

Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of ‘Englishness’

Ceri Owen
Magdalen College, University of Oxford

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music

Faculty of Music, University of Oxford

Trinity Term, 2014

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr Daniel M. Grimley, for guiding and inspiring me throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis. His encouragement, feedback, and continued faith in the project have been greatly appreciated.

With regard to financial assistance I thank the Arts & Humanities Research Council and Magdalen College, Oxford.

I would like to thank Dr Nicolas Bell at the British Library, London, for his assistance in directing me to relevant archival sources, and Dr Eric Saylor, for sending me his PhD thesis and for his discussion of this work with me during the formative stages of my writing.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr Benedict Taylor for reading and commenting upon the project in its final form, and I thank Professor Julian Johnson, to whom I have turned for guidance on numerous occasions. I must also thank Dr J. P. E. Harper-Scott for his words of advice and support throughout.

I thank Professor Jonathan Cross, Professor Peter Franklin, Dr Martyn Harry, and Professor Susan Wollenberg at the Faculty of Music, Oxford, for their guidance as to the progress of my thinking and writing at various stages of the project.

I thank my parents and my friends for their unwavering encouragement, humour, and patience. Finally, I thank John Claude Myerscough.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved grandparents, Tom Duly and Eryl Mair, who taught me the songs of our native Wales, and sang them with me.

Er cof annwyl.

Abstract

It is now broadly accepted that Vaughan Williams's music betrays a more complex relation to national influences than has traditionally been assumed. It is argued in this thesis that despite the trends towards revisionism that have characterized recent work, Vaughan Williams's interest in and engagement with English folk materials and cultures remains only partially understood. Offering contextual interpretation of materials newly available in the field, my work takes as its point of departure the critical neglect surrounding Vaughan Williams's contradictory compositional debut, in which he denounced the value of folk song in English art music in an article published alongside his song 'Linden Lea', subtitled 'A Dorset Folk Song'. Reconstructing the under-documented years of the composer's early career, it is demonstrated that Vaughan Williams's subsequent 'conversion' and lifelong attachment to folk song emerged as part of a broader concern with the intelligible and participatory quality of song and its performance by the human voice. As such, it is argued that the ways in which this composer theorized an idea of 'song' illuminate a powerful perspective from which to reconsider the propositions of his project for a national music.

Locating Vaughan Williams's writings within contemporaneous cultural ideas and practices surrounding 'song', 'voice', and 'Englishness', this work brings such contexts into dialogue with readings of various of the composer's works, composed both before and after the First World War. It is demonstrated in this way that the rehabilitation of Vaughan Williams's music and reputation profitably proceeds by reconstructing a complex dialogue between his writings; between various cultural ideas and practices of English music; between the reception of his works by contemporaneous critics; and crucially, by considering the propositions of his music as explored through analysis. Ultimately, this thesis contends that Vaughan Williams's music often betrays a complex and self-conscious performance of cultural ideas of national identity, negotiating an optimistic or otherwise ambivalent relationship to an English musical tradition that is constructed and referenced through a particular idea of song.

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Introduction

Toward the end of a review of Michael Trend's 1985 monograph *The Music Makers: Heirs and Rebels of The English Musical Renaissance*,¹ Lewis Foreman identifies a shadowy presence lurking behind a tradition of 'English' music forged in the works of British composers at the turn of the twentieth century: a presence which, according to Foreman's assessment, had evaded the attention of Trend's discussion. Seeking to pin down the material content of a musical Englishness that is assumed though insufficiently defined throughout Trend's history, Foreman intuits that there is an element 'fundamental to the language and the imagery' of the music of this period, and offers a suggestion of its vital impetus as follows:

[t]he exact nature of the tradition is very hard to define; and Mr. Trend, though he alludes to it many times, never attempts an extended definition. We recognize its essence intuitively: we can make vague references to Purcellian declamation, Tudor polyphony, false relation, nature-painting, and folksong ... The influence of folksong is undoubtedly important, yet a score exhibiting a folksong influence is not always necessarily 'English' ... So superficial traits may well be signposts of 'Englishness', but there is something deeper as well, something fundamental to the language and the imagery of these composers, particularly from the 1880's onwards.

Fundamental to the acceptance of any musical idiom by the wider British audience – indeed probably by most audiences – is song. Kenneth Leighton (to many, a composer still exemplifying the tradition) has prefaced his recent Third Symphony with a short verse encapsulating it all: 'O yes I must sing/and so must you sing also,/For all music is singing/and in music/There is praise of life.'²

This proposition speaks powerfully to the claims of the current thesis, which posits that song may be considered a complex and pervasive category in the music of a composer whose 'Englishness' has been claimed perhaps more than that of any other: the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

¹ Michael Trend, *The Music Makers: Heirs and Rebels of the English Musical Renaissance, Edward Elgar to Benjamin Britten* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985).

² Lewis Foreman, Review [untitled] of Trend (1985), *Tempo* (New Series), 153 (June, 1985), 43-5, 45.

In reaching for Kenneth Leighton's epigraph, Foreman underlines with uncanny precision a mode of song that speaks to the heart of a number of Vaughan Williams's works, and to the heart of his project for national music. It will be suggested here that Vaughan Williams's music can often be considered to issue a songful invitation to its participation and 'understanding' by a community of listeners: a musical community with whom the composer sought urgently to 'speak', and a community within which song – as related to but also distinct from folk song – played a central role in a cultural idea and practice of national music. As such, and as is implied in Foreman's suggestion, this music's presentation of song and its songful appeal to the listener may be considered definitive characteristics of its particular idea of Englishness.

The proposition that Vaughan Williams's music is 'songful' music engages our intuitive experience of many of his works, as much as a tradition of their critical reception. Most obviously, that this composer forged a native style on the basis of predominantly songful materials speaks to a number of facts that are frequently rehearsed in accounts of Vaughan Williams's musical career and compositional preoccupations, all of which focus around his reclamation of England's distinctive musical past: his interest in and collection, arrangement, and assimilation of English folk songs and hymn tunes; his lifelong attachment to and cultivation of the English choral tradition (especially that of a supposed Elizabethan 'Golden Age'); his development of a 'pastoral' style, in which the songs, voices, and melodies of a temporally remote, idealized, and rural mode of life and landscape are implicitly central to the genre;³ and as related to all these preoccupations, the essentially 'melodious' bent of much of his music. Indeed, it might be posited that as Christopher Palmer claims of Herbert Howells, Vaughan Williams was 'a *vocal* composer', in that his music '*sings*, is melodic in impulse'.⁴

³ See, for example, Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), especially 'The English Pastoral', 268-71.

⁴ As quoted by Trevor Hold, *Parry To Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 296.

Yet it must be noted at the outset that to suggest that the ‘Englishness’ of Vaughan Williams’s music can be examined through recourse to a study of song – or through recourse to an exploration of musical materials – seems rather to fly in the face of directions taken by the field of Vaughan Williams studies since the publication of Foreman’s review. This study takes no such problematic an approach. Rather, it seeks to steer a course between on the one hand, recent and broadly historical and theoretical approaches to an exploration of Vaughan Williams’s nationalism as a construction of critical reception, and on the other, a re-introduction and re-interpretation of the composer’s writings, socio-musical activity, and musical works as sites that can be shown to mediate and participate in the construction of such national identities. As will become clear, a culturally-situated idea and practice of ‘song’ lies at an important intersection between these fields of study.

Vaughan Williams as English Composer: A View from Current Scholarship

The question of ‘re-introducing’ Vaughan Williams’s writings and music to the process of exploring questions of his Englishness demands some explanation. Over the past two-and-a-half decades, Vaughan Williams studies has witnessed a decisive shift in emphasis, as scholars have turned away from exploring the composer’s nationalism through searching musical scores for evidence of ‘native sources’ (especially the presence of ‘folk song’),⁵ and rather, have worked towards an acknowledgement and interrogation of the cultural construction of meaning and value in Vaughan Williams’s music and reputation, this a trend entirely in line with the musicological climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁶

⁵ Duncan Hinnells has suggested that this approach to Vaughan Williams’s ‘Englishness’ is a prominent theme of the host of life-and-works studies that emerged during the latter years of the composer’s life and following his death in 1958. Particularly important in this regard are Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), and Hubert J. Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (London: Harrap, 1950). See Hinnells’s important thesis, ‘The Making of a National Composer: Vaughan Williams, OUP, and the BBC’ (DPhil Diss., University of Oxford, 1999), 3-4.

⁶ In 1993, Alain Frogley suggested that Vaughan Williams scholarship must embrace a contextual approach aligned with a sophisticated understanding of text, this elaborated in ‘H. G. Wells and Vaughan Williams’s *A London Symphony*: Politics and Culture in fin-de-siècle England’, in C. A. Banks, Arthur Searle, and MacIolm Turner (eds.), *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Collection, presented to O. W. Neighbour on his 70th Birthday* (London: British Library, 1993), 299-308. Such an approach can also be seen to characterize Frogley’s work as editor of *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

A definitive turning point might be identified in 1996, when Alain Frogley demonstrated that contextual studies of Vaughan Williams were not only timely but essential. In a trenchant critique of Vaughan Williams's reception, Frogley observed that a slump had beset the composer's critical fortunes during the final years of his life and in the immediate aftermath of his death, arguing that the assumptions driving this critical neglect demanded attention and interpretation. Crucially, Frogley identified the question of Vaughan Williams's nationalism as the most obvious – because pervasive – place to begin.⁷

In essence, Frogley demonstrated that Vaughan Williams's music had become inextricably aligned with certain uncontested categories of 'Englishness', among which 'pastoral' and 'folk song' were particularly powerful. As such, Frogley maintained that the composer's critical reception had been subject to powerful processes of simplification and distortion. Drawing upon influential theories of nation as an imagined community – and of cultural nationalism as an expression of a constructed body of beliefs and practices, or 'invented traditions'⁸ – Frogley suggested that certain national identities that had accrued to the composer's music demanded identification and interrogation as such: identities which, as Frogley maintained, were the products of complex cultural and ideological agendas. It is against such constructions that subsequent twentieth-century critics, anxious as to earlier and apparently provincial and insular ideas of Englishness, responded.

In the wake of Frogley's call to revisionism, a host of studies devoted to re-evaluating the complex relationships negotiated between Vaughan Williams's music and its

1996). Here, Frogley explains that such an approach remains true to a theme upon which Vaughan Williams preached throughout his life: namely, 'the impossibility of separating music from people, the necessity of relating music to the social conditions in which it arises'. See Frogley (ed.) (1996), xiv-xv. See also Frogley's earlier article, 'Vaughan Williams and Thomas Hardy: "Tess" and the Slow Movement of the Ninth Symphony', *Music & Letters*, 68.1 (January, 1987), 42-59, and George Revill, "'The Lark Ascending": Monument to a Radical Pastoral', *Landscape Research*, 16.2 (1991), 25-30. Revill's article represents an early and pioneering contribution to the contextual re-evaluation of Vaughan Williams's music and musical project.

⁷ See Alain Frogley, 'Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams', in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 1-22, and by the same author, 'Getting its History Wrong: English Nationalism and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams', in Tomi Mäkelä (ed.), *Music & Nationalism in 20th-Century Great Britain & Finland* (Hamburg: Von Bockel, 1997), 245-62.

⁸ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); and David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong': 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

contemporaneous society have emerged.⁹ Nourished through recourse to broader discussions of English nationalism – especially Alun Howkins’s seminal essay on the early twentieth-century invention of an idealized ‘rural England’¹⁰ – attention has been devoted in particular to Vaughan Williams’s supposed ‘pastoralism’, a powerful force in perpetuating simplistic images of the rural, regressive, and insular nationalism expressed by the music of a number of English composers.¹¹ As such, Vaughan Williams now emerges as a figure whose once conservative identity stands in an ongoing dialogue with the re-negotiation of his reputation as a more liberal, progressive, and cosmopolitan composer than has hitherto been allowed.¹²

It might be argued that attempts to rehabilitate Vaughan Williams’s reputation have worked in part to de-nationalize his music, however, seeking for example to emphasize the correspondences between various of his works and those of Continental Modernist composers, in part as a means of removing their patina of parochial, regressive Englishness.

⁹ Significant revisionist work in this respect includes Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Vaughan Williams in Perspective* (Somerset: Albion, 1998), and Byron Adams and Robin Wells (eds.), *Vaughan Williams Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). In dialogue with Frogley’s work, a number of articles, chapters, and doctoral theses devoted to exploring the impact of various social and cultural forces on the creation and reception of Vaughan Williams’s music have also sporadically emerged. See, for example, Roger Savage, ‘Vaughan Williams, the Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists’, *Music & Letters*, 83.3 (August, 2002), 383-418; Byron Adams, “‘No Armpits, Please, We’re British’: Whitman and English Music, 1884-1936”, in Lawrence Kramer (ed.), *Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood* (New York: Garland, 2000), 25-42; and Eric Saylor, ‘The Significance of Nation in the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2003). The reader should also be directed to Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). This volume was published after the submission of this thesis, though before minor corrections were completed. As a result it was possible to derive only limited insights from the new research presented herein.

¹⁰ Alun Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 62-88.

¹¹ A series of articles devoted to exploring notions of ‘pastoralism’ and its complex relationship with constructions of landscape in Vaughan Williams’s music have emerged in recent years. Such articles often seek to emphasize the progressive aspects of Vaughan Williams’s approach to the genre. See Revill (1991); Harrington, ‘Holst and Vaughan Williams: Radical Pastoral’, in Christopher Norris (ed.), *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 106-27; Eric Saylor, “‘It’s Not Lambkins Frisking At All’: English Pastoral Music and the Great War”, *The Musical Quarterly*, 91.1-2 (Spring-Summer, 2008), 39-59; Daniel M. Grimley, ‘Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism, and the Symphonic Pastoral’, in Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Musical Modernism, 1895-1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 147-74, and by the same author, ‘Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear”: The Landscapes of Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia Antartica*’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 91.1-2 (Spring-Summer 2008), 116-50; Stephen Downes, ‘Modern Maritime Pastoral: Wave Deformations in the Music of Frank Bridge’, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 93-107; and Simon Shaw-Miller, ‘Palmer and the dark pastoral in English music of the twentieth century’, in Simon Shaw-Miller & Sam Smiles (eds.), *Samuel Palmer Revisited* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 123-52.

¹² The aesthetically progressive aspects of Vaughan Williams’s music have been considered by numerous authors. See, for example, Anthony Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape: Observations on the Manuscripts of Vaughan Williams’s Fourth Symphony’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 91.1-2 (Spring-Summer, 2008), 60-88; J. P. E. Harper-Scott, ‘Vaughan Williams’s Antic Symphony’, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 175-96; and Walter Aaron Clark, ‘Vaughan Williams and the “Night Side of Nature”: Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*’, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 55-71. See also footnote 11.

From another perspective, the danger of devoting attention to Vaughan Williams's nationalism as a product solely of critical construction is that the composer's 'own voice' is somewhat silenced in what Duncan Hinnells has considered to be a powerful historical and cultural process, through which Vaughan Williams actively participated in the formation of his own reputation as a national composer.¹³

In his important thesis 'The Making of a National Composer: Vaughan Williams, OUP and the BBC', Hinnells seeks primarily to examine in more detail the constructions of the composer's reception that are highlighted by Frogley. His approach makes a significant departure from that of his predecessor, however, in that it emphasizes and explores the centrality and agency of 'the composer himself' as a prominent publicist of his own national persona through his writings and public pronouncements, and thus his role in shaping the forces of his music's reception.¹⁴ As such, Hinnells highlights the complexities surrounding Vaughan Williams's 'authorial voice', suggesting that approaches to the study of his music must acknowledge the extent to which his works existed in a complex dialogue between the dynamics of creation and reception. By way of conclusion, Hinnells maintains that such a dialogue must be reconstructed before nuanced conclusions as to the workings, meanings, value, and indeed Englishness of this music can be drawn.¹⁵

It is here that my own work claims its place. It is demonstrated in this thesis that while scholars acknowledge, to some extent, the importance both of Vaughan Williams's writings and his music in shaping ideas of his musical 'Englishness', the complexity of his lifelong engagement with English folk song has received insufficient attention, despite the way in which his status as a folklorist continues to play a powerful role in the reception of his

¹³ See Hinnells (1999).

¹⁴ Hinnells (1999), 11-12.

¹⁵ Numerous scholars seem implicitly to have acknowledged the complex workings of a dialogue between creation and reception in Vaughan Williams's music. Anthony Pople, for example, unfolds the reception of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* through recourse to a consideration of Vaughan Williams's didactic presentation of his ideas of musical evolution (as articulated in his writings). See Anthony Pople, 'Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle', in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 47-80. As is demonstrated below, such a dialogue is rarely explicitly addressed as such, however, and even in Pople's reading, it is rather tentatively staged.

music.¹⁶ The implications of this critical neglect become particularly clear in light of the manner in which Vaughan Williams first staged his ‘self-construction’ as a national composer, in a compositional debut almost entirely neglected by the field. Inherent in this debut was an idea of ‘song’ which illuminates the complexity of the composer’s project for a national art music.

As Duncan Hinnells has demonstrated, Vaughan Williams’s reputation as a folklorist was perhaps the most powerful of the constructions of his Englishness that emerged during his lifetime, fuelling ideas that this music somehow ‘spoke’ with a ‘sincere’ and ‘authentic English voice’.¹⁷ As Hinnells maintains, however, it must be recognized that Vaughan Williams himself promoted folk song as a powerful agent of musical regeneration. The irony of Hinnells’s work is that in seeking to interrogate the various factors impacting upon the composer’s reputation as a folklorist, he fails to unfold the way in which Vaughan Williams in fact denounced the possibilities of folk song in English art music at the moment of his earliest claim to the status of a national composer.

Indeed in 1902, Vaughan Williams published an article in which he mused upon the future of ‘A School of English Music’. Startlingly, he concluded that folk song was for English composers an act of ‘insincerity’, and that a national musical ‘utterance’ must be ‘modelled on the personal style of English musicians’. What is particularly intriguing about

¹⁶ That Vaughan Williams’s folk song project continues to demand nuanced consideration is suggested by Eric Saylor in his 2011 entry for *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, where under the section devoted to ‘Folk Song’ he begins that ‘Vaughan Williams’s interest in and advocacy for the performance of folk music is well known and much discussed, though like so many aspects of his life and career, it is frequently misrepresented or misunderstood’. As Saylor’s entry makes clear, few detailed studies of the ways in which Vaughan Williams approached the question of folk song, either in theory or in practice, are available to the field. See Saylor, ‘Ralph Vaughan Williams’, in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Music*. Accessed 21-Jan-2013. For a further bibliography detailing articles devoted to a study of Vaughan Williams and folk song, see Paulina Piedzia Colon and Devora Geller (eds.), ‘Ralph Vaughan Williams: An Annotated Bibliography, 1996 – to the present (2013)’, http://www.rvwsociety.com/biblio_012.pdf. Accessed 21-Jan-2013.

¹⁷ Hinnells’s thesis proceeds from the proposition that ‘from at least the inter-war years onwards, studies have consistently emphasized the composer’s “Englishness”, attributing to it several principal characteristics.’ As Hinnells elaborates, ‘[m]ost pervasive of all is an almost Herderian view of “the spirit of the people” (what Herder called *Volkgeist*), an often implicit and only vaguely-formed belief that Vaughan Williams’s interest in, and use of, folk song was a central factor in his ability to express the “national spirit”’. See Hinnells (1999), 4. This author proceeds to demonstrate that in criticism emerging both during Vaughan Williams’s lifetime and following his death, responses to the composer’s music became ‘saturated’ with a particular kind of nationalistic language. The studies of Hubert Foss and Frank Howes are located as particularly powerful agents in emphasizing and searching for the presence of ‘folk song’ as crucial to this music’s purported ability to express without mediation certain aspects of national character, and to speak with the ‘sincere authentic voices’ of ancestral English musicians.

this debut is that Vaughan Williams simultaneously published 'Linden Lea', the first of his works to reach publication, alongside this statement on English musical nationalism. Perhaps most astonishing of all is that the composer also appended a subtitle to this song, inviting the listener to consider its propositions as those of a particular kind of 'Dorset Folk Song'.

This thesis takes as its point of departure the curiosity surrounding the publication of 'A School of English Music' and its important dialogue with 'Linden Lea: A Dorset Folk Song'. It is argued that if Vaughan Williams scholarship now claims that this composer's reputation is inextricable from the pronouncements of his own voice, attention must be devoted to the particular claims made by this voice. Further, it is argued that study must be devoted not only to the possible dialogue enacted between the composer's writings and public pronouncements and the reception of his music (as considered in Hinnells's work), but also to the complex relationship between these pronouncements and the propositions of Vaughan Williams's musical works.

By publishing his 'Dorset Folk Song' alongside an article in which he denounced the possibilities of folk song in nourishing an 'intelligible utterance' for English music, Vaughan Williams opened a critical space around an idea of 'folk song'. Moreover, he drew attention to the complexity of his concerns with musical 'intelligibility', 'utterance', and 'song' more broadly. As such this debut presents a provocative point of departure from which to reconsider the role of 'folk song' in Vaughan Williams's musical project, and to take seriously his lifelong insistence that his music should 'speak' with an intelligible community voice (or in Foreman's terms, should claim the 'acceptance' of a listening public). A particular novelty of the current study is that it acknowledges the extent to which Vaughan Williams's compositional debut points to the complex and self-conscious relationship in which his music and his public pronouncements were throughout his life to exist: a relationship that operates in regard to the reception of his music in equally complex terms, and which locates questions of 'song' and of 'voice' at the very heart of his agenda for national music.

Vaughan Williams and Song

In Chapter One, a reconsideration of the manner in which Vaughan Williams approached the question of national music in his earliest and extensive writings about English music and musical culture is provided. The early years of Vaughan Williams's career are under-documented, and the ways in which folk song and its performance were mythologized as part of his project for national musical regeneration demand further attention. Song and the act of singing were promoted by Vaughan Williams in ways which illuminate a particular and subtle aesthetics of national music, where the cultivation of a 'musical citizenship' is implicated in a preoccupation with the 'actual sound' of music as made and heard, particularly by the human voice. As such, these writings provide a powerful context within which to re-interpret the composer's later engagement with folk song, and to reconsider his project for a national, intelligible, and community music more broadly.

Drawing upon materials newly available in the field – including the first extensive volume of the composer's writings to emerge since 1963,¹⁸ and a volume of correspondence presenting information hitherto unpublished in the field¹⁹ – the chapter points to Vaughan Williams's considerable ambivalence towards 'the folk tune theory' during the early years of his career, foregrounding also his persistent emphasis upon the experience of the listener and a composer's ability to 'speak' to a particular community of hearers in intelligible musical terms. This leads to a consideration of a series of underexplored lectures delivered shortly following the publication of 'Linden Lea', in which the composer's earliest 'conversion' to folk song can be pinpointed.

While Vaughan Williams's interest in the power of performed sound as made and heard is foregrounded throughout his writings, it is most starkly articulated in these early lectures, in which his earliest advocacy of 'song' in national music can be explored. Here, the sound of song or of the human voice becomes a crucial means through which to establish

¹⁸ David Manning (ed.), *Vaughan Williams On Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Hugh Cobbe (ed.), *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

what is later defined as a ‘spiritual communication’ between composer and listener. In this way, the composer’s interest in folk song is traced, from its origins, to a broader idea of ‘song’ as a communicative ‘shock’ of performed sound: one which, in this ideal, bore an ‘intelligible’ invitation to community participation. By way of conclusion, it is suggested that the ‘songful’ basis of Vaughan Williams’s music, and his emphasis upon the making of music by English musicians, provides an intriguing window through which to explore the ways in which the composer sought to appeal to the ‘voice’, experience, and participation of a listener. It is also proposed that such ideas might be further traced through a consideration of the musical culture in which Vaughan Williams’s works were created and received.

As such, I consider thereafter how far ‘song’ and ‘voice’ became, in part as related to the cultural power of the folk revival, prominent categories and practices through which a broader revival of English music was focused. As Simon Featherstone has eloquently assessed,

[a] founding myth of twentieth-century Englishness locates the re-discovery of its authentic voice in the encounter between Cecil Sharp and John England, gardener at the rectory of Hambridge, Somerset, on 22 August, 1903...²⁰

Cecil Sharp’s project to revive English folk-song, as with his work with the morris dance, was part of a nationalist strategy which, like that of [contemporary] elocutionists, intended to purify the traditional English voice from the corruptions of modernity.²¹

Featherstone makes clear that a struggle regarding concepts of an English speaking voice – and as will be shown, an English singing voice – was central to debates about national identity during precisely the years in which Vaughan Williams forged his project for national music. It is demonstrated that an emphasis upon the singing of song, and upon the development of a communicative, ‘sincere’, and ‘natural’ English voice informed a broad culture of English music and musical education, and was promoted as central to the revival of a national compositional style.

²⁰ ‘Voices’, in Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 140-58, 150-1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

To this end, Chapter Two presents an exploration of numerous sites upon which an idea of the English musical voice was nourished and performed, these sites with which Vaughan Williams was often intimately connected. Central here are *The English Hymnal*, an important though under-theorized project of the composer's early career; *The Vocalist*, an almost entirely neglected journal devoted to the practice of song and 'voice production', to which Vaughan Williams contributed a host of his earliest songs and articles (including those of his debut); and finally, an outpouring of texts pertaining to the production and creation of an English voice in song and speech. Such sites implicate the development of a 'natural', 'direct', 'spontaneous', and 'sincere' English voice as part of broader ideas of English cultural identity, especially ideas of rural exploration and renewal.

This in turn creates a context within which to consider how far the 'Englishness' of Vaughan Williams's earliest songs might be understood as a product as much of later critical construction as of an emerging, contemporaneous cultural idea and practice of song. By offering close readings and new reception histories of the composer's early song cycles *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life*, it is demonstrated in the final part of this chapter that critics recognized in Vaughan Williams's earliest songs not only a newly 'direct' and 'robust' compositional voice, but further, an invitation to the participation of their own songful experience. A cultural study of song and singing provides in this way a means of unfolding the terms upon which claims for the 'sincerity' and 'naturalness' of Vaughan Williams's music were originally made, and how such categories might be related to the propositions of his music. The materials of the composer's songs seem to mediate a complex dialogue with ideas and practices of English musical culture, becoming works which can be understood as discourses upon the performance of an English voice, and upon the participation of a community of singers and listeners.

In Chapter Three, the self-conscious staging of 'song' as a regenerative agent in musical culture is traced and examined in numerous of Vaughan Williams's pre-War works. It is suggested that critics have long heard the singing presence of multiple voices in both

vocal and instrumental pieces by the composer, especially in works such as the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and *The Lark Ascending*, which claim an overt debt to the songs and voices of ancestral and rural communities. The project of this chapter is to bring critical responses to the vocal performativity and multiplicity of Vaughan Williams's works into dialogue with an examination of various procedures of this music. Drawing upon recent theories of 'voice' in musicology, works such as *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony* are shown to stage the multiple community voices often heard in Vaughan Williams's works. Such theories are invoked in order to demonstrate how far this music engages not only a contemporaneous cultural idea of song and singing, but further projects a means of constructing or 'speaking' multiple musical voices on its own terms.

In the Fourth and final Chapter, it is demonstrated that in works composed after the First World War, Vaughan Williams can be seen to transform an idea of song in such a way that the capacity of his music to project an affirmative performance of 'community voice' is powerfully reconfigured. In devoting attention to the distanced, wordless, and alienating presentation of voices in *A Pastoral Symphony*, *Flos Campi*, and *Riders to the Sea*, the category of 'song' is explored as part of the purported modernity of Vaughan Williams's inter-war 'pastoral' works.

