphi Theater on December 28, 1944 with Comden and Green in leading roles. It was a hit, running for 463 performances on Broadway; Arthur Freed made it into a movie starring Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly and Jules Munshin five years later. The show has been revived for Broadway, most recently in a Tony-nominated production in 2014. The “Three Dance Episodes” include: *The Great Lover*, which captures the vibrant intensity of the bustling metropolis and the high spirits of the young sailors; *Lonely Town (Pas de Deux)*, based on the expressive song of its title; and *Times Square-1944*, a joyous fantasia on *New York, New York*, the show’s hit tune.

# ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NOVEMBER 12-13, 2022  
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

**DIANE M. WITTRY** MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Symphony No. 5 in D major RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS  
Preludio: Moderato — Allegro — Tempo I  
Scherzo: Presto misterioso  
Romanza: Lento  
Passacaglia: Moderato

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 14 SAMUEL BARBER  
Allegro  
Andante  
Presto in moto perpetuo  
Kelly Hall-Tompkins, Violin

Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town* LEONARD BERNSTEIN  
The Great Lover: Allegro pesante  
Lonely Town (Pas de Deux): Andante sostenuto  
Times Square — 1944: Allegro