

## **Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge**

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872 – 1958)

Composed in 1921, this anthem for double choir combines the words of Psalm 90 - 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge' - with Isaac Watts's fine metrical version of the same psalm - 'O God, our help in ages past' - the latter being set to the tune with which it is traditionally associated, 'St Anne'.

In the unaccompanied opening section, in D major, both psalm and hymn proceed together - the psalm chanted, the hymn in broad phrases. D major then becomes D minor for the next verse, 'As soon as thou scatterest them', heard this time without the hymn. A more animated passage in a modal version of C minor brings this section to a close at 'so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life'. An important instrumental transition follows, freely based on phrases from the 'St Anne' tune, leading eventually to a reprise of 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge'. Fugal derivations of 'St Anne' become more prominent as the music gradually builds to an emphatic conclusion.

Vaughan Williams' work as a folk-song collector and hymnal editor was of outstanding importance in its own right, but it also proved to be a fertile source of inspiration in his determined effort to establish a distinctly English musical voice. *Lord, Thou hast been our refuge* is a fine example of his use of a simple English melody - in this case a hymn tune - as the basis for a more substantial piece of considerable emotional and dramatic power.

*programme notes by John Bawden*

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