As various authors have observed, Vaughan Williams's mature works often display a complex renegotiation of the materials and propositions of his earlier music, and in particular of the 'pastoral' genre as in previous years conceived. It is considered here that these works' frequently ambivalent treatment of voices communicates a powerful reconfiguration of, and challenge to, the 'intelligibility' of the composer's later music, as was sensed by contemporaneous critics. Finally, it is suggested that the modernity of Vaughan Williams's music might be explored through a consideration of its particular denial of a mode of musical 'speech': a mode of communication this thesis seeks throughout to explore and define, and which bears its Englishness as a critical construction, a cultural practice, and a material preoccupation of a national idea of song.

A Songful Tradition

Before proceeding to the discussion of Vaughan Williams's compositional debut in 1902, it is illuminating to consider how far 'song' has been claimed as a central and essential category of Vaughan Williams's music, and of twentieth-century English music more broadly. Contrary to Foreman's suggestion at the head of this Introduction, numerous critics have claimed that song is a genre whose Englishness is self-evident, and its role in nourishing a revival of national music, paramount. Though no scholar has turned detailed attention to the proposition that song presents itself as fundamental to the 'language and imagery' of English music (as Foreman suggests), it is clear that by exploring the status of song in histories of the so-called 'English Musical Renaissance', this category emerges as one that has nevertheless been assumed as central to English musical identity. A consideration of such assumptions provides a useful point of departure from which to explore the origins and implications of this idea in relation to Vaughan Williams's musical project.

In even the broadest accounts of 'the English imagination', song – and moreover its communal, convivial performance – is claimed as a historically distinctive and continuous national practice. As Peter Ackroyd sweepingly claimed in 2002,

[t]he English have always excelled at popular song, untouched by any conscious literary art. Dance songs, and part songs, and ballads, and processional chants, were once as much part of communal life as the social and religious ceremonies which decorated existence in a more formal way.²²

To take a more critical example, the title of Stephen Banfield's study of twentieth-century English music, *Sensibility and English Song*, cannot be taken as a neutral statement of its content. 'Sensibility' is mapped in Banfield's preface as a category within which to trace a

²² Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2002), 143.

mode of ‘self-communing’ English art song: a suggestion of emotional restraint appropriate to a generalized notion of English national character, though not a category that is explicitly probed, considered, or demonstrated by this author, either in his preface or in the study offered thereafter.²³

An emphasis upon the ‘Englishness’ of song was prominent within early twentieth-century musical culture itself. In 1934, Henry Cope Colles, a critic of English music and a proponent of Vaughan Williams in particular, suggested in *The Oxford History of Music* that ‘English song...whether for one voice or for many, is the prime factor in that renaissance which was led by Parry and Stanford’. With this in mind, he deferred special consideration of the genre to the end of the volume, where ‘an attempt is made to view the whole situation of the revival in English music’.²⁴

Perhaps more provocative was an earlier claim that English music – and even music of the Continent – had historically emerged from the ‘germ’ of an English communal song. This was a claim made at a formative moment in the institution of national music during the late nineteenth century: as Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling relate in their account of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’, the Duke of Albany delivered in 1881 a speech at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall as part of a strategy to bring the Royal College of Music into being. Here, he proclaimed that the thirteenth-century song ‘Sumer is icumen in’ contained ‘the germ of modern music, the direct and absolute progenitor to the oratorios of Handel, the symphonies of Beethoven, the operas of Wagner’. As the Duke proclaimed, moreover, this song is ultimately ‘a purely English creation, dealing with English sights and sounds – the cuckoo, the blooming meadow...the pastures of Berkshire’.²⁵

²³ Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. I, especially ix-xii.

²⁴ H. C. Colles, *The Oxford History of Music*, vol. VII Symphony and Drama 1850-1900 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 414.

²⁵ Cited in Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (2nd rev. ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 28. This quotation is derived from George Grove’s speeches, which were delivered by royal supporters as part of a fund-raising enterprise in aid of the institution of the Royal College of Music. See *Music in England: The Proposed Royal College of Music: Three Addresses delivered by H. R. H. The Duke of Edinburgh, H. R. H. The Duke of Albany, and H. R. H. Prince*

Seeking some seventy years later to put his finger on the ‘English idiom’ developed in the aftermath of Albany’s call to musical revival, Sir Jack Westrup maintained in a chapter contributed to *The Character of England* that ‘[t]he English vein is no sentimental fiction; but it is easier to admit than to define. It is certainly something more than the supposed heartiness of “merrie England”’. For Westrup, music for the English nation had long needed to serve a pragmatic purpose: social, religious, and charitable. Claiming both a lofty and an amateur function for English music, Westrup rather vaguely underlined that ‘the background of our music is the world of amateurs’. Indeed, perhaps the one definite claim he stakes amid his struggle to define ‘the English idiom’ in music is that ‘[t]he tradition we absorb is shaped by circumstances. Song still lives, because we are a singing nation. From Dowland to the present day the line, though sometimes thin, is scarcely broken’. Thus, he concludes that ‘[s]tyle and tradition are interlinked’, and that

[w]hile in central Europe the popularity of the *Musikant* has made instrumental music seem an obvious outlet, in England the tradition of song has cast its spell on everything we write. We glory in ‘The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear!’ This may have been at times a limitation, but it has also proved a source of strength.²⁶

In more recent years, Nigel Burton’s suggestion of an English tradition of song points to the historical continuity of the English choral tradition. As he maintains,

The choral tradition had always been the heart of English music, and was therefore the most likely breeding-ground for the inevitable revolution [i.e. of twentieth-century musical revival].²⁷

Christian, at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, December 12, 1881 (London: Murray, 1882). It is noteworthy that H. C. Colles also cites the thirteenth-century song ‘Sumer is icumen in’ as a point of origin for English music: see Henry Cope Colles, *Voice and Verse: A Study in English Song* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928) 19.

²⁶ J. A. Westrup, ‘Music’, in Ernest Baker (ed.), *The Character of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 397-407, 406-7. It is significant that Westrup offers a quotation here from Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem ‘I will make you brooches’, which Vaughan Williams had set at the beginning of the century as the third of his *Songs of Travel*. In that Westrup invokes this quotation here, it is clear that he recognizes an emphasis upon the centrality of song (and its singing and hearing by an English public) both in Vaughan Williams’s output, and in the ‘English’ style more broadly.

²⁷ Nigel Burton, ‘Oratorios and Cantatas’, in Nicholas Temperley (ed.), *The Athlone History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914* (London: Athlone, 1981), 214-41, 237.

Such claims seem once again to have been articulated during the years under discussion, as references to the English choral tradition were foregrounded by composers and critics in such a way that an assumption both of the performative and the compositional continuity of this national musical heritage is clear. As Gustav Holst maintained,

[a]s opposed to the ‘night’ of 1800, we are all agreed that the Tudor period was brilliant ‘day’, and most authorities hold that we are having another day now. The alternation of light and darkness, or of brilliance and dullness, is typical of the long history of English music. Another characteristic is the prevalence of good choral singing and good choral writing. We always write well for the chorus although the music itself may be of bad quality.²⁸

One need only turn to Percy Scholes’s account of music in England during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries to illuminate the extent to which singing – and especially choral and community singing – represented perhaps the most robust and continuous feature of English musical life.²⁹ It is no coincidence that Peter Pirie thus begins his history of twentieth-century English music by recalling the tale of Elgar’s hill-top walk in Wales, during which he supposedly overheard heard the voices of Welsh singers and was inspired to assimilate their songs as the ‘Welsh’ tune of his *Introduction and Allegro*.³⁰

The suggestion that song is a central category more particularly of Vaughan Williams’s music has similarly been assumed though rarely examined by scholars. The accessible, humanitarian, and participatory function of Vaughan Williams’s ‘tune’, and its particular capacity to project a certain ‘popularity’, emerges as a corollary to such ideas. These characterizations draw together the ways in which song has been implicitly understood as a broad category of, and essential basis for, the ‘Englishness’ of his music.

²⁸ See Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst (eds.), *Heirs and Rebels: Letters Written to Each Other and Occasional Writings on Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 56.

²⁹ See Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944: A Century of Musical Life in Britain as Reflected in the Pages of the Musical Times*, 2 vols. (London: Novello and Oxford University Press, 1947).

³⁰ See Peter J. Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 13.

One example is provided by Michael Trend, who attests to the fundamentally melodious or ‘tuneful’ basis of Vaughan Williams’s music when turning to an assessment of the composer’s output in the 1985 history chastised by Foreman. As Trend maintains,

Vaughan Williams was a tuneful composer: throughout his life he referred to his major compositions as his ‘tunes’. A student at Cornell University who played Vaughan Williams a movement from his own dissonant quartet on the piano provoked the observation: ‘If a tune *should* occur to you, my boy, don’t hesitate to write it down’. In his latter days, when deafness troubled him and he could not be sure of the balance of sound when listening to rehearsals of his works, Vaughan Williams would ask Roy Douglas, ‘Does the tune come through?’ Although as a young man Vaughan Williams had urged his fellow composers to do away with ‘good taste’ and said ‘what we want in England is *real* music’, that did not mean that he intended to write in a language incomprehensible to his listeners. He was convinced that music should be ‘for the people’, but he would ‘write up’ to them rather than write down. It is inconceivable that a narrow and dry academic style should have appealed to him.³¹

Trend’s assessment is noteworthy in that it draws an important link between Vaughan Williams’s own emphasis upon ‘tune’, on the one hand, and an assumption of the composer’s commitment to an ideal of musical community in intelligibility (and accessibility), on the other. This is a connection explored at length in the following chapters, for it is one that engages a long-held cultural assumption that song was central to this music’s claim to the status of a ‘language’, and was paramount to its ‘acceptance’ by a listening public.

An alignment of ‘melody’ with a purported ‘broad humanity’ in Vaughan Williams’s music has been assumed on numerous occasions. In 1953, Percy Young noted a ‘square tunefulness’ as a basic element of Vaughan Williams’s style: one which has ‘never lost its sociable qualities since the seventeenth century’.³² One of the earliest accounts of Vaughan Williams’s ‘tuneful invention’ made similar claims for the function of song in his works. In 1920, A. H. Fox Strangways offered a defence of Vaughan Williams’s music against criticism that the appropriation of folk song betrayed a creative poverty on the part of the composer.

³¹ Trend (1985), 103.

³² Percy M. Young, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1953), 184.

Strangways contends, rather, that the use of such tunes bore in Vaughan Williams's music a particular social function, and supported a broad aesthetic project:

It is not the tunes so much as the atmosphere of breezy good-fellowship they spread round them that carries us away; they are not set, like jewels, nor arranged, like flowers, but are used, like common everyday things...he intends his tune – not an eight-bar thing, but tuneful invention – to be a vital statement... [this music] is a language. It does not lose sight of the past; it takes the musical phraseology we all know, the figures that a hundred songs have made familiar, the chords on which climax has pivoted time out of mind, and sets them anew.³³

In this reading, 'tuneful invention' – as derived from an ideal of the 'good-fellowship' of folk communities – is implicated in this music's function as a familiar musical 'language'. Such ideas were promoted by Vaughan Williams throughout his theories of national music, and can also be shown to inform both his work as a facilitator of music-making and education, as much as the narratives and preoccupations of a number of his works.

A further emphasis upon song in Vaughan Williams's music is found in Lewis Foreman's Introduction to the tentatively revisionist volume, *Vaughan Williams in Perspective*. Here, Foreman frames the volume by suggesting that

Vaughan Williams was a product of his times, but he also transcended them by developing a language to which a wide spectrum of music lovers could respond. His appeal is surely a melodic one, for the basis of his work is the line: a melody with a visionary quality and a broad humanity. As Michael Kennedy has remarked: 'its appeal at several levels makes it a remarkable expression of the national spirit in music'...[as a] [f]olk-song collector, editor of *The English Hymnal* and later *Songs of Praise*, editor of Purcell, organist and conductor, [Vaughan Williams], whether consciously or unconsciously, managed a synthesis of what we now see as archetypical national elements...³⁴

³³ A. H. Fox Strangways, 'Vaughan Williams', *Music & Letters*, 1.2 (March, 1920), 78-86.

³⁴ Foreman, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 3.

Foreman's reference to Michael Kennedy's observation of an 'appeal at all levels' – as much as this music's expression of 'the national spirit' – is suggestive of the trends of a tradition of studies emerging in the aftermath of the composer's death, and against which the corrective efforts of recent scholars, anxious as to the uncritical constructions of Englishness therein, have responded. Here, in a scholarship now appropriated as an important reception history itself, are the roots of the idea that 'song' – whether embodied by melody, hymn, the choral tradition, or that pervasive presence, folk song – is, as a self-evidently central category of Vaughan Williams's musical 'language', foundational both to its accessibility and to its purported Englishness.

In 1950, for example, Hubert Foss asserted with unflinching confidence that

Vaughan Williams is at base a melodic composer...The violin solo in *The Lark Ascending* has a singing quality; the melismas are vocal, apt though they be for the fingers stopping the strings. Folk-song naturally attracted this man of the earth because it was melodic....The great choral tradition of England is melodic, not harmonic, despite the Anglican chant; not only with 'voice and verse' has Vaughan Williams sought his melodic ideal, but also in forging a singing part for an instrument, in bringing a voice into his *Pastoral Symphony*, in making his viola and 'cello and other inner instruments play parts far more vocal and expressive than the voice parts which Hindemith provided for his *Marienleben* songs. He may ask of his players something they are not accustomed to playing, but he asks nothing that, given the string range and pitch, choralists could not sing.³⁵

Foss's characterizations are worth dwelling upon momentarily, not least because he suggests something of what is considered throughout the current study (and is implied by A. H. Fox Strangways, above): namely, that the songs of Vaughan Williams's music nourish a mode of musical accessibility through reference to a participatory cultural experience of song and singing. Further, while Foss's uncritical alignments of this music with certain assumed and unexamined features of national character are problematic, the freedom of his judgements points to an intuitive response to this music that bears the historical truth of its own time. Free of the self-consciousness of a scholarship now tentative in its evocation of any easily

³⁵ Foss (1950), 43.

demonstrable signals of musical Englishness, Foss's study is useful in that it claims a stark and self-evident connection between song, melody, and vocality as a foundational proposition of Vaughan Williams's music, and furthermore, as fundamental both to its communicative propositions, and to cultural understandings of the 'Englishness' of its statement.

Indeed, perhaps the guiding metaphor of Foss's study is its claim that Vaughan Williams's music not only sings, but that it somehow 'speaks'. This might be considered a further construction of critical reception. Yet given that such constructions have in recent years been identified and preliminarily interrogated as such, these responses might now become useful in exploring the dialogue between the cultural understanding and material preoccupations of Vaughan Williams's 'tuneful' music. As is clear in Foss's characterization, this music boldly communicated to contemporaneous audiences a quality that has since become both veiled and rather uncomfortably side-stepped: namely, its linguistic function. Significantly, this property, both of melody and by implication, song, becomes the guiding metaphor of Vaughan Williams's stated project for an English national music.

With this in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that by 1942, the *Radio Times* supported a BBC broadcast of Vaughan Williams's music in honour of his seventieth birthday, projecting a 'portrait' of the composer's music and an invitation to its hearing in the following terms:

To know [Vaughan Williams's] music at all is to realise – whether you like it or not – that it is the music of a big man. And it is quintessentially English! ...The keynote of the man is sincerity, forthrightness. He does not follow fashion. He avoids rhetoric and sensation...Vaughan Williams's music speaks with a direct, moving, and irresistible appeal...The special broadcasts this week will give the listener a clear and helpful idea of the composer's most characteristic works. In them you will hear an authentic voice, an English voice, speaking plainly, and with moving power too...Homely, modest, retiring, but with a kind of rustic directness, he will not talk about himself or much encourage others to do so. But his music is eloquent and revealing enough. Listen to it, with a keen, attentive ear. It will endure, as the most profoundly English utterance of our time.³⁶

³⁶ C. B. Rees, 'Ralph Vaughan Williams', as cited in Hinnells (1999), 172.

It is the project of this thesis to explore how and to whom this music was considered to 'speak' with a 'sincere' and authentic English voice, and how such responses might become useful in illuminating certain procedures of Vaughan Williams's music. It is clear that song has long been associated with this music: with its purported expression of a direct English voice, as much as its supposedly social basis and function. What must now be considered is how such ideas emerged, and how such propositions might be profitable as part of a discussion of musical process. As such, this study considers how an historical and cultural idea of 'song' might be reconstructed such that it illuminates the communicative qualities of Vaughan Williams's music, as claimed by the composer himself, as reported by contemporaneous critics, and, as I suggest, as projected by the materials of the composer's 'songful' works.

Chapter 1

Song and the Revitalization of English Music

I do hold that any school of national music must be fashioned on the basis of the raw material of its own national song.

~ Vaughan Williams (1932)¹

Introduction

A Dorset Folk Song

In April 1902, Vaughan Williams made his compositional debut with the song ‘Linden Lea’.² Though not the first song he had composed, it was the first selected for publication, and under the subtitle ‘A Dorset Folk Song’,³ it appeared in the first issue of a new journal called *The Vocalist*: a publication devoted to instructing and edifying ‘those fond of singing’ – be they professional, amateur, or listener.⁴ Noting that ‘a particular feature of this magazine will be articles on voice training and voice production’, the editor’s extensive introduction underlined that the journal’s inauguration emerged essentially from a commitment to ‘the improvement of musical taste’. To this end, its regenerative and nationalistic aims sought practical application through the provision of new and ‘artistic’ songs in a ‘conveniently sized’ format suitable for singing at the drawing room piano as much as on the concert platform: songs of ‘good’, ‘intelligent’, and ‘sincere’ quality, offered as an antidote to the ‘sentimental’ ballad so

¹ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (2nd repr. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 41. ‘National Music’ was a series of lectures delivered at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania in 1932, and published in 1934 by Oxford University Press. The lectures, part of a series instituted in honour of a graduate of the College, Mary Flexner, were subsequently published in *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

² *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 13-16.

³ *Ibid.*, 13. It is noteworthy that in the manuscript the title page bears only the words ‘Linden Lea, Song, Words (In Dorsetshire Dialect) by W. Barnes’. See British Library, London. Add. MS. 62906. (All references to this library hereafter refer to the ‘BL’). It is significant, nonetheless, that ‘Linden Lea’ appeared under the subtitle ‘A Dorset Folk Song’ upon its earliest publication in *The Vocalist*. William Barnes appended no such subtitle either to ‘My Orchard in Linden Lea’ or ‘Blackwore Maidens’, both of which were set by Vaughan Williams as ‘Linden Lea’ and ‘Blackwore by the Stour’, respectively. Both songs were originally published under the subtitle ‘A Dorset Folk Song’. See *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 2-3 and *The Vocalist*, 2.1 (May, 1902), 49-52. See also William Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1888), 185-6. The particular significance of ‘Linden Lea’’s appended subtitle becomes clear in light of the discussion below. It should also be noted here that the re-publication of the song in 1912 bears the modified subtitle ‘A Dorset Song’. See Vaughan Williams, ‘Linden Lea: A Dorset Song’ (London: Boosey & Co., 1912).

⁴ *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 2-3.

popular with singers, and so prominent in English musical life, as the editor laments.⁵

That Vaughan Williams should make his debut with a song subtitled ‘A Dorset Folk Song’, and in a journal devoted to a revivalist project of this kind, may seem to represent an entirely appropriate introduction for a composer whose reception has been profoundly shaped by perceptions of his role as ‘the leading member’ of a group of English composers consciously devoted to rehabilitating English music during the early decades of the twentieth century:⁶ a composer who, as Alain Frogley has considered, is universally – though problematically – understood to have recreated a ‘vernacular’ for English music at this time,⁷ seeking musical regeneration through liberation from a nineteenth-century legacy of ‘sentimental’ English music, as much as from the crippling dominance of foreign models and their imitation.⁸ As has been widely documented, such revival led to the development of what has since been awkwardly characterized as an ‘historical-pastoral’ style:⁹ a problematic category whose treatment by scholars has become the subject of increasing scrutiny in studies of English music, but which, especially with Vaughan Williams in mind, continues to invite consideration in light of the composer’s avowed preoccupation with ‘English folk-song, Elizabethan and Jacobean music, and a philosophy of musical citizenship, which he both practiced and preached.’¹⁰

Though revisionist work has in recent years highlighted the often ‘simplistic’ and ‘distortive’ manner in which Vaughan Williams’s nationalism has traditionally been approached – including the extent to which the complexity of his attitude to folk song

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Revill (1991), 25.

⁷ Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), xi-xvii and 1-22.

⁸ As Jeremy Dibble has pointed out, ‘[m]uch has been made of Vaughan Williams’s disenchantment with Britain’s musical scene at the turn of the century, of his need to find salvation in native resources’. See Dibble, ‘Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: The Creation of a Tradition’, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 25-47, 37. The nature of such disenchantment is articulated by Vaughan Williams in writings such as ‘A Sermon to Vocalists’, *The Vocalist*, 1.8 (November, 1902), 227-9; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 25-30. His anxiety regarding the inhibiting influence of foreign models upon the development of English music is articulated in a number of his writings: see, for example, ‘Who Wants the English Composer?’, *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 9.1 (1912), 11-15; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 39-42.

⁹ This particular term is used by Hughes and Stradling (2001), 74-5.

¹⁰ Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, ‘Vaughan Williams, Ralph’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press). Accessed 21-Jan-2013.

demands considerable attention¹¹ – it remains a curiously neglected fact of the composer's debut that some pages prior to the publication of his Dorset Folk Song, Vaughan Williams had also contributed an article entitled 'A School of English Music' to *The Vocalist*, in which, rather astonishingly, he argued with some vehemence against the adoption of folk song as a 'remedy' to the 'general verdict' of the 'unmusical state of the English nation'.¹² Alluding obliquely to the work of folk revivalists such as Lucy Broadwood (with whose song collections he had become familiar in the years before he became an active collector in 1903),¹³ the composer betrays a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the adoption of 'folk song' by English composers, maintaining that

[o]f late years an energetic band of pioneers has sprung up, full of the noble idea of reviving the musical prestige which England once enjoyed. To them it seemed impossible that we were at the core unmusical...In fact, English music was not dead, but only dormant, and the question was, how to re-awaken it. Here the pioneers of the English school made a great mistake; they sought a panacea, and they sought it abroad. This universal remedy was to be the 'Folk-song'; on the continent its exploitation was in full swing...

We cannot but be grateful for the energy and true love of what is beautiful which has inspired the collectors of English country tunes...but new wine cannot be put into old bottles, and it is surely doubtful if any good result will follow the extremely artificial course of setting before a composer music which is entirely foreign to his temperament, and which even the peasantry have long since ceased to sing.¹⁴

Challenging the 'sincerity' of drawing upon 'folk' and 'rural' materials and practices in the development of an English art music – a challenge issued apparently on the basis that folk song was not sung by the people of England, and that a national compositional 'utterance' must be a language spoken, played, or sung 'naturally and unpremeditatedly' by both

¹¹ Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 3, n.5, and 10-11.

¹² Vaughan Williams, 'A School of English Music', *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 8; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 17-18.

¹³ See Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (1964; 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, repr. Clarendon Press, 2002), 19, and Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 62. For further details of Vaughan Williams's early engagement with published folk song collections, see Vaughan Williams's article 'Let Us Remember...Early Days', *English Dance and Song*, 6.3 (1942), 27-8; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 251-3. Here, the composer reflects upon his 'early reactions to folk song'. See also Michael Holyoake, 'Towards a Folk Song Awakening: Vaughan Williams in Bournemouth, 1902', *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 46 (October, 2009), 9-15, 10.

¹⁴ Vaughan Williams, 'A School of English Music' (1902), 8.

composer and people – Vaughan Williams unfolds a critique of English folk song that reads as a startling disavowal of a body of materials to which he was later and throughout his life to attribute his musical ‘salvation’:¹⁵

In truth, the nature of our national melody has been misunderstood – we are not unmusical, but insincere. 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. These natural emotions need not necessarily be those of the peasant, for the rural element in national music is only one of many. The ‘Folk’ music of Bohemia and of other countries is the music which is sung and played by the peasantry in those parts of the country which still remain primitive and unsophisticated; and it so happens that Dvořák (for instance) was born among these surroundings, so that ‘Folk’ music was absolutely a part of his musical life, a language in which he speaks, naturally and unpremeditatedly. The list of great composers to whom the country song is the natural basis of expression is, however, extremely small...¹⁶

With this in mind, Vaughan Williams concludes that

[e]xperience of the past is a warning to avoid artificiality. In former times, musical England came to grief by trying to be foreign; no less surely shall we now fail by trying to be English. 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.¹⁷

It is perhaps one of the most baffling omissions of Vaughan Williams scholarship that this peculiar debut has received so little attention from critics, especially given the recent publication of David Manning’s volume of the composer’s early and little-known writings, which reprints ‘A School of English Music’ in full for the first time since its initial appearance in 1902, and which bears an introduction in which the editor draws attention to the ‘curiosity’ inherent in the article’s publication alongside ‘Linden Lea’:¹⁸ a curiosity

¹⁵ Kennedy (1980), 30.

¹⁶ Vaughan Williams, ‘A School of English Music’ (1902), 8. This is strongly reminiscent of statements made by Elgar in his Peyton Lectures (1905-6): see, for example, ‘A Future for English Music’ and ‘English Composers’, in Percy M. Young (ed.), *A Future for English Music and Other Lectures by Edward Elgar* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968), 22-65 and 79-95.

¹⁷ Vaughan Williams, ‘A School of English Music’ (1902), 8.

¹⁸ Manning (ed.) (2008), 5.

heightened by the fact that this song is not a ‘real’ Dorset Folk Song. While scholars have seemed almost unwilling to confront the perplexing statement made with the publication of this song – and further to confront ‘Linden Lea’'s apparent dialogue with Vaughan Williams’s directive that ‘the national English style must be modeled on the personal style of English musicians’ – this article clearly demands some exploration and interpretation, particularly in light of the power with which the composer’s folkloristic activity continues to shape the reception of his music.¹⁹

Indeed, so powerful is this reception that aside from a handful of fleeting references to the strangeness of this literary debut, scholars have habitually overlooked the contradictions surrounding ‘Linden Lea’, and whether reference is made to its subtitle or not have offered a series of uncritical responses to its apparent embodiment of a provocative tension between ‘folk song’ and ‘art song’. Wilfrid Mellers, for example, judges that

‘Linden Lea’ has – though it is plain diatonic rather than modal – the pristine flavour of a genuine folk-song. Having heard it, one seems to have known it all one’s life; it would seem that for the young Vaughan Williams, as for Barnes, art began as discovery of the values inherent in English rural life.²⁰

Though Mellers offers no clear account of how ‘Linden Lea’ communicates ‘the pristine flavour of genuine folk-song’ (emphasizing, rather, its ‘diatonic’ artfulness), his veiled reference to Vaughan Williams’s own narrative of ‘discovering’ the folk song ‘Dives and Lazarus’ in *English County Songs* during 1893 is unmistakable. As the composer famously recalled towards the end of his life, these tunes evoked in him a profound ‘recognition’: a sense that here was a music he had always known, a music that had always been, lurking in

¹⁹ In 2001, for example, Frank Dineen assessed that ‘In every biography of the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, his meeting with Charles Potiphar, the Ingrave countryman who could not read or write, is decisive... When Potiphar sang “Bushes and Briars” to the composer at Ingrave on 4th December, 1903, the soul of Vaughan Williams was charged with the energy of England’s musical past. All vacillation as to his future path ceased. The needle of his creative compass found its magnetic north’. See Dineen, *Ralph’s People: The Ingrave Secret* (Somerset: Albion Press, 2001), 1-2.

²⁰ Wilfrid Mellers, *Percy Grainger* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 161. See also Kennedy (1980), 77.

his consciousness.²¹ Mellers's response to this 'Dorset Folk Song' seems thus to locate the song's folkloristic quality in the subsequent claims of its composer, for as this author suggests, 'Linden Lea' bears not a 'modal' tune, or any harmonic signal to folkloristic utterance: it is squarely diatonic in its elegant and periodic cadential articulations. Indeed, the regularity with which 'Linden Lea's' phrases are organized is clear confirmation that the song is not a folk song. In this way, its demand to be heard, nevertheless, as some kind of 'folk song', is particularly provocative.

