

1956/6 Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams OM

Portrait head

Height 13"

Bronze (cast by Fiorini foundry)

Modelled in 5 sittings in August 1956

Exhibited Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 1957 Catalogue No. 1394

One cast is in the Royal Festival Hall London, another in the National Portrait Gallery [NPG 4088 Ralph Vaughan Williams by David McFall bronze head, exhibited 1957 Primary Collection], and one in The British Library London.

References:

(i) Ralph Vaughan Williams - a pictorial biography by John E Lunn & Ursula Vaughan Williams (O.U.P. 1971) page 108

(ii) R.C.M. Magazine (Royal College of Music) Vol. LV No.1 Easter Term 1959 - memorial issue to Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams. page 49 description by sculptor of the sittings.

(iii) The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams by Michael Kennedy (O.U.P. 1964) page 380

(iv) Cover of World Record Club VW Symphony No.9 LP record No.T144.

(v) R.V.W. A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams by Ursula Vaughan Williams, published Oxford University Press 1964, page 373/4.

(vi) The Guardian 27/8/58 photo of bust in R.V.W. obituary

(vii) The Sketch 10/9/58 page 232 photo of McFall with bust

(viii) National Portrait Gallery Catalogue page 583 ref 4088: "Bronze cast of head 31.8 high (12 1/2)". David McFall, incised. Purchased 1958.

(ix) The Guardian 27/8/58 RVW obituary with photo of head.

extract from the R.C.M. Magazine contribution by David McFall, page 49:

"The hall at 10 Hanover Terrace contains the Epstein bronze of V.W. - quite an intimidating sight to another sculptor and more especially to myself, as I well knew the technical brio of the modelling of this head. Shown into the composer's study I felt an intruder with my bucket of wet clay and bust peg. There were no time-wasting preliminaries. V.W. declared his attitude with a peremptory sweep of his hand - "I'm not 'sitting' - you must make the best of it young man." That was that. From then on he ignored my presence and settled down to his scores at the desk. But this suited me admirably in so far as I was to be spared the





polite conversation with which many first sittings get going. Working on my knees on the floor and using a corner of his desk instead of a tripod, I glued my eyes upon this beautiful face - he seemed lost in deep contemplation - his inward looking eyes were down-cast and I saw in a flash the supreme humility of the man. I worked as fast as my fingers would go, fearing that he might not tolerate a repetition of this performance. (I was hoping for five one-hour sessions at intervals). ... A flying start it was, already I had registered his brooding mood; and, when he said I could come back another day, I cleaned up and made off in a high state of elation. I was to get my five sittings; they all took place at his desk in the same trance-like state of silent concentration. ... V.W. steadfastly refused to look at what I was doing, saying that he'd wait 'til I'd finished.

extract from R.V.W. A Biography by Ursula Vaughan Williams:

"Cordelia [sister of Adeline Fisher, RVW's first wife] was most anxious for her friend, the sculptor David McFall, to do a head of Ralph, who strenuously opposed the idea. Cordelia persisted, and eventually David was invited to come to the house. Ralph told him that he must do his work while he himself was working; so David arrived with a bucket of clay and a bust peg for the first sitting on 22 August. During the five days on which he came Ralph told me that he had worked harder than usual himself. 'I mustn't let the young man see me slacking,' he said. It was a perfect arrangement, for David caught the private face, known to very few people, of Ralph absorbed in his work. The likeness is extraordinary: the grave beauty of the bronze captured the truth in strength and intimacy."

extract from The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams by Michael Kennedy O.U.P. 1964 page 380

[following a description of RVW's character] "... Of all this Epstein's bust reveals nothing, but David McFall's is a strikingly true portrait of the man as he really was, like Sir Gerald Kelly's 1958 painting."

Mc Fall himself was initially reluctant to do the head because Epstein had previously sculpted him. He changed his mind after Epstein criticised his Pocohontas (see 1955/4) at the L.C.C. Holland Park Open Air Exhibition ("Sculpture - 1850 and 1950) - see news cutting "A Red Indian Princess in a London Park"