



The completed great manual soundboard of the 1958 Thiman organ, being restored for St James's Cathedral, Chicago

The Eric Thiman Collection Newsletter No 17

This is the seventeenth 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

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APPEAL FOR FUNDS

The work of the Thiman Collection is not yet done – there are still about 60 pieces we know about, but of which we do not have a copy (though we do have nearly 1300 !) – and we always hope to support people putting on performances of Thiman's music.

Thank you very much to the generous donors who responded to the appeal in the last newsletter. We have thus been able to make a renewed effort to obtain more copies of Thiman missing pieces (see below).

These donations were not infinite, so further help is always welcome. See the foot of the newsletter for details of how to donate. Thanks

BRAMWELL BOURNE AND A NORSELAND MEDITATION

On the 1967 recording of Thiman playing his own organ music at the City Temple, there is an unpublished piece called *A Norseland Meditation*. As mentioned in Newsletter No 9, Bramwell Bourne has made a transcription of the piece and now included it in his recordings of the complete Thiman organ music.

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Organ-Music-of-Eric-Thiman-101812721686630/>

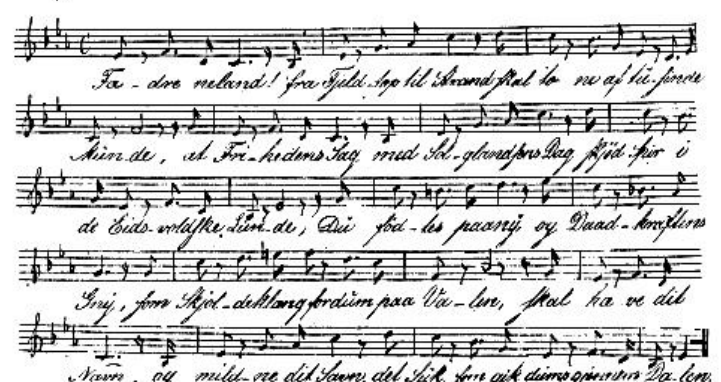
It has so far been a mystery as to what the Meditation was based on – it certainly sounds like an improvisation on an existing tune. Bramwell is now able to shed some light on this. He writes:

I recently shared a copy of my realization of EHT's organ Improvisation from his 1967 recording with Dr. Peter Christie and I share with you additional information which has come to light following this.

Dr. Peter Christie writes:-

"I have an organist colleague who worked in Norway for many years, and I asked him if the folk tune-ish melody in your video of Thiman's Meditation was a 'real' piece - he responded to say that there may be more than one in there, but the main one is certainly 'Sæterjentens Søndag' (The Herd-Girl's Sunday) by Ole Bull (1810-1880), composer and violinist (the Paganini of Norway, according to Schumann) of whom I'd never heard. I've attached Bull's original manuscript..."

Norske Frihedsmarsch
til 17^{de} Mai 1850 1. Mill.



Fa - der medaerd! fra Fjeld-top til Skovsmaal to nu af hi-jeerde
 Min de, at Fri-hedens Tegn med Sol-glede og Dag-lyst for i
 de Bids-vaakke, Min de, der fød-les paasj, og Gud-angst
 Sui, som Kjod-udekling for diem paa Va-ler, skal ha ve dit
 Naar, og mildt-ve dit Naar, det Lick som gik diem og iens Da-lem.

<p>Frihed is Draom, og mijsklofkerk Naar, den rullige skal skal blyfjelle! og blyfjelle paa Vaegt med Sønders Naagt si vrulle for By-gude fljelle! Tegn Kraft fra Vaegt! et fordeligt Slag, et Naarvillag, som Fjelds det Naar, for Frihedens Tegn! for Sønders lovens Naagt! et Naar, fra Fjeldens Naar!</p>	<p>Norveard! Denar hvad Frihed dig bar den Tid, for Frihedens brande! for vil hvad du bar, og vil hvad du gjør for Norge med blyfjelle Naar! I Naarvillag det Lick fra vil som Sønders med Sønders Naar, for Frihedens Tegn! for Sønders lovens Naagt! et Naar, fra Fjeldens Naar!</p>
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It always seemed most likely that this improvisation was on a pre-existing theme (you originally asked if I recognized the theme as a hymn or carol) and it's good to now have evidence to this effect. I believe EHT had some holidays in Scandinavia/Norway prior to / about the time of this recording, which would explain its inspiration and origin and his own title for the piece.

