



Dr Thiman in the 1920s,  
around the time he became the youngest person to date to be awarded the  
London Doctorate of Music

## **The Eric Thiman Collection**

### **Newsletter No 3**

This is the third Newsletter detailing the progress of the Eric Thiman Collection. If you know anyone else who would like to be included in emailing/ mailing list please send their details to Guy Turner (contact details at the end of the newsletter). Thank you.

## **THE ERIC THIMAN COLLECTION**

### *Patrons*

*Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, Principal, The Royal Academy of Music  
The Very Revd Dr John Moses, Dean Emeritus of St Paul's Cathedral  
The Revd Ian Howarth, Chair of the Methodist Church, Birmingham District*

*Frances Thiman, Eric Thiman's Niece  
Paul Hale, Rector Chori, Southwell Minster  
Guy Turner, Archivist*

## **PROGRESS WITH THE COLLECTION**

Since the previous newsletter, much progress has been made in building towards a complete collection of Dr Thiman's work. We have exactly 1100 different pieces in stock (counting some pieces that exist in different arrangements as separate publications – eg: the song 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' which exists in four versions). The other 224 known pieces have been ordered from the original publishers, or their current agents, and we now await delivery of those that are available. In many cases this is no easy job for the publishers, as they have to visit their archives to see if they still have a original from which to print. Many thanks to all the people at the various publishing houses – and especially to Howard Friend at Music Sales (who look after Novello, EHT's main publisher, and several other publishers of his work), who has been most supportive of the project from the outset.

Once all the orders are in, there will no doubt be a number of pieces still eluding us. At this point we will apply for permission to get copies from the British Library, who, as a copyright library, hold single copies of everything ever published in the UK.

In the case of one U.S. publisher, who no longer had copies of four Thiman pieces they once published, it was most impressive to receive permission to apply to the Library of Congress, who then emailed scans of the pieces – all in one day!

By the time of the next newsletter, the list of missing pieces should be short enough to send to everyone.

## **SOUTHWELL FESTIVAL 2016**

Thiman will be a small feature of the next Southwell Music Festival (August 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>). As well as an exhibition about his life and work, and an article in the souvenir programme book, there will be a recital of Thiman's songs and piano duets on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August at 4.00pm.

Full details about the Festival can be found on <http://www.southwellmusicfestival.com/events/>

## RECORDINGS

The new recordings mentioned in the last Newsletter, are now both in the shops, or available direct from Priory Records:

Priory Records: Great European Organs No 97

Simon Hogan plays the Quire Organ of Southwell Minster

*Meditation on the hymn tune 'Slane', Pavanne and Postlude all Marcia*

<http://prioryrecords.co.uk/index.php?route=product/search&search=simon%20hogan>

Priory Records: 'Take the Psalm'

The Choir of Southwell Minster sings psalm settings by Elgar, Ashfield, Wesley, etc

Includes: Thiman's *O that men would praise the Lord*

<http://prioryrecords.co.uk/Southwell-Minster-new%20-choir-recording-%20Psalms-Hogan-Hale?search=southwell%20minster>

In the Spring the Collection will be setting up its own recording of Dr Thiman's music, which will consist of anthems, partsongs and organ music.

Half of the CD will be dedicated to Thiman's Church Music, performed by The Tudor Singers, with John Wright, Organ:

<i>The Te Deum in D flat</i>	<i>Fight the good fight</i>	<i>There is a stream,</i>
<i>Let Thy merciful ears</i>	<i>Morning Hymn</i>	<i>O Father who didst all things make</i>
<i>I praised the earth</i>	<i>Seek ye the Lord</i>	<i>Lord Jesus, think on me</i>
<i>Who would true valour see</i>		
<i>plus two organ pieces –</i>	<i>Terzetto for Flutes</i>	<i>March for a Pageant.</i>

The other half will consist of unison songs and partsongs (exact repertoire yet to be finalised) sung by The Eric Thiman Singers from Caterham School (Thiman's own school).

It is hoped that this CD will be available by September – details of how to purchase it in the next Newsletter.

## LINCOLN TALK

As part of the renewed interest in Thiman's Music builds, Guy Turner has been invited to give a talk to the Lincolnshire Organists Association. This takes place on January 16<sup>th</sup>. This talk, illustrated by recordings – including one of Dr Thiman himself playing – can of course be repeated elsewhere if anyone is interested.

## DAVID DEWAR'S RESEARCH

You will remember from the last newsletter that **David Dewar** is engaged in research into Thiman's music. He writes:

*Having formally started my research into Dr Thiman (under the auspices of the Department of Music at the University of Bristol) I have made a second visit to the Collection – and had the pleasure again of meeting Guy, and also of meeting Frances Thimann. Though that visit was short, it has enabled me to make an encouraging start on the first phase of the project.*

*This is principally looking into Thiman's compositional output during the interwar years 1919-1939. (The restriction is purely to make the research manageable in the initial part of the academic process – I expect to be able to expand it to encompass his whole life in due course. This period covers around 25% of the known compositions at present.) To consider his compositions in context, it is necessary to look at who might have exerted influence upon him (stylistically and personally). I have had some interesting contextual information from the Royal Academy of Music in this respect. Influences and compositions in the period would be somewhat un-anchored without also finding out as much as possible about his early life, the circumstances of his musical education, and his initial composing and performing activities. (It is interesting, for example, to trace the rise of his fame as performer and as composer alongside the rise in broadcasting during the 1920s and beyond.)*

