

85. The Morris Dance (1923)

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 Morris Dance was composed and published by J. B. Cramer & Co. of London in 1923, the year before Stanford's death, at a time when his health was rapidly failing. The folk subject was a fond look backward: the text is traditional, and gives pointed—and sometimes exasperated—directions for the progression of the dance.

Come, lasses, come, come quickly!
See, how trim they dance and trickly,
Hey, there again! ho, there again!
How the bells they shake it...
Now for our town there take it...
Soft awhile, not away so fast
They me't them, piper...
be hanged awhile, knave,
the dancers swelt them, out there,
out awhile! you come too far...
Give the hobby horse more room to play in.

The arranger is again indebted to the Library of Trinity College, Dublin which houses a second edition of the work.

Text by William Melton