How then is 'Linden Lea' to be interpreted? It is significant that as Mellers underlines, the tune of 'Linden Lea' is indeed instantly memorable: strophic, regular, 'plain', and 'natural', the song's melodiousness seems to lodge itself in both the memory and the voice. There is something consciously 'popular' in this song (as Vaughan Williams himself acknowledged some months before its publication),²² such that it seems somehow always to have existed. In this respect, 'Linden Lea' issues an invitation: an invitation to its 'remembering' or 'recalling', and in this, perhaps, an invitation to its singing.

When considered in light of Vaughan Williams's earliest search for a 'sincere' school of English music, 'Linden Lea' offers a provocative statement, and one which highlights its particular quality as a 'language' to be spoken, sung, or played 'naturally and unpremeditatedly' by both composer and people. In this, the song's dialogue with 'A School of English Music' points to a complex role for an idea of 'folk song' in the speaking and hearing of this 'national' musical language: one that is elaborated throughout the broad corpus of Vaughan Williams's writings.

With all this in mind, it is pertinent to consider further how 'Linden Lea' might be interpreted, probing how far this unusual compositional debut may shed light upon the

²¹ As Vaughan Williams himself put it, 'I had that sense of recognition – "here's something which I have known all my life – only I didn't know it!"'. Vaughan Williams, 'Musical Autobiography', in Foss (1950), 18-38, 32.

²² See Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 41, letter number 28. Writing to his cousin Ralph Wedgwood in 'early 1902' (according to Cobbe's annotation), Vaughan Williams noted that he had 'sold [his] soul to a publisher' [*The Vocalist*], who was going to publish a number of his songs. These he describes as 'pot boiling songs', though qualifies 'that is to say not real pot boilers – that is to say they are quite good – I'm not ashamed of them – as they are more or less simple and popular in character'.

considerable complexity of Vaughan Williams's early attitude towards folk song.²³ How, and why, it is asked, did the composer revoke this early ambivalence towards folk materials? Can 'A School of English Music' be considered merely a piece of youthful juvenilia, and even if so, how might the statement made by its publication alongside a song subtitled 'A Dorset Folk Song' be elucidated – a gesture which points to the self-conscious staging of a debut as a 'national' composer, opening a critical space around 'folk song', and around the very ideal of 'song' itself?

As will become clear, Vaughan Williams's early ideal of 'national song' offers a rather different account of his folkloristic project – and of the themes and preoccupations of his writings and lectures – than is currently available in the field. Far from representing a tentative early stance from which the composer later retreated entirely,²⁴ the ideas expounded in 'A School of English Music' are indicative of a series of preoccupations which lie at the heart of Vaughan Williams's lifelong activity as a 'national' composer: ideals of musical community, communication, and participation. These ideals illuminate the curious circumstances surrounding his 'conversion' to folk song, before he became an active folk

²³ Vaughan Williams's study with Max Bruch in Berlin is likely to have played an important part in nourishing his early interest in folk music. He studied with Bruch for six months from October 1897. See Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 74-5, letter number 64. Bruch often used folk music as a source of melody, and he derived melodic material from the songs of countries including Scotland (*Scottish Fantasy*, op. 46, 1880); Sweden (*Swedish Dances*, op. 63, 1892); and Russia (*Suite on Russian Folk Melodies*, op. 79b, 1905). See also the cantata *Das Lied von der Glocke* (The Song of the Bell), op. 45 (1877-8) and *Kol Nidrei*, op. 47 (1881). The latter work is indebted to Hebrew songs, which Bruch drew from Jewish members of a choir he conducted in Berlin. For Bruch's interest in folk song, see Christopher Fifield, *Max Bruch, His Life and Works* (new ed., Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), especially 154-73, and also by Fifield, 'Bruch, Max', *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web*. Accessed 3-May-2014. For Vaughan Williams's correspondence from Berlin, including references to his lessons with Bruch and a letter to Vaughan Williams from Bruch himself, see Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 20-2, letter number 10; 23, letter number 11; and 23-4, letter number 12.

²⁴ This is the position taken by David Manning in a brief article of 2008, in which he draws attention to the way in which 'A School of English Music' was reflective of Vaughan Williams's 'resistant' attitude towards folk song during his early career. Having made this important point, however, Manning quickly concludes that 'the 1902 doubts did not last long'. See Manning, 'Exploring Vaughan Williams's Writings', *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 41 (February, 2008), 15-18, 17. Eric Saylor takes an implicitly similar position in his 2003 PhD thesis: see Saylor, 'The Significance of Nation in the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams' (Ph.D. Diss, University of Michigan, 2003), 14-32. While quoting from 'A School of English Music' in a discussion of the composer's ideas of 'national' music, Saylor does not draw attention to the composer's disavowal of folk materials (and neither is the article's publication alongside 'Linden Lea' noted). When later discussing Vaughan Williams's early development of a national musical style, moreover, this author maintains that '[i]n retrospect, it seems probable that Vaughan Williams's pre-war writings on national music (e.g. "A School of National Music [1902]" [sic] and "Who Wants the English Composer? [1912]"') have been misconstrued as public pronouncements when in essence they were personal musings preparing him for the personal challenges that lay ahead'. See Saylor (2003), 15, and 38. In light of the way in which Vaughan Williams staged the publication of 'A School of English Music' as part of his public debut as a national composer, it may be questionable that the article can credibly be characterized as a 'personal musing'. As David Manning notes, Vaughan Williams 'frequently expressed his views about musical topics in public', speaking to audiences through 'lectures, BBC broadcasts, programme notes, articles, and books'. See Manning, 'Exploring Vaughan Williams's Writings' (2008), 15.

collector during 1903: a conversion hitherto obscured by partial documentation of his early career. As such, the ideals expounded through this compositional and literary debut also highlight the extent to which Vaughan Williams's lifelong preoccupation with folk song may be considered as much a concern with folk songs themselves, as with an ideal of 'song' – and of its 'intelligible' status in an idealized musical community – more broadly.

The Curiosity of 'Linden Lea'

As David Manning has highlighted, Vaughan Williams's writings demand considerable scrutiny. Emphasizing the value of a new volume of the composer's articles and lectures in an Introduction to his 2008 collection, Manning notes the volume's inclusion of 'A School of English Music' in full, also remarking here upon this article's 'curious' publication alongside 'Linden Lea'. While offering no interpretation of the gesture embodied by such a publication, Manning's brief discussion simultaneously makes unavoidable his recognition of the provocative proposition apparently performed with this Dorset Folk Song, for he muses that

[t]he connection of this tune to a folk song is unclear, as Kennedy implies: 'Vaughan Williams developed a type of song midway between folk song and art song, for "Linden Lea" owes as much to Schumann's "Widmung" as to any folk tune.'²⁵

In this way, both Manning and Michael Kennedy (like Mellers) uncritically highlight the way in which 'Linden Lea' bears an awkward relation to 'real' folk song. Yet despite Kennedy's acknowledgement of the status of 'Linden Lea' as an 'artistic' song of folkloristic quality, it is important that elsewhere in the study from which this quotation is drawn, he underplays precisely the song's complex statement: a statement of the role to be played by folk song in an English national art music.

²⁵ Manning (ed.) (2008), 5, n.1.

Indeed, Kennedy had also drawn attention to 'A School of English Music' in his 1964 monograph, reprinting a selection of the article with some brief interpretation, and maintaining, ultimately, that

These views [as articulated in Vaughan Williams's article] are not inconsistent with any which he expresses later. They emphasize merely that Vaughan Williams's style, so hard-won, is the man himself. But a further study of folk song, before he became an active collector, helped him to achieve his own salvation. This is made clear by press reports of the Oxford University extension lectures which he gave in the autumn of 1902 at Pokesdown Technical School, Bournemouth. Many of the phrases and metaphors are forerunners of more famous versions in *National Music* (1934).²⁶

Kennedy's voice has spoken with some power in claiming a simple kinship between Vaughan Williams's early attitude towards folk song and that outlined in later lectures such as *National Music*, for subsequent and notably brief references to this article are habitually derived from his account.²⁷ By omitting entirely the composer's insistence that folk music was somehow

²⁶ Kennedy (1980), 30. It should be noted, however, that in a foreword to the second edition of *National Music and Other Essays*, Kennedy underlines that scholars should avoid a 'dogmatic' attitude towards Vaughan Williams's folkloristic activity, advising readers to steer clear of claims that 'what "liberated" [Vaughan Williams's] muse was the collecting of English folk-songs which he undertook from 1903'. As Kennedy continues, 'He himself never claimed that *by itself* it did. "The English school of composition will not be founded on English folk-song", he said in 1903...He was under no illusions about that'. See Kennedy, Foreword to *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), v-xi, vii. As is clear, Kennedy gives no account of the circumstances in which Vaughan Williams's ambivalent attitude towards folk song was, in '1903', expressed, however, and offers no reference for the curious reader.

²⁷ The few scholars who draw attention to 'A School of English Music' make reference to its contents as printed and interpreted in Kennedy's monograph: see Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 11-12, and Banfield, (1985), vol. I, 76. Neither study mentions the article's publication alongside 'Linden Lea', a song discussed by Banfield without reference to the subtitle found in *The Vocalist*. In Frogley's brief reference to 'A School of English Music', its contents are rather underplayed, and having made only fleeting reference to its existence (offering no direct quotation), this author concludes simply that '[Vaughan Williams's] views on both nationalism and folksong remained more flexible and judicious than they were to appear in parts of *National Music*'. This is an uncomfortable assessment of what David Manning has since emphasized was an 'explicit rejection' of folk song during this period: 'a view quite contrary to the beliefs set out much later in *National Music* and elsewhere'. Manning similarly offers no explanation of the composer's subsequent conversion to the power of folk materials in national music, however. See Manning, 'Exploring Vaughan Williams's Writings' (2008), 17, and Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 11-12, and 12, n.23. Michael Valillancourt's chapter on Vaughan Williams's early instrumental music might further be consulted here, for this author also derives his account of 'A School of English Music' from Kennedy's study, and endorses Kennedy's interpretation of the views expounded in the article as being 'in accord with Vaughan Williams's later attitudes towards folk song'. Vaillancourt seems thereafter to avoid an exploration of the possible significance of 'A School of English Music', for having acknowledged that '[i]t reveals an attitude towards the viability of folksong in concert music far different from that suggested by the later and more familiar writings', he swiftly concludes that '[w]hile we can debate the significance of such statements in light of the composer's later writings, one point is clear: in 1902 Vaughan Williams was in many ways a different man than the composer of *Hugh the Drover* or *A Pastoral Symphony*.' See

‘foreign’, ‘insincere’, and ‘artificial’ to the temperament of ‘English musicians’, his presentation of the article has perhaps worked to underplay Vaughan Williams’s early anxiety towards an adoption of folk materials by English composers, this exacerbated by Kennedy’s curious failure to mention that the article was published alongside ‘Linden Lea’, or that the song was upon publication subtitled ‘A Dorset Folk Song’.²⁸ While this author’s narrative bears one of only two accounts of the contents of the Bournemouth lectures available to the field,²⁹ moreover, his partial and selective outline of their contents serves to mask the significance of a lecture series that represents the first point at which Vaughan Williams appears to have ‘converted’ to the power of folk music, this a result of some apparent period of ‘further study’ – before he became an active collector – which is neither described nor explained in Kennedy’s account.³⁰

It is important to consider, however, that as Kennedy himself suggests, the views expressed by Vaughan Williams in ‘A School of English Music’ are not entirely divorced from those articulated later. In the notorious *National Music* – lectures which have played a powerful role in fuelling simplistic interpretations of the composer’s musical project³¹ – Vaughan Williams is demonstrably concerned here, as in 1902, with the compositional challenge of being able to ‘say something worth saying’, and with a persistent emphasis upon a mode of musical ‘utterance’ and in turn, ‘intelligibility’. At the opening of *National Music*, he maintained that

Art, and especially the art of music, uses knowledge as a means to the evocation of personal experience in terms which will be intelligible to and command the sympathy of others. These others must clearly be primarily those who by race, tradition, and cultural experience are the nearest to him; in fact those of his own nation, or other kind of homogeneous community...³²

Vaillancourt, ‘Coming of Age: The Earliest Orchestral Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams’, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 23-46, 25.

²⁸ See Kennedy (1980), 30, and 50-51 (where ‘Linden Lea’ is mentioned for the first time).

²⁹ A more comprehensive account of Vaughan Williams’s Bournemouth lectures than is offered by Kennedy has recently been provided in Michael Holyoake’s ‘Towards a Folk Song Awakening’ (2009), 9-15.

³⁰ Kennedy (1980), 30-6. References to these lectures as framed and summarized by Kennedy are found in numerous studies: see, for example, Revill (1991), 26, referencing Kennedy at n.11.

³¹ See Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 17.

³² Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 1.

Reiterating this central tenet in his conclusions, Vaughan Williams framed the final statements of *National Music* by emphasizing the extent to which

[a]rt has to give a message from one man to another...you can speak to a man only in a language which you both know...³³
[musical] leaders will have their duty – to speak to the people in the language which they understand.³⁴

This draws into sharp focus Vaughan Williams's emphasis upon the notion of 'musical citizenship' referenced by Frogley and Ottaway, above: a notion of musical community predicated upon an ideal of shared experience, a shared musical language.³⁵ Such propositions emerge throughout the composer's writings, foregrounding an ideal of communal expressive purpose that is also suggestive of his emphasis upon 'the personal style of English musicians': an ideal somewhat at odds with a style that is purely 'the man himself', as suggested in Kennedy's interpretation.³⁶

In 'British Music' of 1914, for example, Vaughan Williams began by declaring that

A work of art, if it is to have strength and vitality – in short, if it is to have any value, must grow out of the character of its inventor. It must be the outcome of the desire for self-expression on the part of some person or group of persons, otherwise it means nothing either to those who make it or those who hear, see, or read it... If an art is to live it must spring direct from the life and character of the people where it had its origin...³⁷

³³ Ibid., 59.

³⁴ Ibid., 68.

³⁵ Appeals to Vaughan Williams's project of 'musical citizenship' are made by numerous authors, though are rarely discussed with detailed reference to either the composer's music, or to his writings. One such instance is provided by Jeremy Dibble, who points out that Vaughan Williams's ideals for national music derived heavily from his teacher Hubert Parry's devotion to 'a higher democratic purpose: one of appeal, accessibility and education. These...values remained the touchstone of Parry's belief in musical citizenship and democracy, values that were propagated by Vaughan Williams in his own choral works.' See Dibble, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 35-6. The particular mode of 'accessibility' and 'education' desired by Vaughan Williams, however, may be considered to reach beyond that of Parry, as is suggested below, and as has been asserted by Lewis Foreman, who notes that 'Vaughan Williams was a product of his times, but he also transcended them by developing a language to which a wide spectrum of music lovers would respond'. See Foreman, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 3.

³⁶ Vaughan Williams's concern with an intelligible musical 'language', to be understood by all, derives in part from the ideals of William Morris, whose view that art must be part of the daily life of every man, to be shared by learned and unlearned 'as a language that all people can understand', was influential in shaping the musical and political ideals both of Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, as Paul Harrington has pointed out. See Harrington, in Norris (ed.) (1989), 106-27.

³⁷ Vaughan Williams, 'British Music', *The Music Student*, 7.1-4 (1914), 5-7, 25-7, 47-8, 63-4; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 43-56, 43.

In 'Who Wants the English Composer?', Vaughan Williams invited the reader to consider more urgently the possibility of a communal expressive voice – the voice of English musicians – as somehow articulate in national music:

Is it not possible that [the English composer] has something to say to his own countrymen that no one of any other age and any other country can say? When English people realize this – that the composer is their own voice speaking through his art those things which they can only dimly grope for – then indeed the English composer will be wanted...We must cultivate a sense of musical citizenship...³⁸

At the heart of Vaughan Williams's concern that an 'intelligible' national music should speak with the voices both of composer and people, however, is an insistent belief that a vital source of inspiration for composers was to be found in English folk song. As he reflected in a 1938 article,

[h]ere at last was song which fulfilled the highest canons of art and yet could be understood by all; melody moreover which fitted the peculiar shy undemonstrative Anglo-Saxon nature.³⁹

Yet as is highlighted by the quotation which forms the epigraph to the current chapter, the nature of Vaughan Williams's belief in the utility of these 'intelligible' melodies – especially as inspiration to an 'artistic' musical idiom – is anything but clear. As he reiterated throughout his career, 'any school of national music must be fashioned on the basis of the *raw material* of its own national song' (emphasis mine). Oliver Neighbour has highlighted the opacity inherent in this locution: ⁴⁰ one which has contributed to a critical backlash against the supposed insularity of the composer's nationalism,⁴¹ and further to

³⁸ Vaughan Williams, 'Who Wants the English Composer?' (1912), in Manning (ed.) (2008), 39–42.

³⁹ Vaughan Williams, 'Traditional Arts in the Twentieth Century', *English Dance and Song*, 2.6 (1938), 98–9; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 243–5, 243.

⁴⁰ Oliver Neighbour, 'The Place of the Eighth among Vaughan Williams's Symphonies', in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 213–33, 218. A preoccupation with the 'raw material' of music emerges in a number of the composer's writings: see, for example, 'Who Wants the English Composer?', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 39–42, 41.

⁴¹ See Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 17.

stringent critiques of his role and methods in ‘expropriating’ folk songs from the mouths of an English peasantry.⁴² It might be suggested, however, that when read out of context, this locution remains as partially understood as the related concept of an art music that was to be expressive of ‘musical citizenship’: a sense that national music was somehow to be the expression of the ‘life’ of the ‘community’,⁴³ or as articulated elsewhere,

we should know and love each other through our art...I believe that one’s own community, one’s own language, customs, and religion are essential to our spiritual health...Everything of value in our spiritual and cultural life springs from our own soil.⁴⁴

Of course, the idealization and romanticizing of folk song as the ‘voice of the people’ – a ‘cultural artifact uniquely expressive of the feelings of the nation’ – was part of the larger rhetoric of the folk revival’s ‘invention of tradition’, which, as Julian Onderdonk has pointed out, was in turn related to ‘an emerging ruralist nationalism that sought reassurance and inspiration in England’s pre-industrial past’.⁴⁵ As Onderdonk contends, however, such idealization embodied, at least as far as Vaughan Williams was concerned, a complex set of *musical* ideals that critics have rather overlooked.⁴⁶ With this in mind, it is ironic that

⁴² See in particular Harker (1985), especially at 209.

⁴³ Vaughan Williams, ‘Who Wants the English Composer?’, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 40.

⁴⁴ This manifesto, reiterated by Vaughan Williams throughout his career, was repeated as part of a speech made in Manchester in 1953. Cited in Kennedy (1980), 324.

⁴⁵ See Julian Onderdonk, ‘Vaughan Williams’s Folksong Transcriptions: A Case of Idealization?’, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 118-38, 119, and further, Boyes (1993), vii, in which this author similarly underlines the extent to which ‘the songs and dances of the “folk” were, it was believed, in a literal sense the voice of the people, a distillation of that authentic English culture which was on the verge of extinction’.

⁴⁶ See Onderdonk, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 120-1, and 121, n.6. Onderdonk makes clear that ‘Vaughan Williams’s collecting work was inconsistent, and his views on folksong often contradictory. On the one hand, he romanticized and idealized folksong and distorted its musical and cultural realities. On the other, he neither sentimentalized his singers nor falsified their repertoires and, most importantly, he faithfully recorded the facts of folksong performance’. Onderdonk continues to underline that Vaughan Williams’s attitude towards folk singers is only partially understood, for ‘[w]hen his work [as a folk collector] is discussed at all, it has generally been only in the context of other collectors’ (and here, Onderdonk refers the reader to studies including Harker (1985), and Boyes (1993)). As Onderdonk implies, these studies treat Vaughan Williams’s views with insufficient detail, and indeed while both Harker and Boyes provide a trenchant critique of the social and political ideologies which underpinned the activities of collectors such as Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams, such studies tend rather to simplify Vaughan Williams’s musical ideals, ‘treating his views as simply an extension of those of Cecil Sharp (which they were not)’, as Alain Frogley has pointed out with relation to Boyes’ study in particular. See Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 3, n. 5. Georgina Boyes has recently provided a rather more nuanced (though brief) account of Vaughan Williams’s folkloristic ideals and collecting methods than is provided in her 1985 study: see Boyes, ‘“An Individual Flowering”: Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Work in Folklore’, *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 46 (October, 2009), 7-8. Here, she foregrounds the extent to which in contrast to other members of the Folk Song Society, Vaughan Williams frequently emphasized and valued the ‘individual artistry’ that often underlay folk performance. She also underlines the extent to which ‘a renewal of interest in Vaughan Williams’s writings’

Onderdonk himself overlooks ‘A School of English Music’ in one of the few detailed studies of the composer’s practical engagement with folk song available. In light of the contradictions highlighted above, it becomes clear that the story of Vaughan Williams’s ‘discovery’ – and subsequent promotion, assimilation, and appropriation of folk song – is one that, while overwhelmingly familiar, is only partially understood.

How and why, it might once again be considered, did Vaughan Williams revoke his earlier position with regard to folk song in the lectures delivered at Bournemouth? What may have been involved in that period of ‘further study, before he became an active collector’, such that he experienced an apparent ‘conversion’ to the possibilities of folk song by ‘the autumn’ of 1902 (having earlier that year denounced its potential vitality)? How, finally, might such questions illuminate Vaughan Williams’s desire to develop a ‘national’ music based on the ‘raw material’ of national song, or the ‘personal style’ of English musicians: a national music which ‘spoke’ not simply of its composer’s voice, but somehow of the voices of an English community? It would seem that some ideal of folk song was incubating in the composer’s imagination for some time before he came ‘face to face’ with the folk singer Charles Potiphar in December 1903: a complex and apparently contradictory ideal that demands some attention.⁴⁷

A useful point of departure for such study lies in a consideration of the way in which Vaughan Williams first advocated the power of folk song in English art music, during the

presents ‘an opportunity for a fresh perspective on the scope and stature of his work in folklore’. See Boyes (2009), 10. A detailed overview of the ideals and activities of the ‘first’ folk revivalists may be consulted in Richard Sykes, ‘The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890-1914’, *Folk Music Journal*, 6.4 (1993), 446-90, though again, Vaughan Williams’s views are not treated in any detail here, and are discussed largely through reference to the writings both of Hubert Parry and Cecil Sharp.

⁴⁷ Vaughan Williams’s folkloristic ‘ideal’ has been noted both by Frank Dineen and Tony Kendall. Dineen makes an intriguing point when he demonstrates that Vaughan Williams had in fact been alerted to the ‘rich storehouse’ of national tunes available for collection in villages such as Ingrave, Essex, during April 1903, pointing out that the composer did not, however, embark upon any first-hand collection of such tunes until December 1903. Both Dineen and Kendall state that an audience member present at the composer’s repetition of the Gloucester lectures at Bournemouth during January to April, 1903, alerted the composer as to the vibrancy of this living tradition. Dineen elaborates, however, that ‘[a]t this stage there is a puzzling reluctance on the part of Vaughan Williams to follow up this extraordinary evidence of a living local folk song tradition. He had a high ideal of what he expected from folk song...’ Dineen does not, however, offer an account of what the composer’s ‘high ideal of folk song’ may have embodied at this time, and makes no mention of ‘A School of English Music’ in his study, in this way leaving the composer’s ‘puzzling reluctance’ as a question that remains open to scholars. See Dineen (2001), 30-1, and further, Tony Kendall, ‘Through Bushes and Through Briars...Vaughan Williams’s Earliest Folk-Song Collecting’, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 48-68.

lectures delivered at Bournemouth between October and December 1902. As David Manning suggests, '[t]he exact development of Vaughan Williams's ideas about folk song in this period is difficult to recuperate, but it is certainly the case that he was extolling the virtues of folk song in the autumn of 1902 during lectures'.⁴⁸ As was implied above, these lectures have retained an elusive presence in the field, this exacerbated by the way in which their contents can only be consulted through exploration of contemporaneous press reports, which fortuitously reproduced the composer's earliest position on the value of folk song in national music at some length. A number of these reports are collected in Vaughan Williams's scrapbook, deposited in the British Library following the death of Ursula Vaughan Williams in 2007.⁴⁹

In recent years, both Frank Dineen and Tony Kendall have provided a more comprehensive narrative of the circumstances in which Vaughan Williams was invited to deliver these lectures at Bournemouth than is available in either Kennedy's or Ursula Vaughan Williams's study,⁵⁰ confirming the precise dates of six lectures entitled 'The History of the Folk Song' as delivered between October 6th and December 15th, 1902, at Pokesdown Technical College, and under the auspices of the Oxford University Extension Delegacy.⁵¹ While these authors offer but the briefest account of the contents of the lectures, a more

⁴⁸ See Manning, 'Exploring Vaughan Williams's Writings', (2008), 15-18, 17.

⁴⁹ The scrapbook (whose pages are not numbered) may be consulted at the BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2. This source bears numerous concert reviews, concert programmes, and press notices pertaining to Vaughan Williams's earliest musical activities (including extensive press announcements of *The English Hymnal*), and also contains reports relating to the composer's delivery of the Bournemouth lectures at Gloucester during 1903. The contents of this valuable source nourish the current study on numerous occasions, as becomes clear below. It is the opinion of Dr Nicolas Bell, Curator at the Music Department at the BL, that Michael Kennedy was granted access to this material by Ursula Vaughan Williams while writing their complementary studies of 1964. This is corroborated by the way in which Kennedy provides comprehensive details of only one of the journalistic publications in which the press reports relating to the Bournemouth lectures can in their original form be found, suggesting that his source for discussion was indeed the composer's scrapbook. That said, Kennedy makes no reference to the scrapbook when discussing these lectures, which has perhaps discouraged further examination of their contents. See Kennedy (1980), 30-6.

⁵⁰ Ursula Vaughan Williams offers a brief recollection of the delivery of these lectures in her biography: see U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 62-4.

⁵¹ Dineen (2001), 29-35, and Kendall, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 50-55. Kendall demonstrates that Vaughan Williams repeated the Bournemouth folk song lectures at Gloucester between January 19th and April 30th, 1903, and further notes that the composer was also invited to Brentwood, Essex for the same purpose, delivering the same series of lectures, concurrent with those at Gloucester, between January 21st and April 1st, 1903. It is during his final lecture at Brentwood that as both Kendall and Dineen suggest, Georgiana Heatley, the daughter of the Rector at Ingrave, handed Vaughan Williams a note in which she advised him as to the singing of folk songs by the people of that village. According both to Kendall and Dineen, Vaughan Williams's decision to begin his own folk song collection seemed to have been spurred by the advice of Georgiana Heatley. See Kendall, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 49-57, and Dineen (2001), 30.

significant acquisition in this respect is an article by Anthony Holyoake, in which the author provides a compressed and conflated account of the lectures as derived from the original press reports, as published in numerous Bournemouth newspapers.⁵²

Though Holyoake's article represents an important contribution in his publication of information not available in Kennedy's study, it is both significant and telling that this author makes no reference to the manner in which the lectures represent the first instance in which Vaughan Williams can be documented in a positive affirmation of the power of folk song in the development of an English national music. That said, Holyoake's provision of a context in which to present the lectures does appeal to the way in which they 'took place a year before [Vaughan Williams's] epiphanic experience' of hearing 'Charles Pottipher [sic] sing "Bushes and Briars" to the composer the following year'. Thus, as Holyoake assesses, they are of interest in that '[t]hey contain the thoughts of someone who by his own admission, "knew and loved the few English folk songs which were then available in printed collections, but only believed in them vaguely"'.⁵³

By contextualizing the press reports in this way, Holyoake makes an important, though implicit, point: namely, the extent to which Vaughan Williams himself made no clear reference to his early rejection of folk song when recalling in later articles his earliest encounters with folk singers, an experience credited with 'the completion' of his own folk song education, as Holyoake underlines. Kennedy too makes reference to the manner in which Vaughan Williams later claimed that before the discovery of 'Bushes and Briars', he was 'entirely without firsthand evidence' about folk song, maintaining, as Kennedy has it, that 'I knew and loved the few English folk songs which were then available in printed

⁵² Holyoake (2009), 9-15. Though Holyoake draws attention to the newspaper sources to which scholars may turn for an account of these lectures, he does not offer precise dates nor page numbers for the newspapers in question. These are important, for Vaughan Williams's scrapbook does not contain the press reports relating to the first two lectures delivered at Pokesdown: details of the first two lectures are included only as repeated at Gloucester from January 1903. The latter lectures from the Pokesdown series are included in the scrapbook, however. Consultation of the original press reports detailing all six of the Bournemouth lectures makes clear that the contents of the lectures as delivered both at Bournemouth and Gloucester are consistent. The Bournemouth press reports may be consulted as follows: the *Observer and Chronicle for Hants & Dorset*, 1902: October 11th, 8; October 25th, 8; November 8th, 8; November 22nd, 8; December 6th, 7; and December 20th, 7; the *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 1902: October 11th, 9; October 25th, 8; November 8th, 8; November 22nd, 5; December 6th, 7; and December 20th, 8; and finally, the *Bournemouth Guardian*, 1902: October 11th, 7; October 25th, 8; November 8th, 6; November 22nd, 8; December 6th, 7; and December 20th, 6.

