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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATION IN THE MUSIC OF RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

by

Eric A. Saylor

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Roland John Wiley, Chair
Professor James Borders
Professor Richard Crawford
Professor Ralph Williams
Assistant Professor Naomi André

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To Amy,
who believed

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INTRODUCTION

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and his music are closely identified with England. This is hardly a new observation: influences from English musical and literary sources are evident in much of his music, his writings testify to the importance of those sources, and he dedicated his career—as composer, conductor, teacher, author, lecturer, editor, and administrator—to improving the quality of England's musical life.[1] Yet he was an international figure as well. He studied with German and French composers, contributed to every major genre of western art music, and received worldwide acclaim within his own lifetime. Vaughan Williams absorbed various formal, stylistic, and technical conventions associated with Continental music, imprinting his own means of expression upon them with the intent of enriching the musical life of his own nation.[2] He preferred to call what he wrote "national music." This concept will be examined further

[1] See also Alain Frogley, "Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams," in *Vaughan Williams Studies* [hereinafter *VWS*], ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

[2] See Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *National Music and Other Essays*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Clarendon Press, 1996), 177–94 [hereinafter *NMOE*]; also Alain Frogley, "Constructing Englishness," 1–22; Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; Clarendon Press, 1992; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 39, 48, 210–11, 375–78 [hereinafter *WRVW*]; Michael Kennedy, Foreword, in *NMOE*, v–ix; Oliver Neighbour, "The Place of the Eighth Among Vaughan Williams's Symphonies," in *VWS*, 213–33; Oliver Neighbour, "Ralph Vaughan Williams: 1872–1958," *Score* 24 (November 1958): 7–13; Christopher Palmer, "Delius, Vaughan Williams, and Debussy," *Music and Letters* 50, no. 4 (October 1969): 475–80; Elsie Payne, "Vaughan Williams's Orchestral Colourings," *Monthly Musical Record* 84, no. 953 (January 1954): 3–10; Michael Vaillancourt, "Coming of Age: The Earliest Orchestral Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams," in *VWS*, 23–46.

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in Chapter 1, but for now, national music may be defined as a body of stylistically distinctive musical works from a nation that respond and contribute to that nation's cultural life (and possibly that of others), often maintaining links to other international musical traditions. This dissertation will examine Vaughan Williams's music from perspectives of the composer, the English critical community, and the analyst of style, with the aim of evaluating Vaughan Williams's claim that his music was "national."

Before attempting this evaluation, a brief introduction to Vaughan Williams's life may be helpful. Along with biographical details, this summary will trace the development of Vaughan Williams's style with particular focus on its connections to English culture. The changing nature of these connections suggests a division of his works into three periods: the years before World War I (ca. 1898–1914), when his works emphasize English content; the interwar period (ca. 1919–1943), when his music shows greater international influence and individual character; and the period after World War II (ca. 1944–1958), when his personal style reached its culmination, superseding the indigenous materials that helped inspire it.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on 12 October 1872 in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, to an upper-middle class family of distinguished ancestry. His father, the village vicar, descended from a long line of respected jurists, while his mother was directly related to both the Wedgwoods (of pottery fame) and the Darwins; Great-Uncle Charles was a familiar figure in RVW's childhood. After his father's untimely death in 1875, his family moved to Leith Hill Place, his maternal grandfather's estate in Surrey, where he was raised in an intellectually and socially progressive environment.[3] Vaughan

[3] This likely contributed to the composer's lifelong liberalism. In a letter (1952) to fellow composer Rutland Boughton, he recalled standing out as a Radical even at prep school, falling in with the

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Williams had a typical Victorian upbringing for someone of his class—a home in the country, boarding school at Rottingdean and Charterhouse—but he also possessed an unusual interest in music that led him to enroll at the recently founded Royal College of Music (hereinafter RCM) from 1890 to 1892, and again from 1895 to 1897, where he studied composition with Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford.[4]

After graduating from the RCM and marrying Adeline Fisher in 1897, Vaughan Williams spent six months in Germany studying with Max Bruch. After returning to England in 1898, he composed, worked as a church organist, edited the English Hymnal for the Anglican Church and a set of *Welcome Songs* for the Purcell Society, completed his doctorate in music at Cambridge, wrote and lectured, and in 1903, became involved with the English Folk Song Society.

The English Folk Song Society (founded 1898) was a group of academics, gentleman amateurs, and ethnographers dedicated to collecting and preserving England's orally-transmitted songs and dances, particularly those from rural locales. Collectively, their activities are sometimes referred to as the "Folk Music Revival" or "English folk song movement."[5] For Vaughan Williams (as well as other collectors), collecting a tune involved transcribing the melody as faithfully as possible from a singer's performance.[6]

Fabian socialists while attending Cambridge, and claimed to have voted Liberal or Radical in every election but one since being eligible (See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 322–23). From the 1940s on, he was involved with the Federal Union and other organizations dedicated to the concept of international government; see Kennedy, *WRVW*, 324; also U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 317, and Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism," 155.

[4] He continued to take lessons at the RCM while enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge (1892–95) where he completed his Bachelor of Music degree; his composition professor at Cambridge was Charles Wood. More on Vaughan Williams's academic career may be found in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 14–21.

[5] A brief introduction to this movement can be found in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 23–36.

[6] Vaughan Williams contrasted this approach with what he considered the distorted transcriptions by early nineteenth-century collectors of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish folksongs: "Nowadays a new spirit animates the collector; he wishes to preserve and put before the public exactly what he has heard—neither

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Julian Onderdonk, however, has shown that these transcriptions were sometimes altered in minor ways to clarify the song's design when being edited for publication, bringing the accuracy of EFSS transcriptions in general into question by today's standards.[7] The only other information Vaughan Williams consistently recorded when collecting a song was the date and site of collection. Texts, information on the song's history, and even singers' names were erratically preserved, not just by Vaughan Williams, but by other collectors as well. Such omissions indicate that Vaughan Williams was less interested in folk music's social implications (what it revealed about its practitioners, its function within a society, its class affiliations, or where and when its performers learned it) than in its strictly musical appeal, both in its own right and as "raw material" for composers.[8]

The English Folk Song Society's understanding of "folk song" (and Vaughan Williams's) corresponds to the definition used by Cecil Sharp, one of the Society's leading members.[9] In his book, *English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions* (1907), Sharp defined folk music as pieces of rural or peasant origin that were orally transmitted and

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more nor less—and we can be sure that whatever we find in the collections of modern investigators is an accurate transcript of the songs of traditional singers" (*English Folk-Songs* (London: The English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1912), 4).

[7] Onderdonk refers to these altered songs as "idealized versions." Changes might involve, for example, altering the rhythmic value or pitch of a note in one phrase to match that of a note from an otherwise identical phrase elsewhere in the song. The term should not, however, connote the drastic reworking of mode or melody that characterized nineteenth-century collecting. Much more on the problematic issues in English folk song and Vaughan Williams's work with them are addressed in Julian Onderdonk, "Vaughan Williams's Folksong Transcriptions: A Case of Idealization?" in *VWS*, 118–38.

[8] He affirmed the scope of his interest in a lecture from 1910, reproduced the following year: "My knowledge of the folk-song is entirely confined to the musical side" ("English Folk-Song," *Musical Times* 52, no. 816 (February 1911), 101).

[9] An introduction to the history and present-day use of the term "folk song" may be found in Carole Pegg, "Folk Music," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 9: 63–67. By contrast, specifics regarding the term in England during the early twentieth century may be found in Ian Russell, "England (i), §II," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., 8: 228–39.

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anonymously composed, a definition widely accepted until the 1950s.[10] He acknowledged that folk song constantly evolved and changed, and that many variants of a single tune might exist, but he also believed that folk music was a self-contained tradition that could be "corrupted" by music or texts from other traditions.[11] As a result, Sharp's definition excluded most music from urban centers (including music hall tunes), music written for commercial consumption (such as broadside ballads), and popular composed tunes in the public domain (such as hymns or patriotic songs). Later scholars seeking to refine the definition of folk song have questioned Sharp's exclusion of these categories, his assumption of an autonomous folk tradition, and the methodology and motives of the English Folk Song Society in general.[12] In short, "folk music" was settled and simple to Sharp; to modern scholars, it is unsettled and complex. In order to treat the issue as Vaughan Williams did, however, this author will use "folk music" (or "folk song") in reference to music of rural or urban origin that is orally transmitted and anonymously composed. The term "indigenous music" will refer to all music associated with the culture of a given nation, including "folk music" as defined above.

In addition to folk song and the monuments of western music he absorbed at the RCM, Vaughan Williams's early style was shaped by his study of English hymnody, Tudor music, and contemporary French music (which he heard in England and

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[10] See Pegg, "Folk Music," 64. Other definitions from the early part of the century were even less specific. The third edition of Grove's dictionary, for example, defines English folk song simply as "the songs of the common English people" from rural England (Frank Kidson, "English Folk-Song," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 3d ed., 6 vols., ed. H. C. Colles (New York: Macmillan, 1928; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1937), 2: 163.

[11] Sharp's principles are outlined in greater detail in *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, 3d ed., revised by Maud Karpeles (London: Methuen, 1954), esp. 1–31. But see also Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song," in *NMOE*, 37.

[12] Sharp's views and criticisms of them are explained at greater length in Pegg, "Folk Music," 64; Russell, "England (i), §II," 228; and Onderdonk, "Vaughan Williams's Folksong Transcriptions," 118–23.

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encountered firsthand while taking orchestration lessons with Maurice Ravel in 1908). His early works reflect these influences through their use of widely spaced triadic harmonies, modal scales, long-breathed melodies, and extensive counterpoint. Many of his early works also evoked associations with England through geographical imagery (*A Sea Symphony*, *Linden Lea*, *In the Fen Country*, the *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, *On Wenlock Edge*, *A London Symphony*), the quotation of indigenous English music (*Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, the *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*), the use of English-language texts by the Rossettis, Stevenson, Housman, and Whitman, or through their association with English subjects (including incidental music for Shakespearian festivals and a stage adaptation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*).

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the 42-year old Vaughan Williams volunteered for service even though he was beyond the age of conscription. He served with the Royal Ambulance Medical Corps in France and Greece before receiving an officer's commission in the Royal Garrison Artillery. This led to a posting with the 141 Heavy Artillery Battery in France where he took charge of ammunition transport, a position he held until the war's end. Upon returning to civilian life in 1919, he became Professor of Composition at the RCM, replacing Parry. Over the next fifteen years, Vaughan Williams's music, conducting, lectures, and other activities made him one of England's best-known composers, second in reputation only to Edward Elgar. In 1934, with the deaths of Elgar, Frederick Delius, and Gustav Holst, he was recognized as English music's Grand Old Man,[13] a role affirmed in 1935 when he was made a member of the Order of Merit, one of Britain's highest and most exclusive royal honors.

[13] Or G.O.M., an abbreviation much used in journals and newspapers. There were more senior composers in England than Vaughan Williams (Granville Bantock and Walford Davies, for instance), but

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Vaughan Williams wrote a few works based on English sources during the interwar period, such as the operas *Sir John in Love* (after Shakespeare) and *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (after Bunyan), *Job* (the "masque for dancing" based upon a series of illustrations by William Blake), and the choral suite *Five Tudor Portraits*.[14] But perhaps because of the wartime tragedies he had witnessed, for which national and imperial rivalries were blamed, conspicuously English allusions were no longer essential to Vaughan Williams after the war. Abstract works (the Violin and Piano Concerti, Symphony No. 4) and pieces free from national connotations (*Flos Campi*, the *Magnificat*, *Sancta Civitas*) took a more prominent place in his output. His music also began to emphasize elements of interwar musical trends: tonal ambiguity within largely diatonic frameworks, regular but metrically unstable rhythms, revivals of old forms, and relatively concise structures. This shift in Vaughan Williams's musical language makes sense within the climate of artistic experimentation that swept through Europe in the years preceding and following the war. It also helped widen his expressive range. He composed some of his most daring and unusual works in the twenties and thirties, such as the Piano Concerto and the Fourth Symphony, alongside some of his most contemplative and intimate, including the *Pastoral Symphony* and the *Serenade to Music*.

Vaughan Williams retired from the RCM shortly before the outbreak of World War Two, but continued to compose for the rest of his life. Despite occasional adversity (such as Adeline's death and the lukewarm reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, both in

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none who commanded the same level of attention and respect. Vaughan Williams thoroughly disliked the phrase, claiming he was "not grand and not old." See Kennedy, *WRVW*, 291.

[14] Although the opera *Hugh the Drover* and *The Lark Ascending* both had their premieres in the 1920s, they were written before the war, and their subjects and styles place them more in line with other works from the prewar period.

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1951), his life after the Second World War was marked by personal and professional achievement. He had become, by then, a historical figure. The first biography on his life and works appeared in 1950, with three more following over the next decade. Conferring a degree from the University of Bristol on Vaughan Williams in 1951, Chancellor Winston Churchill called him "our greatest English composer, and a great musical ambassador."[15] Numerous accolades and performances, his marriage to longtime friend Ursula Wood in 1953, a new home in London, and travel throughout Europe and North America all reinvigorated him and contributed to his prodigious compositional pace until his death in August 1958.

While Vaughan Williams never wavered in his love for English music and culture, he rarely invoked them in music written during the final phase of his career. Few of his post-war works are topically English; those that are tend to be written for amateur performers or choral festivals.[16] By this late period, the musical influences of other composers and traditions—English or otherwise—had been thoroughly assimilated within his own idiom. Vaughan Williams favored abstract forms during this time—the Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth Symphonies, the Violin Sonata, the Oboe and Tuba Concerti, the Romance for Harmonica, and the Second String Quartet—but he also wrote texted pieces, including *Sinfonia Antartica* and the choral cantata *Hodie*, as well as several film scores. Counterpoint and color played increasingly important roles in his late works, which cover a wide expressive and musical range.

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[15] Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964; Oxford University Press, 1988), 314.

[16] His opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951) is an exception, but its development can be traced back more than forty years. See Nathaniel Lew, "Government, Opera, and the British Nation in the Age of the Welfare State, 1945–51," Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2001, 314–418.

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Interpreting Vaughan Williams's writing

Those who study Vaughan Williams in any depth will inevitably encounter his essays and other writings. These cover a period of almost sixty years, and reveal much about the state of English music in the early twentieth century and his place within it. Gaining a clear understanding of the meaning behind his words, however, can be challenging. As already shown with "folk music," Vaughan Williams (and his contemporaries) used words or phrases in connotations that have since changed, and sometimes clash with early twenty-first century usage. Some terms used may even suggest different concepts altogether. In order to clarify the discussion in later chapters, here are definitions for some of the problematic terms that appear most often.

Nation. Vaughan Williams sometimes uses the term in the general sense of "nation-state" (that is, a geopolitical entity). More often, however, he used it in a cultural sense, describing it as a "community of people who are spiritually bound together by language, environment, history, and common ideals and, above all, a continuity with the past."[17] As he uses the term, it almost always refers to the dominant culture associated with a given country rather than minority or diasporic groups.

Nationalism. Recent scholarship suggests that nationalism, like folk music, is understood differently from place to place and from era to era, and that these differences cannot be coherently reconciled in a single definition.[18] Current definitions acknowledge

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[17] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Some Conclusions," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 68.

[18] Michael Murphy argues that "nationalism is not a single doctrine, that its origins are spurious and various," or at least subjective, and "its manifestations are moulded by circumstance" (Introduction to *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800–1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 2. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1991), xii and 1–7.

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the term's problematic aspects: its erroneous association with musical style, troubling connotations with totalitarianism, and its many and various manifestations throughout history. Its use in the earlier part of this century, by contrast, tended to be fairly straightforward and unnuanced. In general, when used in musical contexts by Vaughan Williams, "nationalism" refers to the privileging of one nation's music or musical tradition over another (or all others), sometimes connoting cultural aggression or xenophobia.[19] Vaughan Williams's contemporaries often used the term to refer to the self-conscious use of indigenous musical materials in classical forms.[20] It is not synonymous with "national music," nor does it refer to a particular style.

Modern. Vaughan Williams tends to use "modern" in one of three ways: first, simply to connote "present-day." Second, it refers to aspects of contemporary music that he disliked (e.g., obtrusive orchestral effects or virtuosic displays).[21] Third, it describes the need to express the challenges and mores of contemporary culture, and finding the artistic means to express that connection.[22] He occasionally uses this connotation when presenting his ideas about artistic sincerity and the autonomy of the composer's voice, to be discussed further in the next chapter and in Chapter 4.

Modernism. Like nationalism, this term refers to an attitude or a perspective, not a style. We can historically situate the movement called Modernism in the early twentieth

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[19] But see also Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The History of Nationalism in Music," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 53–58, for his examples of nationalism with positive connotations.

[20] See Ernest Newman, "Concerning 'A Shropshire Lad' and Other Matters," *Musical Times* 59, no. 907 (1 September 1918): 393–98; also Simona Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of His Music* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1957), 22–24; and David Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914. A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 45–46.

[21] See Ralph Vaughan Williams "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note" [1920], in *NMOE*, 129–32.

[22] Ibid. He uses "modernity" to connote being modern in this third sense.

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century, most often associated in music with the early atonal works of Arnold Schoenberg and the early ballets of Igor Stravinsky, and with the rejection of Romantic ideals and expression. For Vaughan Williams, "modernism" more often referred to the challenge "to create new types of art which could express the bewildering but exciting complexity of the rapidly changing world."[23] In this form, the term does not connote specific attributes of style, but unfamiliar or unexpected transformations of musical language in general.

Musical language. For the purposes of this dissertation, the various elements (scale, harmony, form, rhythm, texture, etc.) that combine within a piece of music.

Style. For the purposes of this dissertation, the selection and arrangement of specific elements of musical language in a unique or characteristic manner throughout a collection of musical works. "Personal style" refers specifically to the style of an individual composer.

Universal. Often used synonymously with "international" by Vaughan Williams and many of his contemporaries.[24] "Universal" music generally means "universally western:" works that transcend the musical scene of one nation to become accepted throughout the western musical world.

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[23] Peter Faulkner, ed., *A Modernist Reader: Modernism in England 1910-1930* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), 13. Further examination of modernism as idea (and its relationship to Modernism) may be found in Brian Etter, *From Classicism to Modernism: Western Musical Culture and the Metaphysics of Order* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), esp. x–xii, 1–13, and 121–26.

[24] See Vaughan Williams, "English Folk Song," 103; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 9; Ernest Newman, "An English and Universal Music," *New York Times Magazine* (12 October 1952), 20, 28; Colin Mason, "Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony," *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1956, 5.

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Cosmopolitan. Although Vaughan Williams occasionally used this word in the general sense of "sophisticated" or "international,"[25] he used it more frequently as shorthand for the uncritical adoption of techniques and styles of other composers as a substitute for personal expression.[26] He believed this to be one of the most destructive tendencies in music, because it encouraged the superficial emulation of current musical trends rather than hard work, sincerity of expression, and artistic maturity. His use of the term should not imply a rejection of the larger western musical tradition. Furthermore, although "cosmopolitan" was used in a racist manner by totalitarian regimes in reference to groups who were allegedly "anti-nation," particularly Jewish communities,[27] there is no evidence that Vaughan Williams ever intended or implied such a subtext.[28]

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[25] See Vaughan Williams, *English Folk-Songs*, 15.

[26] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" [1934] in *NMOE*, 2; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Introduction," in Henry Hadow, *English Music* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), xi–xii; "The History of Nationalism in Music" [1934], in *NMOE*, 57; and Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 155.

[27] See "Cosmopolitanism," *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, 8 May 2003, http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00051141.

[28] Some of Vaughan Williams's actions or writings may occasionally suggest otherwise, such as his acceptance of an award from the University of Hamburg in 1937 (presented in 1938). He was reluctant to accept it, explaining in a letter to the professor who nominated him that he was "strongly opposed to the present system of government in Germany, especially with regard to its treatment of artists and scholars. I belong to more than one English society whose object is to combat all that the present German *régime* stands for." Writing his formal letter of acceptance, however, he indicated he was accepting on behalf of "the whole art of music in England through me as one of its representatives," and since it was an artistic award, he to it to imply "no political propaganda" and he would "feel free, as an honourable man, if I accept, to hold and express my views on the general state of Germany which are allowable to any British citizen." Still, upon being offered congratulations by his colleague Hubert Foss, he responded that "honours from Germany are not what they were" (U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 217–18; see also 221–22), and later served as Chair for the Home Office Committee for the Release of Interned Alien Musicians during World War Two and worked with the Dorking Committee for Refugees from Nazi Oppression.

He stood up to British injustices as well. For example, he withdrew a BBC commission when the music of English composer Alan Bush was banned from broadcasts (1939) because of his Communist affiliations, and testified at a tribunal on behalf of Michael Tippett, who was imprisoned in 1943 for being a conscientious objector. In both cases, even though Vaughan Williams "strongly opposed" their beliefs, he thought that their victimization by the government was wrong (see U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 239 and 255). All of this is by way of indicating that Vaughan Williams was a humanist as well as an Englishman. He sometimes makes statements that seem, to modern readers, insensitive or even prejudiced, but likely carried no such connotations (or at least much weaker ones) at the time they were made. Similarly,

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Having examined the background of Vaughan Williams's life and works, and with a basic terminological filter in place, the reader should be prepared to investigate Vaughan Williams's music and compositional philosophy more closely. The first chapter will look at issues related to the composer and his critics, and begins with a question: what does "national music" entail?

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comments hinting at prescriptive social engineering, such as a statement from 1911 about musicians being "servants of the State" who worked for the benefit of all citizens (see p. 22), carried different connotations than they did after 1917; see also U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 323, and Paul Harrington, "Holst and Vaughan Williams: Radical Pastoral," in *Music and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 106–27. This author generally extends Vaughan Williams the benefit of the doubt when such situations arise.

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CHAPTER 1

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND NATIONAL MUSIC

By the phrase "national music," Vaughan Williams connoted a system of beliefs about the role of music and musicians within a nation, though he never articulated its underlying principles in a single manifesto. In general, it has to do with the development of a composer's authorial voice and the motivations underlying that development, a position traceable through his essays and lectures. These writings, however, must be approached with some caution, since they can be contradictory and facile. Vaughan Williams will skim over details or ignore facts in order to make a polemical point, and his range of opinions (and his sometimes complicated expression of them) can make it difficult to know his precise view on a given topic. Nevertheless, careful study of his writing reveals a generally consistent conception of national music throughout his career:

- It embraces many different musical styles.
- It is spontaneous and sincere in its expression.
- It may involve indigenous elements, but is not achievable by "local color" alone.
- It responds to and contributes to national culture.
- It is open to international influences, but is not servile before them.
- It is a prerequisite for "universal" appeal, the ultimate goal of artistic expression.

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Let us examine each of these points in turn.

It embraces many different musical styles. Vaughan Williams made this point in his first published article (1902):[1]

> It is useless to invent a style and then model individual utterances upon it. The national English style must be modelled on the personal style of English musicians. Until our composers will be content to write the music that they like best, without an ulterior thought, not till then shall we have a true School of English Music.[2]

National music was not a monolithic "national style," but rather the totality of distinctive styles within a nation. These styles may be associated with social practices (folk songs, hymns, dance music)[3] or with the music of individual composers. Because it was so inclusive, national music occurred at all levels of musical skill, from the folk-singer to the choral society amateur to the conservatory-trained composer.

National music required the ongoing commitment of the nation's musicians to preserve and enrich this collection of styles. Vaughan Williams believed that an active community of musicians, professional and amateur alike, created an environment conducive to the emergence of great art and great composers.[4] They would, in turn, build upon national music with their own expressive voices. "For every great composer there must be a background of dozens of smaller ones"[5] preparing the way with music that did

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[1] A bibliography of his writings, compiled by Peter Starbuck, can be found in Neil Butterworth, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Guide to Research*, Garland Composer Resource Manuals, gen. ed. Guy Marco (New York: Garland, 1990), 207–22 (it has also been reprinted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 282–94). The article in question (see fn. 2 for citation) was actually written in 1897, but not accepted for publication until 1902; see Kennedy, *WRVW*, 396.

[2] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A School of English Music," *Vocalist* 1, no. 1 (April 1902): 8. See also Kennedy, *WRVW*, 29–32.

[3] Vaughan Williams noted this in 1934: "National music is not necessarily folk-song; on the other hand folk-song is, by nature, necessarily national" ("Some Conclusions" [1934], in *NMOE*, 62.)

[4] Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 158.

[5] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 50.

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not necessarily achieve the status of "high art" but responded to the needs of the community.[6] The great musicians "will not be realized without long and careful preparation, so that the interminable oratorios and cantatas of minor composers which are now crowding our salvage heaps are not waste, because without them the moment of inspiration could not have been caught."[7] The efforts of minor figures and amateurs were just as important to the formation of national music as those of virtuoso performers and conductors, and could be just as sincere in their musical expression. "The greatest artist belongs inevitably to his country as much as the humblest singer in a remote village—they and all those who come between them are links in the same chain, manifestations on their different levels of the same desire for artistic expression."[8] In short, national music was made by a musical nation.

Vaughan Williams worried that the future of active musical communities was threatened by technology that allowed people simply to listen to music rather than make it themselves. "A musical nation is not a nation which is content to listen," he said in 1934. "If we all become listeners there will soon be no one left to listen to."[9]

> Art can only thrive in an atmosphere of art. When we hear the fine flowering of Austrian or Italian music we are apt to imagine that these countries simply teem with Carusos and Kreislers. As a matter of fact you could probably hear more bad music in a day in Austria or Italy than a week in England. But the point is that they do make music. They are not content to listen to lectures about it. What I want to see in England is

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[6] See also Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 4. This "evolutionary" view of music was likely influenced not only by his connection to Charles Darwin, but also though his study with Hubert Parry, who also espoused such views. For more on Parry's historiographical legacy, see Jeremy Dibble, "Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: the creation of tradition," in *Ralph Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, ed. Lewis Foreman (London: Albion Press, 1998), 25–47.

[7] VW, "Shrubsole" [1943], in *NMOE*, 203.

[8] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 7.

[9] VW, "Some Conclusions" [1934], in *NMOE*, 67.

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> everybody making music, however badly. . . . Out of all the bad music the good music will emerge.[10]

It is spontaneous and sincere in its expression. Vaughan Williams stressed the importance of artistic sincerity throughout his career.[11] "The three watchwords of great music," he wrote in 1934, "are sincerity, simplicity, and serenity."[12] By "sincere," Vaughan Williams meant expression that was unpremeditated and honest, not derivative or pretentious. "A musician who wishes to say anything worth saying must first of all express himself—in fact, his music must be the natural utterance of his own natural emotions."[13]

Vaughan Williams believed that sincerity also characterized one of national music's most spontaneous and unpretentious forms: the folk song. To illustrate, he discussed the construction and arrangement of the English folk song, "Searching for Lambs," in a detailed essay from 1934. In it, he pointed out formal repetition, cyclic motives, melodic embellishment, and contrasting phrase structures in the song. "What a wealth of unconscious art in so simple a tune!" he exclaimed. "All the principles of great art are here exemplified: unity, variety, symmetry, development, continuity."[14] These were, he argued elsewhere, precisely the same traits "which we are accustomed to look

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[10] Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 158.

[11] "There are hardly any great composers, but there can be many sincere composers" ("Who Wants the English Composer?" *R. C. M. Magazine* 9, no. 1 (1912): 11; quoted in Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 201); "Artistic self-deception is the easiest thing in the world and we must be continually testing ourselves as to our sincerity, to make sure that our emotions are not all vicarious" ("The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)" [1934], in *NMOE*, 40). See also "The History of Nationalism in Music" [1934], 58; "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note" [1920/1934], in *NMOE*, esp. 134–35 and 151; and "A School of English Music"[1902], 8.

[12] VW, "Some Conclusions," in *NMOE*, 67.

[13] Vaughan Williams, "A School of English Music" [1902], 8. See also "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], 155.

[14] Vaughan Williams, "Some Tentative Ideas on the Origins of Music," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 20.

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for in the highly developed compositions of great masters."[15] Yet in folk songs, they represented "the unconscious utterances of unlettered people . . . unaffected by extraneous influences."[16] The spontaneous, instinctive English folk song, Vaughan Williams argued, was evidence that English musicians could be sincerely and naturally expressive. Composers needed to be motivated by the same creative spirit if they were to create music that was genuinely national. "Until our music becomes a really spontaneous expression, first of ourselves, next of our community, then and then only of the world, in fact until it is as unpremeditated as the folk-singer, it will not be vital."[17]

Vaughan Williams was not necessarily encouraging composers to copy the style of English folk songs, merely to emulate their sincerity and spontaneity of expression.[18] "What we want in England is *real* music, even if it be only a music-hall song," he said in 1902. "Provided it possess real feeling and real life, it will be worth all the off-scourings of the classics in the world."[19] His colleagues did not all share his opinion. Cecil Sharp, for example, claimed that people could rid English culture of "coarse music-hall songs" and other types of "vulgar music" by "flooding the streets" with the "equally attractive but [morally] far better tunes of the folk."[20] Vaughan Williams was less puritanical than Sharp. "It seems to me," he wrote in 1950, "that so long as good music is made it matters

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[15] VW, *English Folk-Songs*, 8.

[16] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "English Folk-Song," *Musical Times* (1 February 1911): 101–2.

[17] VW, "Some Conclusions" [1934], in *NMOE*, 64.

[18] He did say that "The composer must love the tunes of his own country and they must become an integral part of himself" ("The Folk-Song," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 27), though strictly speaking, this does not endorse integrating them into one's style.

[19] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Good Taste," *Vocalist* 1, no. 1 (April 1902): 8.

[20] Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, 136–37. See also Russell, "England (i), §II," 228.

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very little how it is made or who makes it."[21] Expressive sincerity was achieved by holding to one's artistic principles, not by writing in a particular style.

> Why should music be 'original'? The object of art is to stretch out to the ultimate realities through the medium of beauty. The duty of the composer is to find the *mot juste*. It does not matter if this word has been said a thousand times before as long as it is the right thing to say at that moment. If it is *not* the right thing to say, however unheard of it may be, it is of no artistic value. Music which is unoriginal is so, not simply because it has been said before, but because the composer has not taken the trouble to make sure that this was the right thing to say at the right moment.[22]

It may involve indigenous elements, but is not achievable by "local color" alone.

"I do not imagine," wrote Vaughan Williams in 1934, "that one can make one's music national merely by introducing a few folk-tunes into it." [23] Nor would composers become more "national" by doing so. "Beethoven did not become a Russian because he introduced two Russian folk-songs, out of compliment to the Russian Ambassador, into his Rasumovsky Quartets."[24] There was a crucial difference between using folk songs as the vehicle for a personal style (as a starting point for further development, for instance) and simply quoting them for "local color." Vaughan Williams indicated this difference as early as 1912 in a pamphlet written for the English Folk Dance Society:

> "To write rhapsodies [based] on national themes is a delightful exercise for the composer, and may show up the folk-song to the hearer in a new and pleasing light, but merely to take a handful of English folk-songs and

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[21] Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography" [1950], in *NMOE*, 189.

[22] Ibid., 189–90. He made a similar comment during a lecture series at Cornell University in 1954, published in 1955 as *The Making of Music*: "Therefore I beg all young composers not to try to be original, within the narrow sense of the word. Originality will come of itself if it is in one's nature. This does not mean that the composer must be careless and thoughtless. It is hard, indeed, to find a true expression of one's vision. But the artist must not rest until he has discovered the *mot juste*. If another composer has said the same thing before, so much the worse for the other composer. The originality, or perhaps I should say the personality, of music depends very little on the actual outline of the notes. It derives from something more subtle, which perhaps we cannot define but can recognize at once" ("How do we make music?" in *The Making of Music* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); reprinted in *NMOE*, 217).

[23] Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)" [1934], in *NMOE*, 40–41.

[24] Ibid., 41.

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> dilute them to taste with some patent Strauss mixture or a little Brahms-and-water will not make a national style. Ultimately it is a personal, and not a national style that is to be desired."[25]

Composers would not make national music if their own expressive voices were obscured by those of others. "In former times, musical England came to grief by trying to be foreign; no less surely shall we now fail through trying to be English" if composers simply imitated indigenous musical styles instead of Continental ones.[26] But how could composers develop their expressive voices? "How is the composer to find himself? How is he to stimulate his imagination in a way that will lead him to voicing himself and his fellows?"[27] One way, Vaughan Williams argued in 1920, was for composers to assimilate (not copy or quote) the intonations and expression of indigenous music into their distinctive personal styles. Using folk song as his example, Vaughan Williams suggested that contact with music "bound by purely melodic considerations, with rhythms not tied by the convention of bars and time signatures, the expressiveness of short and simple tunes—all this cannot fail to suggest to anyone who is naturally sympathetic new vistas of musical thought which may, indeed, have nothing to do superficially with the curves and cadences of folk-song, but are suggested by its spirit if not by its letter."[28] Vaughan Williams, for example, quoted folk tunes infrequently, but assimilated many aspects of the English folk song (modal scales, flat sevenths, melodies of irregular length) into his

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[25] Vaughan Williams, "English Folk-Songs," 104. He made a very similar statement in an article published in 1911: "To write rhapsodies on folk-tunes is a very good exercise for the composer, and the results may often be delightful, but to garnish our ordinary English hotch-potch of every modern composer from Brahms to Debussy with a few English folk-tunes by way of ornament will not make a national style. It is not a question . . . of 'playing with local colour'" (*English Folk-Songs* (London: The English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1912), 15).

[26] Vaughan Williams, "A School of English Music" [1902], 8.

[27] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 10.

[28] VW, "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note" [1920, 142.

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personal idiom, changing them significantly from their original forms and enhancing his own style in the process.[29]

It was with these so-called "raw materials" of art found throughout British music that Vaughan Williams believed composers should concern themselves, including the element of expressive sincerity that bound them together.[30] What was it about "the direct appeal of the popular tune which makes the audience go home whistling;" was there not "some genuine artistic impulse hidden in unlikely corners?"[31]

> Have not we all about us forms of musical expression which we can take and purify and raise to the level of great art? For instance, the lilt of the chorus at a music-hall joining in a popular song, the children dancing to a barrel organ, the rousing fervour of a Salvation Army hymn, St. Paul's and a great choir singing in one of its festivals, the Welshmen striking up one of their own hymns whenever they win a goal at the international football match, the cries of the street pedlars, the factory girls singing their sentimental songs?[32]

The word "purify" may give pause today, but it seems that Vaughan Williams meant it in the sense of "refine," to capture the sincere expressive qualities of these different types of music within the context of art music, leaving their original musical contexts behind.[33] Vaughan Williams believed that composers could find within native, everyday forms of musical expression something that resonated with their own creative impulses and had the potential to become "great art."

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[29] See Elsie Payne, "Vaughan Williams and Folk-Song," *Music Review* 15, no. 2 (May 1954): 103–26.

[30] "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)" [1934], in *NMOE*, 41; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?" *R. C. M. Magazine* 9, no. 1 (1912): 11; quoted in Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 200; "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 10.

[31] VW, "Some Conclusions," in *NMOE*, 64.

[32] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?" [1912]; quoted in Foss, 200.

[33] Vaughan Williams also wrote about providing the right music for the right occasion in "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 5–6.

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It responds to and contributes to national culture. Musical style, to Vaughan Williams, expressed experience, and he felt that experience was ultimately rooted in perspectives derived from one's national and cultural surroundings.[34] "If [art] is to be of any value," he wrote in 1912, "it must grow out of the very life of [the artist], the community in which he lives, the nation to which he belongs. . . . The composer must not shut himself up and think about art, he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community."[35] A given composition was most likely to resonate among audiences "of [the composer's] own nation, or other kind of homogeneous community"[36] with similar cultural surroundings to those of the composer. Vaughan Williams believed that composers' artistic responses to their own nation's culture would be spontaneous and natural. They could then be captured and conveyed in distinctive, personal styles, which would in turn enrich the musical life of the nation. He pointed to this symbiosis between life and art in the music of Gustav Holst (1920): "To Holst the interests, responsibilities, and realities of life are not a hindrance but a stimulus. . . . as time goes on and his life gets busier and more varied, his artistic production becomes larger and finer, his style more mature, pronounced, and individual."[37] To Vaughan Williams, such interaction cultivated "a sense of musical citizenship; why should not the musician be the servant of the State and build national monuments like the painter, the writer, or the architect?"[38]

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[34] See Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 1–2.

[35] Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?" [1912]; quoted in Foss, 198, 200–1.

[36] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 1.

[37] Vaughan Williams, "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note" [1920], in *NMOE*, 133.

[38] Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?" [1912]; quoted in Foss, 200. The notion of "duty," particularly to the nation, was still a powerful cultural force in England at this time; see

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It is open to international influences, but is not servile before them. Creating national music, Vaughan Williams claimed, did not involve artistic chauvinism; ideally, the best "national monuments" would become treasures for the world.[39] English composers could not ignore other western art music without seeming eccentric. They could, however, impose distinctive styles onto those traditions, furthering their own nation's musical life in the process. For example, in 1911, he wrote that English composers "must of necessity build on the great traditions which we, in common with the whole of Europe, have inherited from Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, and Wagner, and in the matter of pure technique it would be folly to shut our ears to the teaching of better-equipped nations, but let us apply the lesson to our own necessities and be masters of our means, not its slaves."[40] Alternatively, native musical traditions could intermingle with and enrich the international tradition. Vaughan Williams suggested this in an article (1934) that acknowledged the historical importance of foreign models in English music. "When the great School of Tudor music arose," he wrote, it was "fructified of course by the skill of the great Belgian contrapuntists," but inherited "its energy and vitality from the unwritten and unrecorded art of its own countryside."[41]

Vaughan Williams again called for parity between English music and that of other nations in an article from 1942. "Our national art must not be a backwater, but must take its part in the great stream that has flowed through the centuries. In that stream we must

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Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989; Mariner Books, 2000), 118–22 and 176–91.

[39] See Vaughan Williams, "Some Conclusions" [1934], in *NMOE*, 71; "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 159; and "Making Your Own Music" [1955], in *NMOE*, 242.

[40] Vaughan Williams, "English Folk Song" [1911], 104.

[41] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song," in *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); reprinted in *NMOE*, 52.

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preserve our own current. We must not merely become an indistinguishable part of the general flow."[42] This returns to his call for artistic sincerity, and the need for composers, of any nation, to forge their own style—which, to repeat, he believed was (in part) an expression of their national culture.[43] "Music," he wrote in 1934, "above all the other arts is the expression of the soul of a nation. . . . The music of other nations is the expression of *their* soul—can it also be the expression of ours?"[44] Perhaps not directly, to answer the question, but composers secure in their expressive style could deepen it through the study of many different traditions. "If we possess our own soul surely and firmly . . . then, indeed, we can afford to be broad-minded and to enlarge and enrich our own possessions by contact with all that is best in the world around us."[45] Indeed, Vaughan Williams encouraged this type of practice among young composers—appropriately so, having himself benefited from French and German tutelage.

> My advice to young composers is—learn your own language first, find out your own traditions, discover what you want to do; then, go to Paris, Berlin, or anywhere else, rub musical shoulders with others, test your ideas against theirs, and so find out how far your art is 'built up four square.'[46]

It is a prerequisite for "universal" appeal, the ultimate goal of artistic expression. Vaughan Williams believed music could be both national and international in its appeal.[47]

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[42] Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 154.

[43] It was, Vaughan Williams wrote, possible to suppress that expressive impulse, pointing to Stravinsky's neoclassical works as an example. However, it was in choral works like *Les Noces* and the *Symphony of Psalms* that he felt Stravinsky's debt to the Russian vocal tradition showed through. This was music of "the real and the great Stravinsky which will remain fresh and alive when all the clevernesses of his instrumental works have become stale from familiarity" ("The History of Nationalism in Music" [1934], in *NMOE*, 57–58).

[44] Vaughan Williams, "Some Conclusions" [1934], in *NMOE*, 68.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], in *NMOE*, 158–59.

[47] See Vaughan Williams, "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 2.

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> The greatest music is universal in its appeal, and we want our English music to be world-wide in its appeal also, and not merely parochial. But the great composers have achieved universal admiration not by sinking their personal—and therefore their national—characteristics, but by developing them. This is so probably of all the arts; for instance, no creators have been more characteristic of their own nation than Shakspeare [sic], Reynolds, Bach, Beethoven, or Wagner.[48]

When Vaughan Williams uses "parochial," he does not mean "provincial" or "unsophisticated." He refers to art most representative of a nation's culture; he considered Shakespeare's plays, for example, to be some of Britain's most parochial art.[49] Moreover, he thought distinctive, genuinely expressed parochial art stood the best chance of becoming internationally accepted, because it was unlike art made anywhere else. If artists from "every nation and every community will bring to the common fund that which they, and they only, can create,"[50] they not only enrich their own nations, but the international community as well. "The great artists are only international and universal in so far as they are also intensely national."[51]

Yet national music did not have to have "universal" appeal. Not all composers would have expressive voices capable of transcending their own nation, but this did not invalidate the sincerity of their expression.

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[48] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "English Folk Song" [1911], 103. He made a similar comment in *English Folk-Songs* (1912): "I do not wish to advocate a narrow parochialism in music. A composer's style must be ultimately personal, but an individual is a member of a nation, and the greatest and most widely known artistes [sic] have been the most strongly national. Bach, Shakespeare, Verdi, Reynolds, Whitman—their appeal may be cosmopolitan, but the origin of their inspiration is national" (*English Folk-Songs*, 15).

[49] "Was anyone ever more local, or even parochial, than Shakespeare? Even when he follows the fashion and gives his characters Italian names they betray their origin at once by their language and their sentiments" (Vaughan Williams, "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 2).

[50] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Elizabethan Music and the Modern World," in *Monthly Musical Record* 63, no. 752 (December 1933): 217. See also "Nationalism and Internationalism" [1942], 155.

[51] Ibid. See also Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Introduction," in Henry Hadow, *English Music*, The English Heritage Series, ed. Viscount Lee of Fareham and J. C. Squire (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), xii.

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> Every composer cannot expect to have a world-wide message, but he may reasonably expect to have a special message [i.e., a certain appeal] for his own people and many young composers make the mistake of imagining they can be universal without at first having been local.[52]

Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, Vaughan Williams believed that composers could not achieve "universal" appeal without first appealing domestically. Local audiences, in his mind, were an important measure of expressive sincerity. "Some music may appeal only in its immediate surroundings; some may be national in its influence and some may transcend these bounds and be world-wide in its acceptance. But we may be quite sure that the composer who tries to be cosmopolitan from the outset will fail, not only with the world at large, but with his own people as well."[53]

What stands out in these statements about national music is the theme of artistic sincerity. Composers would succeed if they were honest with themselves and their audiences, and could express their artistic impulses consistently and cogently. These goals seem to have little to do with issues of nation, yet Vaughan Williams believed that contact with the culture and customs of one's nation would aid their development. It should also be noted that these points comprise a system of beliefs, not a litmus test for reception. One wonders if they were simply meant as guides for young musicians, or if they were relevant for composers with fully formed styles, including Vaughan Williams himself. His conception of national music had many shades—alternately polemical, persuasive, playful, and pedantic, depending on the time and place—but ultimately encouraged individual expression, stylistic variety, and cultural independence. Like any

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[52] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music Be National?" [1934], in *NMOE*, 2.

[53] Ibid. He restated this point later in the essay, stating that if composers served up "at second-hand the externals of the music of other nations, they must not be surprised if audiences prefer the real Brahms, the real Wagner, the real Debussy, or the real Stravinsky to their pale reflections" (ibid., 9); see also U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 243.

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great artist, he was no dogmatist. As he put it in his "Musical Autobiography" (1950), "there are no canons of art except that contained in the well-worn tag, 'To thine own self be true.'"[54] In the end, that truth comes out most clearly not in his essays, but his music.

The problem of reception

Vaughan Williams's reception, like his writing, raises problems. Because of his position as one of the pre-eminent figures in English music, Vaughan Williams's personal style—perhaps inevitably—became conflated with a popular perception of it as a national voice, transforming him from English composer into a composer of "English music." The pervasive public image of the composer and his music is one of quintessential "Englishness," and has been consistently so since the First World War.[55]

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[54] Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 183.

[55] Because Vaughan Williams lived so long and was so prolific, the amount of material written about him—including reviews, analyses, essays, books, and other monographs—is enormous. The following is not intended as an exhaustive listing of all references attributing aspects of Englishness to the composer or his music, but should serve rather as an introduction to the type of commentary that played such a powerful role in shaping his public reputation. It is worth noting that most of the writers listed here (and in general) cast Vaughan Williams's English or folk-song identification positively: Gerald Abraham, "Sir John in Love," *Musical Standard* 36, no. 595 (12 July 1930): 11–12; Anon., "A Musician's Birthday," *Times* (London), 12 October 1942, 5; Anon, "The King's Birthday Honours," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 3 June 1935, 6; Anon., "Loss—And Challenge," *Music and Musicians* 7, no. 2 (October 1958): 7; Anon., "Obituary: Dr. R. Vaughan Williams," *Times* (London), 27 August 1958, 10; Eric Blom, "Polar Expedition," *Observer*, 18 January 1953, 11; Richard Capell, "A Creative Composer," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 11 October 1947, 2; Richard Capell, "An Eightieth Birthday Salutation," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 11 October 1952, 8; Neville Cardus, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," in *Talking of Music* (London: Collins, 1957) 83–87; H. C. Colles, "The Music of Vaughan-Williams," *Chesterian* 21 (February 1922), 129–34; Gerald Cumberland, *Set Down in Malice* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1919), 255ff.; A. E. F. Dickinson, "The Vaughan Williams Tradition," *Monthly Musical Record* 69, no. 809 (September 1939): 203–7; Frederick Dorian, "Current Chronicle: Pittsburgh," *Musical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (July 1953): 432–35; E. M. G., "The Orchestral Symphonies of Vaughan Williams," *Midland Musician* 1, no. 1 (January 1926): 32–34; Rupert Erlebach, "Vaughan Williams and His Three Symphonies," *Monthly Musical Record* 52, no. 118 (June 1922): 127–28 and 52, no. 119 (July 1922): 151; Edwin Evans, "English Song and 'On Wenlock Edge,'" *Musical Times* 59, no. 904 (June 1918): 247–49; Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1950), 49–76; A. H. Fox-Strangways, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," in *Music and Letters* 1, no. 2 (March 1920): 78–86; Scott Goddard, "Ralph Vaughan Williams, O. M.," in *British Music of Our Time*, 2d ed., ed. A. L. Bacharach (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), 81–96; Donald Grout and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 689–91; Leigh Henry, "London Letter,"

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This image is reinforced even by authors who address Vaughan Williams's non-English influences or practices: his periods of study with Bruch and Ravel, for instance, or the general avoidance of extended folk-song quotations in his works. Occasionally, particularly in older writings, foreign influences are dismissed as minor or inconsequential, or are presented as foils to more "English" traits readers already associate with Vaughan Williams.[56]

Another problem lies in writing intended for popular consumption, such as newspaper and magazine reviews, liner notes for recordings, or radio and television broadcasts. First-night reviews and feature articles from a composer's lifetime can provide insight into contemporary critical and cultural perspectives, but their lack of concern for the totality of a composer's contribution limits their scope. Moreover,

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Chesterian 21 (February 1922): 147; Peter Heyworth, "V. W.'s Eighth," *Observer* (6 May 1956), 14; Frank Howes, "Birthday Greeting to Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 28, no. 717 (8 October 1942), 477; Frank Howes, "Vaughan Williams's Symphonies," *Times* (London), 19 May 1944, 6; Michael Kennedy, "The Ninth Symphony," *Hallé* no. 107 (October 1958): 3–4; William Kimmel, "Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words," *Music and Letters* 19, no. 2 (April 1938), 132–42; Stalkey Leeds, "Ten Living British Composers," *Opera* 1, no. 3 (March 1923), 14; Ernest Newman, "An English and Universal Music," *New York Times Magazine* (12 October 1952), 20, 28; Charles O'Connell, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," in *The Victor Book of Symphonies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 528-41; Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams and the Pastoral Symphony," *Musical Times* 90, no. 1281 (November 1949): 404; Russell Palmer, *British Music* (London: Skelton, Robinson, 1946), 239-41; David Proctor, *Music of the Sea* (London: HMSO, 1992), 126; Henry Raynor, "The Progress of a Musical Pilgrim," *Monthly Musical Record* 83, no. 948 (July–August 1953), 151–56; C. B. Rees and Ralph Hill, "Vaughan Williams: The Man, His Music," *Radio Times* (26 January 1945), 5; Evan Senior, "The New V.W. Symphony," *Music and Musicians* 6, no 9 (May 1958): 30; Norman Suckling, "The Impact of Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 38, no. 976 (9 October 1947), 648; Oscar Thompson, "Vaughan Williams Proffers a Test for Nationalists," *Musical America* (17 June 1922): 4; Donald Tovey, "Vaughan Williams: LIX—Pastoral Symphony," in *Essays in Musical Analysis*, 6 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 2: 129–33; Francis Toye, "Studies in English Music—VI: Vaughan Williams and the Folk-Music Movement," *Listener* 5, no. 128 (24 June 1931), 1057; Glenn Watkins, *Soundings* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 424–27.

[56] For examples of this phenomenon, see Neville Cardus, "Vaughan Williams—'His Music Will Not Suffer Brief Life,'" *Musical America* 78, no. 10 (September 1958): 10, 32; Martin Cooper, "Music's English Genius," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 27 August 1958, 6; Edward Dent, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," *Musical Times* 93, no.1316 (October 1952): 443–44; Hubert Foss, "The Style of Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 48, no. 1232 (9 October 1952), 612; F. G., "Obituary: A Composer in a Great 'English Tradition,'" *Manchester Guardian*, 27 August 1958, 3; Robin Hawthorne, "A Note on the Music of Vaughan Williams," *Music Review* 9, no. 4 (November 1948): 269–74; William Kimmel, "Vaughan Williams's Melodic Style," *Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (October 1941), 491–99; and Ernest Newman, "An English and Universal Music," 20, 28.

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restrictions of space or time in print and broadcast media favor simplification and brevity over nuance and depth. The desire to make connections across a hugely complex cultural landscape can enable a small amount of selective (and often simplistic) commentary to dominate and distort the portrayal of a composer's life and career.

The relatively small specialist literature on Vaughan Williams presents different types of limitations. Before 1950, most writing about Vaughan Williams was limited to criticism, journal articles, and entries in music dictionaries or textbooks.[57] Between 1950 and 1957, however, four major studies of the composer's life and works were published (studies which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5),[58] with three more following by 1963.[59] They varied from technical discussions of harmonic theory (Dickinson) to general surveys (Day, Howes) to observations by an amateur musician (Pakenham). Most of these books covered little more than biography and musical analysis. Those that attempted to explore the composer's relationship to the nation, such as Foss's and Young's examinations of the "Englishness" of Vaughan Williams and his music, tended to be overly reductive, inaccurate, or insufficiently supported.

These early contributions to Vaughan Williams literature were dwarfed in 1964 by Ursula Vaughan Williams's *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, and

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[57] Oxford University Press, however, published three short monographs through its popular Musical Pilgrim series: A. E. F. Dickinson, *An Introduction to the Music of R. Vaughan Williams*, Musical Pilgrim, gen. ed. Arthur Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1928); Frank Howes, *The Later Works of R. Vaughan Williams*, Musical Pilgrim (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); and Howes, *The Dramatic Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Musical Pilgrim (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[58] Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1950); Percy Young, *Vaughan Williams*, Contemporary Composers (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1953); Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); and Simona Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of His Music* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1957).

[59] James Day, *Vaughan Williams*, Master Musicians Series, ed. Jack Westrup (London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1961); A. E. F. Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963); and Elliott Schwartz, *The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964).

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Michael Kennedy's *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams.* These two companion volumes, the composer's authorized biography and musical survey, are wide-ranging and accessible studies that remain indispensable resources for any scholar studying Vaughan Williams.[60] The authors' outstanding work apparently had the effect of discouraging others. Aside from Roy Douglas's *Working With Vaughan Williams* and Hugh Ottaway's *Vaughan Williams Symphonies*, both short monographs printed in 1972 for the centennial of the composer's birth, no new books on Vaughan Williams's music were published until 1989,[61] nor much else beyond a handful of theses and journal articles.

In 1996, Cambridge University Press brought out *Vaughan Williams Studies* (hereinafter: *VWS*), a landmark collection of essays edited by Alain Frogley.[62] Featuring writings by scholars such as Oliver Neighbour, Lionel Pike, and Arnold Whittall, *VWS* picked up where Kennedy and Mrs. Vaughan Williams left off and breathed new life into the field.[63] Even so, it has only been within the last few years that new approaches to Vaughan Williams's music have begun to displace long-established notions about the insularity of his idiom.

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[60] His widow had unique insight into his personality and unlimited access to his personal effects, while Kennedy, then a critic for the *Manchester Guardian*, began a correspondence with the composer in 1947 that led to one of the closest friendships of Vaughan Williams's later life. The authors made other contributions to the field as well, notably Kennedy's *Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (originally published with *WRVW*, later its own volume in 1980, revised in 1996) and Mrs. Vaughan Williams's *Heirs and Rebels* (a collection of the correspondence between RVW and Holst, jointly edited with Imogen Holst, first published in 1959) and *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Pictorial Biography* (1971).

[61] Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989).

[62] Topics included Vaughan Williams's use of Biblical texts, the implications of his folk-song collecting, his use of rhythm, and the ways in which his music created aural models of "Englishness."

[63] Its publication spawned another collection of essays (*Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, 1998), as well as several books, articles, and dissertations, the forthcoming publication of Vaughan Williams's collected correspondence by Oxford University Press, and enough general interest to warrant two conferences dedicated to the composer (in 1999 and 2003).

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Given that the composer's comments on national music and critics' depiction of his works are frequently ambiguous and subjective, they alone cannot provide an accurate picture of the complex relationship between music and nation that plays out in Vaughan Williams's music. Tracing his stylistic development alongside the personal and critical forces that shaped and circulated it will help provide a clearer understanding of them, and suggests a methodological framework for assessing the relationship between his music and the nation. Subsequent chapters will apply such an approach to pieces from all three of the composer's stylistic periods.

The national imagery and symbolism surrounding *A Sea Symphony* (1910)[64] observed several important principles necessary for musical success in England. It was a choral-orchestral work featuring texts by Walt Whitman (popular in England at the time) evoked England's maritime tradition, and received its first performance at a prestigious choral festival. However, its multi-movement form, non-Biblical text, and symphonic scope set it apart from most contemporary English choral works. The importance of these traditions and the *Sea Symphony*'s connection to them will be examined in Chapter 2.

Two of Vaughan Williams's early operas, *Hugh the Drover* (1924) and *Sir John in Love* (1929), are placed in historical settings and feature folk music; however, the presentation of folk tunes differs significantly between the two. *Hugh* is a picturesque ballad opera that generally preserves the original function and context of the tunes quoted; in *Sir John in Love*, folk tunes tend to have specific dramatic functions that may have little to do with their original use. Chapter 3 will examine Vaughan Williams's use of folk and other indigenous music in the two works—continuing the discussion of first

[64] Dates refer to year of first performance.

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period formation from Chapter 2 while also considering his middle period—showing how his application of such music within operatic conventions evolved.

While many composers on the Continent embraced modernist devices and styles after the Great War, British composers favored less experimental styles that were still relevant for the post-war musical world. Chapter 4 will examine two works that illustrate Vaughan Williams's responses to this world—the *Mass in G Minor* (1921) and the oratorio *Sancta Civitas* (1926)—and their connection to national music.

Vaughan Williams's cantata *Hodie* (1954) and his Eighth Symphony (1956) have few (if any) overtly national overtones, a fact rarely acknowledged by music critics at the time, who tended to be caught up in the sway of Vaughan Williams's reputation as England's foremost musical representative. Chapter 5 will examine Vaughan Williams's post-World War Two reputation as a quintessentially "English" composer, while showing how *Hodie* and Symphony No. 8 extend his interwar musical language without relying on evocations of Englishness for their expressive effect.

The dissertation will conclude with an assessment of "national music" in relation to Vaughan Williams's art. Again, Vaughan Williams's music is no more independent of the larger western European musical tradition than that of his predecessors and contemporaries, yet he—as well as those involved in English musical and critical circles—had important personal and professional stakes in winning recognition for English music and musicians. Examining these multiple perspectives on the relationship between national music and personal expression should produce a better understanding of Vaughan Williams's style, musical development, and artistic importance.

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CHAPTER 2

THE USE OF NATIONAL IMAGERY IN *A SEA SYMPHONY*

When Vaughan Williams stepped onto the conductor's podium at the Leeds Musical Festival to lead the world premiere of *A Sea Symphony* on 12 October 1910, he could hardly have anticipated the acclaim that would greet him later that day, his thirty-eighth birthday. The *Sea Symphony*, at that time the largest work (both in length and performing forces) that he had written, took an unusually long time to compose: he began outlining it in 1903, completed the piano-vocal sketch in 1907, and revised and scored the work during 1908 and 1909.[1] A choral symphony, set for baritone and soprano soloists, mixed choir, and orchestra, *A Sea Symphony* features passages from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a popular source for musical texts among English composers.[2] Critics praised the symphony following its premiere,[3] many agreeing with Samuel Langford's assessment of it in the *Manchester Guardian* as "the finest piece of sea music that we, a

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[1] A summary of Vaughan Williams's progress on and revisions of the work may be found in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 48–53; see also Ralph Vaughan Williams to Herbert Thompson, summer 1910, quoted in Lewis Foreman, ed., *From Parry to Britten: British Music in Letters 1900–1945* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1987), 42.

[2] See Bella Landauer, *Leaves of Music by Walt Whitman* (privately printed, 1937), for a list of Whitman's poems set to music by English composers.

[3] See "The Leeds Musical Festival," *Leeds Mercury*, 13 October 1910, 7; "Leeds Festival," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 14 October 1910, 8; J. A. Fuller-Maitland, "Leeds Musical Festival," *Times* (London), 13 October 1910, 12, and "Leeds Musical Festival," *Times* (London), 14 October 1910, 10; "The Leeds Festival," *Musical Times* 51 (November 1910): 720; and Kennedy, *WRVW*, 98-9.

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seafaring people above everything, possess." Langford added that its debut had definitely placed "a new figure in the first rank of our English composers."[4] Commentators quibbled with minor aspects of the work, but all agreed that its scope and expressive depth were matched by few of Vaughan Williams's contemporaries. Predictions of a long life for the work proved accurate. It was frequently performed throughout Vaughan Williams's lifetime, and remains a familiar presence in choral festivals today.

Aside from its artistic merits, part of the reason for the symphony's continued popularity (particularly in Britain) may lie in its association with other traditions closely associated with English culture. It was a natural candidate for performance at England's many choral festivals, venerable institutions that specialized in performing choral-orchestral works. The poetry of Walt Whitman was fashionable (if controversial) in England, where it enjoyed a vogue throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. The sea had been a popular subject among English composers since the mid-nineteenth century,[5] and maritime issues held a prominent place in public discourse in 1910 since, for much of the previous decade, Britain and Germany had been competing for European naval supremacy. With so much of Britain's history, commerce, and identity bound up with the sea, maintaining control of it was both a military goal and a cultural imperative: national power and pride were both at stake.

Yet when Vaughan Williams began composing the *Sea Symphony* in 1903, he did not (and could not) know when he would finish, how the work might be received, or

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[4] Samuel Langford, "Dr. Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony*," *Manchester Guardian* (13 October 1910), 9.

[5] Arthur Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) and *Pirates of Penzance* (1879), Stanford's *The Revenge* (1886), *Songs of the Sea* (1904), and *Songs of the Fleet* (1910), Edward Elgar's *Sea Pictures* (1899), Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* (1905), Frederick Delius's *Sea-Drift* (1906), Granville Bantock's *Sea Wanderers* (1906), and Ethyl Smyth's *The Wreckers* (1906/1909) are only a few notable English sea pieces written before *A Sea Symphony*.

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indeed, whether it would be performed. It was his good fortune that *A Sea Symphony*, in its genre, subject, and performance setting, happened to be perfectly suited to its debut. At the time Vaughan Williams undertook the composition of the *Sea Symphony*, he was still searching for the means to express himself, a process that he felt required a split from the cultural conventions of the grand European musical tradition which, up to that point, had formed an important part of his musical background.[6] Yet many elements of the *Sea Symphony*—particularly its form and musical language—are indebted to those very same conventions, particularly those linked to the great central European symphonic tradition stretching from Beethoven to Mahler. In *A Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams attempted to contribute at the same creative level and within the same tradition as his Continental predecessors and contemporaries, while simultaneously making the work stand out as something distinctively English and personal. This chapter will focus on how Vaughan Williams adapted the symphonic tradition to various conventions of English culture, which helped him find his artistic voice and create "national music" in the process.

Becoming national

By the time Vaughan Williams was 25, he had long been immersed in the music of German and Austrian masters.[7] Growing up at Leith Hill Place, he played piano arrangements with his siblings of pieces by Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, and Beethoven. Bach and Wagner came later, the former through his piano instructor at

[6] "In the early days of the 'Folk-song Movement' when we were all students, we felt there was something to be expressed by us Englishmen, that we had not got to the bottom of it; we saw signs of it in the works of our older composers; but we could not help feeling that foreign influences occasionally cramped them" (Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 45–46). See also ibid., 41 (reprinted in fn. 12, p. 37 of this dissertation).

[7] Vaughan Williams equated the "classical style" with the "Teutonic style;" see Vaughan Williams, "The Folk-Song Movement" [1955], in *NMOE*, 232–33.

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Rottingdean preparatory school, the latter during a visit to Munich in 1890, just before he enrolled at the RCM. His teachers were also saturated in the German classics, Parry, in his younger years, having been a devotee of Wagner's music and Stanford a lifelong champion of Brahms. Early in Vaughan Williams's course of study, Parry assigned him "more Beethoven, especially the posthumous quartets," as an antidote to the "overdose of Gounod" that had captured his pupil's interest, and also loaned him scores of *Siegfried*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and Brahms's *Ein Deutches Requiem*.[8] Before long, according to Vaughan Williams, "I had quite recovered from my Gounod fever and had become the complete prig [i.e. snob]. Bach, Beethoven (ex-officio), Brahms, and Wagner were the only composers worth considering."[9] After enrolling at Cambridge in 1892, he led a small choral society in Sunday performances of Schubert's Masses, and attended rehearsals of chamber music by Schumann, Brahms, and Schubert at the University Musical Club. When Vaughan Williams decided to study abroad for a few months in 1897, Stanford recommended Italy since "he thought I was too Teuton already."[10] Instead, he went to Berlin—in part because it was the only place outside Bayreuth where *The Ring* was performed without cuts—and studied with Max Bruch while frequenting performances at the Sing-Akademie and the Hochschule. He relished the opportunity to hear and study German music, particularly after he enrolled at the RCM, leaving little reason to think that his enthusiasm for it was feigned.

[8] Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 181–82.

[9] Ibid., 183.

[10] Ibid., 187.

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Upon returning from Berlin, however, Vaughan Williams began searching for his own creative voice—one that was sincere and, ideally, untinged by foreign accents.[11] When he began sketching the *Sea Symphony*, he was faced with a challenge beyond the placing of notes on paper: how could he rectify his admiration for the Austro-German tradition with his desire to escape its influence in his own expressive voice? Although he retained a life-long affection for the music of Teutonic composers, particularly Bach, he also claimed that only after he became involved with the English folk-song movement did he find the means to break away from foreign musical influences. This should not imply that *A Sea Symphony* conspicuously evokes folk song, but rather that folk song inspired Vaughan Williams to think about music in new ways, helping him develop his personal style. "English folk song was not a fettering, but a liberating influence; it gave us [composers] a new orientation and freed us from the Teutonic and Slavonic influences which up to then had obsessed us; and this was so whether we actually used these tunes in our work or not, and the influence has persisted."[12]

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[11] See "A School of English Music," 8.

