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Pianist on the Recording: Laura Ward

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PREFACE

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) composed art songs which are among the best British works in the genre, particularly in the first decade of the twentieth century. He composed a few art songs before 1900, but his earliest noteworthy song is “Linden Lea,” composed in 1901. In the same year Vaughan Williams composed “Whither must I wander,” which would become part of *Songs of Travel*. The remaining songs in the cycle, originally for baritone and piano, were composed in 1904. His 1903 song cycle *The House of Life*, which includes the perennial favorite “Silent Noon,” is also from the same period. Other major works for voice from this early period in the composer’s work are *A Sea Symphony* (composed 1903–09), and *On Wenlock Edge* (composed 1908–09). Vaughan Williams achieved wide and varied success in other genres, particularly with orchestral and choral pieces. He returned to song composition in the 1920s, producing 21 songs in that decade. The composer turned again to writing art songs in the 1950s. Vaughan Williams also made quite a few arrangements of English folksongs for voice and piano.

The first eight songs in *Songs of Travel* were first performed as a “complete” set in London in 1904. The ninth song, “I have trod the upward and downward slope” was discovered in the composer’s manuscripts after his death by his widow, Ursula Vaughan Williams, and added in 1960 to the first complete edition of the cycle. The citation was added to the added song’s publication: “This little epilogue to the Song Cycle *Songs of Travel* should be sung in public only when the whole cycle is performed.”

The composer orchestrated “The Vagabond,” “The Roadside Fire” and “Bright is the ring of words.” British composer Roy Douglas, musical assistant to Vaughan Williams at one time, later orchestrated the remaining songs of the cycle, employing the same instrumentation used by Vaughan Williams.

The Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94) is best remembered for his novels *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and the novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He enjoyed a celebrated reputation as an unconventional adventurer, and traveled widely in his short life in Europe and the United States before settling in Samoa. (He died there at a young age from a probable cerebral hemorrhage.) Stevenson was also a sometime composer and arranger, and set some of his poems to music himself. The poetry collection *Songs of Travel and Other Verses* was published posthumously in 1896. The following editor’s note appeared in the original edition:

The following collection of verses, written at various times and places, principally after the author’s final departure from England in 1887, was sent home by him for publication some months before his death. He had tried them in several different orders and under several different titles, as “Songs and Notes of Travel,” “Posthumous Poems,” etc., and in the end left their naming and arrangement to the present editor...

There are 44 poems in Stevenson’s *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*. From these Ralph Vaughan Williams chose nine. Stevenson’s title for the poem used in the first song of the cycle is “The Vagabond (To an air of Schubert).” It is not known what Schubert song Stevenson had in mind. The song title “The Roadside Fire” is Vaughan Williams’ (the poem appears without a title).

—Richard Walters

The Vagabond

original key

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Allegro moderato
(alla marcia)

p *ma sempre marcato*

sempre pesante il basso

5 *risoluto*

Give to me the life I love, Let the love go

9

by me, Give the jol - ly heaven a - bove, And the by-way nigh me.