⁵³ Holyoake (2009), 9.

collections, but I only believed in them vaguely...my faith was not yet active'.⁵⁴ This author enlists these quotations as a means of marginalizing the possible significance of 'A School of English Music', as is argued above, and in so doing he participates with Holyoake in a process of scholarly 'collusion', wherein traditional scholars have loyally, though uncritically, supported Vaughan Williams in the construction of his own identity as a 'national' composer.⁵⁵

It might be ventured that it is such collusion that leads Hugh Cobbe to omit any mention of Vaughan Williams's ambivalence towards 'the folk song question' in the series of remarks offered by way of introduction to the composer's earliest correspondence, transcribed and collected by Cobbe in an invaluable volume published in 2008. Though not highlighted in the editor's framing remarks,⁵⁶ it is important that in letters exchanged by Vaughan Williams with his cousin Ralph Wedgwood during the late 1890s, the composer makes reference to his fluctuating position on the role of folk song in 'national music' on two separate occasions, also referring to the existence of 'A School of English Music' at this time.⁵⁷ As such, a

⁵⁴ Kennedy (1980), 29-30. Consultation of the Musical Autobiography from which Kennedy apparently quotes reveals that Vaughan Williams's account of his earliest engagement with folk song is worded rather differently: see Vaughan Williams, 'Musical Autobiography' in Foss (1950), 18-38, 32-4. Vaughan Williams states that 'I must have made my first contact with English folk-songs when I was a boy in the 'eighties, through Stainer and Bramley's *Christmas Carols, New and Old*. I remember clearly my reaction to the tune "Cherry-Tree Carol", which was more than simple admiration for a fine tune, though I did not then naturally realize the implications involved in that sense of intimacy. This sense came upon me more strongly in 1893 when I first discovered "Dives and Lazarus" in *English County Songs*. Here, as before with Wagner, I had that sense of recognition – "here's something I have known all my life – only I didn't know it". Vaughan Williams continues that 'my intercourse with Cecil Sharp crystallized and confirmed what I already vaguely felt about folk-song and its relationship to the composer's art'.

⁵⁵ See Byron Adams's Introduction to *Vaughan Williams Essays* (2003), in which he notes that '[u]nfortunately, the earlier generations of those who wrote about Vaughan Williams, such as Frank Howes, Hubert Foss and Percy Young, were less likely to investigate the composer's stylistic richness than to collude with him in the creation of a downright, British and homespun persona behind which lurked a sensitive and ambivalent perfectionist. After the composer's death in 1958, Michael Kennedy and Ursula Vaughan Williams loyally accomplished the heroic task of presenting the man and his work as he wished to be viewed by posterity. Their dual task was made more challenging by the adverse critical reaction against Vaughan Williams that had already begun to assert itself during the final years of the composer's long life'. See Adams, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), xviii. Such authors were similarly unlikely to probe the richness and ambivalence of Vaughan Williams's writings and public pronouncements.

⁵⁶ See Cobbe, 'Earliest Letters (c. 1895) to the Outbreak of the First World War: 1895-1914', in Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 8-12.

⁵⁷ The relevant correspondence may be consulted in Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 23-4, letter number 12; 36, letter number 23; and 37-8, letter number 24. The curious omission of an account of these folk song letters is also discernible in the chapter contributed by Cobbe to *Vaughan Williams Studies*: see 'Vaughan Williams, Germany, and the German Tradition: A View from the Letters', in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 81-98. Here, Cobbe includes an example of the composer's testament to an early belief in 'the folk tune theory', while omitting a reference to an article written by Vaughan Williams 'against national music' (though this letter is included, though not highlighted, in Cobbe's larger volume). In the affirmative letter, Vaughan Williams underlines that 'I very much believe in the folk tune theory – by which I don't mean that modern composing is done by sandwiching an occasional national tune – not

consideration of these letters makes clear that far from representing a piece of flippant juvenilia – an exploratory, personal statement that was later revoked following his encounter with Charles Potiphar the following year – the views expounded in ‘A School of English Music’ may in fact be taken as an expression of a long-held point of focus for Vaughan Williams’s earliest aims for the development of national music and musical culture. Indeed, it emerges here that the article was written not in 1901 (as is suggested, for example, by Ursula Vaughan Williams),⁵⁸ but rather as early as 1899, at which point the composer expressed an intention to publish the article ‘as a book’ alongside other articles produced during the period, some of which are discussed below.⁵⁹

That Vaughan Williams apparently sought still to publish ‘A School of English Music’ some three years later, selecting the piece as a stage upon which to launch his voice as a national composer, gives credence to its long-standing significance in his project for English music, this much enforced by its presentation alongside his first published composition, ‘Linden Lea’. Considered in light of the articles published subsequently in *The Vocalist* – especially those following the debut of April 1902, and preceding the delivery of his lectures later that year – Vaughan Williams’s introduction of an idea of national song, both in ‘A School of English Music’ and in his earliest folk song lectures, provides a rich and subtle means of re-contextualizing the idealized role of folk materials in his musical project: one which derived in its earliest manifestations from a preoccupation with a communal expressive voice, and one which could ‘speak’ in such a way as to command the ‘sympathy’ of a particular community.

your own invention – between lumps of “2d the pound” stuff – which seems to be Dvorak’s [sic] latest method. But that to get the spirit of his national tunes into his work must be good for a composer if it comes natural to him, in which case it doesn’t matter if what he writes occasionally corresponds with some real “folk tune”...’ See Cobbe, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 87. It is significant that this letter – which can be found in full as number 12 in Cobbe’s extended volume – is followed some pages later by a letter dated 1899, in which Vaughan Williams makes reference to the fact that ‘I feel awfully national just now – though I have just written an article against “national” music which no magazine has thought fit to accept’. See Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 36, letter number 23. It may be reasonably assumed that the article written ‘against national music’ in 1899 was, in fact, ‘A School of English Music’: in the letter which follows Cobbe’s number 23, Vaughan Williams details (again to Ralph Wedgwood) his completion of four essays entitled ‘How to Play Brahms’, ‘A School of English Music’, ‘The Soporific Finale’, and ‘Bach & Schumann’. See Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 37-8, letter number 24.

⁵⁸ U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 61.

⁵⁹ See Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 37-8, letter number 24.

Explored also in terms of the intellectual traditions upon which his early lectures appear to draw, the study below allows a means of further elucidating the composer's democratic ideal of musical 'citizenship' – of a communal musical 'language', intelligible by all. In this, it becomes possible to return, finally, to the provocative propositions of 'Linden Lea', recovering the nuances of Vaughan Williams's invitation to hear this song as a particular kind of Dorset Folk Song.

A Tale of Open-Air Preaching

At the opening of the first lecture at Bournemouth, Vaughan Williams told a tale of personal experience. It is a tale of encounter: an encounter not with the folk singer, but rather, with an open-air preacher, whose sermon he claims to have heard while walking on the Isle of Skye. The tale is one that is told and re-told throughout Vaughan Williams's lectures and writings, attaining itself something of the status of a folk legend.⁶⁰ While his account of the tale as related at Bournemouth is reprinted both by Michael Kennedy and Andrew Holyoake, the manner in which it was framed, and the way in which the subject of folk song was thus approached in these lectures, has not been clear. By considering the original telling of this tale, a glimpse of the terms upon which Vaughan Williams first theorized the place of folk song in the development of a national music is afforded – a glimpse, thus, of his earliest advocacy of the particular communicative power of 'national song'.

As the journalist reporting on the lectures relates, Vaughan Williams began by outlining a position that appears prominently in a great many of his articles and lectures: namely, that '[m]usic was actually playing or singing – it was the sound they heard – it was not talking about it...For that reason he wanted to take special care that actual examples

⁶⁰ The preacher tale is recounted near the opening of both *National Music* (1932) and *The Making of Music* (1953): see Vaughan Williams, *National Music and other Essays* (1996), 17-18 and 206-7, respectively. The composer also recounted the tale in various letters: see Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 217-8, letter number 234.

should be sung and played to them of the music he was going to talk about.’ Thus, having noted the unusual inclusion of aural demonstrations in these lectures, the journalist reports that the composer continued as follows:

In lecturing to them on songs, Dr Vaughan Williams supposed he was taking as his subject quite the most universal form of music. Symphonies and quartettes might be only for esoteric musicians, dance music only for the frivolous, opera only for the wealthy, but song pervaded every place, every season, and every condition and sort of men. Was there one among them who would not join in the chorus of a well-known song, though wild horses would not drag him to a concert? Did not the most unmusical people take pleasure in singing a well-known hymn in church, though they would never dream of staying for the voluntary? A man who would sleep undisturbed through the most beautiful music would wake up at the sound of the human voice, and be all attention.⁶¹

Foregrounding the power of ‘song’ – and ‘the sound of the human voice’ – to invite and enable a democratic and participatory engagement with music (an invitation difficult to resist by even ‘the most unmusical’ listener), Vaughan Williams unfolds the particular power of this ‘most universal form of music’ by emphasizing its ability to ‘awaken’ a listener to the ‘vistas’ of ‘abstract music’, inviting not only a response to art music, but further, provoking an impulse to participate in its creation. As such, he continues that

...the fascination of the song would inspire many composers to whom the vistas of abstract music were a sealed book. Had not many of them some friend who one day in a fit of confidence had gone to a drawer and pulled out a whole sheaf of musical settings of his favourite poet? Such a man had neither the power nor the wish to write any other kind of music than this – indeed, they said they never knew he composed, and yet when they heard these songs they thought they were the most charming they had ever heard – and they would probably be right – the reason being that the songs appealed to them personally.⁶²

⁶¹ This account is derived from the first of the composer’s lectures, collected in Vaughan Williams’s scrapbook under the reporter’s title ‘Oxford University Extension Lectures’. BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2. This passage is not available in its extended form in Holyoake’s article. See Holyoake (2009), 10. It should be noted that reference is made here to Vaughan Williams’s scrapbook – and thus, to the first folk song lecture as delivered in Gloucester in January 1903 – rather than to the original press reports detailing the first lecture as delivered in Bournemouth in October 1902. This owes to the fact that the reporter at Gloucester offers a fuller account of the contents of the relevant lecture. The preacher tale is reported, in somewhat briefer terms, in the Bournemouth newspaper reports, and the interpretations derived from these lectures are borne out by both sources.

⁶² Ibid.

At this point, Vaughan Williams makes an important claim for ‘song’ in his own creative project – and in his own creative voice – explaining that an appeal to ‘personal experience’ lies at the heart of a ‘sincere’ compositional impulse, and that

[t]his was also the reason why he [Vaughan Williams] wanted to compose, and the reason why the song was the most universal form of music, because it was the most direct experience of personal and intimate emotions.⁶³

Thus, the tale of the open-air preacher is here recounted, as the composer explains the origins of song and by extension the origins of its particular communicative power:

Song was the development of excited speech. [Vaughan Williams] was once at an open-air service in the Isle of Skye, where a sermon was being preached. Gaelic being the language which he unfortunately did not understand, he had plenty of opportunity of attending to the vocal sounds uttered by the preacher. At first, [the preacher] spoke in a monotonous voice – a sort of sing-song – as he had to raise his voice a good deal to make himself heard. But as he became more and more excited over his discourse his speaking gradually changed into a sort of regular chanting on four distinct musical notes. Here then they had the rough beginnings of song – excited speech gradually becoming distinct musical tone. As they [the audience] knew, ordinary speaking did not contain any distinct musical sound, but glided about from one to another. It was only when the emotional elements became strong that the tones began to steady themselves and sort themselves into a regular scheme of notes. Since the song was so direct a development of emotional excitement, they were not surprised to find that every incident in the daily life of unsophisticated people was represented in song. So among the folk-songs, or country songs of a nation they found every event and every emotion represented – love songs, hunting songs, drinking songs, songs of birth, marriage and death...These songs sprang up by themselves; no one knew exactly how they came about...[they] existed side by side with the music of educated musicians.⁶⁴

In later accounts of this tale – as told near the opening both of *National Music* and *The Making of Music* – the composer makes explicit that the vocal sounds uttered by the preacher gave forth the material of folk song itself. Recalling his encounter with the preacher in the first person, the tale of music’s origins is recounted by Vaughan Williams in *The Making of*

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Music as follows:

I once heard a sermon at an open-air service in the Isle of Skye. As the preacher spoke in Gaelic, which I do not understand, I was able to devote my attention to the actual tones of his voice. The fact that he was out of doors forced him to speak loud, and that, coupled with the emotional excitement which inspired his words, caused him gradually to leave off speaking and actually, unconsciously of course, to sing. At first he was content with a monotone, but as his excitement grew, he gradually evolved the following melodic formulae.

[These are quoted here]

Now these melodic formulae are common to the opening of many Scottish and British folk-songs; here are two examples:

[‘Bushes and Briars’]

[‘Searching for Lambs’]

This experience has convinced me that these melodic formulae come spontaneously to the minds of primitive singers. We can hardly believe that our preacher obtained his notes by blowing through a mathematically measured pipe. I have lately read a book by the Reverend George Chambers, in which he describes how in primitive religious services the logical meaning of the words spoken proved inadequate and was supplemented by song, including cantilenas on pure vowel sounds, which were called ‘jubilations’; these evidently had a mystical meaning to their singers that words could not give them.⁶⁵

Still more explicit is the reference to the origins of music in the second of the lectures collected in *National Music*, in which under the title ‘Some Tentative Ideas on the Origins of Music’, Vaughan Williams makes an important reference to the ‘raw material’ of song, beginning, once more, by emphasizing its communicative power, and the particular power of the human voice:

I was once listening to an open air preacher. He started his sermon in a speaking voice, but as he grew more excited the sounds gradually became defined, first one definite note, then two, and finally a little group of five notes.

The notes being *a, b, a, g, a*, with an occasional drop down to *e* [again, Vaughan Williams offers a quotation].

It seemed I had witnessed the change from speech to song in actual

⁶⁵ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 206-8. Vaughan Williams had in fact contributed a preface to this book: see Vaughan Williams, ‘Preface’ to G. B. Chambers, *Folksong-Plainsong: A Study in Origin and Musical Relationships* (London: The Merlin Press, 1956), v. This piece is reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 279-80. George Bennet Chambers (1881 – 1969) was a vicar, social activist, and an author. An expert on folk song as well as plainsong, he was well known for his radical left-wing social and political views, these much-publicized when he commissioned a crucifix incorporating hammer and sickle iconography.

process. The increased emotional excitement had produced two results, definition and the desire for a decorative pattern. Perhaps I went too far in calling this song, perhaps I should call it the raw material of song...

These are what we call the stock phrases of folk-song which play an important part in folk-music just as the stock verbal phrase plays an important part in ballad poetry. There is a good practical reason for these stock phrases. Any of you who are writers, whether you are writing a magazine article or a symphony, know that the great difficulty is how to start, and the stock phrase solved this difficulty with the ballad maker – so nine out of ten ballads start with some common phrase... In the same way we find a common opening to many folk-tunes, and this opening would naturally be a variant of some musical formula which comes naturally to the human voice.⁶⁶

While on the one hand it might be suggested that the ‘raw material’ of song refers simply to the folkloristic melodic formulae quoted in these later accounts of the tale, it is possible to observe that by locating the preacher tale in the context of its original telling, this ‘raw material’ seems somewhat more elusive. The folk song’s emergence as an unconscious musical product of direct and heightened emotional expression – and an expression born out of a desire to communicate with, and spiritually ‘transform’, a hearer – suggests that the composer’s interest lay not principally in folk songs themselves, either in 1902 or in 1932, as in an ideal of ‘song’ more broadly: a mode of music emerging from the emotional ‘tones’ of the human voice, and in this, an embodied, intelligible, participatory mode of expression which could mobilize even the most ‘unmusical’ listener to ‘wake up’ to the sounds of art music, and to ‘join in’ the making of community music.

Further, the *sound* of song – its material reality – is mythologized here as an impetus to creative instinct, leading to the composition of new English music (as the comic tale of the surreptitious song composer, moved by the ‘fascination’ of song, suggests). In this reading, the communicative, evolutionary power of ‘national song’ – a term Vaughan Williams uses interchangeably with ‘folk song’ throughout these early lectures – is potent.

It might thus be suggested that the mode of musical communication apparently sought by Vaughan Williams throughout his theories of national music – as only implicit in the preacher tale as later told – becomes clearer as considered in this tale as told in 1902. The

⁶⁶ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 17-18.

preacher's desire to 'reach' his congregation seems to have thrust the question of musical communication into the foreground for the composer, whose inability to grasp the semantics of the sermon enabled an engagement only with the musical qualities – or tone – of the human voice: a mode of intelligible because visceral musical 'speech', which presupposed a communicative function and a particular mode of embodied, rather than cerebral or semantic, engagement. It is this 'unconscious' mode of emotional expression and communication that lies at the heart of Vaughan Williams's ideal of the 'raw material' of song: an embodied musical expression which becomes inherently communal in its desire to communicate subliminally and 'spiritually' with a gathered and 'understanding' community of hearers.

This is explicit in Vaughan Williams's important article 'The Letter and the Spirit' (1920), in which his central proposition is that

[The composer] wishes to be in spiritual communication with his hearers. To do that certain sounds are necessary; and until those sounds are heard the contact is not established... What the musical composer, in effect, says to his performers is: 'I desire to produce a certain spiritual result on certain people; I hope and believe that if you blow, and scrape, and hit in a particular manner this spiritual effect will result...but until you make the indicated sounds my music *does not exist*' (Vaughan Williams's emphasis).⁶⁷

As is clear in this quotation, the particularly material quality of music as made and spiritually 'heard' was central to the composer's ideal. As Vaughan Williams's introduction to the 1902 lectures made clear, it is the song as made and heard – the 'actual sound', especially of the human voice – that enabled its particular communicative and creative power: '[a] man who would sleep undisturbed through the most beautiful music would wake up at the sound of the human voice, and be all attention'. Further, in claiming that 'the reason [I] wanted to compose, and the reason that the song was the most universal form of music, was that it was the most immediate experience of personal and intimate emotions', the composer does not simply claim a 'songful' mode for his compositional personality: his use of the word

⁶⁷ Vaughan Williams, 'The Letter and the Spirit', in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 121-8, 124-5.

‘experience’ seems to collapse the individual experience of the unmusical listener, the participant performer, and the inspired composer into a single mode of musical experience and expression, one made possible in the moment of creating – and hearing – the ‘actual sound’ of musical tone.

This is also explicit in ‘The Letter and the Spirit’, as Vaughan Williams emphasizes the extent to which the ‘performer’ or ‘maker’ of music played a crucial role in the creation of the art work, a collaborative act in which the moment of sound contains the union of performer and composer:

That the art of music is essentially one of sound is a proposition which would seem too obvious to need proof.

Yet it is the opinion of many people that the really musical man prefers not to hear music, but gets at his music silently by reading it to himself as he would a book... Can a page of musical notes and a page of poetry be compared in any way? ...The art of music differs from poetry and painting in this, that it involves two distinct processes – that of invention and that of presentation...[a] musical composition when invented is only half finished, and until actual sound is produced that composition *does not exist*.

How then is the musical composer to make his invention live in actual sound?...He must seek out others who are capable of making the sounds he desires...⁶⁸

Claiming a powerful role for the performer in giving ‘life’ to the work – a communal creation with the composer – Vaughan Williams also credits the ‘actual sound’ of music as crucial in the inspiration, ‘fertilization’, and evolution of future English art, continuing

And does not the composer also need actual sound to produce in him that spiritual state which he hopes to induce in others? Does not the actual shock of sounds help to fertilize his imagination and lead him on to still further musical invention?⁶⁹

In this reading, the ‘raw material’ of folk song becomes deeply implicated in a particular mode of communal ‘intelligibility’, as guaranteed in embodied, spontaneous modes of musical expression, practiced and experienced as a ‘natural’ part of English community life.

⁶⁸ Vaughan Williams, ‘The Letter and the Spirit’, in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 121-3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

This was controversially expressed in ‘Who Wants the English Composer?’, where Vaughan Williams considered

How is the composer to find himself? How is he to stimulate his imagination in a way which will lead to his voicing the sentiments of himself and his fellows? I need hardly at this time of day point to the folk-song as a worthy study to all musicians...But are there not other incentives for inspiration, imperfect perhaps and overlaid with dross, but pregnant with meaning to those who have ears to hear...what the artist should be concerned with is the raw material. Have we not 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...the Welshmen striking up one of their own hymns... Have all these nothing to say to us?⁷⁰

Here it is significant that vocal – or otherwise, bodily (dancing) – expressions of English community life are considered to contain the ‘raw material’ from which the composer should seek to model a national music: one which thus would ‘voice the sentiments of himself and his fellows’, ‘speaking’ directly to a listener. Though the inflammatory tone of the reference to musics overlaid with ‘dross’ have since contributed to critiques of Vaughan Williams as an exploitative ‘expropriator’ of English musical vernaculars, it is noteworthy that the ‘raw material’ of such sources seems in light of the context outlined above to underpin a particular musical ideal. Such passages suggest that Vaughan Williams sought to capture, and seek inspiration from, the immediacy and participatory function of certain forms of community musical expression: those emerging from the functions of the voice and the body in particular, whether they were rural or urban in origin and practice. Indeed, in the passage recalled from ‘A School of English Music’, above, Vaughan Williams refers to the urban vernacular, not to the rural.⁷¹ What appears to underlie his commitment to such

⁷⁰ Vaughan Williams, ‘Who Wants the English Composer?’, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 39–42, 41. Notably, this particular reference to ‘purifying’ the ‘raw material’ of music has led to stringent attacks upon Vaughan Williams’s supposed exploitation, as a member of the upper middle classes, of the peasant communities from which he collected his folk songs: see, for example, Boyes (1993), and Harker (1985). In Harker’s account, ‘[Vaughan Williams’s] chief interest was in what could be done to “purify” this musical “raw material” by people like himself’. See Harker (1985), 209. This author makes no direct reference to the articles, and thus the context, in which Vaughan Williams made such statements, however.

⁷¹ Historians such as Georgina Boyes and David Harker have criticized folklorists including Vaughan Williams and Lucy Broadwood as much for their idealization of the music of ‘country people’ as for their lack of attention to urban song. Like Vaughan Williams, Lucy Broadwood did not restrict her collecting to the countryside,

vernaculars, as is clear also in his interest in folk song, is a fascination with the tone of voice embodied by such acts of communal musical expression: a mode of delivery unconsciously ‘understood’ and practiced by a broad community of initiated listeners. The emphasis here upon the accessibility of such communal musical practices is crucial, and is further elaborated below.

Before unfolding the extent to which these readings are amplified by, and in turn illuminate, so many of Vaughan Williams’s statements about national music, it is worth dwelling further on the ways in which the story of the preacher is framed within all three sets of lectures, giving particular attention to the intellectual traditions upon which Vaughan Williams clearly draws. In suggesting that music was an expression of the soul, and that the soul had a national character (as expressed in national song), Vaughan Williams relays connections made by theorists of music and nationality that reach back to the end of the eighteenth century (connections that were endemic in the rhetoric of the English folk revival).

Yet this tale has also a more specifically English pedigree. The strains of Wordsworth’s ‘The Solitary Reaper’ are to be heard in this chance over-hearing of the Scottish preacher’s song, its words incomprehensible, its music resonant with a ‘natural’, overwhelming emotion. The voices of the Welsh singers heard by Elgar while standing on a hilltop above Llangrannog (and tellingly recounted at the opening of Peter Pirie’s account of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’) may also be significant here:⁷² voices carried on the wind of another ‘Celtic periphery’, as Robert Colls has it, and captured by early twentieth-century

however, as Dorothy de Val has demonstrated: in a 1904-5 article entitled ‘On the Collecting of English Folk-Songs’, for example, Broadwood insisted that ‘in the workhouses, hospitals, dockyards, and smithies of crowded towns there are as good singers to be found as in country places’. This article is cited in Dorothy de Val’s important revisionist chapter ‘The Transformed Village: Lucy Broadwood and Folksong’, in Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (eds.), *Music and British Culture, 1785 – 1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 341-66, 352. See also de Val’s biography of Broadwood, *In Search of Song: The Life and Times of Lucy Broadwood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). As David Gregory has noted, only a ‘small minority’ of folk collectors active around the turn of the twentieth century extended the term ‘folk song’ to mean industrial and urban vernacular song. However, Gregory lists Vaughan Williams and Lucy Broadwood – as well as Cecil Sharp, Frank Kidson, and Alec Fuller Maitland – as those collectors who favoured a broadly rural definition. See E. David Gregory, *The Late Victorian Folksong Revival, The Persistence of English Melody, 1878 – 1903* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), ‘The Concept of Folksong’, 3-9, 7.

⁷² Pirie (1979), 13.

artists in order to nourish and revitalize a modernized British culture.⁷³ There is also an important scientific perspective invoked in Vaughan Williams's telling of the preacher tale, and it is through an exploration of this context that the implications of the preacher's song for his communicative, participatory musical vision – told at his own moment of folkloristic 'conversion' – becomes particularly clear.

Vocal Origins

Perhaps the most important intellectual debt owed (though not acknowledged) by Vaughan Williams in his inherently accessible telling of the open-air preacher tale is to the evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer: specifically, to this author's 1857 essay 'On The Origin and Function of Music', in which he rigorously set forth the theory that music's origin lay in heightened emotional speech.⁷⁴ As both Byron Adams and Jeremy Dibble have noted, Vaughan Williams's views of musical evolution were powerfully 'filtered', as Adams justly has it, through a 'derivative' reading of Hubert Parry's influential tract, *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, itself heavily influenced by a scientific, Spencerian interest prominent in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century,⁷⁵ and as Richard Sykes has pointed

⁷³ See Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), especially 'Celts', 277-88, 277-8. Colls underlines that the songs, crafts, customs, and languages of the 'Celtic' peoples of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were imagined by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English artists and travellers as a source of inspiration and regeneration. Considered communities and landscapes 'unspoiled' by the corruptions of modernity, such people were imagined to have preserved the 'authentic' voices of pre-industrial Britain. As Colls suggests, moreover, 'it was not necessary to speak Gaelic, Erse, or Welsh in order to appreciate the beauty of those voices, for beauty was in the beholding'. As his chapter demonstrates, a contemporaneous concern with the sounds of the words and songs of 'the Celts' is clear in the frequent publication of volumes of Hebridean-Gaelic fishing songs, for example, by non-native speakers, and often without translations. My point here is made not to propagate a further suggestion that Vaughan Williams participated, at least in part, in appropriating the products of 'peripheral' rural communities as a prop to the dominant culture, but rather to emphasize the extent to which a concern with the possibility of recapturing the sounds of the 'authentic voices' of a pre-modern English past was prevalent in England at this time, especially in musical culture (as is demonstrated in Chapter Two of this study). This concern lay at the heart of the folk revival, as has been suggested throughout this Chapter. Lucy Broadwood enforces this in an early article for the *Folk-Song Society Journal*, in which she relates an account of her collecting activity in the counties of Sussex and Surrey, celebrating the accents of these 'unlettered folk', and relishing the way in which 'their almost Chaucerian pronunciation of the words carries one back irresistibly to olden times'. See Lucy E. Broadwood, 'Introduction', *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, vol. I (1899-1904) (London: Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd.), 139-141, 140.