[12] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Folk Song and the Composer," *Radio Times* 88, no. 1134 (22 June 1945), 5. He made a similar claim for folk music in 1932, allegedly finding "in its simplest form the musical idiom which we [composers] unconsciously were cultivating in ourselves, it gave a point to our imagination; far from fettering us, it freed us from foreign influences which weighed on us, which we could not get rid of, but which we felt were not pointing in the direction in which we really wanted to go. The knowledge of our folk-songs did not so much discover for us something new, but uncovered for us something which had been hidden by foreign matter" ("The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 41). Vaughan Williams's opinion is subject to query. Considering that the first modern English composers to achieve widespread international acclaim—Arthur Sullivan and Edward Elgar—had little interest in folk song, one has to question the importance folk music had for composers besides Vaughan Williams and others already among the converted. He never identified any English composer allegedly "obsessed" by foreign music, nor any piece of foreign music that had insidiously wormed its way into English musicians' consciousnesses. The closest he came was identifying Elgar, Parry, Holst, Bax, Walton, and Lambert as musicians who studied music in England, going on to add: "There are several others who thought that their own country was not good enough for them and went off in the early stages to become little Germans or little Frenchmen. Their names I will not give to you because they are unknown even to their fellow countrymen." This may be a reference to Delius, about whose music Vaughan Williams was ambivalent, but Delius's German ethnicity and emigrant status downgraded his English citizenship; moreover, he was not an "unknown" composer (Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" in *NMOE*, 11). If he did

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In fact, he seems less concerned with undue foreign influences than whether British musicians—himself included—could write music that matched that of foreign composers in sincerity and distinction.[13] English music, to his way of thinking, would only rise up from mediocrity when its composers demanded more from themselves. In retrospect, it seems probable that Vaughan Williams's pre-war writings on national music (e.g., "A School of National Music" [1902] and "Who Wants the English Composer?" [1912]) have been misconstrued as public pronouncements when in essence they were personal musings preparing him for the compositional challenges that lay ahead. Much like Wagner primed himself for composition through his theoretical essays, Vaughan Williams's articles and lectures helped him forge the independent, serious, and above all, sincere artistic identity he sought.

As Vaughan Williams began to break away from academic models, however, his personal voice began to emerge, slowly and subject to extreme self-criticism, in songs and other short works between 1900 and 1906. During this period, he also spent much of his time studying, editing, and transcribing short, tuneful, highly concentrated pieces of

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have specific music or composers in mind, the passage of time has all but erased the evidence of their presence.

[13] Even if Vaughan Williams believed that an enthrallment with German (or Slavic) music kept him from asserting his own musical personality effectively, there is little in his music that supports such a claim. Discounting student works written at the RCM and Cambridge—in which the imitation of models is expected—his early professional works do not sound like Wolf, or Strauss, or Tchaikovsky, and bear no more resemblance to Brahms or Schubert than would be expected, considering his teachers' predilection for those composers. Many, it must also be said, do not sound much like Vaughan Williams, but glimpses of the composer he was to become sometimes appear. Many of the most idiomatic elements were already in place, such as his proclivity for modes (for which Stanford criticized him in his lessons) and a fondness for melodically-dominated textures. The problem with many of Vaughan Williams's early works is not over-indebtedness to other composers' idioms, but an inability to assert his own, either because of his artistic immaturity or lack of compositional experience. For instance, in works such as the Quintet in C minor (1903) and the *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* (1901), Vaughan Williams limits himself to a relatively small amount of thematic material as he dutifully works out various compositional processes: imitation, sequential modulation, restatement of themes at different key levels, and so on. To some extent (on the page, at least), this approach results in a certain amount of monotony; one gets the sense that his compositional decisions are motivated less by a creative impulse than by a (possibly subconscious) obligation to follow learned rules of composition.

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English music (mainly hymns and folk tunes). These were firsthand examples of the expressive directness he had struggled to capture as a student, and his work with them undoubtedly influenced his own approach to composition.[14] Moreover, his study of folk songs (and other English music) provided him with the confidence and professional support he needed to find his own voice.[15]

Vaughan Williams's extensive contact with English music also made him sensitive to its place in the nation's life, and led him to look for ways to integrate his own music more closely with other aspects of English culture. The imagery *A Sea Symphony* evokes and the circumstances surrounding its composition and performance display clear connections to three important English cultural institutions of its day: the English choral festival, the poetry of Walt Whitman, and the sea. Moreover, it was initially performed under conditions that would surely have elicited associations with the English oratorio tradition. Understanding the *Sea Symphony* as "national music" requires a closer examination of these institutions and Vaughan Williams's relationship to them.

The English choral festival and choral tradition

Writing music for amateurs (e.g., solo songs, four-hand piano pieces) was the first step in building a reputation for a serious English composer in the late nineteenth century, but most composers had to balance the financial need to write such commercially popular music against their ambitions to write for professionals. Opportunities for untested composers to receive professional performances were generally limited to venues outside

[14] This stands out in *A Sea Symphony* through the many subsections of the first and fourth movements that begin with brief melodies as a point of departure for further development.

[15] He claimed to have received very little of either as a student; see Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 187.

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London. "No one *made* his name at the Crystal Palace, Philharmonic, St. James's Hall, or Hallé concerts: it was there that established reputations were maintained or advanced. To attract attention, to gain a hearing from all the critics, with most of the leading lights of English musical life in the audience, it was necessary to have a work performed at one of the Leeds, Birmingham, Sheffield, or Three Choirs Festivals."[16]

Choral festivals had played an important role in English musical life from the early eighteenth century. Many were church-sponsored charitable fundraisers (such as the Three Choirs Festival of Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester) which, along with their emphasis on performing cantatas, oratorios, and other sacred works, provided an unimpeachable moral foundation. Others were civic-sponsored (such as those at Leeds and Birmingham) or privately organized (such as those in Cheltenham and Hovingham),[17] but all provided opportunities for large numbers of people to make music together. Many were important annual or triennial events, attracting patrons and performers from all over Britain. The largest, such as the Three Choirs, Leeds, and Birmingham Festivals, were also reviewed in the London press.

Works with religious subjects dominated the festivals. Handel's oratorios (particularly *Messiah*) reigned supreme well into the nineteenth century, but Mendelssohn's *Elijah* augmented the annual performances of *Messiah* in most venues after 1847. Other well-known works also enjoyed frequent performances over the years—Spohr's *Last Judgment*, Haydn's *Creation*, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* (as

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[16] Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Clarendon Press, 1999), 53.

[17] For more on the general characteristics of choral festivals and their venues, see Brian Pritchard, "The Musical Festival and the Choral Society in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social History," 2 vols., Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1968, 2: 721–845.

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"Service in D")—as stewards of the choral festivals generally favored conservative programming choices, often for financial reasons. Performances of novelties were often sparsely attended and lost money, but recent works by popular Continental composers (such as Dvorák, Verdi, and Gounod) could be exceptions to this rule.[18]

In addition to conducting and performing his own works at festivals, Vaughan Williams also served as conductor and adjudicator at the Leith Hill Festival (a non-competitive event for amateurs founded by his sister) from its founding in 1905 until 1953, and conducted a Bach passion annually at Dorking Town Hall for nearly two decades. He loved the English choral tradition, and felt a duty to uphold it. "Parry once said to me, 'Write choral music as befits an Englishman and a democrat.' We pupils of Parry have, if we have been wise, inherited from Parry the great English choral tradition which Tallis passed on to Byrd, Byrd to Gibbons, Gibbons to Purcell, Purcell to Batishill and Greene, and they in their turn through the Wesleys to Parry. He has passed on the torch to us and it is our duty to keep it alight."[19]

Choral festivals gave English composers their best chance of preserving that flame. Some festivals, such as the Three Choirs, gave English composers opportunities to have their works performed at their own expense; under any circumstances, however, the prestige of getting a performance was still great. Between 1869 and 1895, 51 works by 25 British composers were performed at the Three Choirs Festival,[20] though rarely more than

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[18] See Watkins Shaw, *The Three Choirs Festival* (Worcester: Ebenezer Baylis & Son Ltd., 1954), 66.

[19] Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 182. Handel's absence from this list reflects Vaughan Williams's conception of Handel's music as belonging to a German tradition, despite the popularity of the Handelian oratorio among English musicians for over a century. See Vaughan Williams, "Should Music Be National?" in *NMOE*, 5; and "A Minim's Rest," in *NMOE*, 166–67.

[20] See Anthony Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festival* (Wolfeboro Falls, N.H.: Alan Sutton Publishing Inc., 1992), 98–100 for new works by English composers performed from 1869 to 1895.

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once. Many nineteenth-century English composers fashioned their choral-orchestral works after Handel and Mendelssohn; as the twentieth century dawned, however, "Elgar's works began to appear with their gradual abandonment of the conventional clear-cut division into recitative, aria, and chorus, and the full adoption of the Wagnerian unifying device of the 'leading motif,'" and they quickly assumed a prominent place in festival programs.[21] Despite a disastrous premiere at the Birmingham Festival of 1900, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* soon secured a level of popularity among English audiences that was challenged only by *Messiah* or *Elijah.*

While Elgar's constantly shifting colors, use of leitmotifs, and passionate emotional displays recall passages in Wagner, he assimilated the German composer's techniques without imitating his style, resulting in a distinctive voice that contained "more of the Wagnerian manner than its matter."[22] Solos and choruses freely intermingle, and the continuous forward flow of the music disguises formal divisions between sections. He was also particularly sensitive to the orchestra, raising it from simple accompaniment to a position of structural and dramatic prominence. As one scholar put it, "the triumph of *Gerontius* lies in how surely Elgar took what he wanted from his own past and from his predecessors to form a work conditioned by his country's festival demands."[23] Elgar's example was not lost on the admiring Vaughan Williams, who (with Holst) tried without success in 1900 to study orchestration with him. Undeterred, Vaughan Williams decided that if "Elgar would not teach me personally he could not

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[21] Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music, 1844–1944,* 2 vols. (London: Novello and Co. Ltd. and Oxford University Press, 1947), 1: 8.

[22] Nigel Burton, "Oratorios and Cantatas," in *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800–1914,* ed. Nicholas Temperley, The Athlone History of Music in Britain, gen. ed. Ian Spink (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 230.

[23] Diana McVeagh, "Elgar, Edward," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 20 vols., gen. ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 6: 122.

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help teaching me through his music. I spent several hours at the British Museum studying the full scores of the [Enigma] Variations and *Gerontius*. The results are obvious in the opening pages of the finale of my Sea Symphony[.]"[24]

The results, in fact, are clear throughout the piece. Like *The Dream of Gerontius*, the *Sea Symphony*'s length, performing forces, and accessible musical language made it an ideal candidate for festival performance. Vaughan Williams contributed to "the great English choral tradition" by creating distinctive music free from clichés and worthy of its performers and audience by recasting the oratorio within the framework of the late romantic symphony. The four movements of *A Sea Symphony* generally adhere to the scale and structure of symphonic form, an unusual format for English choral-orchestral works at the turn of the century.[25] The first movement is a sectional form containing several unifying motives that provide a strong sense of continuity throughout, preserving many of the tensions inherent in sonata form if not the actual shape.[26] The forms of the other movements are more straightforward: the second movement is a slow ternary, the third a scherzo, and the finale a sprawling, rondo-like movement with an extended introduction and coda.[27] Voices and orchestra are carefully balanced to favor ensemble

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[24] Vaughan Williams, "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 188. VW said the finale "cribbed" from "Thou art calling me" in Part 1 of *Gerontius* ("What Have We Learnt From Elgar?" in *NMOE*, 252–53).

[25] Vaughan Williams justified his use of the term "symphony" to critic Herbert Thompson; see Foreman, *From Parry to Britten*, 42.

[26] See Ottaway, *Symphonies*, 16. The opening fanfare and orchestral flourish, for instance, return at the beginning of what could be considered the "development" of the movement, and the soprano solo that opens this section (see Example 2-4) is reminiscent of the phrase "Today a rude brief recitative" that opens the exposition proper. However, the main choral theme from the introduction is deferred for another 127 measures, setting it up as a truncated recapitulation. Ottaway analyzes the first movement as a modified sonata form, though some analysts consider it to be simply ternary form with an introduction and coda. Neither analysis, however, sufficiently accounts for the movement's non-repetitive theme groups and harmonic layout.

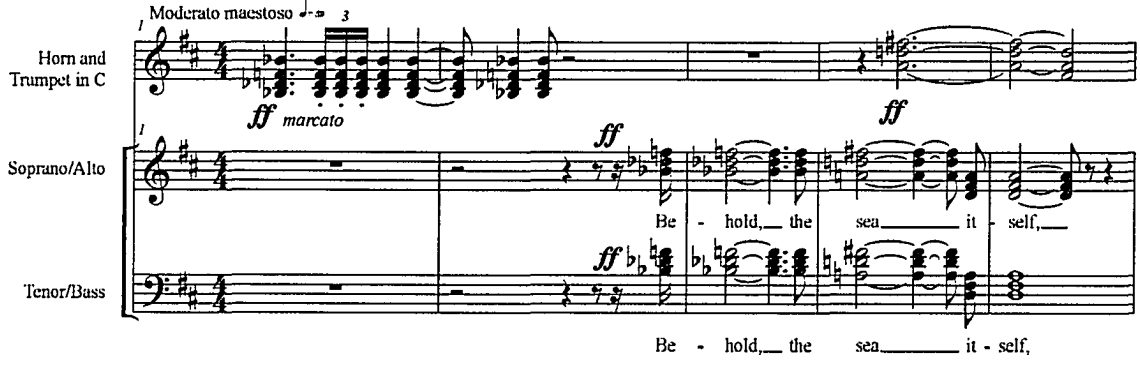
[27] Vaughan Williams had plans for a fifth movement ("The Steersman"), intended to fall between the Scherzo and Finale, but abandoned it sometime after 1906.

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depth over brilliant virtuosity. The expansive dimensions of *A Sea Symphony* allow ample time for Whitman's equally expansive thoughts to emerge; a performance lasts a little more than an hour, the finale accounting for almost half that time. Such a layout recalls the works of other late Romantic symphonists (in compositional approach, if not necessarily in musical language), rather than Vaughan Williams's English contemporaries (with the possible exception of Elgar, whose Symphony No. 1 had its premiere two years before the *Sea Symphony*).

Although Vaughan Williams acknowledged the debt the *Sea Symphony* owed to Elgar, its language and style were very much his own. The *Sea Symphony*'s creation spanned a period during which Vaughan Williams collected folk songs, edited hymns, composed in small forms, and studied with Ravel. During that time, Vaughan Williams synthesized all of these experiences into a coherent whole, forging a musical language that would sustain him for the rest of his career. For example, the sudden modulation by a third following the chorus's initial entrance (Example 2-1), a common trait of French impressionist music, went on to become one of Vaughan Williams's most characteristic musical devices.[28]

Example 2-1: ***A Sea Symphony*, I**
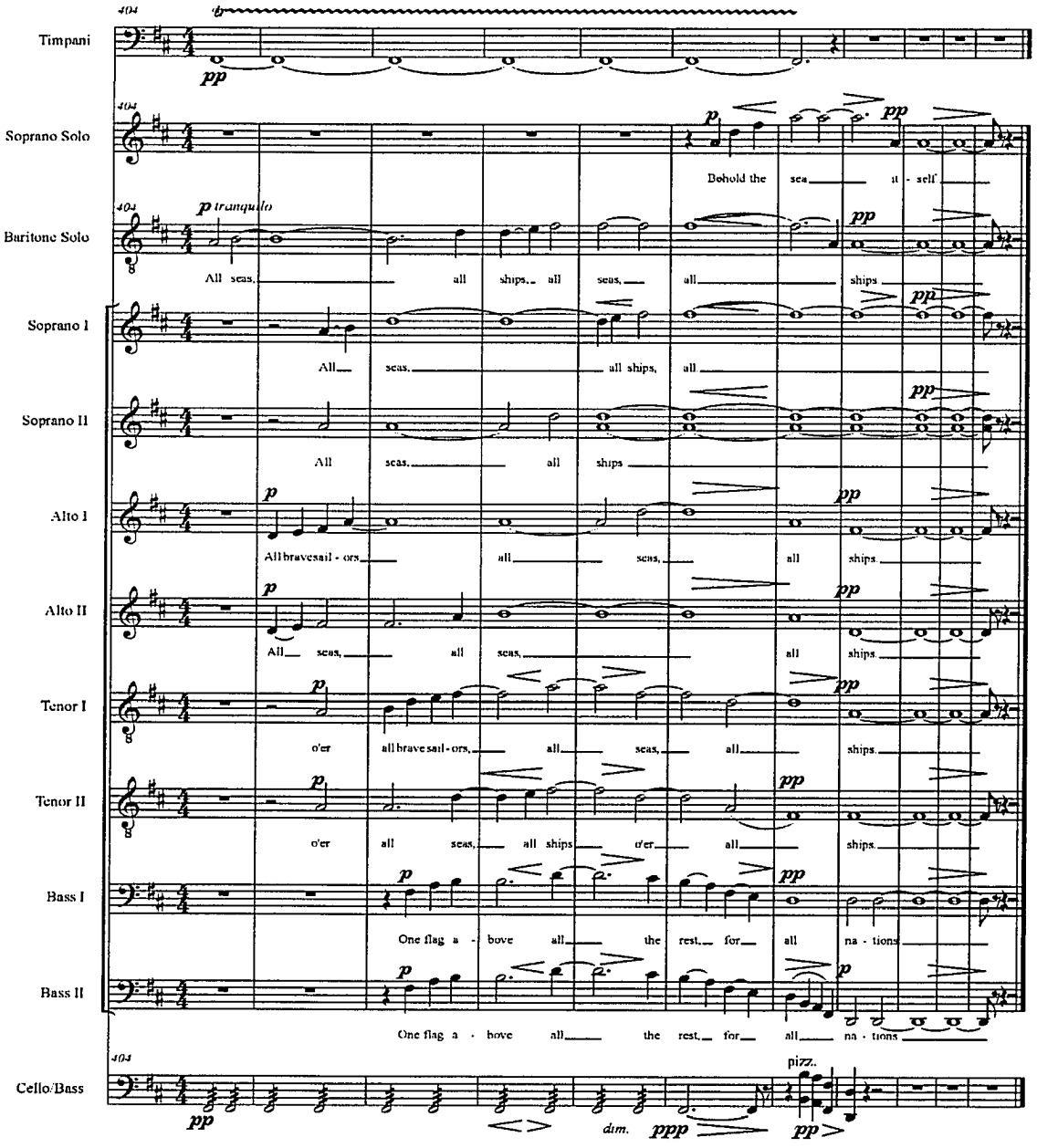


[28] See also the beginning of the *Sea Symphony*'s second movement, as well as the opening of *Sinfonia Antartica*, *Sancta Civitas*, the *Mass in G Minor*, and the first movement of the Piano Concerto.

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Three of the four movements feature hushed endings marked *niente* ("nothing"), a diminuendo approaching silence characteristic of Vaughan Williams's symphonic works. Such endings also frequently feature ostinato figures alternating between two chords or a final, rising melody, as at the end of the first movement (Example 2-2).[29]

Example 2-2: *A Sea Symphony*, I

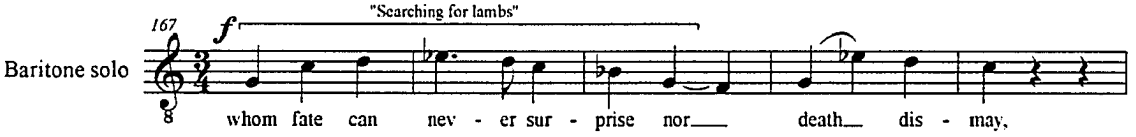


[29] Notable here is the resemblance between the ending of this movement and the close of the *Serenade to Music* (1938).
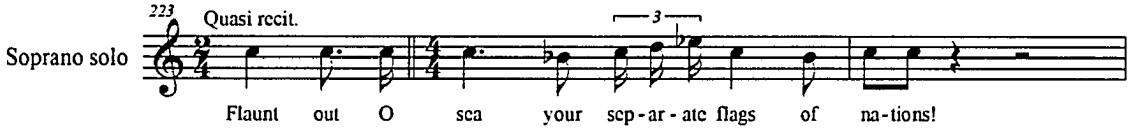
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Other devices that later became hallmarks of the Vaughan Williams style were prominently displayed in *A Sea Symphony*, such as the use of the opening phrase (either in full or in part) from the folk song "Searching for lambs" (Example 2-3).[30] Its flattened seventh is characteristic of English folk songs; Vaughan Williams's use of it (Example 2-4)[31] reflects his thorough assimilation of the English folk style into his own.

Example 2-3: ***A Sea Symphony*****, I**



Example 2-4: ***A Sea Symphony*****, I**



The work also features homorhythmic strings spaced over multiple octaves, recalling the purely melodic designs of folk songs (Example 2-5),[32] and a steady pizzicato bass line under an extended melody (Example 2-6).[33] It took some time for these traits to be recognized as integral to Vaughan Williams's expressive idiom. In a review of *A Sea Symphony* from 1938, Ernest Newman said that he and other critics "used to prick up our ears a little suspiciously, in the old days, at what seemed to be Vaughan Williams's mannerisms . . . to-day, with thirty more years of his music to help us, we see these less as mannerisms than as the Vaughan Williams manner."[34]

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[30] As in the first and second movements of *A London Symphony*, the opening of *In the Fen Country*, as well as *Hugh the Drover*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, the *Mass in G Minor*, and many other works; see also Payne, "Vaughan Williams and Folk Song," 108–11.

[31] As in the overture to *The Wasps*, *A London Symphony*, the *Songs of Travel*, Symphony No. 5, the *Pastoral Symphony*, the *Mass in G Minor*, and countless others.

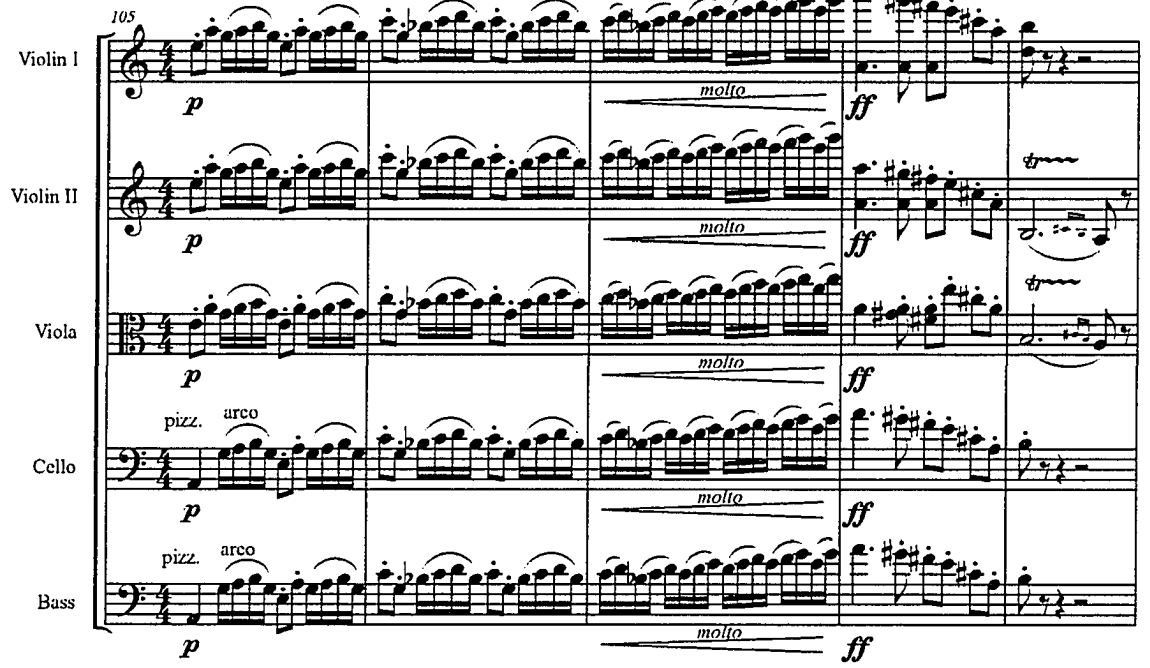
[32] As in the second movement of *A London Symphony*, the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, the *Tallis Fantasia*, the finale of Symphony No. 9, and the Epilogue from *Hodie*.

[33] As in the first movement of Symphony No. 6, the Minuet from the First String Quartet, "Oh When I Was in Love With You" from *On Wenlock Edge*, the "Dirge for Two Veterans" from *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and "The March of the Three Kings" from *Hodie*.
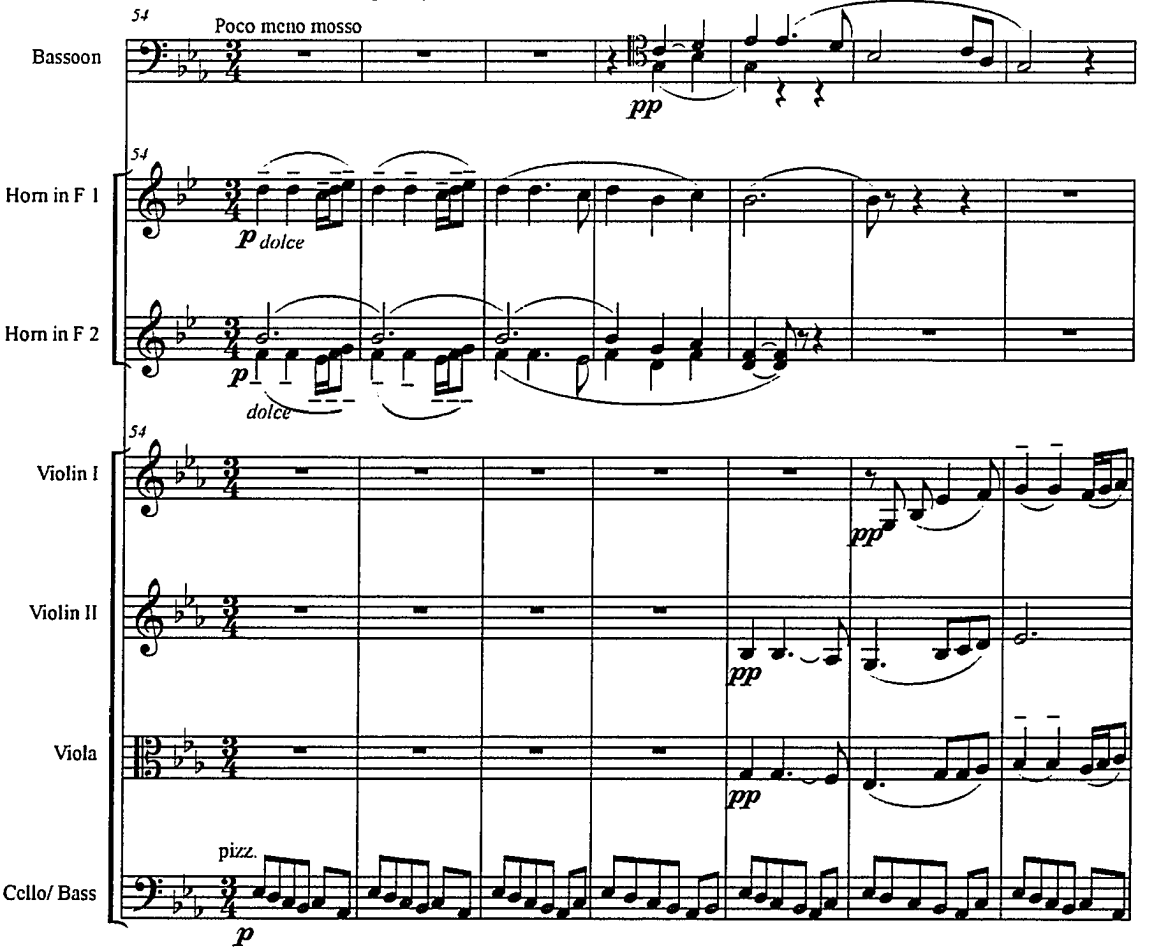
[34] Ernest Newman, "The World of Music," *Sunday Times* (London), 6 February 1938.

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Example 2-5: *A Sea Symphony*, I



Example 2-6: *A Sea Symphony*, II



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In the *Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams successfully exploited the venue of the choral festival and the conventions of the English choral tradition, like Elgar did, to make unfamiliar music more accessible by placing it within familiar surroundings.

The appeal of Walt Whitman

To characterize the poetry of Walt Whitman as an English cultural institution may seem incongruous, considering the allusions to American geography and conventions that permeate it. One British critic, however, believed that the distinctively American localities in Whitman's poetry were simply convenient reference points for a larger allegory just as applicable to late Victorian Britain as to the United States:

> The universal of which "these States" were the particular in Whitman's poetry is Democracy; and all over the world democrats . . . that is, those who believe that a self-governing society of free and responsible individuals offers the only way of progress towards the Good—have had no difficulty in regarding Whitman's America as the city of their own soul. It is for them a symbol of the ideal, of the same order as Blake's Albion and Jerusalem; and Whitman...is behaving as Shakespeare's poet, "who gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."[35]

Whitman himself was grateful for the enthusiastic British responses to *Leaves of Grass*: "Those blessed gales from the British Isles probably (certainly) saved me. . . . That emotional, audacious, open-handed, friendly-mouthed, just-opportune English action, I say, plucked me like a brand from the burning, and gave me life again. . . . I do not forget it, and I shall never forget it."[36]

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[35] J. Middleton Murry, "Walt Whitman: Prophet of Democracy," in *Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After*, ed. Milton Hindus (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1955), 125.

[36] Floyd Stovall, ed., *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2: 699–700; quoted in M. Wynn Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles," in *Walt Whitman and the World*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 11.

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Initial British responses to his poetry, however, were less enthusiastic than those of later years. When the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in England in 1856, members of the British literary establishment were just as shocked by the poems as their transatlantic counterparts. Not only the egalitarian and sexually frank subject matter scandalized conservative English readers and critics—although that was certainly the most prominent objection—but their means of organization as well. The freedom and unpredictability of Whitman's sprung rhythms contrasted with the regular metrical patterns favored by Victorian poets, suggesting a crudeness that some critics found not just aesthetically objectionable, but morally so.[37] As the century wore on, however, English critical attitudes softened, not least because an expurgated version of *Leaves of Grass*, edited by William Rossetti (1860), eliminated what he believed to be some of the "deforming crudities" present in Whitman's poems, from "father-stuff" and "onanist" to "prostitute" and "womb."[38] One suspects that snobbery played a part in adverse criticism of Whitman. An American laborer lacking formal education or academic credentials, apparently more at ease among nature and the common man than in parlors with respectable middle-class citizens, was unlikely to elicit a warm response from the more conservative segments of Victorian society.

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[37] See Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles," 21–23, for a review (1856) by an anonymous writer who vehemently objected to Whitman's poetry on both counts; also Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1934), 1–9.

[38] Byron Adams, "'No Armpits, Please, We're British:' Whitman and English Music, 1884–1936," in *Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood*, ed. Lawrence Kramer, Border Crossings Series, no. 10, ed. Daniel Albright (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 26. Although Rossetti objected to calling explicit passages "immoralities," and sympathized with Whitman's perspective on the relationship between body and soul, he felt that the British public would not share that sympathy. See Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles," 25–27, for an extended excerpt of Rossetti's introduction to the 1868 expurgated edition. For an account of Rossetti's dealings with Whitman on this edition, see Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, 22–33.

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Leaves of Grass struck its most sympathetic chord among the leftist and socially progressive subcultures of late Victorian and early Edwardian England, to which Vaughan Williams belonged, and was admired by intellectuals and working class citizens alike.[39] Left-leaning readers saw Whitman "as the heir to a distinguished British and European tradition of libertarianism"[40] unconstrained by the stifling class mores of English society; his vigorous, expansive mode of expression was all-inclusive and wide-ranging in its subject matter. John Addington Symonds identified four major themes in Whitman's poetry: "First come [sic] religion or the concept of the universe; then personality or sense of self and sex; then love, diverging into amative and comradely emotions; then democracy, or the theory of human equality and brotherhood."[41] Regardless of the subtexts individual Victorian commentators found most resonant, nearly all stressed "the liberal, democratic, and (in both Spenserian and Darwinian terms) 'evolutionary' aspects of Whitman's message."[42]

Whitman's poems were also popular among English composers.[43] Their length and metrical unpredictability suggested novel rhythmic effects when set to music, a trait shared by the Authorized Version of the Bible. Anthony Burgess suggested that since "Whitman, like the Bible, seemed to stand on the margin of art, composers saw that they

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[39] More generally, intellectuals gravitated toward *Leaves of Grass* from its initial publication in 1856, but was only widely popularized among workers after 1885, particularly among those with socialist inclinations. See Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles, 12–13.

[40] Ibid., 11.

[41] John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman: A Study* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893), 34.

[42] Adams, "No Armpits," 27.

[43] Stanford, Delius, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Cyril Scott, and Charles Wood all made settings of Whitman's verses before the *Sea Symphony*'s premiere, while Holst, Hamilton Harty, Frank Bridge, Rutland Boughton, Arthur Bliss, and many others did so in later years.

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could add some art to him."[44] Less prosaically, the stylized, almost ceremonial formality of both Biblical and Whitmanesque verse lent itself to musical settings in ways that metrically regular poetry did not.

Vaughan Williams made several settings of Whitman's verse; near the end of his life, he told Michael Kennedy that he was glad he "never got over" the American poet.[45] His first Whitman settings were two vocal duets in 1904 using texts from *The Last Invocation* and *Sea-Drift*,[46] while his first choral setting was of "Darest Thou Now O Soul," retitled *Toward the Unknown Region* and performed at the Leeds Festival of 1907. Later in life, he used Whitman's texts in a song cycle (1925) and in the cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936). *A Sea Symphony* features Vaughan Williams' most extensive citation of Whitman. The first movement ("A Song for All Seas, All Ships") sets passages from the poem of the same name and from "Song of the Exposition." The second movement ("On the Beach at Night Alone") draws lines from the eponymous poem, the third ("The Waves") uses texts from "After the Sea-Ship," and the finale ("The Explorers") excerpts sections from "A Passage to India." [47]

Vaughan Williams's treatment of Whitman's poetry was typical of his approach to text setting. No text, no matter how famous, accomplished, or respected it might be, was exempt from his editorial prerogative to cut or rearrange. This practice occasionally irritated contemporary authors, notably A. E. Housman. Housman objected to Vaughan Williams's decision to cut a stanza from "Is my team ploughing," one of the poems from

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[44] Anthony Burgess, *Urgent Copy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 48-49; quoted in Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles," 64.

[45] Kennedy, *WRVW*, 100.

[46] Vaughan Williams only set a small portion of the latter poem, which he retitled "The Love-song of the Birds."

[47] See Appendix 1 for the edited texts used in each movement.

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A Shropshire Lad included in the song-cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. When asked on behalf of Housman's biographer if he would mind the reprinting of the author's angry opinion about "Is my team ploughing," Vaughan Williams replied: "You may print anything you like. If the biographer consents I think I ought to be allowed my say, which is that the composer has a perfect right artistically to set any portion of a poem he chooses provided he does not actually alter the sense."[48] The composer harbored no guilt over his decision to edit texts any way he saw fit, even if it *did* end up altering the writer's original intent. In the case of *A Sea Symphony*, the portions of the poems he selected reveal a great deal about what he found important in Whitman's poetry.

As an agnostic liberal who respected the ethical and moral teachings of Christianity,[49] Vaughan Williams was most attracted to Whitman's poems that celebrated democracy, brotherhood, and spiritual transcendence. Whitman thought with the same mind about subjects important to Vaughan Williams, and created in poetry the type of message the composer hoped to convey in music. Whitman was also able to throw off centuries of literary models to create his own language, an example surely not lost on the composer. A critique of Whitman's writing by David Daiches resonates with Vaughan Williams's own notions about sincerity of utterance in composition:

> [Whitman] did not hold simply that "whatever is, is right," but rather that whatever exists in its true, undistorted nature is good. The "parcel of hopeless dandies" that he attacked were denounced as "all second-hand, or

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[48] He added, apropos of the stanza he eliminated from "Is my team ploughing," that "a poet should be grateful to anyone who fails to perpetuate such lines as: 'The goal stands up, the keeper / Stands up to keep the goal.'" Quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 44. Whitman and Housman were not the only authors Vaughan Williams submitted to such treatment: Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Shakespeare's plays and the Bible also came in for significant cutting and rearranging.

[49] Ursula Vaughan Williams claims that RVW "was an atheist during his later years at Charterhouse and at Cambridge, though he later drifted into a cheerful agnosticism: he was never a professing Christian" (*RVW*, 29).

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third, fourth, or fifth hand," and that was the real burden of his complaint.[50]

As we have seen, Vaughan Williams believed that if his art was to be taken seriously on the international scene, it had to reflect something genuine and true about his nation. Moreover, he felt that domestic recognition needed to precede international acclaim. He addressed this point in an article titled "Who Wants the English Composer?" (1912), which was prefaced by a quotation from Whitman's "Song of the Exposition," another part of which opened *A Sea Symphony*'s first movement.

> Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,
> Cross out, please, those immensely over-paid accounts,
> That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings,
> Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,
> Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,
> The same on the walls of your German, French, Spanish castles, and Italian collections,
> For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide untried domain awaits, demands you.[51]

Whitman obviously had the United States in mind as his "wide untried domain," but Vaughan Williams took advantage of England's absence from the poem's catalogue of nations to position it as a natural and logical destination of the westward voyage from Greece—a seafaring nation whose reputation as the cradle of both democracy and music was surely meant to evoke parallels with England. By using metaphors that appealed to a sense of national pride, Vaughan Williams encouraged English readers to think of themselves as belonging to a musical nation that had something new and unique to contribute to the international tradition.

Vaughan Williams's advocacy for English music nearly always took the form of calls for parity with the music of other nations. Participation in the international musical
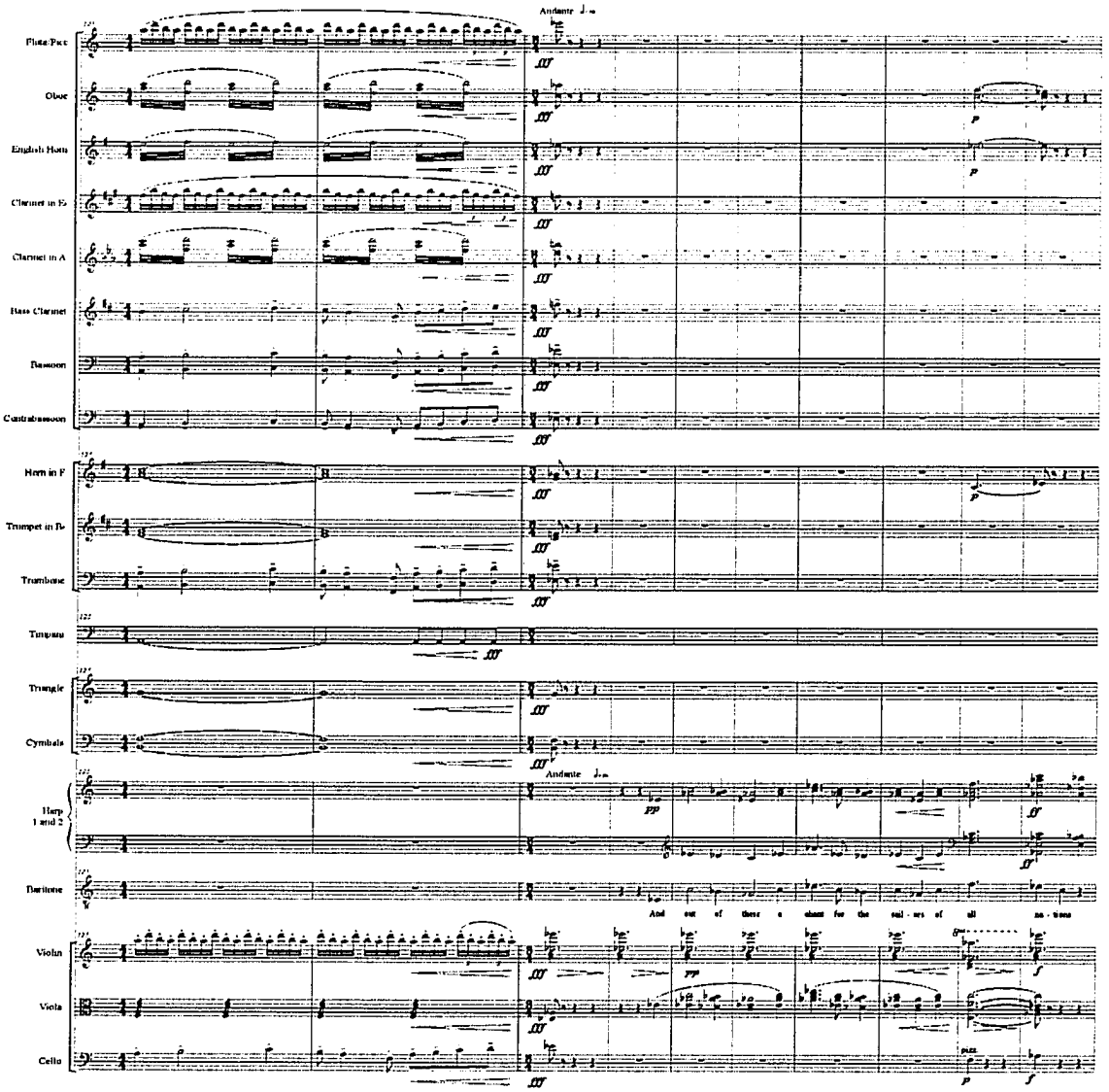
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[50] David Dachies, *Literary Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 79–80; quoted in Thomas, "Whitman in the British Isles," 62–63.

[51] Quoted in Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the British Composer?" quoted in Foss, 197.

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tradition was his aim for English music, and the message of *A Sea Symphony* is rooted in this spirit of internationalism. The first two movements of the symphony, for example, include several references to "all nations." The first movement is "a song for *all* seas, *all* ships," not just England's. Its first lines evoke a picturesque scene of ships on the ocean, heralded by one of the most thrilling openings Vaughan Williams ever wrote. The focus soon changes, however, from the sea to those who sail it, "the sailors of all nations," bound together by the great anonymous expanse of the ocean. This shift in focus is realized musically by a sudden shift in the texture, from chorus and full orchestra to baritone, strings, and harp (Example 2-7).

Example 2-7: *A Sea Symphony*, I



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There are several other references to this unity of "all nations" throughout the poem. Phrases like "Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time and unitest the nations," "But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest / A spiritual woven signal for all nations," and "A pennant universal, subtly waving all time o'er all brave sailors," emphasize a spirit of internationalism that permeates the movement.

In the second movement, Vaughan Williams omitted lines from Whitman that he considered extraneous. Whitman's original middle section of "On the Beach at Night Alone" reads as follows:

> All distances of place however wide,
> All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets,
> All distances of time, all inanimate forms,
> All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different, or in different worlds,
> All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes, the brutes,
> All nations, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages,
> All identities that have existed or may exist on this globe, or any globe...[52]

Vaughan Williams, perhaps realizing that "mineral processes" was not a phrase that would easily trip off the tongues of singers, truncated this passage into a more succinct expression of the infinite distances Whitman evoked:

> All distances of space[53] however wide,
> All distances of time, all souls, all living bodies, though they be ever so different,
> All nations, all identities that have existed or may exist...

Though he eliminated more than half of the original passage, his preservation of "nations" from Whitman's litany of participants connected across the "vast similitude" of
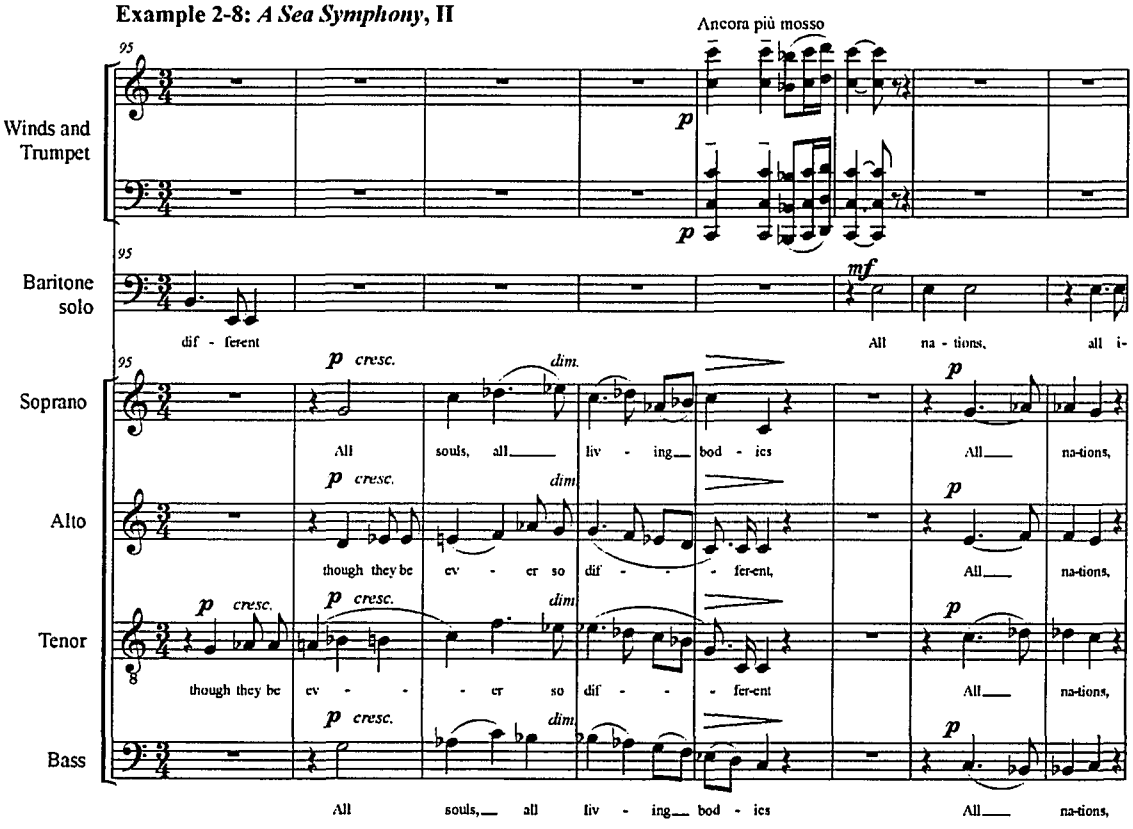
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[52] Walt Whitman, "On the Beach at Night Alone," in *Leaves of Grass*, 1892 ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 211.

[53] Vaughan Williams substituted "space" for Whitman's "place".

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space and time is surely significant, all the more so given its position immediately before "all identities." The music also hints at the importance Vaughan Williams extends to the concept of the nation. When the text arrives at "all nations" (m. 100), the chorus departs from the freely contrapuntal setting used up to that point in favor of a quiet but emphatic homorhythmic statement, allowing those words to be clearly declaimed (Example 2-8).

Example 2-8: ***A Sea Symphony*****, II**



Vaughan Williams's editorial choice and musical setting implies a belief that nationality could override race, culture, or language as a unifying force among a diverse population, or at least that these traits were assumed under the mantle of "nation." Moreover, "all nations" were united through their common humanity (suggested by the C Major chord that opens and closes the phrase) even as differences existed among them (in this case, the B-flat minor seventh chord that separates the two C Major chords), and the deliberate geographic ambiguity of the word "nation" as used throughout the *Sea Symphony* (as

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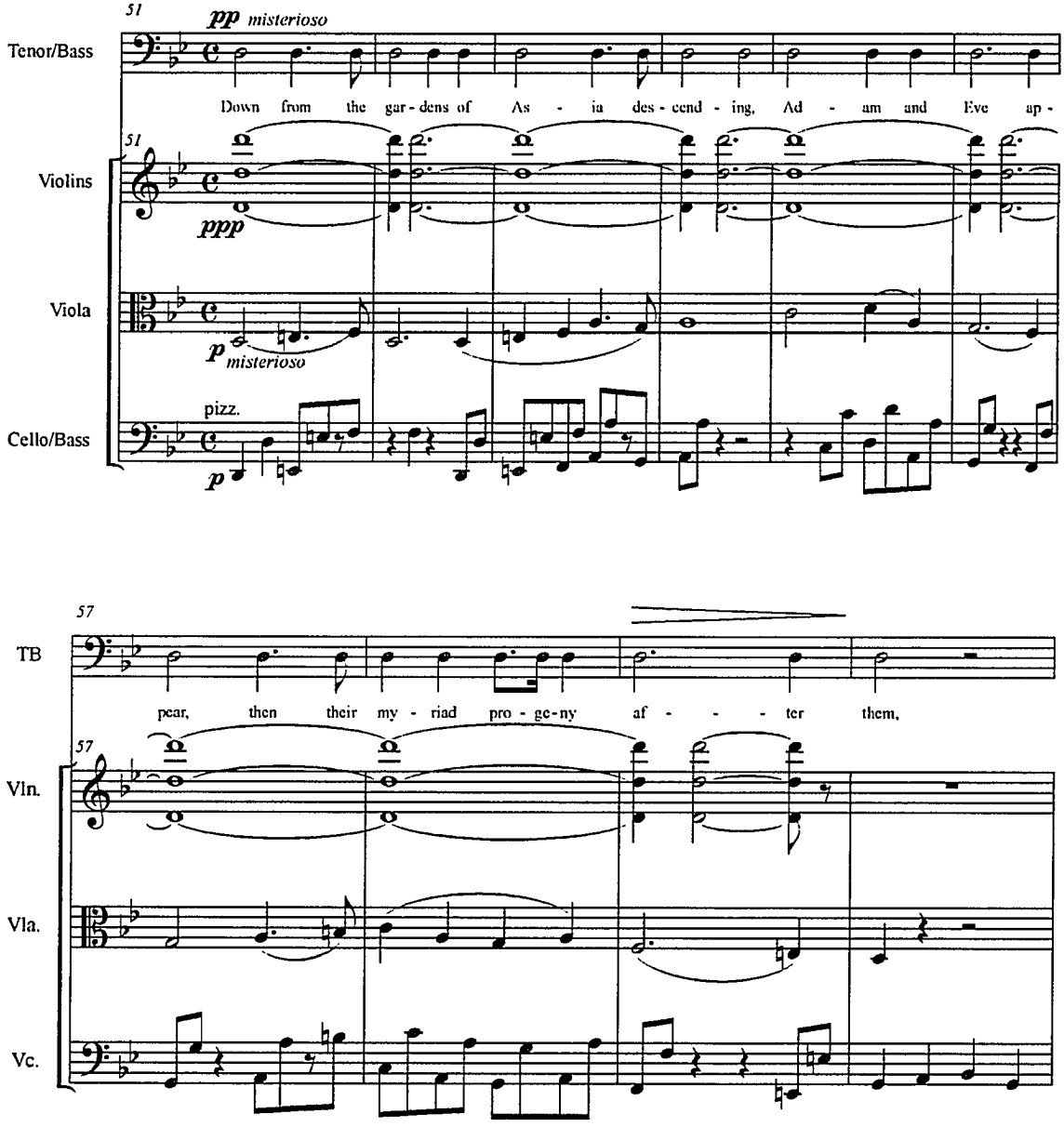
opposed to an editorial alteration to "England" or forms thereof) keeps the work from sinking into narrow nationalism.

The final movement ("The Explorers") finds Vaughan Williams approaching internationalism from a different perspective than in the first two, using text from Whitman's "A Passage to India." The first part of this lengthy poem addresses the construction of the Suez Canal and its unification of east and west. Since the British maintained custodianship of the canal beginning in 1875, and considering India's reputation as the jewel in the British Empire's crown, one might expect the finale to be a celebratory movement exalting the grandeur and glory of imperial England.

Yet the composer eschewed such sentiments. There is no mention of the Suez construction, and Vaughan Williams removed references to the poem's title, which Whitman repeated throughout. The poem's theme of exploration and the discovery of far-flung lands are portrayed in *A Sea Symphony* as futile quests leaving restlessness, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness in their wake. A monotonous, plodding passage for tenor and basses beginning with the text "Down from the gardens of Asia descending" (Example 2-9) effectively conveys this sense of world-weariness. This is followed by a response from a four-part women's semi-chorus entering on the phrase "Wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?" (Example 2-10), a registral and timbral shift that sounds otherworldly compared to that of the men. Perhaps significantly, this passage also resembles the choral settings he would have worked with while editing the *English Hymnal.*
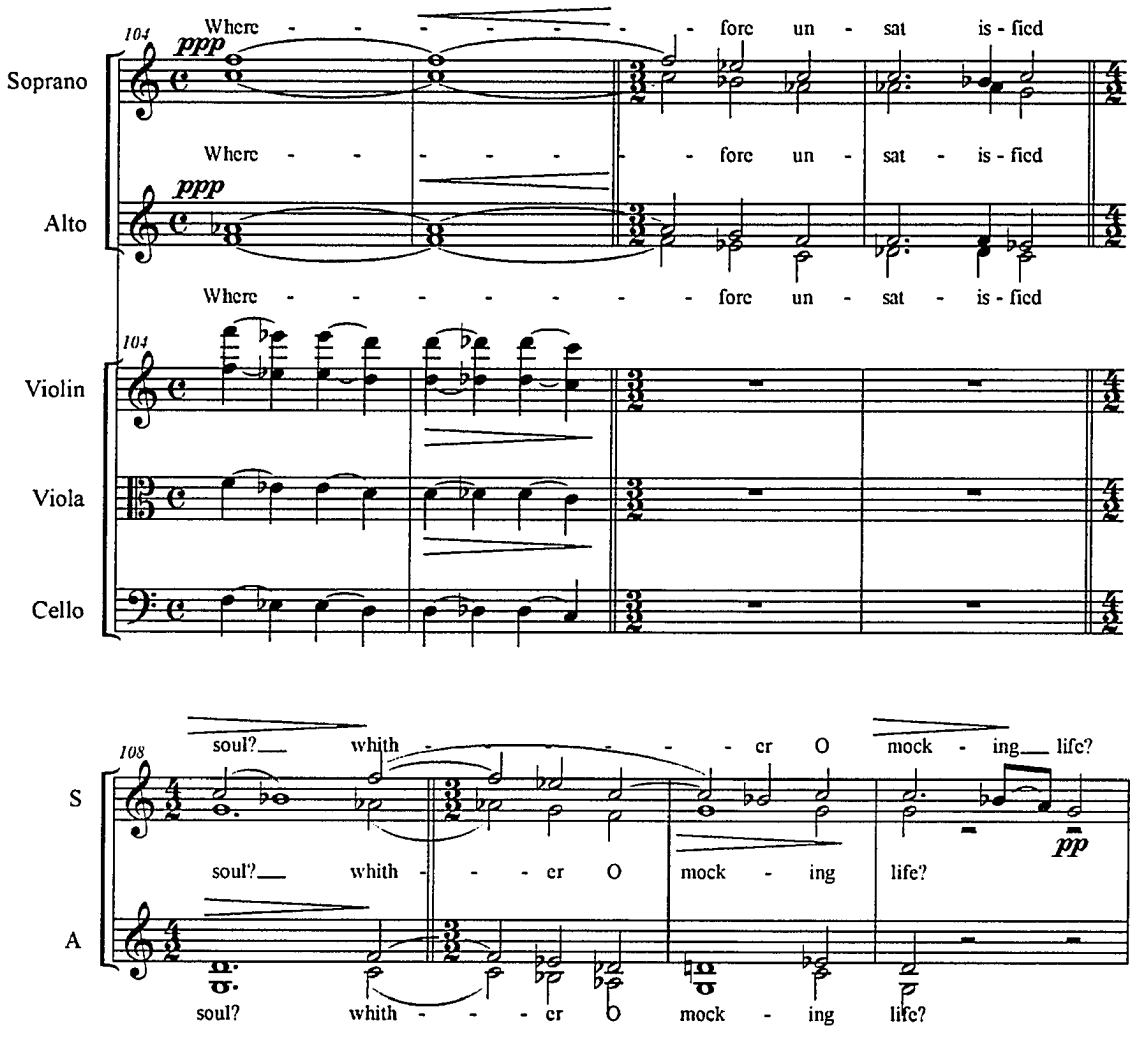
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Example 2-9: ***A Sea Symphony*****, IV**



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Example 2-10: ***A Sea Symphony*****, IV**



As the first half of the piece draws to a close, the chorus reveals the successor to the explorers of old referred to in the title:

> After the seas are all crossed,
> After the great Captains have accomplished their work,
> After the noble inventors,
> Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
> The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

One could interpret this passage as Vaughan Williams's commentary on the state of English music at the turn of the century. Britain was one of the richest financial centers of the world, a commercial and industrial powerhouse, and ruled not only the waves, but a quarter of the globe. The captains of state, commerce, and industry had built a great

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society; the time was right for English musicians to sail forth and take their place alongside their distinguished countrymen. Vaughan Williams may have used the words of an American to rally support for this cause, but Whitman's maritime imagery would have held special significance for English audiences.

Behold, the sea

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the sea in the British imagination. Winston Churchill's description of the British as an "island race" conveys how the sea's constant presence has shaped British identity, not to mention its territorial expansion, financial enrichment, cultural preservation, and international prestige.[54] Easy access to the ocean not only facilitated economic expansion, but helped make Britain the undisputed commercial center of the world and a major imperial power. England came of age as an international power when the British Navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. British heroes—Drake, Raleigh, Nelson—built their reputations through naval exploration and warfare. Its presence has been felt in British life for centuries, in commerce, war, colonization, industry, literature, and art. To the artist, the sea is a metaphor for the mutable human condition: calm and reflective, tempestuous and destructive, capable of unexpected depth and power. Some writers, like Whitman, also used the vastness of the sea as a metaphor for the infinite distances of the spiritual plane. The sea and those who sailed upon it were popular subjects for British composers who not only saw the musical possibilities suggested by the sea, but were inescapably affected by its physical presence.

[54] See George Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1987), 15–16, for the perspective of one of Britain's most distinguished historians on the sea's importance to his nation.

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Nautical themes also took on special significance for the British after German unification in 1871. When Vaughan Williams began writing the *Sea Symphony*, Britain was in the midst of a naval arms race with Germany. The British had seen the German state as a potential threat ever since it came into being, and ambitious—not to say reckless—attempts by Kaiser Wilhelm to position Germany as a major European power only exacerbated the tensions between the two nations. The introduction of new Navy Laws by Germany in 1898 and 1900 enabled the construction of a massive fleet, one that could compete with the rest of imperial Europe for colonies, trade, and military might.[55] The British government reacted with dismay to the German naval buildup, in part because the Germans also had the largest, best-trained army in Europe. Britain balanced this by laying claim to the world's best-equipped and most powerful navy which, in combination with the complex web of interlocking alliances throughout Europe, had thus far staved off direct conflict between the two nations. In 1906, Britain responded to Germany's challenges by launching the *HMS Dreadnought*, an all-big-gun ship that made all other battleships obsolete. Unfortunately, it transformed what had been largely a war of words into an all-out arms race; Britain's sizable battleship advantage was now down to one, and Germany intended to capitalize on the suddenly reduced naval gap.[56] Although German shipbuilders initially surprised the British with their rate of production, placing the outcome of the competition temporarily in doubt, they ultimately could not keep up after Britain turned the full force of its industrial might to the challenge, an

[55] See Donald Read, *England 1868–1914: The Age of Urban Democracy* (London: Longman, 1979), 486; also Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870–1992*, 2d ed., Foundations of Modern Britain (London: Longman, 1994), 37–39. Extended treatment of the Anglo-German naval rivalry may be found in Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race* (New York: David MacKay Co. Inc., 1974).

[56] A. J. P. Taylor, "Prologue: The Year 1906," in *Edwardian England*, ed. Donald Read (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 10.

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unsustainable dedication of resources in the long term.[57] Despite maintaining naval superiority, the British government was taken aback by the seriousness of the German challenge, and its potential impact on the empire.[58]

Interest in the naval competition was not limited to those directly involved with military policy. The general public apparently paid very close attention to naval affairs, judging by coverage period newspapers' coverage of the subject. In 1909, at the height of the dreadnought building project, the *Times* of London had an entire page dedicated each day to information on naval affairs, in addition to the usual reporting on current events involving the navy. Although coverage of the navy was reduced by 1910, naval events were still generously covered. Editorials left little to the imagination when outlining what was at stake for the British Empire, portraying the Germans' efforts as an upstart attempt to depose Britain as rightful controller of the oceans.

Artists who appropriated maritime imagery during the Edwardian period must have expected that the public would judge their work against the backdrop of current events.[59] Yet none of Vaughan Williams's first period works, including *A Sea Symphony*, displays the kind of chauvinism characterized by Edwardian politics, either in music or

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[57] In 1908, the German government raised production to four dreadnoughts per year, a prodigious pace. In response, the English government authorized the construction of an astonishing 8 dreadnoughts in 1909, a decision that turned the tide of the race in Britain's favor. By 1912, the Germans had 9 dreadnoughts to England's 15; two years later, the UK-German dreadnought ratio was 20:13 (active) and 12:7 (under construction) (Read, *England 1868–1914*, 487).

[58] See Michael Howard, "The Edwardian Arms Race," in *Edwardian England*, 157.

[59] Some artists attempted to take advantage of this state of affairs, including Sir Henry Newbolt, a slightly younger contemporary of Charles Stanford and author of *Songs of the Fleet*, an overtly patriotic set of six poems that alluded to the recent naval competition. Charles Stanford made a setting of them for the 1910 Leeds Festival, the only other novelty that year besides *A Sea Symphony*. Stanford's work, however, attracted much less attention than Vaughan Williams's. See also Patric Dickinson, ed., *Selected Poems of Henry Newbolt*, with an introduction by Patric Dickinson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981), 20–22; Susan Chitty, *Playing the Game: A Biography of Sir Henry Newbolt* (London: Quartet Books, Ltd., 1997), 178–81; and C. L. G., "Music: The Leeds Festival," *Spectator*, 22 October 1910, 648.

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verse. While the navy's campaign formed part of the cultural background against which Vaughan Williams wrote the symphony, it does not appear to have had any direct impact on his choice of music or text; indeed, when he began composing it in 1903, the significance of Germany's naval policy was not yet clear. Instead, Vaughan Williams captured two contrasting aspects of the sea in his music: its physical presence (which dominates the first and third movements) and its metaphysical connotations (which dominate the second and fourth movements). These depictions link the work to traditional portrayals of the sea in British music and literature without using it to advance a political stance. Moreover, Vaughan Williams's encouragement of English composers to find a distinctive musical voice stemmed from a personal belief, not a national mandate, and it developed independently from political events. The *Sea Symphony*'s title may have had a special resonance for listeners because of the ongoing naval competition, but no reviewers associated the work with current events. Whitman's texts discouraged such conclusions through their depiction of a world united in liberal-democratic brotherhood, a utopian vision far removed from the hawkish politics of the day.

Alain Frogley has suggested that the connection Vaughan Williams made between the end of H. G. Wells's novel *Tono-Bungay* and the finale of *A London Symphony* reveal the composer's unease about the politics of empire on the verge of the Great War.[60] We also know that other pieces, such as the *Pastoral Symphony* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*, were written in response to events of military and imperial significance. Given his tendency to react to current events and issues in his music, one must consider the possibility that parts

[60] Alain Frogley, "H. G. Wells and Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony*: Politics and culture in fin-de-siècle England," in *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Collections*, ed. Chris Banks, Arthur Searle, and Malcolm Turner (London: The British Library, 1993), 299–308.

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of *A Sea Symphony* responded to the Anglo-German naval rivalry by presenting a scenario of international cooperation as an alternative. At the very least, Vaughan Williams emphasized the sea's iconic status rather than its importance to the national interest at a time when the latter response might have been expected.

In *A Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams uses the trappings of English culture to locate and ground the work within the grand tradition. Though first performed at an English choral festival, the symphony's formal layout and language owe little to most of his domestic predecessors other than Elgar; it is much more akin to the symphonic descendents of Beethoven, Schubert, or Brahms. Whitman's picturesque and visionary poems conveyed a powerful message to his British readers, and Vaughan Williams intensified and focused that expression through his adaptation of the text. His unchauvinistic portrayal of the sea clashed with the politically charged atmosphere encouraged by the press and current events, but transcended those circumstances to retain artistic significance for future audiences. By engaging important national institutions and subjects through its distinctive organization and style—a style that owed much to the grand tradition, but spoke its language in an unfamiliar dialect—*A Sea Symphony* marked an important step in Vaughan Williams's quest to create national music.

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CHAPTER 3

NATIONAL SONG IN *HUGH THE DROVER* AND *SIR JOHN IN LOVE*

Vaughan Williams's six operas tend to be overshadowed by his symphonies, choral works, and songs, but they nonetheless represent significant musical and personal accomplishments. Ranging from topical satire (*The Poisoned Kiss*, 1936) to ritualistic allegory (*The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1951), with corresponding variations in their musical language, Vaughan Williams's operas possess considerable artistic and expressive variety. Two of them, *Hugh the Drover* (1924)[1] and *Sir John in Love* (1929) used English folk songs to achieve their expressive ends.[2] Differences in the way these songs are used in each opera, however, reflect Vaughan Williams's own artistic maturation and increasing confidence as a composer. By examining his use of folk song in these works and their places within the English operatic scene, we can trace shifts in his realization of national music between his first and second periods.

