

## ABOUT TODAY'S MUSIC

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
17 May 2020

Healey Willan, considered the “Dean of Canadian Composers” (1880–1968) was an Anglo-Canadian organist and composer. He composed more than 800 works including operas, symphonies, chamber music, a concerto, church music, and pieces for band, orchestra, organ, and piano.

Willan is best known for his sacred choral and organ works, which show evidence of his love for plainsong and Renaissance music. For example, many of his liturgical compositions employ western church modes from a thousand years ago and the modality and harmony of late nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox choral music. His vocal lines are significantly more melismatic, his style more contrapuntal and rhythmically much freer than was the case in the liturgical music of his contemporaries.

The lively acoustics at Saint Mary Magdalene allowed the melismatic lines to soar and yet linger at the same time. His larger choral works, however, were very Romantic in nature. His rich harmonic palette and luxuriant, soaring melodies stand as testament to his admiration of both Brahms and Wagner.

*His music represents a unique and beautiful combination of styles: both an homage to the sacred music of five centuries ago and a reflection of the innovations of the Romantic/post-Romantic period in which he lived. - from “A tribute to Willan: St Martins Chamber Choir”.*

This morning, Nina Vannucci, one of our SAKLC choral scholars, will sing a selection from Willan’s “Twelve Sayings of Jesus”. Today’s selection will quote our Gospel for this morning in John 14.



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The text for our opening hymn, “Come down, O love divine”, was written by Bianco da Siena, an Italian monk who wrote poems called *laudi spirituali* in the fourteenth century. A collection of his poems was published in 1851 at Lucca. One of these, “Discendi, amor santo,” is the basis for this English translation by Richard F. Littledale in *The People's*

*Hymnal* in 1867. Littledale translated four of the original eight stanzas, but most hymnals omit his third (beginning “Let holy charity”) for a consistent three-stanza text.



This hymn is addressed to the Holy Spirit. Though the third Person of the Trinity is not specifically named until the very last line of the hymn, it is clear through the terms “O Love divine” and “O Comforter” that He is the one to whom this prayer is addressed.

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the tune DOWN AMPNEY for this text in the *English Hymnal* in 1906. It was named after his birthplace, and has been praised as one of the most beautiful hymn tunes ever written.