*It is very much a work in progress, as would be expected. My principal research questions at present include:*

*His influences (bi-directional – how was he influenced as a composer, and whom did he influence as a teacher?)*

*How did societal changes in the period 1919-1939 (and prior to 1919 as a young man) affect his life and his performing and composing?*

*What were the principal means of communication of his reputation and fame through this period – i.e. he became sought after in various ways across the English speaking world – how was this mediated?*

*And a host of others!*

*As a result, I would be very interested to hear from anyone with anything of interest to offer on these and any subject connected with Eric Thiman. In the first instance, please contact me.*

*Contact can be by email to [david.dewar@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:david.dewar@bristol.ac.uk) and I'm sure that anything sent by post via the Collection at Southwell would make its way to me, too – especially as I'm planning a further visit shortly after Easter, at a time to be arranged. Please don't think that any thought, reminiscence, or other evidence is too minor to be of interest, the interrelationship between items of evidence is the stuff of research!*

*Research outputs, the principal ones, are planned to be:*

*Dissertation dealing with Eric Thiman's early period of publication (1919-1939)*

*Thesis (draft title "Eric Harding Thiman – an influential musician?")*

*A website forming the kernel of research access to archival material, including an archival database conforming to international research standards*

*One final point, though I have had for some time a liking for those pieces of his which I have heard or performed, the more I find out from this research, the more I feel I would have liked and got on with the man himself.*

## **MEMORIES OF DR THIMAN**

Thanks to those who have contributed memories of Thiman, and in the first case particularly of his wife Madeline, as remembered by **Selwyn Image**:

*It is very easy to forget the support that can sustain and enrich even outstanding talent such as Eric's; in his case, the musical ability of Madeleine Thiman, his wife. As a boy, I spent a lot of time with them both, and as an adult, I also sang in the Bach Choir, in which Madeleine sung as a alto for very many years. She was also a member of his choir at Park Chapel and the City Temple.*

*One Sunday after lunch, a discussion arose about sight reading skills, and Madeleine said, quite uncharacteristically, that she thought she could sight read any hymn put before her.*

*"I bet you can't" said Eric.*

*"How much" replied Mrs T.*

*"£5", he said; a bet that that time was somewhat heavier than today.*

*"You're on!"*

*Eric left the room, went upstairs to the study, and returned with a quiet smile and a very stonker of a tune. Unfortunately, I cannot remember which. What I do remember was that Madeleine played it perfectly, and a perfectly mannered but not totally pleased husband, who preferred not to lose, reached inside his wallet and paid up.*

The second contribution is from **Dorothy Webster Thomas**, who knew the Thimans very well in his years as organist at the City Temple:

*On Easter Day 1957, Eric Thiman became organist of the congregation of the City Temple. The Minister was Dr Leslie Weatherhead, a famous preacher, writer and broadcaster. He was the first doctor of divinity to become a fully qualified psychiatrist. The great man had led his people through the Blitz, then raised money to rebuild the church, the only free Church in the City of London. The New City Temple was opened by the Queen Mother in October 1958. It seats 1200 and in those days there was overflow seating for 500 in the hall, served by closed-circuit television.*

*Eric Thiman helped design the Walker organ. The choir had about 30 amateur singers, led by a professional quartet. I was the soprano. Choir rehearsals were on Wednesday evening and half an hour before the 11am and 6.30 services. To work with him, for me, was life enhancing. He was always encouraging and appreciative, though demanding. Rehearsals were enlivened by his humour and his natural musicianship always shone through.*

*The theme of the sermon inspired the music for introit, anthem and hymns. Music chosen was of a wide variety, some especially composed by Eric. He also edited the 'Congregational Praise' Hymn Book. Eric Thiman's personal ministry was to help create an atmosphere of spirituality, warmth and love for everyone, believer or not.*

*For five minutes before the service, Eric played very quietly, encouraging a prayerful atmosphere. At the entry of the choir and Minister there was a crescendo. The last chord of the music was the first of the introit. Eric's greatest contribution was to get the congregation to really sing the hymns, He always played the tune fully before the first verse, then interpreting the words with a wide variety of registration. Before the last verse he would repeat the last line, with a huge crescendo. This verse was always sung in unison, Eric re-harmonising the tune, surprising, delighting and strengthening the meaning of the words. At the end of hymns, he would improvise a diminuendo playing of the tune, to cover the noise of people sitting down and getting ready for a reading, prayer or sermon.*

*Eric Thiman was self-taught and his greatest accomplishment was to improvise. After the blessing, the choir would process out at the front, the minister to the vestibule at the back. When the church door was closed, the choir members would run down the corridor, and go through the secret door at the back of the choir stalls to listen to the improvisation on the last hymn. Glorious music, which would never be heard again. Dr Weatherhead said he could wait for ten minutes for someone to come and shake his hand.*

*In 1963 I married Bill Webster, the principal double bass player of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Dr Weatherhead came out of retirement to perform the ceremony. Eric played the organ and Madeline sang in the choir. Our three daughters arrived promptly. I sang in the choir whenever possible.*

*On Christmas Day 1974 Eric played the service, Madeline said, beautifully. They came to use for lunch. It was a happy time. Eric died of Cancer on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1975.*

Thank you to the above contributors – more reminiscences would be most welcome.

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