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[1] Although *Hugh the Drover* had its premiere in 1924, it was written from 1910 to 1914; stylistically and chronologically, it belongs with the works of his first period.

[2] None of Vaughan Williams's other operas features folk songs, although *The Pilgrim's Progress* quotes the hymn tunes "York" (*English Hymnal*, no. 472) and "Monk's Gate" (*English Hymnal*, no. 402) throughout.

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Hugh the Drover: background and plot

Although *Hugh the Drover* was Vaughan Williams's first opera, the composer was not totally inexperienced in writing for the stage when he began outlining the work in early 1910. In 1905, he and Gustav Holst collaborated on the music for Ben Jonson's masque, *Pan's Anniversary*, performed (strangely enough) for the Shakespeare birthday celebrations at Stratford-upon-Avon that same year.[3] Vaughan Williams also wrote incidental music for two plays: a dramatized version of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* produced and staged at Reigate Priory in 1906,[4] and a production of Aristophanes's *The Wasps* as part of the Cambridge Greek Play Series in 1909.

The libretto for *Hugh*, written by Harold Child, is set in a Gloucestershire village on April 30, 1812. It opens on scenes from a fair before introducing Mary, the village constable's daughter, who is reluctantly engaged to John, the town butcher and bully, a betrothal arranged by her father. After bemoaning her situation to her Aunt Jane, Mary meets and falls in love with Hugh, an itinerant horse-wrangler. John finds out and challenges Hugh to a boxing match, for twenty pounds and the hand of Mary as the stake. Hugh wins the fight, but John accuses him of spying for Napoleon's army and has the drover arrested.

The second act opens on Hugh in the town stocks. As John and his friends leave a late-night drinking session, they stop to rough up Hugh before heading home. Mary, having acquired the keys to the stocks from her father's turnkey assistant, releases Hugh,

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[3] Kennedy, *WRVW*, 64.

[4] This was the first of Vaughan Williams's many settings of Bunyan's story, which also included the one-act "pastoral episode" *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922), the motet *Valiant for Truth* (1942), incidental music for a radio adaptation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1942), and a full-length opera (or "morality," as Vaughan Williams called it) based on the story (1951).

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but their escape is foiled by the impending arrival of John and other May Day celebrants as dawn breaks. Mary and Hugh both get in the stocks and cover themselves with Hugh's cloak; when they are discovered, the constable disowns Mary out of shame and John renounces his engagement. A squad of soldiers arrives to arrest the "spy," but it turns out that Hugh once rescued their sergeant from certain death. After attesting to Hugh's credentials as a true-blue Englishman, the sergeant presses John into service for wasting his men's time. After a final farewell to her friends and family, Mary rides off with Hugh into the sunrise.[5]

Vaughan Williams completed *Hugh* by June 1914, but volunteered for military service before a performance could be arranged. Even if the war had not intervened, the long dominance of foreign composers, performers, and repertoire over England's principal theatre, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, still made a professional performance there unlikely. Vaughan Williams was frustrated by the domination of Covent Garden by foreign musicians and by the lack of a permanent English-language opera company in Britain.[6] He was pessimistic about seeing a performance of any opera he wrote, much less one as conspicuously English in its subject and setting as *Hugh the*

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[5] A more comprehensive summary can be found in the preface to Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Hugh the Drover*, vocal score, rev. ed (1956) (London: J. Curwen & Sons Ltd., 1977), viii–ix. The opera underwent many revisions in later years. Several significant modifications and cuts were made, including the transfer of a love duet between Hugh and Mary from their scene in the stocks to the finale, the elimination of a final harangue by Hugh to the villagers, minor alterations to the text, and the removal of several small passages of music. Vaughan Williams added an extra scene at the beginning of Act II for a 1933 revival, but later withdrew it. All references and citations in this chapter are made to the definitive version of 1956 unless otherwise noted. See Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 253, 262; also Michael Kennedy, "A Note on the Opera," in Vaughan Williams, *Hugh*, xi; also Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 98–103.

[6] "Serious opera has never flourished in this country," he wrote in 1942, "largely, I believe, because it was sung in a foreign language by foreign artists, or by English artists trying to be as foreign as possible . . . Opera in a foreign tongue will only appeal to the snobs who want to hear expensive foreign artists; or the prigs who cannot bear the sound of their own language. It will not touch the people, those who are eventually going to make opera in this country" ("Nationalism and Internationalism," 157).

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Drover. Moreover, since Vaughan Williams wrote *Hugh* without a commission in place and therefore no guarantee of performance, the composer was realistic about its chances for success. Writing to Harold Child in early 1910, after thanking him for agreeing to write the libretto, Vaughan Williams indicated "that if our scheme ever comes to anything then it will never get past pen on paper, for I see hardly any chance of an opera by an English composer ever being produced, at all events in our lifetime—does this make any difference to your entering into the scheme?"[7] Child was undeterred, so work went forward despite the composer's misgivings.

Vaughan Williams's complaints about the state of English opera, however, may stem more from his lack of self-confidence than from an absence of activity. In fact, British composers who aspired to write opera around 1910 had several options available. They could tailor their works to the conventions of the Royal Opera House (for example, translating English libretti into Italian, French, or German for the performers), although doing so did not guarantee a performance.[8] Still, several British composers (including Stanford, Frederic Cowen, Hamish MacCunn, Alexander Mackenzie, and Edward Naylor) secured performances at Covent Garden between 1890 and 1909, most in English.[9] Alternatively, it was possible to obtain performances by student or amateur groups (notably at the RCM), at other London theatres (such as His Majesty's, the Savoy, or Drury Lane), or by touring companies (of which the Carl Rosa Company was one of the most prominent) at theatres outside London.[10] Composers could also ignore grand

[7] U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 402.

[8] See Eric Walter White, *A History of English Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 340.

[9] See Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera* (London: John Lehmann, 1951), 260–63.

[10] The Glastonbury Festival, founded by Rutland Boughton in 1914, was another important (if short-lived) venue for opera in English, but did not exist when Vaughan Williams began work on *Hugh*.

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opera entirely, instead creating works that drew upon domestic traditions such as the musical, pantomime, or ballad opera. Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy operas are the best-known examples of such an approach, but such works (even if entertaining) were generally considered to be less artistically sophisticated than grand opera.

At about the time Vaughan Williams warned Child about the dismal prospects for *Hugh* in 1910, Thomas Beecham conducted a short season of English-language opera at Covent Garden. It not only included English translations of *Elektra*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Carmen*, but three operas by English composers (Sullivan's *Ivanhoe*, Frederick Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, and Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*). Beecham followed with another all-English season at His Majesty's Theatre later that summer, and rapidly established the Beecham Opera Company as a leading force in English-language performances. Over the next decade, the BOC performed throughout Britain, but financial losses forced it into liquidation in 1920. Out of its ashes arose the short-lived British National Opera Company (BNOC), which launched its first season in 1922. Like the Beecham Opera Company, the BNOC patronized English composers, and expressed interest in mounting a production of *Hugh the Drover* in 1924.[11] Vaughan Williams made some minor revisions to the work after returning from the war, and staged two private performances of it at the Royal College of Music in July 1924, a week before its professional debut by the BNOC.[12]

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[11] Much more information on the complicated and often frustrating history of English-language opera in England may be found in White, *History*, 372–86; also Frances Donaldson, *The Royal Opera House in the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 8–22.

[12] Although *Hugh* was the first opera Vaughan Williams wrote, it was the second to be performed. In 1921–22, he composed *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, a one-act "pastoral episode" drawn from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It had its premiere in 1922, and was later incorporated into Vaughan Williams's morality *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951). See Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 99–100.

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Overall, *Hugh the Drover* is a light, unpretentious entertainment, and was generally treated as such by reviewers;[13] Percy Scholes said that the description of it as "a Romantic Ballad opera" might well be dropped in favor of "Dramatic Musical Entertainment."[14] Many found it, in the words of the reviewer from the *Daily Telegraph*, "unmistakably English in character and atmosphere," though this apparently rankled some critics who were unenthusiastic about the opera's use of folk songs.[15] Not all such objections were for philosophical reasons. H. C. Colles claimed that the singers "seemed a little uncomfortable when they had to sing real folksongs or tunes in the folk-song manner. That was not surprising, because such tunes are quite unlike what the professional opera singer is singing every day, and when he tries to give them with all the little airs and graces of a conventional operatic style there is a misfit."[16] Such self-consciousness on the part of the performers was a symptom of the larger flaw in *Hugh*: the characters and story come off as somewhat artificial, unable to inspire identification or empathy among audiences. Hubert Foss noted this, characterizing Hugh as "so picturesque, with his boxing match, his stocks, his escape, and his love triumphant, as to be unconvincing."[17] Ernest Newman also commented on what he saw as the opera's lack of theatricality, particularly in the second act, calling it "just 'opera'—that strange world

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[13] See H. C. Colles's reviews in *Musical Times* 65, no. 978 (1 August 1924): 744–45, and "Hugh the Drover," in the *Times* (London), 15 July 1924, 12; "Figaro," *Musical Opinion* 47, no. 563 (August 1924): 1075; and Percy Scholes, "Music of the Week," *Observer*, 20 July 1924, 10.

[14] Scholes, "Music of the Week," 10.

[15] Anon [Robin Legge?], "Hugh the Drover," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 15 July 1924, 16. One can find objections, albeit fairly mild ones, in Edward Sackville-West, "Hugh the Drover," *Spectator* (10 July 1924), 90–91; and Ernest Newman, "This Week's Music," *Sunday Times* (London), 20 July 1924, 7.

[16] Colles, "Hugh the Drover," 12. Edward Sackville-West agreed that Vaughan Williams's use of folk songs was a mistake, as "[t]hey invariably 'sound wrong,' wedged in between snatches of recitative and choral sections of a more sophisticated nature" (Sackville-West, "Hugh the Drover," 90–91).

[17] Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 177.

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in which people say things and do things that they would never be permitted to do in poetry, in drama, or in fiction."[18] Most criticism over the years has focused on the weaknesses of Child's libretto, his first attempt at writing one.[19] In fairness, however, Vaughan Williams also took a prominent role in shaping the story and must share an equal portion of the blame for its shortcomings.[20] He once wrote that the composer of an opera should also be its librettist, but he evidently lacked the confidence to pursue this ideal in his first practical effort.[21] Yet even he was unsatisfied with the work's original form, and revised both the music and text several times after the premiere before producing a "definitive" version of the opera in 1956.

In spite of *Hugh*'s dramatic flaws, critics all agreed that its music (folksong sections excepted) was charming, fresh, and good enough in its own right to salvage the opera as an entertaining diversion.[22] While the story may not be a timeless study of the human condition, *Hugh* was nevertheless frequently revived over the next several decades, usually in provincial or university productions, and retains a certain quaint

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[18] Newman, "This Week's Music," 7.

[19] Child was a professional editorial writer who had been recommended to Vaughan Williams by a mutual friend, Bruce Richmond (the literary editor for the *Times*), though it is unclear why Richmond thought Child would be a good choice as librettist.

[20] One critic felt "in the later phases of the opera, the composer gives one the impression sometimes that he is not thinking wholly in terms of the theatre" (Anon. [Legge?], "Hugh the Drover," 16). Some of Vaughan Williams's letters to Child suggest that he was more concerned with composing attractive tunes than music tailored to a specific point in the drama, while at other points, he wrote music without any clear notion of what to do with it, forcing Child to come up with situations or words to fit. See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 408–11.

[21] See Vaughan Williams, "The Words of Wagner's Music Dramas," *Vocalist* 1, no. 3 (June 1902): 94–96 and no. 5 (August 1902): 156–59. Ursula Vaughan Williams noted that when RVW began writing *Hugh*, "he felt that his lack of stage experience and literary ability was too great. It is also probable that he was longing to gallop away with the music and the idea of more-or-less writing a play to begin with was too great a hindrance" (U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 400).

[22] Audience response to the music was apparently positive enough to convince Curwen, the original publisher of the score, to bring out sheet music editions of songs from the opera at two shillings for individual tunes, four shillings for small collections of songs and choruses. An advertisement by Curwen for selections from *Hugh* appeared in *Opera and the Ballet* 2, no. 8 (1924): 37.

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charm even today. Vaughan Williams never intended to create a deeply introspective work of art in *Hugh the Drover*, nor do his comments to Child suggest any interest in following the conventions associated with grand opera.[23] They do suggest, however, that the composer wanted to create a distinctively national alternative to the international grand operatic tradition.[24] Vaughan Williams must have known that he was not going to be able to get the Royal Opera House to perform an opera like *Hugh*. That being the case, he rejected the model favored by Covent Garden in favor of something more closely connected to an English stage tradition, a decision not lost on critic Percy Scholes:

> Someone has put to me what he regards as an unanswerable condemnation in the form of what I admit to be an unquestionable truth—"There isn't an opera stage on the Continent that would take it." Probably there isn't. This is *our* opera; it would not be comfortable at Munich or Milan, but on the English stage it is exceedingly comfortable. . . . We can't all be cosmopolitan, and probably if there ever does grow up amongst us a genuine school of opera, it will be by the recognition of this fact. Gilbert and Sullivan do not enjoy much favor in Naples.[25]

Ironically, by infusing *Hugh* with local settings, characters, language, and music, Vaughan Williams separated himself from the mainstream of English operatic life. The tributary he ended up following, however, connected him to a venerable domestic tradition: English ballad opera.

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[23] This position is bolstered by a comment in a letter to Child: "Could you come here one day soon and have a long talk over the opera—the 2nd Act is getting entirely out of hand—its [sic] grand opera of the worst description." Quoted in U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 412.

[24] Ironically, this alternative stemmed in part from another European tradition. VW told Child that he wanted to write "a musical, what the Germans call 'Bauer Comedie'—only applied to English country life (real as far as possible—not sham)—something on the lines of Smetana's *Verkaufte Braut*—for I have an idea for an opera written to *real* English words, with a certain amount of *real* English music and also a real English subject might just hit the right nail on the head" (quoted in U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 402). He also made a public statement to this effect in the *Observer* on 23 July 1922, which was reprinted in Percy Scholes, "Music and Musicians: *Hugh the Drover*," *Observer*, 13 July 1924, 10.

[25] Scholes, "Music of the Week," 10. Vaughan Williams also admired the Savoy operas (see "A Minim's Rest, in *NMOE*, 168, "What Are the Social Foundations of Music?" in *NMOE*, 232), and used them as a model for *The Poisoned Kiss* (1936).

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Vaughan Williams described *Hugh* as a "Romantic Ballad Opera in Two Acts."[26] Eighteenth-century English ballad opera alternated between spoken dialogue and "songs set to traditional or popular melodies and sung by the actors themselves."[27] The subject matter was frequently satirical, but stories with historical or patriotic themes were common after 1750. The first and best-known ballad opera, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), satirized social and musical conventions of the day, the former through its use of criminals and lowlifes as the protagonists, and the latter through parodies of both Italian opera seria and popular tunes of English, Irish, French, and Scottish origin. It debuted to huge success and has withstood the challenges of both time and domestically produced grand operas.[28] Gay's work had parallels in other countries—German Singspiel and melodrama, and French plays with musical divertissements, for instance—and spawned a number of domestic descendants, including romantic comic operas, musical comedies, and combinations of satire and pantomime, all of which featured popular songs or folk tunes.[29]

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[26] Vaughan Williams's classification of the opera may have taken some time to crystallize. The title page of *Hugh*'s autograph manuscript has the title and subtitle listed as "*Hugh the Drover* or *Love in the Stocks*: A ~~English~~ Romantic Ballad Opera in two acts." Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Hugh the Drover*, autograph vocal score, 1924, Add. 50843, British Library, London; observed on microfilm copy (M1515, reel 7), University of Michigan Music Library, Ann Arbor. Vaughan Williams qualified many of his stage works; only *Sir John in Love* and *Riders to the Sea* were called "operas." *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* was a "pastoral episode," *The Poisoned Kiss* was a "Romantic extravaganza," and *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a "morality." See the appropriate entries in Kennedy, *CWRVW*.

[27] Curtis Price and Robert Hume, "Ballad opera," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols., gen. ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992), 1: 289.

[28] A revival of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1922 (from a new edition by Frederic Austin) played for 1,463 consecutive performances at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith. Compare this to Rutland Boughton's contemporaneous *The Immortal Hour* (1922, 216 performances), at that time the longest continuous run for a grand opera written by an Englishman. The previous record-holder was Sir Arthur Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* (1891), with 153 consecutive performances. David Russell Hume and Arthur Jacobs, "London," in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 3: 14; and White, *History*, 324–25.

[29] Vaughan Williams knew of a folk song ("The Miller of the Dee") used in a ballad opera of 1750 ("English Folk-Songs," 6). See also Walter Rubsamen, "Ballad opera," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., gen. ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 2: 80–81; Michael

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Vaughan Williams was familiar with Gay's work when he began work on *Hugh the Drover*.[30] The parallels between the operatic environment of his London and Gay's are striking: in both eras, opera was dominated by a well-established, popular troupe of foreign performers, English-language performances of opera were rare, and societal conventions discouraged Englishmen from composing operas professionally. Despite the dominance of his Italian rivals, Gay had great success with a work that featured popular tunes with vernacular texts in a local setting, making an immediate connection with English life and customs. To Vaughan Williams, Gay's innovative and immensely successful prototype may have seemed ripe for rebirth. Percy Scholes asked him about the work's genre in an interview for the *Observer*:

> [PS] I have heard the work spoken of as a 'ballad opera.' Is that correct?
> [RVW] Well, it is and it isn't! I call it a 'ballad opera' because it is frankly made up of songs and ensembles with recitative in between. I meant to use a lot of traditional tunes—as things turned out I have hardly used any.[31]

The small amount of borrowed music, however, does not negate the parallel between *Hugh* and *The Beggar's Opera*. Vaughan Williams had established a precedent for recasting genre in *A Sea Symphony*, and did so again with *Hugh the Drover*. *Hugh* is a ballad opera with different organization and components, and thus varies from traditional models, which explains the composer's ambivalent answer to Scholes's question. Connections to classic ballad opera remain in the use of lower-class protagonists and pre-

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Hurd, "Opera: 1834–1865," in *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800–1914*, ed. Nicholas Temperley, The Athlone History of Music in Britain, gen. ed. Ian Spink (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 315.

[30] He wrote an article on British music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries published in 1914, in which he referred to *The Beggar's Opera* as "what we should nowadays call a 'musical comedy,' and what the Germans call 'sing-spiel.' That is a spoken comedy interspersed with songs." Ralph Vaughan Williams, "British Music in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," *Music Student* 7 (1914–15), 64; quoted in Stephen Connock, "From Polly to The Wasps: The Musical Context," *Journal of the RVW Society* 26 (February 2003): 2.

[31] Scholes, "Music and Musicians," 10.

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existing songs. However, Vaughan Williams avoided using popular songs or new texts, favoring instead (when he used pre-existing music) street cries, country dance tunes, and folk songs from rural England, almost always with their original texts. Many of the newly-composed arias imitate the folk song style through their use of modes or melodically-dominated textures.[32] Other departures from ballad opera conventions were inspired by later musical practices, explaining the composer's description of *Hugh* as a "Romantic" ballad opera. Arioso replaces spoken dialogue, the plot and characters are neither satirical nor parodistic, comic elements are kept to a minimum, the setting is the recent rural past rather than the present, and the bulk of the music is newly composed. Rather than adhering to earlier conventions for their own sake, Vaughan Williams drew upon a variety of styles and genres in order to achieve his expressive and dramatic goals—just as John Gay did when selecting the music for *The Beggar's Opera.*

Although Vaughan Williams never referred to Gay or *The Beggar's Opera* in his correspondence to Child, his initial letter to Child mentioned the ballad tradition.[33] A striking dramatic parallel also stands out between the two works. At the end of Act II in *The Beggar's Opera*, Lucy Lockit releases her beloved Captain Macheath from Newgate prison using the keys she procured from her father, the jailor. In Act II of *Hugh*, Mary

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[32] See, for example, the Showman's arias "Cold blows the wind" or "The Devil and Bonyparty" in Vaughan Williams, *Hugh the Drover*, 14–18 and 50–53. Vaughan Williams had written songs like this for years prior to *Hugh the Drover*; *Linden Lea* (1901) is one of the earliest and best-known examples.

[33] After suggesting several different declamatory and musical effects he wanted to achieve, Vaughan Williams opined that "the whole thing might be folk song-y in character, with a certain amount of real ballad stuff thrown in" (quoted in U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 402). Another of Vaughan Williams's letters to Child, again without specifically referring to ballad opera, cites its convention of naturalistic, variable speech rhythms as a goal worth pursuing in *Hugh*, but in a lyrical arioso rather than spoken dialogue. "Your words at present suggest an absolutely formal and Mozartian setting with regular set numbers and the chorus standing around and having their chips-in at intervals. . . . How wd. it be to try a scene in prose, developing into something more lyrical and rhythmic (but not necessarily in cut and dried metres) as the situation demands?" (ibid., 406.) His suggestion of a prose setting not only reflects ballad opera conventions, but a more naturalistic form of declamation that Vaughan Williams pursued to a greater (and more effective) degree in his opera *Riders to the Sea* (1936).

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releases Hugh from his imprisonment in the stocks with the keys stolen from the turnkey assistant to her father, the constable. Regardless of whether *Hugh the Drover* was directly modeled after *The Beggar's Opera*, evidence suggests that ballad opera was at least as influential on Vaughan Williams as another domestic musical tradition more frequently associated with *Hugh*: the English folk song movement.

Folk song in *Hugh the Drover*

When Vaughan Williams began composing *Hugh*, he was heavily involved with the English Folk Song Society. He did most of his folk song collecting between 1903 and 1913; until 1909, he spent about thirty days in the field annually collecting songs, some new, others variants of established tunes.[34] He actively sought opportunities to apply his research. In his own words, he was "fascinated by the tunes and wanted other people to be fascinated too,"[35] and he spread the word through public lectures punctuated by performances of folk songs (sung, ironically, by other collectors or professional singers) and through frequent contributions of songs to the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society.*

Although stylistic elements of English folk song pervade *Hugh the Drover*, the opera contains only eight folk tunes, some quite brief, all of which were listed by the composer in the preface to the score.[36] These include three street cries of urban origin and

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[34] Even before Vaughan Williams became an active folk song collector, he was familiar with folk song collections edited by Lucy Broadwood, Sabine Baring-Gould, and others. For a full list of the songs and variants Vaughan Williams collected, see Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 245–81; also Roy Palmer, ed., *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1983), which also describes Vaughan Williams's collecting practices in detail (see vii–xxii).

[35] Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 46.

[36] It also contains one psalm tune ("York," no. 472 in the *English Hymnal*), which rings out on the clocktower at the beginning of Act II. The performance of hymn tunes on clocktower bells was apparently a common practice in rural England; see Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 51.

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anonymous composition ("Cockles," "Toy Lambs," and "Primroses"), which occur in quick succession during the opening scene at the fair.[37] The entrance of the ballad-seller soon after these street cries precedes a brief quotation from "Maria Martin"—a variant of the song "Dives and Lazarus," a favorite of the composer's—and "Tuesday Morning," sung by the ballad-seller and Mary.[38] Vaughan Williams credited the music accompanying a group of Morris dancers in Act I to a tune collected by Cecil Sharp, and two songs in Act II (John's "May Song" and the "May Day Carol") complete the list of folk songs in *Hugh*.[39] Most of these tunes are atmospheric, appropriate to the moment but irrelevant to the plot. Other street cries, for example, could have been used in the opening scene without affecting the story; their importance stems from the function they fulfill or the mood they evoke. John is the only major character assigned a complete folk song. Mary, the female protagonist, receives only a single verse of "Tuesday Morning," and

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[37] Vaughan Williams attributed the street cries "Cockles" and "Toy Lambs" to Frank Kidson, who published them in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 4, no. 15 (December 1910): 105, although the tune of "Cockles" differs somewhat in *Hugh* from the one printed in the *Journal*. "Primroses" was first collected as "Primrose-selling man's cry" by Lucy Broadwood in 1898, but not published until 1910; see *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 4, no. 15 (December 1910): 100. A similar tune, "Lavender Cry," appears in the second movement of *A London Symphony*, written concurrently with *Hugh*. Ursula Vaughan Williams indicated that the tunes for "Primroses" and "Lavender Cry" were identical, and that the flower name was changed to primroses because of the spring setting for *Hugh*, but the publication of Broadwood's version of the "Primrose" cry—identical note for note—indicates otherwise. See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 400.

[38] Vaughan Williams collected several variants of "Maria Martin" and wrote about its connection to "Dives and Lazarus" in "Carols," in *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 2, no. 7 (1905): 115–39. "Tuesday Morning" is also known as "At the Sign of the Bonny Blue Bell." He collected a version of "Tuesday Morning" in 1904, but the version used in *Hugh* is nearly identical to one collected by Frank Kidson in 1903 and printed in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, which Vaughan Williams would doubtless have seen. See Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 255, and the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 2, no. 6 (1905): 51.

[39] The words to the Morris dance tune come from a Cheshire Morris dance that Sharp credited to William Barclay Squire (see "Morris Dance," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1st ed., 5 vols., (London: Macmillan, 1880), 2: 369), though the tunes differ. Frank Howes identifies the tune used in *Hugh* as a Morris Processional set against a jig in triple time (*Music*, 258). Vaughan Williams collected John's "May Song" in 1907, but a version also appears in Lucy Broadwood and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, eds. *English County Songs* (London: Leadenhall Press Ltd., 1893), 98–99. See also Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 266, and Roy Palmer, ed., *Folk Songs Collected*, 6–7. Vaughan Williams credited the "May Day Carol" to Lucy Broadwood, who collected a version published in *English County Songs*, 108–09, though Vaughan Williams used a different text for the first verse.

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Hugh, Aunt Jane, and the Constable receive none at all. Most of the folk songs in *Hugh* are sung by ensembles or minor characters, possibly alluding to an operatic convention whereby anonymous masses are often given folk songs to perform.[40]

Perhaps the most striking characteristic about the folk songs in *Hugh the Drover* is their exclusive use as diegetic music (music heard as music by both the audience and the characters on stage).[41] When a folk song is sung, other characters react to it as a self-consciously performative event appropriate to the situation; they recognize that it differs, textually and musically, from their normal form of declamation within the opera. The most obvious departure is textural. When a folk song is sung, the orchestra tends to subside, both in volume and density, shifting from a contrapuntally-driven texture to simple chordal accompaniment or doubling of the melody. The text usually changes from prose to poetry, with corresponding shifts in meter and rhythm, and irregular arioso becomes more regular. Choral harmonizations tend to be simple, dominated by unison or octave doublings. Arranged this way, the folk songs stand out from the surrounding operatic texture. As one interested in sharing the virtues of folk songs with audiences, Vaughan Williams would have had a purpose in isolating them.

The ways in which folk songs stand out vary with the situation. The merchants' street cries of "Cockles" and "Toy Lambs" are functional, fixed melodies used to sell particular items (Examples 3-1 and 3-2). The sellers have not been requested to perform, but the crowd recognizes their cries as performative actions rather than background noise.
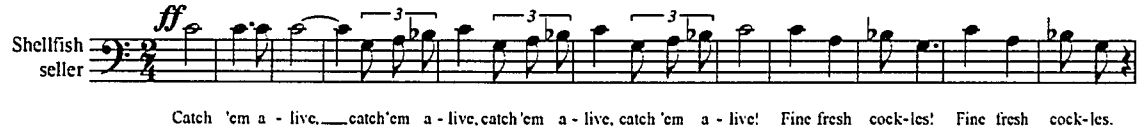
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[40] See also Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, 2d ed. (New York: October House Inc., 1967), 141.

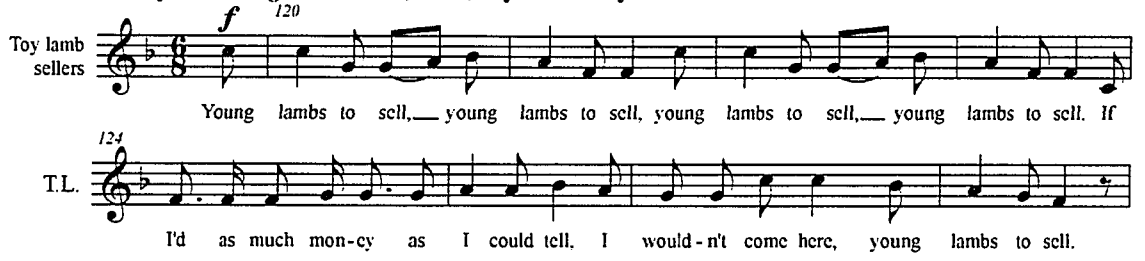
[41] The term is most commonly used in association with film music; for example, if a character in a film is listening to a symphony concert on the radio, that music is diegetic. Its opposite, extra-diegetic music, is music heard by the audience but not the characters; most incidental music falls into this category. See also Mervyn Cooke, "Film Music," The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online, ed. L. Macy (accessed 9 January 2003), http://www.grovemusic.com.

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Example 3-1: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I, Cockles cry



Example 3-2: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I, Toy Lambs cry
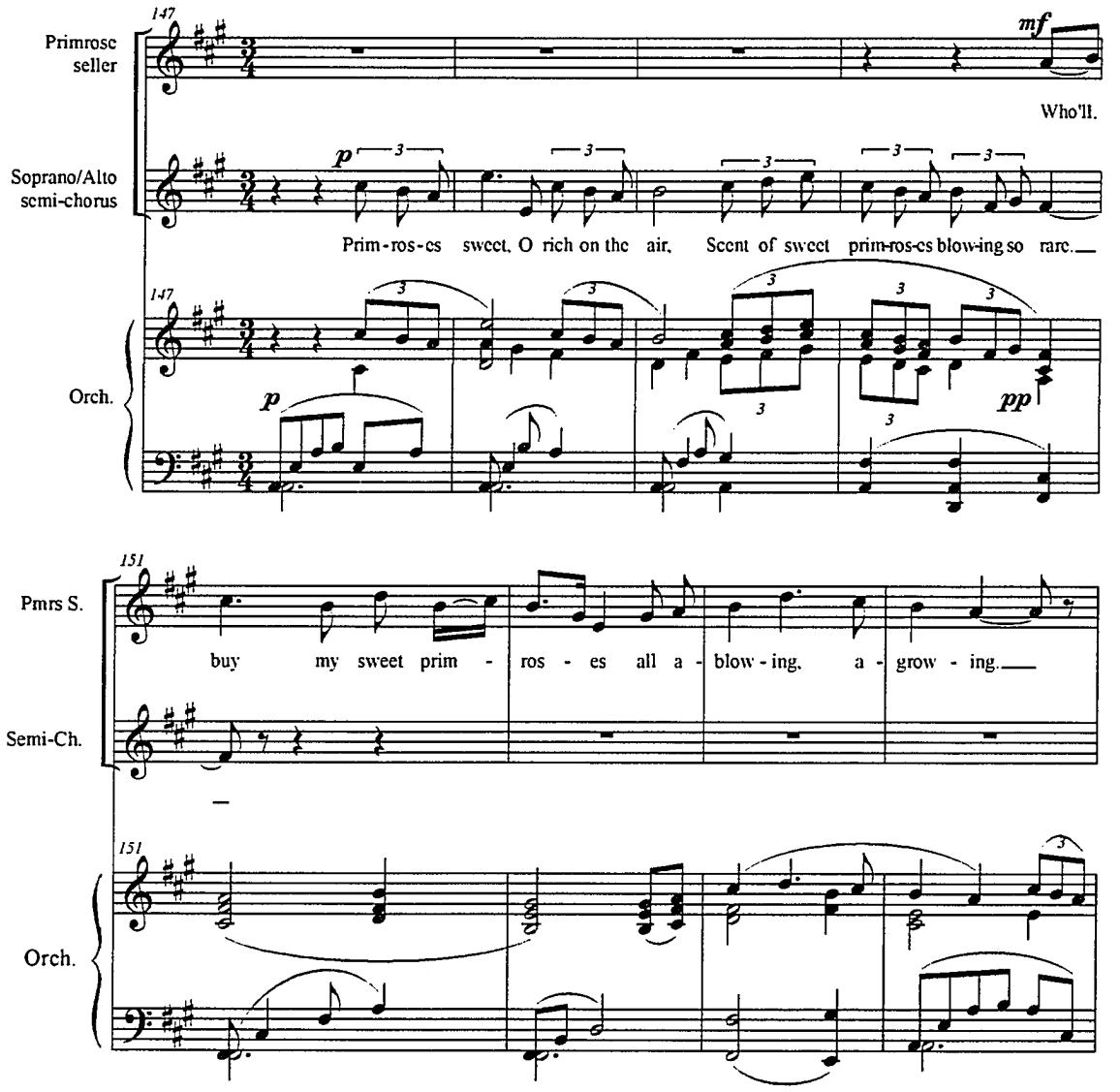


The third street cry, "Primroses," induces a different response among the crowd. The original street cry consists only of a single line of music accompanying the text "Who'll buy my sweet primroses, all a-blowing, a-growing." In the opera, however, the crowd responds to the tune with newly composed choral passages about the effect of primroses on one's beloved, though these subside when the original street cry returns (Example 3-3). That such a reaction could be inspired by a simple street cry strikes at the heart of Vaughan Williams's philosophy about national music responding to indigenous elements. The crowd's response—a spontaneous musical reaction—sounds nothing like the "Primroses" cry, yet was directly inspired by its performance.[42]

[42] All orchestral reductions are taken from the piano-vocal score.

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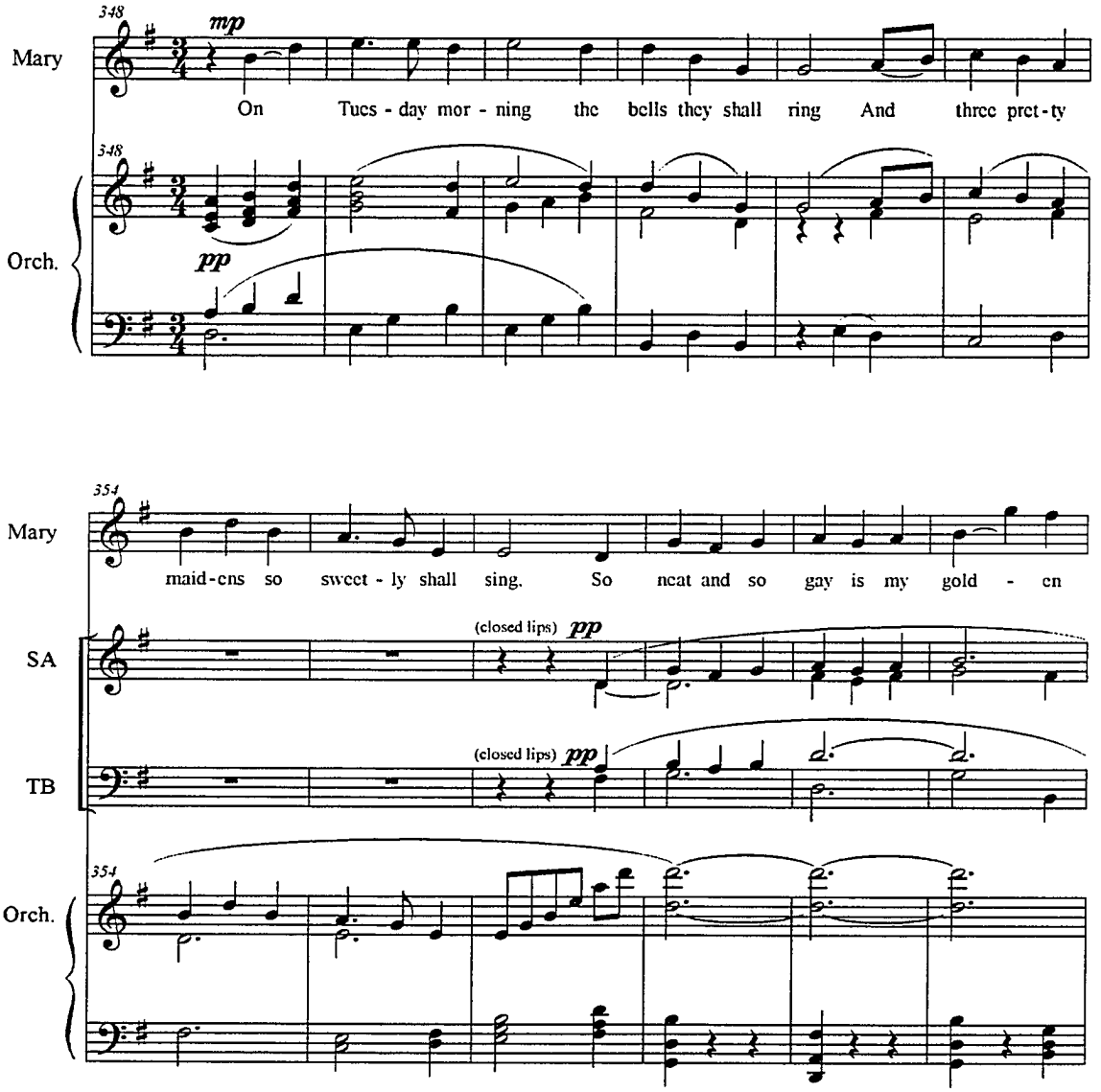
Example 3-3: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I, Primroses cry
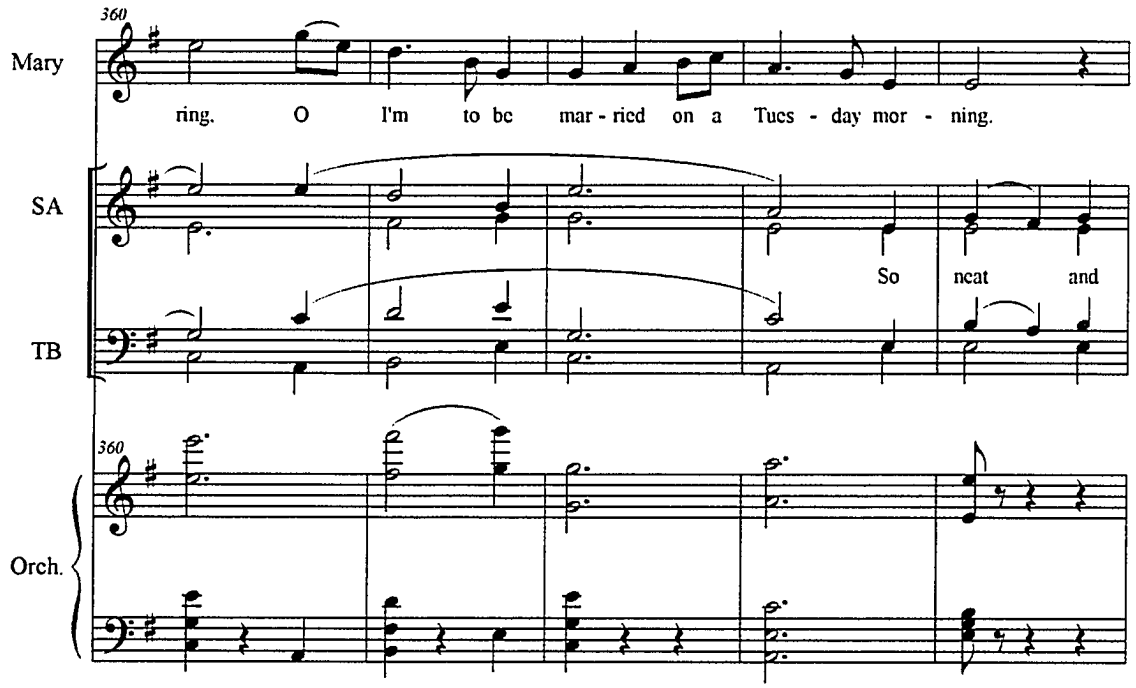


Folk songs tend to elicit responses that differ from the responses to the street cries. For instance, "Tuesday Morning" is sung by the ballad-seller at the request of the villagers, but Mary enters repeating the last two phrases, and goes on to sing another verse by herself (Example 3-4).

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Example 3-4: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I, "Tuesday Morning"



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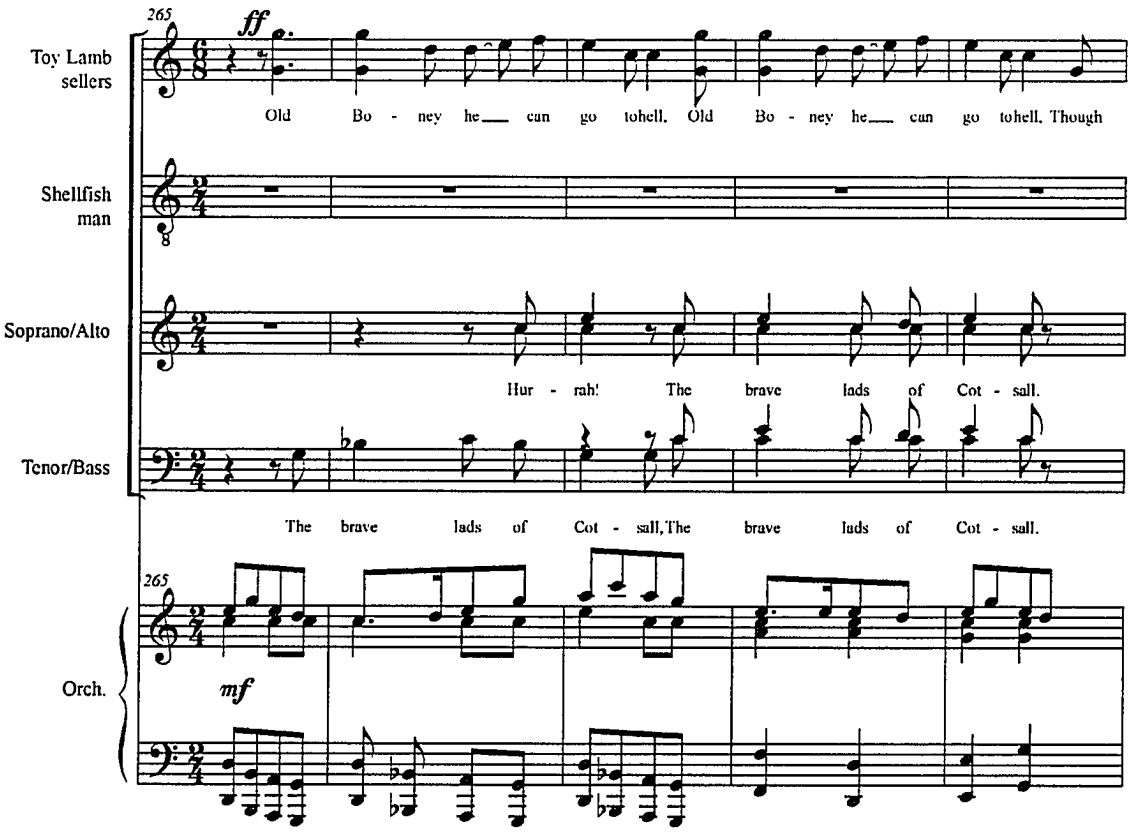


While the "Primroses" cry elicited a contrasting response from its listeners, Mary reacts to hearing "Tuesday Morning" by singing another verse of the song, without directly commenting on the music's effect. Other diegetic tunes (the May Day Carol and the Morris Dance tune) are scored for ensembles. A group of women returning from gathering flowers for the May celebrations sing a carol appropriate for the day, while the Morris Dance begins with a Fool inciting the crowd to sing along with the dancers' fife and drum players as they proceed to their dance site. In both cases, the successful realization of these songs hinges on assuming the performers have pre-existing knowledge of them. Finally, even though John sings his "May Song" alone on stage, it too is a self-conscious performance. Believing Mary to be in her room (though unbeknownst to him, she is actually in the stocks with Hugh), his serenade is an attempt to win her love. In all of these examples, whether street cries or folk songs, characters treat the pre-existing tunes as self-consciously performative events, and other characters respond to them as such.

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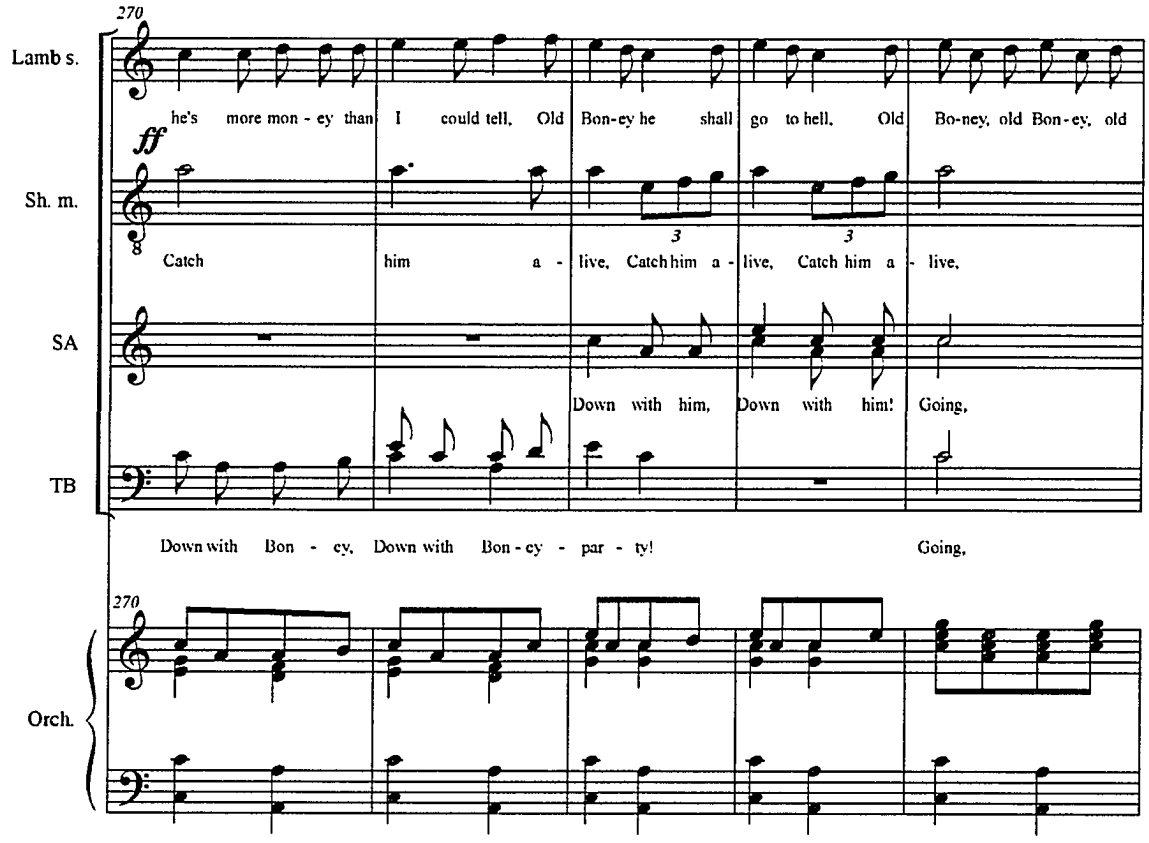
A few folk songs in *Hugh* are connected to the plot. For example, the music for "Cockles" and "Toy Lambs" returns after the fair's Showman sings "Cold blows the wind," an anti-Napoleonic song.[43] By the end of the tune, the Showman has whipped the crowd into a patriotic fervor, and several of the musical themes heard up to that point (including the street cries) combine before suddenly cutting out at the ballad-seller's entrance (Example 3-5). The texts, however, change in response to the Showman's appeal to defeat Napoleon: the shellfish seller's lines change from "Catch 'em alive" to "Catch him alive," and the lamb sellers from "Young lambs to sell, young lambs to sell" to "Old Boney he can go to hell," the only such substitutions for folk song texts in the opera.

Example 3-5: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I



[43] See Vaughan Williams, *Hugh*, 15–17.

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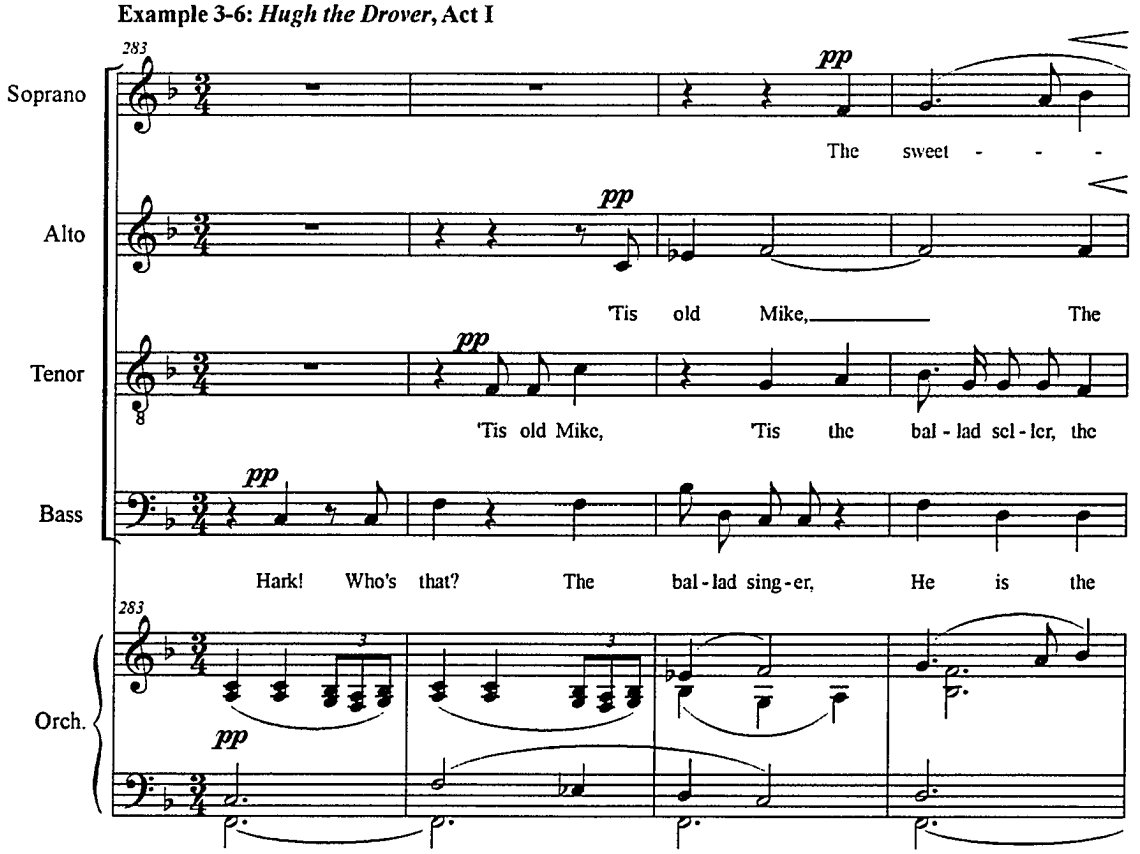


"Tuesday Morning" also uses folk-song effectively as a dramatic device. Although the text describes a girl happily preparing for her wedding, Mary unexpectedly bursts into tears at the end of the verse. The audience learns soon after that Mary is herself betrothed, but under circumstances that are no cause for joy, unlike those in the song. Mary's reaction foreshadows the revelation of her own status, turning the song into an ironic moment of realization that prepares the audience for the conflict that follows.

This type of sympathetic treatment of the characters was important to Vaughan Williams, even if other theatrical elements did not receive the same attention. He objected to Child's initial portrayal of the English villagers as stereotypical yokels. "I should rather be more sympathetic with the English peasantry," he requested. "What I want in the opera is that the English peasant shall not be looked on as a mere *clown* but a person capable of such beautiful songs (and all that is implied by them) as we now know

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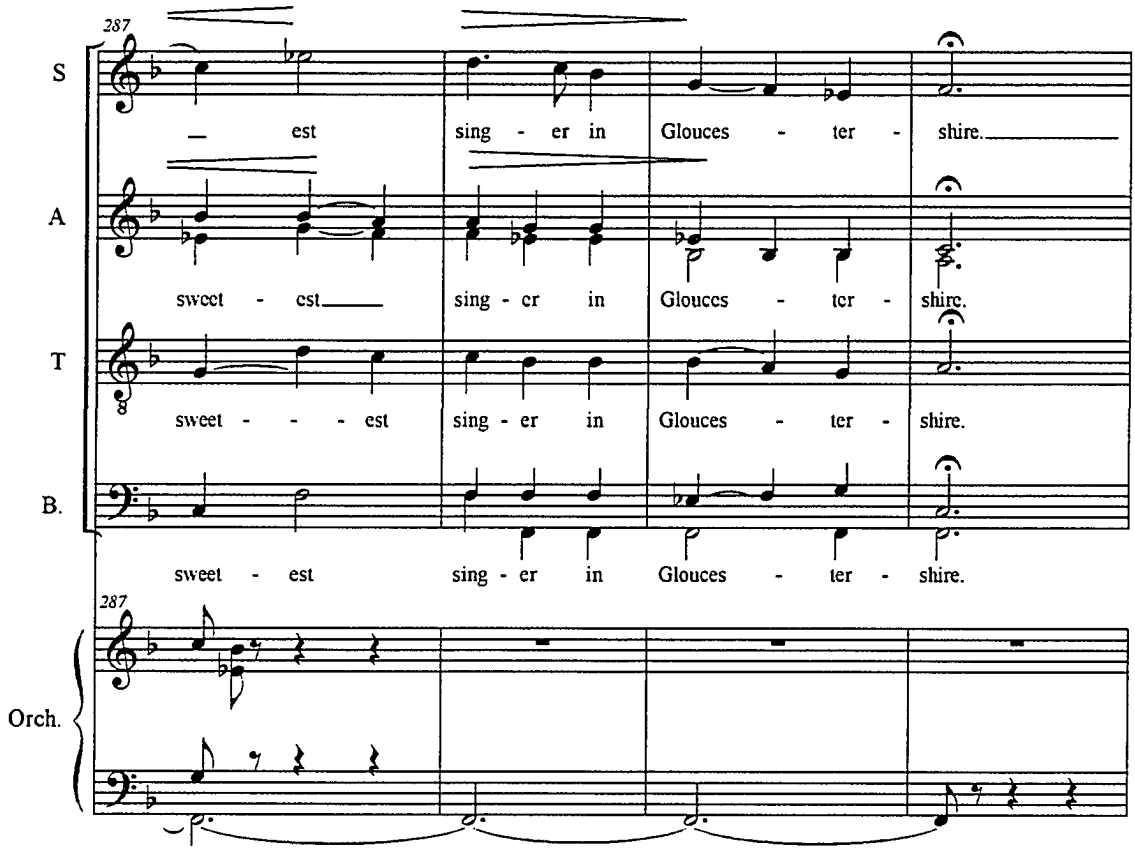
of."[44] The very presence of folk song among the people of rural England showed that they possessed unseen spiritual and emotional depths that were only revealed through their music. One such example occurs at the ballad-seller's entrance, when the villagers' mode of declamation changes. Before that point in the opera, choral passages have featured simple harmonizations (unisons, thirds, or octaves) with unified declamation. When the ballad-seller enters, however, the choral texture gradually shifts to a contrapuntal web in which each vocal part enters independently (Example 3-6). This textural alteration makes it seem as though the ballad-seller, a musician of the English countryside, brings the villagers' inherent musicality to the surface.

Example 3-6: *Hugh the Drover*, Act I



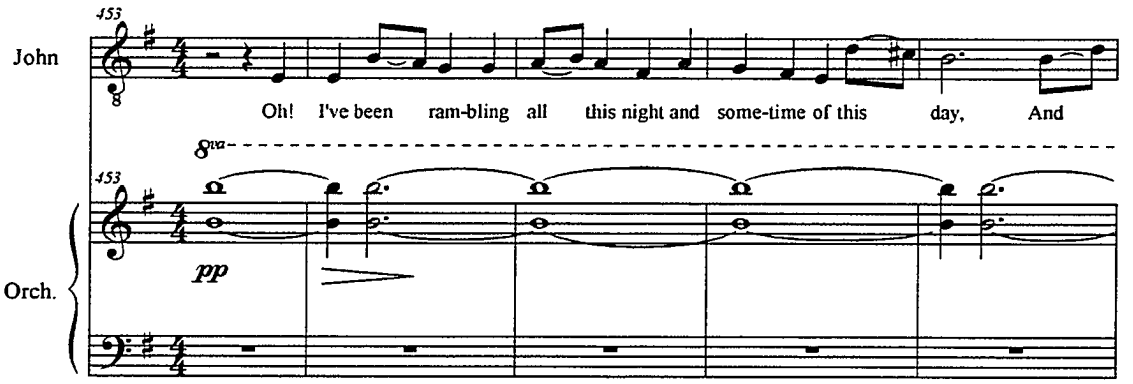
[44] U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 405.

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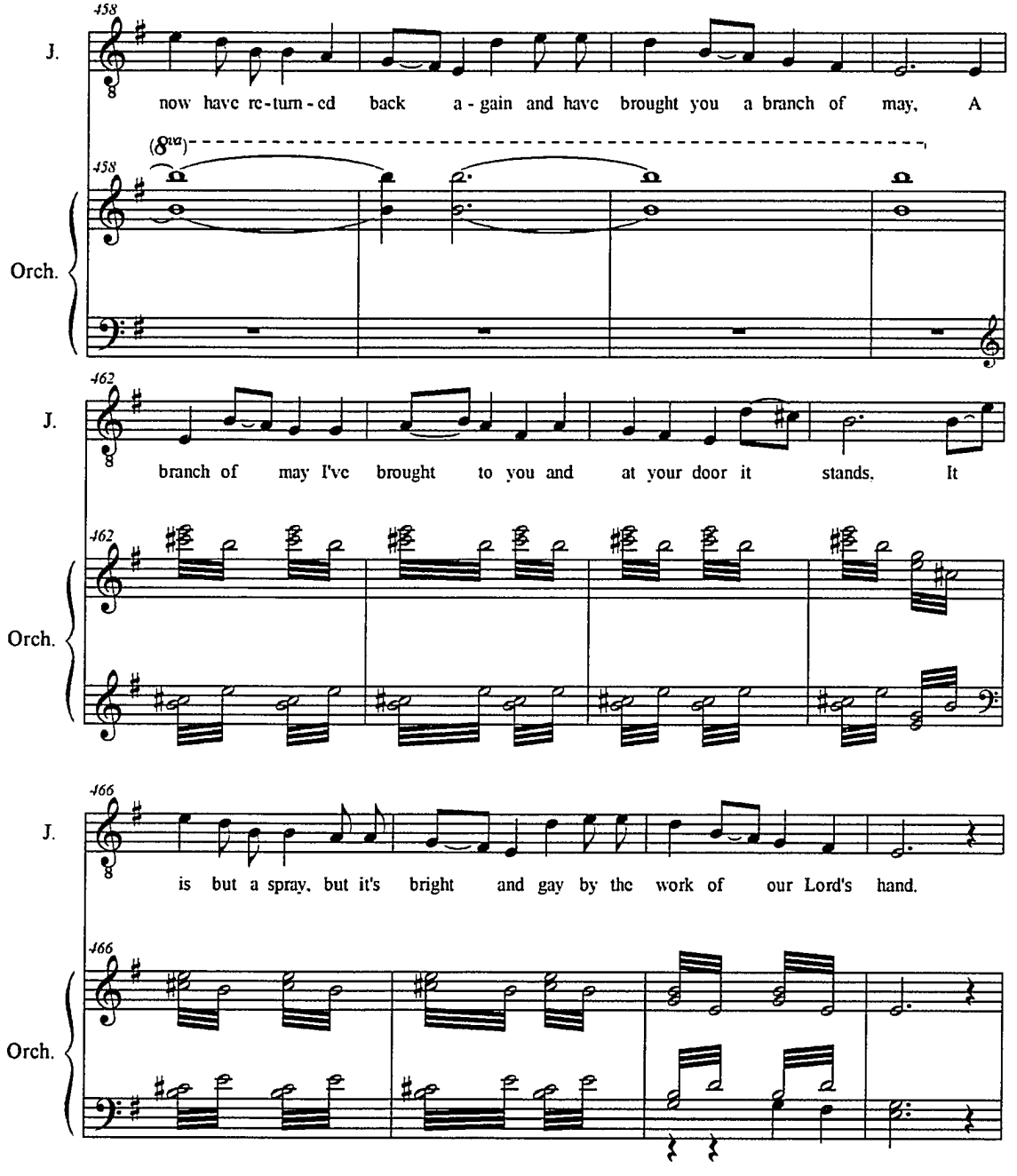


Although problems with the overall theatricality of *Hugh the Drover* generally fall outside this study's purview, John's "May Song" (Example 3-7) poses such a problem. This song, although potentially an effective piece of musical character development, is let down by other shortcomings in the story.

Example 3-7: *Hugh the Drover*, Act II, John's May Song



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According to Ursula Vaughan Williams, this tune was included to show that John had a more sensitive side, which coincides with the composer's own rationale that folk songs revealed hidden depths about those who sing them. Before this point in the opera, John's music was marked by fairly disjunct and choppy melodic lines, unexpected rhythmic and metrical shifts, and surprising patches of chromaticism. The May Song, by contrast, is a

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long-breathed, rhythmically regular melody entirely in E Dorian, a striking shift from John's earlier forms of expression. The mode of this tune (the same as collected by Vaughan Williams) could be a subtle allusion to Mary's performance of "Tuesday Morning," which was in E Aeolian; John may be attempting to match Mary's scale, but his inherent unsuitability for her precludes him from doing so.

Unfortunately, the song's late appearance in the story does not deepen John's character so much as undermine it. Nothing in the drama indicates that John actually loves Mary; he finds her attractive, but she does not bring out any emotion in him that softens his thuggish, charmless personality. Moreover, John has been shown as nothing more than an arrogant, bad-tempered bully throughout the opera, and the audience has been prepared to accept that portrayal at face value. As a result, it hardly seems credible when John comes to Mary's window late in the opera holding a bouquet and serenading her with a folk song. The attractiveness of the song alone does not mitigate or justify the sudden reversal of his character, because there were no hints it could be reversed. The problem arises not so much from attempting to develop John's character beyond that of a one-dimensional villain, but by doing so when it comes too late to be effective.

In general, it appears that Vaughan Williams was less concerned with folk songs' theatrical effectiveness than their musical appeal and atmospheric potential. The folk songs used in *Hugh* are diegetic and self-consciously performative, occur at dramatically static moments, and stand out from the usual texture. In other words, Vaughan Williams did all he could to ensure that listeners would focus on the songs (and, as he might argue, their innate expressivity) without being distracted by other aspects of the drama. Such considerations changed when Vaughan Williams began composing *Sir John in Love*.

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Sir John in Love: background and plot

"To write yet another Opera about Falstaff at this time of day may seem the height of impertinence, for one appears in so doing to be entering into competition with four great men—Shakespeare, Verdi, Nicolai and Holst."[45] So began Vaughan Williams's program note for *Sir John in Love*, which had its premiere in March 1929 at the Royal College of Music. He began composing *Sir John* in 1924, about the same time *Hugh the Drover* received its first performance. As with *Hugh*, he had no commission and no guarantee that the work would ever be performed; this time, however, he came to the task having received productions of *Hugh* and his one-act opera (or "pastoral episode") *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922).

Of the settings of Falstaff's story Vaughan Williams listed, Otto Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1849) was by far his favorite.[46] Though he considered Verdi's *Requiem* (1874) a masterpiece and counted *Rigoletto* (1851) among his favorite operas, he admitted that *Falstaff* (1893)—which he almost certainly would have seen a performance of in 1896 at the RCM, if not on other occasions—left him somewhat flat. "I know it is very brilliant and skilful and that the basket scene ensemble is a miracle of stagecraft. After all, the real Verdi carried on his drama in terms of broad tune, but Boito's medicated Shakespeare hardly ever gives him a chance. Again and again the orchestra seems to be preparing us for something like the big tunes of his earlier operas, but they do not materialise."[47] For one who favored a good melody as much as Vaughan

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[45] Ralph Vaughan Williams, preface to *Sir John in Love*, vocal score (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), vii. All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

[46] See Kennedy, *WRVW*, 385.

[47] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Verdi—A Symposium," in *The Opera Bedside Book*, ed. Harold Rosenthal (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1965), 196.

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Williams, Verdi's departure from the "big tunes of his earlier operas" was clearly disappointing.

