



2013 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
ARTS, HUMANITIES, & SOCIAL SCIENCES
JANUARY 6TH TO JANUARY 8TH
ALA MOANA HOTEL
HONOLULU, HAWAII

“RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS’S THANKSGIVING FOR VICTORY: AN ARTIFACT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE”

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“Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *Thanksgiving for Victory*: An Artifact of the British Empire”

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Near the end of the Second World War, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) commissioned a work from Vaughan Williams that was to be recorded and broadcast as part of a special thanksgiving service after the German surrender: *Thanksgiving for Victory*. That the special service would be transmitted throughout the Commonwealth and colonies makes the work for which it was written an offering for, and an artifact of, Imperial Britain, the status of which was recognized by the composer through his literary choices: words from the Bible that provided a common stock of allusions and references, rivaled only by Shakespeare in this respect, which saturated the English language and resounded in the minds of the educated and religious, as well as those who acquired it only by listening, plus lines by Kipling that referenced a particular Imperial event from long ago. Hence, the work is much more significant than the nationalist label it is usually given. This presentation will discuss (1) the compositional idiom Vaughan Williams used for the occasion, derived from the church music of the time, which represented one aspect of the English collective identity; (2) the musical components and design used by the composer, which would have been comprehended by the broadcast audience; and (3) the texts and subtext of the work, with which Vaughan Williams celebrated the survival of the Empire and offered hope for the future.