⁷⁴ Herbert Spencer, 'On The Origin and Function of Music', in *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1911; rev. 1976), 310-30. Originally published in *Fraser's Magazine*, LVI (October, 1857).

⁷⁵ For a nuanced account of the intellectual contexts within which Vaughan Williams nourished both his writings and his music, see Adams, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 99-117, especially 101-3. Jeremy Dibble provides a rather more

out, influential in the rhetoric and practices of early twentieth century folk revivalists.⁷⁶

Like that of Parry, Vaughan Williams's account of the origins of music makes an unmistakable reference to a debate staged between the 1870s and the 1890s between Herbert Spencer and Vaughan Williams's great uncle, Charles Darwin, who took rather a contrary view of musical evolution to that of his younger contemporary. As Peter Kivy has authoritatively demonstrated, the respective theories of Darwin and Spencer bear more comparison than is generally admitted, for as Darwin himself acknowledged, both authors agreed that music arose from vocal noises.⁷⁷ The central point of contention arising between their respective views of musical origins, however, relates in important ways to Vaughan Williams's emphasis upon the human and communicative origin of song: an emphasis subtly different from the evolutionary ideas of Parry and Cecil Sharp.

Broadly speaking, it was Spencer's insistence that music was originally a *human* vocal phenomenon: a function of the emotional language of communicative speech. In Darwin's view, the origins of music lay rather in bird song, a function of sexual selection: as Kivy summarizes, '[t]he songs of birds, which had fascinated so many writers on music since the 17th and 18th centuries and excited so much idle speculation, became through the machinery of sexual selection, reasonable phenomena on which to build an evolutionary theory of music'.⁷⁸ Parry stakes his claim to a voice in the Darwin-Spencer debate by stating at the outset of *The Evolution of the Art of Music* that 'the childish theory that [music] began by imitating birds' songs' is 'as a serious explanation for the origin of music...too trivial and too incompatible to be worth discussing'.⁷⁹ When framing the tale of the open-air preacher in

detailed account of the specific correspondences between Vaughan Williams's writings and those of his teacher, Hubert Parry, in a piece dedicated to unfolding the 'creation of tradition' for English music in the writings of Parry, Stanford, and Vaughan Williams. See Dibble, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 25-47. See also Vaughan Williams's 'Talk on Parry and Stanford, 1957', given as part of a series of lectures delivered on the subject of 'Composers as Teachers' under the auspices of the Composers' Concourse. Here, Vaughan Williams explained the significance of Parry's debt to the ideas of Herbert Spencer. See Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst (eds.) (1959), 94-102, 96.

⁷⁶ See Sykes (1993), especially 473-7.

⁷⁷ Peter Kivy, 'Charles Darwin on Music', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 12.1 (Spring, 1959), 42-8. Kivy provides in this article a pithy discussion of the points of correspondence and divergence within the musical aesthetics of Darwin and Spencer.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁹ C. Hubert H. Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (2nd ed., London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1897), 4. (First published in 1893).

both *National Music* and *The Making of Music*, on the other hand, Vaughan Williams enacts a debate not between the calls of birds and humans – of ‘amatory’ vocal noises versus a broader range of expressive emotional sounds (this the nub of the debate, as Darwin saw it) – but rather between the claims of vocal versus instrumental music.

Indeed, Vaughan Williams seems to accept as self-evident the essentially human basis of all music (this emphasized throughout his writings), foregrounding, thus, music’s vocal rather than instrumental origin. At the opening of *The Making of Music*, he begins by stating his conception of music in broad terms:

Before we go further we had better have a definition of what we mean by music, and I would define it thus: music is a reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound. By ‘ordered sound’ I mean sounds of a definite pitch in a definite rhythm and, perhaps we should add, with a definite harmony...

There are two theories of how these ordered sounds arose. Some people think that they grew out of excited speech, some that they developed from blowing through a pipe pierced at definite intervals with holes.

I do not want to set up my opinion against that of those learned musicologists who hold the pipe theory. But an ounce of experience is worth a pound of speculation, and I want to describe a personal experience, when I actually heard excited speech grow into melody... [here, the preacher tale recounted above is offered].⁸⁰

In *National Music*, the tale is again framed within the context of a debate between the relative claims of vocal versus instrumental music:

I cannot see why it should not be equally natural to presuppose an aptitude for singing in the natural man as an aptitude for speaking; indeed, singing of a primitive kind may be supposed to come before speaking, just as emotion is something more primitive than thought, and the indeterminate howls which travellers tell us savages make to accompany dances or ceremonies in which they are emotionally excited may be supposed to be the beginnings of music. However, the difference between real music and mere sound depends on the fact of definitely sustained notes with definite relations to each other. Some people hold that this definition of sounds can only have arisen after the invention of the pipe or some other primitive musical instrument; but I shall be able to give you personal evidence to the contrary. I have no doubt myself that song is the beginning of music and that purely instrumental music is a later development. Song, then, I

⁸⁰ Vaughan Williams, ‘What is Music?’, from *The Making of Music*, in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 206.

believe, is nothing less than speech charged with emotion. The German words *sagen* and *singen* were in early times inter-changeable and to this day a country singer will speak of ‘telling’ you a song, not of singing it...The personal evidence I shall give you is as follows. I was once listening to an open air preacher...⁸¹

In this account of the tale (in which singing arises also from the ‘indeterminate howls’ made by savages to accompany dances), Vaughan Williams corroborates the essentially embodied ideal of musical expression interpreted in the reading of the 1902 lecture offered above, his reference to the dancing of savages a further derivation from Parry, as much as the theories of Cecil Sharp.⁸² Yet at once, the composer ostensibly strays into the realm of his great uncle’s views here: specifically, in his suggestion that ‘I cannot see why it should not be equally natural to presuppose an aptitude for singing in the natural man as an aptitude for speaking; indeed singing of a primitive kind may be supposed to come before speaking...’ Darwin had opposed Spencer’s linguistic theory, which participated in a long eighteenth-century tradition, via Rousseau, Hiller, and the English John Brown, in which music was considered a product of a primitive language of emotions. Rather, as Kivy explains, he favoured the view that music itself was the source of language, asserting that

articulate speech is one of the latest, as it certainly is the highest, of the arts acquired by man, and as the instinctive power of producing musical notes and rhythms is developed low down in the animal series, it would be altogether opposed to the principle of evolution if we were to admit that man’s capacity has been developed from the tones used in impassioned speech. We must suppose that the rhythms and cadences of oratory are derived from previously developed musical powers.⁸³

From this perspective, Vaughan Williams ostensibly confuses the debate by drawing from both sides of the argument, maintaining, on the one hand, that ‘I have no doubt myself that song is the beginning of music’, while immediately continuing that ‘[s]ong, then, I believe, is nothing less than speech charged with emotion’, as is clear in the preacher-tale as told in

⁸¹ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 16-17.

⁸² See C. H. H. Parry (1897), and Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907; 4th rev. ed., by Maud Karpeles, with an appreciation of Cecil Sharp by Ralph Vaughan Williams; London: Mercury Books, 1965).

⁸³ As quoted and contextualized by Kivy (1951), 45.

National Music. In this way, Vaughan Williams posits that song is a surplus of excited emotional speech, this perhaps corroborated in the tale as told in *The Making of Music*, as the composer explains that the preacher's emotional speech (the origin of song) was akin to processes of 'primitive religious services', as noted above:

I have lately read a book by Reverend George Chambers, in which he describes how in primitive religious services the logical meaning of the words spoken proved inadequate and was supplemented by song, including cantilenas on pure vowel sound, which were called 'jubilations'; these evidently had a mystical meaning to their singers that words could not give them.

Once more, the 'excitement' embodied in an act of heightened, emotionally expressive speech is located as prior to – or at the origin of – song's production.

Unlike Darwin (and in turn, Sharp and Parry), however, Vaughan Williams seems less concerned with folk song as a later or 'higher' expression of the primitive urges of the mythical 'savage' (whether vocal or bodily), for as is clear in the preacher tale as told in *National Music*, he aligns song with simply the emotional outpouring of an 'unconscious' expression and communication. Further, he emphasized from the earliest of his Bournemouth lectures that

in a way, all music was Folk-music. Beethoven and Wagner were men, and the same impulse which drove country people to sing at their work and their pleasure, also drove Beethoven to write his symphonies... So those of them who said that they liked country tunes but did not care for classical music – whatever that might mean – he would ask them to remember that there was absolutely no difference between the two.⁸⁴

Perhaps the central debate lies for Vaughan Williams not so much in the historic primacy of either song or speech, therefore, but rather between the originary claims of vocal and instrumental music, and the essence of music as an act of human expression, or 'telling'.

⁸⁴ Press report, as collected in the composer's scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2. The press cutting is entitled 'Oxford University Extension Lectures'.

Indeed, this becomes clear not only through his conception, above, of the composer as folk singer (singing with a collective community voice), but is highlighted when his views are considered within another relevant context: namely, in his discussion of the aesthetics of Richard Wagner, whose music dramas he had explored in his article ‘The Words of Wagner’s Music Dramas’, published in two parts in *The Vocalist* between June and August, 1902 (and thus in the immediate aftermath of his debut with ‘A School of English Music’).⁸⁵

In a study of the close relationship between words and music in these works, Vaughan Williams explains that

the nature of music is that it can express emotion, but cannot touch reason and fact. Words, on the other hand, cannot express emotion, but can only indicate emotion through the medium of fact. Wagner himself argues thus: ‘All music springs originally from the utterances of the human voice’. The primitive man may be supposed to have conveyed all his impressions by means of vocal sounds. Gradually, however, this mode of expression divided itself into two – the musical tone to express emotion, and the articulate word which can only express what appeals to the intellect.⁸⁶

Here, the nub of the issue for Vaughan Williams becomes once again clear: he is concerned above all with the inherently vocal origins of music in an emotional act of expression and communication. He frequently mused upon the extent to which language presented the origins of music, emphasizing the essence of music as a speech-act wherein, as he claimed elsewhere in his discussion of Wagnerian music drama, words and music ‘spring from the same source’. In this way, Vaughan Williams situates himself squarely within a perspective from which music emerges not only from an act of human self-expression, but further, an expression designed for communication – and crucially, one which presupposes a communicant.

It is important that Vaughan Williams’s interest in the communicative quality of the human voice is habitually located at the root of a great many of his arguments about the origins and function of music: statements which make clear a particular interest in the notion

⁸⁵ See *The Vocalist*, 1.3 (June, 1902), 94-6, and 1.5 (August, 1902), 156-9; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 133-51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

of ‘sympathy’ generated between the makers and hearers of ‘actual sound’, and thus which illuminate his idea of a national musical ‘community’ considerably. By exploring a selection of these propositions concerning the human voice, especially as projected in song, the important relation of Vaughan Williams’s 1902 preacher tale to the theories of Herbert Spencer – as much as the implications of a Spencerian perspective in his idea of ‘national music’ more broadly – is further elaborated. In this context, the idea of musical ‘community’ and ‘citizenship’, as enacted in the moment of ‘actual’ sympathetic sound of voice, is brought forcefully to the forefront.

In turn, the themes of the articles published by Vaughan Williams in *The Vocalist* following his debut with ‘Linden Lea’, and during the same month as his apparent ‘conversion’ to folk song by October 1902, can thus be considered. It is demonstrated that a concern, essentially, with the capacity of a composer to ‘speak’ to an audience, and of a listener to ‘understand’ and ‘participate’ in the act of making national music, is again foremost among his preoccupations. It becomes possible, thereafter, to return to April 1902, and to the curious proposition embodied by the composer’s debut with ‘Linden Lea’. Here, a possible explanation for Vaughan Williams’s apparent ‘conversion’ to folk song is offered. The particular relation of ‘Linden Lea’ to an idea of ‘folk song’ and of the voice, and the role and particular nature of these categories at the origins of the composer’s project for national music, is by way of conclusion further interpreted.

Vaughan Williams and Spencer: A Sympathetic Hearing

As is frequently rehearsed in accounts of Vaughan Williams’s musical nationalism, the composer emphasized throughout his life the importance of ‘national traditions’ in the work of any composer. Speaking, in *National Music*, of modern composers who cast themselves adrift from the ‘refreshing wellspring’ of their own artistic heritage, he maintained that there was ‘salvation’ for those who remembered that

in one branch of our art it is hardly possible for an artist to be untrue to himself, namely when he writes for the human voice...the human voice is the oldest musical instrument and through the ages it remains what it was, unchanged; the most primitive and at the same time the most modern, because it is the most intimate form of human expression.⁸⁷

Comparing voice to instrument, he continued that

Instruments are continually being improved and altered, new inventions are continually increasing their capabilities both for good and evil. The pianoforte of today is not the instrument for which Beethoven wrote, the modern chromatic trumpet has nothing to do with the noble tonic and dominant instruments of the classics. Violinists can perform feats on their instruments undreamed of by our forefathers; we can add mutes hard, soft, or medium to our brass instruments which change their features so that their own mothers would not know them. But through all this the human voice remains what it was with its unsurpassed powers and its definite limitations, and in the face of these limitations the composer is forced to think of the essentials and not of the external trappings of music; thus he often finds his salvation. More important than all, the human voice is connected with our earliest associations and inevitably turns our thoughts back to our real selves, to that sincerity of purpose which it is so difficult to follow and so perilous to leave.⁸⁸

Here, Vaughan Williams advocates a particular ancestral consciousness, and thus an important ‘sincerity’ (as well as authenticity) in the sound of the human voice: its ability to engage ‘our earliest associations’, ‘inevitably turn[ing] our thoughts back to our real selves’. In this, the starkest expression of the composer’s debt to Herbert Spencer becomes apparent. Spender emphasized the particular ‘sympathy’ enabled through the making and hearing of the voice in a crucial passage from ‘The Origin and Function of Music’. His reference to the various ‘tones’ of the primitive voice, as projected in the expression of certain emotions, powerfully correlates with Vaughan Williams’s emphasis, in 1902, upon the way in which song emerged as the product of emotional speech. As the composer underlined, when ‘the emotional element’ of speech became ‘strong’, there emerged the ‘folk-song’ or ‘country song’:

⁸⁷ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 57.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

Since the song was so direct a development of emotional excitement, [the audience] were not surprised to find that every incident in the daily life of unsophisticated people was represented in song. So among the folk-songs, or country songs of a nation they found every event and every emotion represented – love songs, hunting songs, drinking songs, songs of birth, marriage and death...

Read in dialogue with the following from Spencer's theory of musical evolution, the correspondences are powerful:

All music is originally vocal. All vocal sounds are produced by the agency of certain muscles...variations of voice are the physiological results of variations of feeling; it follows that each inflection or modulation is the natural outcome of some passing emotion or sensation...That different *qualities* of voice accompany different mental states, and that under states of excitement the tones are more sonorous than usual, is another general fact...⁸⁹

The expressiveness of these various modifications of voice is innate. Each of us, from babyhood upwards, has been spontaneously making them, when under the various sensations and emotions by which they are produced. Having been conscious of each feeling at the same time that we heard ourselves make the consequent sound, we have acquired an established association of ideas between such sound and the feeling which caused it. When the like sound is made by another, we ascribe the like feeling to him; and by a further consequence, we not only ascribe to him that feeling, but have a certain degree of it aroused in ourselves: for to become conscious of the feeling which another is experiencing, is to have that feeling awakened in our own consciousness, which is the same thing as experiencing feeling. Thus these various modifications of voice become not only a language through which we understand the emotions of others, but also the means of exciting our sympathy with such emotions.⁹⁰ (Spencer's emphasis).

In this, Spencer outlines the power of the human voice to enact a 'sympathy' between the maker and hearer of human sounds: one predicated upon the experience of having made such sounds, and thus responding in a particularly embodied and unconscious manner to their making by others. Vaughan Williams claims precisely this power for the voice in the passage above, as he maintains that the voice turns ourselves back on our 'real selves', engaging our 'earliest associations'. Crucially, he also engaged this idea when emphasizing the extent to which an experience of music 'from the inside' was paramount to a particular mode of listening, hearing, and understanding.

⁸⁹ Spencer (1976), 312-14.

⁹⁰ Spencer (1976), 317-8.

That the composer was heavily involved with the act of ‘making music’ throughout his career is well-known: it is his continued conducting of local festivals and amateur choirs, even when a composer of international repute, that lies at the heart of Frogley’s reference to such citizenship, as noted above. Yet Vaughan Williams’s particular devotion to the ‘actual sound’ of music is perhaps more subtle and more powerful than the promotion of mere participation in amateur musical events. The embodied ‘ownership’ and ‘understanding’ of music, as guaranteed through its making, is explicit in a later article in which Vaughan Williams recounts his experience as the conductor of one of many amateur choirs. Here, he makes clear a mode of musical engagement that is achieved in an experience of art music through the music of the body, or the utterance of human sounds:

We are not experts, and many of us have at first but the vaguest idea of what sounds are represented by these curious little black blobs and straight stems at which we stare, but this weakness is also our strength; until we have made these sounds bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, we cannot attempt to sing them. The expert can pass from one musical experience to another, lightly and easily and forgetfully, but we, once great music has burnt into our minds and souls, have it for an everlasting possession.⁹¹

The mode of embodied engagement with music imagined here by the composer is powerful: an engagement with the materials of art music from the inside. Accordingly, Vaughan Williams maintained throughout his life that amateur music-making would form the basis from which a lasting tradition of English music would emerge. As Ursula Vaughan Williams points out in her account of Vaughan Williams’s preoccupations during 1902:

Ralph always believed that music must be heard...

‘When England has its municipal-aided music, so that every town of decent size possesses its own permanent orchestra...with increased musical activity, our composers will grow’... This subject was filling his mind and von Holst’s at this time.⁹²

⁹¹ Vaughan Williams, ‘Local Musicians’, *The Abinger Chronicle*, 1.1 (1939), 1-3; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 79-81, 80.

⁹² U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 63.

This focus upon the material quality of music as made and heard seemed in fact to ‘fill the composer’s mind’ throughout his career. It draws together, moreover, a number of otherwise disparate strands of Vaughan Williams’s thinking and activity. His call to ‘the amateur and especially the listener’ to ‘be doers of the word and not hearers only’ is more significant than it first appears, for as the composer maintained, ‘a musical nation is not a nation which is content to listen. The best form of musical appreciation is to try and do it for yourself; to really get inside the meaning of music’.⁹³ At the opening of *National Music*, he stated: ‘As long as a country is content to take its music passively there can be no really artistic vitality in the nation’.⁹⁴ In ‘Making Your Own Music’, the Epilogue to *The Making of Music*, Vaughan Williams reiterated that

All art is creative art; and musical appreciation especially demands active participation rather than passive acceptance on the part of the hearer. When we listen to a symphony as we should do, we are actually taking part, with the composer and the performers, in the creation of that symphony.

Shakespeare wrote some very beautiful lines about letting music creep in our ears, but this is not a true picture of real, creative listening, which cannot exist except as a counterpart of active participation by the hearer. Therefore, before we truly listen we must be able also to create.⁹⁵

This preoccupation derives from Vaughan Williams’s earliest discussions of music, as embodied in the articles published in *The Vocalist* following his debut of 1902. Here, Vaughan Williams’s concern is similarly with the experience of the listener, and with the capacity of music to ‘speak’ from composer to hearer. (His discussion of folk song is notably absent throughout these months.) In ‘The Soporific Finale’, an article contributed alongside ‘Linden Lea’ and ‘A School of English Music’ to the April edition of *The Vocalist*, the composer discusses the business of ‘keeping a listener awake’, this to be achieved through providing music – and especially a finale – which ‘fills an emotional niche’. As he suggests, a composer must be aware of the ‘purely physical’ ‘weakness’ of the average listener, who falls

⁹³ Vaughan Williams, ‘National Music: Some Conclusions’, in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 67.

⁹⁴ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

asleep as ‘the natural result of

tiring the nerves by the repetition of similar sensations; a monotonous voice, the roaring of a train, or a surfeit of first-rate music, all produce the same result...[a] composer must in his last movement take...special efforts to reclaim the wandering attention...The ear, which has been deadened by the steady progress of vigorous and unemotional themes, must be suddenly arrested by something now. The most obvious way of doing this is to place a new tune at the end of the movement...The art of keeping an audience awake may not be the glory of the musical temple, but it is a foundation without which that temple could not exist.⁹⁶

The significance of guiding the appreciation of art music – as much as ‘arresting’ the listener, eliciting an embodied, physical musical experience – is clear. Vaughan Williams demands, literally, that the finale of a musical work project a different tone of voice: one that will break the potential ‘monotony’ of a listener’s experience of art music, bringing a new and engaging emotional content to bear upon a listener’s experience and response. This article speaks powerfully to the composer’s later programme notes, in which little more than a series of ‘tunes’ are offered by way of guidance to the progress of his music.

In a related, though somewhat more complex fashion, a concern with the ‘musical emotions’ of the composer and in turn the hearer is expressed in his article ‘Palestrina and Beethoven’, which appeared in the May 1902 edition of *The Vocalist*. Again, Vaughan Williams emphasizes the role of the hearer in ‘creating’ the musical work, locating its emotional capacity in the perception and experience of the listener:

Let us first see what we mean by the word ‘emotional’. All music, strictly speaking, is emotional, because every impression produced by music is an emotion; but when we talk of emotional music, we mean music which produced a very high degree of excitement in the sensibilities....[There are] double emotions which surround a work of art, namely, that emotion which impels the composer to write the music, and that which the hearer experiences when it is performed. These have no necessary connection.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Vaughan Williams, ‘The Soporific Finale’, *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 31; reprinted in David Manning (ed.) (2008), 19-21. It is provocative that Sibelius (whom Vaughan Williams had not yet heard in 1902) provided just such material at the conclusion of the finale of his Second Symphony (1902). This work ends in D major with a radiant, rising hymn-like melody. It will become clear in the following chapters that a hymn-like conclusion (often cast in the key of D major) was to become a fingerprint of Vaughan Williams’s music.

⁹⁷ Vaughan Williams, ‘Palestrina and Beethoven’, *The Vocalist*, 1.2 (May, 1902), 36-7; reprinted in David Manning (ed.) (2008), 125-8.

Here, the composer seems anxious as to the question of being able to reach the listener, the musical work emerging as a kind of unknowable space within which communication from one to another can be lost, the wakeful attention of the listener in peril.

The singing of song, however, creates a means of ‘reaching out’ across the space of the open-air, or across the space of a concert hall – the space of the abstract wilderness of an art work – in order to ‘reach’ a listener: to communicate. This becomes clear in ‘A Sermon to Vocalists’, the first article in which Vaughan Williams refers to folk song after ‘A School of English Music’. Here, he stages an impassioned plea, appropriate to the title of the article, both to singers and listeners, and with an urgency somewhat absent from his earlier articles. Published during November 1902 (at which point he was delivering his folk song lectures at Bournemouth), Vaughan Williams maintained that a ‘disease’ affecting English musical culture was fast destroying its hopes for a vital future. The name for this disease was ‘the ballad concert’, and its symptom, the ubiquitous ‘royalty ballad’. A remedy for this ‘malady’, in turn, was to be found in the singing of ‘good’ and ‘sincere’ songs, as the composer maintained as follows:

the typical ‘royalty ballad’ possesses neither melody nor rhythm. Melody – a real tune, must be vital and individual... Amateur singers! I ask you in all seriousness, why do you sing such songs?...There is nothing in [ballad songs] which can be dignified by the name of a tune, and their emotions are false, artificial, and vulgar, but emphatically not simple. I know that there is a great difficulty in getting good English songs...[but] if you want a rich storehouse of national tune why do you not go to our own dazzling treasury of British folk-tunes. Here we find all those qualities which are so painfully absent from the ‘ballad-concert’ song – sincerity, depth of emotion, simplicity of expression, and, above all, beautiful melody...

Amateur singers! You are in a position of great responsibility! The British public is not unmusical; it is only indiscriminating. When you come on to the platform to sing to an audience you hold them at your mercy. The better your voice, the more telling your delivery, the more surely you will mesmerise your hearers, and rob them of all their critical faculties. You have only to open your mouth wide enough, and they will open theirs, and swallow any stuff you are pleased to hurl at them...With you will lie the guilt, if you give your audience milk-and-water instead of wine, or poison instead of stimulating food...What we want in music, as in everything else, is something alive...⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Vaughan Williams, ‘A Sermon to Vocalists’, *The Vocalist*, 1.8 (November, 1902), 227-9; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 25-30.

In this essay, the nourishing power of the ‘sincere’ song, as sung, ‘told’, and thus heard, is of paramount importance: the quality of a ‘living’ music, in which performer and hearer are at one. This ‘Sermon to Vocalists’ makes explicit the question of holding a listener, and the question of a direct line of communication with a hearer ‘mesmerised’, unconsciously, by the quality of song, and by the ‘telling’ delivery of a voice. The image of open mouths, hurling the ‘actual sound’ of song from a platform to the swallowing English public is a highly potent one, and correlates with that notion of the preacher’s tones reaching out across the land, reaching out to his congregation, to ‘draw’ them, thus enacting a spiritual transformation and a bond of union. Crucially, the desire that these melodies be ‘fed’ into the mouths of the people makes clear their promised potency as a source of musical, physical, and spiritual sustenance: a sustenance predicated upon their performative status as sung, and heard, by all.

The Conversion of 1902

It is useful to return, at this point, to a consideration of how the discussion above furthers an understanding of Vaughan Williams’s apparent conversion to the power of folk song by October 1902, at which point he delivered his Bournemouth lectures, and in the following month, published his ‘Sermon to Vocalists’. In ‘A School of English Music’, Vaughan Williams denied that folk song could play a part in the revival of English musical culture and English composition: a denial articulated on the basis that this music did not present a ‘natural’ part of the English musician’s everyday life, and thus was not a ‘language spoken naturally and unpremeditatedly’ between composer and people. At this point in his career, moreover, he appeared to discern a gulf between social classes, suggesting in ‘A School of English Music’ that composers such as himself – members of the ‘lettered’, upper-middle classes – would find problematic the assimilation and absorption of music of the ‘unlettered’ classes: folk music was not a ‘language’ spoken between composer and people, as Vaughan Williams maintained. The proposition suggested some months later in his earliest folk song lectures, however, was that the *sound* of ‘song’ – of which one type was folk song – provided

just this means of ‘speaking’ to a culture who were in turn invited to respond, through the status of song as a ‘universal’ extension of the human voice. As Vaughan Williams later maintained,

the art of singing is nearly universal; most people can sing a bit. Moreover, the technique and the nature of the human voice is very much what it was two thousand years ago. This is why choral music has remained in the straight road much more than has instrumental writing...Music for voices deals with something essential, not with the tricks of presentation.⁹⁹

What, it might be contemplated, had awakened the composer to a belief that ‘universal’ ancestral voices could be recovered, re-performed, and heard once more by a community of literate English listeners? How had the question of musical praxis provided a link, in his imagination, that would enable the bridging of class divisions as regards folk song in this inherently democratic musical project?