To counter the problems he thought arose from Boito's "sham Shakespeare,"[48] Vaughan Williams took matters into his own hands in setting the libretto, a significant departure from his approach in *Hugh the Drover. Sir John in Love* takes Shakespeare's text to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as its point of departure, paring down the story, like Boito, to adapt it for the operatic stage.[49] At the same time, he added passages from other sources, writing in the preface to the score: "With regard to Shakespeare, my only excuse can be that he is fair game, like the Bible, and may be made use of nowadays even for advertisements of soap and razors."[50] He declined to use Falstaff's monologue on honor from *Henry IV, Part 1* that Verdi included in *Falstaff.* He did, however, include a drinking song from *Part 2*, as well as songs from *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Texts from Elizabethan and folk poetry (by Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Campion, among others) are also used, either substituting for Shakespeare's lines or interspersed among them (often for an ensemble scene).[51]

The opera opens with Justice Shallow bringing complaints against Sir John Falstaff and his cronies (Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol), who reject them out of hand. Page, a citizen of Windsor, invites Shallow and his associates (his cousin Slender and Parson

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Vaughan Williams eliminated several passages from the play, including the episode with the old woman of Brentford and the tutoring session between Evans and William Page. Unlike Boito, however, he retained Nym, Shallow, Slender, and the Host of the Garter, along with the subplot of the duel between Caius and Evans.

[50] Vaughan Williams, preface to *Sir John*, vii.

[51] A full list of the interpolated material (including titles and authors of original sources and position within the opera) may be found in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 122–24. One citation, however, is absent: that for "A cup of wine," from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, Act V, scene 3. Further information on the origins and use of these sources may be found in Howes, *Music*, 275–98.

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Hugh Evans) to the Garter Inn for dinner, where they are joined by Mistresses Ford and Page, as well as Anne, Page's daughter and object of Slender's inept courting. Anne's father favors Slender as a potential suitor, while her mother prefers the town's French chemist, Dr. Caius, but Anne cares for neither one. As she pines over her situation, her own love, Fenton, appears and they share their feelings for each other. As Fenton prepares to leave, Dr. Caius, his squire Rugby, and Mrs. Quickly (his maid and the town gossip) enter. Caius too is smitten by Anne Page, and means to win her. But Fenton is resolute, and persuades Mrs. Quickly to do what she can to keep him in Anne's favor.

After a brief thieving expedition leads Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol back to the Garter, Falstaff announces his intent to seduce both Mistresses Ford and Page. Struck by a sudden sense of integrity, the trio refuses to help him, so he dismisses them from his service. Annoyed, Nym and Pistol warn Ford about the fat knight's intentions; Ford, enraged with jealousy, plots his revenge.

Act II opens on Mistress Page reading a love letter from Falstaff when Mistress Ford enters. The two discover that Falstaff sent each of them the same message, and they too plan retaliation. Mistress Quickly, enlisted by the Windsor wives to assist them, visits Falstaff in his lodgings at the Garter, and tells him that Mistresses Ford and Page are both interested in his advances. Delighted, he begins a new love letter to Mistress Ford when he is interrupted by one Mr. Brook (Ford in disguise). "Brook" offers to pay Falstaff to corrupt Mistress Ford's marriage vows in order to slander her reputation. Falstaff agrees, telling him of his plans to visit Mistress Ford between ten and eleven that day, and goes off to change in preparation for his visit. Ford, fuming with anger, is diverted by Slender,

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Shallow, Page, and Bardolph to go see the duel between Dr. Caius and Parson Evans, whom Caius blames for encouraging Slender's advances on Anne.

Act III begins with an Interlude added by the composer in 1933 (generally referred to now as Act III, scene 1), which develops the wooing between Fenton and Anne, with the assistance of the Host of the Garter.[52] Scene 2 finds a gloomy Evans preparing for his duel, averted at the last minute by the Host. Ford, hoping to catch Falstaff, invites the whole crowd back to his house. Scene 3 opens there, where Mistresses Ford, Page, and Quickly have prepared for Falstaff's arrival. When he enters and begins to woo Mistress Ford, Mistress Page suddenly bursts in with the news that Ford is coming. Falstaff hides in a laundry basket, which is carried out and dumped in a ditch by the Thames. Ford tears his house apart in search of Falstaff, but finds only Mistress Page hidden behind a tapestry as the others laugh at his discomfiture.

Ford shamefacedly apologizes to his wife at the beginning of Act IV, and the entire crowd prepares a final revenge for Falstaff: they will tempt him to the outskirts of Windsor and, disguised as fairies, humiliate him in front of the townsfolk. Falstaff's spirit may be weak, but his flesh is willing enough to respond to a final entreaty from Mistress Ford to meet her at the great oak tree disguised as Herne the Hunter. Almost as soon as Mistress Ford and Page arrive, they run off, leaving Falstaff at the mercy of the townspeople and their children to pinch and burn him. Once this is accomplished (and after a bit of moralizing), Page invites Falstaff to laugh at his wife, since he had arranged to have Anne marry Slender that evening. Mistress Page is surprised, because she secretly

[52] In addition to this Interlude, Vaughan Williams added a Prologue and an Episode (the thieving expedition in Act I). The composer later withdrew the Prologue, but the Episode and Interlude are generally understood as being part of the definitive version of the opera. See Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 123–24, and also "Note" in Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, ix, which clarifies the position each section should take (in contradiction to Kennedy's notes, which only provide the composer's original intent).

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made plans to have Anne marry Dr. Caius. It turns out both are wrong: Anne and Fenton have married each other, to their parents' dismay, but Falstaff saves face by smoothing the feathers of all involved. A celebratory dance closes the opera.

Sir John in Love was the first of Vaughan Williams's works that he referred to simply as an opera, without the modifications he attached to some of his other stage works (like "Romantic ballad opera" or "pastoral episode" or "morality"). This suggests that he was moving toward the grand operatic style favored at Covent Garden, but *Sir John*'s status as a romantic comedy tended to de-emphasize its relationship to that tradition (as did Verdi's *Falstaff*), *Sir John in Love* is also slightly incongruous for its time. Puccini's *Turandot* and Berg's *Wozzeck* were each less than five years old when *Sir John* debuted in 1929, and might have made Vaughan Williams's piece look a bit old-fashioned by comparison. Indeed, its lightness and cheerful tone are more reminiscent of *opera buffa* by Mozart or Rossini, updated for the musical language of the twentieth century.

Vaughan Williams included several folk songs and other pre-existing tunes in the piece, and explained his rationale for their inclusion in the preface to the score:

> When a particular folk-tune appeared to me to be the fitting accompaniment to the situation, I have used it. When I could not find a suitable folk-tune, I have made shift to make up something of my own. I therefore offer no apology for the occasional use of a folk-song to enhance a dramatic point. If the result is successful I feel justified; if not, no amount of 'originality' will save the situation. However, the point is a small one, since out of a total of 120 minutes' music, the folk-tunes occupy less than 15.[53]

Vaughan Williams's selection and application of folk songs in *Sir John* resembles that of *Hugh the Drover*, but they are used with greater variety and sophistication in *Sir*

[53] Vaughan Williams, preface to *Sir John*, vii.

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John. They tend to suggest a retreat (though not a complete renunciation) from the more overt evocations of Englishness that characterized several of his first period works, *Hugh the Drover* included, since he no longer made each folk song stand out from its surroundings in a deliberately conspicuous manner. Instead, they serve more subtle and wide-ranging dramatic ends than do the folk songs in *Hugh the Drover*.

His decision to diversify the treatment of folk music in *Sir John* may also have been due to the success of the folk-song movement. Its members' goal of making indigenous English song better known throughout the country had been remarkably effective since the turn of the century. Not long after the first performance of *Sir John*, Vaughan Williams told an American audience about the movement's success: "Largely owing to the labours of Cecil Sharp our folk-tunes are now known to English people from their earliest youth. These tunes have become part of the national basis of musical language to every child in England. . . . we are now taking folk-song for granted, whether we like it or not, as part of our natural surroundings; that its influence is no longer self-conscious but organic."[54] By the late 1920s, folk songs were a standard part of music education in primary schools,[55] solo and choral arrangements of songs were published and performed throughout Britain, and some composers (such as Gerald Finzi, John Ireland, and others) either used folk songs or elements of the folk idiom into their own music. More and more people knew or knew of folk songs than in years past, and were beginning to accept them as a part of England's musical heritage. The need for Vaughan Williams to share them with the public (simply in order to prevent their extinction) was

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[54] Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 46–47.

[55] See Alun Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England," in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 77–78.

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no longer as urgent as it had been earlier in the century, and that shift in focus perhaps enabled him to explore more varied treatment of folk songs in his own music.

Of course, some critics had long objected to the presence of folk songs in "serious" music. A critic in the *Star* raised such a complaint about their use in *Sir John*: "The music is the thing in opera, or should be, and I confess I found it a trifle on the heavy side. The traditional melody stunt is being overdone in this and other countries."[56] Ernest Newman had long opposed the use of folk songs by composers, believing that they lacked the descriptive and dramatic qualities required for opera.[57] Still, Vaughan Williams attempted to overcome these potential shortcomings in his treatment of folk songs for *Sir John in Love*, and did so more effectively than in *Hugh the Drover*. In *Hugh*, the songs are exclusively diegetic, often decorative, and tend to interrupt the dramatic progression of the opera. By contrast, *Sir John* integrates the folk songs (both diegetic and extra-diegetic) into the musico-dramatic fabric of the work, making them seem like natural extensions of the characters' expressive modes and part of the overall texture. Put another way, it is as though the drama generates from the music in *Hugh*, and the music from the drama in *Sir John*.

Folk song in *Sir John in Love*

Twelve pre-existing tunes are used in *Sir John* (nine folk tunes, a hymn, a song by William Byrd, and a chanson), and are all indicated in the score. The tunes to "A Sailor Loved a Farmer's Daughter" and "A Sailor from the Sea" are heard during Falstaff's first

[56] Quoted in Figaro, "The Operatic World," *Musical Opinion* 52, no. 620 (May 1929): 720.

[57] Newman, "This Week's Music," 7.

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exchange with Shallow in Act I, but without their original texts.[58] Later in the same act, in the scene featuring the first appearances of Mrs. Quickly, Dr. Caius, and Rugby, two songs are used: "Robin Hood and the Bishop" [59] and a French chanson, "Vrai dieu d'amours."[60] Act II features only a single folk song, "Lovely Joan,"[61] but the third act contains three ("To Shallow Rivers," "Peg-a-Ramsey," and "Greensleeves,").[62] No folk songs are used in the final act, but two traditional dance tunes are present: "T'old wife o' Dallowgill" and "Half Hannikin."[63] Vaughan Williams also included two composed songs in the opera: "John come kiss me now," a song by William Byrd first heard in Act I,[64] and the hymn tune "St. Mary," from a psalter by the Welshman Edmund (or Edmwnd) Prys (d.1623), in Act III.[65] *Sir John* also features several newly-composed songs mimicking the folkish idiom that could easily be mistaken for actual folk tunes.[66]

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[58] These first appear in Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 7 and 15–16, respectively; the former is also known as "A sailor courted a farmer's daughter." Vaughan Williams collected the first tune in 1909, and published it in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 3, no. 13 (June 1909): 294; his source for the second tune is unclear, but he did not collect a version of it himself.

[59] See Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 42. The song's full name is "Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford," collected in 1906 by H. E. D. Hammond ("Conventional Ballads," in *The Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 3, no. 11 (1907): 61).

[60] See Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 50–54.

[61] Ibid., 106. Vaughan Williams first collected this tune in 1908; see Ralph Vaughan Williams and others, "Songs from Norfolk," *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 4, no. 15 (December 1910): 90. Roy Palmer has noted that the first line ("A noble knight there was indeed") sometimes substituted "fine young man" for "noble knight," but the latter seems to be most common (*Folk Songs*, 127).

[62] See Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 158–61, 178–79, and 195–96, respectively.

[63] Ibid., 212–13 and 306.

[64] Ibid., 71–76. See also William Barclay Squire and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, eds., *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1899; reprint, New York: Dover, 1963), 47–53.
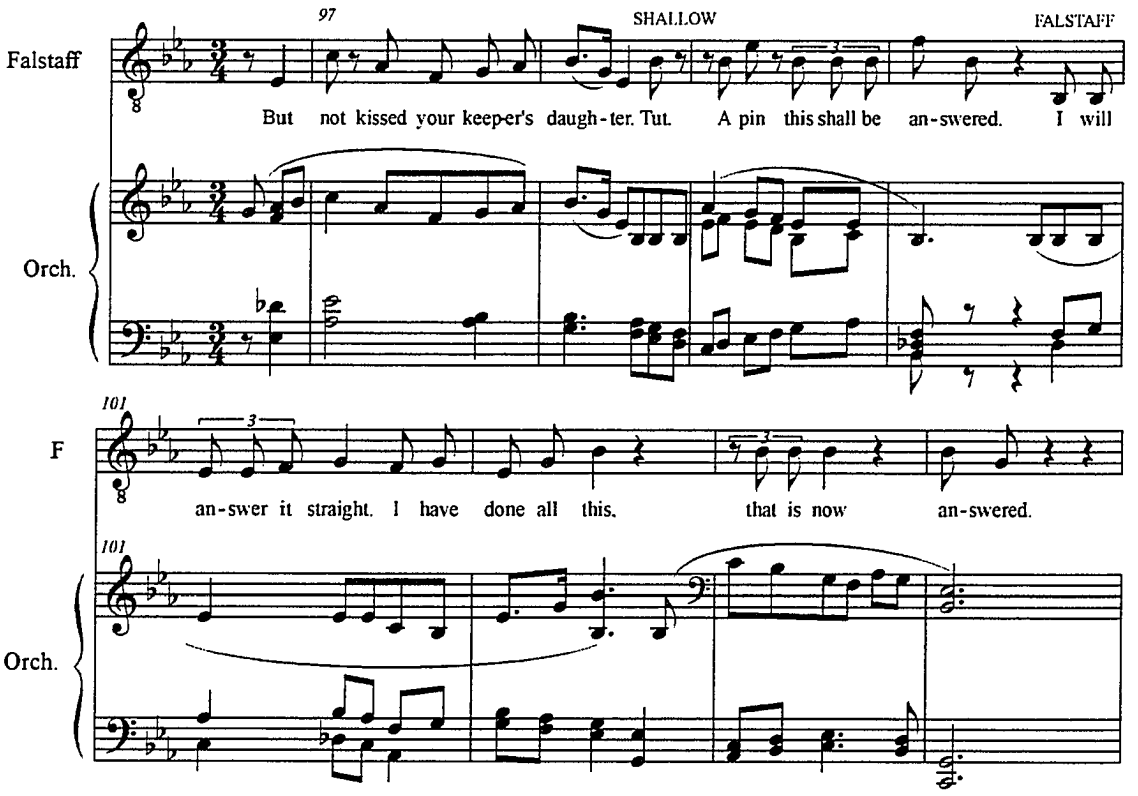
[65] Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 159-61; also listed as no. 84 in W. J. Birkbeck, Percy Dearmer, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and others, eds., *The English Hymnal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), 120.

[66] These include the following (page citations are for Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*): "Back and side go bare" (59–63), "When daisies pied" (90–94), "Sigh no more ladies" (107–14), and "A cup of wine" (119–20). One other folk-like tune, "I mun be married a-Sunday," can be found in Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Prologue, Episode and Interlude from the opera* Sir John in Love, vocal score (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 51.

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In much the same way that Vaughan Williams detached various texts from their original contexts to form the libretto for *Sir John*, so too does he occasionally modify the texts of folk tunes (for example, by substituting new words, or sometimes eliminating the text altogether) in order to serve new dramatic purposes. The first two songs ("A Sailor Loved a Farmer's Daughter" and "A Sailor from the Sea") exemplify this phenomenon. No attempt has been made to separate either tune from the overall texture. That is, although a distinctive tune is present each time, nothing in the action, dialogue, or dramatic situation indicates their folk origin. In both cases, the original words have been removed in favor of Shakespeare's prose, but the new text does not follow the melody note for note. Only the second half of the tune "A Sailor Loved a Farmer's Daughter" is quoted, when Falstaff answers Shallow's charges. The accompaniment plays the melody in full, but Falstaff's melody only follows it for part of the time (Example 3-8).
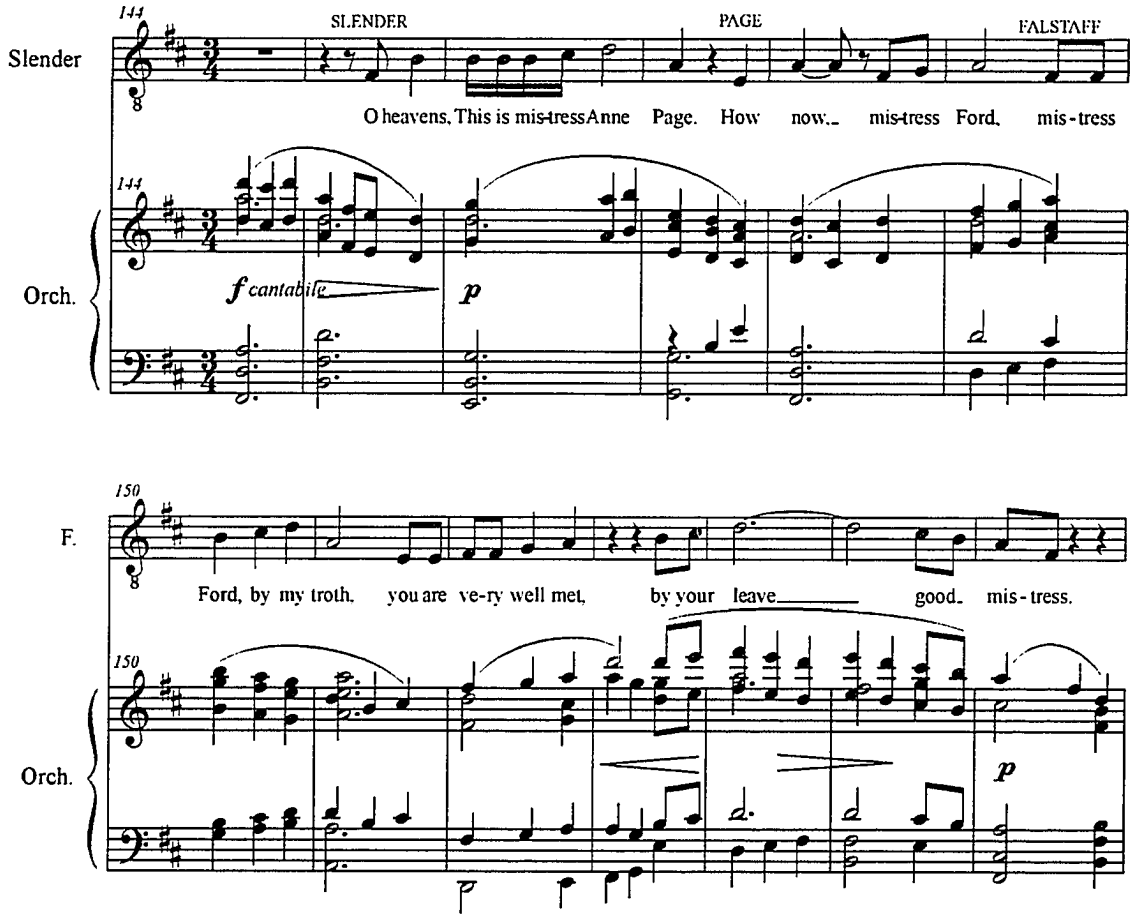
Example 3-8: *Sir John in Love*, Act I, quote of "A sailor loved a farmer's daughter"



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"A Sailor from the Sea" accompanies two recitative-arioso exchanges—first among Slender, Page, and Falstaff, then among Anne, Shallow, and Evans. As before, the singers only double the melody occasionally (Falstaff the first time, Shallow the second) using new words, but the entire tune is present in the accompaniment (Example 3-9).[67]

Example 3-9: *Sir John in Love*, Act I, quote of "A sailor from the sea"



Each of these tunes is identified as a folk song in the score, but there is little reason to assume that the casual listener would recognize them as such—they simply blend into the larger musical texture. Both songs are both accompanied by textural shifts, but these differ from the textural changes of *Hugh the Drover*. There, the entire orchestral
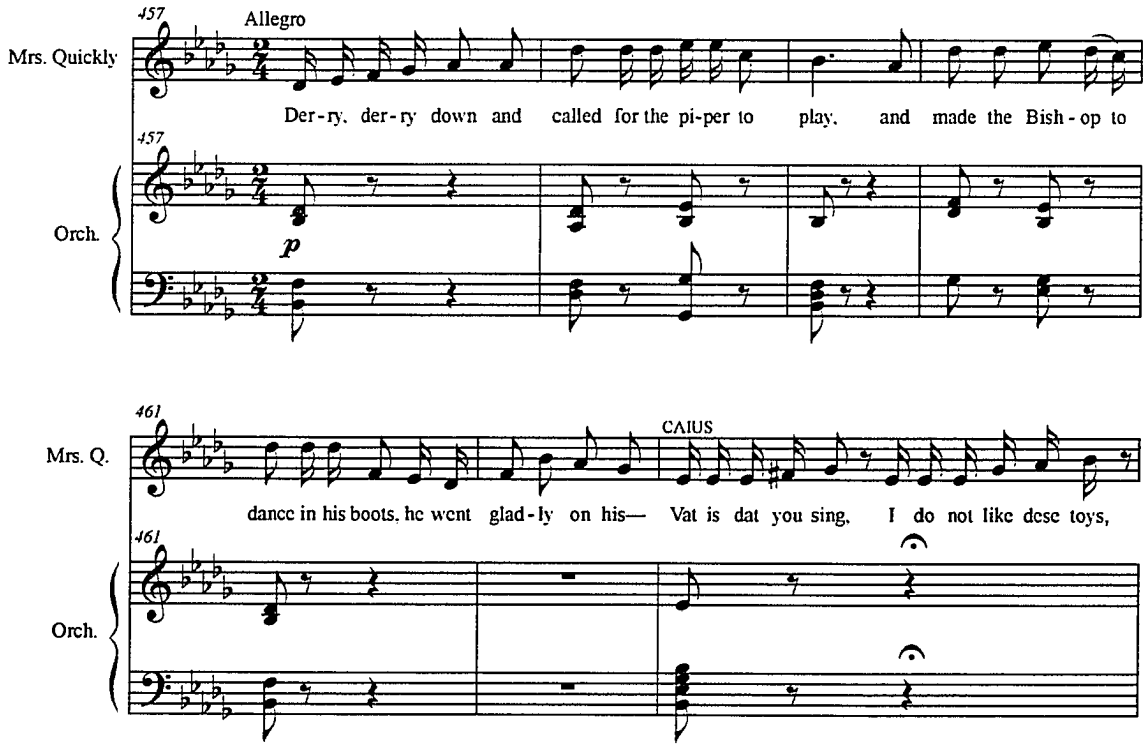
[67] The example shown is that of the first exchange; the second may be found in Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 21. One gets the impression Vaughan Williams may have considered this tune as a potential leitmotif for Anne Page—it initially appears at her first entrance and when she re-enters in the same scene—but it is not heard again in the piece.

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texture would subside in order to place the sung melody (with its original text) at the center of the musical action; here, the melody itself is used mainly as accompaniment. Any fragments of the melody that make it into the vocal line are accompanied by new text, disguising it even further. As soon as a single strophe of each song is completed, the melody segues into a passage of newly-composed music. In other words, these two folk songs are extra-diegetic music: the characters do not recognize them as folk tunes, nor do they react as though a performance is taking place.

A few diegetic folk songs appear in *Sir John*, the first of which is "Robin Hood and the Bishop," sung by Mrs. Quickly in order to distract Dr. Caius (Example 3-10).

Example 3-10: *Sir John in Love*, Act I, "Robin Hood and the Bishop"



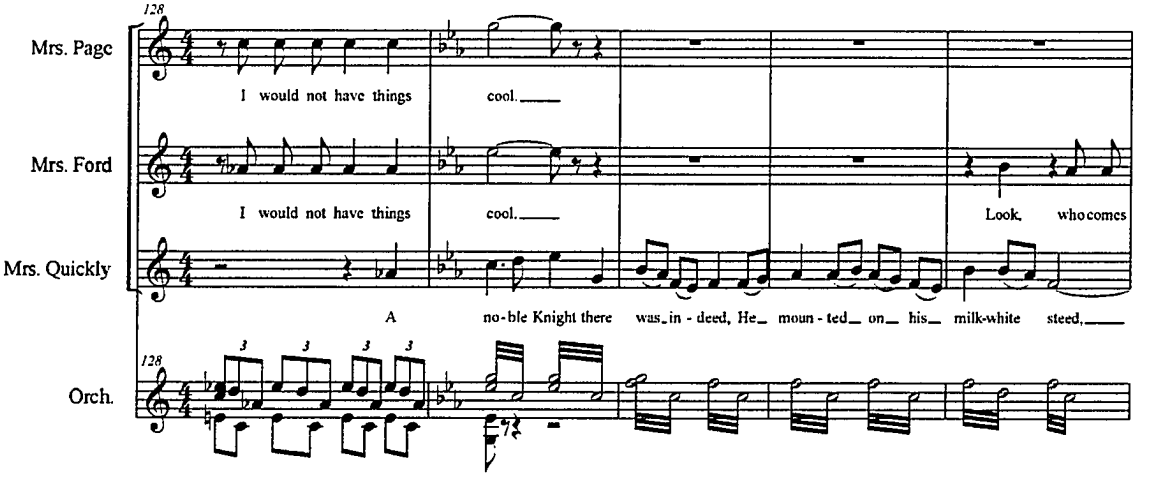
Shakespeare's original text simply indicates that Mrs. Quickly sings the refrain of a song ("And down, down, adown-a"), so Vaughan Williams filled in the gap with a tune that he thought a middle-class matron like Mrs. Quickly might know and sing under the

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circumstances.[68] It achieves her goal of catching Caius off-guard—he notices her singing the song, is struck by its incongruity, and makes a suspicious comment to that effect. Musically, this tune stands out because of its sparse accompaniment. Much of the previous section lacked accompaniment, but featured fast recitative and a limited melodic range. When the folk tune appears, one expects more extensive accompaniment with the more active melody, since most passages with similarly active melodic lines had so far displayed this trait. When these expectations are upset, Caius notices and responds appropriately. Here, a folk tune successfully achieves a dramatic end.

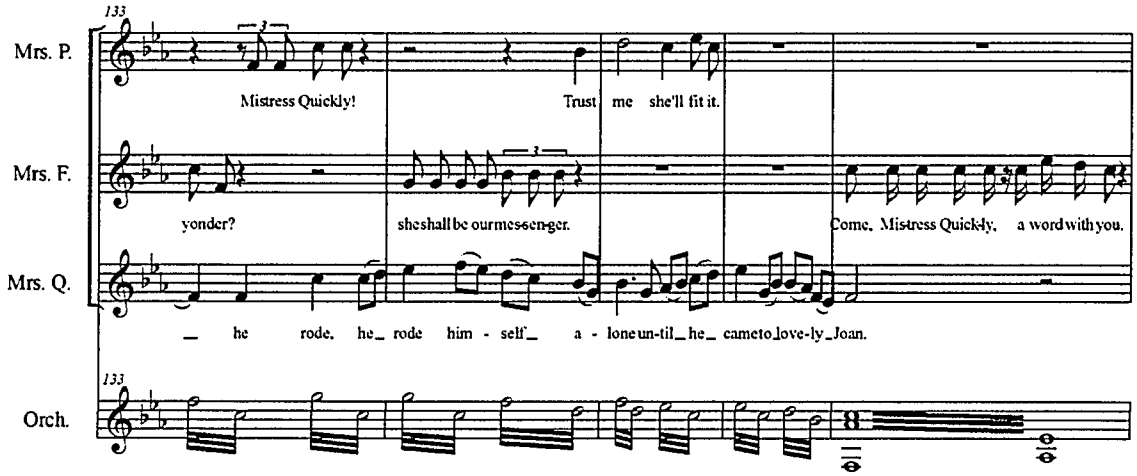
Mrs. Quickly receives another diegetic folk tune in Act II, "Lovely Joan." As Mistresses Ford and Page discuss how to gain revenge on Falstaff for wooing them both, they hear Mrs. Quickly singing a song as she approaches (Example 3-11).

Example 3-11: *Sir John in Love*, Act II, "Lovely Joan"



[68] See William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. T. W. Craik, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 105.

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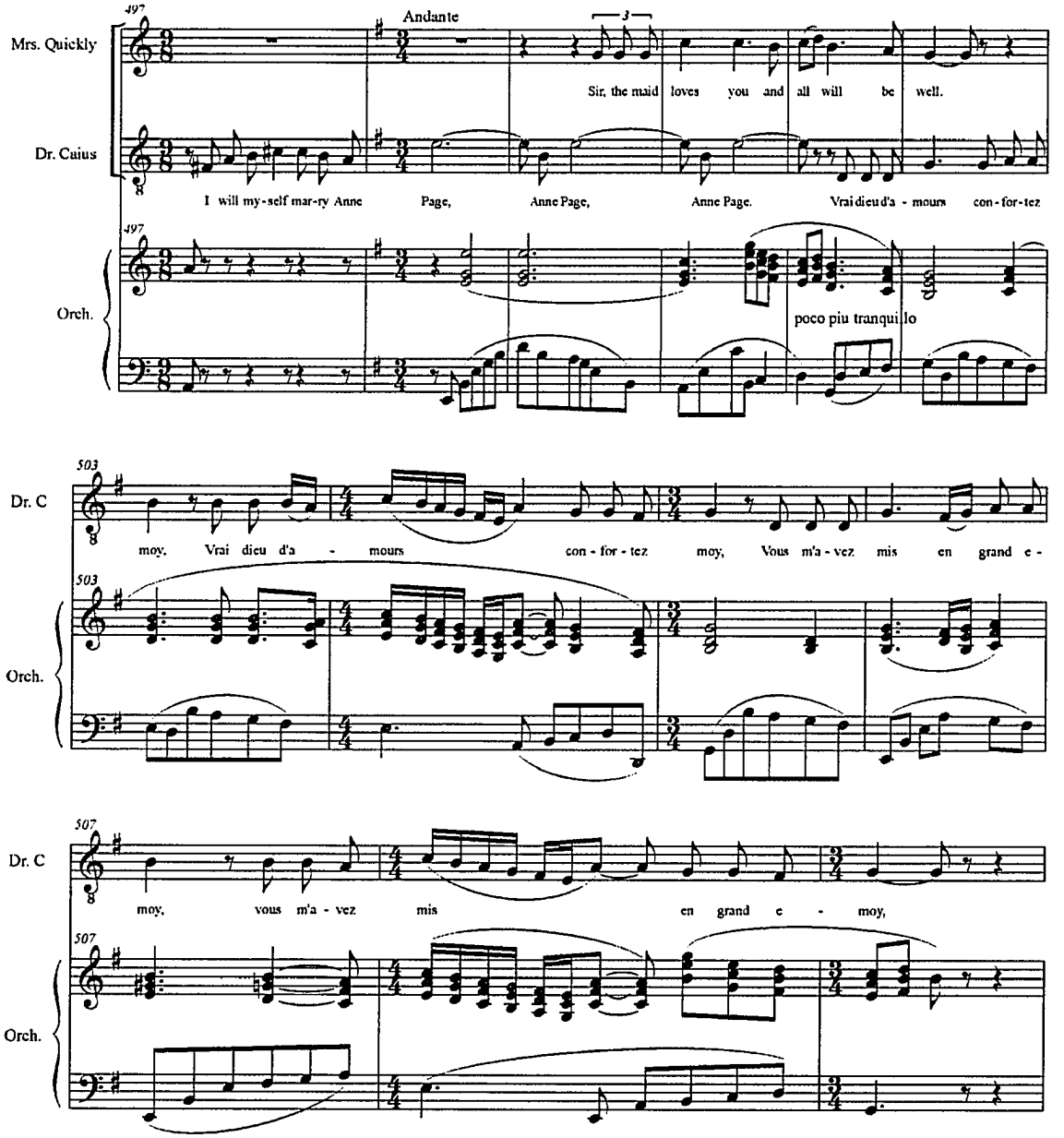


Throughout this passage, the Windsor wives continue to exchange fragments of recitative over the song, demonstrating that even though they hear it, they clearly don't consider it to be a musical event demanding their undivided attention. Mrs. Quickly sings only a single verse of the song, off-stage and accompanied by a quiet string tremolo to give the illusion of distance. Although "Lovely Joan" dominates the musical texture at this point, it doesn't receive the same kind of undivided attention from the other characters as similar folk songs do in *Hugh the Drover*.[69]

Vaughan Williams also uses folk songs to facilitate character development. The French chanson "Vrai dieu d'amours" (Example 3-12), for example, helps provide some insight into Dr. Caius's personality.

[69] Stradling and Hughes heavily criticized Vaughan Williams's treatment of this tune, but their comparison of his folk-song settings with Schubert's lieder (and their objections to the so-called "gentrification" of folk song) seem oddly misplaced. See Hughes and Stradling, *English Musical Renaissance*, 211.

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Example 3-12: ***Sir John in Love*****, Act I, "Vrai dieu d'amours"**



While the motivation for giving this song to Caius recalls that of giving the May Song to John in *Hugh the Drover*—to flesh out the personality of the antagonist—it is applied more effectively here than in *Hugh*. Perhaps most importantly, it is sung during Caius's first appearance, before his personality traits have been firmly established. At the beginning of the scene, he comes off as haughty and hot-tempered, ordering Rugby around and threatening Parson Evans's squire. Yet one gets the sense that Caius is more

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bluster than bully, a distinct contrast to John the Butcher. Moreover, he sings "Vrai dieu d'amours"—a lyrical, long-breathed tune that contrasts with his previous fragmentary staccato—because he starts thinking about Anne Page, with whom he is truly infatuated. His feelings seem to go much deeper than John's did for Mary. That he sings in his native French further suggests that his expression of love is sincere, since it would be the most natural and comfortable language for him to use. By adding this song, Vaughan Williams makes Dr. Caius a more sympathetic figure than Shakespeare did. Instead of simply being a one-dimensional boor, Caius shows that he is capable of more tender emotion, something that might have seemed less plausible had its revelation been put off.[70]
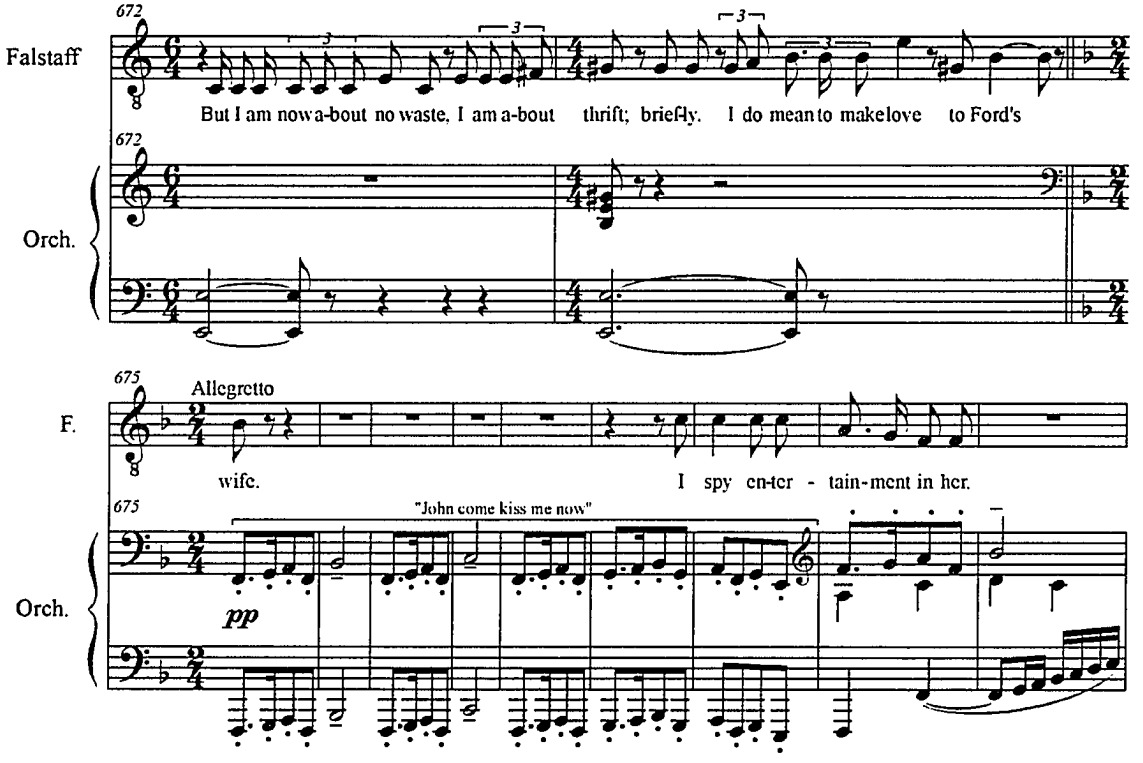
It is difficult to tell how Rugby and Mrs. Quickly respond to "Vrai dieu d'amours." Their reactions to the song indicate that they notice a change in the doctor's behavior: Rugby states "My master is himself again," and Mrs. Quickly mollifies Caius by assuring him that Anne returns his interest. Yet there is no hint that they understand what he is saying, and they could simply be reacting to the sudden change in his musical idiom, now slow and lyrical rather than fast and choppy. Rugby could be referring to Caius's broken English when he observes his master's return to normalcy; rather than speaking a language he does not fully command, he reverts to his native tongue. Rugby and Mrs. Quickly join Caius in singing—though in English—creating a quasi-imitative texture that shows their sympathy with him as well as their subservience. (Recall Caius's reaction to "Robin Hood and the Bishop" when it deviated from the expressive norm.) Both Rugby's and Mrs. Quickly's musical expression in this scene depends upon Caius's.

[70] The reviewer in the *Daily Telegraph* disagreed, suggesting that the music was "more fitting to courtly Fenton than the swaggering French physician" (F. B., "A New English Opera," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 23 March 1929, page not noted).

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Falstaff also inspires other characters to sing—perhaps a tribute to his claim of being "not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men"?—but, unlike Caius, does so through his actions rather than his musical language. This occurs with "John come kiss me now," the only song in the opera that Vaughan Williams claimed had a title related to the story (Example 3-13).[71]

Example 3-13: *Sir John in Love*, Act I, Scene I



This song, composed by William Byrd ("Jhon come kisse me now"), comes from the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, a seventeenth-century collection of English keyboard music now held by the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge. The song's dramatic function varies throughout the opera. The tune is first heard quietly in the orchestra after Falstaff announces his plan to seduce Mistresses Ford and Page, and is soon sung (with its

[71] Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, vii.

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original text) by Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, and the Host of the Garter.[72] They dismiss the possibility of Falstaff successfully wooing either woman, much less both, and sing this song—its text a plea from a woman to a man she finds irresistible—in order to make fun of Sir John.[73] The implication is that Falstaff will recognize this song, which stands out from the surrounding musical material through its unison declamation, regular rhythm, non-conversational text, and distinct melody, and realize he is being mocked.

Yet Falstaff is so sure of himself that the taunting song does not faze him. In fact, he seems to take its sentiment at face value (rather than in the ironic manner his friends intended), and turns it into one of his signature tunes. It appears in various guises—with new texts, no text, and different orchestrations—at points in the drama when Falstaff is confident and thinks himself in control of a situation.[74] Falstaff has a second motive with a rhythmic and melodic link to "John come kiss me now," first heard in the orchestra at the beginning of Act II, but later sung by Mistress Page ("Thine own true knight," Example 3-14).

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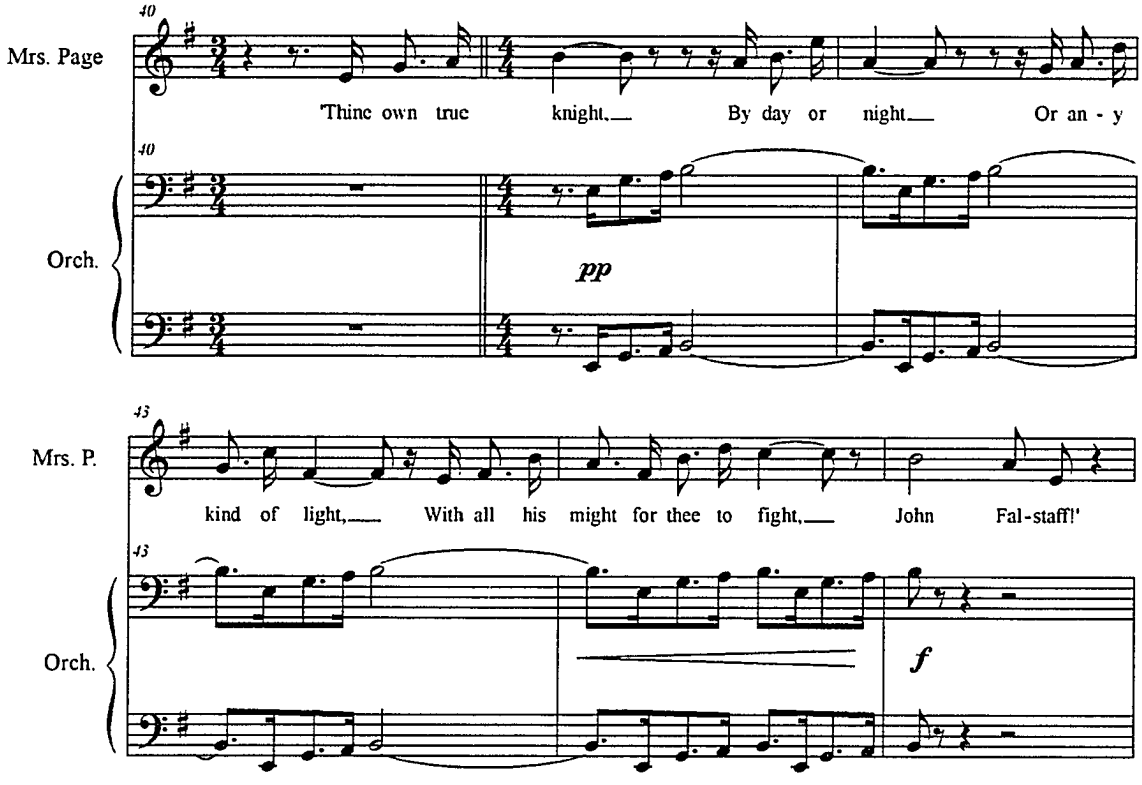
[72] Ibid., 71–73.

[73] "John, come kiss me now, now / John, come kiss me now / John, come kiss me bye and bye / And make no more ado" (ibid., 72–73).

[74] See ibid., 130, 157, 292.

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Example 3-14: *Sir John in Love*, Act II, Scene 1



Unlike "John come kiss me now," the appearance of "Thine own true knight" foreshadows situations detrimental to Falstaff's well-being, such as when the Windsor wives first conspire against him, or before the fairy attack in the final act.[75] Vaughan Williams's treatment of "John come kiss me now" illustrates a key difference between the use of folk songs in *Sir John in Love* and *Hugh the Drover*. In *Hugh*, songs were usually isolated from the surrounding musical material in order to emphasize them as autonomous events. Here, songs are more closely integrated with the overall musical texture in order to serve a dramatic end, downplaying their identity as folk songs.
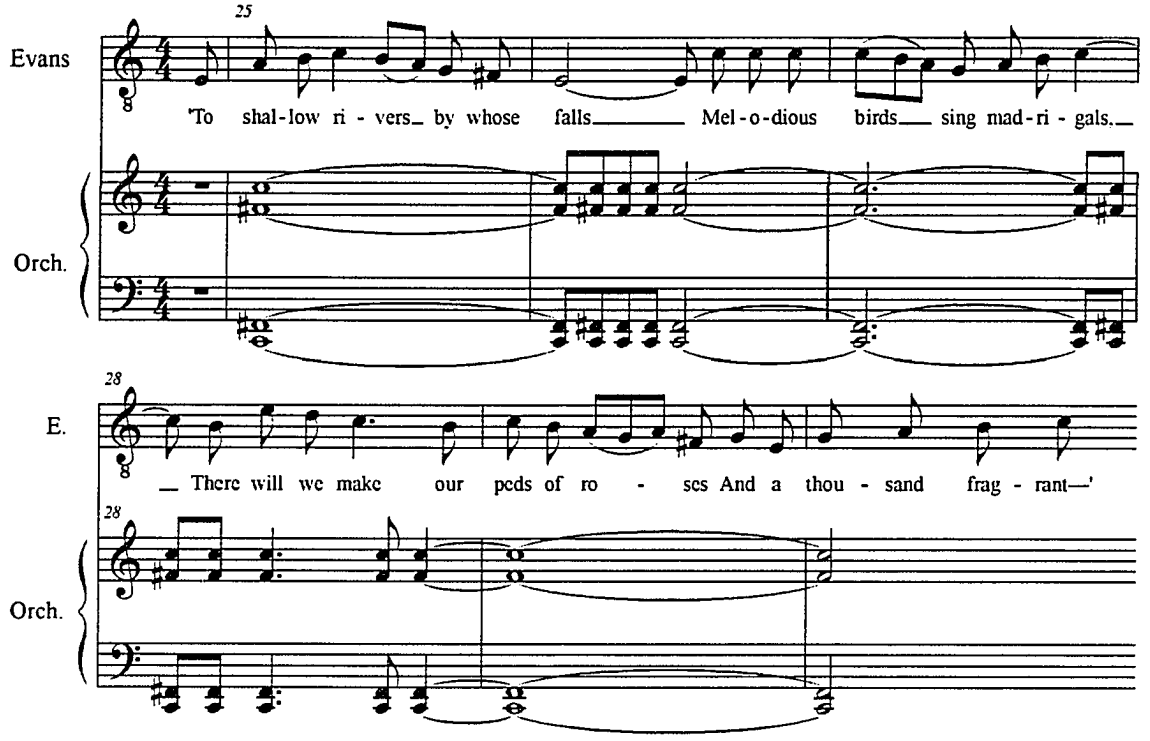
This technique recurs at the beginning of Act III, scene 2. As Parson Evans waits for Dr. Caius to arrive for their duel, he tries to calm himself by reading from a book of poetry. In his nervousness, he ends up conflating texts from Philip Marlowe's *Passionate*

[75] Ibid., 95-7,103-04, 246, 254-55.

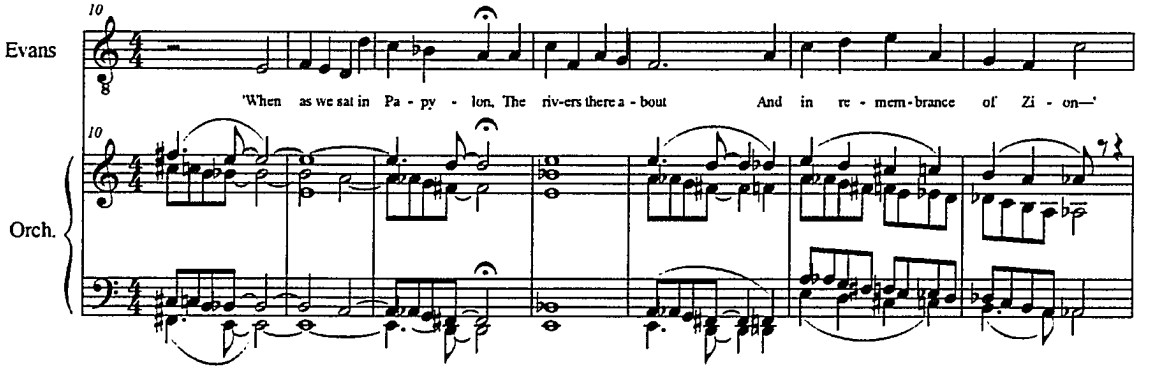
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Shepherd ("To shallow rivers by whose falls," Example 3-15) and Psalm 137 ("When as we sat in Babylon," Example 3-16).

Example 3-15: *Sir John in Love*, Act III, Scene 2, "To Shallow Rivers"



Example 3-16: *Sir John in Love*, Act III, Scene 2, "When as we sat..."



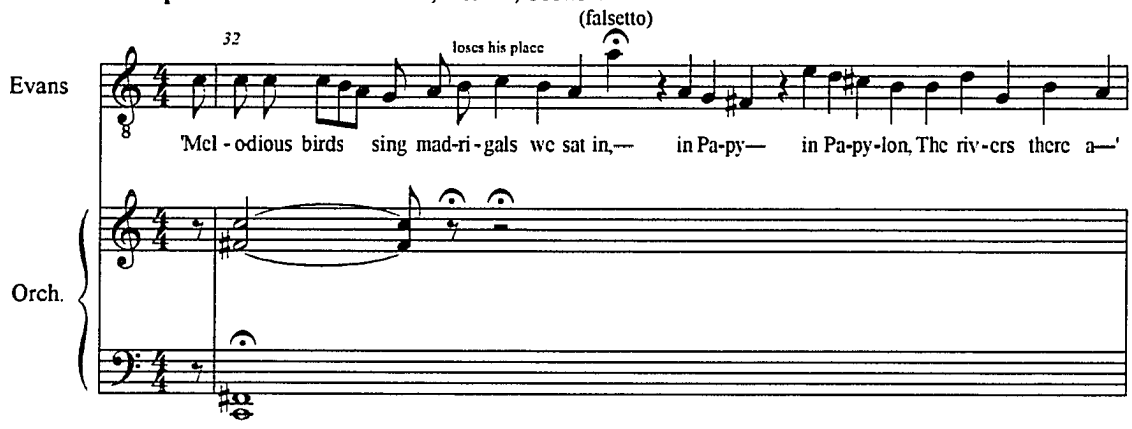
Shakespeare included both of these texts in his play, indicating that they were supposed to be sung. Vaughan Williams chose the hymn tune "St. Mary" for singing Psalm 137, the same pairing as used in the English Hymnal,[76] and assigned "To Shallow Rivers" a

[76] See no. 84 in *The English Hymnal.*

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melody of the same name that was evidently an older version of the folk tune "Black-eyed Susan."[77] Vaughan Williams depicts Evans's underlying anxiety by saturating the accompaniment with tritones and descending chromatic figures, and cleverly combines the two melodies when Evans loses his place in the book and confuses the texts (Example 3-17).

Example 3-17: *Sir John in Love*, Act III, Scene 2



Evans compounds the error by singing "St. Mary's" in A Dorian (the key of "To Shallow Rivers") rather than in its original D minor, resulting in an octave leap that exceeds his range and alerts him to his mistake. Again, the origin of these tunes is less important than their dramatic role; Vaughan Williams has effectively subordinated form to function.
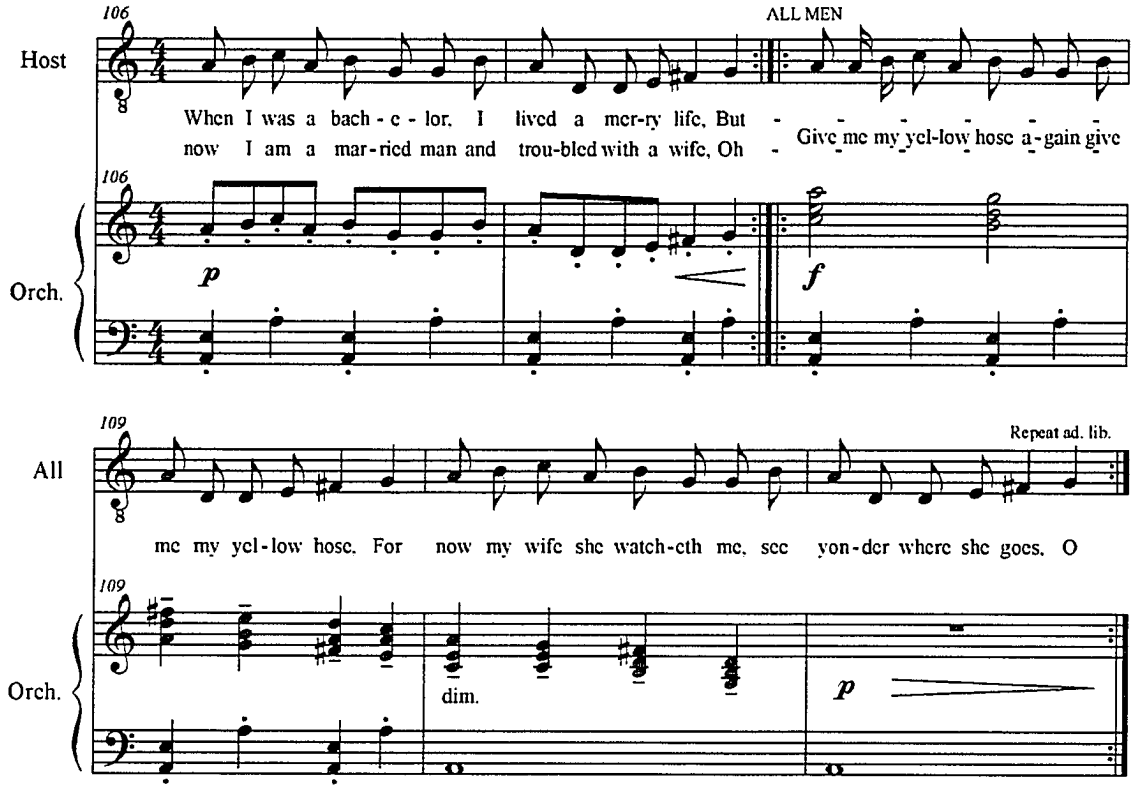
After the duel is averted, Ford invites all the men back to his house, hoping to catch Falstaff there with his wife. He shares his suspicions with the Host, who responds by singing the tune "Peg-a-Ramsey," a song about a husband troubled by his wife. Shakespeare referred to this song in *Twelfth Night* (Act II, scene 3), but its presence here

[77] For the musical examples, see Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 158–61. For information on the relationship between "To Shallow Waters" and "Black-eyed Susan," see Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 121, and Howes, *Music*, 286.

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was entirely Vaughan Williams's doing. It is first sung by the Host (and picked up by the other men) to gently mock Ford for maligning his wife's fidelity (Example 3-18).[78]

Example 3-18: Act III, Scene 2, "Peg-a-Ramsey"
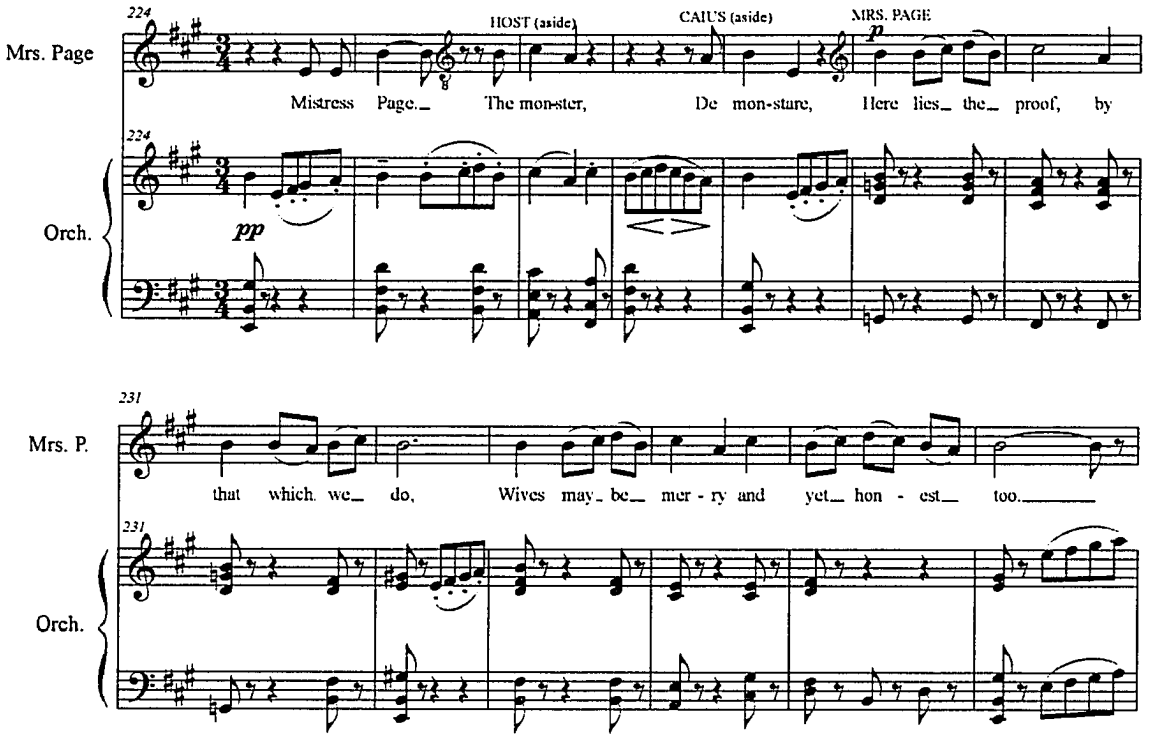


The same song recurs at the beginning of the next scene to alert Mistresses Page and Ford to the imminent arrival of their husbands—still singing the song as they approach the house—leading to Falstaff's concealment in the laundry basket. The melody undergoes augmentation later in the scene, after Ford rips away a tapestry he believes Falstaff to be hiding behind, only to discover Mrs. Page instead. At this point, the tune returns in the form of a slow minuet, as Mrs. Page reminds Ford: "Wives may be merry and yet honest too" (Example 3-19).

[78] Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 178–79.

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Example 3-19: *Sir John in Love*, Act III, Scene 3



This calmer, more lyrical version of the tune contrasts the women's cool heads with those of the impetuous men, transforming the latters' suspicion to sheepishness.[79] "Peg a-Ramsey" is thus treated similarly to "John come kiss me now:" although first presented diegetically, it is later transformed into a subtle commentary on those who sing it.

A variation of this technique applies to the performance of "Greensleeves," a song Vaughan Williams had long associated with Shakespeare's *Merry Wives*.[80] Shakespeare mentioned "Greensleeves" twice in *Merry Wives*, but didn't provide an opportunity for its performance. Vaughan Williams remedied this by setting the tune in Act III for Mistress Ford, who, after being alerted to Falstaff's approach, sings it in an attempt to look casual
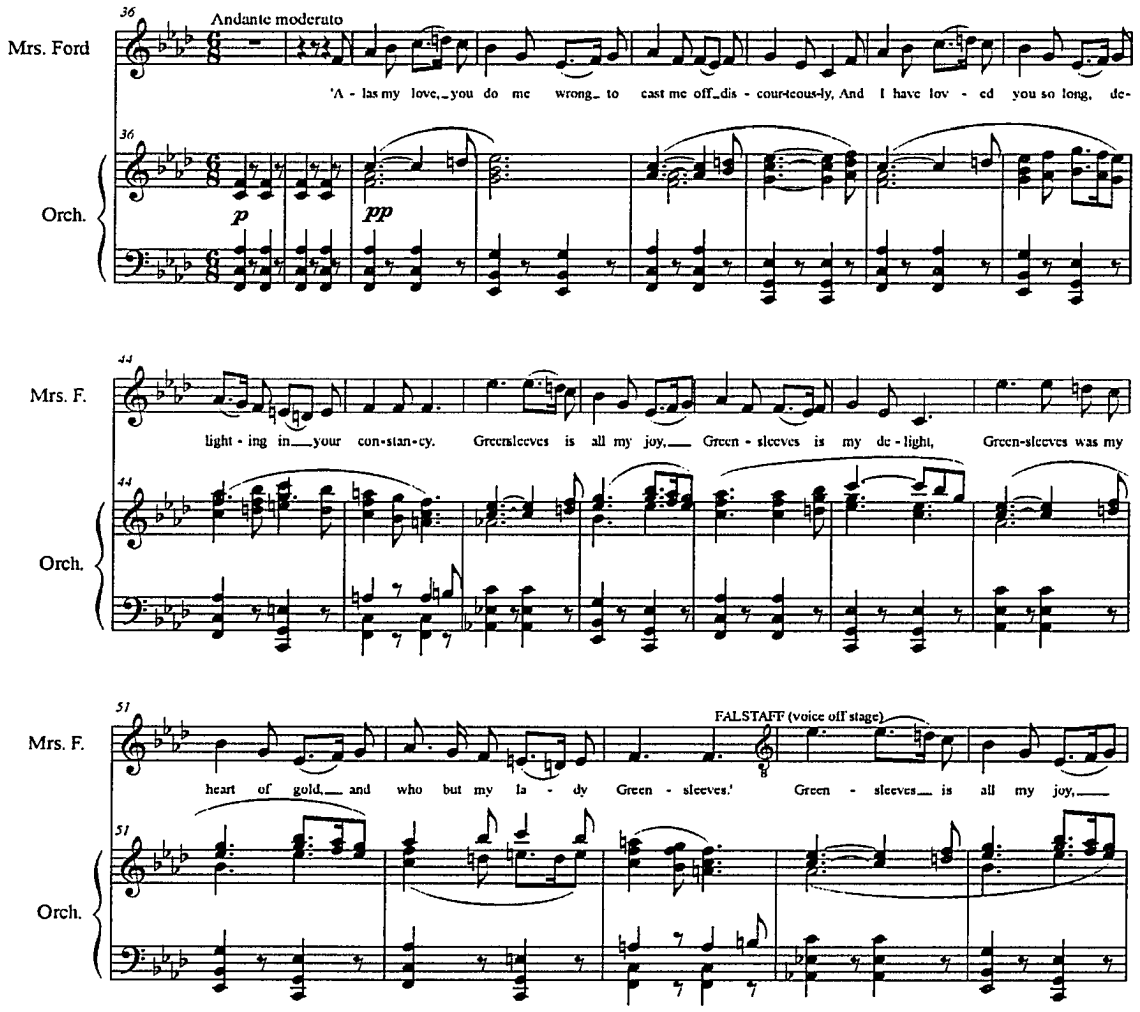
[79] An analogous example occurs in Act I during Dr. Caius's first scene. Caius has a distinctive signature tune in 6/8 time that recurs throughout the opera. When he discovers that Mrs. Quickly has been hiding Slender's servant, he flies into a rage; as he does, his signature tune reappears in double time and in 4/4 meter. See ibid., 38 (beginning at rehearsal mark 25) and 43 (at the Allegro marking).

[80] He spent part of 1913 writing incidental music for Frank Benson's Shakespeare performances at Stratford-upon-Avon. Among the works produced that season were *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV, Part 2*, two of the three operas featuring Falstaff. Little of the music written for these productions survives, but what remains shows that Vaughan Williams made an arrangement of "Greensleeves" for a performance of *Richard II* that was reused in *Merry Wives* (see Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 78–79)

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(Example 3-20).[81] Sir John, hearing Mistress Ford singing as he approaches, repeats the chorus upon his entrance. His action forms a dramatic connection with the love letter he initially sent to Mistress Ford, which constantly returns to the theme of "sympathy," the common interests and traits he believes they share.[82] By finishing the song, Falstaff attempts to demonstrate further "sympathy," though the fact that they sing separately reveals its illusory nature. True sympathy between the two suggests that they would finish the song together in harmony.

Example 3-20: *Sir John in Love*, Act III, Scene 1, "Greensleeves"



[81] The stage instructions read: "Mrs. Ford arranges herself in a seductive attitude on the couch and takes her lute and begins thrumming it" (Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 194).

[82] "You are not young, no more am I / go to then, there's sympathy. You are merry, so am I / then there's more sympathy. You love sack and so do I / would you desire better sympathy?" See Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 100–4 for the full text of the letter.

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The opera's final pieces of folk music are textless dances, and both serve different functions than the texted folk songs. As Ford tears his house apart looking for Falstaff in Act III, the orchestra plays the tune "T'old wife o' Dallowgill" in the background. Cecil Sharp collected a version of this tune, originally used to accompany a Yorkshire sword dance, and almost certainly introduced Vaughan Williams to it.[83] In keeping with the tune's original function, Vaughan Williams included steps in the score for a sort of stylized dance to accompany the music.[84] The other tune, "Half Hannikin," was a traditional dance tune first published in John Playford's *Dancing Master* of 1650. It too is used to accompany a dance, this one for all the townspeople at the close of the opera.[85] Strictly speaking, neither the tunes nor the dances they accompany are relevant to the plot or characters, but they provide an opportunity for the composer to engage in *divertissements* prior to dramatically cumulative events: Ford's discovery of his wife's innocence in the first instance, and the final chorus in the second.

