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Arranger's note

Of course, 'last pieces' are hardly conceived as such—rare is the composer who writes a final work and lays down their pen knowing they will not pick it up again. Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Four Last Songs* may be 'last', but it is likely they were not even thought of by him as a set: 'Menelaus' and 'Procris' were to be part of one cycle, and 'Hands, Eyes, and Heart' and 'Tired' as part of another.

That said, as a sequence the four songs offer a beautiful snapshot of two aspects of Vaughan Williams's writing. Vaughan Williams wrote for amateur choirs all his life. Like his younger colleague Britten he was able to write accessible music for the inexperienced singer that wears its learning lightly while losing none of its emotion. The middle two songs, 'Tired' and 'Hands, Eyes, and Heart', are simple and affecting, and in arranging them for unaccompanied choir I have tried to retain their simplicity.

'Procris' and 'Menelaus' show a different side to Vaughan Williams's writing. This is the Vaughan Williams of mystery and intense colour, of swirling mists and (occasionally dark) magic. The ever-shifting harmonies in these pieces offer both a challenge and an opportunity to the arranger. I have tried to harness some of the floating magic of Prospero in 'The Cloud-Capp'd Towers', and aimed to splash an extra dab of colour to Vaughan Williams's already fantastical piano score.

All four pieces would benefit from a nimble and flexible approach to choral singing. The pieces want, I think, to sound as artless and as effortless as possible—at times as if they were blowing about on the breeze—while at the same time the accompanying vocal lines in particular need to move exactly together, the singers always aware of what is happening in the other parts.

This arrangement was commissioned by the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music and first performed in 2022 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Duration: *c.*10 minutes

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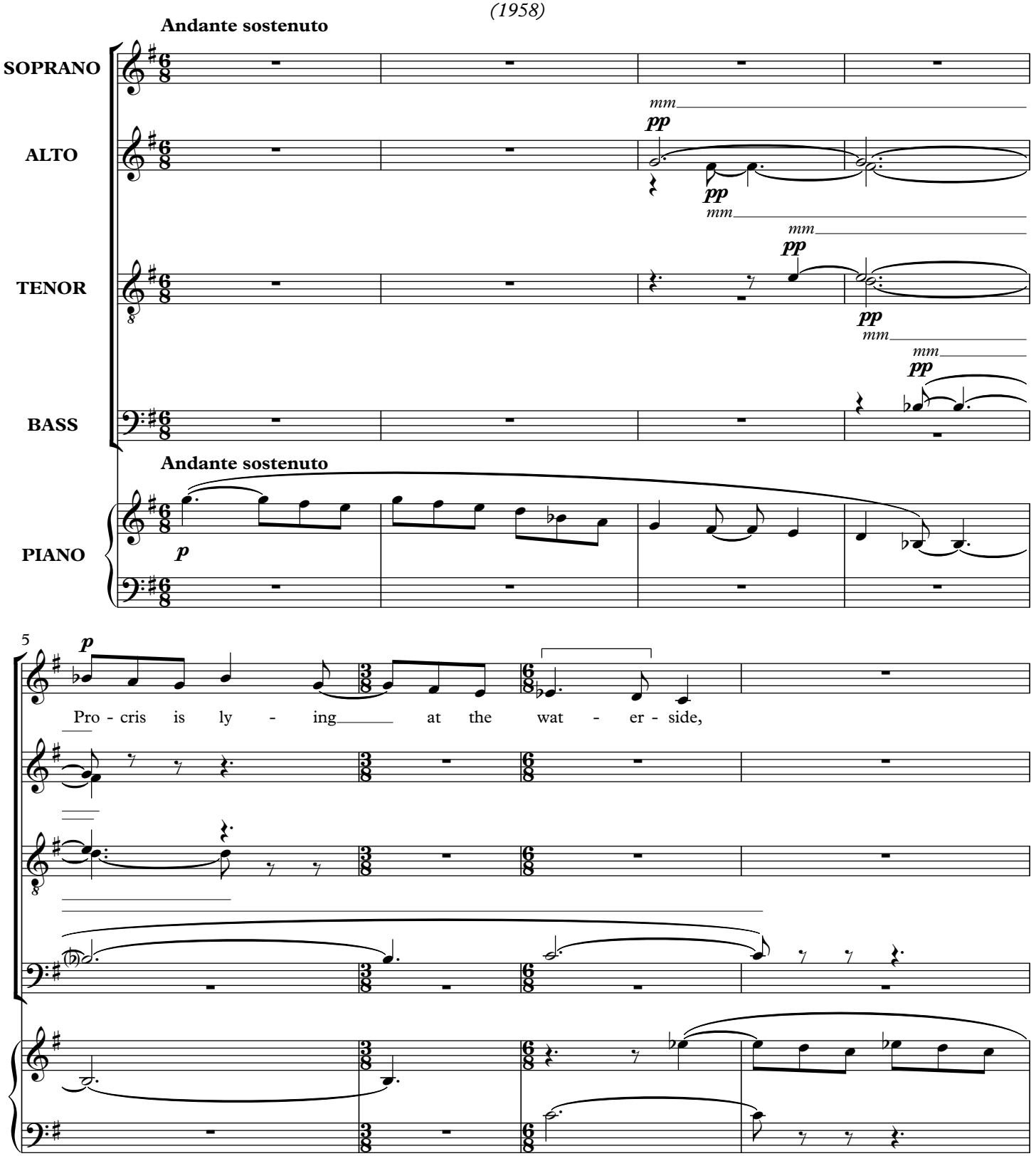
Four Last Songs

1. Procris

(1958)

Ursula Vaughan Williams

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
arr. Jonathan Wikeley



Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, poems by Ursula Vaughan Williams © Oxford University Press 1960.
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Printed in Great Britain

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2. Tired

(1956)

Andante sostenuto ♩ = 80

MEZZO-SOPRANOS* ***p***

Sleep, and I'll be

mm ***p***

SOPRANO
ALTO

mm ***mm***

TENOR
BASS

p

4

still as an - oth - er sleep - er hold - - ing you in my

mm ***mm***

7

arms, glad that you lie so near

mm ***mm*** ***mm***

*taken from a mixture of sopranos and altos, always with a mind to the overall balance.

