

Music Listening for the Easter Season—Easter VI

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This is the sixth of a series of articles on music, mostly choral, that we might be hearing in live performances in this season, but cannot, due to the current pandemic in which choirs can neither rehearse nor perform in public worship. We all look forward to a time when we again can gather together to perform and enjoy the performance of music. Until that time comes, however, we do have access to a vast library of recorded musical performances. Much of what we now cannot hear live is available for us to experience as previously performed, and now electronically retrievable.

An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, edited by Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boek Slocum, has the following entry about Rogation Days:

Traditionally, these are the three days before Ascension Day on which the litany is sung (or recited) in procession as an act of intercession. They originated in Vienne, France, in the fifth century when Bishop Mamertus introduced days of fasting and prayer to ward off a threatened disaster. In England they were associated with the blessing of the fields at planting. The vicar “beat the bounds” of the parish, processing around the fields reciting psalms and the litany. In the United States they have been associated with rural life and with agriculture and fishing. The propers in the BCP (pp. 207-208, 258-259, 930) have widened their scope to include commerce and industry and the stewardship of creation. The BCP also permits their celebration at other times to accommodate different regional growing seasons. The BOS contains material for a Rogation procession, including petitions to be added to the Great Litany and the prayers of the people. The term is from the Latin *rogatio*, “asking.”

While *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979) currently provides scripture readings and prayers for Rogation Days, it does not designate a *Rogation Sunday* on the Sixth Sunday of Easter as the 1928 Prayer Book had previously so designated the Fifth Sunday after Easter. Nonetheless, this last Sunday before Ascension Day retains the themes of resurrection and rebirth which parallel what we see in the natural order in this spring season. *Rogationtide* in the spring can be viewed as the foundation for what we celebrate as Thanksgiving in the fall, a time of prayer and thanksgiving for the gift of creation, life, and salvation.

For lo, the winter is past

A biblical text often associated with Easter, and with spring, is found in the tenth chapter of the *Song of Solomon*, chapter 2, beginning at verse 10. One often hears these words sung during the Easter season and they are particularly appropriate for the Sixth Sunday of the season. I would like to highlight three distinctive settings. The first is by the Canadian composer, Healey Willan (1880–1968), and the other two are by the English composers Patrick Hadley (1899–1973) and Henry Purcell (1659–1695).

Here is more about the composers and their settings:

The name of Healey Willan (1880–1968) is well known to Episcopalians because of his *Missa de Santa Maria Magdalena*, composed in 1928. This setting appeared in *The Hymnal 1940* and was retained in *The Hymnal 1982*. It has been widely sung throughout the Episcopal Church and by other denominations for decades. Willan's career and reputation, however, went far beyond composing this beloved congregational Mass setting. He composed more than eight hundred works including operas, symphonies and other music for orchestra and band, chamber music, and music for piano and organ, in addition to a great quantity of choral church music. His liturgical music included fourteen choral Masses, motets for many occasions, canticles, and hymn settings. Willan, who is said to have described himself as "English by birth; Canadian by adoption; Irish by extraction; Scotch by absorption," was a champion of historic liturgical chant and the aesthetic of Renaissance church music. He incorporated these influences and mingled them with an appreciation of the rich harmonic palette of the late nineteenth-century masters. Through his compositions and choral direction he significantly set the standard for North American Anglo-Catholic church music in his time. In 1956 Willan became the first non-English church musician to be awarded the Lambeth Doctorate, Mus.D *Cantuar. Rise up, my love, my fair one*, Willan's setting of Song of Solomon 2:10-12, is the fifth of ten Liturgical Motets which he composed between 1928 and 1937. Scored in four parts with occasion *divisi*, this motet is modest in length but rich in expression.