Although there are several diegetic folk tunes in *Sir John*, they are all employed for specific dramatic purposes, often related to revealing characters' emotions and motivations. At several points, characters sing particular songs because Shakespeare's text provides dramatic rationale for doing so; that is, they contain lines or sentiments

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[83] Howes, *Music*, 290.

[84] "Ford starts searching the house. The others, including men and women servants of the house, follow in single file. Whenever Ford comes to a likely place he steps back in order to examine it. The others conform, so that gradually a sort of dance evolves—24 steps forward then 3 steps forward and 3 steps back, them 6 steps forward, 3 steps back and 6 steps forward (the steps back on the long accented notes of the tune). Ford goes immediately off stage, but the procession is so long that the tail and head join together—when Ford reappears on the other side of the stage. After this they all dance off stage" (Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 213).

[85] Vaughan Williams, *Sir John*, 306. As with "T'old wife of Dallowgill," Vaughan Williams included choreographic instructions with this song, though in more technical language; see ibid., 308.

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appropriate to the character or situation at hand. Instead of being isolated from the surrounding passages, they are often incorporated into the larger musical texture.

Vaughan Williams's compositional motivation differs between the two operas, and the music reflects that difference. If one accepts Ursula Vaughan Williams's hypothesis that the story in *Hugh* was subordinate to the musical material, then the underdevelopment of the characters makes sense. Vaughan Williams was more interested in writing attractive music (which he did) that brought elements of indigenous music to the fore than in issues of theatricality. By contrast, Vaughan Williams had the story of *Merry Wives* in hand before he began writing the music. Knowing full well that Shakespeare provided ample opportunities for the audience to find out the characters' motivations, Vaughan Williams had to harness the music to that task.

Moreover, *Sir John* has a closer relationship to mainstream operatic traditions than *Hugh*. Two of the three Falstaff operas he pointed out were by non-English composers (Verdi and Nicolai), and Vaughan Williams's version has considerably more in common with them than with a contemporary English opera on the subject, Holst's *At the Boar's Head* (1924). Although both Vaughan Williams and Holst used folk tunes in their operas, their application and end results are quite different. Holst's opera is a one-act work that substitutes Shakespearean texts for those of folk songs. The entire opera consists, quite literally, of a succession of folk songs: as soon as one ends, another begins. Vaughan Williams's use of folk music in *Sir John* was nowhere near so thorough. As he pointed out, the vast majority of the music in *Sir John* was newly composed.

Although Vaughan Williams claimed to be least fond of the Falstaff story that came from the dominant operatic tradition (Verdi's *Falstaff*), *Sir John in Love* bears a

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stronger resemblance to it than to either opera by Nicolai or Holst. Despite *Sir John*'s connections to English musical and literary traditions, Vaughan Williams downplays the presentation of the elements that are most conspicuously English (i.e., the folk songs). He no longer has to deliberately introduce people to this tradition, as was the case when he composed *Hugh the Drover*, and his headiest days of folk song prostelyzation were behind him. When folk songs do stand out, they are usually clever asides commenting on the drama. This reduction in self-conscious references to national materials would presumably bode well for someone who wanted to contribute to an international tradition.

The differences in folk song treatment between the two operas come down to this: *Hugh* applies them within the context of an updated, yet historically English style, but in *Sir John*, they are tailored to the conventions of an international operatic tradition. This should not imply that *Sir John in Love* is not an example of "national music." Quite the contrary: the setting, characters, text, and music are all of English origin, and Vaughan Williams's characteristic style permeates the work. The difference is that the indicators of "Englishness" are more subtly communicated, enhancing rather than dominating the musico-dramatic fabric of the work. His shift in operatic subgenre—from "Romantic ballad opera" to simply "opera"—also implies he thinks Englishmen are now able to have operas assessed on the same level as composers from other nations, making special pleading for the quality of English opera unnecessary. After generations of English operas confined to "outsider" status—one-act operas, various types of ballad opera, or other stage works outside Covent Garden's orbit—*Sir John in Love* showed that an opera could be both English and connected to a larger international tradition.

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CHAPTER 4

MODERNITY AND THE NATION: THE *MASS IN G* AND *SANCTA CIVITAS*

The widespread public characterization of Vaughan Williams as a particularly "English" composer began to develop in the early 1920s, coinciding with Edward Elgar's gradual retirement from active composition.[1] Given his string of successful premieres and outspoken advocacy for English music, Vaughan Williams must have seemed Elgar's heir apparent in the years leading up to the Great War. Despite the obvious differences between the two men's styles, they also shared several traits: both favored works featuring expansive structures, complex chromatic language, large instrumental resources, and programmatic undertones. Following his sabbatical from composition during the war, however, Vaughan Williams largely abandoned Edwardian (or Elgarian) post-romanticism for a style that was more concentrated, consolidating the central elements of his expressive idiom while simultaneously exploring a variety of other techniques to enhance it.[2] Some of his interwar works recall older forms and styles (the *Mass in G Minor*, *Concerto Accademico*), others a Bartókian experimentalism (Piano

[1] See Frogley, "Constructing Englishness," 12–19.

[2] Adrian Boult commented on this in a tribute made in 1947: "The difficulty in making any kind of division or classification of Vaughan Williams' [sic] output is mainly due to the amazing diversity and pace of development from work to work. Rather than three periods one could place each and every work in a separate category . . ." (*Boult on Music*, Musicians on Music no. 1 (London: Toccata Press, 1983), 64).

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Concerto, Symphony No. 4) or impressionist practices (*Flos Campi*, *Riders to the Sea*). Others drew upon various English musical sources (the *Pastoral Symphony*, *Sir John in Love*), while several pieces defied categorization altogether (*Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Job*, *Five Tudor Portraits*). Yet the interwar works, despite their stylistic variety, share many technical characteristics: increased reliance on contrapuntal textures and non-functional triadic harmonies, rapidly shifting pitch collections, tight structures, and new sensitivity to instrumental and vocal colors. Moreover, many of these elements were clearly drawn from sources other than folk song or other indigenous music, particularly influences based in contemporary and Continental musical thought. Some pieces still retained connections with English antecedents, but those connections tend to be subtler or more sophisticated than those of first period works (as shown with the treatment of folk song in *Sir John in Love*).

This chapter will argue that Vaughan Williams's interwar music was a progressive force within the relatively conservative English musical scene. Using the *Mass in G Minor* (1922) and *Sancta Civitas* (1926) as examples, discussion will focus on the advancement of Vaughan Williams's musical language during this period, along with the gradual reduction in his use of overtly English references. That is not to suggest that links with English cultural traditions were entirely absent, but they were less obvious. The *Mass in G Minor*, for example, displays a level of structural concentration and tonal ambiguity rarely found in his first period works, but also invites comparison with other distinguished English works in that genre from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The form and musical language of *Sancta Civitas*, the composer's only oratorio, bears little relation to that of its nineteenth-century counterparts, but the piece connects with

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both the English choral tradition and a visionary ethos that had many precedents in English art.

Modernism in Britain

Many different interpretations of musical modernism emerged throughout Europe during the interwar period.[3] "There is really no such thing as 'modernism' in the sense of a common policy, a common aim, a common language among the new composers," wrote Ernest Newman in 1930. "The revolt against the past has taken various forms in different men and in different environments; nor has the same man, with one or two exceptions, pursued the one consistent course throughout."[4]

In 1968, Adrian Boult recalled that Vaughan Williams "knew a great deal that was going on" in contemporary music throughout Europe and the United States, and "was always to be seen at concerts . . . avidly drinking up what these young people were doing, whether he liked it or not."[5] Vaughan Williams was also actively involved with the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), attending several of its annual conventions in the 1920s when his works were performed. While he did not always like

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[3] Leon Botstein has identified five major strands of musical modernism during the interwar period: "(i) the Second Viennese School, made up of Schoenberg and his followers, particularly Berg and Webern; (ii) the French-Russian axis, dominated by Stravinsky; (iii) German Expressionism, which included Busoni and the young Paul Hindemith; indigenous Modernisms, characterized by Ives in America, Bartók in Hungary, Szymanowski in Poland, Janácek and Martinu in postwar Czechoslovakia and Carlos Chavez in Mexico; and (v) experimentalism, characteristic of Hába, Varèse and Cowell, that led to the exploration of microtonality, the embrace of ambient sound and the machine and a fascination with non-Western musics and technology" ("Modernism," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 16: 871).

[4] Ernest Newman, "The Spirit of the Age," in *Testament of Music: Essays and Papers by Ernest Newman*, ed. Herbert Van Thal (London: Putnam, 1962), 230.

[5] Adrian Boult, interview with Robert Layton, in *Boult on Music*, 76. Vaughan Williams was well-known for using what influence he could on behalf of younger English composers, even those whose idioms one might not have expected him to sympathize with. For examples, see Kennedy, *RVW*, 253 (n. 2), and Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 46–47.

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the pieces performed at the ISCM concerts (or the "Freak Festivals," as he sometimes called them),[6] they introduced him to many new musical trends.

Nearly fifty years before Boult's made his comments, Vaughan Williams had addressed the nature of the modern in terms similar to Newman: "Modernity does not depend on certain tricks of diction but on the relationship between the mind that expresses and the means of expression. The modern mind needs a modern vocabulary, but the vocabulary will not make the modern mind. . . . The modernity of Holst is the result of the simple fact that he is a modern Englishman and that his music is in direct relation with real life."[7] Vaughan Williams was suspicious of music that he thought substituted complicated technical devices or self-conscious attempts at "originality" for an artistic message, and argued that technique was only meaningful if expressive and intelligible.[8] Like many other post-war composers with inclinations similar to his own, Vaughan Williams confronted "the need to forge a post-Romantic language which would move beyond established tonality, yet also somehow subsume it."[9]

English critics' attitudes toward new music of their own nation gravitated toward one of two camps.[10] The first, represented by critics such as H. C. Colles of the *Times* and

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[6] See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 159.

[7] Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note," in *NMOE*, 129, 132.

[8] See Vaughan Williams, "What Have We Learnt From Elgar?" in *NMOE*, 253; "A Musical Autobiography," in *NMOE*, 189-91; "Some Conclusions," in *NMOE*, 70; and Gordon Jacob and Elizabeth Maconchy, "Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, O.M.," ed. Edwin Benbow, *RCM Magazine* 55, no. 1 (Easter Term 1959): 31, 33-34.

[9] Anthony Payne, "Encompassing His Century's Dilemmas: The Modality of Vaughan Williams," in *Ralph Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, ed. Lewis Foreman (London: Albion Press, 1998), 175.

[10] More information on the history of interwar criticism in Britain may be found in Christian Kennett, "Criticism and Theory," in *Music in Britain: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Stephen Banfield, The Blackwell History of Music in Britain, gen. ed. Ian Spink (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), 503–9; and Nigel Scaife, "Criticism, §II, 3: History to 1945: Britain," in The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 28 October 2002), http://www.grovemusic.com; Arnold Whittall, "British Music in the Modern World," in *Music in Britain: The Twentieth Century*, 12–18; and Jennifer

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Edwin Evans, who published in various periodicals, argued that English composers were writing music artistically equal to or greater than that of their Continental counterparts. English music had achieved a national identity, something determined not by a widespread consistency of style, but (as Vaughan Williams would have it) by a perception that English composers were making artistic statements that reflected something about their nation.[11] Adherents to this position could be narrow-minded. A critic for the *Midland Musician*, after pointing to the achievements of Vaughan Williams, Holst, Elgar, and Bantock, wondered if anyone could seriously object to a lack of quality in native music at the time (1926). "The serious question that emerges," he continued, "is, whether, with so rich a native art at our disposal, we need worry our over-dosed musical minds any longer over Messieurs Schönberg, Satie, Bartók, and Pfitzner."[12] Another article, from the *Chesterian* (1931), credited the premieres of Vaughan Williams's *Job*, Arthur Bliss's *Morning Heroes*, and Walton's Viola Concerto with "a wealth of imagination, of originality and an excellence of workmanship hardly equalled, certainly not surpassed by anything produced abroad."[13]

The second critical camp, supported by Newman and George Bernard Shaw, argued that the era of national styles had passed. British composers could best achieve their potential by absorbing the great works of the western tradition, regardless of their

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Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67–73.

[11] See Edwin Evans, "English Song and 'On Wenlock Edge,'" *Musical Times* 59, no. 904 (June 1918): 248; and "Modern British Composers: Ralph Vaughan Williams," *Musical Times* 61, nos. 928 (June 1920): 371–72.

[12] Neville D'Esterre, "Notes from Bournemouth," *Midland Musician* 1, no. 5 (May-June 1926): 204.

[13] L. Dunton Green, "London Letter," *Chesterian* 7, no.94 (April-May 1931): 169.

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countries of origin, and embracing that tradition as their own.[14] Works that evoked English folk songs or other indigenous music would do little but limit a composer's breadth of expression and scope of appeal. "The language and instrumentation of music are now international," wrote Shaw in 1919, "and what is meant by British music is music in which British musicians express their British character in that international language."[15] Constant Lambert argued that the ability to strike a balance between domestic and foreign musical influences had a long and distinguished history in England. "The strength of the English tradition in art is that it has always been open to fruitful foreign influences, which have been grafted on to the native plant without causing it to wither away. The Elizabethans, and Purcell after them, drew what they could from their Italian contemporaries without in any way submerging their own personalities."[16] He further suggested that critics' "quarrel is not so much with nationalism as with that particular form of provinciality that has degraded nationalism to the level of the exotic,"[17] a practice Vaughan Williams also opposed. In the end, the two camps advocated different paths to the same goal: an independent and active British musical community, enriched by the international tradition while drawing upon native art and culture for its inspiration.[18]

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[14] But see also Ernest Newman, "Mr. Ernest Newman on French and English Music," in *Musical Times* 59, no. 908 (October 1918), 471–72; and Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 36–37.

[15] George Bernard Shaw, "The Future of British Music," in *Shaw's Music*, vol. 3, *1893–1950*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: The Bodley Head, 1981), 717.

[16] Lambert, *Music Ho!*. 153.

[17] Ibid., 162.

[18] The two camps each asserted that the other's viewpoint was incompatible with their own, but often using specious logic. Newman reasonably argued that English musicians could benefit by keeping an open mind about Continental music, but went on to suggest that those who did not look to Europe believed English music was only English if it contained folk song quotations or other such native musical material, a position alleged only by the crankiest writers (see Ernest Newman, "Concerning 'A Shropshire Lad' and

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The desire to establish an identity for English music had precedents in other British arts. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a number of artistic movements were dedicated to the re-creation of a (fictitious) rural golden age, lost to industrialization and urban migration.[19] The art of William Morris and the writings of John Ruskin called for a return to the simplicity and craftsmanship of the past, a call heeded by the Arts and Crafts Movement in design, aestheticism in literature and graphic art, and preservation movements (e.g., the establishment of the National Trust) and the introduction of mock-Tudor construction in architecture. In music, this turn to the past emerged with the folk-song movement and its stylistic descendant, English pastoralism.[20] In this usage, "pastoral" described post-Victorian works that featured the use of modes, rhapsodic melodies of irregular length and pulse, clear textures, predominantly triadic harmonies, streams of parallel chords, and occasional evocations of dance rhythms or tunes. Such works also often carried programmatic associations with nature or the rural past, either through their titles or accompanying texts.[21] Many of Vaughan Williams's early songs

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Other Matters," 393–94). Conversely, those who felt that English composers were good enough (and European music fragmented enough) that they no longer needed to turn to the Continent for their artistic lead painted their opponents as unthinking snobs, in love with any music so long as it wasn't English (see Edwin Evans, "English Song and 'On Wenlock Edge," 248–49; H. C. Colles, "Job: A Masque," in *Essays and Lectures* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 101–2. Vaughan Williams himself was guilty of such polemic; see "Nationalism and Internationalism," 158; "Should Music Be National?" 4–5; and "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," 46).

[19] See Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England," in *Englishness: Politics and Culture*, 69–74. As England was transformed from a predominantly rural society to an urban one, the importance of the rural populace in matters of national interest steadily decreased. Yet the advancements of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods came at a cost: overcrowding, pollution, and poverty reached new extremes, civil unrest and demands for suffrage put a strain on old social and political orders, and the demands of empire were increasingly felt in Britain itself. In the face of such overwhelming challenges to a recently industrialized society, the slower pace of rural life must have begun to look like an attractive alternative to the worldliness of the city.

[20] See Roy Strong, *The Spirit of Britain: A Narrative History of the Arts* (New York: Fromm International, 1999), 567–97.

[21] Despite the frequent use of "English pastoral" in literature on English music, few writers have offered definitions for it; a general assessment of the style can be found in Ted Perkins, "British Pastoral

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and orchestral works (such as the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* or *In the Fen Country*), as well as later pieces such as the *Tallis Fantasia*, *The Lark Ascending*, and the *Pastoral Symphony* characterize this "historical-pastoral" style, which later developed a reputation as a quintessentially "English" mode of expression.[22]

Arnold Whittall claimed that Vaughan Williams's interwar works, particularly the symphonies, "have roots in a language in which a modality and thematic character closely related to folk music were brought into fruitful confrontation with the much more disruptive resources of modern tonal chromaticism."[23] This assessment accounts for both the historical-pastoral works and his more discordant, harmonically complex, and rhythmically dynamic ones (such as *Concerto Accademico*, *Flos Campi*, or *Sancta Civitas*), suggesting that their differences may not be as great as they sometimes seem. In both the *Mass in G Minor* and *Sancta Civitas*, Vaughan Williams infused the musical traditions of England's past with a twentieth-century perspective.

Mass in G Minor

Despite his agnosticism, Vaughan Williams had a lifelong interest in religion and spirituality, and respected the important role the Christian church had played in the development of western culture and music. As he put it, "There's no reason why an atheist can't write a good Mass,"[24] a point he proved by composing the *Mass in G Minor* between 1920 and 1921. He dedicated it to Gustav Holst and the Whitsuntide Singers, a

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Style and the Oboe," in *International Double Reed Society Journal Online*, ed. Yoshiyuki Ishikawa, accessed 21 May 2003, http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR11.2/DR11.2.Perkins.html.

[22] See Hughes and Stradling, *English Musical Renaissance*, 166.

[23] Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

[24] U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 138.

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choral group Holst directed while teaching at Morley College, but it was first performed by Joseph Lewis and the City of Birmingham Choir in December 1922. The work was much admired by Richard Terry, choir director at Westminster Cathedral. Terry, a scholar and performer of polyphonic choral music, particularly that of Palestrina and English Tudor composers, gave the first liturgical performance of the work in March 1923. When Vaughan Williams sent Terry a copy of the *Mass*, Terry replied that it was "the work one has all along been waiting for. In your individual and modern idiom you have really captured the old liturgical spirit and atmosphere."[25] Critics agreed.[26] Shortly after its debut, the *Mass* was performed at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, which moved one local critic to write: "If this work represents the average of the English unaccompanied church music of the present day . . . then we must confess that we do not possess in Germany at present any works which are so sure in form and so expressive."[27]

The work's brevity, modal harmonies, and contrapuntal texture drew considerable attention from critics. H. C. Colles described it as "reactionary towards the nineteenth century" in terms of its harmony, but acknowledged that the work's really significant harmonic contribution was "the unmediated juxtaposition of unrelated chords,"[28] a

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[25] Quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 160.

[26] See AJS, "City of Birmingham Choir," *Birmingham Post*, 7 December 1922, 7; Anon., "A New Choral Work," *Musical Standard* 20, no. 399 (30 December 1922): 224; Anon., "Music in Birmingham," *Musical Opinion* 46, no. 544 (January 1923): 344; CFM, "City Choir Concert," *Birmingham Mail*, 7 December 1922, 6; H. C. Colles, "Dr. Vaughan Williams's Mass," *Musical Times* 64, no. 959 (1 January 1923): 36–37; Watson Lyle, "London Concerts and Recitals," *Musical Standard* 21, no. 407 (21 April 1923): 130; and RJB, "A Musical Event," *Birmingham Gazette*, 7 December 1922, 4.

[27] Quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 161. See also "Mr. Holst on his Early Days," *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 14 November 1925, 5, which quotes a German critic, possibly the same one quoted by Kennedy, saying that if VW's Mass was "typical of modern British music, we have nothing to equal it."

[28] H. C. Colles, "Liturgical Music," *Times* (London), 24 March 1923, 8. It was here that he asked "Have there since Hucbald been so many consecutive fifths in a Mass?" which led wags to characterize Vaughan Williams's historical-pastoral works as part of a "Back to Hucbald" movement, an allusion to the

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procedure Vaughan Williams had also applied in the *Pastoral Symphony* (1922). The critic for the *Birmingham Mail* referred to the "old modes" by which Vaughan Williams, "whether deliberately or not, approached the styles of the famous ecclesiastical composers of several centuries ago."[29] The critic for *Musical Opinion* came to a similar conclusion: "He appears to think naturally in this modal idiom, and there is much of the spirit of Byrd and his contemporaries interpenetrating the music."[30] Percy Scholes, however, found the *Mass*'s use of modality unpersuasive and limiting:

> Vaughan Williams, in whom some of our highest hopes for British music have been realized, is now in danger of becoming the slave of his own idiom. His melodies tend to circle about one note, to which they return continually, and his consecutive fifths and false relations to be so habitual as to indicate no longer the breaking with an old convention but the formation of a new and narrower one. By his modal melodic lines, his unrelated harmonies and his consecutives, he gains an effect of archaism that in moderation is not unwelcome, but that in profusion palls.[31]

A closer look at Vaughan Williams's harmony reveals two important shifts in his style beginning with the *Mass in G Minor*: the frequent application of triadic and chromatic harmonies outside of conventional tonal frameworks, and extensive use of contrapuntal techniques.[32] Frank Howes suggested this was one of many different reactions to the gradual breakdown of tonality: "One line of search was to take up again

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"Back to Bach" label affixed to some neoclassical works. See Colles, "Dr. Vaughan Williams's Mass," 37, and Kennedy, *WRVW*, 160.

[29] CFM, "City Choir Concert," 6.

[30] Anon., "Music in Birmingham," 344.

[31] Percy Scholes, "Yesterday's Concerts," *Observer* (London), 8 April 1923, 6.

[32] In most of his pre-war works, triads and chromatic notes usually function within the framework of a given key or mode, but in many interwar works, they may also be used for expressive effects without regard for the key area or mode, or may deliberately clash with other harmonies set against them. Hugh Ottaway described the music that Vaughan Williams wrote during the 1920s as being related to some extent "to the aural world of Impressionism," inasmuch "as he exploited chords and phrases for their evocative power and effect" rather than using them to advance a tonally functional harmonic scheme ("Vaughan Williams and the European Background," 13).

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the discarded church modes and to use them, not in the old careful way in which little modulation was possible, but in a new way in which the resources of three centuries of harmonic development could be applied to modes other than the Aeolian and the Ionian."[33] In fact, much of Vaughan Williams's interwar music moves fluidly between modality and diatonic tonality, frequently blending the two, emphasizing certain broad tonal hierarchies (such as dominant-tonic or mediant relationships) while simultaneously undermining them through sudden harmonic shifts or ambiguous pitch collections.[34] In the *Mass*, Vaughan Williams organized this new approach to harmony within a pervasive contrapuntal texture reminiscent of those used by his Tudor predecessors. Such a design not only provided a polyphonic framework for managing the rapidly shifting consonances and dissonances, but the imitative entries and antiphonal exchanges also helped impose a sense of structural coherence on the work. Because harmonic ambiguity became an important part of Vaughan Williams's style during the interwar period, key signatures and scalar patterns cannot always be taken at face value, a point much in evidence in the *Mass in G Minor.*

Despite its name, the key of G minor is heard infrequently throughout the piece. Of the five movements, only the Kyrie has a key signature of two flats, but it opens with a statement in D Aeolian. The answer that follows initially sounds like G minor, but the appearance of an E-natural in the original statement—and the consistent recurrence of that pitch throughout the movement—strongly implies G Dorian instead (Example 4-1).[35]

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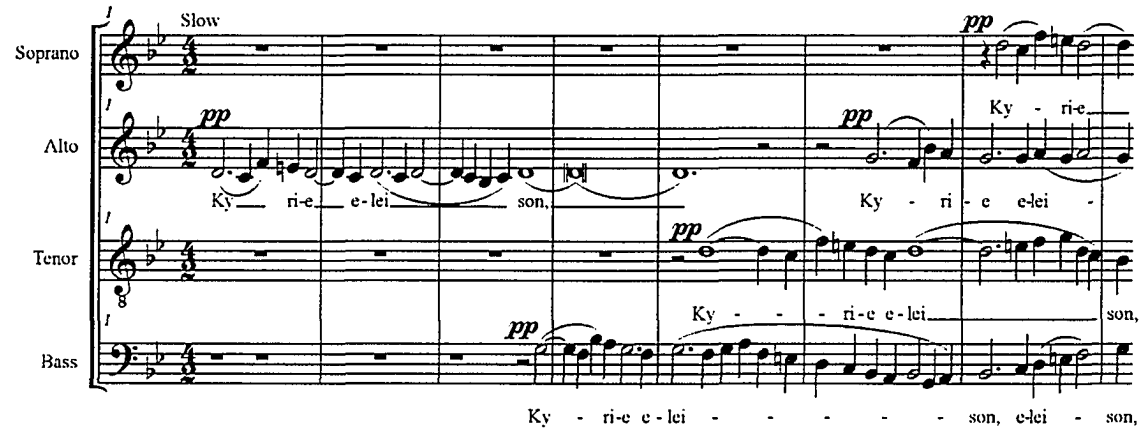
[33] Howes, *Music*, 136.

[34] For an example of analysis that attempts to account for this phenomenon, see Arnold Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major: Models and Mutations," in *VWS*, 187–212.

[35] The Kyrie sections, both of which indicate a key signature of G minor, favor E-natural to E-flat at ratios of 6:1 (Kyrie 1) and 8:1 (Kyrie 2).

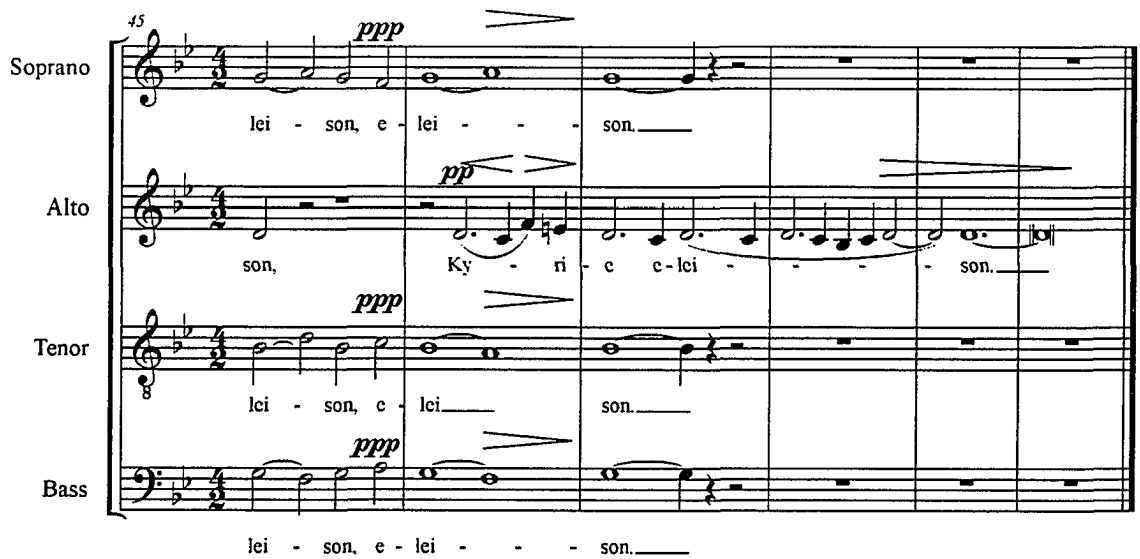
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Example 4-1: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Kyrie**



The second Kyrie (m. 31) also has a key signature of G minor, but opens identically to the first. Indeed, when the movement ends, it remains unclear whether G is actually the tonic, since the opening motive returns in its original guise, thus pushing the emphasis back toward D as the central pitch (Example 4-2).[36]

Example 4-2: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Kyrie**



Regardless of which pitch is actually the "tonic," analysis reveals that the harmonic layout of both Kyries is based on the juxtaposition of two modes with different tonics but identical pitch class sets. The Christe section is organized similarly: while the key

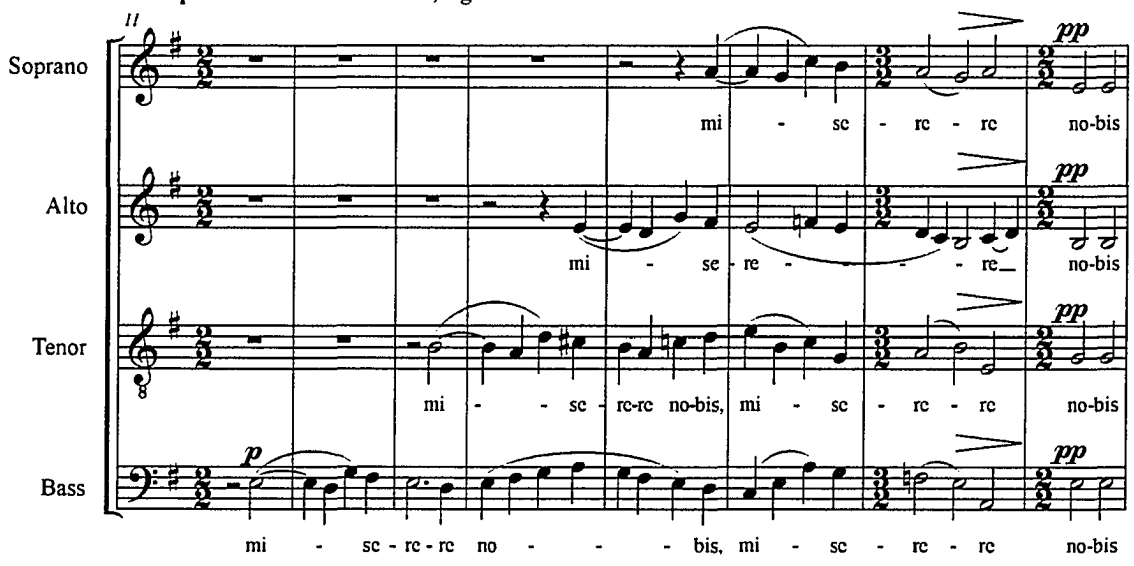
[36] An analogous example of harmonic tension, also between D and G, can also be found in the first movement of Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*, written contemporaneously with the Mass.

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signature would indicate a key shift to G major, the music is more effectively analyzed either in D Dorian or G Mixolydian—again, two modes with identical pitch classes but different tonics. Throughout all of this harmonic ambiguity, Vaughan Williams imposed formal cohesion using basic contrapuntal techniques: imitative entries, antiphonal exchanges, parallel consonances, and careful dissonance management. This movement shows how the composer preserved the basis of a tonal harmonic relationship (that of dominant-tonic) while altering it in ways unaccounted for by tonal (or modal) analysis alone, all while maintaining a sense of order through the meticulous use of counterpoint. And again, it illustrates Vaughan Williams's assimilation of an English musical tradition—Tudor church music—within his own distinctive style.

The head motive of the Kyrie melody returns in the Agnus Dei, on the word "miserere" (Example 4-3), linking the first movement of the *Mass* to the last.

Example 4-3: *Mass in G Minor*, Agnus Dei



The harmonic arrangement of the voices, however, differs from their original presentation in the Kyrie. Rather than obscuring the pitch center, the voices are now arranged to confirm it, if indirectly. The melody is stated four times, beginning on E, B,

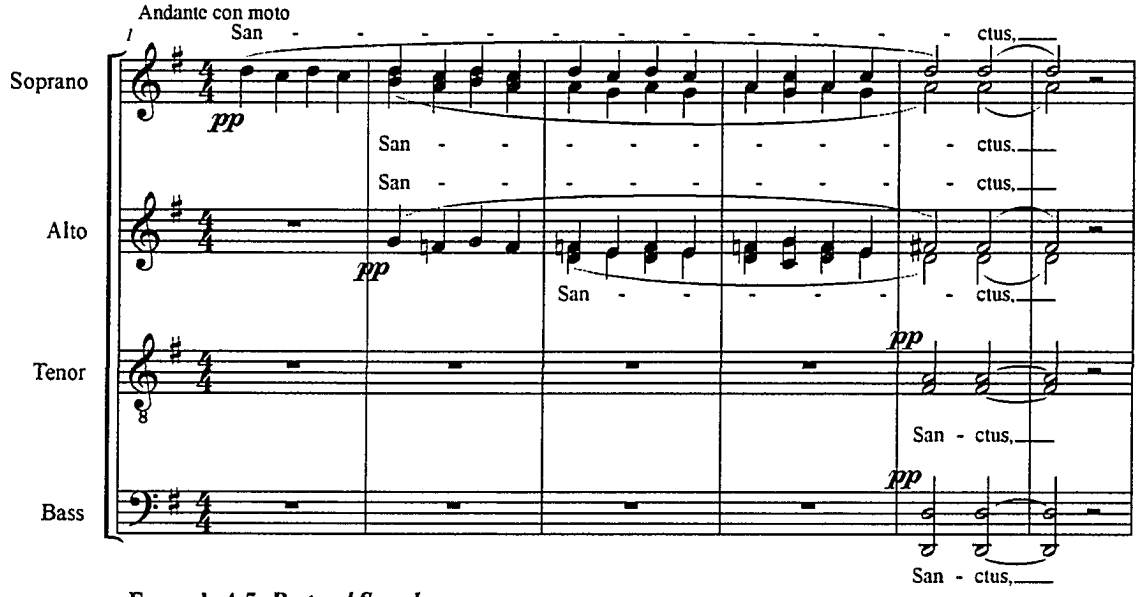
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E, and A, thus confirming E minor as the basis for this movement—the key in which it opened—by presenting answers a fifth above and a fifth below the tonic. Again, Vaughan Williams maintains a dominant-tonic root relationship within a modal context, while simultaneously undermining its original tonal implications.

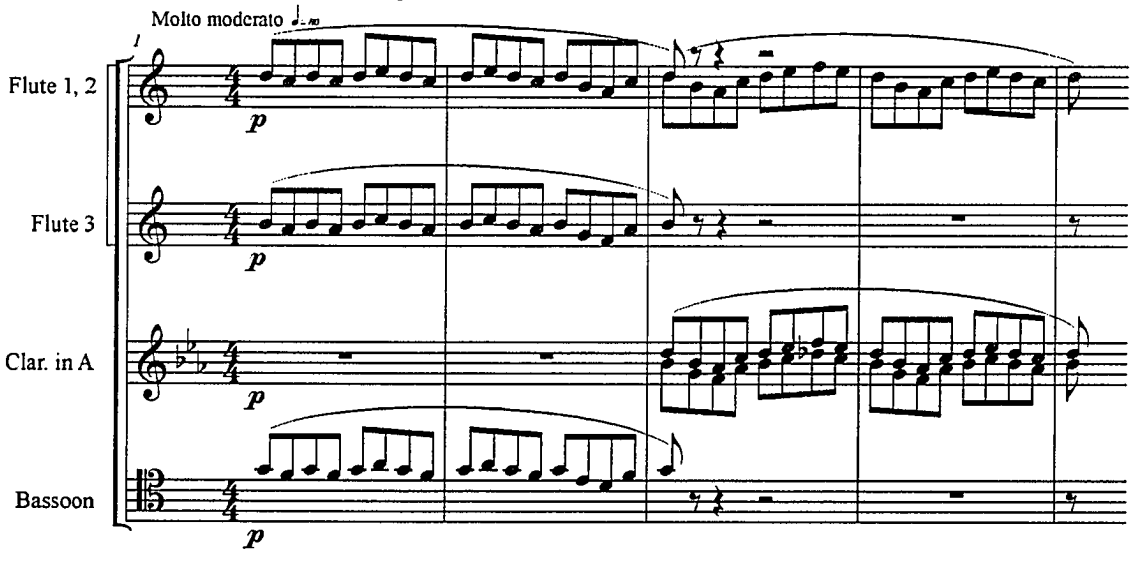
Although chordal textures do appear in the *Mass* (most notably in the Credo and Gloria, as necessitated by the extended texts), Vaughan Williams also uses imitative counterpoint to create the illusion of strictly homophonic motion. For instance, the oscillating melody that opens the Sanctus (Example 4-4) sounds nearly identical to the opening of the *Pastoral Symphony* (Example 4-5), but the sound of the Sanctus results from the interplay of four independent melodic lines that create the effect of a gradually thickening chordal texture. The *Pastoral Symphony*, by contrast, opens with three lines moving in strict parallel motion. Although this chordal planing creates a very similar sound to the opening of the Sanctus, it may be that Vaughan Williams thought that using imitative counterpoint instead would be more faithful to the *Mass*'s Tudor antecedents, creating a more "modern" sound using traditional methods of composition. Nonetheless, while Vaughan Williams may have been inspired early on by the pentatonic and modal harmonies he heard in English folk song and church music, his application of them had more in common with the examples of Debussy and Ravel. His use of such harmonies were not necessarily meant to evoke associations with folk music, but rather to facilitate rapid harmonic movement from one pitch center to another in a manner that did not rely upon traditional voice leading.

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Example 4-4: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Sanctus**



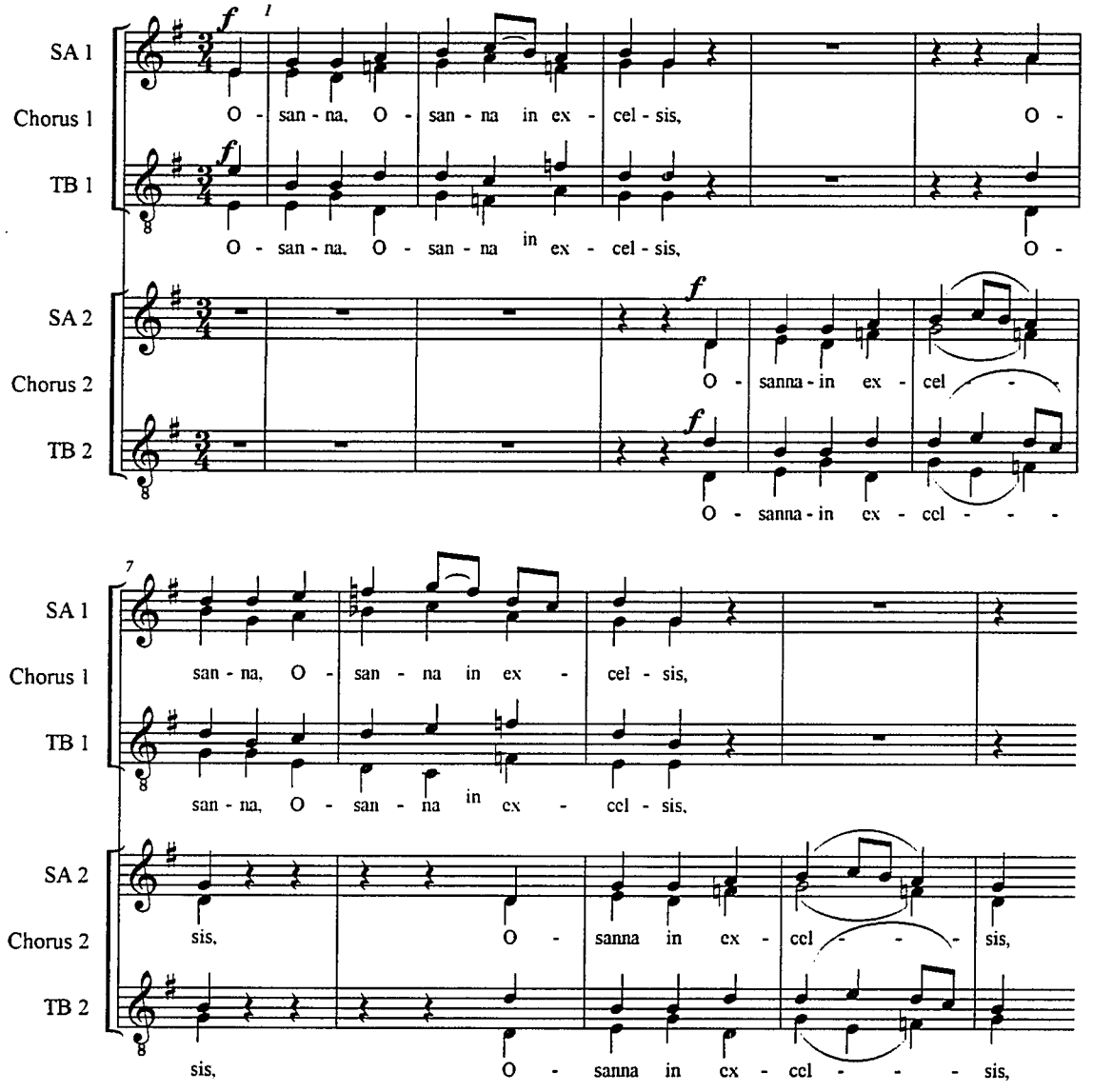
Example 4-5: ***Pastoral Symphony***



When passages of block chords do occur in the *Mass*, they tend to feature close intervallic spacing, predominantly planar motion (rarely exceeding leaps of a fourth) and are often set antiphonally or contrapuntally (or both) against another set of block chords sung by a second group of choristers. An example of this can be seen at the beginning of the first Osanna, where the choir is divided into two antiphonal groups, each singing in nearly homorhythmic four-part harmony (Example 4-6).

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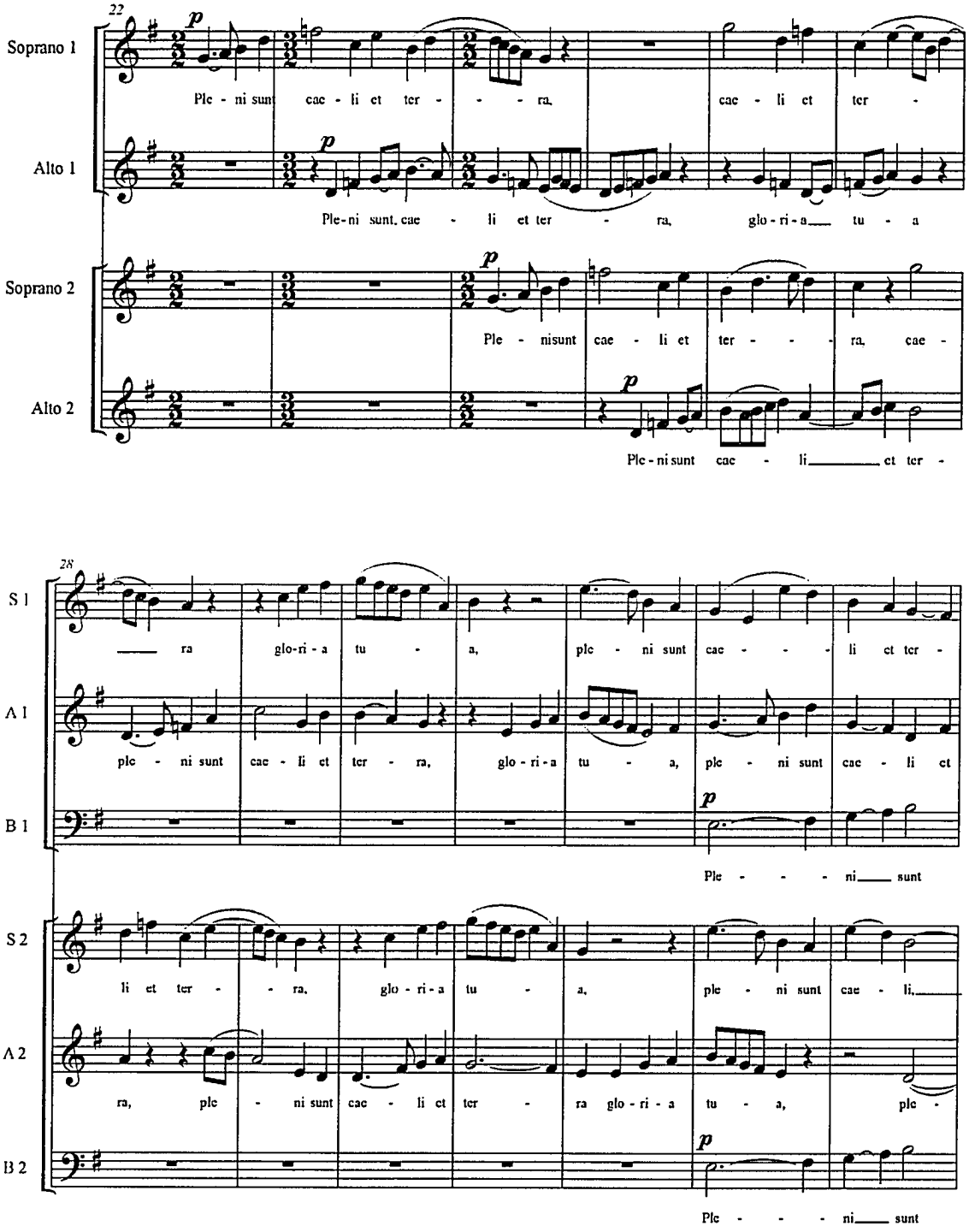
Example 4-6: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Osanna I**
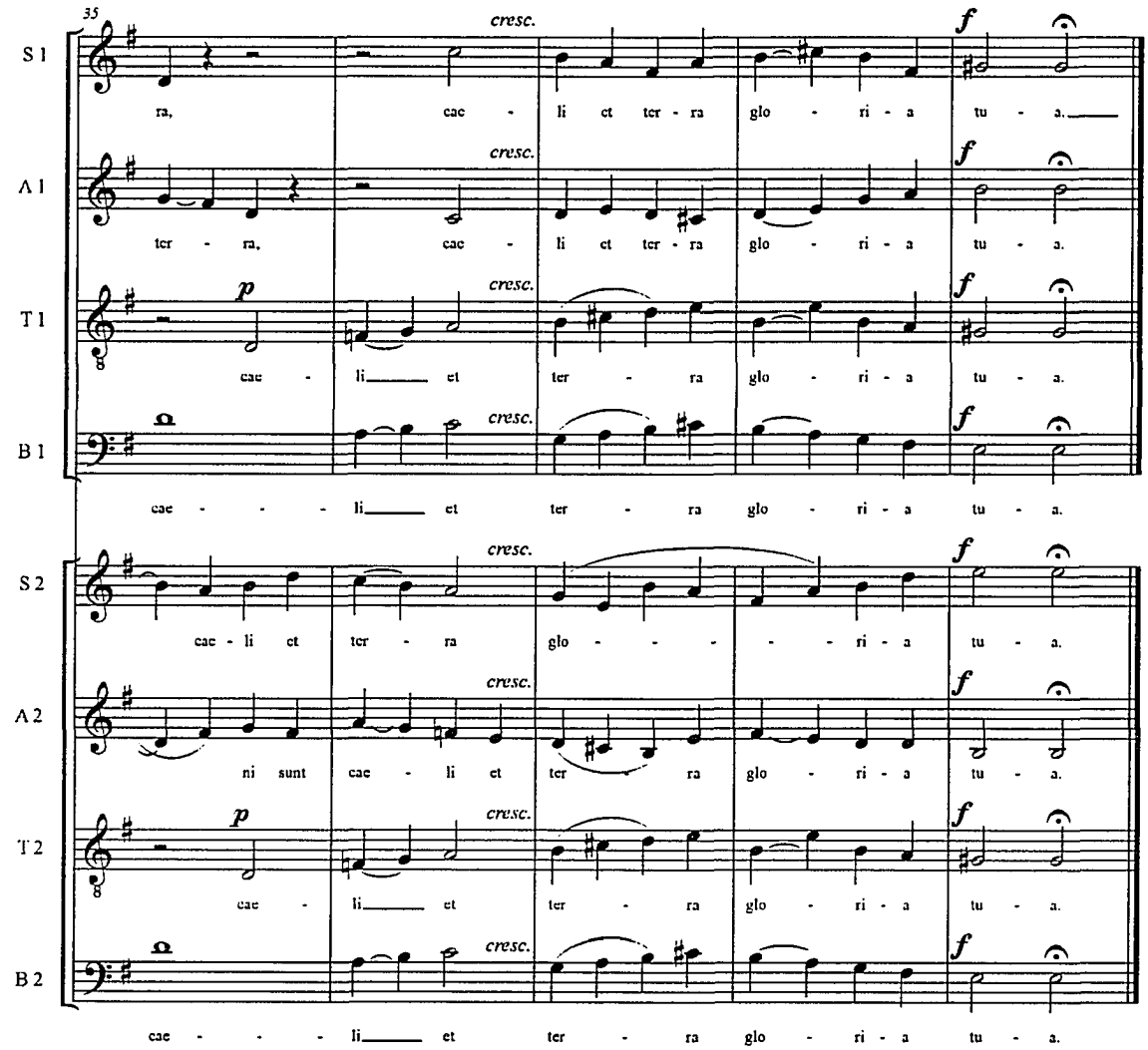


These two choral blocks are set against each other in a variably imitative texture (i.e., from strict to free imitation) before closing in unison. The second half of the Sanctus (beginning at the text "Pleni sunt caeli") also features this technique, but it is more complex than that of the Osanna: a freely contrapuntal statement and answer by the soprano and alto from Choir I is followed in strict imitation by the soprano and alto from Choir II. Both choirs' baritones and tenors sing in unison, thus forming six separate musical lines arranged in four groups (Soprano 1/Alto 1, Soprano 2/Alto 2, Tenors 1 and 2, and Baritones 1 and 2) before closing in homorhythmic harmony (Example 4-7).

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Example 4-7: *Mass in G Minor*, Sanctus I



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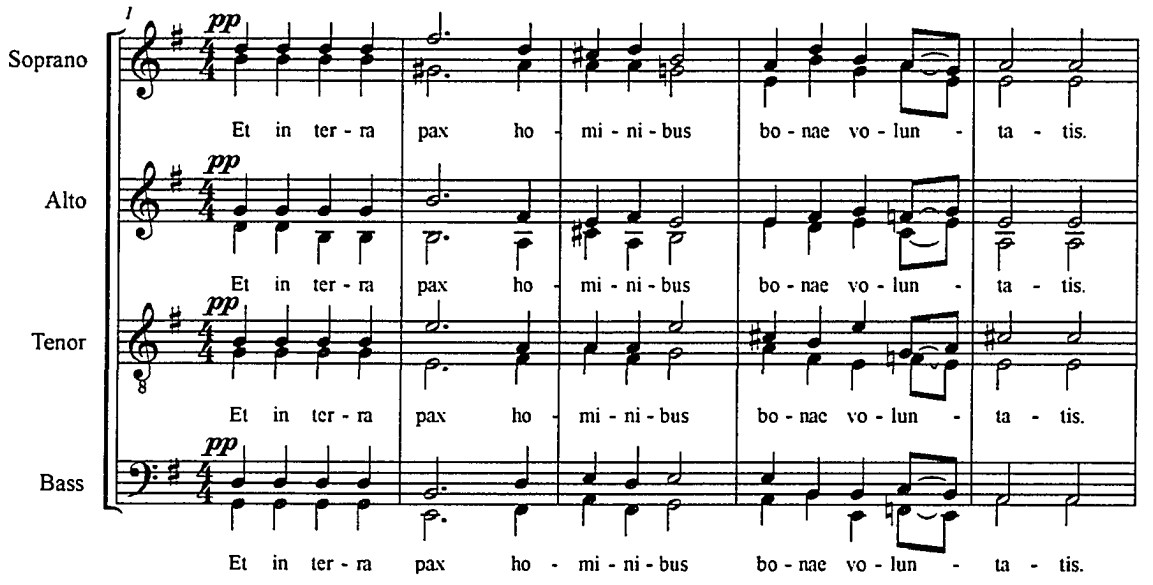


For all of the new approaches to harmony and counterpoint explored in this piece, many sections evoke more familiar elements of Vaughan Williams's idiom. The performing forces of the *Mass*—two antiphonal choirs and a third group of soloists—recall the two orchestras and string quartet featured in the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The frequent use of the flattened seventh scale degree (see, for instance, Examples 4-1 and 4-7) characterized many of Vaughan Williams's melodies, and the mediant shift altering the first chord's root in the Gloria (Example 4-8) was also present at the beginning of *A Sea Symphony*.[37]

[37] See Chapter 2, Example 2-1.

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Example 4-8: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Gloria**



Cross relations—a pitch in one voice followed by a chromatically altered version of the same pitch in another—of this type are commonly found in works from Vaughan Williams's first and second periods. They are also heard in the music of Henry Purcell and in that of Tudor church music composers, reinforcing the *Mass*'s connection to England's musical past.
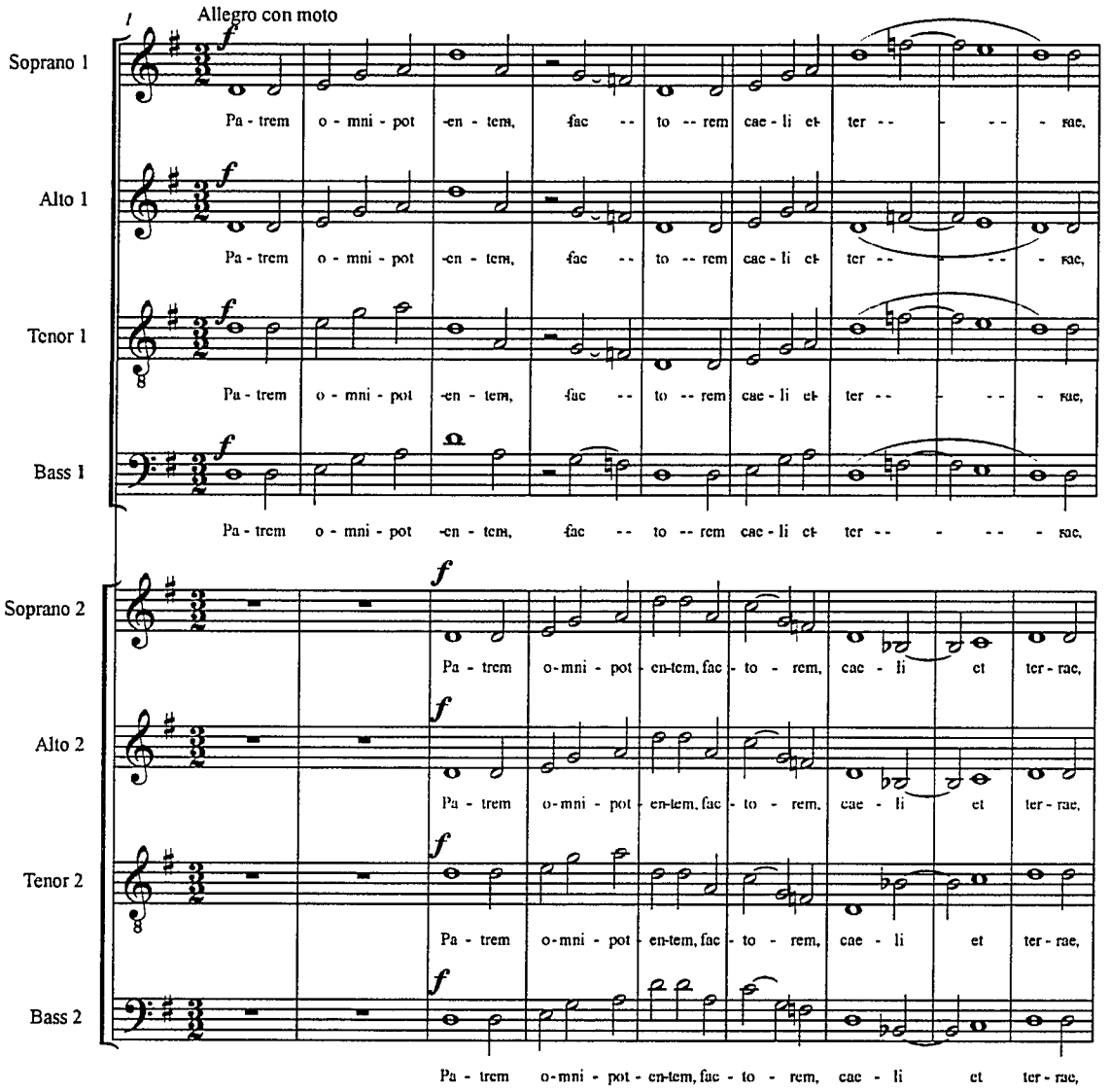
Another characteristic Vaughan Williams motive appears near the beginning of the Credo, on the word "terrae" in m. 7: a unison D splits to a minor third above and major third below (for a chord comprising B-flat and F) before returning through a passing tone to a unison D (Example 4-9).[38] This phrase originally appeared in "Antiphon" from the *Five Mystical Songs* of 1911, to the words "My God and King" (Example 4-10), and it recurs in several other works.[39]

[38] This motive recurs following the "Ex resurrexit" on p. 23 of the vocal score.

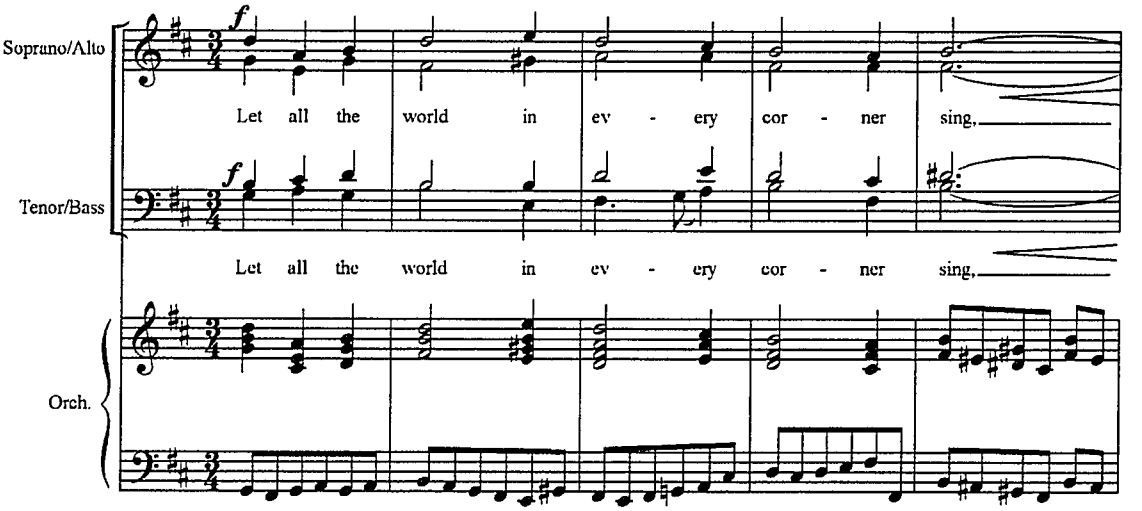
[39] These include *Hodie* (1954) and the Eighth Symphony (1956); see Chapter 5.

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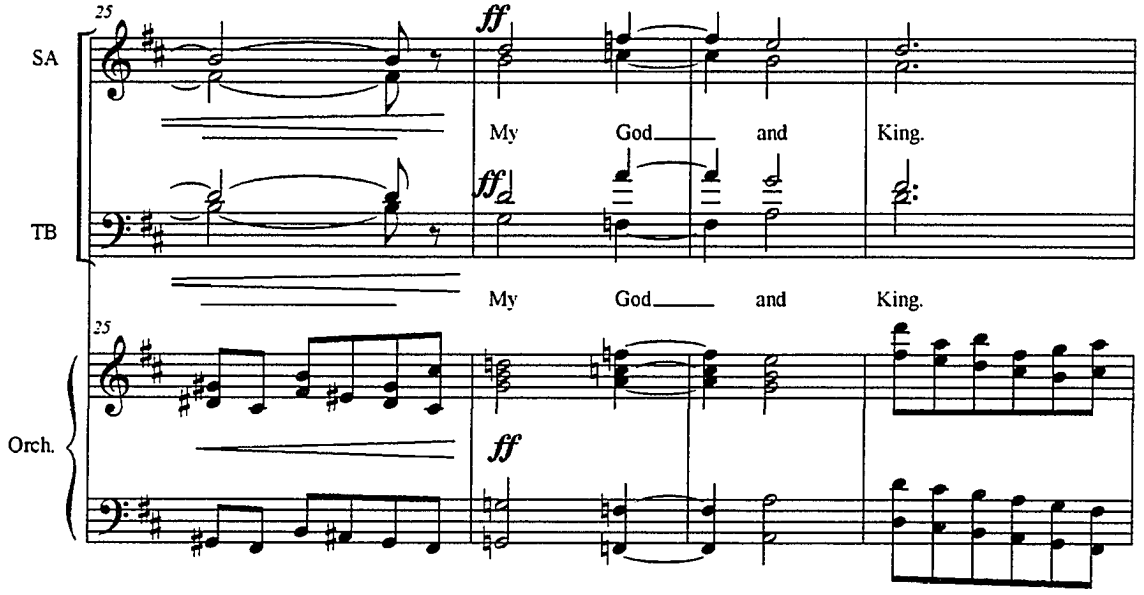
Example 4-9: ***Mass in G Minor*****, Credo**



Example 4-10: ***Five Mystical Songs*****, "Antiphon"**



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The *Mass* features many elements associated with the historical-pastoral style, reinterpreting England's musical past from a twentieth-century perspective. While it unquestionably pays homage to the monuments of Tudor music that inspired its design, it is not beholden to them for its musical language, then unfamiliar to many English listeners. Its concise, uncluttered structures refute the expansiveness of post-Romanticism, paring away all extraneous matter in an attempt to create a direct, intimate connection between composer and audience.

Sancta Civitas

While the *Mass* represents the formal and ceremonial side of spirituality, *Sancta Civitas* turns to the visionary and allegorical. *Sancta Civitas* was the only work that Vaughan Williams classified as an oratorio, and he also claimed it was his favorite among his choral works.[40] Its text comes from the Book of Revelations (Chapters 1, 7, 18,

[40] See Kennedy, *WRVW*, 383.

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19, 21, and 22, King James Version) and the Sanctus of the Mass,[41] but the score is also preceded by an epigraph from Plato's *Phaedo*, in which Socrates muses on the existence of the afterlife after describing the voyage of the soul to the Elysian Fields. Vaughan Williams studied Greek as a schoolboy, and provided his own translation of Plato's text in a copy of the score he gave to Ivy Herbert (now held by the Royal College of Music):

> That these things are exactly as I have described, no sensible man will believe. But that this or something like it is true of our souls and their mansions, since we believe that the soul is immortal, appears to me worthy of belief and enough to justify some adventures of the ~~mind~~ imagination. For the venture is a noble one and it is right to sing of such things.[42]

Musical depictions of the apocalypse were familiar staples of British choral festivals. Settings by Louis Spohr (*The Last Judgment*, 1825) and Alfred Gaul (*The Holy City*, 1882), all but forgotten today, were frequently performed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[43] Unlike many oratorios from that time, *Sancta Civitas* was relatively brief. As H. C. Colles put it, "had Handel taken the Apocalyptic vision as his story...he would have produced an oratorio which it would take a complete evening to perform, whereas the modern composer with his more concentrated style passes all

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[41] Vaughan Williams claimed that the text also used passages from Richard Taverner's version of the Bible (1539), but comparisons with the few textual passages deviating from the KJV do not correspond with the appropriate verses in Taverner's Bible. Alterations to and omissions from the text appear to be based upon Vaughan Williams's own preferences, rather than other pre-existing editions. It is also interesting to note the parallel between the themes of *Sancta Civitas* and the final movement of *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936), namely, the destruction of Babylon and the gathering of all peoples into a single church. This is the subject in Chapter 21 of Revelations, but it also arises in the verses from Isaiah (43:9 and 66:18-22) used in *Dona Nobis Pacem*. The Sanctus text does not include the Benedictus or a second Hosannah.

[42] Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Sancta Civitas* (London: J. Curwen & Sons Ltd., 1925), ii; copy held by the Royal College of Music (London), shelfmark 45.E.10. Alternative translations may be found in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 108-09; and Howes, *Music*, 150.

[43] Arthur Fox-Strangways believed that Vaughan Williams used the Latin title "Sancta Civitas" in order to avoid confusion with Gaul's work; see A. H. Fox-Strangways, "'Sancta Civitas': Ralph Vaughan Williams," *British Musician* 3, no 6 (October 1927): 165.

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Heaven in review in half an hour."[44] The oratorio's premiere took place at Oxford's Sheldonian Theatre on 7 May 1926, performed by the Oxford Bach Choir and Orchestral Society under Hugh Allen. Vaughan Williams conducted the first London performance the following month.