3. Hands, Eyes, and Heart

(?1956)

Andante tranquillo

CHOIR I — SOPRANO, ALTO; TENOR, BASS

CHOIR II — SOPRANO, ALTO; TENOR, BASS

p

Hands, give him all the mea - sure of my

p sostenuto

Hands, eyes, and heart. Hands, give him all the

Choir II should be slightly quieter than Choir I until bar 11.

4

love sur - er than an - y word. Eyes, be

mea - sure of my love, sur - er than an - - y

mea - sure of my love,

mea - sure of my love,

4. Menelaus

(1954)

Andante moderato

shhh

SOPRANO
ALTO

A.T.B. whisper 'will you come home?', each singer at a different speed.

T. & B. *unis.*

pp

TENOR
BASS

You will come

Andante moderato

PIANO

pp

3

S.A. whisper 'will you come home?', each singer at a different speed.

home,

5

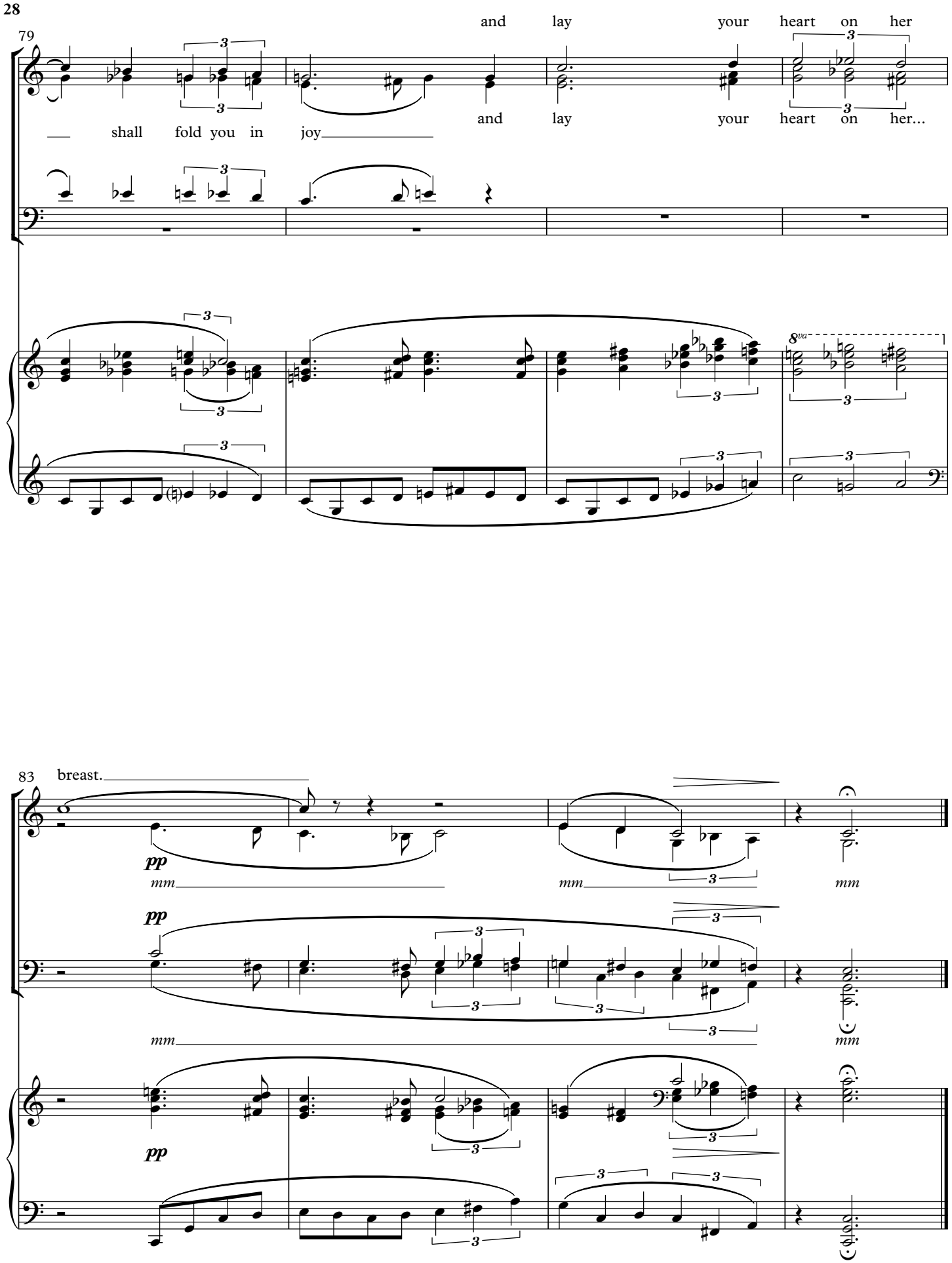
pp

S.A. whisper 'will you come home?', each singer at a different speed.

that your

not to the home you knew

that your,


79
and lay your heart on her
shall fold you in joy
and lay your heart on her...
8va
83
breast.
pp
mm
mm
mm
pp
mm
mm
pp