

## 14. The Royal Hunt, Op. posth.

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford

(1852-1924)

*arr. William Melton*

### **Stanford, Sir Charles Villiers**

(born 30 September 1852 in Dublin; died 29 March 1924 in London)

Though steered by his father towards a career in law, Stanford was inexorably drawn to music. After early lessons on piano, organ and violin in Dublin, he studied piano at London's Royal Academy of Music with the Austrian pianist Ernst Pauer. Stanford later recalled that he was kept on a steady diet of Mozart—Pauer had been a pupil of Mozart's son Franz Xaver Wolfgang Amadeus. A scholarship allowed study at Queen's College, Cambridge, and Stanford obtained the post of college organist at Trinity College (an appointment as conductor of the Cambridge University Musical Society would follow). Sojourns in Germany beginning in 1874 allowed Stanford to study with Carl Reinecke in Leipzig and Friedrich Kiel in Berlin and make the acquaintance of Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim. At home he was appointed to professorships at the Royal College of Music (1883) and Cambridge (1887), and he became musical director of the Bach Choir and the Leeds Philharmonic Society and Festival. His operas and symphonies were well received—the 3rd 'Irish' Symphony was premiered by Hans Richter and subsequently conducted by the likes of Hans von Bülow, Walter Damrosch, Willem Mengelberg and Gustav Mahler. Stanford was awarded honorary doctorates from both Oxford and Cambridge and was knighted by King Edward VII in 1902.

Stanford's distinguished achievements as a pedagogue, conductor and scholar (he gathered and published collections of folk music, notably the Irish songs of his youth) have to some extent eclipsed his reputation as a composer. Certainly his successful pupils make up a formidable group: Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Frank Bridge, Arthur Bliss, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, E. J. Moeran, Charles Wood, Herbert Howells, Rutland Boughton, Thomas Dunhill, Rebecca Clarke, James Friskin, George Dyson, Edgar Bainton, William Hurlstone, Sir Henry Walford Davies, Arthur Benjamin, Ivor Gurney and Gordon Jacob. Though the success of

his music outside of Britain never approached that of his contemporaries Elgar or Sullivan, Stanford's compositions are very fine, and include six operas and further stage works, seven symphonies and diverse orchestral pieces, concerti for piano (2) as well as violin and clarinet, a wealth of chamber music, songs and myriad choral works both sacred and secular. Stanford's music, wrote Vaughan Williams, 'is in the best sense of the word Victorian,' while Stanford's biographer Jeremy Dibble added 'yet the best of his musical utterances have...transcended Victorianism, possessing the power and eloquence to speak with a fresh, undated voice'.

*The Royal Hunt* was penned in Stanford's last year of life, and was based on a song from the collection *Songs of Old Ireland* that he had compiled more than four decades before. It was scored for a chorus of Alto, Tenor, 1st Bass and 2nd Bass, and the text was by the Anglo-Irish writer Alfred Perceval Graves (father of Robert Graves, the author of *I Claudius*). A court hunt of the ancient Irish kings was the subject matter, and the poet's galloping 'Tantara' and 'tally ho' were matched to dotted rhythms and a rollicking 6/8 tempo that faded as the company faded in the distance: 'fainter and fainter the horn is now replying, and further, and further...the hunt is dying'. The arranger is indebted to the Library of Trinity College, Dublin which houses a first edition of the work (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1928).

*Text by William Melton*