Sancta Civitas met with a much cooler critical reception than did the *Mass in G Minor*. Many critics came away from the premiere somewhat nonplussed by the piece's unfamiliar idiom, which was not helped by the Bach Choir's mediocre performance. *The Daily Telegraph* found it "ponderous, heavy-footed music seeming . . . to have little real spiritual contact" with the text, and called Vaughan Williams "a draftsman first, a colourist second, and a poor dramatist at the best of times."[45] The usually effusive H. C. Colles was ambivalent about the "disturbing new experience" of the work, an effect he credited to a belief that Vaughan Williams's "vision is greater than ours," but was unsure "whether he has really found the right notes to convey it to our ears."[46] Ernest Newman called it "a high-minded piece of work" but did "not feel that technically it all 'came off.'"[47] Leigh Henry's terse review described it as "a work of dull devotionalism."[48] Only a few reviewers were impressed: a critic for the *Musical Times* found himself "profoundly stirred" by "something visionary" in it, reserving judgment on the unusual idiom "knowing that the hard sayings of Vaughan Williams belong to a musical speech that we wish to understand."[49] Arthur Eaglefield-Hull also found it "an important

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[44] H. C. Colles, "Vaughan Williams and Handel," *Times* (London), 12 June 1926, 12.

[45] Richard Capell (?), "London Concerts," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 10 June 1926, 16.

[46] H. C. Colles, "The Bach Choir," *Times* (London), 10 June 1926, 14.

[47] Ernest Newman, "Sancta Civitas," *Sunday Times* (London), 13 June 1926, 7.

[48] Leigh Henry, "London Letter," *Chesterian* 8, no. 56 (July-August 1926): 278.

[49] Anon., "The Bach Choir Jubilee Festival," *Musical Times* 67 (1 July 1926): 647–48.

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contribution" to English choral music, calling it "big, broad, mystical, and highly imaginative."[50] Perhaps the most moving critique came from Edward Elgar. He had long planned a successor to his oratorios *The Apostles* (1903) and *The Kingdom* (1906) entitled *The Last Judgment*, but after attending a performance of *Sancta Civitas*, he told Vaughan Williams: "I once thought of setting those words, but I shall never do that now, and I am glad I didn't because you have done it for me."[51]

Despite the differences in their reception and reputation, the *Mass* and *Sancta Civitas* share many stylistic traits: both alternate between contrapuntal and chordal textures, employ tonally non-functional harmonic schemes, set blocks of chords against each other in counterpoint, rapidly shift between pitch collections, and retain the triad as the basic harmonic unit. The main difference between the two works is the degree to which dissonant harmonies are used for coloristic or dramatic effect: the *Mass* is generally consonant, while *Sancta Civitas* employs dissonant pedal points, added-note chords, and other such devices throughout. The different critical responses to the two pieces may stem from critics' perceptions of how the works followed the conventions of their respective genres. Considering the popularity of movements evoking the past in early twentieth-century England, it comes as little surprise to note the positive reception that met the *Mass in G Minor*. Externally, it resembled multi-part *a capella* Masses by Byrd or Taverner; as such, it could be portrayed as their spiritual and musical successor. *Sancta Civitas*, on the other hand, could be compared to the typical English oratorio only insofar as it featured a Biblical text set for chorus and orchestra. Its musical language and

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[50] Arthur Eaglefield-Hull, "Bach and Vaughan-Williams at the Oxford Festival," *Musical Standard* 27, no. 488 (June 1926): 180.

[51] Quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 195.

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formal organization were highly unconventional for the genre, which had changed little beyond Elgar's innovations in the early part of the century. As a result, it was received with considerable circumspection, even suspicion, by a critical community unused to such significant departures from convention, particularly from English composers.[52]

As he did in *A Sea Symphony* and *Sir John in Love*, Vaughan Williams adapted the texts in *Sancta Civitas* to his own purpose. The Biblical verses are arranged into four groups, each corresponding with one or more of the five major musical sections. The introductory section begins with the announcement made by John of Patmos in Chapter 1 of Revelations ("I was in the spirit") and is immediately followed by passages from Revelations 19:1 and 5–9, in which the choir sings the praises of God. The second section continues the narrative from Chapter 19, beginning at verse 11 ("And I saw heaven opened") as the baritone soloist and chorus describe the events surrounding the Second Coming. The third section of the piece shifts to text from Chapter 18, mourning the fall of Babylon, while the fourth relates John's vision of the descent of the Holy City from Chapter 21 and God's promises to the faithful outlined in Chapters 7 and 22. The final section of the work sets the Sanctus and the closing verses from Chapter 22.

Interestingly, Vaughan Williams omitted all direct references to Christ's name from the work, despite His prominent place in the story.[53] This choice perhaps foreshadows his later change of Christian's name to the more generic "Pilgrim" in his setting of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an alteration he justified in a letter to Rutland Boughton: "I want the idea to be universal and apply to anybody who aims at the spiritual

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[52] See Harvey Grace, "New Music: Choral Works," 422.

[53] Examples of cuts include the final line from 22:20 ("Even so, come Lord [Jesus]") and 21:22 ("For the Lord God almighty [and the Lamb are] is the temple of it,") although he did preserve the phrase "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" from 19:9.

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life whether he is Xtian, Jew, Buddhist, Shintoist, or 5th [sic] Day Adventist."[54] Given that Vaughan Williams was an unbeliever, it is reasonable to assume that he intended the Biblical language, allegory, and symbols contained within *Sancta Civitas* to represent a private, personal vision of destruction and despair, possibly one he saw while serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps. This type of visionary ethos had long-standing precedents in English art, and surfaced in many works by poets and artists who fought in the Great War.[55] As a soldier himself, Vaughan Williams had witnessed an apocalypse first-hand, an experience that might well have reminded him of the end days described in Revelations. Yet Vaughan Williams never gave direct utterance to the anguish and horror of the war. Works of his that suggest connections to war are always tempered by an expression of hope or the possibility of redemption—if not in this world or at this time, then in a time and place yet to come.[56] Percy Young commented on this tendency, describing the theme of *Sancta Civitas* as an examination of the fullness "of the spiritual life and the futility of the transient things which pass, as did Babylon the Great."[57]

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[54] Ralph Vaughan Williams to Rutland Boughton, 12 May 1951; quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 313.

[55] William Blake's depiction of "England's green and pleasant land" as Jerusalem (and the English as God's chosen people), for example, was a familiar image, made more so during the war years by Hubert Parry's popular choral setting of Blake's poem in 1916. Several of Vaughan Williams's artistic contemporaries (and fellow veterans) also drew parallels between the Great War and God's judgment on mankind. Wilfred Owen described No Man's Land as "the eternal place of gnashing of teeth; the Slough of Despond could be contained in one of its crater-holes; the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah could not light a candle to it—to find the way to Babylon the Fallen" (Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 19 January 1917, *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 429). Stanley Spencer's disturbing paintings—visions of men and horses amidst jumbles of crosses and barbed wire—and Paul Nash's blasted landscapes captured the spiritual barrenness implied by the phrase "No Man's Land."

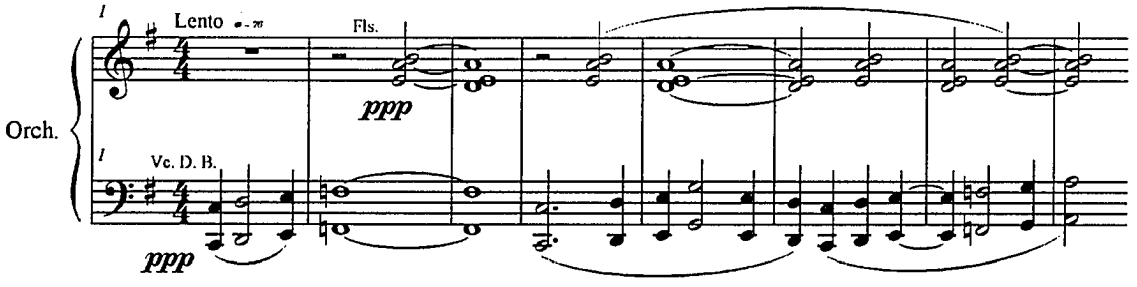
[56] Even one of the grimmest of such works, the motet *O vos omnes* (1922)—a setting of Lamentations 1:12-14, depicting God's destruction of Jerusalem—closes with the plea "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord thy God," implying that salvation remains at hand if only Jerusalem's inhabitants repent their sins.

[57] Percy Young, *The Choral Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971), 295.

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The text's emotional breadth demanded an equally wide-ranging musical idiom. To that end, Vaughan Williams brought forth in *Sancta Civitas* an array of contemporary musical techniques: passages of bitonal, bimodal, pentatonic, and pandiatonic harmony; triadic planing in conjunct and disjunct motion; sudden shifts of key or mode; rhythmic and metrical instability; and the use of harmonic dissonances for purely coloristic effects. This last technique is effectively applied at the opening of the work (Example 4-11), which bears some similiarity to the opening of the "Farben" movement from Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Op. 16 (Example 4-11a).[58]
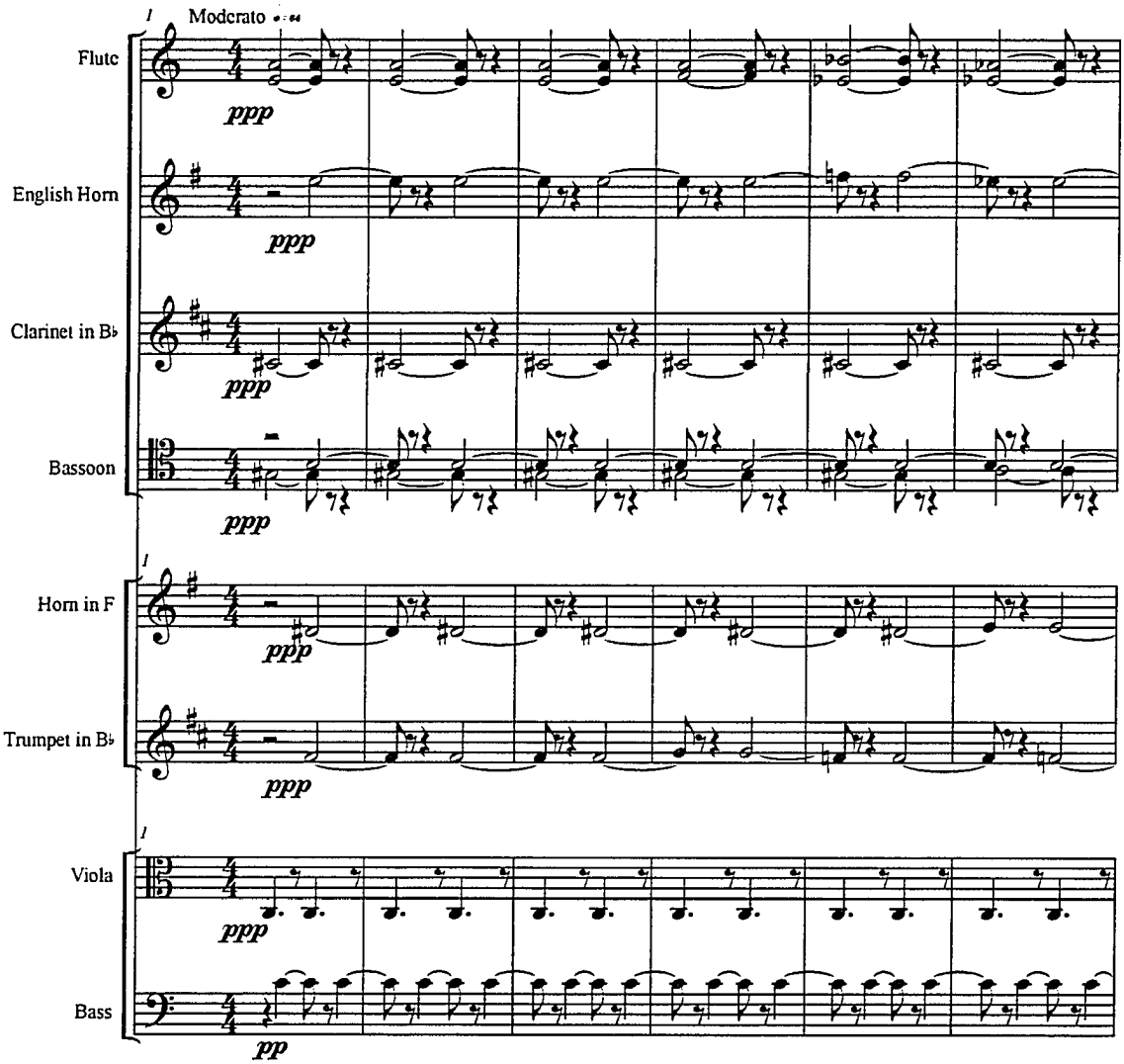
Example 4-11: ***Sancta Civitas***



[58] Vaughan Williams probably heard Schoenberg's piece in London at either its 1912 or 1914 performance; he certainly would have known of it, considering the controversy and attention these performances attracted.

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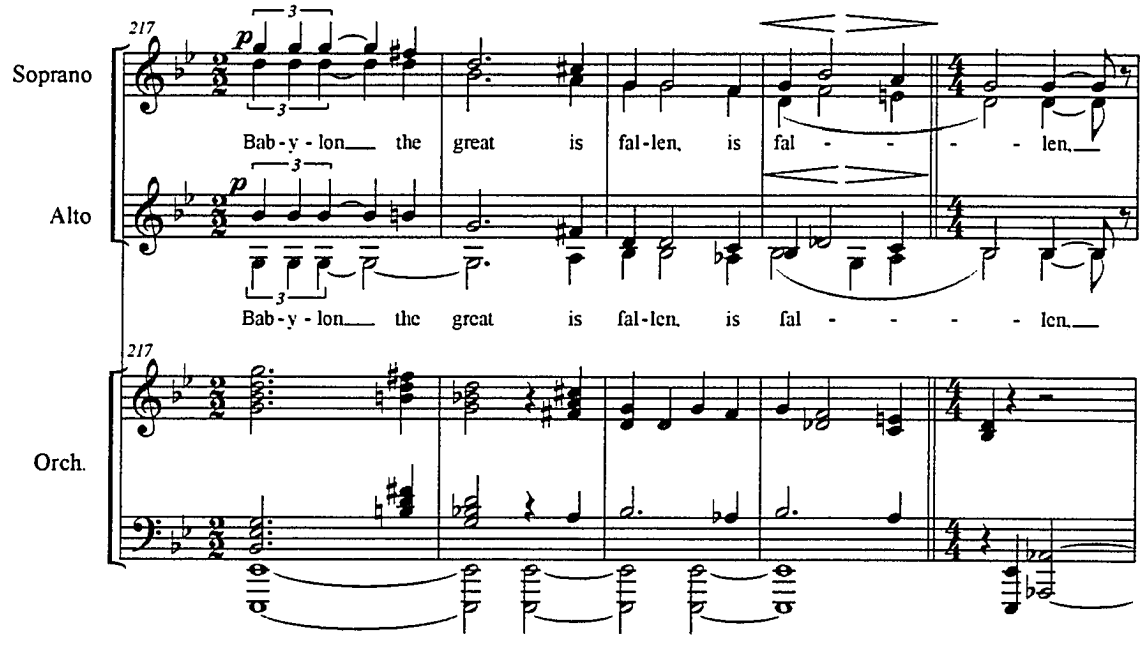
Example 4-11a: Schoenberg, *Five Pieces for Orchestra, III: Farben*



In both "Farben" and the opening of *Sancta Civitas*, the harmony shifts very slowly, often only one note at a time, creating a sheen of instrumental color divorced from any sort of tonal voice leading procedures. The effect is otherworldly and somewhat unsettling, appropriate for the visionary spirit permeating the work. A similar effect recurs throughout the third section of the piece, achieved by orchestral pedal points that create dissonances against the vocal harmonies lamenting the destruction of Babylon (Example 4-12).

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Example 4-12: ***Sancta Civitas***



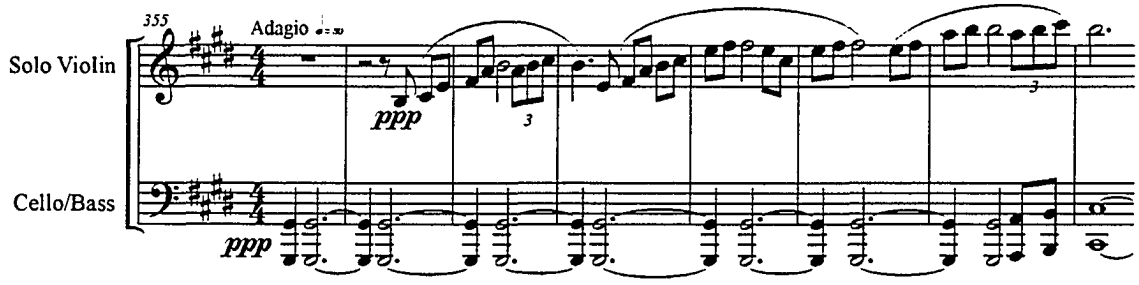
The opening phrase also reflects the various techniques of motivic unification used throughout the work. The five musical sections are largely self-contained, each employing different repetitive elements to provide a sense of unity and shape. The opening phrase returns, slightly modified, at the very end of the first section (rehearsal mark 8), a particular rhythmic motive pervades the second (Example 4-13), the musical and textual refrain "Babylon the Great is fallen" recurs throughout the third (see Example 4-12), a pentatonic violin solo opens and closes the fourth (Example 4-14), and a trumpet call of a rising fifth introduces a distant choir at the beginning and end of the fifth.

Example 4-13: ***Sancta Civitas***
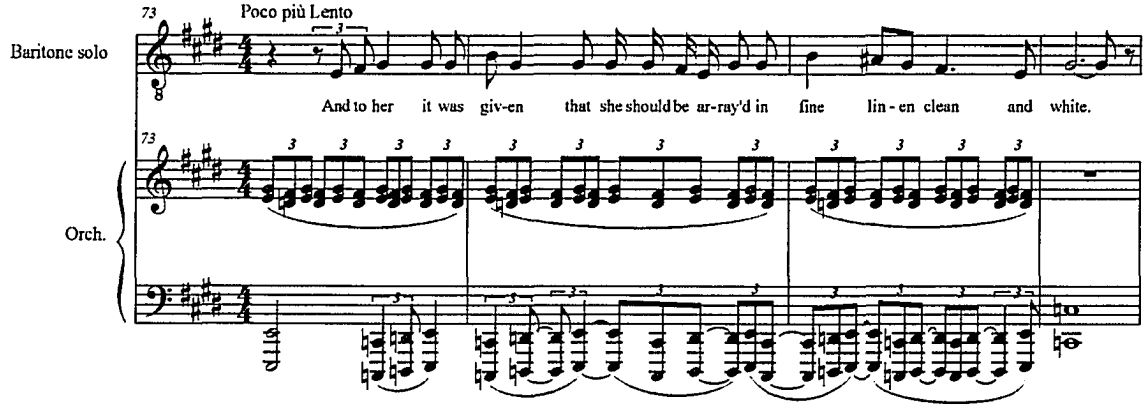


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Example 4-14: ***Sancta Civitas***
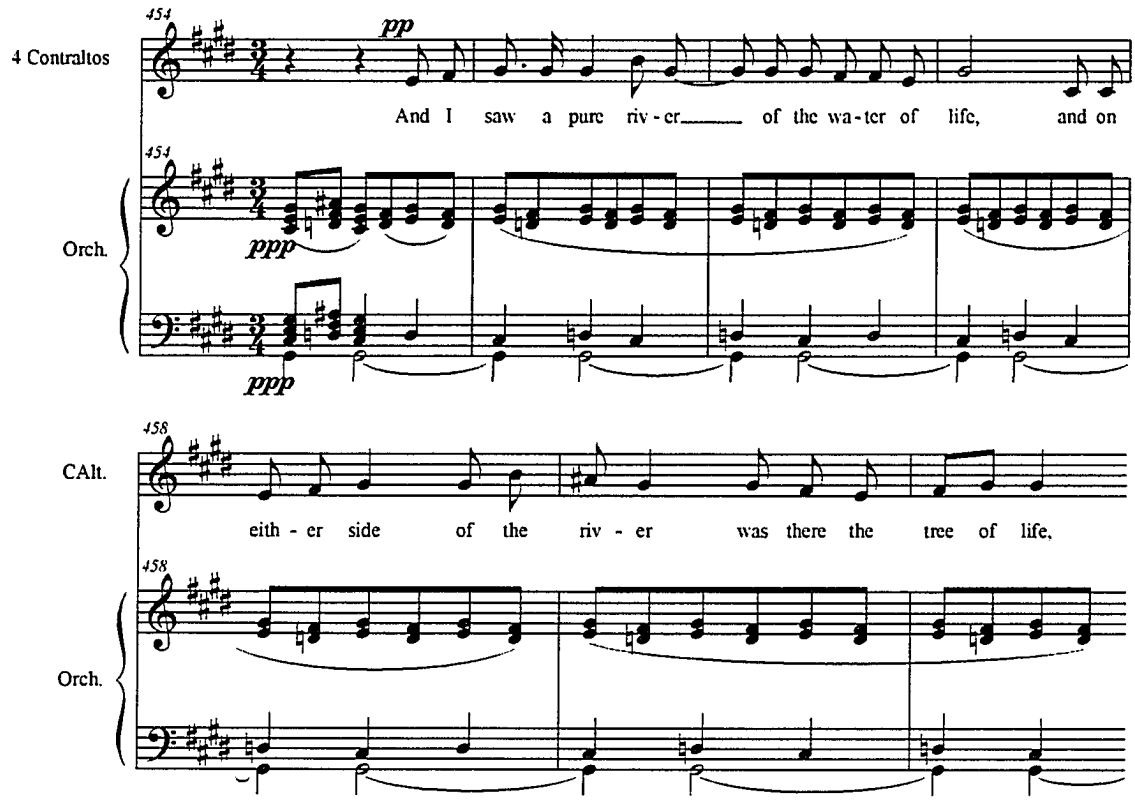


A few musical passages, however, recur in multiple sections. The opening motive is one, as it also sounds at the end of the piece (rehearsal mark 60). Another phrase from the first section, the baritone solo "And to her it was given that she should be arrayed in fine linen," returns in the fourth section as a quartet for four contraltos. The texts of both passages share the theme of purity (Examples 4-15a and 4-15b), suggesting the musical link. The wavelike oscillation of the harmony is also appropriate for the quartet's evocation of the "water of life."

Example 4-15a: ***Sancta Civitas***



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Example 4-15b: ***Sancta Civitas***

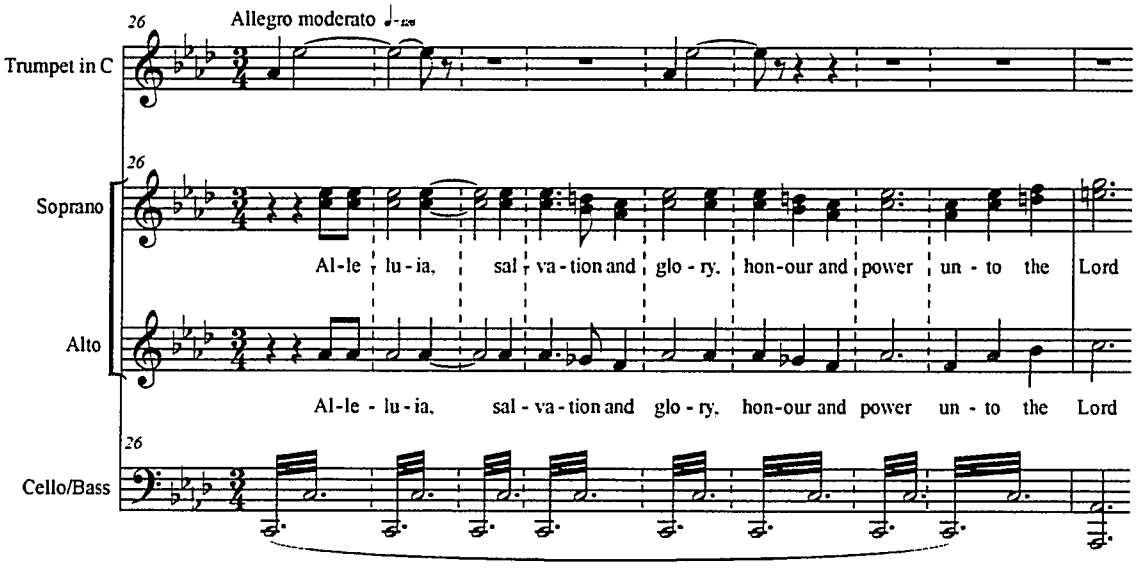


The most pervasive unifying motive, however, is the rising fifth of the trumpet mentioned in conjunction with the fifth section. This motive was first heard in the opening section (twice), and again in the third. The statements by the distant chorus that follow the trumpet call vary from entry to entry, but each one opens with an A-flat major triad over a C pedal (Example 4-16), sung to texts that briefly depart from the narrative to praise God.[59] Each of these choral statements passes through slightly different pitches and harmonies, creating a sense of progression and development from one to the next. At the same time, their distinctive timbre and consistent planar motion help unite the contrasting sections of the piece into a coherent whole.

[59] In order of appearance, these include "Alleluia, salvation, and glory, honour and power unto the Lord our God" (Rev. 19:1), "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), "Rejoice over her O heav'ns, for God hath aveng'd you on her" (a slight alteration of Rev. 18:20), and "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" (from the Sanctus of the Mass).

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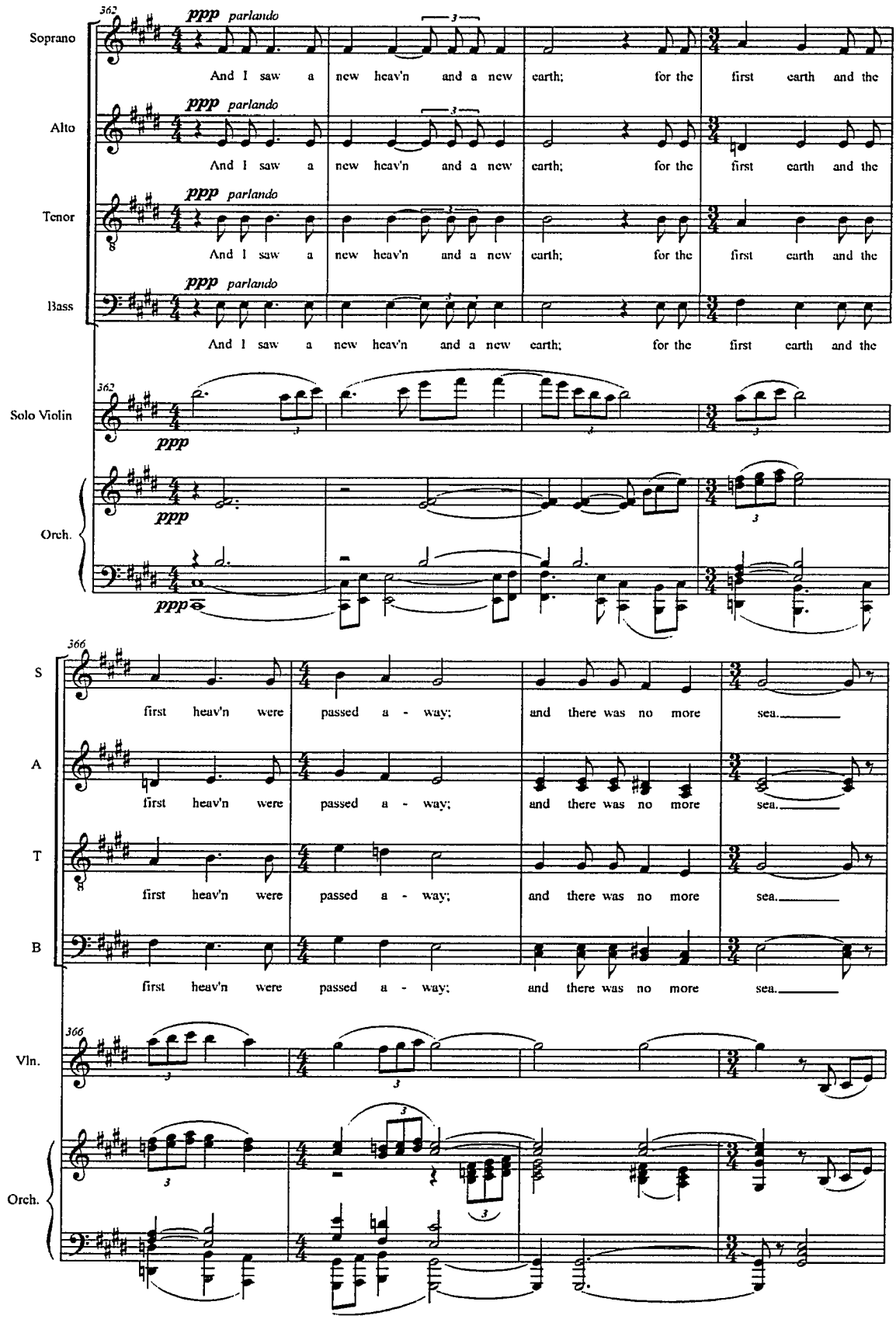
Example 4-16: ***Sancta Civitas***



Although Vaughan Williams frequently departs from diatonic voice-leading and dissonance resolution in *Sancta Civitas*, he sometimes modifies such practices so that they can apply to non-diatonic scales. For instance, the pentatonic violin solo that opens the fourth section of the work uses the scale A, B, C-sharp, E, F-sharp, but is played over a G-sharp pedal in the orchestra (see Example 4-14). The solo is followed by the entrance of the chorus on a dissonant chord comprising E, B, and F-sharp; however, on the phrase "for the first earth," Vaughan Williams introduces a D-natural into the pentatonic collection, transforming G-sharp from a dissonant pedal point into the fifth scale degree of a harmonically coherent mode, C-sharp Phrygian. At the same time, the choir's line suddenly blossoms into a first inversion D major triad, then moves to an E major triad before returning to its original dissonant harmony (Example 4-17). In this context, it becomes clear that the choir's F-sharp was the first half of a double neighbor to G-sharp, a relationship prepared by the orchestra's extended G-sharp pedal and resolved on the words "first earth." The "delayed resolution" of that F-sharp heightened the tension at the chorus's entrance and made the sudden shift to D major more dramatic than a simple oscillation between E major and D major triads would have been, while also exploiting the ambiguous harmonic implications of the pentatonic scale.

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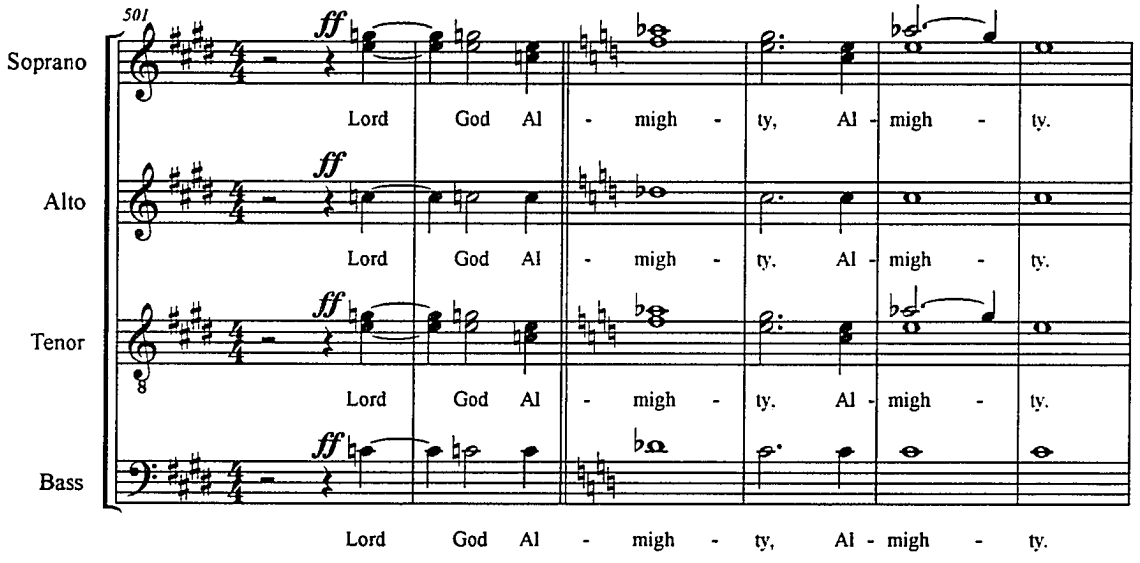
Example 4-17: ***Sancta Civitas***



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Vaughan Williams intensifies the work's pervasive harmonic ambiguity by moving to key areas that are unexpected, but enharmonically logical. For example, repetitions of the phrase "Lord God Almighty" (from the Sanctus setting in the fifth section) often set each syllable of that phrase, except the penultimate one, to the same triad. In this example, the C major triads are disrupted by a brief A-flat appoggiatura that immediately resolves to G (Example 4-18).

Example 4-18: ***Sancta Civitas***
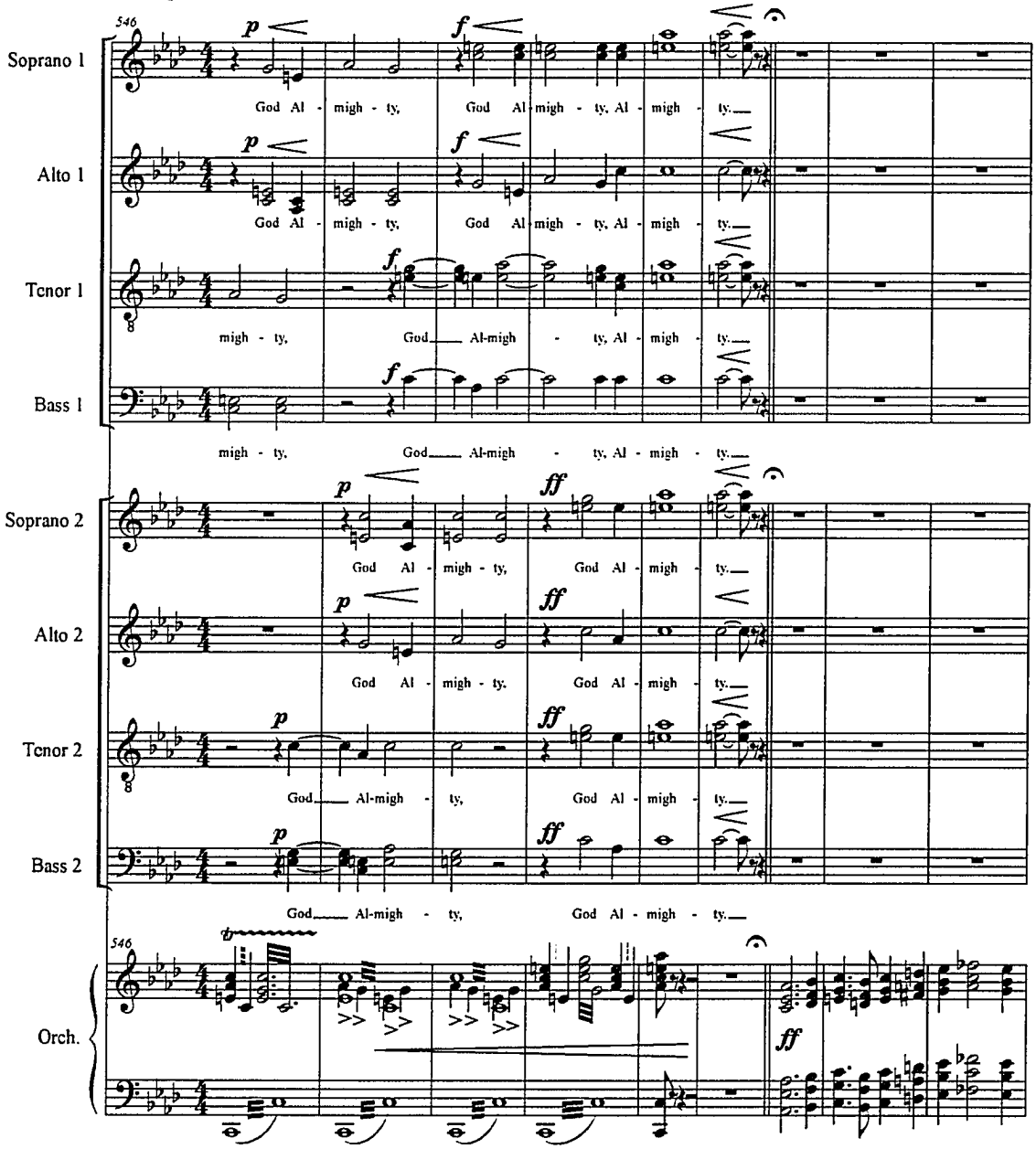


At the climax of the section, however, when both choruses shout "God almighty" (Example 4-19, m. 551), the anticipated resolution of the A-flat does not occur, leaving an augmented triad hanging in the balance. After a beat of silence, however, the orchestra re-enters with a root position A-flat major triad instead of the expected C major. Vaughan Williams reinterpreted the chord preceding the A-flat major entrance as an A-flat augmented triad in first inversion, even though listeners had been conditioned by its frequent repetition to hear it as a C major triad with an unresolved fifth. The E-natural,

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originally the third of the C major triad, thus becomes an enharmonic F-flat, which obediently resolves to E-flat. By keeping the identities of pitch collections ambiguous, Vaughan Williams is able to move quickly and with little preparation from one key or mode to another, to dramatic and frequently surprising effect.

Example 4-19: ***Sancta Civitas***
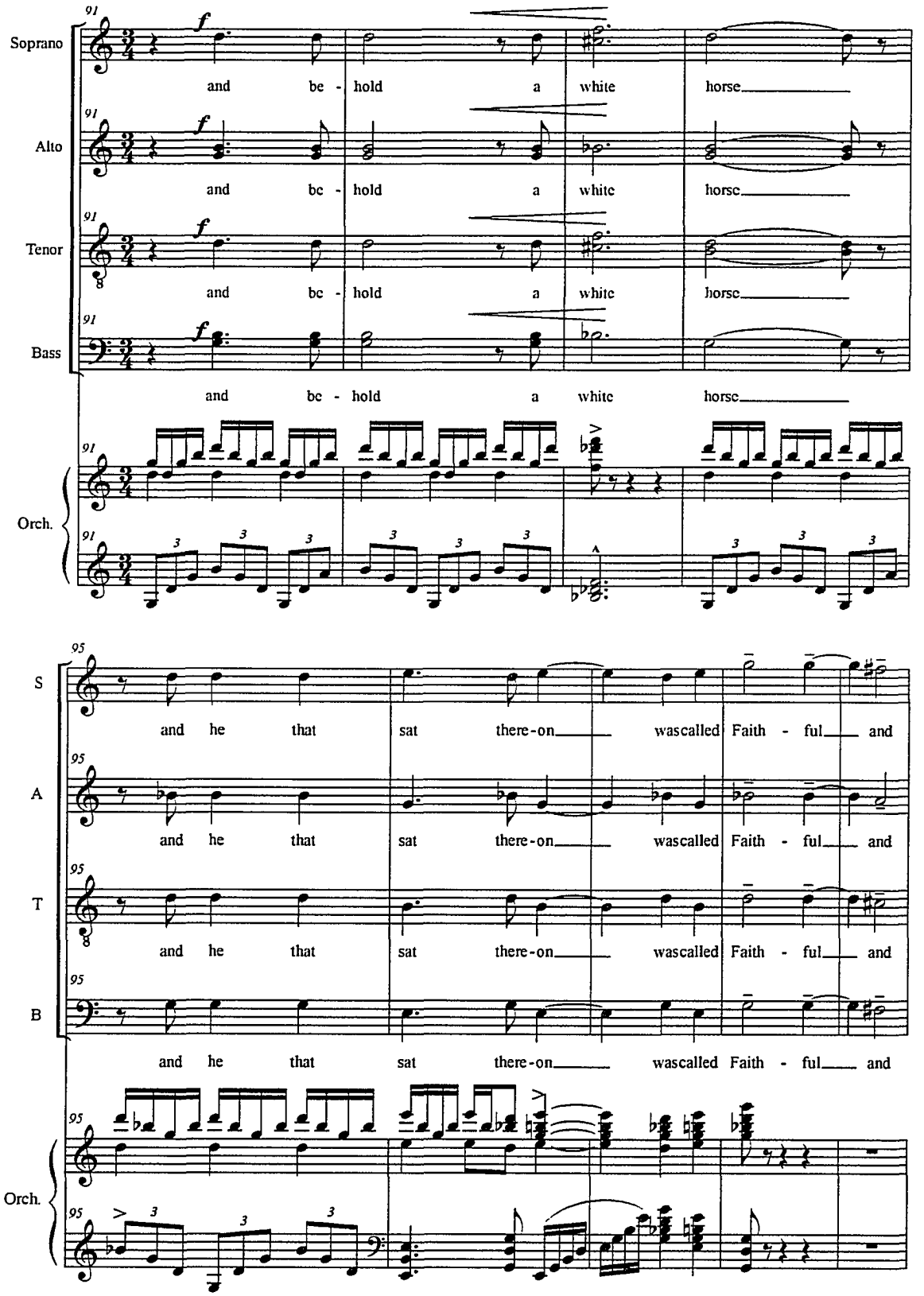


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In passages dominated by block chords, Vaughan Williams will frequently combine cross relations, mediant shifts, and parallel chords to achieve rapid modulations. The opening phrases of the second section (Example 4-20) display several examples of this procedure: a mediant shift from a G major triad to B-flat minor and back takes place at the phrase "a white horse." The pitch center then alternates between G minor and E minor triads before resolving to an E Major triad on the phrase "Faithful and True." The pitch center of the following phrase is initially obscured by parallel fourths and fifths, but the words "he doth make war" are accompanied by another mediant shift from D Major to B Major. Using almost nothing but root position major and minor triads, this fourteen-measure-long passage passes through at least seven different key areas. The lack of leading tones, tonally functional progressions, and other key-defining elements has the result of making every major or minor triad equally viable as a point of modulation or arrival. Although harmonically ambiguous, however, the second section of *Sancta Civitas* still retains momentum and direction by harnessing the constantly shifting chords to a distinctive melodic line, reinforced by the propulsive, homorhythmic declamation.[60]
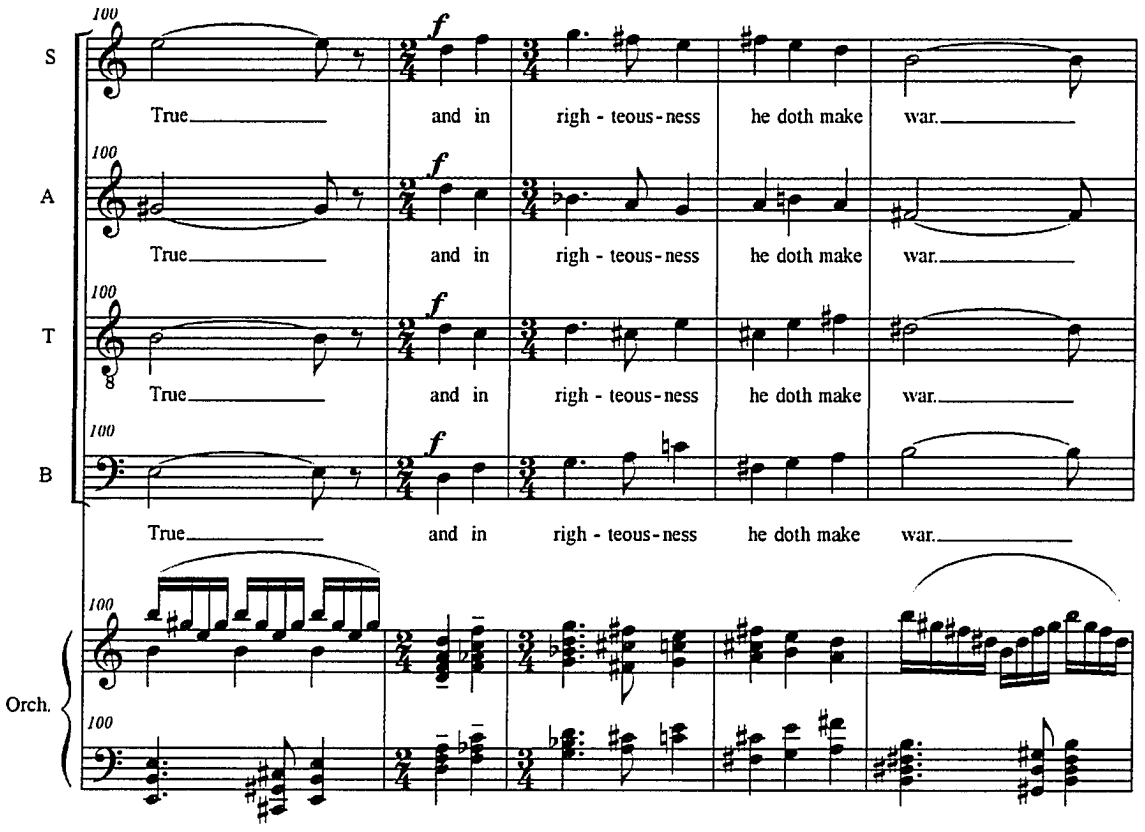
[60] Debussy uses a similar technique in "Nuages" from *Trois Nocturnes* of 1899, but his repetitive rhythms and harmonies create a sense of motion without specific direction

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Example 4-20: *Sancta Civitas*



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Taken individually, the compositional techniques featured in the *Mass* and *Sancta Civitas* were not unusual in Continental music by the time Vaughan Williams used them, though they were not widely used by English composers. What made his use of such techniques effective, to paraphrase Constant Lambert, was his ability to apply or combine them in innovative ways without sacrificing his own musical personality. If anything, the resulting changes in his musical language enhanced his style's intensity and focus by underscoring traits that remained consistent, such as sudden harmonic shifts, prominent contrapuntal structures, extended lyrical melodies, and flexible meters. In the *Mass* and *Sancta Civitas*, Vaughan Williams applied post-tonal practices shared by musicians throughout the west (chordal planing, non-diatonic scales, free use of dissonance) to certain stylistic characteristics associated with English folk songs or Tudor music that he had already assimilated (modality, strong melodic design, irregular phrasing) without any

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incongruity or hint of insularity, creating an entirely new form of musical speech in the process.

Vaughan Williams's interest in contemporary music and application of modernist techniques—including many favored by non-English composers—helped invigorate the post-war, post-Elgarian musical scene in England without adversely affecting his reputation as a composer of "national music."[61] As one of the leading and most distinctive-sounding composers of his generation, Vaughan Williams proved that English composers could look to both new and foreign music for creative inspiration without losing their personal styles, provided that those styles were securely established and genuinely expressed. Those who could successfully assimilate the national and the modern within their own idiom, like Vaughan Williams, would ultimately enrich not only their own nation's musical life, but also that of the international musical community.

[61] See Colles, "A Pastoral Symphony," 92–94; Evans, "Modern British Composers: Ralph Vaughan Williams," 371–72; and Fox-Strangways, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," esp. 82–86.

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CHAPTER 5

NATIONAL DIVISIONS: *HODIE* AND THE EIGHTH SYMPHONY

Although characterizations of Vaughan Williams as quintessentially English began appearing after the First World War, this image of him became the prevailing one after WWII.[1] His status as "the doyen of English composers"[2] undoubtedly fueled such critical depictions. His seventieth, seventy-fifth, eightieth, and eighty-fifth birthdays were all marked with concerts dedicated to his music and articles acknowledging his important place in English music.[3] Four extended studies of his life and works were published between 1950 and 1957, a testament to the significance of his art. Premieres of his new works met with significant media coverage and public interest; his Symphony in E Minor, for example, received over 200 performances during the year following its debut

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[1] See Frogley, "Constructing Englishness," 18–20.

[2] See A. T. Shaw, "Triumph of 'This Day,'" in *Evening News and Times* (Worcester), 9 September 1954, 1; also Anon. [Frank Howes?], "Modern Choral Music," in *Times* (London), 10 September 1954, 11; and Anon., "Birth of a Symphony," in *Music and Musicians* 4, no. 9 (May 1956): 5.

[3] See Anon., "A Musician's Birthday," *Times* (London), 12 October 1942, 5; Eric Blom, "Vaughan Williams," *Observer* (London), 12 October 1952, 13; Richard Capell, "An Eightieth Birthday Salutation," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 11 October 1952, 8; Edward Dent, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," *Musical Times* (October 1952): 443–44; Hubert Foss, "The Style of Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 48, no. 1232 (9 October 1952), 612; Frank Howes, "Birthday Greeting to Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 28, no. 717 (8 October 1942), 477; Michael Kennedy, "Vaughan Williams at 80," *Hallé*, no. 53 (October 1952): 10–12; Kennedy, "A Tribute to Ralph Vaughan Williams on His 85th Birthday," in *Hallé* 98 (October 1957): 4–6; Kennedy, "Vaughan Williams at Eighty-five," *Musical Times* 98, no. 1376 (October 1957): 545–46; Ernest Newman, "An English and Universal Music," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 October 1952, 20, 28; and Norman Suckling, "The Impact of Vaughan Williams," *Listener* 38, no. 976 (9 October 1947), 648.

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in 1948.[4] Even composers and critics who claimed that Vaughan Williams and his music were out of touch with post-war, post-colonial, cosmopolitan Britain reinforced his public image of "Englishness" by defining their internationalist sympathies against his advocacy for national music.

Like most composers, Vaughan Williams's compositional choices were not affected by criticism. Having forged the means to express himself effectively after much time and effort, criticism was not likely to change his mind. It did, however, reinforce stereotypes about the "Englishness" of his style, which predisposed audiences to receive his new music as "English." Yet as Vaughan Williams's nationalist image became more entrenched in the post-war years, his new music was increasingly disconnected from it. He generally avoided using indigenous music, subjects or texts with nationalist undertones, genres of national or historical significance, and other "English" characteristics in overt ways. Rather, his late-period works reflect a new interest in experimenting with texts, forms, and instrumental colors, though his musical language remained relatively consistent from the interwar years. The changes in Vaughan Williams's music between his second and third periods were less in style than in focus: he became capable of showing markedly different sides of his expressive idiom in a single work, but maintained a sense of stylistic continuity with his earlier periods even as the remnants of English externals fell away. This culmination of his personal style, seen in such late works as the Christmas cantata *Hodie* ("This Day") and the Eighth Symphony, also represents a culmination of national music: Vaughan Williams's style

[4] Michael Kennedy noted "in the period 1945–58, a new work by Vaughan Williams and a new work by Britten were the events in English music which attracted most attention from musicians and public" (*WRVW*, 295).

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not only responded to English musical life, but represented it in the eyes of others. This chapter will examine the post-war portrayal of Vaughan Williams's music as the embodiment of a national spirit rather than a personal idiom, and how *Hodie* and the Eighth Symphony consolidated and resolved the many sides of his personal style.

The perception of Vaughan Williams in post-war England

By 1950, musicians could view Vaughan Williams's professional life and stylistic idiom with some sense of perspective. He had composed more than one hundred and fifty works over the past half-century, not counting hymn tunes, folk song arrangements, and unpublished pieces. The time was right for a comprehensive assessment of Vaughan Williams's place in English musical history; the loftiness of that place, however, lent itself to myth-making. In 1951, Hugh Ottaway observed that some English writers on music displayed "an exaggerated consciousness of musical nationality, with praise of Englishry for its own sake," and that the music of Vaughan Williams, especially earlier in his life, had been taken as "a focal point for the propagandists" of English music. Ottaway thought the time was at hand to "save" Vaughan Williams from "his friends."[5] That is to say, supporters of Vaughan Williams sometimes made his Englishness seem avuncular and paternalistic, even isolationist.

One such supporter was Hubert Foss, Vaughan Williams's editor at Oxford University Press, a devotee of the composer's music and a close personal friend. In 1950, he became the first author to write an extended biography of Vaughan Williams (*Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study*), which included a chapter entitled "The English

[5] Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams and the European Background," 11. See also Peter Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 9.

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Background." In it, Foss proposed to examine the reputation of Vaughan Williams's music as characteristically English by exploring "six aspects of the English way of life: the English character and mind, the English language, the English landscape, English folk-song, an earlier English music, and the English Church."[6] In examining these aspects of English life, Foss proposed to answer the question of what nationalism was and how it affected Vaughan Williams's music. What he actually did was present a litany of stereotypical traits associated with English thought and behavior, and explain how he thought Vaughan Williams's music embodied them.[7] Additionally, Foss drew parallels between Vaughan Williams and other Great Englishmen—writers, artists, explorers, and other men of action[8]—placing their accomplishments on equal footing with his own.

Foss, however, also tried to depict Vaughan Williams as an exemplar of the common man, a deliberate misrepresentation. Playing down the composer's upper-middle class background and extensive education, Foss portrayed him as a countrified workingman who struggled against a clumsy, unsophisticated, provincial manner to create music that, while constrained by technical crudities and awkward language, was expressively honest and completely free from alien influences.[9] Foss intended such comments to show that Vaughan Williams was an instinctive, hard-working, empirical

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[6] Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 49–50.

[7] A similar practice was adopted in a dissertation (1957) by John Bergsagel. Although he does a capable job tracing Vaughan Williams's adaptation of folk and Tudor styles, Bergsagel also makes sweeping claims about the existence of "national character" (liberally drawn from the philosophies of Spanish scholar Salvador de Madariaga) that reduces Vaughan Williams's national expression to the level of a predetermined socio-cultural impulse. See John Bergsagel, "The National Aspects of the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1957), esp. 50–81 and 195–222.

[8] See also Foss, *Vaughan Williams*, 9–11, for a tribute Foss made on the occasion of Vaughan Williams's seventieth birthday that linked the composer with Milton, Hardy, Shakespeare, and Blake.

[9] For examples, see ibid., 17, 40, 42, 44, 47, 52, 55, and 57–59. Such a portrayal also implied that Vaughan Williams was a modest man who was unsusceptible to the trappings of fame and glory, as well as to the insidious musical influence of "the foreigner;" see also Frogley, "Constructing Englishness," 19–20.

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composer, less concerned with theories and academicism than with expressing himself as directly and meaningfully as possible. Unfortunately, his perpetuation of the "dogged amateur" myth (i.e., the hard-working, self-made artist) made it easy for less sympathetic (if not outright disingenuous) critics to take his comments at face value, often using them to disparage Vaughan Williams while promoting composers said to be more "professional" in their comportment and compositional practices.[10] The irony was that Vaughan Williams did not need Foss's aggressive promotion to be recognized in the British musical pantheon. His place of distinction was already secure; the attempt by some to claim ever-greater status for him and his works must have seemed, if not arrogant, at least somewhat shameless.

Vaughan Williams lived to see three more books written about his music: Percy Young's *Vaughan Williams* (1953), Frank Howes's *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (1954), and Simona Pakenham's *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of his Music* (1957).[11] Of these three books, two were by professional writers on music (Young and Howes), while Pakenham's was a self-styled "history of an obsession" by an enthusiastic amateur musician.[12] Ironically, Pakenham's book, a chronological survey of

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[10] That is not to suggest that such responses were themselves taken at face value; see, for instance, the reception that greeted the publication of *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary On His Works by a Group of Specialists* (London: Rockliff, 1952), edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller; addressed in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1992), 315–17; see also Mitchell, "Contemporary Chronicle," (April 1955), 411.

[11] Although Vaughan Williams never publicly criticized works written about him, he would correct any factual errors prior to publication if asked by the author, and occasionally commented on the books in private correspondence. See Ralph Vaughan Williams, London, to Simona Pakenham, 6 July 1956 [560706]; Ralph Vaughan Williams, London, to Simona Pakenham, July (?) 1956 [56xxxx]; Ralph Vaughan Williams, Dorking, to Percy Young, 13 May 1953 [530513]; and Ralph Vaughan Williams, London, to Michael Kennedy, Manchester, 10 February 1954 [540210] (bracketed numbers refer to catalogue designation in pre-publication proofs for Vaughan Williams's correspondence, ed. Hugh Cobbe), Music Collections, The British Library, London.

[12] Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2.

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works with general descriptions of each piece and her impressions and criticisms of them, was arguably the most insightful of the three. Although light on technical detail—only one musical example appears in her 200-page book—her appraisal of Vaughan Williams's music was by no means uncritical or sycophantic.[13] She did not deal extensively with the "national characteristics" of Vaughan Williams's music, but did assert that while folk song and other indigenous music clearly influenced his style, there were many more sides to the man and his music than typically presented.[14] Yet she also asserted that he felt "an international style of music would be as dead and colourless as Esperanto," and that the essential Englishness of his idiom was never in doubt.[15]

Howes's book was also a survey of works (or, as he put it, "a book of glorified programme notes")[16] that provided basic analytic summaries of pieces (outlines of the form, major motives, key areas, themes, and other significant traits) with limited critical commentary, much like Donald Tovey's *Essays in Musical Analysis*. Like Foss, Howes was a personal friend of Vaughan Williams, and had reviewed his music in the *Times* with sympathy for over a decade by the time he wrote the book.[17] He provides a great deal of useful information on the layout and structure of Vaughan Williams's music, but his contextual and critical discourse is occasionally misleading, such as his assignment of programs to the Fourth through Sixth Symphonies contrary to the composer's wishes and

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[13] See Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 52 and 67–69 for examples of her grappling with complex artistic questions associated with *Hugh the Drover* and the *Mass in G minor*. Pakenham also documents the musical background and training available to members of her generation, and is a valuable corroborative source for claims made about the quality of musical education and musical life in England during the early twentieth century.

[14] See ibid., 22–28.

[15] Ibid., 26–27.

[16] Howes, *Works*, v.

[17] Howes was chief critic for the *Times* (London) from 1943 to 1960.

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intent.[18] As for Young's book, it resembles Foss's biography in both organization and style, and presents Vaughan Williams as the first modern English composer (not excepting Elgar) who wrote music that did not rely on imitating other composers' styles and was capable of transcending its own era.[19] In short, despite the number of books available on Vaughan Williams and his music in the 1950s, their myth-making tacitly condoned or encouraged the limited terms in which Vaughan Williams's approach to national music was commonly framed.[20]

Efforts to correct the image of Vaughan Williams as narrowly nationalist met with mixed results. One group of critics and writers—young men such as Hugh Ottaway, Michael Kennedy, and Oliver Neighbour—were just as passionate about Vaughan Williams's music as Foss or Howes, and acknowledged the important influences of English music and culture on Vaughan Williams, but they also argued that the composer's stylistic influences and artistic importance transcended England's boundaries.[21] As they saw it, the depth and creativity of his expressive mode, not especially its relationship to England, made his music relevant and timeless.[22] Some

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[18] See Howes,*Works*, 1–3.

[19] See Percy Young, *Vaughan Williams*, Contemporary Composers, ed. Scott Goddard (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1953), 26–28. Young's book also contains several factual errors and flowery prose that tends to lapse into vagaries and digressions. For more on his treatment of "Englishness," see 13–27.

[20] Critical reaction to these four books was mixed. For Foss, see William McNaught, "The Musician's Bookshelf," *Musical Times* 91, no. 1293 (November 1950): 426–27; for Young, see Hubert Foss, "The Musician's Bookshelf," *Musical Times* 94, no. 1325 (July 1953): 311–12; for Howes, see Hugh Ottaway, "The Musician's Bookshelf," *Musical Times* 95, no. 1339 (September 1954): 476–77; and for Pakenham, see Michael Kennedy, "The Musician's Bookshelf," *Musical Times* 98, no. 1375 (September 1957), 486–87.

[21] See Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams and the European Background," *Hallé* 28 (July 1951): 10–13; Michael Kennedy, "A Symphony of Heroism," *Hallé* 66 (February 1954): 7–9; Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams and the Symphonic Epilogue," *Musical Opinion* 79, no. 939 (December 1955): 145–47; and Oliver Neighbour, "Ralph Vaughan Williams 1872-1958," *Score* 24 (November 1958): 7–13.

[22] It must also be acknowledged that VW's pronouncements on national music did not necessarily reflect the practical application of his skills in his new works. W. R. Anderson addressed the polemical

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writers tried to make Vaughan Williams's new music seem more sophisticated by dismissing earlier works considered closely bound to a national ethos. For example, a reviewer of the Cheltenham Music Festival of 1950 described Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony as "far removed from the fake half-timbering and mock Tudor of cooked-up folk tunes." The writer, Charles Stuart, commented that its complex opening harmonies must have scandalized "those who hoped Vaughan Williams would go on supplying village institutes with four-part settings of *Gathering Peasecods* and *Flails and Firkins* for the rest of his days."[23] This whiggish attitude was not uncommon in English musical discourse, wherein each new work by a composer was judged (in part) on the basis of whether it was an advance on those that preceded it. As Vaughan Williams turned to a more abstract music in his late period, his earlier works not in keeping with that vein could be dismissed as quaint at best, stylistic dead ends at worst.[24]

Other critics, however, took issue both with Vaughan Williams's arguments and his own compositional practices. Beginning in the early 1940s, serious music criticism in England slowly began to shift from newspapers and the popular press to academia and scholarly journals, introducing critical approaches based on contemporary musical analysis and theories (particularly those of Schoenberg), political and psychological

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value of Vaughan Williams's writings in a review of his book *Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony With Writings on Other Musical Subjects* (1953): "The author hits out at those who are not convinced about folk-music's value in composition. I think, myself, he is largely beating the air: but we on the other side admire his John Bullish squaring-up to the opponents, just as much as we cherish what in his hands (and in so few other Britons': there's the rub) has become of other people's tunes" ("The Musician's Bookshelf," *Musical Times* 94, no. 1330 (December 1953): 567).

[23] Charles Stuart, "Music at Cheltenham," *Hallé* 26 (July 1950): 3.

[24] This also applied to programmatic works from his late period, which were often not as well received by critics as non-programmatic ones. For instance, in 1953, the premiere of his seventh symphony (*Sinfonia Antartica*) was tarnished by tedious debates about the work's originality—parts of it were based upon incidental music Vaughan Williams wrote in 1947 for the film *Scott of the Antarctic*—and semantic arguments over whether its origins and five-movement design made it a symphony or a symphonic poem.

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theory, performance practice, and historiographical work conducted over the preceding decades.[25] Hans Keller and Donald Mitchell, co-editors of the short-lived but influential journal *Music Survey* (1947–52), led the vanguard of a new generation of critics and musicologists—among them Wilfrid Mellers,[26] Martin Cooper,[27] and William Glock[28]—who strove to "bring to the notice of readers those composers whom [we] felt were neglected or cold-shouldered in England, or to whom the English were indifferent."[29] Critics of this generation were more interested than many of their predecessors in new music, especially neoclassical and serialist works from the Continent. British works deemed similarly progressive, such as those of Humphrey Searle or Benjamin Britten, were also frequently well received; Keller and Mitchell in particular were early and vociferous champions of Britten's music.[30]

Less attractive than these critics' enthusiasm for new music were their polemical displays, particularly those of Keller and Mitchell, toward anyone who disagreed with

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[25] See Kennett, "Criticism and Theory," in *Blackwell*, 509–17; and Kennedy, *WRVW*, 331–32.

[26] See Wilfred Mellers, "Master of the King's Music, 1942," and "Towards a Musical Academy," in *Studies in Contemporary Music* (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1947), 179–86 and 196–216.

[27] See Martin Cooper, "Pastoralism," "Pastiche and Eclecticism," and "Neo-Classicism," in *Judgments of Value*, 83–90; and "The Romantic Agony in Music," in *Ideas and Music* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1965; reprint: Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), 15–28.

[28] See William Glock, "Comment," *Score*, no. 6 (May 1952): 3–6; "A Note on Elliott Carter," *Score*, no. 12 (June 1955): 47–52; and "Stravinsky Conducts," *The New Statesman* (December 1958), quoted in Glock, *Notes in Advance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 41–43.

[29] Donald Mitchell, "A Colloquy with Hans Keller and Patrick Carnegy," in *Cradles of the New*, ed. Christopher Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 14–38. This interview, conducted by Carnegy, encompasses Keller and Mitchell's views on mid-century English musical life and music criticism at that time. Their opinions, while frequently strident and unashamedly elitist, nevertheless point to their disgust with a climate of close-mindedness and amateurishness that they perceived in many newspaper and journal critics at that time, for which see esp. 19–22, 28, and 33–34; see also Mitchell, "More Off than On *Billy Budd*," in *Cradles*, 365–92.