It is of no small significance that the promise of a ‘vital’ musical future was pledged by Cecil Sharp when he reported in that famous statement that ‘every country village in England was a nest of singing-birds’.¹⁰⁰ The image of birds, open-mouthed, singing, was also a potent metaphor that fed into a larger project of the folk revival’s promotion of regeneration in English musical culture, as nourished through Sharp’s work to facilitate folk singing in schools and in public education. In a tribute to his colleague in 1954, Vaughan Williams made clear the central importance of the *practice* of folk song in the revival of English musical culture, when he wrote as follows:

⁹⁹ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 220. Elsewhere in his ‘National Music’ lectures, Vaughan Williams challenged his audience to consider the following proposition: ‘is not folk song the bond of union where all our musical tastes can meet?...One day, perhaps, we shall find an ideal music which will be neither popular nor classical, highbrow or lowbrow, but an art in which all can take part’. See *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 39. In light of the democratic ideals inherent in Vaughan Williams’s project for national music, it was entirely appropriate that his Mary Flexner lectures should have been delivered at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. Bryn Mawr is an all-female liberal arts college, founded by Quakers in 1885 with a view to providing women with a more ambitious academic education than was provided anywhere else in the United States at that time. It was the first college to offer women graduate education through to the level of PhD, and was also the first institution to offer doctorates in social work. Between 1921 and 1938, the college supported the women’s labour movement, and during the Second World War offered refuge to European scholars who had become refugees from Nazi persecution. The ideological outlook of this college would surely have appealed to Vaughan Williams.

¹⁰⁰ Cecil Sharp, *Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), quoted in Kennedy (1980), 26.

In the domain of theory, Parry had applied the Darwinian theory of evolution to music, and had proved the necessity of folk song. It remained for the big man to come along and combine theory and practice in one.

There was already a Folk Song Society in existence which discussed our traditional melodies over a cup of tea in a dilettante spirit, and had to admit, rather shamefacedly, that some of these tunes sung by simple-minded rustics were ‘sweetly pretty’...Parry had theoretically traced the evolution of music from the primitive tune to the elaborate symphony. It was left to Sharp to declare, in no half-hearted manner, that here was something of supreme beauty which had grown up, as part of our life, with our language and our customs. And he set to work both by precept and practice to enable, at all events, the younger generation to recapture their great heritage of song which their fathers had nearly let slip through their fingers...Here were tunes obviously of the highest beauty which were nevertheless easy to understand and easy to sing. Sharp, who had no idea of hiding his light under a bushel, published several volumes of these wonderful tunes which the average amateur could easily sing...¹⁰¹

Here, Sharp’s role in facilitating the singing of folk song – such that children would speak ‘the national musical idiom’, as Sharp put it in his *Conclusions* – is central to Vaughan Williams’s advocacy of the movement. Yet given that the composer did not engage with Cecil Sharp on the question of folk song until some months after he had collected his first songs in December 1903, we might wonder what had provoked his realization, in the October lecture of 1902, that folk music could be re-introduced as an accessible and singable material through which an English musical public could be made musical. It might be deduced that an event or realization of some significance must be located in Vaughan Williams’s experience between April and October 1902, such that he renounced his earlier and adamant suggestion that folk song could not become the basis from which an English revival could proceed: an event relating to the practice and communicative capacity of song and of the voice.

It is perhaps in the biography of Ursula Vaughan Williams that there emerges a possible explanation: namely, in her innocuous and brief suggestion that in preparation for the lectures at Bournemouth, Vaughan Williams took lessons in both singing and ‘voice production’.¹⁰² As was signaled by the editor’s introduction to *The Vocalist*, ‘the subject of

¹⁰¹ Vaughan Williams, ‘Cecil Sharp: An Appreciation’ (1954), in Manning (ed.) (2008), 269-71, 269. Vaughan Williams appears to be referring with some sarcasm to Lucy Broadwood’s attitude towards traditional singers when he evokes the ‘simple-minded rustic’: see, for example, Broadwood’s ‘Introduction’ to a collection of folk songs from Surrey and Sussex, in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, vol. 1 (1899-1904), 139-141.

¹⁰² U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 60.

singing [was, in 1902,] daily attracting more attention than was ever the case before', and it will become clear in the following chapter that a wealth of manuals pertaining not only to the practice of song but to the production of a particularly English, communicative voice, emerged in England throughout the opening decades of the century (many of these emerging as tracts aimed at preachers and other orators). It is noteworthy, with this in mind, that Vaughan Williams himself devised a series of 'Vocal Exercises' along with Gertrude Sichel during the 1920s, these founded upon J.S. Bach's B minor Mass. As Vaughan Williams and Sichel makes clear, they are 'not necessarily actual passages out of the Mass, but are suggested by such passages'. These exercises were clearly intended to foster the development of the voice, for as is also remarked in a prefatory note to these exercises, 'They may be sung at any pitch suitable to the voice of the singer using them'.¹⁰³

Presently, it will be demonstrated that this idea of song as an extension of the natural, communicative, and nourishing voice called forth from a 'primitive' rural past, illuminates the centrality of singing in the broader revival of English music. This exploration of ideas of 'an English voice' in English musical culture, both literally and figuratively, sheds further light, in turn, upon Vaughan Williams's projections of certain kinds, or tones, of musical voice in various of his works. In the meantime, it might simply be posited here that Vaughan Williams's emphasis in his Bournemouth lectures upon the power of the 'sound' of a human voice to 'wake up' the 'unmusical listener' – a listener unable to understand the unintelligible sounds of 'abstract music' – was paramount to his earliest and lifelong promotion of the role of folk song in English musical culture.

¹⁰³ See Gertrude Sichel and R. Vaughan Williams, '25 Vocal Exercises Founded on Bach's Mass in B Minor' (London: Stainer & Bell, 1924). The exercises consist of a series of passages which present various vocal and musical challenges to the vocalist: singing intervals; managing quaver and semiquaver passages; and singing in harmony with other voice parts. Words are only added to exercises 9 and 11 ('Amen') and 17 ('judicare vivos').

Concluding Remarks

While Vaughan Williams's position on folk song remained ambivalent during the early years of his career, his concern with the 'actual sound' of music was consistently articulated throughout his life, and crucially was elaborated in the moment of his public 'conversion' to folk materials in the wake of his earlier and ambivalent debut. In this context, it would appear that the mode of musical expression, communication, and participation represented by the *ideal* of a performative act of folk song, and its communal function in 'unlettered' English communities, is what attracted the composer to folk music throughout his life, as becomes clear in the conclusions of *National Music*:

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 that of the folk-singer, it will not be vital.¹⁰⁴

Vaughan Williams's search for an English art music that spoke with the immediacy, spontaneity, and intelligibility of the folk singer's song – as much as the songs and hymns of the parish Church – might thus be considered essential to a nuanced understanding of his approach to finding an intelligible compositional voice, and one that was somehow to assimilate, and sing with, the voices of English musicians. With this in mind, it is significant that as Julian Onderdonk has demonstrated, Vaughan Williams's methods as a folk collector can be shown to have been shaped by a powerful desire to reclaim 'those tunes that bore most vividly the imprint of the singer's own personality'.¹⁰⁵ Such ideals are suggestive of the composer's early and strangely articulated desire that a national style be 'modelled on the personal style of English musicians', and of his concern with the 'raw material' of folk song.

In this way, the perspectives offered above provide a means of considering how Vaughan Williams's music was to speak with multiple voices, and further to consider how

¹⁰⁴ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 64.

¹⁰⁵ See Onderdonk, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 132.

such an ideal might relate to his multifarious activities as ‘social’ musician. As David Manning suggests,

He may have gained a lasting reputation as a composer, but in his lifetime Vaughan Williams was also a folksong collector, musical editor, teacher, conductor, music historian, polemicist, and administrator...What is less obvious is how, or whether, all of these activities are related, and why, given that Vaughan Williams was passionately committed to original composition, he spent so much time engaged in other work.¹⁰⁶

As Manning continues, ‘there was a central purpose to all that activity which is revealed most clearly in his writings’.¹⁰⁷ In light of the discussion above, it might be proposed that Vaughan Williams sought in his editing of the *Hymnal*, his collection and publication of folk songs, and his conducting of amateur choirs and orchestras, a means of inculcating English musicians with an experience of music ‘from the inside’: a language of music as made, thereafter spoken ‘naturally and unpremeditatedly’, by a dialogue between composer and people. In this reading, Vaughan Williams’s rather elusive desire that music should express the ‘life of the community’, speaking for and with a community voice, might gain a rather more tangible perspective.

Thus the composer’s debut in *The Vocalist* was as entirely appropriate as it first appeared, though for different reasons. ‘Linden Lea’ appeared in a journal devoted above all to the performance, composition, and appreciation of song, promoting a practical and ‘popular’ engagement with the genre that correlated powerfully with Vaughan Williams’s earliest theorizing of a national music. It might be suggested that those lessons in singing and voice production, taken by way of preparation for the Bournemouth lectures, were formative in Vaughan Williams’s ‘further study’ of folk song, enabling his particular advocacy of its powers by the autumn of 1902: a practical engagement with the production of his own communicative singing voice, this crystallized, perhaps, in the experience of hearing the song

¹⁰⁶ Manning (ed.) (2008), 3–4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 4.

of the open-air preacher (as much as hearing the ‘actual sound’ of Charles Potiphar’s folk song the following year). While the encounter with the preacher might be read as but a powerful mythology, Vaughan Williams’s frequent telling of this tale, quite aside from its reality as a biographical fact, illustrates his very real concern with a communicative, ‘spiritual’ experience of music, and one that was latent in his earliest search for an intelligible and communal compositional voice.¹⁰⁸

In this reading, ‘Linden Lea’ acts as a complex call to the voices of a community past, present, and future. It is a song whose broad and participatory melodiousness is alive to its own quality as the potential bearer of community voices,¹⁰⁹ its invitation to the song compulsive, and its status as a ‘natural’ and ‘unpremeditated’ language of English music as clear in its materials as in its dialogue with ‘A School of English Music’. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, numerous songs of the composer’s early career function in a comparable fashion. Their status as an early expression of his national musical voice is illuminated first through an exploration of certain ‘sites’ upon which the voice of an English singer, and of a listener, were performed and called forth. A broad concern with the role of song in the nourishment of a particular kind of ‘English voice’ – a ‘sincere’, ‘artistic’, ‘intelligible’, and thus communal national voice – emerges as a prominent though hitherto entirely unexplored feature of early twentieth-century English culture. By examining discourses surrounding the making and hearing of this voice, it becomes possible, in turn, to unfold the ways in which Vaughan Williams’s music engaged a complex dialogue with those responding to his music contemporaneously: a dialogue in which the voices of the music, as much as those called to its participation, can be shown to define a particularly English mode

¹⁰⁸ Despite the rather mythological tone of the composer’s tale of the open-air preacher, Ursula Vaughan Williams maintains that this encounter occurred ‘one summer’ around the period 1893-4, while Vaughan Williams was on a walking holiday with his cousin, Ralph Wedgwood. See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 39.

¹⁰⁹ It is provocative that numerous composers arranged ‘Linden Lea’ for performance by multiple voices at various points during the first half of the twentieth century, as is clear through consultation of the extensive list of arrangements included in Michael Kennedy’s *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (rev. ed. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14. See, for example, Arthur Somervell’s arrangement for unaccompanied SATB choir, published by Boosey & Co. in 1929. Somervell was himself deeply committed to improving standards of music education and in particular, singing, in Britain, especially during the early years of the century. For his views on ‘national song’, singing, and the necessity of community participation in music, see Gordon Cox (ed.), *Sir Arthur Somervell on Music Education: His Writings, Speeches, and Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003).

of song.

Chapter 2

The Place of Song

In October 1926, Harry Plunket Greene, the celebrated baritone to whom Vaughan Williams had some years earlier dedicated *Songs of Travel* (1901-4),¹ gave a series of three radio talks for the BBC.² The subject of these lectures, derived in part from articles published earlier in the inaugural edition of *Music & Letters*³ and from his monograph *Interpretation in Song*,⁴ was that of singing. More precisely, he explored the question of interpretation in singing: a mode of discovery and communication defined as the creation of a particular bond with – and mode of journey with – a listener, within an imagined space, or land, of song.

Beginning from the proposition that '[f]rom time immemorial the human voice has held a royal position in music', Plunket Greene celebrates the materiality and particular communicative function of the human voice with an emphasis that is highly evocative of the ideals of song and of the voice embraced by Vaughan Williams, unfolded above.

As Plunket Greene begins,

[the human voice] owes that pre-eminence to its gifts...the capacity of its resonators is more or less variable at will; it has a box of colours with which to paint its pictures; and it travels with its own orchestra without any danger of leaving the double-bass in the hat-rack or being charged extra luggage on its flute. It has one serious drawback (the cause of all its troubles) – the breath on which it is carried is meant primarily for running its owner's body and strongly objects to *sostenuto* and other digressions from the normal. But its real power lies in its ability to give a message from man to man without proxy.

It has taken us centuries – in spite of Schubert – to learn the lesson that the object of singing is to make words more beautiful, that song is but divine speech... It is true that we sing by nature when we are children and have to learn to speak, but as we grow up and self-consciousness takes possession of us these positions are reversed; speech becomes so much of a habit as to be practically spontaneous, while singing has to be learnt.⁵

¹ See Rufus Hallmark, 'Robert Louis Stevenson, Ralph Vaughan Williams and their *Songs of Travel*', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 129-56, 135.

² These radio talks, delivered on October 4th, 14th, and 19th, and entitled 'Equipment', 'Rhythm and Diction', and 'Phrasing and Style', respectively, were also published that year as a small booklet: see Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing given for the British Broadcasting Company at their London Station* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1926).

³ Harry Plunket Greene, 'The Future of the English Song: I. The Singer and the Public; II. The Singer and the Composer', *Music & Letters*, 1.1 and 1.2 (January and March, 1920), 19-26 and 123-34.

⁴ Harry Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1912).

⁵ Plunket Greene (1926), 1.

Encouraging the singer to ‘sing as you speak’, Plunket Greene seeks to return the act of song to a ‘natural’ and ‘simple’ state of innocent and unselfconscious immediacy: the guiding maxim of all three lectures is that ‘the highest art is to conceal art’.⁶ This attempt to recover song’s primordial naturalness, free from any artifice in its making, is directed in turn towards enacting ‘the sympathetic force with which audience and singer hold one another’, for the real power of the voice is ‘to give a message from man to man without proxy’. To this end, Plunket Greene’s discussion is focused around the production of a ‘simple’, ‘natural’, embodied, and emotionally ‘spontaneous’ singing voice, for as he underlines with a Spencerian emphasis prominent throughout, ‘[t]he physical use of [the singer’s] voice must be the *unconscious response to the play of his feeling*’ (Plunket Greene’s emphasis).⁷

Attempting to mitigate the ‘only serious drawback’ of the human voice engaged in the potentially unnatural and emotionally overwhelming act of song (one which ‘interferes’ with the breath that runs the human body), Plunket Greene’s search for a primordial English voice leads to his suggestion of a means of disciplining this act of self-expression, such that it remains contained in the natural functions and actions of the body. In recovering song’s innocence and primitivity, the singing body must deliver its music in a particular way: the singer must call forth his voice on the breath which runs the body; in turn, the body remains healthy and nourished in such singing:

I must tell you where to breathe...

You do *not* breathe in your stomach. If you do you will probably get bad dyspepsia, and your figure will deteriorate...

There is one place which fulfills our Latin proverb [‘the highest art is to conceal art’] – one tiny place so small and so ‘easy’ that you cannot see it. Run your hand down your breast-bone until you come to the end. There where the ribs branch off on either side is a little elastic triangle. When you breathe *in* this expands *out*, and when you breathe *out* this recedes *in*. All the rest of your body remains in repose. A singer should never be *seen* to breathe...

That little spot is the power-house of all your physical efforts... Not only that, but it is the seat of all your emotions. What is the meaning of the word ‘Inspiration’? (we are coming near to Interpretation now). It means

⁶ Ibid., 2. In 1912, Plunket Greene was even more vehement regarding the ‘naturalness’ of the human voice, stressing that ‘the very idea of artificiality is abhorrent’. See Plunket Greene (1912), 16.

⁷ Plunket Greene (1912), 4.

‘breathing in’.

And what is the good of inspiration if you cannot express it to others? And what is the meaning of the word ‘expression’? It means ‘pressing out’. There in that little invisible spot your breath takes the message of your inspiration and meets the great abdominal muscles which run across the centre of your body below your ribs, and hands it over to them to deliver.

Whether you swing a pickaxe, or hit a ball over the pavilion, or call ‘good-bye’ across the sea, or sing a child to sleep – power, attack, defence, love, hate, fright, indignation, admiration, tenderness – all have their home in that little invisible spot.

Our emotions are, mercifully, secret things, locked within ourselves, but if we undertake to give them to others we assume grave responsibility. Inspiration is a sacred trust: if we try to express it let us see to it that we make the message as beautiful as we can...⁸

The significance of this ‘inspired’ but emotionally ‘contained’ English singing becomes clear when considered in light of the particular relationship imagined by Plunket Greene between singer and listener, this outlined most succinctly in his 1912 monograph, in which he attempts to characterize the singer’s projection of a certain ‘Magnetism’:

the indefinable *something* which passes from singer to audience and audience to singer alike, for the audience which the singer holds in the hollow of his hand, holds him as surely in its own. Each acts and reacts on the other in ever-increasing degree. It is a gossamer thread over which passes that nameless electric current which stirs the singer to his depths and holds his audience thrilled and still. Which starts to spin it we do not know; probably the singer...as it grows it intoxicates...Its absence leaves an almost physical feeling of depression.⁹

To this end, Plunket Greene reminds the performer that at all times, ‘singer and audience sing, in reality, together in sympathy’,¹⁰ and in the second of his radio talks, illustrates the nature of such ‘sympathetic’ singing in hearing, staging a provocative invitation to the listener in a performance of Arthur Somervell’s arrangement of ‘All Through the Night’, accompanied by pianist ‘Mr Liddle’, as follows:

When Mr Liddle starts the opening symphony [the piano’s introduction] I want you to get in step with him and walk forward in slow march time. I will join you immediately and we will all go forward together. I have

⁸ Plunket Greene (1926), 5-6.

⁹ Plunket Greene (1912), 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

really been walking with you all the time, but do not become obstreperous until the fifth bar. Take a line at random, say:

‘Hill and dale in slumber steeping’”

and notice how the *ll* of ‘hill’ jumps on to the *a* of ‘and’ and pushes it forward; and the *nd* of ‘and’ jumps on to the *d* of ‘dale’ and the consonants merge; and the *l* of ‘dale’ on the *i* of ‘in’, and so on.

I have to call your attention to it, for if I didn’t you would never notice it. All you would feel would be that we were all three moving on in rhythmic pulses in a straight line to the end, and that we never once paused or looked back.¹¹

These ostensibly idiosyncratic directives to the singer are worth recounting extensively in this way, for they bring to the fore a series of themes that characterize an outpouring of discourses relating to ‘the production of the voice and its use in singing’, as Percy Scholes assessed when noting the proliferation of such texts as published in England during the early decades of the twentieth century.¹² This is a body of literature articulating a tradition and culture of ‘English’ song performance and voice production that has evaded the attention of historians. It is a culture, moreover, that offers a powerful insight into ideas of musical creation, appreciation, and revival during the opening decades of the century, and one which locates the genre of ‘song’, and the voices of English musicians, at its very heart.

Emphasizing a mode of singing that celebrates the human immediacy of the voice, reclaiming its originary primacy to and containment of the instrumental – ‘the flute’, ‘the double bass’, ‘the orchestra’ – Plunket Greene’s emphasis upon a ‘natural’ mode of song extends to his coding of a particularly English singing voice. Accordingly, English singing must engage but contain human emotions within a defined space in the body, which in turn requires the body’s exploration in a recovery of its ‘powerhouse’ of emotional reserve (a powerhouse reminiscent of Vaughan Williams’s advocacy of the ‘rich storehouse’ of national

¹¹ Plunket Greene (1926), 15-16.

¹² The surprisingly vast number of texts published on the art of singing and the mechanics of the voice from the turn of the twentieth century and flourishing during the inter-war years was highlighted by Percy Scholes, who remarked in 1947 that ‘books on the voice and its use in singing poured out during the *Musical Times* century, many of them written by the only man or woman who really understood the subject’: i.e. the singer. This outpouring is signaled through consultation of the large number of articles and reviews published in *The Musical Times* during this period, a selection of which are collected by Scholes under ‘Singing Teaching During the Century’, in Scholes (ed.) (1947), vol. I, 286-91, 289. A number of the texts noted by Scholes are examined in the prose below.

song to be discovered in England). The expressive passage of an emotional ‘message’ from this powerhouse sees a mapping of the body through a series of streams and connections: the charting of the body’s space, its flooding with song. These ‘currents’ or ‘messages’ thereafter leave the body in an act whereby ‘inspiration’ becomes ‘expression’.

The ‘expression’ of these ‘messages’, however, is such that they are imagined to remain contained within acts of natural, out-of-doors activity, becoming instrumental within practical acts of toil, care, and communication: waving a pickaxe, nursing a child, calling across the sea. Through this, the naturalness of song extends to a location of the singer in the land. The singer, in pressing out his ‘inspiration’, is imagined as engaging in a mode of movement, both within the body – the ‘resonators’ passing an emotional ‘message’ through a series of ‘currents’ – and simultaneously, within a ‘space’ of song: one in which crucially, the hearer is bound in step with the resonant singing body as it weaves its ‘gossamer thread’, moving through the ‘hill and dale in slumber steeping’. At the opening of his 1912 monograph, Plunket Greene made more explicit this association of singing with an exploration and discovery of the land, characterizing the singer as a ‘pioneer’, and teaching that

There is a fascination about the pioneer; he carries romance in his very name...To explore the unexplored, to ‘walk out toward the unknown region’, to win the secrets of the earth by force of arms have been the dream of boy and man from time immemorial. As with Nature, so with Art. Song has her dark continents and virgin peaks waiting to be conquered, and when they call the pioneer must be up and doing...¹³

Such metaphors offer a tantalizing glimpse of an uncharted region that itself, bears critical attention: namely, the idea of song – and of its performance – as a ‘place’ imagined by English musicians in which to make, communicate, and ‘understand’ a particular mode of national music, and to rediscover or reawaken a lost music within themselves.

As was posited above, Vaughan Williams’s debut with ‘Linden Lea’ opened a critical space around ‘song’, inviting, in turn, a shift in scholarly emphasis away from a

¹³ Plunket Greene (1912), 3-4.

preponderance with the composer's interest in folk materials as such, and rather towards an interrogation of his particular ideal of song as an extension of the communicative capacities of the human voice: an idea of a participatory but also performative – or embodied – national music, in which the contribution of the 'maker' played a crucial role in the creation of 'whole'. To this end, Vaughan Williams's emphasis upon the immediacy, materiality, or 'shock' of 'actual sound' was highlighted as part of a communicative ideal of 'musical citizenship', and his preoccupation with the performative and experiential capacities of music as made and heard, particularly by the human voice in song, interpreted as an integral part of this vision of a 'growth' of English music.

It will be considered in the current chapter that a study of sites for the communal performance of English song provide a powerful lens through which to explore the role of song, and of the ancestral voice, in the revival of English music and musical culture more broadly. This study provides a context, in turn, through which Vaughan Williams's earliest negotiation of a national, community music can be approached and illuminated. Ideas of an English voice highlight the notion of an English mode of musical 'delivery' in performance, and in this, the delivery of an invitation to a listener's participation. The ways in which Vaughan Williams's early song cycles seem to stage, and invite, the participation of a particular kind of English voice are identified through recourse to a study of their early reception, but also through a study of musical materials, these reconsidered within a new and telling context.

As Simon Featherstone has assessed in his recent study of cultural performances important in defining English identity during the early years of the twentieth century, a persistent preoccupation with the recovery of an 'English voice' was a concern not only of the folk revival but, as related to the discoveries of Cecil Sharp, became central to ideas of national identity in a wide range of social and cultural discourse and practice. As this author eloquently summarizes,

[a] founding myth of twentieth-century Englishness locates the re-discovery of its authentic voice in the encounter between Cecil Sharp and John England, gardener at the rectory of Hambridge, Somerset, on August 22 1903...¹⁴

Cecil Sharp's project to revive English folk-song, as with his work with the morris dance, was part of a nationalist strategy which, like that of elocutionists, intended to purify the traditional English voice from the corruptions of modernity.¹⁵

Offering an illuminating discussion of the ideas of the work of leading English elocutionists, Featherstone makes clear that a struggle regarding concepts of an English speaking voice was central to debates about national identity and social change throughout the century. Tracing the emergence of these concerns to the first decade of the century, he brings such performative acts of speech into dialogue with other cultural performances considered instrumental in defining ideas of English community and nation, important among which are 'journeys' of discovery, in which the 'secrets' of the lost and forgotten countryside were to be 'unearthed' and recovered.¹⁶

Alun Howkins has located the origins of this preoccupation with recovering an idealized rural England in a classic study published some years ago, assessing that

a strain emerged within English politics and ideas in the 1880s which linked the rural to a general crisis in urban society...this in turn produced a cultural response from the 1890s and 1900s which, by 1914, had spread far across English art and letters, music and architecture, producing a ruralist version of a specifically English culture...beginning before 1914 but reaching its peak in the interwar period, a great movement 'to the outdoors' completed the process by making the countryside an accessible and popular site of leisure... men and women had to be returned to the land if the nation was to survive.¹⁷

Plunket Greene's directives to the interpretation of song demonstrate that acts of musical expression, communication, and participation were nurtured through the production of a

¹⁴ Featherstone (2009), 150-1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶ See 'Journeys' in Featherstone (2009), 66-83. For further discussion of the 'invention' of rural England through ideas of its exploration and discovery, see 'Journeys' in Robert Colls (2002), 258-72. For a sourcebook bearing samples of inter-war tales of rural journey, see 'Versions of Rural England', in Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (eds.), *Writing Englishness 1900-1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73-109. The most detailed account of Vaughan Williams's interest in Edwardian ideas of travel and of journeying can be found in Savage (2002).

¹⁷ Howkins, in Colls and Dodd (eds.) (1986), 63-7.

singing voice which in turn became equated with ruralist ideas as a function of its 'nourishment' and 'renewal'. As Howkins makes clear, these were precisely the terms upon which a ruralist vision of a regenerated English culture was imagined during these years. It will be demonstrated in this chapter that ideas of a 'natural' English singing, and the 'discovery' of English song and of an 'ancestral' English voice, participate in a process of imagining the return of man to the music of the land. Such ideas offer not only an idea of the English singing voice called forth and constructed through these discourses, but help to define a broader idea of the 'out-of-doors' or early 'pastoral' song. As will be demonstrated, the performance of song became deeply implicated in the cultivation of the 'land' of English music, emerging as a peculiarly participatory and intelligible genre, and one from which a revival in English music was promoted to proceed. The insights gleaned from such a culture, as considered with relation to Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel* in particular, are provocative.

To this end, a study of the sites of song performance with which Vaughan Williams was intimately connected during the early years of his career is offered in Part I of this Chapter. These sites encouraged not only the 'artistic' performance of song, but simultaneously nourished a democratic project of musical education and communication. Such sites include a host of 'singing manuals' published during the early years of the century, and further include the discourses promoted by *The Vocalist*, the newly instituted journal of song performance in which Vaughan Williams made his debut as a national composer.

Before these ideas of song and voice production are explored, however, *The English Hymnal* is first theorized as an important site upon which the performance of English song, and thus its creation in the hands of a community, was facilitated and promoted. This context provides a powerful means of exploring, in Part II, the particularly 'artistic', 'popular', but further 'fresh' and 'out-of-doors' qualities discerned in Vaughan Williams's early song cycles, *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life*. It is the project of this section to bring a discussion of musical materials into dialogue with the performance culture outlined, and the

critical responses of an English public nourished by such cultures. Given that the two song cycles discussed were composed between 1901 and 1904, they span the years of Vaughan Williams's ambivalence towards and subsequent conversion to folk song, also encompassing his earliest activities as an active collector of folk music. As such, the ways in which a 'nationalist' purpose and character has been defined in these songs, as awkwardly related retrospectively by critics to a folkloristic ideal, can be powerfully re-inflected. Finally, a consideration of the particularly embodied mode of this national music – and its apparent desire to 'speak' to a listener – is unfolded through a phenomenological reading of a number of these early songs.

