



Thiman in the early 1970s at the organ of the City Temples

The Eric Thiman Collection

Newsletter No 6

This is the sixth 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

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

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

PROGRESS WITH THE COLLECTION

We continue acquiring missing items for the Thiman archive, and the current total in the collection is 1260 different pieces. Lock down has rather slowed progress on this – in particular preventing a visit to Cambridge University Library to get copies of pieces they hold. The full list of works in the collection and known works missing is now on the website – see below. And occasionally works turn up that previously appeared on no list. Pleasing discoveries of Thiman's light orchestral music have been made – again, see below.

WEBSITE

The important news is that we now have a much more extensive and useful website, which is part of the Southwell Minster site. Many thanks are due to the Dean, Nicola Sullivan (who has also kindly agreed to be our new patron) and the Cathedral Administrator, Adele Poulson, for kindly facilitating this – not to mention the Minster's continued support in housing the collection in the Paul Hale Choir Library.

You can find the website at:

<https://www.southwellminster.org/eric-thiman-collection/>

It has lots of new features, including:

- List of Recommended works in each medium
- Photo Gallery
- Links to YouTube performances
- Links to Spotify and other on-line sound sources
- Notes about publications and research

In addition the full catalogue is there – the Catalogue of every piece of music in the Collection; the Miscellany catalogue – books, CDs, memorabilia; and the list of known missing works.

There is also a video talk lasting half an hour – an introduction to Thiman, by the Collection archivist, Guy Turner. This is a shorter version of the talk Guy had given to various organists associations – and which is available to others.

Everything else that was on the previous website is also there, plus interesting material from Frances Thiman, the composer's niece and prime-mover in setting up the collection. All previous Newsletters can be found on the site too.

PSALM 23 PREMIERE

In the last Newsletter, we reported on a manuscript setting of Psalm 23 for Soprano, Choir and Piano, which was discovered in Thiman's papers. There is no evidence of its ever having been performed until May 11th 2019 when Bingham Choral Society gave the (assumed) premiere in St Mary's Church Radcliffe-on-Trent. Harriet Astbury was the Soprano soloist, with pianist Caroline Clemmow. An audio recording was made, and this can be heard on YouTube, where the score can also be followed:

<https://youtu.be/FK8j1ZzXaX0>

THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC CONNECTION

Congratulations are overdue to our Patron, the Principal of the Royal Academy of Music, Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood who was appointed CBE in the 2018 New Years Honours.

As you know, the Academy, where Thiman taught for many years, has been very supportive to the collection from the outset, and also supports some of its students though the funds generated by the Thiman royalties, which were bequeathed to the RAM.

THIMAN IN LIGHT MUSIC MODE

Thiman is of course mainly known for church and educational music, but there are a number of ways in which he dipped his toe into the world of light music. He spent a brief period as a Cinema organist in his early career, and there are the Ivor Novello-esque songs he wrote under the name Eric Harding. But there were also a number of orchestral pieces in a light idiom, some of which have recently come to light.

Three pieces have turned up on YouTube in this idiom (the first of them is from an LP entitled *Melodrama and Passion*(!):

Rejection and Romance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKJxelqjdXE>

Nostalgic Landscape <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjwfe1YFt0>

Farming Life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sh-KLGs5GuA>

We do not have the scores for these three, or even know the publisher, so any information about them will be gratefully received.

Even more interestingly there has been a recent issue of a CD consisting entirely of previously unrecorded music, including Thiman's *Billy Boy* and *Shenendoah* (both for Strings and Piano). This CD, entitled *Palace Premieres* is by the Countess of Wessex String Orchestra (the strings of the Army Corps of Music) and also includes music by Curzon, Bantock, Rowley and Quilter.

The CD can be purchased here:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Premieres-Countess-Wessexs-Orchestra-Hammond/dp/B07Y9CF76Z>

and can be heard on Spotify here:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/0zpqqi7iN6jJomUNwf9i00>

Thanks to Sgt. Simon Duggan from the orchestra for helping the Collection to obtain copies of these pieces.