[30] See Keller and Mitchell, eds., *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary On His Works by a Group of Specialists* (London: Rockliff, 1952); also Mitchell, "VII: The Quiet Innovator," in *Cradles*, 305–419; and Keller, "Resistances to Britten's Music: Their Psychology," "*Gloriana* as Music Drama: a Reaffirmation," and "Britten's Last Masterpiece," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Christopher Wintle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10–17, 89–92, and 111–13.

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them—Frank Howes and Ernest Newman were often targets of their ire—and their dismissal of music they thought reflected "the awful parochialism of English musical life."[31] Keller said that when he "was confronted with a traditional attitude, an attitude that insisted on a certain tradition (as indeed Frank Howes did, within the context of Vaughan Williams, for instance)," he "tried to demolish all *evaluation in terms of style* in favour of *evaluation in terms of substance* [Keller's emphasis]."[32] Keller's implication was that music favored by "traditionalist" critics was too shallow artistically to hold up to rigorous critical evaluation, though he preferred to make this argument through polemic rather than attempt to prove it through analysis.[33] Such attitudes contributed to a climate where the issue of Vaughan Williams's basic musical competency actually had to be defended in print, something that would have been unthinkable in the interwar years.[34]

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[31] Mitchell, "A Colloquy," 15. The irony, of course, was that their polemical tone reflected their own parochialism, and alienated at least as many people as it attracted; see 26–29 of the same volume.

[32] Quoted in Mitchell, "A Colloquy," 23.

[33] See, for example, Hans Keller, "National Frontiers in Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Christopher White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 18–28.

[34] Following the debut of *Sinfonia Antartica*, rumors began circulating that Vaughan Williams no longer orchestrated his own music (see Kennedy, *WRVW*, 287; and Eric Blom, "Polar Expedition," *Observer*, 18 January 1953, 11). His increasing deafness and notoriously poor handwriting led him to enlist composer and pianist Roy Douglas as his copyist and proofreader in 1947, and he came to rely on Douglas's opinion regarding the instrumental effectiveness of his new works. Occasionally Douglas would suggest alterations, but would only change Vaughan Williams's scores at the elder composer's express request, as notes between them make clear (see notes from Roy Douglas to Ralph Vaughan Williams for Symphony in D minor, Add. MS 65533, f. 1 (r), Music Collections, The British Library, London). Evidently some people took Vaughan Williams's humorous introduction of Douglas to others as "the man who writes my music for me" literally. Douglas vehemently denied accusations that he orchestrated Vaughan Williams's works; see Roy Douglas, *Working With Vaughan Williams*, 2d ed. (London: The British Library, 1988), 2. Vaughan Williams referred to the rumors with a self-deprecating *bon mot* in a letter to Neville Cardus: "if Roy Douglas had scored [*Sinfonia Antartica*] it would have sounded a great deal better. . . . I should like to tell you what Roy Douglas actually did do, for which I am very grateful to him: firstly he made a beautiful copy of the score (my writing is very bad) and in making the copy he discovered a lot of careless errors on my part . . . in no case did he make an alteration without consulting me first. We had long talks and letters over the whole matter. Sometimes I accepted his amendments and sometimes I did not. As I say, I am prepared to ignore all these idle tongues, but if the matter does crop up again I owe it to Mr. Douglas to explain what happened. He earns his living by orchestration and I should not like him to be blamed for my shortcomings" (quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 289).

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Vaughan Williams's advocacy for national music also had little relevance for these critics' conception of Britain's post-war musical scene.[35] In an essay discussing the composer's relationship to national music, Mitchell argued that the philosophy underpinning Vaughan Williams's music was bound to affect his style in undesirable ways:

> If a national musical culture, or the basis for one, were to be created [in the early twentieth century], then it must necessarily assert its pedigree pretty aggressively; it was not the moment for half-measures. Vaughan Williams, to his immortal credit, had the courage to tackle this heart-breaking task, with both integrity and musical inspiration. . . . But the acceptance of the burden of a national revolution in musical taste also meant the acceptance of stylistic limitations which might have crippled a smaller talent. A pioneer is inevitably obliged to exaggerate. A new aesthetic attitude has to develop a militant characteristic if it is to survive. In short, the composer who pioneers in the national field loses that very freedom of artistic expression which his pioneering activities confer upon his successors. In a sense he becomes the first—perhaps only—victim of his revolution."[36]

It was, Mitchell argued, this "virtuous 'nationalism' . . . which militates against acceptance of Vaughan Williams as a 'great' composer."[37] He assumed that any composer who deliberately tried to create "national music" was destined to fail. At best, the composer's efforts would fertilize the ground for a new generation of more talented musicians; at worst, they would lead to a creative cul-de-sac. Although Vaughan

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[35] "Our brief and tardy nationalist phase was, in effect, more a deviation from what we call the English tradition than central to it. [Constant] Lambert was right when he said that 'the particular type of self-conscious Englishry practised by the folk-song composers was in itself peculiarly un-English'" (Hugh Wood, "English Contemporary Music," in *European Music in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Howard Hartog, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 146). For Mitchell and Keller's opinions on Vaughan Williams and/or the issue of "Englishness" in music, see Donald Mitchell, "Vaughan Williams" and "Elgar and the English Oratorio," in *Cradles*, 87–97 and 251 –54, and "Contemporary Chronicle," *Musical Opinion* 78, nos. 931–32 (April and May 1955): 409–11 and 471; also see Hans Keller, "Resistances to Britten's Music: Their Psychology," "National Frontiers in Music," and "Elgar the Progressive," in *Essays on Music*, 10–17, 18–25, and 63–67.

[36] Donald Mitchell, "Contemporary Chronicle," *Musical Opinion* 78, no. 932 (May 1955): 471.

[37] Ibid.

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Williams no longer followed his own precepts as closely as he had as a younger man, much critical discourse still suggested that his compositional practices were incompatible with the cosmopolitan outlook favored by composers like Britten, which hindsight shows to be false.[38] Not only was Vaughan Williams's music internationally accepted, it spanned the Channel, the Atlantic, and the Pacific more effectively than that of most other living composers.[39]

Vaughan Williams's reputation as an "English" composer, which reached its height after World War Two, significantly colored the critical response to his music, which in turn has hampered the long-term assessment of Vaughan Williams's late works. General studies tend to focus on his early and middle periods,[40] implying (or sometimes stating outright) that his later works were simply "repeating well-tried efforts"[41] better realized in his earlier music. Vaughan Williams may have avoided the type of radical shifts in musical language that characterized the careers of composers like Stravinsky, but

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[38] Some young English composers also entered the polemical fray with writings intended to establish their cosmopolitan credentials by attacking Vaughan Williams; see Peter Maxwell Davies, "Problems of a British Composer Today," *Listener* 62, no. 1593 (8 October 1959), 563. His article elicited several letters over the following month, including one from Justin Connolly, a composition student at the RCM under Peter Racine Fricker and a budding serialist composer; see Connolly, Letter to the Editor, in *Listener* 62, no. 1598 (12 November 1959), 834.

[39] As Kennedy notes, "it is instructive to read the list of overseas performances given between September and November 1957. The Fourth Symphony was played in New York, the Fifth on New Zealand radio; the Eighth in Helsinki, Malmo, Rotterdam (twice), Houston, Boston (10 times), Hilversum, New Zealand and Cape Town; the *Serenade to Music* in Cape Town, Auckland, Hilversum, and Kingsport, Tennessee; *Hodie* in Sydney N.S.W. and Youngstown, Ohio; *Job* in Toronto; the Harmonica Romance on Australian Radio; the Piano Concerto on Danish radio with the original soloist, Harriet Cohen; the Oboe Concerto in Germany and Vancouver, and *The Sons of Light* and the Concerto Grosso in New Zealand" (*WRVW*, 338, n. 1).

[40] Few general histories even mention any of the late period works; for a sample, see Robert Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, The Norton Introduction to Music History (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991), 130–34; Donald J. Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), 618–22; Donald J. Grout and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2001), 689–91; Whittall, *Musical Composition*, 65–69; and Eric Salzman, *Twentieth-Century Music: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 80.

[41] Whittall, *Musical Composition*, 68.

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his late works show that he was still capable of finding the *mot juste* in distinctive and expressively sincere ways—principles at the heart of national music.

Hodie

Hodie, one of Vaughan Williams's last major choral-orchestral works, was first performed at the Three Choirs Festival (Worcester) in September 1954. Dedicated to his former student Herbert Howells, *Hodie* is a multi-movement setting of the Nativity story that includes texts by John Milton, Thomas Hardy, George Herbert, William Drummond, and Ursula Vaughan Williams, interspersed with passages from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.[42] Its musical design is reminiscent of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*,[43] which is made up of fifteen main scenes, some with subdivisions, and two exordia (i.e., introductions to the two parts) for a total of seventeen.[44] *Hodie* also has fifteen movements and an epilogue, though the epilogue divides into two sections (for a grand total of seventeen) in Vaughan Williams's organization and treatment of the texts. *Hodie* also follows the textual layout of Bach's Passion by alternating between scripture and

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[42] The movements and texts are organized as follows: I. Prologue (From the Vespers for Christmas Day), II. Narration (Matthew 1: 18–21 and Luke 1: 32), III. Song (John Milton, "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity"), IV. Narration (Luke 2: 1–7), V. Choral (Miles Coverdale, after Martin Luther), VI. Narration (adapted from Luk 2: 8–17 and the *Book of Common Prayer*), VII. "The Oxen" (Thomas Hardy), VIII. Narration (Luke 2: 20), IX. Pastoral (George Herbert), X. Narration (Luke 2: 19), XI. Lullaby (W. Ballet), XII. Hymn (William Drummond), XIII. Narration (adapted from Matthew 1: 1–2, 11), XIV. The March of the Three Kings (Ursula Vaughan Williams), XV. Choral (Anonymous and Ursula Vaughan Williams), XVI. Epilogue (John 1: 1–14 (adapted) and Milton, "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity").

[43] Vaughan Williams knew this piece intimately. He first conducted it at London's Queen's Hall in 1923, in 1931 at the newly opened Dorking Town Hall, again at Dorking in 1938, and then annually from 1942 until his death in 1958. He also led performances elsewhere in England, notably at Manchester in 1956; see Celia Newbery, ed., *Vaughan Williams in Dorking* (Dorking: Local History Group of the Dorking and Leith Hill District Preservation Society, 1979), 18; and Kennedy, *WRVW*, 334 and 341. Kennedy states that RVW conducted 23 performances of the *St. Matthew Passion* in Dorking, though Newbery's statistics indicate only 18.

[44] See Christoph Wolff, "Bach's 'Great Passion,'" trans. Michael Talbot, from notes to Johann Sebastian. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion,* Archiv 427 648-2, 1989, 3 CDs, 26.

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meditative poetry. The poems are variously set; most are through-composed solo arias and choral movements, but the work also includes a song (in the form of a da capo aria), a lullaby, and two strophic chorales.[45] The simplicity and timelessness of the Nativity story warranted a straightforward, restrained, respectful setting. As Simona Pakenham noted, it seemed only appropriate that *Hodie* did not find Vaughan Williams exploring unknown musical regions: "An 'avant garde' and difficult Christmas cantata is surely the last thing that even a critic wants to hear."[46]

Most reviews of the premiere (and of the first London performance the following January) were enthusiastic, many writers commenting on the octogenarian composer's astonishing creativity and technical facility. A. T. Shaw, of the Worcester *Evening News and Times*, called it "a most wonderful and triumphant success" from beginning to end. "The opening chorus with its syncopated shouts of 'Nowell' begins the work with an impetus which never flags and carries it through the sequence of tranquil narrations, lovely songs, and gravely beautiful chorals [sic] to the confident strength of the Epilogue[.]"[47] The *Times*'s reviewer remarked that *Hodie* was "vivid, warm-hearted, and of fundamental simplicity."[48] *The Listener*'s Dyneley Hussey concurred, calling it "a grand simplicity, the finest form of expression to which great artists can aspire," admiring the freshness and originality with which it manifested "many new ideas about form and

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[45] Vaughan Williams particularly hoped that the work would catch on for school performances (though it did not), which may explain his simple, almost childlike conceptions of pomp and ceremony in certain parts of the work, such as "The March of the Three Kings" or the second half of the Epilogue. See Roy Douglas, *Working with Vaughan Williams*, 67–71, for an account of Vaughan Williams's attempts to promote the work as appropriate for schools.

[46] Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 170.

[47] A. T. Shaw, "Triumph of 'This Day,'" *Evening News and Times* (Worcester), 9 September 1954, 1, 4.

[48] Frank Howes (?), "Vaughan Williams's New Cantata," *Times* (London), 10 September 1954, 11.

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treatment."[49] Oliver Neighbour, in *The Score*, was moved by the melodic invention and "refined workmanship" Vaughan Williams displayed, and declared *Hodie* "probably the finest of all Vaughan Williams's choral works."[50]

Not all critics were quite so moved, including the *Manchester Guardian*'s usually sympathetic Colin Mason. He thought that much of the piece was in the composer's "least attractive or interesting style—the lumpy pentatonic," that rarely led to any "happy or purposeful effect."[51] Arthur Jacobs, of the *Sunday Times*, found the whole greater than the sum of its parts, but thought some of those parts were "tedious," containing "things that have become commonplace largely through Vaughan Williams's own usage—his fanfares, his processions of triads, his 'oom-pah' accompaniments."[52] The harshest criticism of the work, however, came from Donald Mitchell. In the March 1955 issue of *Musical Opinion*, Mitchell finished his monthly column with the casual aside that he considered *Hodie* to be "grossly over-praised." He expanded upon the remark the following month in one of the most vitriolic reviews ever written about Vaughan Williams:

> Not only was the work over-praised, but, more importantly—and hence my complaint—grossly under-composed. If this is the kind of music that rouses cries of exaltation, then our musical culture is in a worse condition than I thought possible. . . . [*Hodie*], apart from its vigorous and original first movement, is crudely written, thrown together rather than organised, dreadfully thick in its textures, and second-rate in musical invention. No end of its numbers are little more than improvisations, and scantily clad improvisations at that. It is a rough and sketchy work, with its composer at his most take-it-or-leave-it attitude. Hence my description of it as "grossly

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[49] Dyneley Hussey, "New Music at Worcester," *Listener* 52, no. 1333 (16 September 1954), 459–60.

[50] Oliver Neighbour, "Christmas Cantata," *Score*, no. 11 (March 1955): 61.

[51] Colin Mason, "Three Choirs Festival," *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1954, 5.

[52] Arthur Jacobs, "New Choral Works at Festival," *Sunday Times* (London), 12 September 1954, 10.

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> under-composed." Aside from its lack of real inspiration (here and there, by the way, there are distinct signs that the cantata was influenced by Britten's "St. Nicholas"), the piece does nothing to satisfy—or even to begin to meet—those technical requirements which masterpieces from our musical past, English or European, have taught us to demand of an extensive composition by a serious composer. There is a level below which "directness" and "forthrightness" of utterance—qualities for which Vaughan Williams is praised—deteriorate into a downright unacceptable and damaging primitivity.[53]

In the same article, Mitchell attacked the quality of writing and philosophy in Vaughan Williams's recently published book *Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony* and seized upon the composer's own self-deprecating remarks about struggling his whole life "to conquer amateurish technique." He agreed that even in earlier works, Vaughan Williams's "technique has not seemed fully adequate to his needs," and noted in general "how clumsy his technique can be, and how much he relies on his inimitable idiosyncrasies to pull him through."[54] Mitchell's various accusations—carelessness, lack of inspiration, implied plagiarism, incompetence—were made at such length, with such intensity, and with so little support or justification that it is difficult to take them seriously as anything other than polemic.[55] They do, however, vividly illustrate the ideological divide that Vaughan Williams's music inspired among critics during the 1950s.

Vaughan Williams's late works, to repeat, are characterized by their resolution of the many different stylistic idioms the composer explored throughout his career while retaining a consistent musical language. *Hodie* resembles Vaughan Williams's other

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[53] Donald Mitchell, "Contemporary Chronicle," (April 1955), 409.

[54] Ibid., 411.

[55] Surprisingly, subsequent issues of *Musical Opinion* contained no letters from readers responding to Mitchell's article. Given that the journal rarely shied away from controversial topics, the absence of any response to such an obviously inflammatory article is unusual. See also Mitchell, "Contemporary Chronicle" (May 1955), 471, for a follow-up to this review assessing Vaughan Williams's role in the formation of an English "national music," reprinted in part on p. 164 of this dissertation.
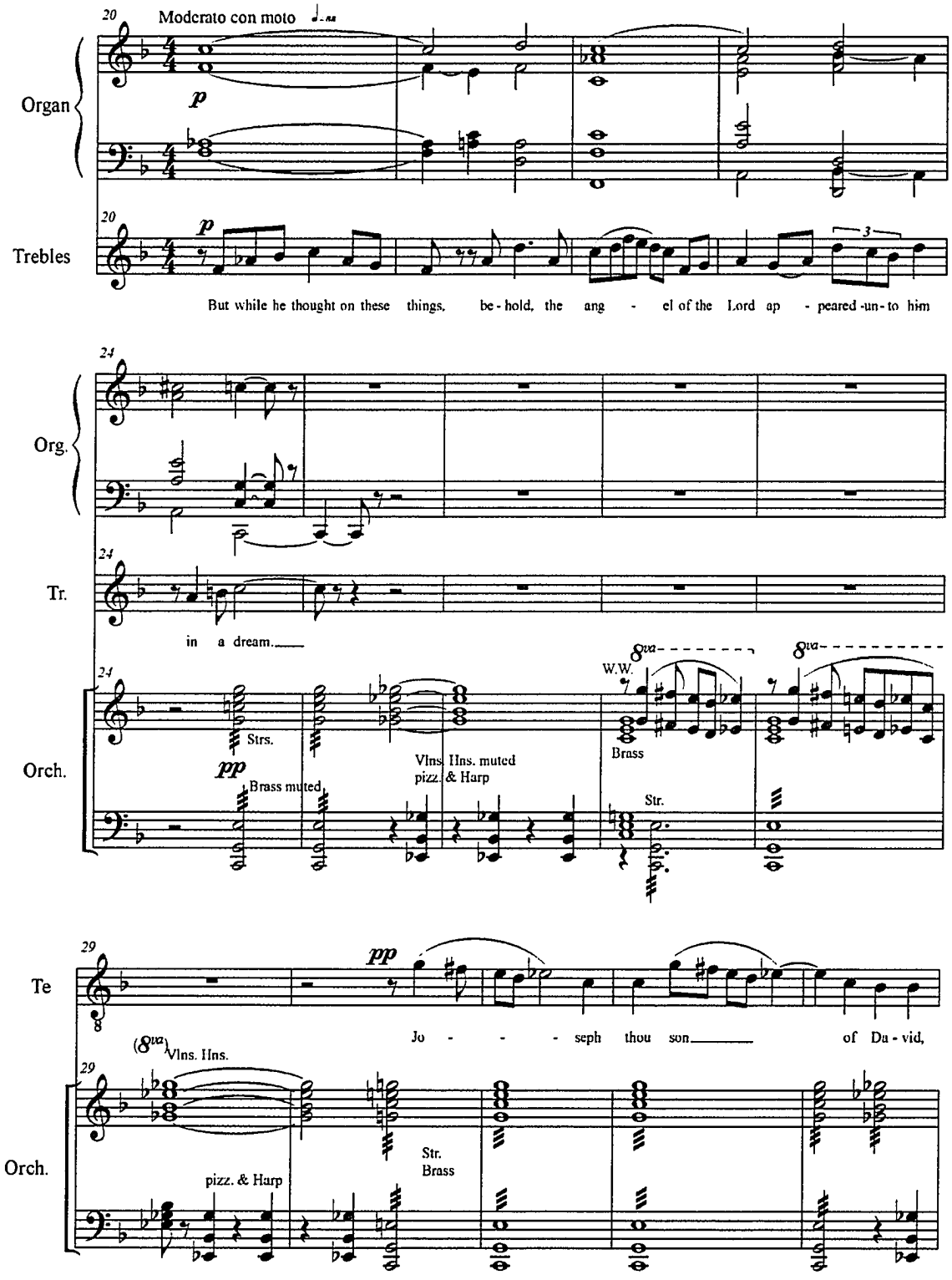
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choral works in its triadic harmonies, rhapsodic melodies, modal inflections, and flexible meters, but their use here differs from that of previous pieces. *Sancta Civitas*, like *Hodie*, was episodic and largely through-composed, but it retained a strong sense of harmonic unity from beginning to end. Even in tranquil sections, Vaughan Williams used musical language based on modal or post-tonal procedures that gave *Sancta Civitas* a generally consistent sound throughout. *Hodie* also features passages of modality, pandiatonicism, and other post-tonal harmonic structures, but places them side by side with some of the most diatonic, tonally-oriented music of Vaughan Williams's late period—indeed, of his entire career. Many of these decisions were likely motivated by considerations of the text, which gave him a framework to organize these many different styles without seeming eccentric or inconsistent. An early example occurs in Movement II ("Narration," the first of several movements with this name) between the choirboys' recitation and the entrance of the Angel. The boys' text is nearly free of accidentals, but their closing phrase ("in a dream") unexpectedly introduces a B-natural. The music then leads into a sinuously chromatic motive in the winds as the Angel appears to Joseph (Example 5-1) and maintains a highly chromatic idiom for the rest of the movement.[56]

[56] A similar incident occurs in the first movement: aside from the fanfare (with its prominent A-natural, C-flat, and D-flat) recurring through this section and a modulation to C Major at rehearsal mark [3], the harmony is almost entirely diatonic. Only at the phrase "Gloria in excelsis deo: Alleluia"—a motive associated with the presence of angels later in the piece (see Example 5-8)—does the harmony turn to a predominantly chromatic idiom.

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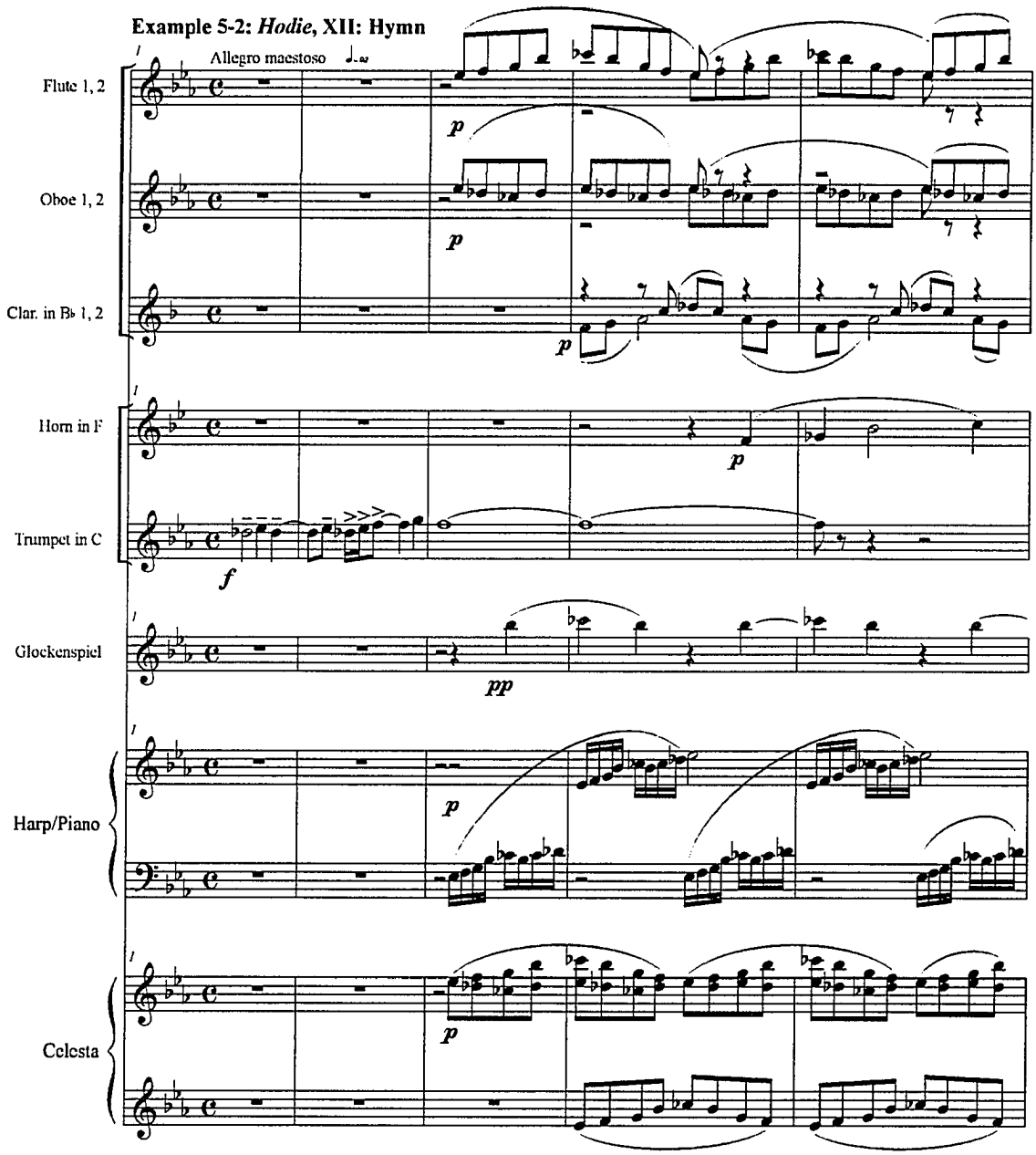
Example 5-1: *Hodie*, II: Narration



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This type of contrast occurs between movements as well, such as the shift from the diatonic and tranquil Movement XI (Lullaby: "Sweet was the song") to Movement XII (Hymn: "Bright portals of the sky," Example 5-2).

Example 5-2: *Hodie*, XII: Hymn



The hymn's text, calling for the doors of Eternity to open for the coming of Christ, is accompanied by music reminiscent of passages from the contemporaneous *Sinfonia Antartica*: glittering orchestration for winds and percussion, tonally ambiguous

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harmonies, extensive use of chromaticism, and chordal planing all contribute to this movement's otherworldly sound. This makes an immediate contrast with the preceding movement's euphonious, diatonic harmonies for women's chorus and the gently undulating contrapuntal accompaniment of the winds and strings.
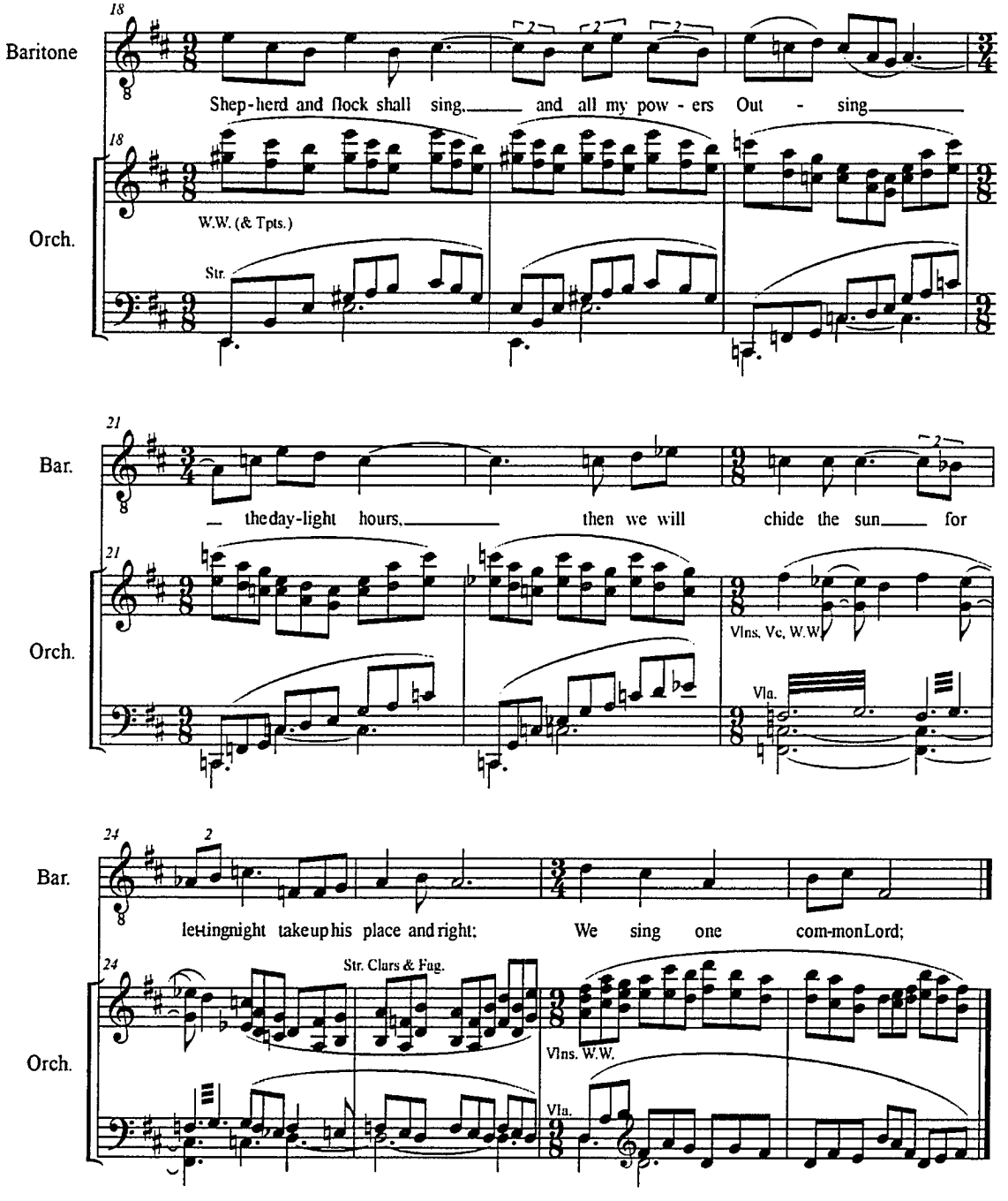
As the previous examples suggest, Vaughan Williams tends to introduce modes, pentatonic scales, extensive chromaticism, and other pitch collections outside major/minor tonality in passages dealing with the supernatural or exotic, while sections addressing more earthly, personal subjects tend to adhere to diatonic keys. Movement IX (Pastoral: "The shepherds sing,") illustrates the juxtaposition of these two techniques in a single movement. The text is by George Herbert, whose metaphysical verse Vaughan Williams also set in the *Five Mystical Songs* of 1911,[57] and depicts a shepherd singing of the enrichment of his soul by the grace of God. The movement is grounded in D major—the opening and closing key area—but it includes several passages that grow increasingly chromatic as the singer's thoughts become more lofty and metaphysical, only to return to the tonal center at the beginning of a new phrase (Example 5-3). These chromatic passages act like tonally functional progressions; that is, they sound as though they are preparing to modulate to a new key area rather than simply elevate the text, even though that modulation never actually occurs. From a dramatic perspective this passage gives the impression that the singer is trying to reach beyond the physical limitations of the world, catching glimpses of a new spiritual plane just beyond his own perception, but is irresistibly pulled back to his own earthly reality.

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[57] The return of the motive associated with the phrase "My God and King" from the fifth song of that set ("Antiphon"), this time with the words "No hymn for thee" (mm. 6–7) is therefore apropos; see also Chapter 4, Example 4-10.

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Example 5-3: *Hodie*, IX: Pastoral



Movement VII ("The Oxen,") also juxtaposes diatonicism and chromaticism, but in a way that suggests spiritual doubt rather than exaltation. The narrator describes a scene on Christmas Eve, imagining the animals kneeling in their pens as if to pay their respects to the Christ child. The poem concludes:

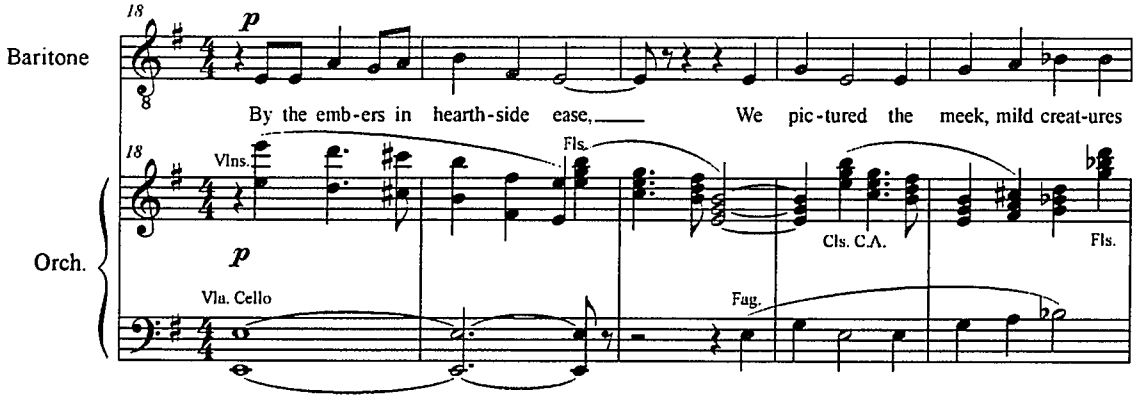
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So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! yet, I feel
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,"
Hoping it might be so."

As the narrator imagines the animals in their pen, the harmonies suddenly shift from parallel octaves and parallel diatonic triads to chromatic parallel triads (Example 5-4). These harmonies return at the end, when the narrator goes with his imaginary companion into the gloom, and represent both the narrator's imagination and the mystical story he cannot quite dismiss.

Example 5-4: *Hodie*, VII: The Oxen



Unlike the other movements, "The Oxen" steps outside the bounds of the nativity story to look back in. It is the only movement that suggests it is told from a vantage point other than the purely religious or from one contemporary with Christ's day, and its prominent dissonances and stark textures make it stand out from the other movements.[58]

[58] Byron Adams characterizes this as a very personal (not to say pessimistic) expression from the composer singing "of his nostalgia for a kind of faith irrevocably lost long ago" ("Biblical Texts," 116). One could also interpret it as a spark of hope in the midst of, if not hopelessness, unsentimental realism; in

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Significantly, "The Oxen" begins and ends in E Dorian. Scales built on E seemed to carry mystical or metaphysical associations for Vaughan Williams; certainly the music he wrote in E tends to be some of his more spiritually introspective.[59] It is also extremely remote from the opening key of the work, E-flat major, further reinforcing the distance of Hardy's questioning, modernist sentiment from the joyful celebration of Christ's birth sung of at the beginning of the piece.

Non-diatonic scales could be used for generally symbolic purposes as well as for illustrating specific texts. For example, the cantata's opening brass fanfare, reminiscent of the beginning of *A Sea Symphony*, is made up of a six-note pitch collection centered on B-flat and unrelated to the key signature of E-flat major (Example 5-5). No pitch set of this type occurs naturally in any tonally or modally diatonic scale, nor in any pentatonic, hexatonic, or octatonic collection; the closest scales it resembles are B-flat melodic minor with a lowered second or B-flat Phrygian with a raised seventh.

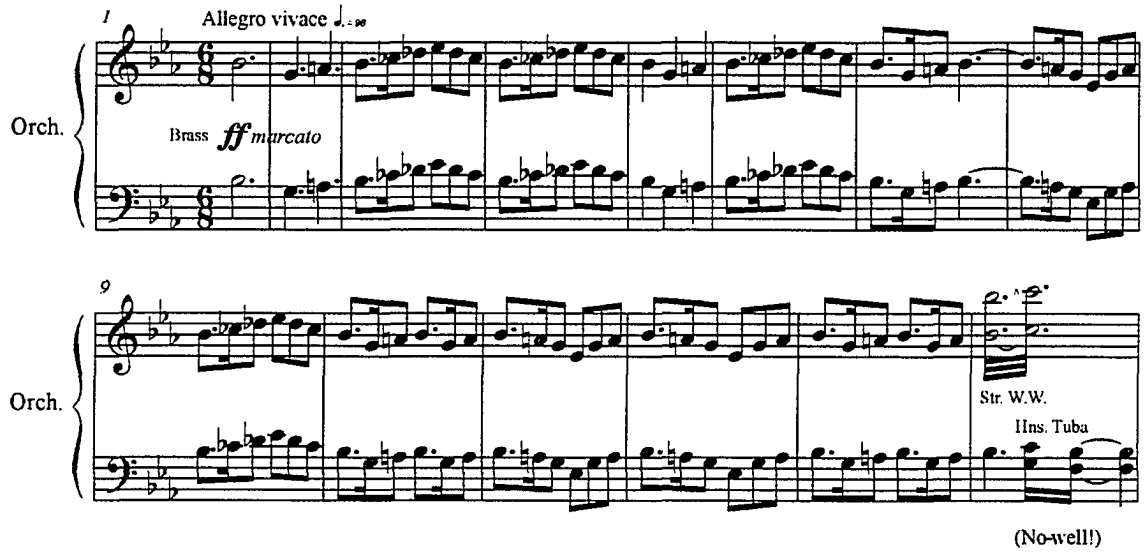
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spite of himself, the narrator still wants to believe in the possibility of salvation. At the very least, the loss of faith has not left cynicism in its wake. As noted previously, Vaughan Williams found nothing incongruous about being an atheist who wrote religious music. The underlying beliefs may not have inspired him, but the literary quality of the texts themselves—not to mention the sacred music of the illustrious English choral tradition associated with them—belonged to national traditions capable of eliciting a heartfelt artistic response.

[59] The *Tallis Fantasia*, for example, uses Tallis's E Phrygian melody from Archbishop Parker's Psalter (see also the English Hymnal, no. 92) as its theme; consider also the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies in E minor. Michael Kennedy has noted an analogous example of this type of tonal association with pieces centered around D, which he suggests is associated with blessing or benediction.

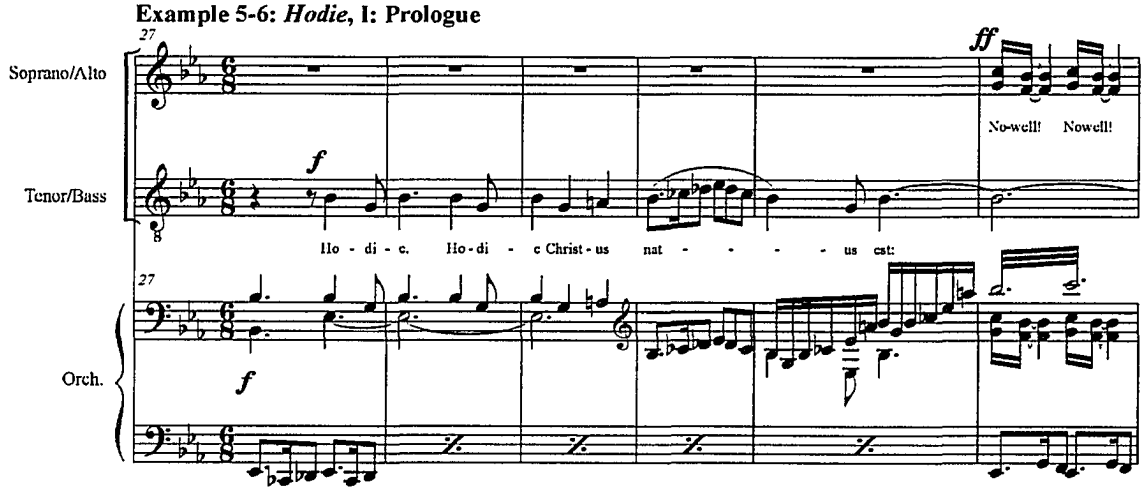
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Example 5-5: *Hodie*, I: Prologue



Because this pitch collection is relatable to both key (which represents the earthly and ephemeral) and mode (representing the eternal and divine), it may be meant as a musical depiction of the union of God and man in Christ, setting up the thematic contrast of the human and the divine explored throughout the rest of the piece. Such a reading is reinforced by the assignation of this motive to the text *Hodie Christus natus est* ("Christ is born this day," Example 5-6) later in the movement, directly relating this hybrid scale to the birth of Christ. The blending of key and mode also reflects an evolution of Vaughan Williams's earlier approaches to scalar ambiguity, as in works like the *Mass in G Minor* and *Sancta Civitas.*
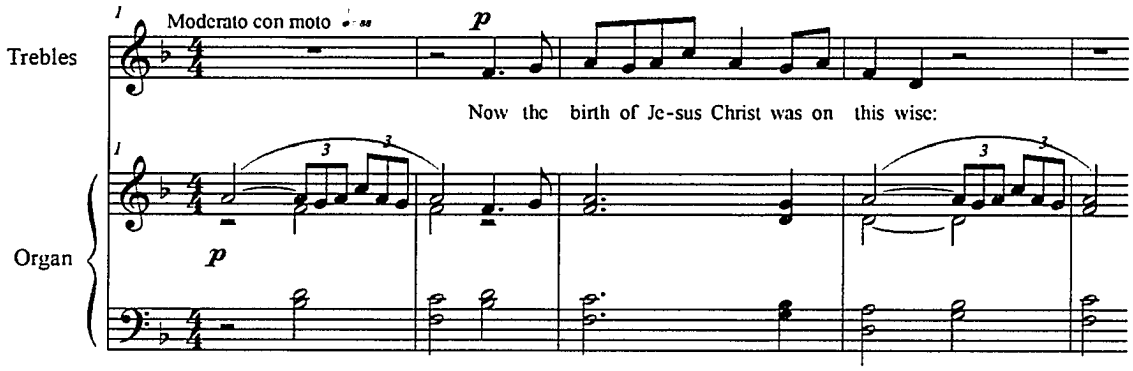
Example 5-6: *Hodie*, I: Prologue



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Because the movements are so stylistically diverse, Vaughan Williams uses several recurring motives to create a sense of thematic unity and long-term coherence among them. Some applications of this technique are quite simple. Each movement entitled "Narration" (II, IV, VI, VIII, X, and XIII) features scriptural texts sung in a recitative-like manner by a chorus of boy trebles with organ, three of which (II, IV, and X) open with the same triplet figure (Example 5-7).

Example 5-7: *Hodie*, II: Narration



The Narrations are the only movements that use the treble chorus, making the textural and timbral shifts that accompany the Gospels sound unlike anything else in the piece.

Other motives appear in conjunction with certain themes or phrases. For example, the Angel's announcements about the coming of Jesus made to Joseph (Movement II) and the shepherds (Movement VI) are set to a motive for solo tenor (see Example 5-1).[60] Some motives are unified in both music and text, such as the phrases "Emmanuel, God with us" (Example 5-8, heard in mvts. II and XVI, with the fanfare only heard in VI) and "Glory to God" (Example 5-9, mvts. I, VI, and VIII), both of which are sung by the full chorus.[61]
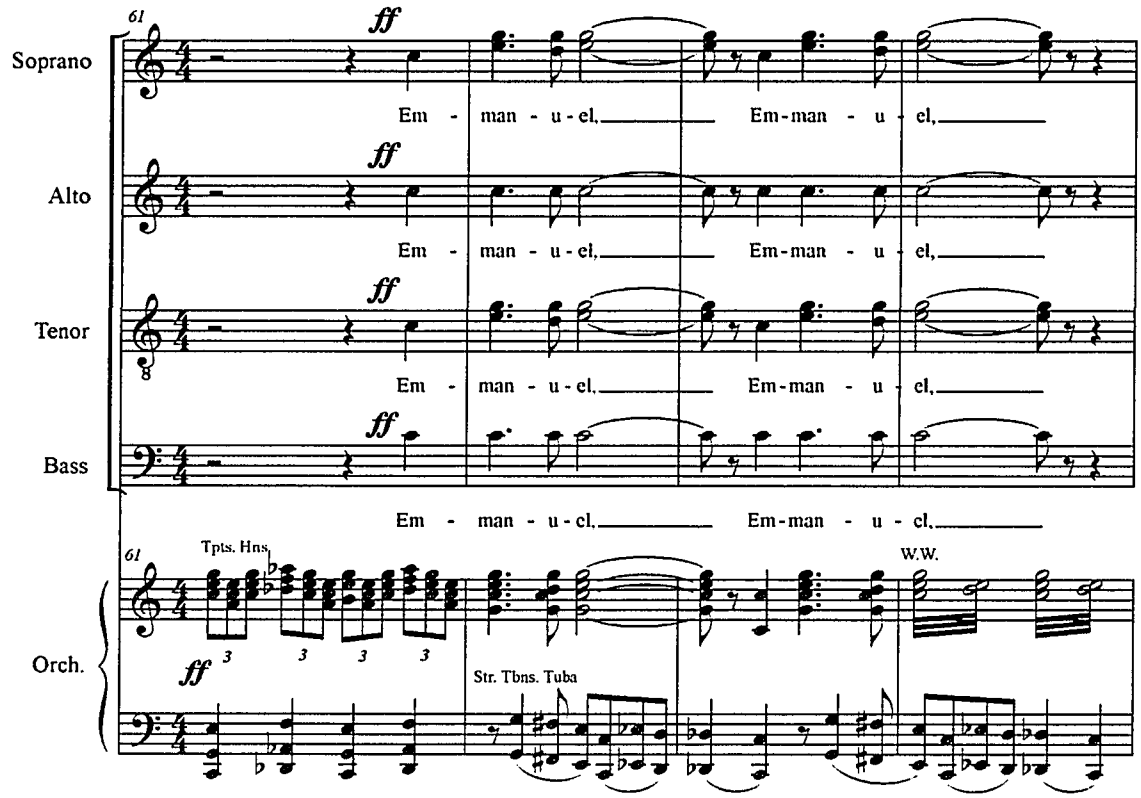
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[60] This motive also appears in the first part of the Epilogue (Movement XVI) accompanying narrative text from the Book of John; the tenor soloist, however, is not singing the part of an Angel.

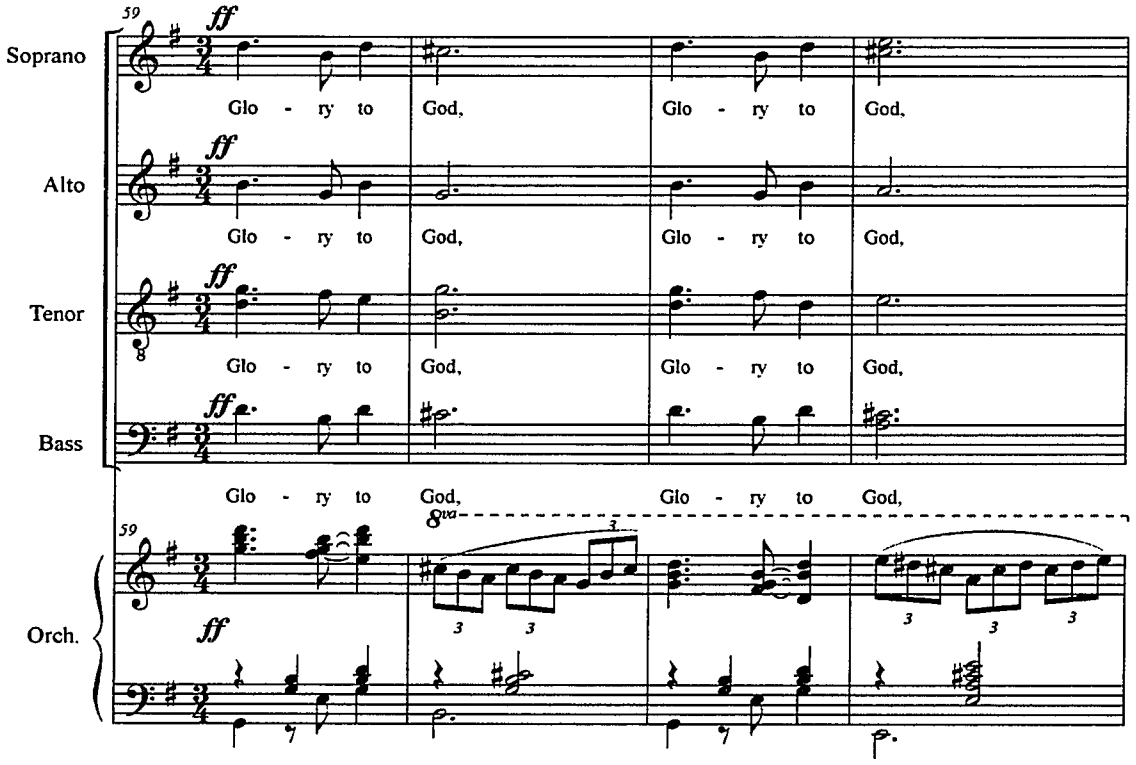
[61] The "Emmanuel" motive also emphasizes the same chords as the "Lord God Almighty" progression from the final section of *Sancta Civitas*.

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Example 5-8: ***Hodie*****, II: Narration**



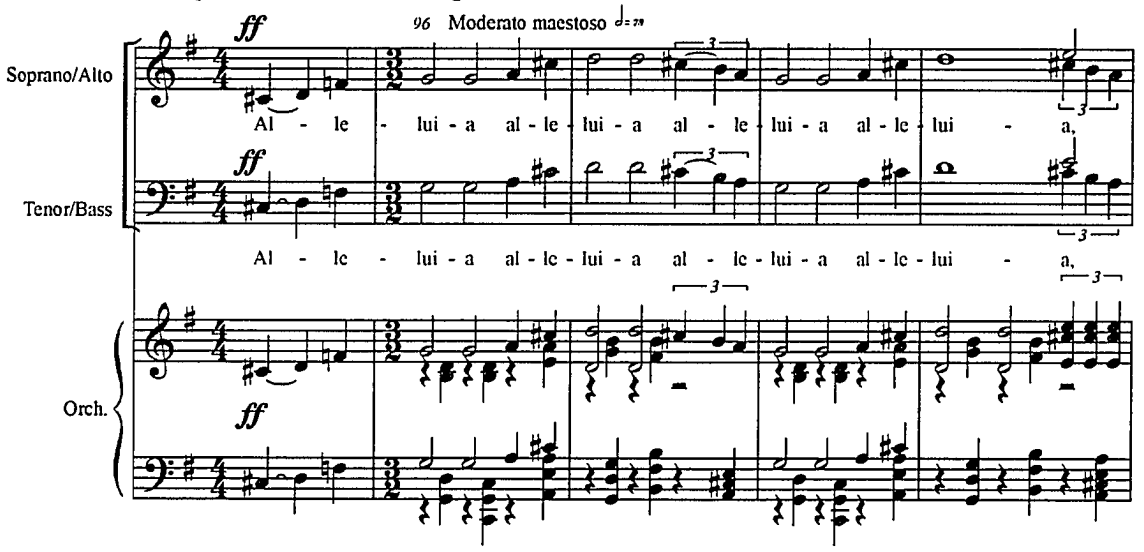
Example 5-9: ***Hodie*****, VI: Narration**



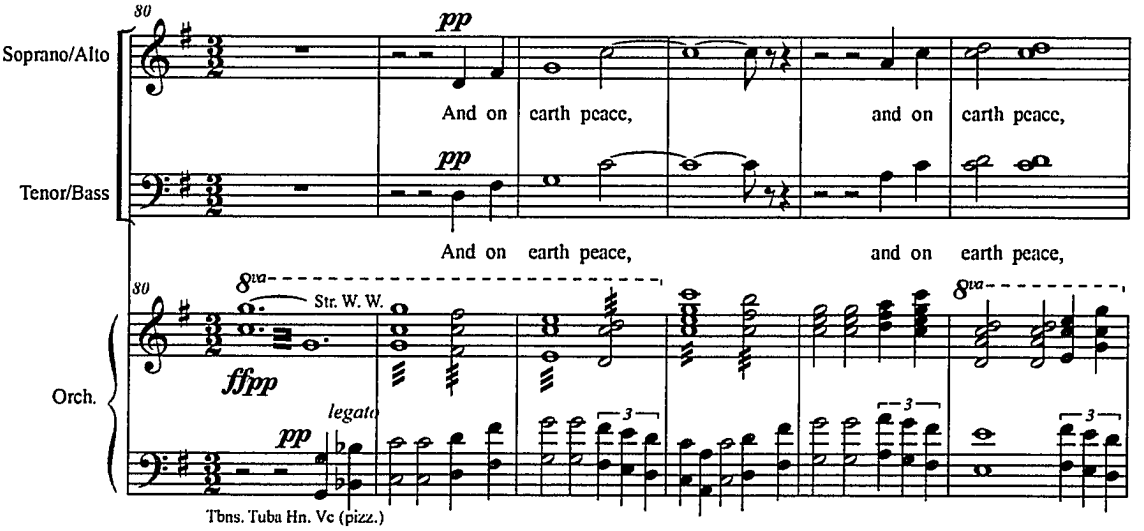
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The largest shared passage occurs between Movement III (Song: "It was the winter wild") and the second half of the Epilogue. Each uses the same melody, perhaps because the movements both feature text from Milton's "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," although they set different passages from it. There are also three unifying passages connecting Movements I and VI, including the aforementioned "Glory to God" motive. The other two (originally accompanying two different settings of the word "Alleluia") return as parts of a larger contrapuntal texture with new texts (Examples 5-10a-b and 5-11a-b).

Example 5-10a: *Hodie*, I: Prologue
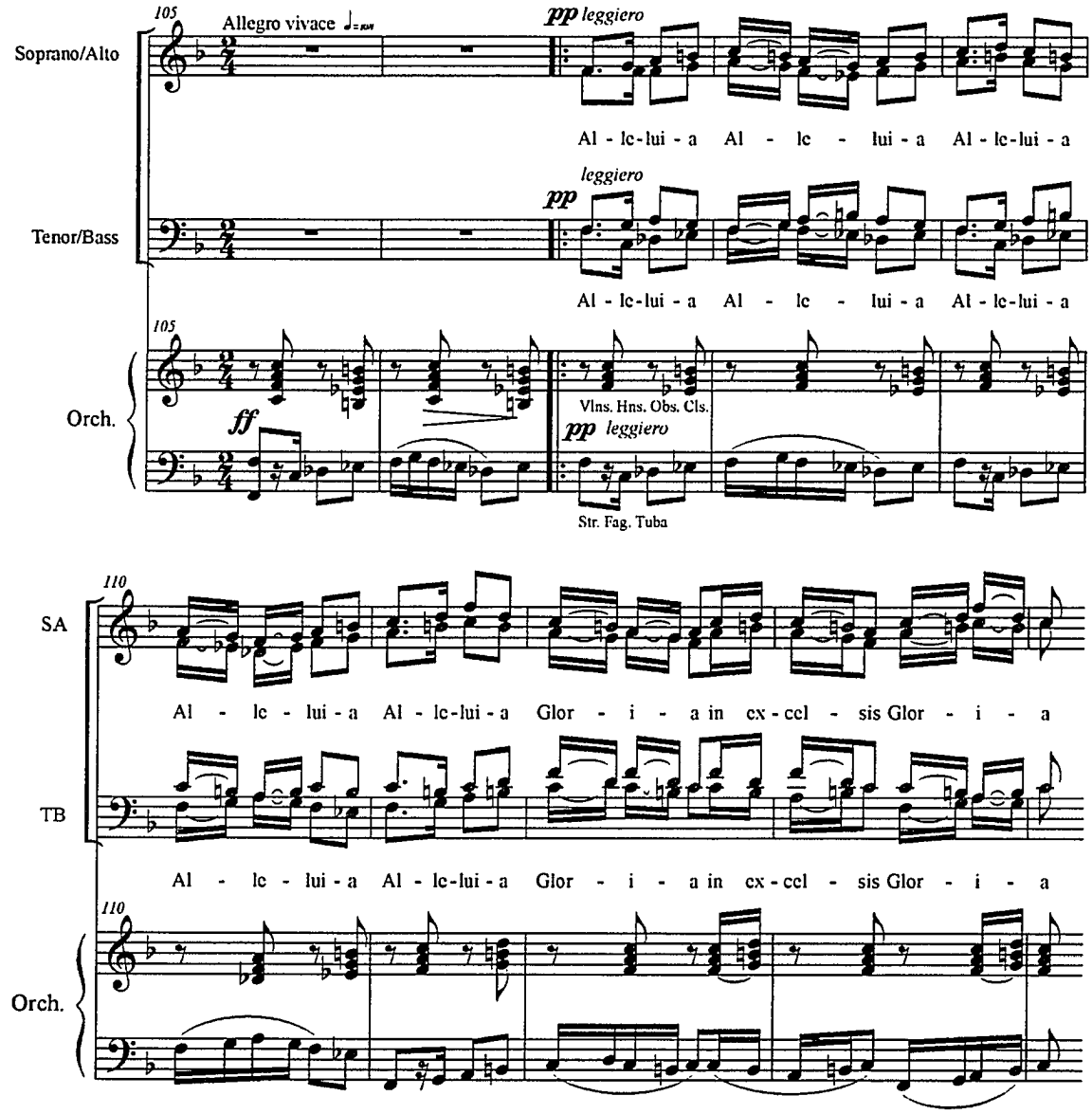


Example 5-10b: *Hodie*, VI: Narration
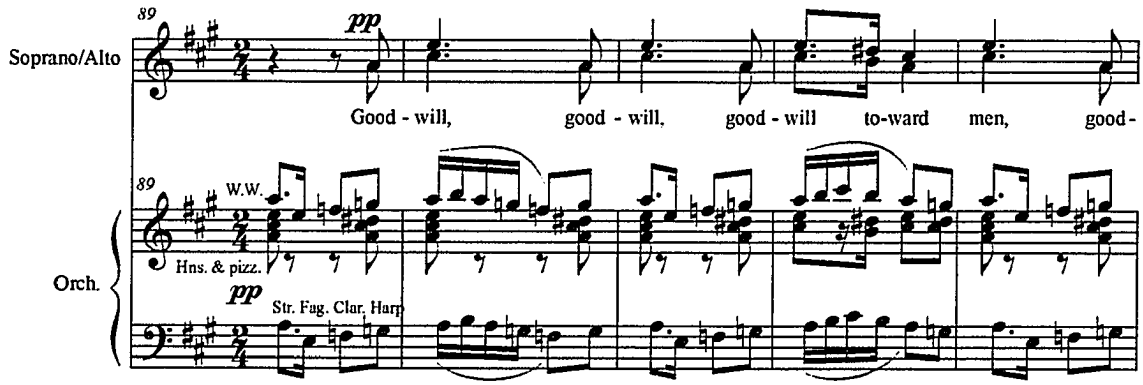


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Example 5-11a: *Hodie*, I: Prologue



Example 5-11b: *Hodie*, VI: Narration

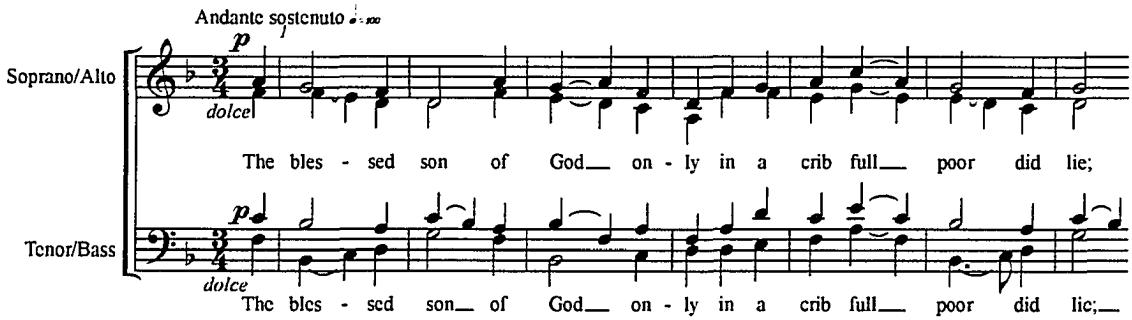


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The strong thematic connection between these two movements further justifies their motivic pairing. The Prologue sets the tone for the whole piece, joyfully announcing the birth of Christ and the rejoicing of heaven and earth, while the remaining movements gradually relate the events of the nativity story itself. The annunciation of Christ's birth to the shepherds in the fields comes in Movement VI, thus suggesting an opportunity for a musical link with the Prologue to go with the thematic connection.

Some movements, usually the meditative, poetic ones, are entirely self-contained. Movement V (Choral: "The blessed son of God") is an *a capella* chorale written totally in diatonic F major, something almost unheard of in a serious piece of music from 1954.[62] Its simple and unornamented sonority befits the text's supplicants who praise Christ and ask for His mercy. It is, however, more than simply a seventeenth-century part-writing pastiche. Like the *Mass in G Minor*, the chorale departs from conventional part-writing rules, especially in the governance of parallelisms (Example 5-12).

Example 5-12: *Hodie*, V: Choral



While none of the other movements is exclusively diatonic, the Song, the Lullaby, and the second half of the Epilogue pay only token acknowledgement to chromatic procedures. The Song and the Lullaby are both meditations on the Christ child; the only passage of chromaticism in the G major Song comes at the text "And kings sate still with

[62] See Kennedy, *WRVW*, 365; Frank Howes [?], "Hodie," *Times* (London), 20 January 1955, 11.

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aweful eye / As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by," reflecting the unease the kings of the earth must have felt when this challenge to their power emerged. The Lullaby has no such threatening overtones: only a dozen chromatic notes occur in the movement, all grounded within the context of the central key areas, E-flat major and F minor. Both movements are meditative and tranquil, befitting the contemplation of peace on earth and the love of a mother for her child.

Vaughan Williams's breadth of compositional experience late in his career gave him the confidence to draw from many different musical idioms when writing *Hodie*—ranging from tonal, diatonic *a capella* chorales to highly chromatic, modally-derived dramatic narratives for chorus, solo voices, and orchestra—while still retaining a sense of stylistic consistency throughout the work. To this end, he worked primarily in two directions: first, he carefully tailored these various idioms to the expressive needs of the text and unified them through recurring motives.[63] Second, he saturated the work with various technical devices characteristic of his style (triadic harmony, streams of parallel chords, extended melodic lines, flexible meters) that could remain generally consistent regardless of what pitch collections were employed at any given time. This provided a common denominator for movements of otherwise divergent style or harmonic design, as well as a connection to many of his earlier works that was not based in the overt evocation of "Englishness." In *Hodie*, Vaughan Williams's personal style was able to transcend the national materials that originally inspired it.

[63] Such a plan may sound obvious, but for those willing to dismiss *Hodie* as something "thrown together rather than organised," it seems worth repeating.

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Symphony No. 8

Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony[64] was the subject of much speculation in the days and weeks leading up to its premiere in 1956. The magazine *Hallé* and the journal *Music and Musicians* both printed Vaughan Williams's official program note for the piece, a practice he followed for most of his symphonic premieres, though his notes grew increasingly irreverent as he grew older.[65] The editors of *Music and Musicians* also included a short biography with the program note, along with comments and reminiscences about the composer from Oxford University Press's Alan Frank, and a rather breathless editorial claiming that Vaughan Williams, "more than any other man, speaks in music with the voice of England." Yet the writer downplayed this point, insisting instead that Vaughan Williams's symphonies "have not achieved the hold that they have today on world music because of any particular 'Englishness,' appreciated though that quality may be. They have won their place because they express and transcend the feelings and aspirations of all men, because here is an artist who sees into men's minds and souls, who not only reflects what he sees, but transfigures and exalts."[66]

The first performance of the Eighth Symphony, given by Manchester's Hallé Orchestra under Sir John Barbirolli on 2 May 1956, was by all accounts an unqualified triumph; the composer received a standing ovation and numerous calls to the stage. The

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[64] The work was originally titled "Symphony in D" with the qualification "minor" added later. Vaughan Williams had avoided numbering his symphonies up to that point; the authorized titles for the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Symphonies are "Symphony in F minor," "Symphony in D Major," and "Symphony in E minor," respectively, while the other four have descriptive titles. The Eighth was the first symphony he (very reluctantly) identified by number, allegedly in order to prevent it from being confused with the Fifth Symphony; a similar distinction was made with his Symphony No. 9 in E minor. See Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 220.

[65] The composer's complete note for the symphony can be found in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 221–25.

[66] Anon., "Birth of a Symphony," *Music and Musicians* 4, no. 9 (May 1956), 5.