THE THIMAN ORGAN IN CHICAGO

The former City Temple Organ (designed by Thiman and William McKie and inaugurated in 1958) continues being restored by Buzard Pipe Organ Builders. The hope is to begin installing it in St James's Cathedral, Chicago in the autumn, with the hope that it might be ready for advent. Dave Brown from Buzard has kindly sent the following photos (and the one at the head of the letter)



New leather on Roosevelt motors



Ventil stop actions



Newly restored soundboard key primary action

SEEKING OUT THE MISSING SCORES

As mentioned above, the generosity donors has made it possible to seek out more of the pieces we know of, but which are missing from the collection. This is a remarkably complicated business. The list of the missing pieces comes from various sources: Thiman's own lists, some of the hand-written; the pieces registered with the Performing Rights Society; pieces that appear in library or publisher catalogues; pieces which appear on concert programmes; random references on the internet.

Some of these may be spurious entries: a listing which has a word wrong in the title; a piece which is listed in the wrong arrangement (eg: an anthem which appears in a university library catalogue as an anthem for three part choir, which on investigation turns out to be four-part – and we already have the four-part one); something which turns out not to be a piece of music at all – including an item on several lists which turns out just to be a translation into Welsh of the words of a Thiman part-song. These dead ends take time to identify, but they at least can be crossed of the missing list once resolved.

Once concrete evidence has been obtained that a piece does exist and that there is a copy in a particular library, then one always has to ask for written permission from the original publisher. Once this permission is obtained, one can then ask the library to send a scan of the missing piece, which then goes into the collection. Some publishers, and some libraries, make a charge for this – others do not. Many libraries, and some publishers are really helpful – notably the libraries at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, and the publisher Stainer and Bell. Another example is the Library of Congress in the USA, who responded (no charge) with scans on the same day they were requested!

But the process can be complicated, especially in obtaining the publisher permissions. For instance, Thiman's published works with 40 different companies in the UK, USA and Canada (the most being 381 pieces with Novello). Many of these companies no longer exist, and it can be a detective job to find out who holds the copyright nowadays. For instance, the rights for pieces published by Asherberg, Hopwood and Crewe passed to Chappell, which was then absorbed into Warner Chappell, but their printed music rights are now handled by Alfred Music (who have been helpful).

Further complications: (a) the fact that the music catalogue at the British Library was the victim of a well-publicised cyber-attack, so obtaining pieces from them is impossible in the medium term; (b) publishers who are approached through an online form and can take weeks to reply; (c) one very famous publisher who has seven times failed to reply to enquiries, despite the fact that 13 Thiman pieces appear on their own historical lists!

The final irony, as one is gradually whittling down the list of missing pieces, as that in the process of searching one will sometimes discover a previously unknown title, which just makes the missing list longer.

You will see that this can be a complicated and frustrating process, especially as many of the pieces have different publishers and libraries and must be dealt with individually. Keeping records of what stage each piece has got to is a laborious process.

But gradually more pieces are appearing, and the process goes on...

And just sometimes somebody spots a Thiman piece in a second hand or charity shop, which is much easier!

'CONTROVERSY' WITH PETER WARLOCK

Thiman supporters may remember John Mitchell, who discovered, music-processed, and arranged for the publication of the early Thiman Piano Sonata. John has a wide interest in English music and is treasurer of the Peter Warlock Society. In their Autumn 2025 newsletter, John published the following article, which he has kindly shared with us.

It is interesting to see Thiman and Warlock connected in this way: although contemporaries – Warlock was born just four years before Thiman – they could not have been more different in personality. Classic FM – not given to extremes of expression – describes Warlock (real name Philip Heseltine) and 'an alcoholic hell-raiser', whereas Thiman was sober, self-effacing and industrious.

We publish (with thanks) John's complete article:

Eric Thiman and Warlock's aspersion

Just recently I purchased from a dealer a piano piece by Eric Thiman, and its title, In a Hammock, rang a vague bell in connection with Warlock. It eventually came to me: it was mentioned in Malcolm Rudland's article Warlock, Thiman and Aprahamian that appeared twenty years ago in Newsletter 66 (Spring 2000, pages 10 and 11). In it attention was drawn to a postscript in one of Warlock's last letters (dated 6 th October 1930) to his friend E.J. Moeran. It read:

One Thiman (Thimple or otherwise) has infringed one of your copyrights. See this month's "Monthly Musical Record".

