

Hymns

30. Jerusalem (1916)

Sir Hubert Parry
(1848-1918)
arr. William Melton

Parry, Sir Charles Hubert Hastings

(born 27 February 1848 in Bournemouth; died 7 October 1918 in Knight's Croft, Rustington)

Son of the artist and collector Thomas Gambier Parry of Highnam Court, Gloucester, Hubert Parry took composition classes and honed his talents as pianist, organist and violinist while at Eton. Lessons with Henry Hugo Pierson in Stuttgart preceded Oxford (Exeter College), and time under the supervision of Sir William Sterndale Bennett and Sir George Alexander Macfarren completed his technical training. Nevertheless, it was his piano study with Edward Dannreuther in London that turned Parry into a well-rounded artist. The Alsatian-born Dannreuther was a graduate of the Leipzig Conservatory, an eminent pianist who had introduced the concerti of Liszt, Grieg and Tchaikovsky to English audiences. He was well versed in contemporary music, knew the leading musical figures of Europe personally, and his students were exposed to Wagner and Brahms in addition to the classics.

Beginning with *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound*, premiered at the Gloucester Festival in 1880, Parry produced a body of works that would make him the leading English choral composer of the day. He was made Chorus of Oxford University in 1883, and over the next few years was given honorary doctorates from Cambridge, Oxford and Trinity College Dublin. In 1894 he became director of the Royal College of Music, and pupils there over the years included the likes of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Herbert Howells and George Butterworth. Parry was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1898, the following year named professor at Oxford and he was made first Baronet of Highnam in 1902. A health crisis in 1908 forced him to shed the Oxford post, but he continued to produce books on musical history and style as well as *Johann Sebastian Bach* in 1909 (he had previously written a

slew of articles for *Grove's Dictionary*). A two-volume biography of Parry appeared eight years after his death, and since then several more have been published, the latest by scholar Jeremy Dibble in 1992.

There is little doubt that Parry's great abilities as pedagogue and administrator, though invaluable for the cause of music in England, hindered the promotion of his own creations. For Parry's considerable output is rarely to be heard: the opera *Guinevere*, four symphonies (five if the *Symphonic Fantasia* 1912 is counted), overtures, a piano concerto, suites and other orchestral works, three string quartets, three piano trios and various chamber works, secular cantatas and part songs, solo songs, organ music and pieces for piano. As to Parry's style, Jürgen Schaarwächter has noted, 'Long influenced by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Schumann, later by Brahms and at times by Wagner, the important characteristic of his compositional technique was a great seriousness and integrity that was closely allied with the Victorian ideal of beauty'. His own generation knew him best for his sacred choral works, which included three oratorios and a large body of anthems, motets, odes and hymns. Yet, except for one shining exception, these remain little known outside of England.

That exception is a brief work that Parry composed in 1916. Written at the request of the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, its goal was to rally sagging public morale after two years of death and sacrifice in the First World War. Bridges sent Parry the short poem 'And did those feet in ancient time' by William Blake (from the preface to his epic *Milton: a Poem*, 1804), inspired by an apocryphal story of the young Jesus being brought to the town of Glastonbury by Joseph of Arimathea. Hardly a conventional Christian, Blake employed the religious imagery to project a bucolic paradise — a new Jerusalem — in place of the 'dark satanic mills' of his own emerging industrial era. Evocative phrases like 'green and pleasant land' are now widely used, but within the framework of the poem they retain their original power. Parry was taken with the text and swiftly sketched out the hymn *Jerusalem*. Copies were distributed across the country and the piece was rapidly adopted by the public. After its quintessential orchestration by Sir Edward Elgar in 1922, King George V was said to prefer *Jerusalem* as a national anthem over *God Save the King*, and many others have echoed this sentiment.

It would be difficult to overstate the degree that *Jerusalem* has permeated English life since 1916. Sung during two world wars as a rallying cry, it still appears at state ceremonies, weddings and funerals, worship services and football matches (and cricket and rugby events as well). It has long been sung by the members of the Women's Institute, and political movements as diverse as the Suffragette movement, the Labour and Conservative Parties and even the National Front have variously adopted it as their own. Every year at the end of The Last Night of The Proms in the Royal Albert Hall (or in Proms in the Park locales across England), *Jerusalem* is devotedly sung by the assembled throng:

And did those feet in ancient time
walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
on England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine
shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight,
nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.

Text by William Melton