

Henry V *Alive!*

Presented April 13, 2025

William Byrd Suite

The Earle of Oxford's March
Pavana
Jhon Come Kisse Me Now
The Mayden's Song

Gordon Jacob
(1895 - 1984)

Crown Imperial

William Walton
(1902 - 1983)

*** intermission ***

Henry V: A Shakespeare Scenario

Prologue
Interlude - At the Boar's Head
Embarkation
Interlude - 'Touch her soft lips and part'
Harfleur and The Night Watch
Agincourt
Interlude - At the French Court
Epilogue

William Walton

Kevin P. Kern, Speaker
Kantorei Chamber Choir

"British Subjects"

The music selections on this concert program are not only by British composers, but they are also thematic works about Britain and her people. And though all of the music was composed or arranged in the twentieth century, the music harkens back in one way or another to centuries past – to battles fought and won, and to the majesty of the monarchy itself.

William Byrd Suite, Gordon Jacob

This work is the tale of two composers: William Byrd, one of England's and Europe's great composers of the Renaissance era, and Gordon Jacob, one of England's most prominent composers and music educators of the early 20th century.

Byrd was born to a successful London family around 1540. Many scholars believe Byrd was a boy chorister and then an assistant under Thomas Tallis. By the time Shakespeare was born in 1564, Byrd had just received his first professional appointment, as organist and master of the choristers at Lincoln Cathedral. In 1572, he received a lifetime post of Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. Much of his compositions were written for voice, keyboard, or viol, and the majority were written for church services. Though Byrd was quietly Catholic, he served the Anglican church. Byrd outlived Shakespeare by about seven years.

Gordon Jacob's life began with hardship, but he devoted himself early to music and from that vocation found success and satisfaction. He was born in 1895 in London, the youngest of ten children. His father died in India when Gordon was three. He joined the army when World War I broke out. As one of the few survivors of a battalion of 800, he was held as a prisoner of war in Germany. In the prison camp, he studied a book on harmony and began his career as a composer there, writing works for his fellow prisoners to perform.

After the war, he first obtained an associate's degree in music through a correspondence course, then was admitted as a full time student to the Royal College of Music (RCM). Soon after his graduation, he was invited to join the faculty of the RCM, where he remained until his retirement in 1966. He produced over 700 works, spanning from that beginning in the prison camp to well into his official retirement.

The 300th anniversary of Byrd's death occurred while Jacob was a student at RCM (1923). For the occasion, he created an orchestral arrangement of three of Byrd's works written for virginal, a keyboard instrument similar to the harpsichord. Unlike the piano, the virginal and harpsichord do not allow the performer to adjust the volume. Not having such limitations with an orchestra, Jacob took cues from Byrd's compositions to guide his choice of instrumentation and dynamics. The piece received favorable reviews, and Jacob was invited to both expand the work and arrange it for wind band, for a military concert in 1924. Jacob selected three more Byrd works; the six-movement suite has become part of the standard repertoire for wind ensembles. The Alliance Symphony performs the first four movements.

Recommended reading:

Gordon Jacob: "William Byrd Suite", by Brian K. Doyle,

<https://www.umwindorchestra.com/single-post/2010/08/16/gordon-jacob-william-byrd-suite>

Toward a Critical Edition of Gordon Jacob's William Byrd Suite: A Comparison of Extant Editions with The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, doctoral dissertation of Andrew Jason Trachsel, University of North Texas Digital Library <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc3913/>

Crown Imperial, William Walton

When a composer receives a commission to create a new work for a particular occasion, the most important objective is to meet the needs of the particular occasion – style, theme, and the pragmatic matters of duration, instrumentation, and number of performers required. Many such works are performed just once. Sometimes a composer succeeds in creating a work that is so beautiful and so expressive of a certain intent that it goes on to be performed again and again. *Crown Imperial* is one of those that transcends the original occasion.

The choice of William Walton to write the coronation march for King George VI in 1937 may have surprised some. The 35-year-old composer could be a bit avant garde. Ralph Vaughn Williams was more established and had greater esteem. The first choice might have been Edward Elgar, but he had died in 1934. Walton knew this was a time for tradition to rule.

Crown Imperial begins with an energetic march, using the full orchestra and featuring the brass. The melody is fanfare-like, joyful, with a little syncopation to make it lively while maintaining dignity. A quieter second section featuring strings and winds evokes pastoral images, a nation at peace. The section

gradually adds brass and percussion to add majesty while maintaining regal restraint. We jump back to the opening march theme. A slow crescendo and rising melody climax into a slower, unhurried procession. We end with a flourish: a variation on the original march, lots of brass, held notes. The message is clear: the United Kingdom and her monarch are strong and confident.

Part of the piece's popularity may stem from the fact that this was the first time in history that England could hear a coronation ceremony live on radio. Millions tuned in and heard Walton's majestic and inspiring march. Ironically, because it was composed for and dedicated to the rarest of royal occasions, it is rarely performed *live* in the United Kingdom. There are studio recordings for the people to enjoy whenever they wish, but live performance is reserved for momentous royal events. It was performed for the coronations of Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III in 1953 and 2023, respectively, and for the wedding of Prince William in 2011. We Americans are under no such restriction of propriety.

Henry V: A Shakespeare Scenario, William Walton

When George V was taking the throne, he and his advisors were well aware of military aggressions in Germany. Two years later, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany in response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. From 1939 to 1945, the United Kingdom was fighting not only to defeat the Axis powers but for its own survival.

Just as Hollywood produced patriotic films during the war, so did England. In 1943, Lawrence Olivier, the most famous British young actor of the time, produced and starred in a film version of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the more or less true tale of how a greatly outnumbered English military force won a pivotal battle in the Hundred Years' War against France. William Walton composed the music for the film. Decades later, when John Williams was composing the heroic music for the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series, he had the work of William Walton and others to inspire him.

In 1988, Christopher Plummer (best known to Americans as Captain von Trapp from *The Sound of Music*) and Sir Neville Martinson came up with the idea of making a concert version of the movie score. Select some of the best music for orchestra and chorus, and strategically include some of Shakespeare's best speeches from the play. The result was *Henry V: A Shakespeare Scenario*. The full work is just under one hour long. The Alliance Symphony presents a slightly edited version.

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