The Third Symphony of Vaughan Williams, composed during and after the First World War, concludes with and eerie and beautiful sense of space: an evocation perhaps of a tragic and haunted landscape.

In this window, the upper part of the right-hand light is illuminated by the green of dusk, over an empty Flanders fieldscape. Vaughan Williams served as a stretcher-barer during the war, an especially vivid memory was of the flickering light of torches ahead of him as wounded soldiers were carried along the trenches. This too is depicted in that right-hand part of the window.

Lower down, and perhaps in more nebulous connection with his music, are shattered angular shapes, suggestive of shrapnel. But Vaughan Williams’ 6th Symphony is itself angry and jagged in character. ‘Shrapnel-esq’ shapes can also be read as the breaking of a wave. One enters into this right-hand lancet by way of a surging waterine movement – an announcement of The Sea that parallels the beginning of The Sea Symphony.

It has been an extraordinary but elusive task to attempt to make something in glass that could be a worthy celebration of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Is it possible for visual art to equate to music? Not exactly, of course. But likewise, can music be full of colour? Can a pianist be a poet? Perhaps we can think of this window as adjacent to the composer, *‘a dissident and reverent homage to the profoundly numinous experience’* in the words of the composer, James McMillan of listening to the music of Vaughan Williams.

The richness and profundity of folk music began to be more widely recognised in Vaughan Williams’ time. He himself was deeply affected by his explorations and discoveries in this field. All of the melancholy and joy of folk music, the sense of loss, courage and yearning re-emerges in the music of Vaughan Williams – often as an elegised essence rather than as a direct quotation. So many folk songs are about love and parting.

The left-hand light of the window is intended to hold this sense of longing. A woman shelters alone under a holly tree, the rain framing her. She looks out into a distant golden veil. Perhaps one can also have in mind ‘My Philip is slain’ from the Five Tudor Portraits – the loss of a sparrow embodying universal loss.

Folk songs of the four seasons find their way into the small traceries above the two outer lancets - the most westerly of these, for example, contains a cluster of carolling children walking out on a winter landscape and carrying a lantern. This tiny scene can be a reminder of Vaughan Williams’ wholly unpatronizing generosity towards children. He wrote, in 1958, to the boys and girls of Swaffham Primary School that ‘*the arts are the means by which we can look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond.’*

In the centre of the window, and growing into the upper traceries, we find the narrative of the Pilgrims Progress with which Vaughan Williams was preoccupied for decades. A nice analogy perhaps for a lifetime’s endeavours and revelations. The Pilgrims Progress is an archetypal pathway towards enlightenment and grace. A tremulous figure embarks on a journey: he has passed through a wicket gate, danger and struggle, fear and mockery may lie ahead, but so too do delectable mountains – here depicted as Cotswold! In the 17th and 18th centuries such ranges of hills were indeed seen as majestic mountains.

The Pilgrim is rather Milton-like in appearance, with long flowing hair – one of the several suggestions in the window of the 17th century. Vaughan Williams was, of course, deeply attached to the music of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Pilgrim meets encouragement from the guardian of the house beautiful, an encounter on a journey with all kinds of parallels.

In the outer traceries, mountain slopes are lined with figures singing the Pilgrim’s arrival in paradise. And, in the central quatrefoil, a figure emerges into an ethereal, airy, gothic structure – the Tallis Fantasia in mind.

Vaughan Williams himself spoke of heaven as a place where he would no longer hear music, but would, rather, be music.

Tom Denny

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