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London premiere was held two weeks later on 14 May, with the same artists performing to similar acclaim. Unlike its symphonic predecessor, *Sinfonia Antartica*, the Eighth was organized in four movements, though some of them departed from conventional forms: Fantasia (Variazioni senza Tema), Scherzo alla Marcia (per stromenti a fiato), Cavatina (per stromenti ad arco), and Toccata (originally titled "Toccata colle Campanelle").[67] Vaughan Williams anticipated that the first movement's unusual design—a set of seven variations—would invite comment, and addressed it in his program note:

> I understand that some hearers may have their withers wrung by a work being called a symphony whose first movement does not correspond to the usual symphonic form. It may perhaps be suggested that by a little verbal jugglery this movement may be referred to the conventional scheme. Thus, the first section may be called the first subject; the second (presto), section can become the 'bridge passage'; the third section, starting at (*d*), may be described as the second subject. Sections four and five we will call the development, the allegro will be the reprise of the first subject, though this, I admit, will be skating over rather thin ice; but there will be no difficulty in referring the final section to the recapitulation and coda. Thus all wounds will be healed and honour satisfied.[68]

Reviewers dutifully cogitated over the composer's sonata suggestion, doing themselves and him a disservice. Vaughan Williams was not one to hold with convention for convention's sake;[69] as with the *Sea Symphony*, the issue at hand is not so much the preservation of sonata form but the arrangement of musical material in a way that captures its inherent effect of tension and balance.

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[67] Vaughan Williams dropped the "colle Campanelle" by March 1956, allegedly because he thought that sorting out the Italian grammar was not worth the trouble, but more likely because he thinned out the percussion in a later revision. See Ralph Vaughan Williams, London, to John Barbirolli, Manchester, March 1956 [5603xa], Music Collections, The British Library, London. According to the autograph manuscript, the third movement was originally titled "Cavatina per istromente a corde" (Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Symphony in D Minor," score, 1955, Add. MS 57338, The British Library, London).

[68] Quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 223.

[69] Writing on Beethoven, Vaughan Williams said: "The great artist uses the conventions as his tools and bends them to his will, so that they are no longer conventions but a vital means of expression" ("Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony," in *NMOE*, 85). See also Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Romantic in Music: Some Thoughts on Brahms," *Music Student* 2, no. 9 (April 1910): 117–18.

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Although the first movement's formal construction received considerable attention, most comments addressed the work's urbanity and sophistication. Colin Mason, in the *Manchester Guardian*, called it "the most sophisticated, civilized, and universal music" that Vaughan Williams had ever written, praising the movement's melding of shape and content "with a mastery of the sheer art of composing such as Vaughan Williams has never before displayed."[70] Felix Aprahamian, calling the work "genial" and "good-natured," declared that it "may well become the most loved and popular of the series,"[71] while Dyneley Hussey felt that though the symphony "plumbs no great depths nor aspires to exaltation, [it] is a fresh and lovely musical work" in which Vaughan Williams "displays an undiminished intellectual vigour."[72]

One striking aspect of the critical commentary is that reviewers did not find much that was serious about the work. All described the formal layout (many drawing heavily upon the composer's own notes) and described the character of the movements (e.g. rhapsodic, witty, cheerful, etc.). Yet few critics thought it more than a symphonic divertissement;[73] terms such as "lightweight," "unassuming," and "slight" were used to describe the overall effect of the piece, with the exception of the finale. A handful of

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[70] Colin Mason, "Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony," *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1956, 5.

[71] Felix Aprahamian, "R.V.W. in D Minor," *Sunday Times* (London), 6 May 1956, 12.

[72] Dyneley Hussey, "The New V.W.," *Listener* 55, no. 1415 (10 May 1956), 615–16.

[73] An assessment of Vaughan Williams's symphonies made by David Brown in 1960 called the Eighth "rather a sorry affair, more a divertimento than a symphony and not even a particularly distinguished specimen of that genre. Humour in music can be sublime as any other quality (*vide* Haydn) but the heavy jokes of this work do not even really entertain. The scherzo is commonplace, and the slow movement only repeats old, familiar things in different notes." He also dismissed the Ninth Symphony, concluding that "these last two symphonies were not necessary" ("Vaughan Williams's Symphonies: Some Judgments Reviewed," *Monthly Musical Record* 90, no. 998 (March–April 1960): 51). See also a later reading of the piece by Arthur Hutchings, "Music in Britain: 1918–1960," in *The New Oxford History of Music*, 10 vols., *The Modern Age (1890–1960)*, ed. Martin Cooper (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 10: 512; and Donald Mitchell, "Vaughan Williams's New Symphony," *Musical Times* 97, no. 1360 (June 1956): 318.

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commentators, perhaps caught up in the sway of Vaughan Williams's reputation, described parts of the piece (or its composer's general orchestral style) as "very English" in tone without explaining what such a description meant.[74] Several critics deemed the percussion excessively noisy, with the vibraphone in particular an undesirable and even "loathsome" addition to the orchestra's ranks.[75] Peter Heyworth's comments in the *Observer* were particularly snide on the subject of Vaughan Williams's orchestration:

> In the finale of what to this point is a rather delightful and unassuming symphony, he unlooses an orchestral tornado which sweeps up every hitting instrument within reach. . . . this orgy is as unaccomplished as it is inappropriate. The trouble is that in matters of orchestral virtuosity Dr. Vaughan Williams remains an invincible amateur. He is, for instance, quite unable to tap the vein of robust yet exhilarating high spirits of the last part of Britten's "Spring Symphony." . . . At any rate, it was just as well that Ravel was not present at the Free Trade Hall to hear what his old pupil was up to.[76]

By contrast, John Boulton argued in *Music Review* that extensive use of percussion in the finale was a logical extension of the pattern established with the all-wind second movement and all-string third: "Is it not a *toccata* and should it not therefore be dependent upon things touched, stroked and banged rather than scraped and blown? The sound-storm that results demonstrates that a finale committed to being aurally exciting at the utmost limit can at the same time register sophisticated high spirits."[77]

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[74] See Anon., "Birth of a Symphony," 5; Scott Goddard, "London Letter," *Chesterian* 31, no. 184 (Summer 1956): 28; Heyworth, "V.W.'s Eighth," 14; Percy Cater, "The GOM of music claps the Hallé," *Daily Mail* (London), 15 May 1956, 3; and Martin Cooper, "New Vaughan Williams Symphony," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 3 May 1956, 8.

[75] See Mason, "Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony," 5; Martin Cooper, "New Vaughan Williams Symphony," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 3 May 1956, 8; Arthur Jacobs, "Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony," *Musical Opinion* 79, no. 945 (June 1956): 533–34; John Warrack, "Festival Hall Tribute," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), 15 May 1956, 8; and Hussey, "The New V.W.," 617.

[76] Peter Heyworth, "V.W.'s Eighth," *Observer* (6 May 1956), 14.

[77] John Boulton, "The Eighth Symphony of Vaughan Williams," *Music Review* 17, no. 2 (May 1956): 159. Boulton's observation was backed up by Vaughan Williams's own program note for the piece

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Although Vaughan Williams used uncommon timbral effects throughout his career, such as wordless voices,[78] exotic or unusual timbres are especially prominent in his late period works.[79] The extensive battery of percussion in the Eighth is the most obvious manifestation of this tendency, but emphasizing it is to overlook the delicacy with which he applied the instruments. Like Berlioz or Mahler, Vaughan Williams did not add instruments to his orchestra just to increase the sound, but to achieve specific expressive results through careful choices of timbre.[80]

Boulton also criticized "the poverty of music-journalism" and "ambiguous comment" that surrounded the work;[81] Hugh Ottaway concurred with Boulton's observation, which he addressed the following year in *Music and Letters*:

> There is little doubt that what really offended the aesthetes was not the structure of the [first] movement, which could have been criticized, though in fact it was largely ignored, but the general ethos of the music. The truth of the matter is that the modern critic, like the modern composer, is most at ease in the part of the Outsider. Give him material sufficiently recondite to absorb his professional powers to the limit and he will know how to handle it; but confront him with something direct and unsophisticated,

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that the finale "commandeers all the available hitting instruments which can make definite notes, including glockenspiel, celesta, xylophone, vibraphone, tubular bells, and tunable gongs" (quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 224). Vaughan Williams indicated elsewhere in the program note that the orchestra contained "a large supply of extra percussion, including all the 'phones and 'spiels known to the composer" (ibid., 221). See also Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Symphony [No. 8] in D minor," score, 1955, Add. MS 57338, f. 63 (r), Music Collections, The British Library, London; also notes from Roy Douglas to Ralph Vaughan Williams for Symphony in D minor, Add. MS 65533, f. 1 (r), Music Collections, The British Library, London.

[78] See the *Pastoral Symphony*, *Flos Campi*, *Riders to the Sea*, *Sinfonia Antartica*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* for examples of wordless vocal music.

[79] For example, the use of vibraphone in the last three symphonies, solo works for tuba and harmonica, flugelhorn in the Ninth Symphony, saxophones in the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies, and wind machine, wordless voices, and organ in *Sinfonia Antartica*.

[80] He once claimed that overly thick scoring was one of his compositional vices, "and it arises, I am convinced, from the fact that I am not always sure enough of myself . . . and that I must hide my nakedness with an apron of orchestration" ("A Musical Autobiography," 194).

[81] Boulton, "Eighth Symphony," 159.

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whose vigorous humanity hits below the professional belt, and he will become embarrassed, even resentful.[82]

Vaughan Williams's Eighth occupies a similar position within his own symphonic pantheon as does Beethoven's Eighth in his: both works are comparatively short, witty, and tuneful, both have a key signature of one flat, and both are generally perceived as "lightweight" pieces in their respective symphonic families.[83] Vaughan Williams's Eighth, however, covers a wider expressive range than does Beethoven's. It retains a musical language based in triadic but frequently non-diatonic harmony, rhythmically elaborate but metrically weak melodies, ambiguous pitch centers and scales, and pervasive contrapuntal structures. However, it also has the ability, peculiar to many of his late period works (as also shown in *Hodie*), to express that musical language in a variety of contrasting styles within a single piece while still maintaining a sense of motivic coherence and formal symmetry.

The first movement's variation form is well suited such a display: each variation concentrates on a particular characteristic that features prominently in one or more of his other symphonic works. There is no evidence that this was a conscious decision on Vaughan Williams's part, but the symphony was written at a point in his life when he might well have been in a valedictory frame of mind, perhaps inclined to consolidate his musical legacy within a single piece. For example, the disjunct, irregularly accented
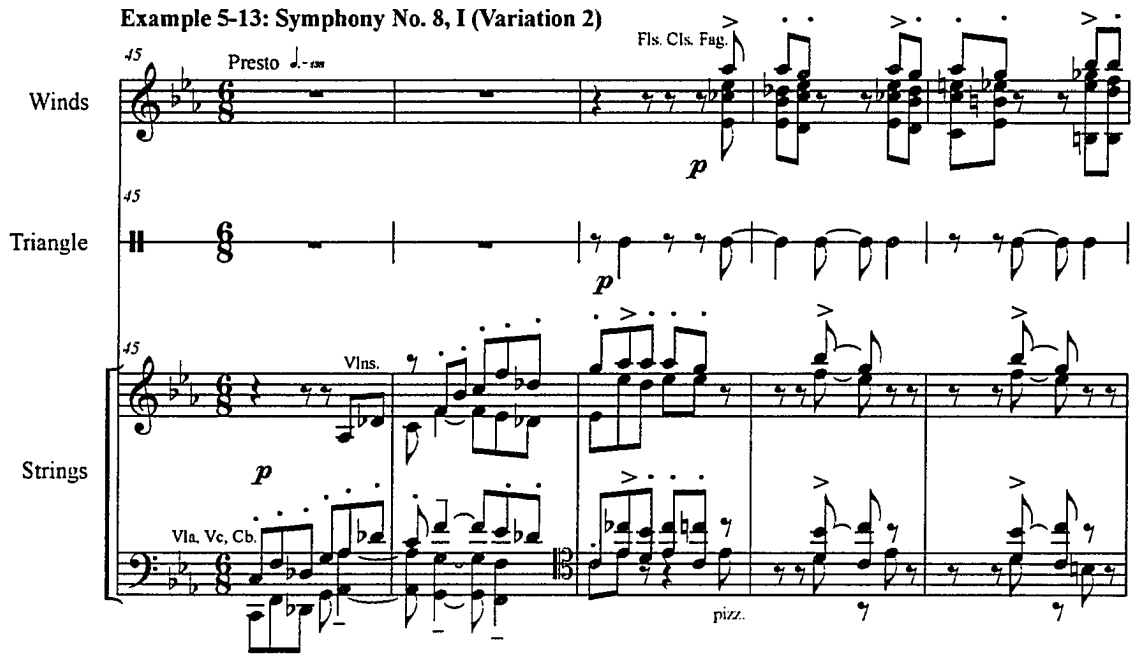
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[82] Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony," *Music and Letters* 38, no. 3 (July 1957): 224. See also Ottaway, "The Three Choirs at Gloucester," *Musical Opinion* 80, no. 950 (November 1956): 81.

[83] Vaughan Williams worried about the climate the symphony would face, as he indicated in a letter to Michael Kennedy: "As regards the new symphony—I hope it is going to be all right. But I feel rather nervous. At all events it is simple and sets no problems, but at my age ("I speak as a fool") I cannot afford to let out anything 2nd rate—which is not really straight from the fountain-head. . . . I believe John [Barbirolli, conductor of the Hallé Orchestra] is going to allow me a private run through in Feb [1956] which will settle its fate" (quoted in Kennedy, *WRVW*, 384).

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triplets of Variation 2 (Example 5-13) bring to mind the third movements of the *London* and Fourth Symphonies.[84]

Example 5-13: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 2)
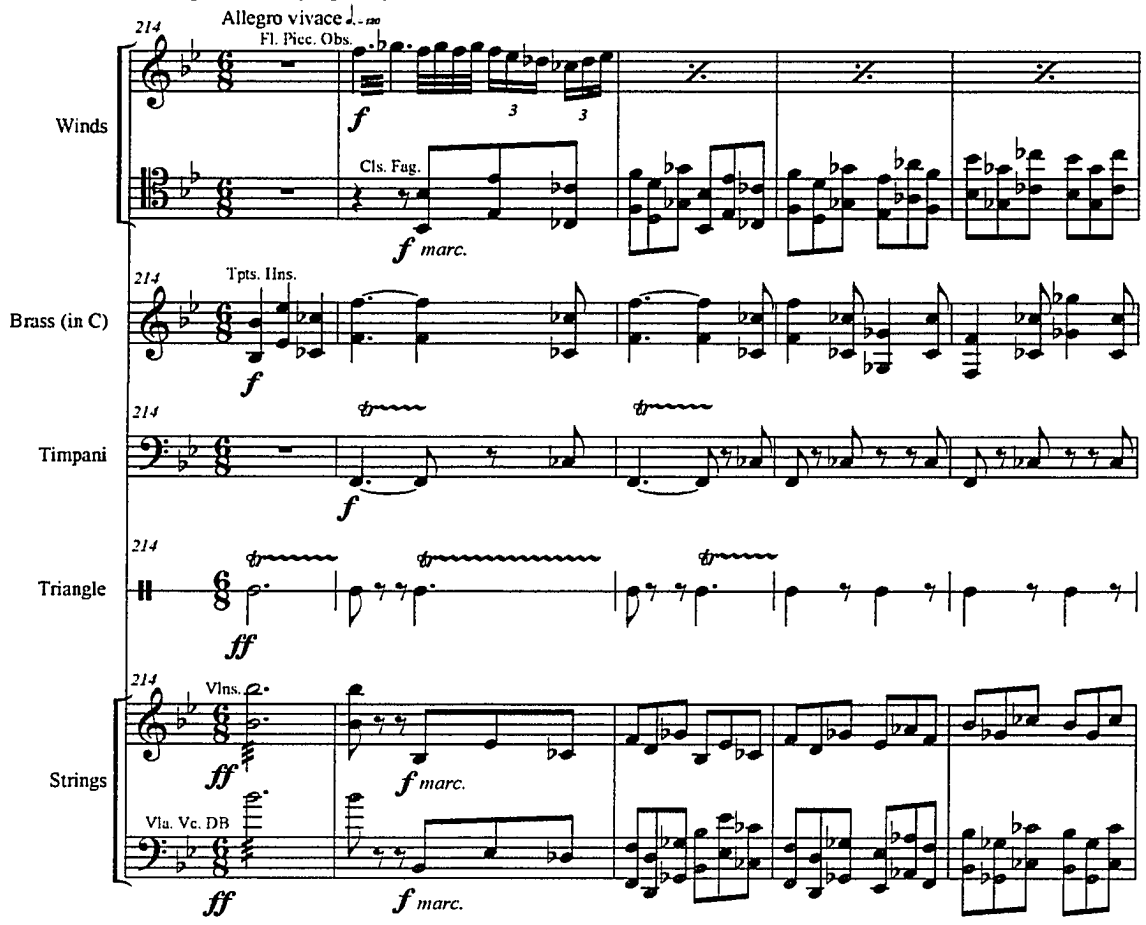


The beginning of Variation 6, with its contrapuntal blocks of instruments, static harmony, and trill/glissandi effects (Example 5-14) recalls the second movements of *Sinfonia Antartica* and the Sixth Symphony.[85]

[84] See Ralph Vaughan Williams, *A London Symphony* (London: Stainer and Bell Ltd., 1920; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 103–5; and Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Symphony in F Minor* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 41–57.

[85] See Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Sinfonia Antartica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 50–55; and Vaughan Williams, *Symphony in E Minor* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 71–78.

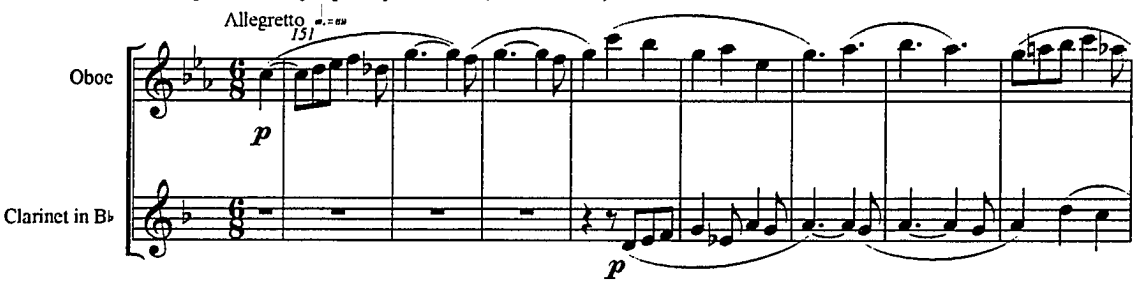
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Example 5-14: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 6)
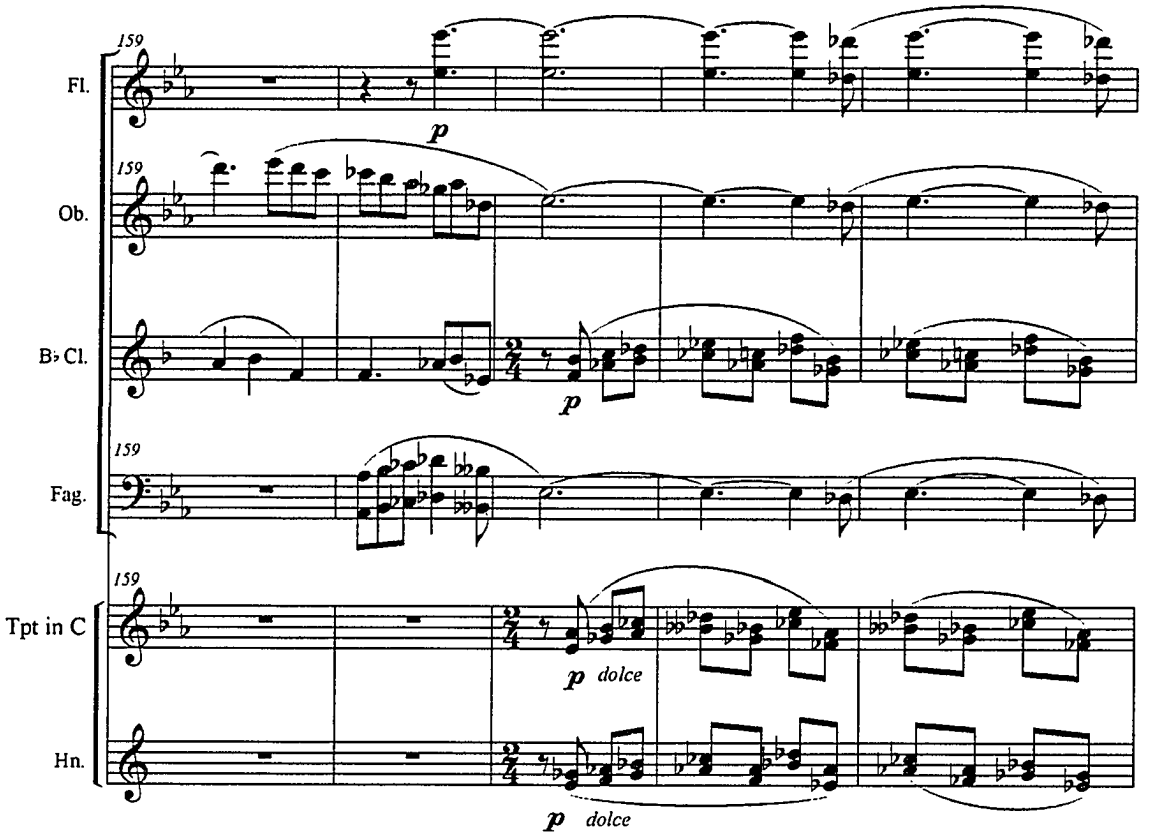


Variation 4 features solo lines that gradually merge into a larger texture of planar harmony, as in the first movement of the *Pastoral Symphony* (Example 5-15), but its presentation of an extended melody over harmonic and rhythmic ostinati also recalls the first movements of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies.[86]

Example 5-15: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 4)



[86] Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Pastoral Symphony* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1924; reprint, London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), 4–5; Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Symphony [No. 5] in D Major* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2–5; Vaughan Williams, *Symphony in F Minor*, 6–9.

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The melody of Variation 3 passes seamlessly from one instrument to another over a long period of time, like the melody from the second movement of the *Pastoral*;[87] its modified reprise, Variation 7, closes with a climactic unison statement followed by a quiet epilogue, just like the final movements of *Sinfonia Antartica* and the *Pastoral Symphony*.[88] Vaughan Williams's evocation of these distinctive compositional practices, regardless of whether he intended such an interpretation, preserves a sense of stylistic continuity from his earlier works, but the juxtaposition of markedly different tempi, rhythms, textures, and harmonies in such close proximity is a departure from middle period works.

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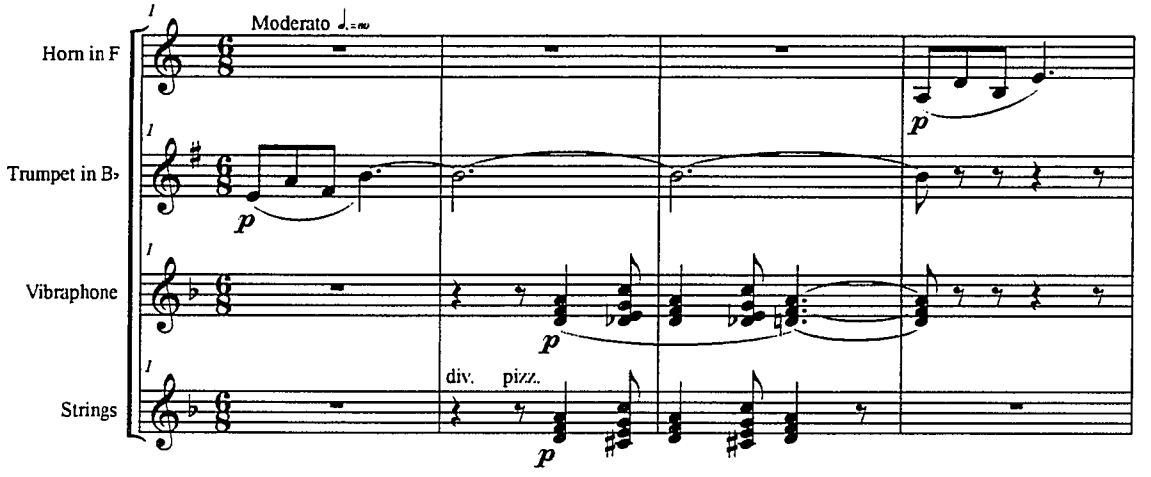
[87] See Vaughan Williams, *Pastoral Symphony*, 35–40.

[88] See Vaughan Williams, *Sinfonia Antartica*, 140–45; and Vaughan Williams, *Pastoral Symphony*, 102–5.

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As he did in *Hodie*, Vaughan Williams unifies the four movements' disparate styles by using recurring motives, most thoroughly in the first movement. The piece opens with a trumpet announcement of two successive rising fourths, the roots of which are separated by a whole step (Example 5-16).[89]

Example 5-16: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 1)



Each successive variation transforms the second interval of a fourth in different ways. For instance, the gap widens to an augmented fourth in Variations 2, 4 and 6 (see Examples 5-13 and 5-14) and to a fifth—the inversion of a fourth—in Variations 3 and 7 (Example 5-17). Variation 5, the analogous "development" section, expands into a long chain of perfect, diminished, and augmented fourths (Example 5-18). The initial pair of perfect fourths only returns at the largamente midway through Variation 7 (Example 5-19) before the opening motive returns at the end of the movement, though its final statement of perfect fourth-tritone hints at changes yet to come in later movements.[90] The thorough application of this motive helps create a sense of coherence and direction, further
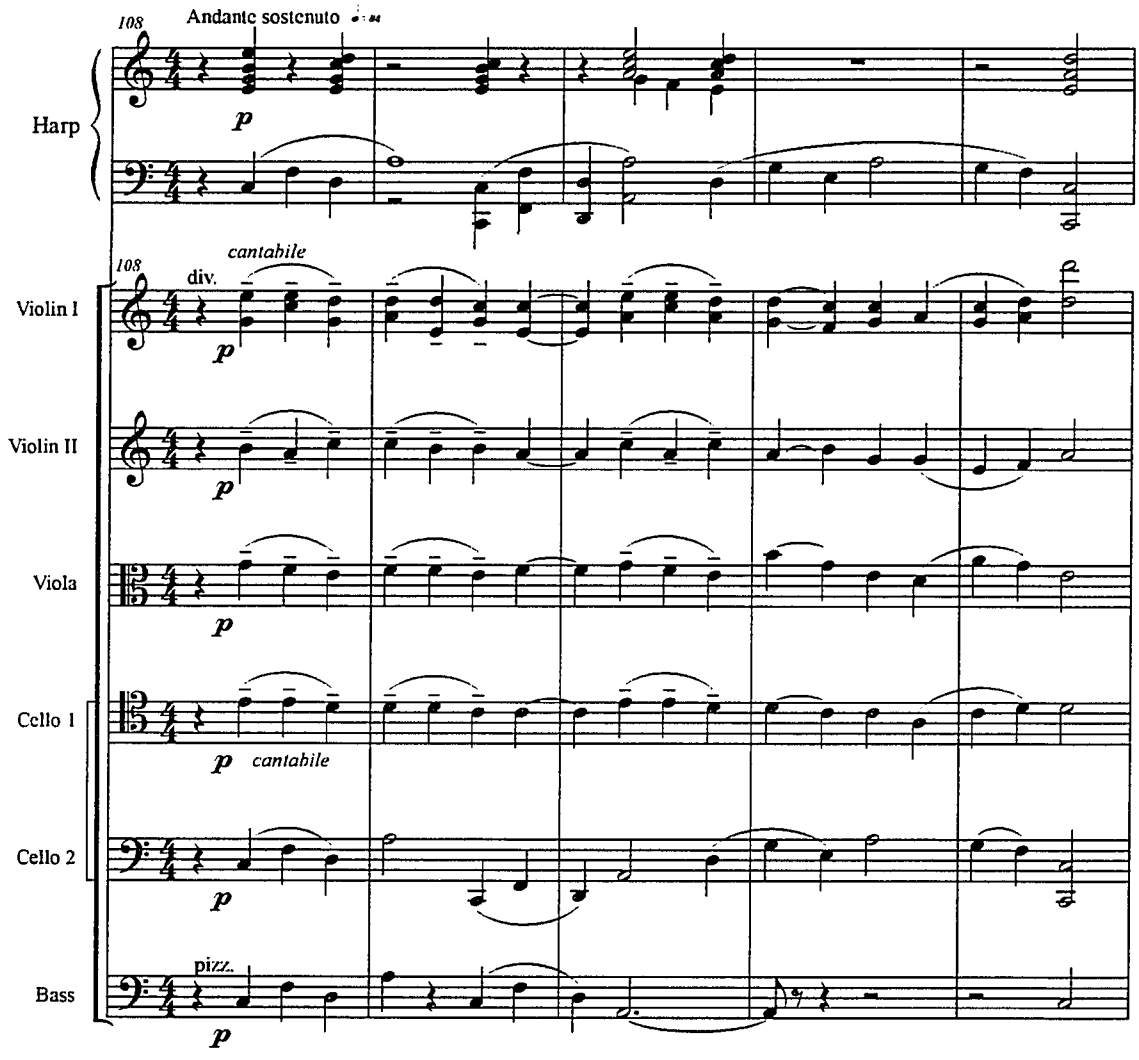
[89] Alan Beechey and Oliver Neighbour have both pointed out the resemblance between this opening motive and the hymn tune "Valiant Hearts," written by Gustav Holst at Vaughan Williams's request for the 1925 edition of *Songs of Praise*. See Neighbour, "Place of the Eighth," 230–32; and Beechey, *Journal of the RVW Society* 2(1995): 7.

[90] See also Elliott Schwartz, *The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964), 137–41.

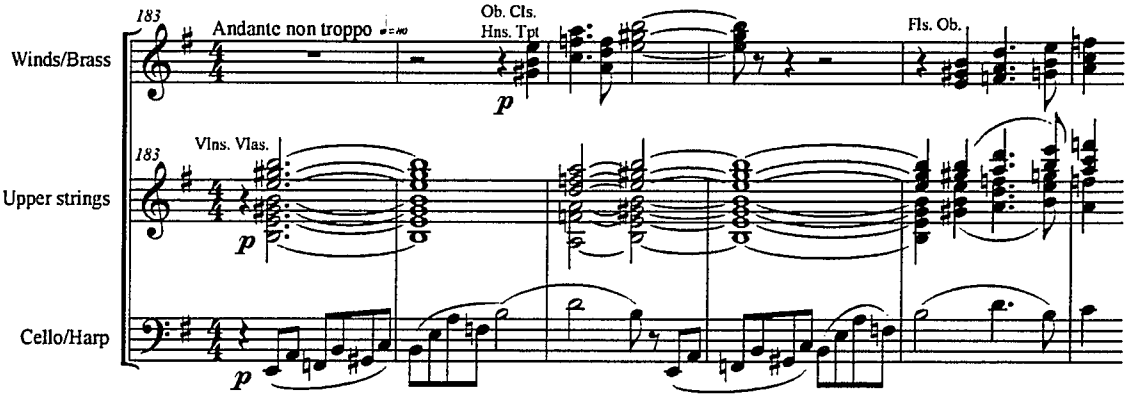
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reinforced by the "sonata resemblance" of variations 2 and 3 with 6 and 7, thus creating a sense of symmetry and return.

Example 5-17: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 3)

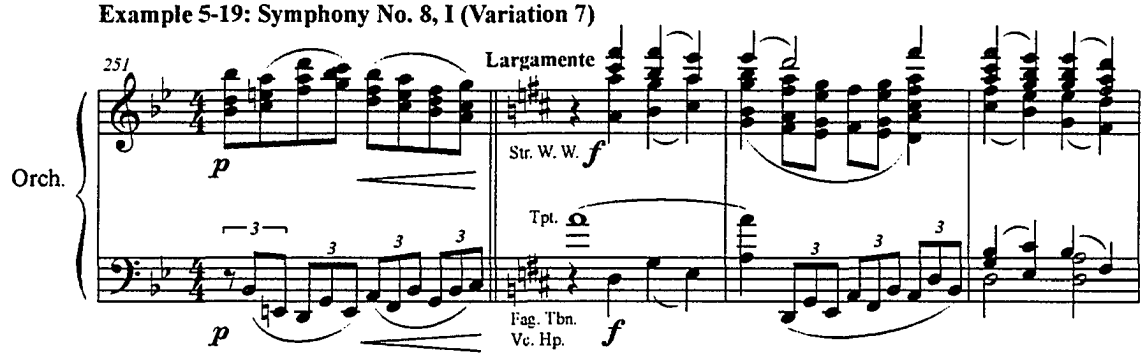


Example 5-18: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 5)



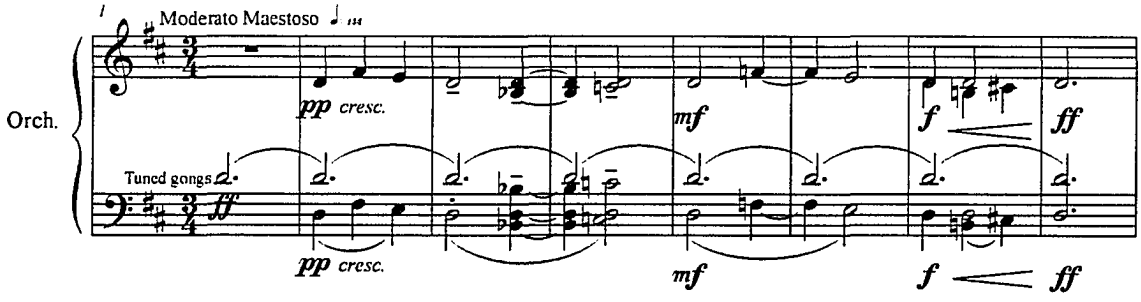
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Example 5-19: Symphony No. 8, I (Variation 7)



While not as closely integrated into the structures of the remaining movements as in the first, pairs of fourths play prominent motivic roles that help unify the rest of the work as well.[91] The comparatively short second and third movements incorporate the fourths into their opening melodic passages, but they play a larger role in the finale, a rondo (ABA′CA′′DA′′′) that opens with seven measures of what Vaughan Williams originally called a "sinister exordium" (Example 5-20).

Example 5-20: Symphony No. 8, IV

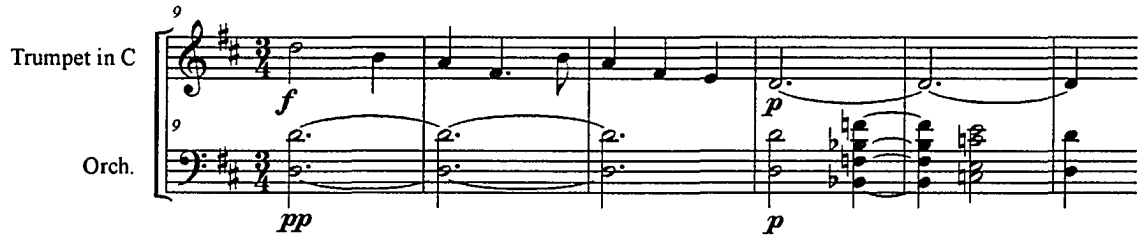


The opening exordium shifts from D major to D minor and back—a distinction further reinforced by the assignation of half notes to the D minor section and quarters to D major—then moves to a pentatonic scale built on D for the first theme of the A section, which features a pair of interlocked descending fourths (Example 5-21). The melodic contour of the A section's second theme also emphasizes the interval of a fourth (Example 5-22), frequently outlining one with each change of direction.

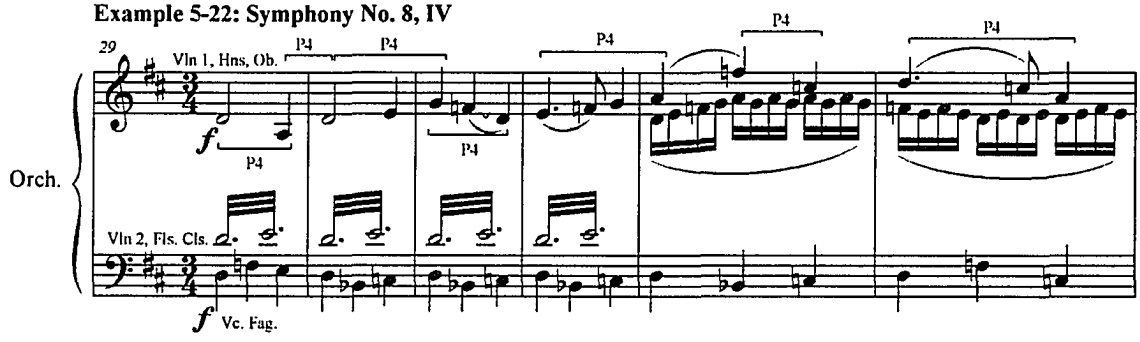
[91] For a description of their transformation between the first and second movements, see Arthur Jacobs, "Vaughan Williams' Eighth Symphony," *Musical Opinion* 79, no. 945 (June 1956): 533–34.

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Example 5-21: Symphony No. 8, IV



Example 5-22: Symphony No. 8, IV
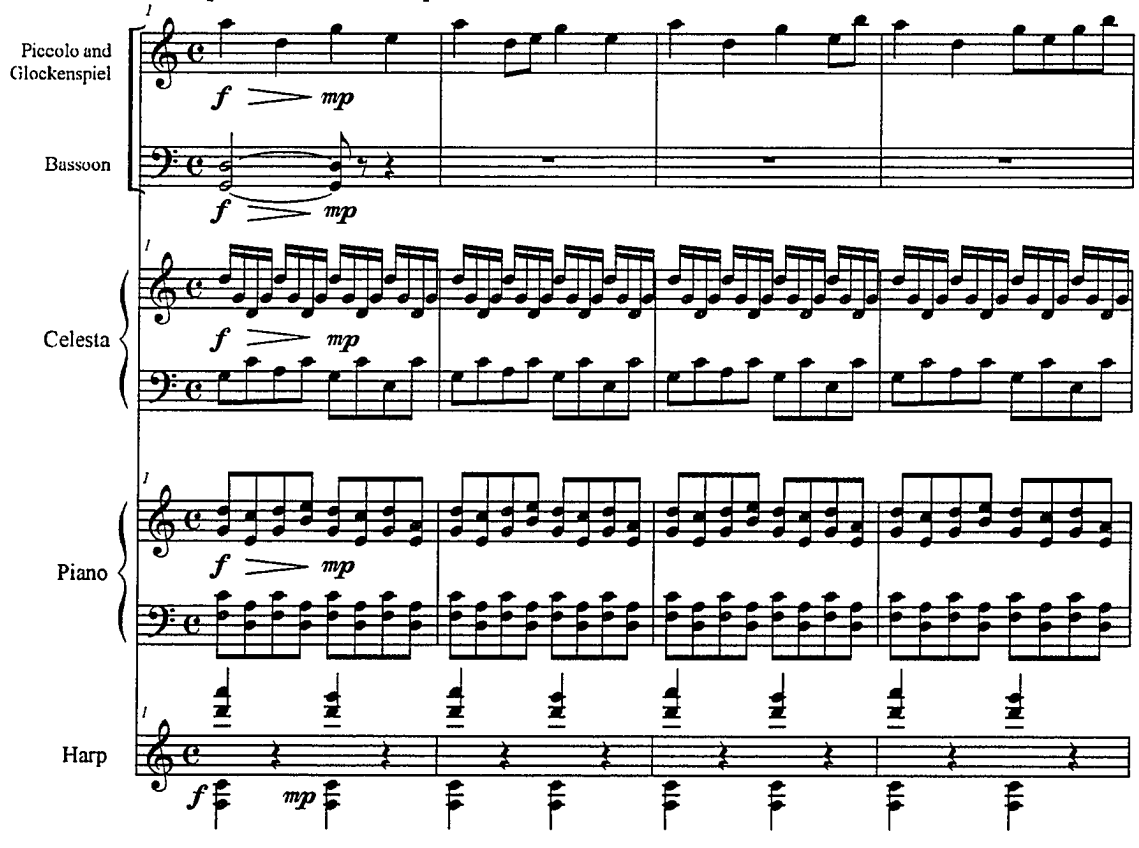


As he did in the first movement, Vaughan Williams modifies the motivic material of Theme 1 each time it returns: A′ lowers the second F-sharp to an F-natural, A′′ moves the key from D major to E-flat, and A′′′ reverses the original progression of Themes 1 and 2. Only in the final measures does Theme 1 return in its original guise, paired once again with the "sinister exordium." In this final appearance of the exordium, only the lowered forms of the third, sixth, and seventh scale degrees are heard, a final gesture to the symphony's titular key in a movement dominated by its parallel major.[92]

[92] All four movements of the Eighth Symphony draw upon motives and compositional practices closely associated with Vaughan Williams's style: the second movement recalls the so-called "oom-pah" bass and stretto textures of the Fourth Symphony's finale, the third movement's continuous string textures recall such works as the *Tallis Fantasia*, *Partita for Double String Orchestra*, and the Fifth Symphony, and the finale's opening exordium recalls the "My God and king" motive from the *Five Mystical Songs*, as well as the "Galliard of the Sons of the Morning" from *Job* (see Neighbour, "Place of the Eighth," 228–29).

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Not all of the characteristics of this piece are necessarily drawn from Vaughan Williams's own music. The first movement's unusual title—"Variazioni senza tema"—was also the name of a piece by Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero for piano and orchestra (1923), which Vaughan Williams heard at the ISCM Festival of 1925 in Prague.[93] It too has seven variations without a "theme," and its opening motive—like that of Vaughan Williams's Eighth—is a four-note figure comprised of two interlocking fourths (Example 5-23).

Example 5-23: G. F. Malipiero, *Variazioni Senza Tema*



Malipiero's piece sounds quite different from Vaughan Williams's, and lacks any suggestions of sonata form, but it does depart from conventional rules of tonal harmony and voice leading while still retaining a central pitch area, much like the first movement

[93] See Basil Maine, *Twang With Our Music* (London: The Epworth Press, 1925), 108–9.

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of the Eighth. Vaughan Williams had a long-standing interest in contemporary Italian music. In 1924, asking Edward Dent his advice on where one of his students might study abroad, Vaughan Williams wrote: "It seems to me the best teaching now is going on in Italy—at all events the Italian composers seem to know their job extraordinarily well."[94] The three tuned gongs of the last movement were also derived from an Italian source; Vaughan Williams heard them when he attended a performance of Puccini's *Turandot* for the first time, and was so taken with their sound that he added them to the already completed finale.[95] It would be excessive to describe the Eighth Symphony as an *omaggio a Italia*, but Vaughan Williams clearly had Italy on his mind when he started composing it—he spent a holiday there with his new wife, Ursula, in the spring of 1953,[96] the same year he began writing the symphony—resulting in a work of high spirits and brilliant colors more often associated with composers like Malipiero or Respighi than Vaughan Williams.

There are tributes to other composers in the piece as well, either specific or implied. The opening melody of the Cavatina is actually a rhythmic rearrangement of the chorale "O Sacred Head" from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, a relationship first noticed by Paul Henry Lang and confirmed by the composer.[97] The E minor key of this movement strongly implies that it had a special spiritual resonance for Vaughan

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[94] Ralph Vaughan Williams, Chelsea, to Edward J. Dent, Cambridge, [24xxxa], from the King's College Dent Archive, Cambridge University.

[95] See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 371. RVW added a note in the score: "The Gongs are not absolutely essential, but their inclusion is highly desirable," and indicate that they were the same instruments "as used in Puccini's *Turandot*" (Vaughan Williams, *Symphony No. 8 in D Minor* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), ii).

[96] See U. Vaughan Williams, *RVW*, 331–32.

[97] Neighbour, "The Place of the Eighth," 228–30. Neighbour has pointed out the similarity between the close of the movement and the final phrase of the chorale as well; Lang only noticed the relationship between the openings.

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Williams; given his lifelong admiration of Bach's music, particularly the *St. Matthew Passion*, his choice of key is entirely appropriate. It is also interesting to note a comment Vaughan Williams made in an essay (1953) on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:

> To my mind, two composers and two only . . . have been able to write music which is at the same time serious, profound, and cheerful—Bach in the 'Cum Sancto' of the B minor Mass and Beethoven in the finale of the Choral Symphony. Incidentally both these movements are in D major.[98]

With this in mind, it seems unlikely that the choice of D major as the key for the finale of the Eighth Symphony, with its joyful torrents of sound headed by a "sinister exordium," was mere coincidence. The influence of these non-English models on his own music further reinforce Vaughan Williams's inclination for music that resonated with his creative spirit, regardless of its national origin. This may seem to conflict with his concerns about "cosmopolitanism," but no more so than his exhortations on the study of indigenous music. While he considered warnings about the uncritical adoption of foreign musical practices appropriate for the fledgling composer, he was secure enough in his own skills to apply a wide variety of techniques without compromising his own expressive voice. For critics and pundits who celebrated "the new," Vaughan Williams's long-term stylistic consistency must have looked like creative atrophy; in reality, it showed he possessed a creative vision and fully-formed musical language capable of finding endless expressive possibilities within a stable stylistic framework.

The complex critical response to Vaughan Williams's late period works seems to hinge on a philosophical question: was it a greater measure of artistic achievement to create music that captures the character of a particular point in history, or to create a wholly individual artwork that transcends its time? Vaughan Williams clearly felt the

[98] Vaughan Williams, "Some Thoughts," 88.

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latter was the more valuable achievement, and he credited his study of national music with helping him find the voice with which to make those transcendent statements. If a composer, Vaughan Williams argued, "consciously tries to express himself in a way which is contrary to his surroundings, and therefore to his own nature, he is evidently being, though perhaps he does not know it, insincere. It is surely as bad to be self-consciously cosmopolitan as self-consciously national."[99] While direct references to the music of his own nation became more and more infrequent as his career progressed, its true importance came from giving him the confidence and inspiration to begin that career, and to find his own voice in the process. This gets at the heart of his advocacy for national music: far from being a fettering influence, he believed that a firm grounding in the indigenous music of his own nation—combined with the fructifying influences of the larger western musical tradition—would lead to the stylistic diversity so craved by the progressive elements in English musical life.

[99] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" in *NMOE*, 3.

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CHAPTER 6

BEYOND THE NATION

The preceding examination of Vaughan Williams's approach to composition and his creative relationship to England reveals significant differences between his philosophy of "national music" and his responses to English music and culture in his own works. Before outlining those differences in detail, however, let us briefly recapitulate the progression of Vaughan Williams's style, along with his various approaches to nation in specific pieces throughout his career.

During the early part of his career (ca. 1898–1914), Vaughan Williams developed the technical procedures that would later become the basis of his style—progressions of triadic harmonies that deviated from conventional tonal hierarchies, the frequent use of non-diatonic scales and pitch collections, chordal planing, rhapsodic melodies (frequently set to irregular or weakly emphasized meters), complex contrapuntal designs—while still digesting the wide array of compositional influences to which he had been subjected since his student years. One of the first significant works of the mature Vaughan Williams was *A Sea Symphony*, a piece that reflected his seven-year-long struggle to balance the ideological demands he placed upon himself with the centuries of tradition imposed by the symphonic genre. The *Sea Symphony* enabled him to combine the

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multiple influences he had been dealing with up to that point in his career. That he does not express himself concisely in this piece is less important than his success in harnessing such a wide variety of musical influences to his own expressive goals.

Many works from his early period display conspicuously English elements (in subject, text, musical quotation, or venue, for example) even though their musical language largely derives from compositional practices used throughout western music. Moreover, the pieces that tend to be most artistically effective—such as *A Sea Symphony*—have the least direct connections to "Englishness." For example, there are two very brief quotations of English folk songs in the third movement—"The Golden Vanity" and "The Bold Princess Royal"—but they are unmarked in the score and well-integrated into the musical fabric; in any event, they last for no more than ten seconds out of sixty-five minutes. Although the performing venue of the Leeds Choral Festival represents an old English musical tradition, and the subject of the sea resonates with the British national consciousness, the lush, wholly Romantic music displays the influences of many different composers, styles, and traditions from all over Europe, while the text itself comes from the New World. While perceived as uniquely English by critics and audiences, it would be more accurate to say that *A Sea Symphony* combines familiar British venues and genres with unconventional musical language and forms.

Compare this to another early period work, *Hugh the Drover*, in which Vaughan Williams turned away from mainstream operatic conventions, embracing instead a domestic tradition—that of ballad opera—in an attempt to create a "real" English opera. The compositional approach to that domestic tradition, however, is heavily influenced by the customs of European grand opera: the use of arioso rather than spoken dialogue, long-

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stretches of newly-composed music, historical rural settings, and non-satiric story all depart from the conventions of classic ballad opera. Still, *Hugh* is conspicuously English in its subject, text, and use of indigenous music, which is somewhat to that piece's detriment. The characters, for example, are insufficiently developed from a dramatic point of view, which makes them seem like caricatures of country dwellers or generic character types who fail to inspire audience sympathy. The music, though attractive, simply cannot sustain the piece on its own, in large part because the folk (or folk-like) songs contribute little to the plot besides atmosphere. While it is to Vaughan Williams's credit that he was willing to experiment with new ways of invigorating British opera, the national trappings of *Hugh the Drover* ultimately prove more constricting than liberating.

By the beginning of his middle period (ca. 1919–1943), Vaughan Williams began writing works that were more concise and direct than many pieces from the pre-war years. Many (though not all) of his middle-period works are based upon a relatively small amount of thematic material, or maintain a consistent mood throughout, or explore the expressive possibilities suggested by a single compositional idiom (such as pastoralism or neoclassicism). While willing to apply his creative skills in a variety of ways—consider the musical and emotional variety encompassed by the *Mass in G Minor*, the Fourth Symphony, and the *Serenade to Music*—Vaughan Williams generally preferred to emphasize internal commonalities within a single piece rather than create strong formal, thematic, or stylistic contrasts.

Overt evocations of Englishness were no longer essential to Vaughan Williams's musical speech during the interwar years, as he displayed greater willingness to distance himself from some of the more strident pronouncements he made as a younger man—in

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practice, if not necessarily in word.[1] Pieces like the *Mass in G Minor* and *Sancta Civitas* are unapologetically ambiguous in their musical material and relationship to the nation. Again, their identification as "English" music stems more from an association with other English traditions than from any intrinsically national characteristics of their own. The *Mass*, for example, recalls other works in that genre by much-vaunted Tudor composers, while *Sancta Civitas* is an oratorio, one of the few musical genres in which British composers had been well-represented over the centuries. Yet these two pieces frequently depart from the conventional forms and musical language associated with their respective genres. Both are wholly modern works, in the sense that they responded to contemporary musical ideas that had become widespread (if not quite yet conventional) throughout Europe, and convey messages that were relevant and meaningful to listeners regardless of nationality. Vaughan Williams's depictions of the celebration of Christian faith and the impact of war may have been based upon his own perspective and experiences as an agnostic English veteran, but these were subjects that transcended national boundaries to touch a deeper, more visceral level of human experience.

Middle period pieces that display conspicuous ties to national traditions or subjects, like *Sir John in Love*, do so while avoiding suggestions of provinciality. For example, even though the story takes place in Elizabethan England, the Shakespearian libretto for *Sir John* is a considerable improvement over that of Harold Child's in *Hugh the Drover*; the Bard's characters are more plausible and situations more believable than anyone or anything in *Hugh*. Musically, Vaughan Williams evidently realized that aural

[1] Vaughan Williams wrote some of his most extended and passionate arguments in support of both national music as a general philosophy and English music in particular during the interwar period, such as those put forth in *National Music* (first published in 1934; see Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, 1–82) and in the introduction to Henry Hadow's *English Music*, vii–xiii.

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attractiveness alone was not enough to make folk songs work effectively in a theatrical setting. Unlike those in *Hugh*, the folk songs used in *Sir John* display strong dramatic justifications for their inclusion. The opera itself embraces an international tradition—the Verdian comic opera style of *Falstaff*—not just in its choice of subject, but in its overall form and design. By this time, Vaughan Williams was secure enough in his style that he was able to shape it to the requirements of any genre, without worrying about whether or not he would run the risk of being overpowered by the weight of other traditions. The anxiety of influence he struggled with throughout his early period had largely dissipated.

The musical language he developed during this time also sustained him throughout his late period (ca. 1944–1958), although the national materials that inspired it were largely absent. Works written after the Second World War often displayed a great deal of internal variety in their emotional range and stylistic practices, but the basic tenets of Vaughan Williams's musical language remained intact and instantly recognizable. His craftsmanship and creative fecundity were almost unprecedented for so old a composer, and his music exhibited an expressive confidence and assurance that was long sought and deftly communicated.

While contemporary writings on music might suggest otherwise, Vaughan Williams's later works reveal few discernible links with practices or subjects that could be considered distinctively English. Instead, he turned his attention to some of the most fundamental technical aspects of the western musical tradition, such as classical forms and counterpoint, proving that the nimble artistic mind could still find ways of breathing new life into old forms. The Eighth Symphony exemplifies this shift, displaying some of Vaughan Williams's most familiar stylistic techniques within a tightly wrought and

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imaginatively realized structural framework that covers a broad expressive palette. One of the few large-scale choral works from this time, *Hodie*, celebrates the birth of Christ with highly dramatic music that ranges from expressions of unbridled joy to introspective meditations. While its texts (except for the gospels) are all by English authors, the emphasis is placed on their messages rather than their origins. Both of these works enriched the world of English music without having to draw directly on aspects of national culture for their expressive power or artistic justification.

With this synopsis in mind, one can make a more specific assessment of the place of the nation in Vaughan Williams's music. We have seen that the composer makes a distinction between "national music" (a way of thinking about composition), and the presentation of elements drawn from the culture of one's nation in a musical setting. Vaughan Williams's use of the phrase "national music" refers to a compositional philosophy intended to enable British composers to achieve parity (in terms of artistic credibility) with other European composers.[2] It does not call for cultural retrenchment, isolationism, or provinciality, nor does it indicate an attempt to promote a particular style as "authentically English" or "national" in its expression. Instead, it implies a symbiotic relationship between musicians and the musical life of their nation, including their nation's musical history. There was, of course, a strong element of self-interest involved in Vaughan Williams's promotion of such a perspective, since he came of creative age at a time when the position of "English composer" had just recently become a realistic (if still unlikely) career possibility. His own efforts over the next several decades on behalf

[2] Vaughan Williams returned to the issue of British composers' worthiness throughout his career, even well after the point where they had been embraced by the public; see, for example, Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Music and 'British Music,'" *Times* (London), 22 July 1929, 15, and Vaughan Williams, "Nationalism and Internationalism," in *NMOE*, esp. 155–56.

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of English music helped bestow a level of respect upon it unknown since the days of Henry Purcell.

Vaughan Williams advocated the study of indigenous music not as a goal in itself, but as a means for fledgling composers to find their own characteristic musical style. Having felt unable to forge an individual and distinctive idiom of his own as a young man (despite his extensive training, much of it based in a general western tradition rather than a specifically English one), Vaughan Williams turned to indigenous music in an attempt to find new inspiration for his expressive desires. His success in turning that inspiration into something both expressively honest and artistically credible led him to advocate the same path of study as a possibility for others struggling with similar problems. Yet those who found their artistic salvation through other paths were, in his eyes, more than welcome to do so. "The object of the composer is to produce a beautiful work of art and as long as the result is beautiful it seems to me it matters very little how that result is brought about."[3]

In developing his philosophy of national music, Vaughan Williams found a solution to the crisis of late Romanticism and the dissolution of tonality that did not require fully renouncing the aesthetic ideals of either tradition. Although a leading figure in the folk song movement, and a strong advocate for English music and musicians, he also had a healthy respect for the European musical tradition in which he was trained and sought a place. Vaughan Williams recognized that national music, if it were to be effective, had to be rooted in the tradition it allegedly rebelled against.[4] He found

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[3] Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 44.

[4] He frequently quoted Gilbert Murray to this effect; see Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of the Folk-Song (2)," in *NMOE*, 47.

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examples of this phenomenon not only in the music of his own country, but among mainstream Continental composers as well:

> Chopin is generally considered the first of the nationalist composers and he certainly was strongly influenced by the patriotic aspirations of his oppressed country. We must, however, distinguish between the Parisian Chopin of the waltzes and nocturnes and the national Chopin of the mazurkas, polonaises, and Polish songs. But in reality he was no more national than Schumann or Beethoven or Mozart; his inspiration simply came from a new source. His period was the heyday of the romantic movement when everything had to be exotic. One's own time and one's own place were not enough and one sought an escape from reality in the glamour of remote times and remote places, the forests of Poland or the mountains of Scotland. So when Chopin appeared on the scene with his Polish rhythms and cadences he was hailed as the first nationalist, though he was only building on his own foundations just as Beethoven and Mozart had built on theirs.[5]

Vaughan Williams just as easily could have been speaking of himself. He too cultivated a musical language immediately identifiable as his own, despite variations in its accent and inflection, and always maintained connections with the larger western tradition from which it derived. By remaining open to both domestic and international musical ideas and traditions, Vaughan Williams was able to adapt elements from both into a wholly individual and wide-ranging style.

The influence of England on Vaughan Williams's own music has perhaps been overstated and overemphasized, particularly considering that the composer himself thought self-conscious displays of musical nationalism antithetical to great art.[6] Although conspicuous connections to English subjects, traditions or sources in his music feature prominently in several pieces from his first period, they drop off considerably following the end of World War One, and all but disappear from his works during his final period.

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[5] Vaughan Williams, "The History of Nationalism in Music," in *NMOE*, 55.

[6] Vaughan Williams, "Should Music be National?" in *NMOE*, 3, and Vaughan Williams, *English Folk-Songs*, 15.

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The reason for this lies in Vaughan Williams's artistic maturation: as a young man coming off conservatory training in the Continental tradition, he drew heavily upon materials of English origin (or affiliation) because he felt that assimilating their "national" intonations, a decisive departure from conservatory influences, would encourage the development of his own musical voice. It did serve the short-term goal of firing his creative processes, but the musical idiom that resulted soon surpassed the evocative power of those early influences. Furthermore, the musical world of the 1920s and beyond was considerably different from that of pre-war Europe. The fragmentation of Romanticism into multiple stylistic streams effectively ended the anxiety Vaughan Williams (and others) must have felt about having to fit into the European grand tradition. Indeed, with the advent of atonality and other avant-garde musical trends, British musicians found themselves in the unusual position of finding their new music more popular among domestic audiences than many contemporary German works. With an external challenge no longer so potent, the need for a national alternative was lessened. As a result, Vaughan Williams could cultivate the style initially inspired by indigenous sources without having to retain clear expressive connections to them.

Yet even his early works are rarely national in a descriptive sense, nor are they conventionally programmatic. They generally do not attempt to portray an image so much as capture a mood or a feeling suggested by an image or setting, much as Beethoven described his Sixth Symphony as *mehr Ausdruck als Malerei.* Vaughan Williams himself confirmed this position—albeit in a rather roundabout manner—in an early program note for *A London Symphony*, a work from the end of his first period.

> The title *A London Symphony* may suggest to some hearers a descriptive piece, but this is not the intention of the composer. A better title would

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> perhaps be 'Symphony by a Londoner', that is to say, the life of London (including, possibly, its various sights and sounds) has suggested to the composer an attempt at musical expression; but it would be no help to the hearer to describe these in words. The music is intended to be self-expressive, and must stand or fall as 'absolute' music. Therefore, if listeners recognize suggestions of such things as the 'Westminster Chimes' or the 'Lavender Cry' they are asked to consider these as accidents, not essentials of the music.[7]

There is, of course, nothing "accidental" about the inclusion of either tune. Vaughan Williams's point was that the "Lavender Cry" or the Westminster chimes do not themselves represent a particular feeling, mood, or expression, but in fact *interrupt* the expressive fabric of the piece. They may lead the composer's thoughts off in other directions—acting as distractions that intrude upon the pervading expressive idiom—but are not themselves programmatic elements essential to understanding the composer's artistic message. Vaughan Williams wrote the work from the perspective of someone who had experienced life in London and had found the musical means to express its effect. He clearly struggled with the means of communicating this point, which was made even more complicated by his general disinclination to impose specific readings on his own works. "The third movement is in the form of a Scherzo. If the hearer will imagine himself standing on Westminster Embankment at night, surrounded by the distant sounds of the Strand, with its great hotels on one side, and the 'New Cut' on the other, with its crowded streets and flaring lights, it *may serve as a mood* in which to listen to this movement [emphasis added]."[8] Despite the frequently ambiguous manner in which he argued his point, Vaughan Williams's musical evocations of Englishness, like his

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[7] Ralph Vaughan Williams, program note for *A London Symphony*, 1920; quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 71.

[8] Ralph Vaughan Williams, program note for *A London Symphony*, 1925; quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 71. A later note indicated that listeners "may, if they like, localize the various themes and movements, but it is hoped that this is not a necessary part of the music." Quoted in Kennedy, *CWRVW*, 72.

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adoption of the philosophy of national music, served only as the means to achieve more personal and complex expressive goals, not as goals themselves.

In conclusion, there is no question that Vaughan Williams's philosophy of national music and various aspects of English culture inspired his muse, and have come to be closely associated with his musical idiom in the public imagination. These points, however, are ultimately of peripheral concern in assessing his musical and stylistic significance in the larger world of twentieth-century music. Even though a desire to create "national music" underpinned his compositional efforts, it was rarely the primary goal for any given piece, nor can its presence or effect be measured in any quantifiable form. Similarly, the persistent critical portrayal of his style as externally "English" is not only subjective, but misleading. Vaughan Williams may have been the public face of English music, but he never presumed that his personal musical voice spoke on behalf of all his countrymen. His place in English music history is important, but equally important in terms of his creative legacy are his responses to the disintegration of tonality and his ability to remain artistically relevant. Understanding Vaughan Williams's relationship to nation may be helpful as a point of departure for examining these broader issues, but we must break through what Hugh Ottaway described as its "too-sheltering walls"[9] in order to arrive at substantive and meaningful evaluations of his unique and significant stylistic contributions to the western musical tradition.

[9] See Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams and the European Background," *Hallé*, no. 28 (July 1951): 10.

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APPENDIX

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APPENDIX: TEXTS USED IN *A SEA SYMPHONY*

I: "A SONG FOR ALL SEAS, ALL SHIPS"

(Sources: Walt Whitman, "Song of the Exposition," 1871, rev. 1881, and "Song for All Seas, All Ships," 1873, rev. 1881)

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind, speckle the green and blue
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming in or out of port,
See, dusky and undulating, see, the long pennants of smoke.
Behold, the sea itself
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships.

Today a rude brief recitative,
Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship signal,
Of unnamed heroes in the ships—of waves spreading and spreading far as the eye can reach,
Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing
And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,
Fitful, like a surge,
Of sea captains young or old, and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay,
Picked sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen by thee,
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time and unitest the nations,
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,
Indomitable, untamed as thee.

Flaunt out O sea your separate flags of nations!
Flaunt out visible as ever the various flags and ship signals!
But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest,
A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man elate above death,
Token [Emblem] of all brave captains and of all intrepid sailors and mates,
And of all that went down doing their duty,
Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains young or old
(Emblem of man, elate above death)
A pennant universal, subtly waving all time o'er all brave sailors
(One flag above all the rest,
Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships
One flag above all the rest, o'er all brave sailors)
All seas, all ships.

II: "ON THE BEACH AT NIGHT, ALONE"

(Source: Walt Whitman, "On the Beach at Night Alone," 1856, rev. 1881)

On the beach at night alone,
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and

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of the future.
A vast similitude interlocks all.
All distances of space however wide,
All distances of time, all souls, all living bodies, though they be ever so different,
All nations, all identities that have existed or may exist,
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spanned,
And shall forever span them, and shall compactly hold and enclose them.
(On the beach at night alone).

III: "THE WAVES"
(Source: Walt Whitman, "After the Sea-Ship," 1874, rev. 1881)
After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
Below, a myriad myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,
Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,
(After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,)
Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,
Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,
Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant with curves,
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the surface,
Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the ocean yearnfully flowing,
The wake of the seaship after she passes, flashing and frolicsome under the sun,
A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,
(After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
Below, a myriad myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,)
Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.
(A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,
Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.)

IV: "THE EXPLORERS"
(Source: Walt Whitman, "Passage to India," 1871, rev. 1881)
O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Covered all over with visible pow'r and beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters,
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thoughts begin to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia descending,
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,
Wandering, yearning, with restless explorations,
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts,
With that sad incessant refrain, "Wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?"

Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who justify these restless explorations?
Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?
("Wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?")

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Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.

After the seas are all crossed,
After the great Captains have accomplished their work,
After the noble inventors,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship O soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds,
Thou pressing me to thee, O soul, I thee to me,
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing,
Bear me indeed as through regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O Soul, thou actual me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastness of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding O soul thou journeyest forth.

Away O soul! Hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves, and all.

O my brave soul! O farther sail!
O farther farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

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