

The World Is Charged

Karen P. Thomas's *The World Is Charged* (set to the poem *God's Grandeur*) was commissioned by Laura Patton Ballard and Jim Ballard.

The poem *God's Grandeur* was written by the English Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. In *God's Grandeur* Hopkins conveys his reverence for the magnificence of God and nature, and his despair about the way that humanity has seemed to lose sight of the close connection between the two. The poet describes a natural world through which God's presence runs like an electrical current, becoming momentarily visible in flame-like flashes that resemble the sparkling of metal foil when "shook" in the light. Hopkins also describes God's presence as being like a rich oil, whose true greatness is only revealed when crushed to its essence. Hopkins wrote *God's Grandeur* in 1877, during the Second Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid technological advancement, including the expansion of factories, railroads, and electrical power. While the Second Industrial Revolution improved standards of living, it also had a brutal impact on nature: clear-cutting and mining decimated the landscape; and pollution from factories and trains darkened the air and water. The poet's use of the words "seared," "bleared," and "smeared" in the first section of the poem conveys Hopkins's sadness at how all has been corrupted by humanity's relentless "trade" and "toil" as we trod the earth.

The poem then takes a turn toward hope—nature never loses its power, and deep down, life always continues to exist. We can bring regeneration to the broken world by caring for it, much like a mother bird "broods" over an egg; containing the assurance that nature will endure humanity's plundering and be reborn.

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

MUSIC SUNDAY AT UNIVERSITY UNITARIAN CHURCH

November 2, 2025

Serenade to Music
by Ralph Vaughan Williams

The World Is Charged
by Karen P. Thomas

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

Nocturne by Lili Boulanger
Holly Eckert, violin; Dwight Beckmeyer, piano

Call to Celebration

Doxology #381

Hymn #103

For all the saints

Offertory

Serenade to Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams
Loft Choir; Holly Eckert, violin; Page Smith, cello; Dwight Beckmeyer, piano

Reflection

Rev. Doug Wadkins

Postlude

The World is Charged by Karen P. Thomas
Loft Choir; Page Smith, cello

LOFT CHOIR and CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

- Amy Peer, soprano
- Cally Lindenmier, mezzo
- Danny Szydlo, tenor
- Mike Sederquist, tenor
- Nick Young, baritone
- Chris Rule, bass
- Holly Eckert, violin
- Page Smith, cello
- Dwight Beckmeyer, piano
- Karen P. Thomas, conductor

UUC Loft Choir & Friends

SOPRANO

Ann Bridges
Alison Gim
Carole Jones
Nicole Kister
April Materowski
Emily Parzybok
Amy Peer
Emma Pihl
Susan Ritchie

ALTO

Shirley Beresford
Grace Carlson
Deb Crespin
Alisan Geisey
Julie Johnson
Cally Lindenmier
Michelle Mao
Susan Maughlin Wood
Stacy Miller
Suzanne Peterson
Ruth Pettis
Jackie Smith
Kaitlin Webster
Beth Youse

TENOR

Gary Ackerman
Gary Cannon
Kevin Clark
Mike Sederquist
Danny Szydlo

BASS

Steve Ellzey
Andy Jessup
Steve Johnson
Alex Rogers
Chris Rule
Nick Young

The Music Committee, Loft Choir and Music Program staff wish to thank members of the congregation and visitors for their donations.

Serenade to Music

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on 12 October 1872 in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, where his father, the Rev. Arthur Vaughan Williams, was vicar. After music studies in England, Paris and Berlin, he developed his personal musical style which has been described as “characteristically English.”

In 1904, Vaughan Williams discovered traditional English folk songs, which were fast becoming extinct owing to the increase of literacy and printed music in rural areas. He travelled the countryside, transcribing and preserving many folk songs himself. His efforts did much to raise appreciation of English folk song and melody. Later he incorporated some songs and melodies into his own music, being fascinated by the beauty of the music and its anonymous history in the working lives of ordinary people. His style expresses a deep regard for and fascination with folk tunes, the variations upon which can convey the listener from the down-to-earth (which he always tried to remain in his daily life) to the ethereal. Simultaneously the music shows patriotism toward England in the subtlest form, engendered by a feeling for ancient landscapes and a person’s small yet not entirely insignificant place within them.

The ***Serenade to Music*** is a setting of Shakespeare texts by Ralph Vaughan Williams for 16 vocal soloists and orchestra. The composer drew the text from the discussion about music and the music of the spheres in Act V, scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. The lovers in the play sit gazing at the stars in this scene – Vaughan Williams set the lyrical texts to music of the utmost sensuous sweetness. He wrote it as a tribute to the conductor Sir Henry Wood to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Wood’s conducting career and wrote the solo parts specifically for the voices of sixteen eminent British singers. In some parts of the work, the soloists sing together as a “choir,” sometimes in as many as twelve parts; in others, each soloist is allotted a solo. Sergei Rachmaninoff attended the premiere of the *Serenade* (having played his 2nd Piano Concerto on the first half of the concert), and when he heard the *Serenade* from his place in the audience, he was so overcome by the beauty of the music that he wept. Later, Rachmaninoff told Wood that he had never before been so moved by a piece of music. Vaughan Williams, realizing the difficulty of assembling sixteen soloists for future performances, subsequently made arrangements for four soloists plus choir and orchestra, and also for solo violin with orchestra.

Program notes by Karen P. Thomas

Serenade to Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Text by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) from *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V Scene I

Lorenzo:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There’s not the smallest orb that thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress’ ear,
And draw her home with music.

Jessica:

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

Lorenzo:

The reason is, your spirits are attentive:
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov’d with concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted... Music! hark!

Nerissa:

It is your music of the house.

Portia:

Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.

Nerissa:

Silence bestows that virtue on it.

Portia:

How many things by season season’d are.
To their right praise and true perfection!
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion,
And would not be awak’d.
(Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.)