ANOTHER CD PROJECT IN THE PIPELINE

Thiman's friend, Dorothy Webster-Thomas, who sang for him at the City Temple, and has been supportive of the Collection since the outset. She writes about the new CD of Thiman songs which she is sponsoring:

Eric Thiman and Michael Head, both professors at the Royal Academy of Music, were the adjudicators at the Whitehaven Festival in 1952, where they heard me sing. With their encouragement, I applied and was accepted at the Academy in 1954. Over many years, Eric and Michael became my friends. They both wrote a song for me. I would not have had my life in music without them. Now in my later years, I want to help to keep their music alive by covering the expense of a CD of their songs.

I already know the voice perfect to perform them. I heard Emily Gray sing in competitions and recitals at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire. I knew immediately that this young lady was a true artist, passionate about the meaning of the words she was singing, and with an instrument of beauty and warmth through every note of its range. Her career is already established. One Saturday she sang Elijah in Lincoln Cathedral and the next day The Messiah at the Royal Albert Hall. She has sung in the Purcell Room and broadcast. The 'lock down' prevented her from making her debut at English National Opera. Emily and her accompanist, Timothy Salter, are pleased to have a project, while other performances have been cancelled. I gave Emily twelve songs by Eric and twelve by Michael. She is already working hard, but the present situation dictates that joint rehearsals are not possible.

See Emily Gray's website: <https://www.emilyjanegray.com/>

FUNDS

The continued work of the Collection is of course reliant on funding from our supporters. Obtaining the missing pieces often involves copying fees from libraries, or just straightforward publisher charges (often more expensive if a one-off print of an out of print work). Some pieces turn up in the US or Canada (where Thiman was and is every popular), so there can be postage costs. In addition we are keen to support performances of Thiman's music where possible by providing access to copies etc. (though not by substantial sponsorship, unfortunately). All this costs money – though we are VERY economical! If you are able to make a donation please see the details of how to pay at the end of the Newsletter. Many thanks for your continued support.

RESEARCH UPDATE FROM DAVID DEWAR

Here is an update from David about his PhD researches, previously mentioned in our Newsletters:

Archival and other physical research into Eric Thiman's life is virtually complete, and a first draft similarly. This is, mainly, a biographical dissertation – and therefore brings together some of the various writings, anecdotes, and comments relating to him and his activities.

My project has turned, as these things do, to a wider scope – that of the interrelationships between professionals and amateurs (which also looks at some representative examples of institutions which served them in various ways), in England during the period c.1900 to 1939. As such, the life of Eric Thiman provides an interesting case study. His early life in music, and his rapid acquisition of musical honours of various kinds, illustrates many of the issues confronting musicians in the period.

Eric's life, and how he navigated his training and his work, forms one of the case studies in the larger thesis.

To help with finding out about Thiman I persuaded one of the choirs I conducted to include some of his music in their programmes. A memorable performance took place of his 'Songs of Sailors and the Sea', six pieces on different nautical themes. All six are interesting and gained enthusiasm from choir and audience alike. One, though, was for all very special. It is often quite obvious that, in shaping his vocal compositions to appeal to the widest catchment, he put the larger part of the musical 'heft' in the piece into the accompanimental parts. This is true of 'Songs of Sailors' but in the one particular component piece, Homeward, there are challenging effects for singers, too. These effects give an ethereal, and eerie, expression to the story. It's probably obvious that I was glad to make the acquaintance of this score, and further glad that at least one contemporary choir and its audience not only enjoyed rehearsing it and performing it, but emerged from the experience with enthusiasm.

THIMAN ANTHEMS AND PARTSONGS CD

The CD of Thiman's Anthems and Partsongs recorded in 2016 has sold well and been well received. There are just 21 copies left in stock. They cost £12.50 each, plus £1.50 post and packing. Email your order to Guy Turner at guyscottturner@gmail.com and pay as below, with the referenc ThimanCD.

PAYMENTS

For payment of donations, or for CDs:

Either by bank transfer to Southwell Minster Choirs Association
60-20-15 68034652

Reference: Thiman Collection (and either 'donation' or 'CD')

Or post your order, and a cheque made out to 'Southwell Minster Choir Association', with 'Eric Thiman Collection' written on the back, to Guy Turner.

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