Patrick Sheldon Hadley (1899–1973) was born in Cambridge when his father was a fellow of Pembroke College. His mother was the daughter of a military school chaplain in Dublin. Following military service in World War I, during which he suffered the amputation of his lower right leg, Hadley continued his education at Pembroke College and studied with Charles Wood (1866–1926) and Cyril Rootham (1875–1938). After completing B.Mus. and MA degrees, he began his association with the Royal College of Music in London where he taught composition and was influenced by such notable figures as composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and conductor, Sir Adrian Boult. From 1946 until his retirement in 1962 he held the Chair of Music at Cambridge University. His students include such distinguished church musicians and scholars as Sir David Lumsden, Sir Philip Ledger and Peter le Huray. Hadley's catalogue of compositions is varied though relatively modest. One of his most performed pieces today is his anthem *My beloved spake*, composed for the wedding of former pupil Ursula Grotrian on 5 May 1936 at Ripon Cathedral. The conception of the anthem is grandly orchestral. One might recognize reflections of Vaughan Williams' *Easter (Five Mystical Songs)* in Hadley's extravagant harmonies and textures.

Henry Purcell (1659–1695), more than any other composer of his time, defined English Baroque musical style in a variety of vocal and instrumental genres which included works for theater, court and church. Purcell was born in London, his family home being virtually in the shadow of Westminster Abbey where he became organist in 1679. Standing on the foundation of such composers as Tallis (c.1505–1585), Byrd (c.1543–1623) and Gibbons (c.1583–1625), copies of whose anthems he made at an early age, Purcell forged a musical language of rich harmony and vivid textual expression. His verse-anthem *My beloved spake* is an extended setting of *Song of Solomon* 2:10-13,16a and an outstanding example of the symphony anthem, a genre to which Purcell contributed significantly in his time. His *My beloved spake* is scored for strings and continuo, four soloists (alto,

tenor and 2 basses), and four-voice choir. It begins with an instrumental “symphony” into which the four soloists eventually are introduced. Several sections follow which are delineated by phrases of the text, usually presented first by the soloists, and followed by choral commentary. These sections are made distinct by imaginative changes of key, meter, texture, or mood, and separated by instrumental interludes. *Hallelujahs* are interpolated into the text to heighten the anthem’s expression of joy and festivity. It is remarkable that such a sophisticated piece dates from before 1678 when Purcell was yet a teenager.

Here are the texts and YouTube links:

Rise up, my love—Healey Willan (1880–1968)

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear upon the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60uVwwVch74>

My beloved spake—Patrick Hadley (1899–1973)

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The figtree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSTfv6OhuwE>

My beloved spake—Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear upon the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come. Hallelujah. And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The figtree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Rise, my love, my fair one, and come away. My beloved is mine and I am His. Hallelujah.

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

The Apple Tree

The image of the vine and the branches featured in John 15:1-8, the gospel reading for the Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A, brings to mind a text from *Divine Hymns or Spiritual Songs*, a collection compiled by Joshua Smith and published in New Hampshire in 1784. Another source attests that

this text was first printed in London in 1761 and signed “R. H.” This text has liturgical resonance with the Advent season and is frequently sung in Advent services of Lessons and Carols. Its suitability for the Easter season is especially appreciated on Easter VI, formerly known as Rogation Sunday. *Jesus Christ the apple tree* (or *The tree of life my soul hath seen*) has come to be widely known and sung in a setting composed in 1967 by Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987). Poston was born in Highfield House in Pin Green. She attended Queen Margaret’s School in York, studying piano with Harold Samuel, before moving on to the Royal Academy of Music in London from which she graduated in 1925. Her mentors there included composers Peter Warlock and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Poston was actively engaged with the BBC over many years beginning during World War II. In the course of her career she composed extensively for radio and television broadcasts, collaborating with such writers as C. S. Lewis and Dylan Thomas. From 1955 until 1961 she was also president of the British Society of Women Musicians.

Elizabeth Poston’s is one of several settings of the 18th century “apple tree” text, but it may be the best known of them all, and also the most often performed of her compositions. Poston’s enthusiasm for and knowledge of folksong is evident in the elegant simplicity and naturalness of her “apple tree” setting, which begins and ends with stanzas sung in unaccompanied unison. Her second stanza is scored for four treble voices, and stanzas 3 and 4 are set for four-voice mixed voices. The printed edition indicates that the unison stanzas may be sung in canon and some performers have used this option very creatively.

Here is the text and a YouTube link for *Jesus Christ the apple tree*:

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree—Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit, and always green:
The trees of nature fruitless be
Compared with Christ the apple tree.

His beauty doth all things excel:
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see
In Jesus Christ the apple tree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought:
I missed of all; but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,
Here I will sit and rest awhile:
Under the shadow I will be
of Jesus Christ the apple tree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

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