Song in English Revival

In delivering his BBC radio broadcasts, Plunket Greene (by 1926 a venerated 'pioneer' of the solo song recital, and a powerful agent in the development of a vernacular tradition of English song)¹⁸ contributed to a debate surrounding the English singing voice that raged throughout the early decades of the century: a debate which, as the editor of *The Vocalist* underlined in 1902, was 'daily arousing more interest and attention than was ever the case before'.¹⁹ Staging his voice through the medium of the BBC; through the newly instituted *Music & Letters*; and through one of a number of educational manuals dedicated to the improvement of musical literacy and performance in England, Plunket Greene spoke through three important institutions that have since been considered instrumental in constructing and popularizing a

¹⁸ Percy Scholes enlists the term 'pioneer' to characterize the work of both Plunket Greene and Gervase Elwes (the tenor who premiered Vaughan Williams's song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*) in consolidating the solo song cycle – and the solo English song – as a robust presence in English musical life during the early years of the century, maintaining that '[w]ithout abandoning the German *Lied*, which had formed the staple of the programmes of the pioneers in this line, they introduced and popularized the songs of Parry, Stanford and other native composers'. See Scholes (ed.) (1947), vol. I, 285-6. Michael Kennedy has also emphasized the way in which '[Campbell] McInnes, Francis Harford, and [Harry] Plunket Greene were at this time [1902] bringing forward new English songs at their recitals', emphasizing that a 'lead' was given by such singers to young English composers, prompting the composition of English song as an important genre for the negotiation of a native style. See Kennedy (1980), 51 and 63.

¹⁹ *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 2.

particular idea of musical Englishness.²⁰

As scholars of the twentieth-century revival of English music have underlined, the so-called ‘Renaissance’ proceeded in two stages: first, the regeneration of musical culture through promoting improvement in standards of musical performance and education; and second, the regeneration of a distinctive style of musical composition.²¹ Duncan Hinnells has demonstrated that historians of nationalism have often suggested that an education system can play a decisive role in shaping and nurturing national identity,²² and as such has explored the extent to which trends in ‘music appreciation’, especially during the inter-war years, shaped emerging ideas of Englishness in music. As Frank Howes considered in his study *The English Musical Renaissance*, the extent to which emergent compositional ‘styles’ can be related to the themes and preoccupation of education systems is a complex matter. Nevertheless as he reflects,

any form of knowledge, even discursive knowledge about music, broadens the basis of communication, and music is of its very nature a form of communication, implying two parties to it, the creator and his audience. It follows that a great composer can only arise in a society that is ready for him: composers cannot write in a vacuum; they will not spin notes for themselves alone if there is no interest in music in the society in which they live – as Vaughan Williams argues in his book *National Music*. History shows that composition flourishes only in a music-loving society...

The dark night of our eclipse coincided with the decay of our learning and the poverty of our taste (i.e. listener’s response). Our renaissance advanced with the revival of our learning. A renaissance of composition presupposes logically, if not chronologically, some sort of renaissance of response.²³

²⁰ See Hinnells (1999), who devotes sustained attention to the role of the BBC and OUP in shaping and promoting a national musical education policy. See also Revill (1991), who underlines the extent to which journals such as *Music & Letters* in particular demand attention given their powerful role in negotiating and promoting ideas of English musical identity during the inter-war years. Stephen Banfield has also underlined the extent to which *Music & Letters* represented a ‘Bible’ to the ‘nationalist credo’ of composers such as Vaughan Williams and Holst, these composers characterized as the ‘saviours’ of this movement, ‘its high priests and their learning the other constituencies that appeared in those early issues of the journal – Cecil Sharp and folksong, Plunket Greene and English art song, R. O. Morris and Tudor counterpoint, Violet Gordon Woodhouse and early keyboard instruments’. See Banfield, ‘Vaughan Williams and Gerald Finzi’, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 202-21, 203.

²¹ See, for example, Frank Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966).

²² Hinnells (1999), 48.

²³ Howes (1966), 343.

An emerging theme of the discussion thus far has been that of musical communication: a concern with music as created in the experience, or ‘response’, of a hearer, this a persistent strain of Vaughan Williams’s thinking from the earliest years of his career.²⁴ As Howes suggests above, such trends are related in turn to the broader ‘music appreciation’ movement, which as E. D. Mackerness has shown, emerged during the nineteenth-century and flourished in the aftermath of the First World War.²⁵

In the context of the current discussion, an important precedent to the early twentieth-century emphasis upon voice production is the ‘Tonic Sol-Fa’ movement, a vocal education system developed and popularized with spectacular success by John Curwen. Charles Edward McGuire has recently devoted sustained attention to the aims and practices of this movement, assessing that its promotion of community singing was motivated primarily by the desire for social and moral improvement, rather than a drive towards national musical regeneration.²⁶ Important among the premises of this education system was an emphasis upon the participatory and democratic experience of music. To this end, as McGuire assesses, vocal rather than instrumental forms were powerfully promoted as materials for teaching, precisely because ‘vocal music appeals at once to everyone’. As such, vocal genres provided an efficacious forum through which a community consciousness could be fostered.²⁷

In this context, Vaughan Williams’s emphasis upon the specifically vocal, rather than instrumental, origins of music – and his justification of ‘song’ as the most ‘universal’ form of music – is an important legacy of such ideas. Yet while the Curwen system provides an

²⁴ Bojan Bujic has underlined that an aesthetics of hearing was advanced in the influential ideas of Edmund Gurney, to whom Vaughan Williams turned on numerous occasions in his writings. This emphasis upon the psychological aspects of musical aesthetics was, moreover, ‘wholly understandable within the confines of the theories of art then prevalent in England’, as Bujic asserts. As such, he suggests that such trends might be considered a particularly English tradition. See Bujic, Introduction to ‘England’, in *Music in European Thought 1851-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 260-2. It is notable that during the inter-war years, discourses surrounding music and psychology emerged in England with some persistence, the study of Frank Howes significant in this respect: see Frank Stewart Howes, *The Borderland of Music and Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1926).

²⁵ See E. D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964), 259. For a further discussion of developments in music education during the nineteenth century, see, for example, Bernarr Rainbow, ‘The Rise of Popular Music Education in Nineteenth-Century England’, in Nicholas Temperley (ed.), *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 17-42.

²⁶ See Charles Edward McGuire, *Music and Victorian Philanthropy: The Tonic Sol-fa Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 59-61.

important context for the illumination of ideas of English singing during this period, it is clear that the theories of vocal education and improvement emerging throughout the opening decades of the twentieth century proceed with a rather different purpose. To the extent that they emphasized, like Curwen, the spiritual, moral, and physical benefits of singing, this becomes part of a changing project, aligned with ideas of the culturally regenerative powers of ruralism, and with the development of an individually ‘creative’ or ‘inspirational’ musical response, both in singing and in listening.

In what follows, it is suggested that an emphasis upon the act of creation in performance and listening – and the idea of song and of the voice as powerful in binding together a musical community – became a theme not only of Vaughan Williams’s writings but of a broader scheme of vocal education in England. Through investigating such themes, a study of how a culture of musical appreciation might be shown to nourish artistic style is considered. Though both Stephen Banfield and Trevor Hold have underlined the extent to which English song composers sought throughout this period to nourish an ‘art-song tradition’ to match ‘the thriving, healthy tradition of German *Lied* or the quickly-flowering French *mélodie*’,²⁸ the extent to which English song was nourished through an idea of the English voice has not been clear. As Trevor Hold has maintained, however, an important factor in any definition of the aesthetics of early twentieth-century song must take into account the manner in which composers were ‘complemented and inspired’ by the voices of singers such as Gervase Elwes and Plunket Greene. As such, Hold maintains that a definitive characteristic of the genre of ‘Romantic English Song’ may be located in the ‘eminently singable’ quality of its melodies.²⁹

²⁸ Hold (2002), 17.

²⁹ See Hold (2002), ix-xi. It is important that Vaughan Williams himself emphasized the role played by the tenor Gervase Elwes in the development of Roger Quilter’s approach to song composition in particular, asserting that ‘If it be true that singers found their style on some particular composer, the converse is equally true, and there can be no doubt that the graceful and refined music of Roger Quilter owes its inspiration largely to the exquisite style and perfect phrasing of Gervase Elwes’. See Vaughan Williams, ‘Gervase Elwes’ (1921), in Manning (ed.) (2008), 57-9. Also notable in this tribute is Vaughan Williams’s emphasis upon the extent to which Elwes fought against ‘singers’ English, promoting, rather, the ‘beauty’ of the vernacular in song. It is perhaps of further interest that Ursula Vaughan Williams attested to the extent to which Vaughan Williams composed his songs with particular

Hold's characterization of the 'Romantic' English song is worthy of brief attention, for such a characterization is akin to that which dominates Banfield's study of the 'sensitivity' of English song during this period. The implications of these rather ill-defined aesthetic designations seem to run contrary to the ways in which ideas of a communal, 'singable', but also 'artistic' song were under construction in English culture at this time. Though many critics have located song as a powerful and 'popular' presence in the history of English music – and further, a 'sociable' and 'humane' genre appropriate to, and definitive of, its 'Englishness' – it is perhaps only Stephen Banfield who has made explicit the extent to which the increased composition of song during this period is indicative of its importance in the twentieth-century revival of English music:

Publishers' and library catalogues show that there was an enormous market in both royalty ballads and 'art songs' – the distinction was not always clear, as we shall see – from the mid-Victorian period into the 1930s, without giving any obvious indication that the turn of the century was climactic. Nevertheless, beyond the relatively stable commercial success of song-writing throughout this 60-year period there was, roughly in the middle, a radical transformation in the aesthetic status of English song. In the 1870s and 1880s no composer was likely to feel proud of concerning him- or herself overmuch with the genre; by 1914, however, song was beginning to flaunt its rediscovered pedigree.³⁰

As is clear, Banfield underlines the 'popularity' of the genre to the extent that he acknowledges a 'huge market' for its consumption. Yet his definition of the aesthetic character of 'serious' English song seems to deny the 'popular' quality of a complex milieu of popular song performance from which the genre of early twentieth-century art song arose, emphasizing its purely 'artistic', and further, 'self-communing' quality. While claiming to avoid any 'aesthetic definition' of English song, it is unavoidable that by adopting the category 'sensitivity' he makes an implicit statement about the aesthetic ideal he assigns to

singers in mind, suggesting that his *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), for example, were composed with 'Campbell McInnes's voice in mind'. See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 97.

³⁰ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 1-2.

these works (one that informs his entire conception). The ‘Romantic song’, he explains in his definition of ‘sensibility’, is concerned with ‘the “refinement” of emotion’:

an essentially inward-looking, private and intimate nature...the element of self-communion is paramount. Hence the reflective and reflexive role of the accompaniment in so many cases, hence the relative unimportance of questions of performance (which are hardly touched upon in this study)...³¹

Accordingly, Banfield approaches English song as an essentially ‘artistic’ extension of the German *Lied*: a tendency which speaks to his broader project of defining English song as comparable and equal to the powerful heritage of German and French national song.³²

While it is beyond the scope of the current study to take up the challenge issued by Banfield’s suggestion that scholars will need to ‘define anew’ the complex boundaries between ‘art’ and ‘popular’ song through a consideration of the myriad ‘popular’, ‘ballad’, and ‘art songs’ composed at this time, an attempt to explore these categories as negotiated by early responses to Vaughan Williams’s songs is offered below. In this, it is suggested that a mode of purely ‘self-communing’ English song is rather inappropriate to the powerful tradition of popular song performance from which composers such as Vaughan Williams drew inspiration.³³ As will become clear, ‘artistic’ song in early twentieth-century England

³¹ Ibid., x.

³² Notably, John Caldwell takes a similar approach in his account of twentieth-century ‘genteel’ English song, suggesting that ‘there is no easy distinction to be made between an “art-song” and a commercial ballad’, maintaining, however, that ‘[t]he higher type of song can be distinguished not only from its sentimental offshoot the “drawing-room ballad” but from the popular (comic or sentimental) songs of the music hall and similar outlets, and from urban and rural folk music’. While underlining that ‘[h]ere too there are difficulties of definition, and a considerable degree of overlap existed both within these categories and between them and more genteel types of song’, he continues that ‘[t]he quantity of “serious” song produced in the period is in any case enormous’. In this way, Caldwell struggles to define a type of ‘serious’ and ‘genteel’ song emerging during these years (his use of ‘art song’ similarly self-conscious), and while offering a nuanced account of a broad tradition of popular song performance from which English song arose during these years, maintains that ‘[t]hese phenomena are not our immediate concern’. See John Caldwell, ‘Solo Song’, in *The Oxford History of English Music, vol. II From 1715 to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-86, 274-5.

³³ As Trevor Hold suggests, ‘whereas Parry, Stanford and Somervell consciously strove to establish a serious song-writing tradition based on the example of the German *Lied*, Quilter, like his close contemporary Frank Bridge, seems to have accepted the sorry situation; he seized the dowdy song-ballad and decided to make a lady out of it... What he did was to raise the genre of the English drawing-room ballad to a serious art-form, by exquisite craftsmanship, sensibility and a discerning choice of poetry’. See Hold (2002), 138. Caldwell makes a similar claim when he maintains that ‘[s]ome composers, like the young John Ireland (1879-1962), were so conscious of the distinction [between ‘art-song’ and the commercial ballad] that they had their ballads marketed under a

was shaped, largely through pedagogical invitations to its creation and interpretation, by a series of participatory and performative ideals. In this, the performance of song obtained a powerful role in nourishing the early twentieth-century revival of English music more broadly.

Part I

Sites of Song

The English Hymnal: 'A Distinctly Artistic Effect'

The English Hymnal presents perhaps the most powerful site upon which the performance, appreciation, and creation of a mode of 'communal' English song was facilitated in early twentieth-century English culture: a 'revolutionary' act of 'cultural nationalism', as Byron Adams has assessed, through which Vaughan Williams enriched and rejuvenated an important national musical tradition.³⁴ The composer's musical editorship of the *Hymnal* has in recent years been theorized as both a symbolic and a practical act of reclamation, through which a host of 'forgotten' English folk songs were returned to the English Church.³⁵ To this extent, the designation of the *Hymnal* as a book of song is not entirely inappropriate. Somewhat less obvious is the extent to which this 'treasury of English song'³⁶ became, simultaneously, a site for its consciously 'artistic' and 'intelligent' performance, and thus a site for the performance of an English voice.

Julian Onderdonk has demonstrated that Vaughan Williams's encounter with folk song and his engagement with hymnody have been closely linked since the earliest studies of his life and works. As Michael Kennedy has noted, Vaughan Williams devoted considerable attention in the fifth of the folk song lectures (1902) to the construction of what was to

pseudonym. Others, like Sullivan and Elgar, swooped high and low without apparent consciousness of any anomaly'. See Caldwell (1999), 274.

³⁴ Adams, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 106.

³⁵ See Onderdonk, 'Hymn Tunes from Folk-songs: Vaughan Williams and English Hymnody', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 103-28.

³⁶ Kennedy (1980), 85.

become a much-rehearsed mythology of the debt owed by church music to the popular songs of a nation's people.³⁷ Importantly, the composer also expressed a considered argument that the 'enervating' and 'sickly' tunes compiled in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* failed to offer the 'bracing' and 'stimulating' musical experience so essential to the spiritual life of those for whom the church offered perhaps their only regular engagement with music. With this in mind, his acceptance of the *Hymnal* project can be considered an act of specifically musical, as much as 'cultural', nationalism.³⁸ It also represented, moreover, a reaction against conservative Victorian Broad-Church Anglicanism: a radically liberal and socialistic purpose that was shared by the other members of the *Hymnal*'s committee, as is further considered below.

In a valuable study of the editorial process through which Vaughan Williams adapted folk songs to hymn tunes, Julian Onderdonk interprets that Vaughan Williams's foremost concern was to arrange folk songs into hymns suitable for singing by a non-specialist musical congregation – a process through which he sought to make the performance of such songs accessible to 'motley assemblages of individuals whose musical abilities are widely varied'.³⁹ In this way, Onderdonk underlines the fundamentally participatory ethos of the *Hymnal*, and its function in making familiar a body of 'tunes'. As he assesses,

hymn-tune arrangements had to be sensitive to the constrictions of vocal range and clear part-writing...Vaughan Williams tended to adapt folk-songs into hymn tunes in a simple and direct manner. Whereas his arrangements of folk-song for secular contexts often employ elaborate and even experimental techniques, those prepared for church performance bring the tune forward as clearly and forcefully as possible.⁴⁰

This interpretation is borne out by the emphasis placed upon cultivating 'familiarity' with a body of tunes in Vaughan Williams's preface to the *Hymnal*.

³⁷ Kennedy (1980), 32-3.

³⁸ See Hinnells (1999), and in particular, 'Revivalism, Nationalism and *The English Hymnal*', 40-7. As Hinnells demonstrates, the *Hymnal*'s Preface is strewn with promises of 'bracing', 'stimulating' and 'noble' melodies, these categories subsequently taken up by OUP and the BBC when promoting the 'Englishness' of Vaughan Williams's later works.

³⁹ See Onderdonk, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 108-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

It must be recognized that Vaughan Williams's extensive introductory remarks in his guide to the performance of church hymns were unusual, especially as compared with the tone and content of the preface contributed to the volumes it sought to supplant, specifically *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.⁴¹ In the *Hymnal*'s preface to the music, Vaughan Williams devoted considerable attention to a careful description of the ways in which the 'simple' and 'noble' melodies of this book were to be sung. Having underlined from the outset that '[t]he music is intended to be essentially congregational in character' – that 'fine melody rather than the exploitation of a trained choir has been the criterion of selection', and that '[w]here the congregation is singing it is important that familiar melodies should be employed' – Vaughan Williams offers an extensive section entitled 'The Manner of Performance', in which a note on 'Pitch', 'Unison Singing', 'Choir and People', 'Speed', 'Expression', and 'Notation' are explained to the future leaders of church music. Indeed this manual was issued with the reminder that

hymns are essentially for the congregation; the choir have their opportunity elsewhere, but in the hymn they must give way to the congregation. It is a great mistake to suppose that the result will be inartistic. A large body of voices singing together makes a distinctly artistic effect, though that of each individual voice might be the opposite.⁴²

Vaughan Williams's emphasis in these directions to performance is above all upon the cultivation of the 'familiarity' and 'popularity' of the *Hymnal*'s tunes. To this end, he notes in his preface that

Every hymn is so arranged that it can be sung in unison accompanied by the organ...the congregation must *always* sing the melody, and the *melody only* (Vaughan Williams's emphasis).⁴³

⁴¹ *Hymns Ancient and Modern, For Use in the Services of the Church* (London: Novello and Co., 1861). Compiled and arranged under the editorship of William Henry Monk. The preface to this volume includes no comparable directives to the performance of hymns: 'as to the speed at which each tune should be sung, it has been thought best to leave this to the individual judgment of Directors of Choirs. The size of the congregation, the strength of the choir, & etc., may often make a quicker or slower pace desirable. But as a rule it may be said that ordinary congregational singing is too slow, and it would perhaps be better to err on the side of quickness than slowness; remembering, of course, that hymns or tunes in themselves penitential or solemn must never be sung too fast.' Preface, v.

⁴² Vaughan Williams, 'Preface to *The English Hymnal*', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 31-7, 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34.

In a section entitled ‘Choir and People’, he encourages all members of the congregation to engage with the music they sing in an ‘intelligent’ fashion, challenging the singer to take an active role in this community music-making by attending ‘congregational practices’, often in preparation for a ‘recital’ of such hymns:

There are churches in which the experiment has been successfully tried of making choir and people sing hymns antiphonally. By this means the people are given a distinct status in the services, and are encouraged to take an intelligent interest in the music they sing, while the eternal war between choir and congregation, each considering the other an unnecessary appendage to the services of the church, is done away with. The congregation might be encouraged to sing and appreciate the finer melodies if a system of monthly congregational practices were held...[a] *hymn recital*, at which some of the less familiar hymns might be sung by the choir, would also be a pleasant variety from the Sunday organ recital.⁴⁴

Offering further guidance to performance, Vaughan Williams also noted that

Metronome marks are added to each hymn, which, the editor believes, indicate the proper speed in a fairly large building with a congregation of average size.⁴⁵

In making provision for the acoustic effect of such songs within the spaces imagined for their performance, the composer encourages musical leaders to acknowledge and nurture the ‘unconscious artistic insight’ congregations are ‘inclined to make at the end of every line’ of a hymn, instructing the organist to develop such insights through sympathetic accompaniment.⁴⁶

Writing in a tribute to Martin Shaw in 1955,⁴⁷ Vaughan Williams seized an opportunity to reinforce a gospel preached fifty years earlier, attesting in retrospect to the power of the *Hymnal* in nourishing English artistic life, as well as its role in nourishing the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁷ Martin Shaw became the organist and choirmaster at St. Mary’s, Primrose Hill, where Percy Dearmer took his first permanent position. The appointment was made on the recommendation of Vaughan Williams. See Nancy Dearmer, *The Life of Percy Dearmer* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1940), 164-5. Shaw later became the composer’s co-editor when compiling *Songs of Praise* in 1925. See Dickinson (1963), 137.

English voice.⁴⁸ He insists once more upon creating a ‘community’ through listeners’ engagement and participation, in which all singers have their place, and to which all must contribute their share in the ‘creation’ of artistic music:

Artistic appreciation must be creative. Are you putting something of yourself into the music you hear and sing? Are you going half way to meet your leader?...Everyone taking part in a church service has his share...[t]here are the principal singers, the choir, the instructor. These may not always have supreme skill, but they can work hard to make all as perfect as possible...[the people] also have their share. Sometimes they only have to listen. Let them listen with intelligence, and as I have already suggested, go half way to meet the reader or singer to whom they are listening. It is in the congregational hymn that they have their opportunity... I admit that this is difficult unless you, who are the congregation, co-operate intelligently. Do you do so? Or do you prefer to remain wallowing in the mire and making no effort to arrive at something nobler and cleaner? Do you study your part at home? Do you attend congregational practices at which you can learn new tunes which may at first appear difficult or distasteful, but will, if well chosen, come to exercise their power over you?⁴⁹

The ways in which the church – both for singer and listener – is mapped as a place within which the ‘new tunes’ can exert a ‘power’ over those ‘appreciating’ the music actively is clear. The question of journey towards transformation and renewal is inherent in the composer’s conception. With a rhetoric reminiscent of that supporting his impassioned plea in ‘A Sermon to Vocalists’, Vaughan Williams challenges the church-goer to make an ‘effort to arrive at something nobler and cleaner’ through their engagement with music in the church. Such cultivation of ‘appreciation’ is enhanced, moreover, by ‘attending congregational practices at which you can learn new tunes’. In this way, musical creation becomes a shared musical experience, an act of communal endeavour.

⁴⁸ This tribute is printed in Manning (ed.) (2008), 275-7, as sourced from *The Diocesan Magazine* [St Edmundsbury and Ipswich] 42.6, this in turn derived from an address given Vaughan Williams at St Mary-le-Tower Church, Ipswich, on the 22nd of October, 1955. The urgency with which the composer preached his message is emphasized by Ursula Vaughan Williams, who is quoted in Manning’s annotation as testifying to ‘a fiery oration, practically a communion service’. See Manning (ed.) (2008), 275.

⁴⁹ Manning (ed.) (2008), 276-7.

Such concerns for an artistic experience of Church music are entirely in line with Percy Dearmer's uncompromising aims for the reform of English Church worship.⁵⁰ Dearmer was the principal figure on the editorial committee of the *Hymnal*,⁵¹ and expressed a distinctly nationalistic purpose in his project for Church reform, as articulated in his *Parson's Handbook* (1898). He had been since his days at Christ Church, Oxford, a radical socialist (despite the conservatism of his youth), and the *Hymnal* represented part of his crusade, both political and liturgical, against Victorian Broad-Church Anglicanism.⁵² His nationalistic – as much as reformatory – zeal was manifest in the extent to which 'he had little tolerance for any ceremonial that was not within the English tradition'.⁵³

Dearmer's incessant emphasis upon an 'artistic' church, wherein both ceremony and worship were conducted along the lines of 'democracy' and 'beauty', are representative of a Ruskinian and humanitarian approach to an English Christian socialism which, as Dearmer emphasized in an 1891 article for *Church Reformer*, should retain a socialistic emphasis without losing a liberal democratic focus. As he concluded here, 'the essence of a true Church is democracy'.⁵⁴ This emphasis upon democracy extended to the active participation of the congregation in church worship: a participation which, like Vaughan Williams, Dearmer encouraged through the rehearsal of hymn singing in preparation for the Sunday service.⁵⁵

Dearmer practiced this democratic zeal at his first Church, St Mary The Virgin, in Primrose Hill, North West London. Writing in his introduction to the *Parson's Handbook*, he emphasized the extent to which he sought to recuperate the artistic efforts of the nation's

⁵⁰ Percy Dearmer (1867 – 1936) was a writer on ceremonial subjects and religious music. Influenced by the high churchman Charles Gore while a student at Christ Church College, Oxford, he was one of the first members of the Christian Social Union (1899). Ordained a deacon in 1891 and a priest in 1892, he sought to popularize the adaptation of medieval English ceremonial to the Prayer Book rite. He became a professor of Ecclesiastical Art at King's College, London, and co-edited with Vaughan Williams *The English Hymnal; Songs of Praise*; and *The Oxford Book of Carols*. See 'Dearmer, Percy', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd rev. ed., E. A. Livingstone, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 459, and Nancy Dearmer (1940), especially 32-6.

⁵¹ The other principal members of this committee were W. J. Birkbeck and T. A. Lacey, both of Anglo-Catholic sympathies like Dearmer, and intent upon eradicating banalities and generally raising the quality of English hymnody, in the realm both of words and music.

⁵² On Broad-Church Anglicanism, see Cross (ed.) (1997), 241-2.

⁵³ Nancy Dearmer (1940), 106.

⁵⁴ As quoted by Nancy Dearmer (1940), 68.

⁵⁵ Writing for the *Parish Paper* in 1901, Dearmer encouraged the congregation to attend the Friday evening rehearsals for congregational music with 'Mr Palmer', for this was 'a great opportunity for learning under so eminent an authority...as the congregation come to take a larger part in the service they will feel that it is just as necessary for them as it is for the Choir to practise the music that is to be sung'. See Nancy Dearmer (1940), 119.

artists, and to kindle a dialogue between ‘artists and the Church’ such that the ‘vulgarities’ and ‘confusions’ of Church ritual could be reconciled to a service supported by the enlightened beauty of national artistic expression. As Dearmer made clear in this ‘Introductory Essay on Conformity to the Church of England’, moreover, ‘[t]he Church has almost entirely failed to call to her service the great artists and craftsmen of which the last generation produced so large a number’, this a great shame given that ‘music can drive away the excruciating faults of church ritual’. As Dearmer maintained ‘[i]t is the hope of the Handbook to help in restoring the ancient spirit of beauty in our churches’.⁵⁶

Provocatively, Dearmer’s views on English art bear close resemblance to Vaughan Williams’s own, as is clear through consultation of Vaughan Williams’s article ‘Good Taste’, published in *The Vocalist* in May 1902.⁵⁷ Writing in *Commonwealth* in 1905, Dearmer discussed the role and concept of music in contemporary English perception, and in demanding an artistic Church in which an expression of human beauty, as reflected in the beauty of nature, would become a vital part of national life, enacts a dialogue with Vaughan Williams’s distaste for the ‘musicianly’ English composer: a composer intent upon avoiding ‘vulgarity’. As Vaughan Williams maintains, in seeking ‘good taste’, the artist ‘stifles’ his ‘natural expression’, failing thus to make a ‘living body’ – a genuine expression – in his music. As Dearmer similarly emphasized,

art is regarded as a harmless, private craze, like postage stamp collecting, only not so innocent – for in England, a person who is keen about art is still regarded as out of the normal, as a little suspect, while the clergyman who cares for it must not be surprised if the state sets a royal commission to inquire into his state of mind.

