

An Anthem for Remembrance

It's that time of year again – what are we going to sing at the Remembrance Service? There are of course the usual suspects: Ireland's "Greater Love" and Vaughan Williams' "Let us now praise", the choice being dependent on the forces available.

Whilst pondering the subject, and looking through the Novello Anthem Book (the old one with a light blue cover), I came across another candidate: "Earth does not hold" is an anthem for Remembrance-tide with words by Patience Ross set to music by Eric Thiman.

As published it is for unison voices with an independent (probably piano) accompaniment, and as such may well have been intended for schools or choral societies. If played on the organ, the accompaniment could usefully be thinned out a bit.

There are four sections, the first two being marked Full Unison, the third to be sung by a semi-chorus, and the last Full again, with the Amen, in two parts, to finish. In practice, the first two sections could be given respectively to higher and lower voices to add some tonal variety.

About the composer

Eric H. Thiman (1900-1975) was an organist (known for outstanding powers of improvisation), composer and conductor. He gained the FRCO in 1921 and in 1930 was Professor of Harmony at the Royal Academy of Music. In 1958 he was appointed organist of the (Methodist) City Temple in London and from 1969 was conductor of the Purley Choral Society (now the Chandos Choir). Today he is remembered for some organ music and choral works such as "The Last Supper", a cantata for Passiontide.

About the poet

What little we know of Patience Ross (born Patience Henrietta May Ropes in 1906) comes from her time as a pupil of another musician – John Ireland – who was her piano teacher. Among John Ireland's effects were found slim volumes of poetry by Patience Ross: "Black Bread" (published by Basil Blackwell in 1929) and a second volume "The Glass Rose" (1930).

Given that it was probably written during or just after the First World War, it is interesting to note the tone of the poem which forms the text of this anthem. Unlike many such before or since it shows no jingoism, is not triumphalist and does not glorify warfare. Rather, it expresses faith that those who fight and fall are gathered into a new and better place to which we can all aspire:

Earth does not hold the spirits of the brave,
Seek no imprisoned honour in the grave.
The body broken, th' unbroken soul
In some new region is unscarr'd and whole.

They gave their peace that peace might follow pain.
They died in Christ, in Him they live again.
As Christ is ever with us, so are they:
A shining host upon the shining way.

Oh, in the bright procession of their fame
May we now follow, free from sloth and shame
To that great music, on the path they trod,
Who now have ended pilgrimage with God.

We praise and bless the memory of all
Whose lives were given at their country's call.
Let God by us who live be glorified
And by the living souls of them who died. Amen.

If you have (or can borrow) the book, do have a look at the piece. If not, it may be worth making contact with Novello to ask about reprints or publisher-approved copies.

Paul Minchinton