

The expressive voice and beautiful articulation of Laurence Olivier made him one of the greatest Shakespeare actors of the 20th century, and he is foremost remembered as a man of the theater. Olivier (1907-1989) worked in film starting in 1930, winning success with his utterly British, even stiff manner in the Hollywood Classics WUTHERING HEIGHTS (after Emily Brontë, 1939), REBECCA (1940) and PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1940). His most important contributions as actor and director are his three adaptations of Shakespeare: HENRY V (1944), which became the 'Song of Songs' to English patriotism during the Second World War; HAMLET (1948), performed as a pale spirit with a psyche oriented toward Sigmund Freud; and RICHARD III (1955), a mix of static stage drama and masterful color dramaturgy.

The story: England, 1415. In the name of Edward III, the young King Henry V, a scion of Normans, declares his claim to the French throne and sets off to the mainland with his army. The weak French King, poorly advised by his insubordinate son, the Dauphin, and his dukes, long hesitates before opposing the English triumphal procession. As illness and paltry conditions decimate the army, Henry wants to retreat to Calais. The French faction confronts him in Azincourt. During the night following up to the slaughter and on the morning thereof, the king amazes his exhausted soldiers when the English crush their enemy.

HENRY V

Sir William Walton was born in 1902 as the son of a choir and conductor and voice teacher in Oldham in the English county of Lancashire. He became a choirboy at Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral and then began his studies at the university there. Yet he never received systematic instruction in composition and, despite the help he received from Ernest Ansermet and Eugene Goossens so that he could learn to conduct later on, remained primarily an autodidact.

In Oxford William Walton made the acquaintance of Sitwell, who became not only his friend but provided moral and financial support. In 1922 he wrote the music for Edith Sitwell's poetry cycle „Façade.“ Scarcely ten years later, it was Edith's brother Osbert who provided the text for Walton's masterpiece BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST.

During the war years, William Walton was foremost absorbed in writing film and ballet scores. The films include FIRST OF THE FEW; an excerpt from the film score, "Spitfire Prelude & Fugue," was also published as an independent work. In 1944, Walton wrote the music for Laurence Olivier's first major Shakespeare film, HENRY V. HAMLET appeared four years later, followed by RICHARD III in 1955. Walton thus earned his standing in the ranks of great film composers.

He was knighted in 1951 and awarded the Order of Merit in 1968. Walton died in 1983 at the age of 80.



Director:
Laurence Olivier
(UK, 1944)
Music: William Walton

Instrumentation:
1+2/pic.2+1/ca.2+1/bcl.2 –
4.3.3.1 – timp.2perc –
harpichord – hp – strings –
SATB choir + children's choir
143 min.