The article went on to identify the two works (both piano pieces) involved: E.J. Moeran's Bank Holiday and Eric Thiman's In a Hammock, and posed the question of which came first? This is a good point to consider, and the facts here are not completely clear cut. Unquestionable are the dates the two works were published, these being 1926 for In a Hammock (Augener Ltd.), and 1928 for Bank Holiday (OUP). Purely on this basis it could argued it was more the case that Moeran had infringed Thiman's copyright! However, that is not the whole story because, in his book on Moeran (*The Music of EJ Moeran*, Toccata Press 1986, p 258), Geoffrey Self lists Bank Holiday as having been composed three years earlier in 1925. When Thiman penned his piece is less easy to be certain about, and by way of progressing matters I got in contact with the fairly recently set up (2014) Eric Thiman Collection. Located at Southwell Minster (Nottinghamshire), this enterprising project aims to be a comprehensive resource dedicated to Thiman and his compositions, with it being quite ambitious in its scope in that Thiman was a very prolific composer with well over a thousand works in his catalogue (and 80+ of these are still to be located). I had wondered whether amongst any Thiman manuscripts in the Collection there may have been one of In a Hammock with a date of composition inscribed on it. Unfortunately, the administrator explained that, probably relating to Thiman being so prolific, after a work had been published, he seldom bothered to retain his manuscripts, and accordingly there are very few present within the Collection.

Eric Harding Thiman was born at Ashford, Kent in September 1900 and was largely self-taught as a composer. His huge output includes songs & part-songs; anthems and other choral works; piano pieces & organ music; and some orchestral works. Apart from his composing career he had a very full and active musical life, which included two major organist appointments (one of these being at the City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, from 1957 till his death in 1975); his Professorship of Harmony and Composition at the Royal Academy of Music for over forty years; and enjoying a prominent position as a music examiner and festival adjudicator. It would seem unlikely that his and Moeran's paths ever crossed; although living in the London area at the time when Moeran was sharing the cottage with Warlock at Eynsford, it would be easy to believe they were temperamentally dissimilar, and that they mixed in quite different musical circles.

BANK HOLIDAY

Allegro molto ritmico ♩ = 168 E.J. Moeran

Piano *mp non legato*

IN A HAMMOCK

Molto moderato Eric Thiman

p legato *rall.*

The opening bars of *Bank Holiday* and *In a Hammock*. Note the resemblance of the first two bars and how the continuations are quite different.

The image displays two piano pieces side-by-side. The top piece, 'Bank Holiday' by E.J. Moeran, is in G major, 4/4 time, with a tempo of 'Allegro molto ritmico' (♩ = 168). It starts with a piano (*mp non legato*) texture. The bottom piece, 'In a Hammock' by Eric Thiman, is also in G major, 4/4 time, with a tempo of 'Molto moderato'. It starts with a piano (*p legato*) texture and ends with a *rall.* (rallentando) marking. Both pieces share the same initial two bars of music, but their subsequent melodic and harmonic developments are distinct.

Turning to Warlock's aspersion that Moeran's copyright had been infringed by Thiman's piano piece, it seems unlikely Warlock was being serious here, and that his postscript was intended more in the way of a throwaway jokey remark, with his having spotted by chance how the two piano pieces had an initial resemblance to each other. However, if 'Thimple' (in connection with Simple Simon of the nursery rhyme) was meant to be a waggish allusion, it would have misfired: Thiman is not pronounced as 'Thigh-man', but as 'Tee-man'! Even if he were serious, it is difficult to believe Warlock really would have thought the similarity between the two opening bars of each piece would have constituted a significant breach of copyright: Although in the same key of G major, the pieces are otherwise quite different in character: *Bank Holiday* (although admittedly with its more reflective middle section) is something in the way of a high spirited Graingerian romp, whereas the Thiman piece is paced at a relaxed slower tempo (with an impression of a final nodding-off in the hammock as the piece concludes *ppp*). For the pianist it might be worth adding *In a Hammock* is much easier to play than *Bank Holiday* (which can be quite tricky to articulate well and get all of the notes in!). *In a Hammock* is very pianistically conceived with some well-judged hand-crossing, resulting in a piece

that makes for a rewarding playing experience. After the two similar bars they begin with, the remaining musical material in each work is quite different. Ultimately one can't resist concluding that, although probably intended as an amusing aside to his friend, Warlock 'got it wrong' here: we are simply dealing in this instance with a coincidence, rather than copyright infringement, plagiarism, etc., with the likelihood that Bank Holiday and In a Hammock may have been composed both contemporaneously and independently.

John Mitchell
December 2020

RECORDINGS AVAILABLE FROM THE COLLECTION

Anthems and Part-songs by Eric Thiman (2016) The Tudor Singers / Eric Thiman Singers

Thiman playing his own music on the City Temple Organ in 1967

The Silver Swan – song by Thiman and Head (Emily Gray/Nicole Johnson (2022))

All the above available for £10 plus £1.50 post and packing

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

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