

H. Walford Davies

H. Walford Davies (1869 – 1941), or more precisely, Sir Henry Walford Davies is the composer of 9 melodies in the Christian Science Hymnal, and the arranger of 4 more. There's one problem: we sing very few of his hymns because in all but a few cases there is a different melody which we prefer. Here's an example of one of his less-familiar arrangements:

Hymn 380

Davies was born in 1869, the 7th of 9 children in the town of Oswestry on the England-Wales border. The Welsh influence must have been strong for him, because he favored Welsh music most of his life and taught music at the university of Aberystwyth in Wales for most of the last 20 years of his life. Walford played a variety of instruments as a boy, most importantly the piano and organ. But he first made his mark as a singer. He was accepted into the boys' choir at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and from the age of 12 was singing 14 services a week, while attending school. Here is one of his original compositions.

Hymn 203

While at St. George's he began the serious study of the organ, and entered the Royal College of Music at the age of 21 to continue. At 26 he began teaching there, all the while serving as organist in a number of successively larger churches in the London area over the next 27 years. At the same time he was a prolific composer, his first published composition appearing at the age of 20. Over the years, he composed for orchestras, choirs, solo voices and solo instruments, including symphonies, chamber music, choral music and even an oratorio. Here's another case where he provided a seldom-used setting for one of our familiar hymns.

Hymn 344

In 1918 Davies was appointed music director of the Royal Air Force, where he wrote the march "RAF March Past" which is still the official march of the RAF. He received a number of honors and was knighted in 1922. Maybe the most interesting of his honors was being appointed as Master of the King's Musick (that's with a "k") in 1934. In England, it's like being poet laureate. The Master advised the king or queen on matters of music, and was expected to compose music for special events (coronations, royal weddings, birthdays, etc.). Here's a familiar hymn that sounds like it came from the Master of the King's Musick.

Hymn 82

Despite his success as a composer, organist, and academician, his greatest fame came from the fact that he was a radio personality. "He made radio broadcasts on classical music under the title *Music and the Ordinary Listener*. These lasted from 1926 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, and Davies became a well-known and popular radio personality." (Wikipedia) A contemporary writing in 1934 said, "What I believe to be the cause of Walford Davies's abandonment of large-scale composition, and also of his continued work for the BBC, is an earnest desire for useful service to the greater number. Twenty odd years ago he told me that he looked upon music as an aid to higher social and religious work."

Interesting fact about Hymn 232: Davies gave special permission for the use of this music with these words.

Hymn 232

Throughout his life Davies went mostly by the name Walford Davies. For some reason, he didn't like the name "Henry." In most of his published compositions, he uses the name H. Walford Davies, and that is how he is identified in our Hymnal. There is little surprise that so many of his melodies are included in the Hymnal considering how popular he was in England when the revised Hymnal was introduced in 1932. No surprise, too, since Violet Hay, a co-chair of the hymnal revision committee was living in London. Maybe you'll remember that Violet Hay chose all the musical settings of her poems. Here is the one of only two hymns that bear both their names. (The other is #9.)

Hymn 136

That Davies was a prolific composer is shown by the fact that his music is still widely available. I found numerous recordings and sheet music on Amazon and other sites. A biography, simply titled, *Walford Davies* by H.C. Colles was published in 1942, republished in paperback in 2007, and is available on Amazon. The 200-page book gives a highly detailed look at Davies' life with a full listing of his musical compositions and publications that runs to 18 pages.

Although there are many of his hymns that we rarely sing, he happens to be the composer of one of my favorites. So let's close with that.

Hymn 278

(These hymns not included: 9, 132, 159, 165, 223 & 316.)

(Latest update: 1/24/15. Compiled by Dick Frantzreb. For the latest version and for other composer/lyricist hymn sing outlines, visit www.vocal-works.com.)