But what if by ‘good taste’ we mean that which has the profoundest, truest human qualities, that which indeed alone is truly human and humane, that which is in harmony with the plan of the universe and at one with the eternal verities – that which alone is true to the purposes of God and to the picture of his mind which we call nature?⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 113-14. Nancy Dearmer emphasizes that her husband’s church became renowned throughout London as a place wherein artists congregated, and further, where they were employed and commissioned by the Church to provide adornments to both the building and its rituals. As she assesses, ‘[Percy] was creating that rare place: a church where artists could feel at home...It was not only painter-artists who gathered around Percy; writers and musicians quickly found their way to St. Mary’s Church’. As his biographer makes clear, Dearmer was an ‘artistically enlightened pioneer’. See Nancy Dearmer (1940), 122-3.

⁵⁷ Vaughan Williams, ‘Good Taste’, *The Vocalist*, 1.2 (May, 1902), 38; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 23-4.

⁵⁸ Nancy Dearmer (1940), 122-3.

In this, Dearmer points to an awareness of the extent to which ‘music’ had become, in an English society shaken by the Wilde trials in particular, a pursuit wherein an indulgence in Aestheticism and excessive emotion were to be powerfully disciplined, ideally within ‘robust’ acts of rural endeavour, as Byron Adams has pointed out.⁵⁹ Yet Dearmer’s emphasis upon ‘the profoundest, truest human qualities’, to be set ‘in harmony’ with the ‘plan of the Universe’, also speaks in important ways to Vaughan Williams’s emphasis upon the place of ‘human emotion’ in English art, as much as to its place in English singing, as becomes clear below.

Equally important in Dearmer’s essay is his emphasis upon the beauty to be derived from man’s union with nature. Michael Kennedy has underlined the extent to which the hymns in the *Hymnal* were given place names (or names of people) by Vaughan Williams, especially those derived from folk songs. Accordingly, their place of origin was inscribed into their associations, and such tunes thus became evocative of the English landscape. ‘Down Ampney’ was the name of the composer’s birth-place; ‘Ingrave’ and ‘Hambridge’, the sites of his folk song collecting. Sometimes, simply ‘Forest Green’ seems to have been enough to evoke a sense of place for these tunes, as their melodies became rooted not only in the English church, but were furnished with a specific place, making further links to an idealized past (inextricable, at the time, from the English countryside).⁶⁰

It is interesting that an idea of evoking but ‘containing’ human emotions becomes inscribed within the very texts selected for *The English Hymnal*. It was noted above that Vaughan Williams sought that congregations should take an ‘intelligent’ interest in the music they were to sing. Importantly, the editorial committee derived hymns for this book with a clear desire to foreground virtues of national community and duty in their selected texts, this

⁵⁹ Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2000), 31.

⁶⁰ It is perhaps of some interest that Percy Dearmer was himself an avid explorer of the countryside, contributing in 1900 to Macmillan’s ‘Highways and Byways’ series, albeit with a guidebook to Normandy, rather than to the English countryside. See Percy Dearmer, *Highways and Byways of Normandy* (London: Macmillan, 1900). It is also interesting that Harold Child, the librettist with whom Vaughan Williams collaborated in his opera *Hugh the Drover*, was also a travel writer: see Robin E. Gallienne and Harold Hannington Child, *The Channel Islands* (London: n.p., 1902).

noted in contemporaneous press reports which announced the imminent arrival of a new hymn book throughout 1904 and 1905 (as consultation of Vaughan Williams's scrapbook makes clear). A particular novelty of the new *English Hymnal* was the extent to which, as was emphasized by a journalist for *The Daily Mail*,

The committee is also making a strong point of including hymns that deal broadly with national righteousness and practical duty. There is much selfishness in a good deal of hymnology, and the duty to one's neighbour has found but little place in the aspirations of popular worship. This is to be remedied in the new book, which proposes to give modern hymns that appeal to the thinking man to-day.⁶¹

It might be noted, with hindsight, that Vaughan Williams selected particularly significant tunes for the setting of texts which explored ideas of community, and of 'duty to one's neighbour': tunes which were later to appear as the basis of 'national' works such as the *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*. In line with his ideal of a musical community predicated upon 'loving one another through our art', one hymn is of particular interest to the current discussion. Provocatively, the idea of voice is promoted in important ways, and the origins of the hymn in a folk song arrangement are clear. In this, links between folk song, art song, and hymn tune become intricate in Vaughan Williams's ideal.

In the same year that he accepted the project of the *Hymnal*, Vaughan Williams also arranged a number of French folk songs for concert performance, two of which were premiered in February alongside new art songs by Tovey, Hurlstone, and Ernest Walker as part of the Broadwood recitals at St James's Hall (a series in which many of the composer's early songs had been premiered and performed).⁶² Another of these folk song arrangements (composed the previous year) had been sung in November 1903 at the first of a series of eight lectures on the Songs of France given by tenor Walter Ford, who sang the song himself as a

⁶¹ *The Daily Mail*, March 22nd, 1905; press report as collected in Vaughan Williams's scrapbook. BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2.

⁶² Michael Kennedy lists these in his *Catalogue of Works* as 'Jean Renaud and 'L'amour de Moy', two 'fifteenth-century songs', arranged for voice and pianoforte, with English text provided by Paul England. See Kennedy (1996), 21.

means of demonstration.⁶³ A still further arrangement – not premiered on the concert stage that February, nor sung in Ford’s lectures in November – was ‘La Ballade de Jesus Christ’.⁶⁴ This arrangement, recently recorded for the first time among a host of the composer’s early art songs,⁶⁵ was in 1906 to find its way to performance through another forum, for it appears, adapted to an English text, as hymn 318, entitled ‘Picardy’, in *The English Hymnal*.⁶⁶

As the composer’s attribution in the hymn book makes clear, the tune is ‘a French carol, probably 17th century’, and had been ‘found in Tiersot’, this a source to which Vaughan Williams habitually appealed throughout his lectures and writings, as a means of defending his practice of using folk songs as the basis of hymn tunes. Indeed, Tiersot often provides a scholarly prop to the composer’s insistence upon the historic unity of folk-, church-, and art music, and Vaughan Williams himself performs and re-inscribes this proposition with the inclusion of ‘La Ballade de Jesus Christ’ in the *Hymnal*, fitted with a new text as appropriate to its devotional purpose, and retaining the basic harmonic and melodic profile of the original folk arrangement (all except the song’s final ‘Tierce de Picardie’, so appropriate to the folk tune’s allegorical message of nourishment and spiritual transformation).

The song’s text, it might be interpreted, speaks of a musical transformation and renewal sought in the very publication of the *Hymnal*, and in its promotion of community singing. The text of the French original, as is suggested by its title, is a song about a song; it is a ‘ballad’ through which Christ sings a plea for alms. Responses are issued from two voices: that of a wicked husband, who refuses the weary caller ‘the crumbs from [his] table’, and that of a good mistress, who provides food and rest for a traveller in need. Once nourished, Christ ascends the stairs of the dwelling by the light of ‘three angels’, who provide safe passage to a place of rest. In so doing, he brings the teaching of the ballad to pass in the final verse:

⁶³ See Kennedy (1996), 19.

⁶⁴ See Kenedy (1996), 27. This song was later published by Oxford University Press in 1935.

⁶⁵ [Sound recording] *Kissing Her Hair: Twenty Early Songs of Vaughan Williams* (Albion Records Ltd., 2009). The recording was released to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams’s death. The sleeve notes provided to this recording are the source from which a translation of the original French folk song discussed are derived.

⁶⁶ *The English Hymnal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906), 450.

Christ's assurance that 'In three days you'll die, good mistress,/And your soul in Paradise shall dwell;/ But that wicked man, your husband,/Shall for ever burn in hell'.

The tale of a songful plea for nourishment, and the spiritual transformation that ensues, finds intricate parallels in the text supplied for the communion hymn, 'Picardy'. Quotation of this text draws into focus a rich and telling alliance between the images and teachings of the folk text and the hymn verse

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of Lords, in human vesture –
in the body and the blood –
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
as the darkness clears away,

At his feet the six-winged Seraph;
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the Presence,
as with ceaseless voice they cry,
Alleluya, Alleluya,
Alleluya, Lord most high.

That a communion hymn should speak of Christ as body and blood – as giving 'his whole self as heavenly food' – is unsurprising, but the ways in which the hymn text interacts with the imagery, structure, and allegorical message of the folk model is striking. The hymn's penultimate verse provides an analogous emphasis upon Christ's bringing of light to that in the folk song. In the hymn, Christ descends to earth with a flood of light to bring angelic

‘ceaseless voices’ in praise of nourishment and spiritual transformation. In the folk text, Christ ascends to a metaphorical place of rest and transformation, contained within the dwelling in which the earthly voices to whom he has called out are visited. That the folk song bears a ballad in which Christ’s voice is staged in a dialogue in which he seeks nourishment and rest in two earthly voices provides a neat parallel with that of the hymn; the song about a song, bearing the dialogue between the voices of earth and heaven, confirms a plenitude of voices that are paralleled in the final verse of the hymn text: a passage to spiritual transformation and nourishment, and the ‘ceaseless voice’ of praise in such narrative.

It is also notable that this tale of (after)life through a plea for and delivery of nourishment is couched in an allegory that invites unmistakable parallels with that of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, a tale that received popular rendering as the folk tune ‘discovered’ by Vaughan Williams during the 1890s, and which, as is widely known, appeared subsequently in a number of his celebrated artworks (not only as the basis for *Five Variants of ‘Dives and Lazarus’*, but in the *English Folk Song Suite*, for example). That this tune also appeared as ‘Kingsfold’, number 574 in *The English Hymnal*, is often noted, but what is important is the manner in which the parable of Dives and Lazarus bears rich associations with that of the French folk carol: a tale which, as Mary Crowther has noted, represents an important Christian tradition from which Edwardian myths of ‘wandering’ ultimately derive.⁶⁷ Here, the text selected for the hymn setting of a tune which was later to form the basis of one of the starkest expressions of Vaughan Williams’s national music, explores the theme of community and communication. Once more, the presence of the voice is paramount:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast:’
I came to Jesus and I was,

⁶⁷ See M. E. Crowther, ‘The Tramp’, in Roy Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 91-113, 91.

Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
And he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.

The emphasis upon the voice of Jesus, staged through a testimony to the power of after-life, confirms a further preoccupation with multiple voices in these texts, in which the final verse brings travel towards rest and the dawn of everlasting light. A concern with nourishment in response to the call of Jesus can be read as a gloss, once more, on the original parable of Diverus and Lazarus, found in Luke 16:19-31, wherein the rich man, Diverus, makes a feast and turns away the poor man, Lazarus, who arrives at his door pleading for 'crumbs to be fed from the rich man's table', and for 'water to cool [his] tongue'. The delivery of Diverus to hell by the power of angels confirms the eternal darkness of the one who has shown no mercy to his fellow man.

Again, a complex web of allegorical correspondences is suggestive of the ideals embedded in Vaughan Williams's project of providing a 'nourishing' national music: one in which a community in communication is taught through the persistent evocation of voices in hymns designed for 'nourishing' communal singing. The manner in which the 'darkness' of a past age of English music is perhaps engaged in these texts (for the Renaissance was frequently considered a period of 'light' or 'dawn', as Gustav Holst made clear in the quotation offered in the Introduction to this study), is also important here.

With all this in mind, it might be interpreted that the songs performed by those who sang from the *Hymnal* evinced ideals in which people, land, Church, and music were linked into a unified sense of nation. When Roy Palmer noted that 'the folk song is of ancestral

voices', he could have added that they became much more than this, for through the *Hymnal*, their singing became a fortifying activity of the present, and one that promised a particular musical future. The 'artistic' community song inscribed and became inscribed with the rituals of English life: of place, song, and communal national endeavour. These voices sang of a Golden Age recaptured, its redemptive power restored in a communal performance.

The Vocalist: A Popular Pursuit

To move directly from the High Church idealism of *The English Hymnal* to the eccentric and often humorous cornucopia of articles, histories, stories, and songs published by *The Vocalist* between 1902 and 1905 may be to incur something of a jolt in the reader's experience of this journey through early twentieth-century English song culture. Yet the journal's consciously 'artistic' and simultaneously 'democratic' milieu speaks powerfully to the complex nexus of ideas and materials impacting upon the emergence of the genre during the earliest years of the century. *The Vocalist* paints a colourful world of Edwardian song-making, wherein rural bicycle tours and sea-side holidays are the places where ancestral voices, and an 'old' or 'forgotten' music, are to be found and 're-awakened' by singers, and where an invitation to the space of song – in composition, performance, and appreciation – is continually offered.

The virtually wholesale critical neglect of a forum through which Vaughan Williams made his compositional debut might be attributed to a number of factors. *The Vocalist's* short-lived existence, ceasing publication in December 1905, may in part have contributed to assessments of its only limited significance.⁶⁸ In a rare account of the journal's origins, preoccupations, and character, Stephen Banfield makes clear the extent to which *The Vocalist's* avowedly accessible, popular, and participatory ethos may further have led to its scholarly dismissal as a site apparently at odds with the manner in which the emotionally 'refined' sensibility of English song has traditionally been understood.

⁶⁸ See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 3.

Identifying *The Vocalist*'s inauguration as one of five important events considered instrumental in the 'transformation' of song's status in musical culture from 1900 onwards,⁶⁹ Banfield explains that the journal emerged as 'a monthly periodical supposed to be exclusively concerned with English solo song and its exponents', providing an account of its origins as follows:

The Vocalist had been preceded by *The Dome: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine and Review of Literature, Music, Architecture and the Graphic Arts*, which ran from 1897 to 1900 and displayed something of the panache of the nineties. In May 1898 Yeats had contributed three poems...*The Vocalist*'s cultural pretensions were far lower than this, but it was nevertheless significant, partly because it presented an Edwardian reaction to the royalty ballad, and in retrospect because it entertained angels unawares, in the forms of Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, and Gustav (von) Holst.⁷⁰

Though Banfield acknowledges the journal's significance as a forum through which some of the foremost composers of twentieth-century English musical revival made their debuts as song composers, his distaste for the methods and tone of *The Vocalist* is unmistakable. He characterizes the journal as a forum somehow inappropriate to the artistically superior 'Linden Lea', and in this denies the potential insight to be gained by exploring this site as an early platform upon which Vaughan Williams fostered a particular kind of communal 'national song'. That 'Linden Lea' was published among a milieu of songs including the 'folk-song arrangement'; the 'ballad-like' song; the 'popular' song; the 'sacred' song; and the 'artistic' song, as introduced and loosely defined each week in *The Vocalist*'s pages, is important. This is a milieu that seems entirely appropriate to the aesthetic of 'Linden Lea', and appropriate also to the community ethos and broadly popular instinct of the journal: one which invites the singing of, intelligent appreciation of, and indeed composition of 'good new songs'.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

Yet in many ways, Banfield might be forgiven a certain distaste in his discussion of *The Vocalist*. Its pages are alive with articles and songs that ostensibly were aimed at a broad and varied audience, scholarly and non-scholarly, professional and amateur. One snippet typifies the tone of the journal, lurking in the bottom right-hand corner of page four of the first issue, immediately following the ‘Notes on the Songs in this Number’, in which Vaughan Williams’s ‘Linden Lea’ is introduced. A morsel headed with the title ‘Recipe for a Song’, it reads as follows:

Take a few lines of words (note that they all end with slightly similar sounds), sit down before a piano, add a few notes to each syllable, then mix together till your neighbour’s temper boils; place these words and notes together on a sheet of paper, MS music preferred, but a genius can rule his own lines, the notes being uppermost, the words making a layer underneath, and underneath these introduce a well mixed solution of notes and crotchets, add sharps and flats to suit the taste. Cut into equal proportions and serve as desired.⁷¹

This comic instruction to the maker of song can mask an important emphasis upon the materiality inherent in the act, as much as the invitation issued by the journal to experiment in the composition of new English songs: a democratic aim through which the amateur is induced to try out the creation of a song, and throughout the various issues is provided with texts and advice to this purpose.⁷² Such a snapshot is reminiscent of Vaughan Williams’s own tale of the amateur song composer (told in the Bournemouth lectures delivered some months

⁷¹ *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 4.

⁷² The journal printed a series of poems each week, inviting not only the reader’s perusal of the texts, but presenting poems which issued an invitation to the creative engagement of an aspiring composer. See also the articles on ‘English Lyrics’ by Arthur Clare, which throw open the compositional world of song to the reader, explaining that ‘the all-important question to a composer of songs is “[w]hat words shall I set, and where are they to be found? From the outset the path of a composer is beset with difficulty, even danger!’ The author proposes to ‘go over what may be termed the standard lyrics for music in our language’, which is aimed at ‘helping composers in their search’. To this end, he introduces ‘lyrics of past centuries’, including Herrick’s ‘To Daffodils’, a much-set text of the time (and set by Vaughan Williams himself), as much as exploring texts by celebrated English giants of the Romantic period (Wordsworth’s ‘She dwelt among the untrodden ways’, for example). See ‘English Lyrics’, *The Vocalist*, 1.2 (May, 1902), 39-40, and 1.5 (August, 1902), 134-5. To the extent that *The English Hymnal* also re-introduced the ruralist poetry of English poets such as Housman – as much as unknown texts by Milton, Addison, and Herbert – it might be suggested that *The Hymnal*, like *The Vocalist*, played a part in returning the poetry and the songs of an English heritage to the mouths of the people, encouraging their re-creation in singing. Notably, contemporaneous press reports emphasized the unconventional use of these poems as hymn texts, this considered one of the *Hymnal*’s controversial novelties. See, for example, *The Daily Mail*, March 22nd, 1905; press report as collected in Vaughan Williams’s scrapbook. BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2.

later), reaching into a drawer for a sheaf of songs composed in a fit of creative energy spurred by the hearing of a song, compelled to share it with an assembled company of friends.

That such items appeared among the earnest and purposeful discussion of musical aesthetics and a future for musical composition, as evidenced not only in Vaughan Williams's articles but further in those such as Rutland Boughton's erudite discussion of 'The Modern Song',⁷³ makes the project of assessing the nature and purpose of this journal rather difficult. More troubling is that such snippets can also serve to mask the progressive and prophetic instinct of a magazine replete with histories and articles which prefigure inter-war constructions of English identity: the journal makes clear on numerous occasions a desire to recapture an earlier 'golden-age' of English music, this a trend of writing and re-writing histories in order that the place of music and especially song in national life is defended and re-inscribed.

Scholarly histories of English minstrelsy and of the English ballad, for example, are contributed with some consistency to the journal's issues, giving emphasis to the prominence of English song composers during the 'Elizabethan era' in particular, and lamenting the decline in compositional standards thereafter.⁷⁴ Articles on Purcell's songs are also important in this respect,⁷⁵ wherein an emphasis upon song as an historically 'English' genre, and upon the need in contemporary culture to revive the practice of English song, is clear. This is also emphasized in the editor's regular introductions to various issues. In October 1902, for example, he maintains that the task of musical regeneration in England lies ultimately in the hands of the public, for 'the aptitude to sing agreeably is given to many, far more indeed than is commonly supposed' (unlike 'the agreeable handling of the brush', for example). By mobilizing the instincts of the amateur, as the editor frequently underlines,

⁷³ Rutland Boughton, 'The Modern Song', *The Vocalist*, 1.10 (January, 1903), 324.

⁷⁴ See 'Ballads', *The Vocalist*, 1.7 (October, 1902), 196-8. An article on 'Early English Minstrelsy' by Herbert H. Nelson is further notable here, in which Celtic peoples are identified as the original 'Bards'. Examples of 'genuine English poems for singing' are also discussed here, according to authoritative histories of English minstrelsy. See *The Vocalist*, 1.4 (July, 1902), 101-3.

⁷⁵ See 'The Songs of Purcell', *The Vocalist*, 1.11 (February, 1903), 357-8, in which Purcell is located as 'the solitary great composer of England's past'. The article relays that his songs contain 'an English tenderness', 'melodiousness', and 'a beautiful and singable quality'. It is also suggested that a level of 'sincerity' is demanded by these songs in their interpretation by twentieth-century students, the author further underlining 'how closely the art of Purcell is akin to the folk-art of his nation'.

England would become 'a musical nation'.⁷⁶

In this way, *The Vocalist* marks its decidedly revivalist tone from the outset: a drive towards encouraging a kind of English music – and a kind of English voice – that is more commonly analyzed as a construction of the inter-war years. What is clear above all in the editor's introduction to the inaugural issue of the journal is the extent to which he characterizes the contemporary culture of English song as corruptive, degenerate, and commercial, this an important gesture of its revivalist purpose, and prefiguring later such processes of rewriting cultural forms.⁷⁷ As the first issue of *The Vocalist* begins:

it must be obvious to even the most casual observer of society's habits, tastes, and accomplishments, that the subject of singing is, at the present time, daily arousing much more interest than was ever the case before...

But while all this interest is manifest, it is impossible not to observe that real musical art, as it exists in modern songs and ballads, is becoming more and more subservient to the demands of what is correctly described as 'commercialism in art', and is therefore in danger of becoming almost extinct, or at least to be of so degraded a type as to be unworthy of notice of refined instincts.

The finest specimens of classic song writers – Schubert, Brahms, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Grieg, (not to mention other more modern writers, lest their claims be disputed) – are now less frequently heard, and are no more understood and appreciated than they were a few years previously; while, on the other hand, as regards composition, except in the case of airs or solos from operas or oratorios, we seem to have drifted into a current of sentimentalism, which is manifest on even the merest acquaintance with that vast quantity of effusions called lyrics, and their musical companions called songs...⁷⁸

Here, *The Vocalist* views the 'sentimentality' of the ballad as a particularly degrading aspect of English music. Further, it is interesting that the editor expresses anxiety that 'the finest specimens' of 'classic song writers' are not 'heard', 'understood', or 'appreciated' in England. Banfield argues that this degradation in the cultural tastes and musical knowledge of

⁷⁶ 'From the Editor', *The Vocalist*, 1.7 (October, 1902), 194-5.

⁷⁷ See Howkins, in Colls and Dodd (eds.) (1985), especially 69. Howkins notes that in promoting the reworking of cultural forms, English writers defined the recent past as 'un-English': a culture dominated by 'metropolitanism', and as having 'erected a set of values that were unnatural to this English people'. As Howkins considers, Cecil Sharp underlined in his *Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907) the extent to which a culture not simply of English composition but further of vocal *performance* had been dominated by foreign influences: 'Since the death of Purcell...the educated classes have patronised the music of the foreigner, to the exclusion of that of the Englishman. Foreign vocalists, singing in a foreign tongue, have for two centuries monopolized the operatic stage; while English concert platforms have, during the same period, been exclusively occupied by alien singers and instrumentalists, singing and playing compositions of European writers'.

⁷⁸ *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 2.

the English public was considered instrumental in undermining the emergence of a tradition of English song to rival that of the powerful example of the German *Lied*.⁷⁹ In a typically humorous fashion, the *Vocalist* seeks to remedy this malady as much by publishing discussions of German song (as in Boughton's pieces), as by promising 'a serial story written by an eminent author'. Entitled 'A Schubert Fantasy', and published in a number of parts across editions between 1902 and 1903, this most emblematic of song composers is cast as the protagonist of a series of tales, which variously re-imagine the German composer's encounter with his own doppelgänger, or his traversal of a wintry and alienating landscape, battling his frail constitution with the aid of a robust housekeeper. Schubert's voice, ventriloquized in an English speech, sees an English appropriation of this figure, enforcing a familiarity with Schubert's supposed personality, but also with the themes of his songs.⁸⁰ Such tales are interesting when considered in light of Vaughan Williams's own reimagining of Schubert's travel songs, as shall be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Further noted in the introduction to the first issue of *The Vocalist* is the kind of songs defined as 'good' and 'artistic':

These songs will be carefully selected by a musical committee, who will be asked to note: (1) that the music is distinctly good, *i.e.* neither trashy nor common-place; (2) that the melodic interest of the voice part shall be such as may appeal to any singer of average ability; (3) that the accompaniment is not too difficult; (4) and that the words are free from sentimental rubbish.⁸¹

The alignment of artistic with accessible is crucial to the journal's aims. Elsewhere, it locates 'fine broad melodies' and 'striking vigour' among the attractions of its 'good songs',⁸² with 'spontaneous', singable melodies and playable accompaniments elsewhere lauded in their

⁷⁹ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 12.

⁸⁰ See *The Vocalist*. Examples of this series of tales can be found in issues 1.8 (November, 1902), 229-30; 1.9 (December, 1902), 259-60; and 1.11 (February, 1903), 334, 355-6.

⁸¹ *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 2.

⁸² See *The Vocalist*, 1.7 (October, 1902), 195.

‘artistry’. As was noted above, the idea of ‘spontaneity’ was an important preoccupation of Vaughan Williams’s ideal for national music, as related to his folkloristic ideals. These categories become powerful in the reception of Vaughan Williams’s early national songs, and in turn in defining ideas of a particular delivery of the English singing voice.⁸³

Guidance as to nature of ‘good songs’ is nourished, in turn, through the unique selling-point of the journal: its articles on ‘voice production’. To this end, the editor’s introduction of new songs encourages, variously, a ‘thoughtful’ approach to ‘artistic’ interpretation, developing the ‘natural integrity of the voice, free from artificial registers’, producing a ‘pure, sustained tone’ with a ‘pronounced, natural ring’, and avoiding any ‘forced’ quality.⁸⁴ While such themes are developed further in the discussion of singing manuals offered in the following section, it is interesting to note that ideas of a ‘natural’ singing voice emerge in the earliest outlets through which Vaughan Williams’s career can be studied, and are lauded as crucial in the regeneration of English song, through the development of an English voice.

The imagining of song as a particularly ‘natural’ pastime, woven into a culture of rural discovery, is also clear in the persistent articles upon travel included in *The Vocalist*. Not only do each of the journal’s issues bear a feature entitled ‘from the concert room’, in

⁸³ In the first issue of *The Vocalist*, as in all subsequent issues, the editor introduces the ‘four new songs’ published at the heart of the journal, with a brief note as to their character and the appropriate manner of singing. Introducing ‘Linden Lea’ as ‘a folk song’, the editor notes that in such songs ‘there is little room for originality’ by the composer. However, he continues ‘but it is perhaps doubtful whether so simple a melody could have been associated with a more varied and more flowing accompaniment, which is clear, without being in any way strained, throughout’. The manner of its singing demands a certain ‘vigour’, as the editor notes. Gounod’s ‘Slumber Song’, a ‘sacred song’, is introduced in its derivation from ‘A Latin hymn’, ‘acquired by the composer from a well-known amateur’, and ‘recently adapted to the well-known hymn written by Isaac Watts’. See ‘Notes on the Songs in this Number’, *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 4. Such rather vague distinctions are found throughout, but the extent to which these popular, sacred, and ballad-like songs are considered ‘good’ is explored through their various ‘artistic’ and further, ‘spontaneous’ quality, this celebrated by the editor in numerous such introductions. See, for example, ‘Notes on the Songs in this Number’ in *The Vocalist*, 1.2 (May, 1902), 35, where the editor discusses ‘I love thee’, by E. Cowdell: ‘a particularly spontaneous work’. It is further notable that Vaughan Williams’s songs are habitually hailed as possessing a peculiarly ‘artistic’ quality. See, for example, the note to ‘Blackwore by the Stour’ (the second of Vaughan Williams’s Barnes settings), which is defined as ‘a folk song in the Dorset dialect’. The editor emphasizes the ‘natural flow’ of its phrases, as much as the way in which its character is located in the manner of its singing – its invitation to such singing – when he notes that the song demands ‘little explanation’ in criticism. ‘Like “Linden Lea” it depends upon its artistic treatment for its proper effect’. See *The Vocalist*, 1.2 (May, 1902), 35, and for a discussion of the ‘artistic’ merits of Vaughan Williams’s ‘Boy Johnny’, see *The Vocalist*, 1.7 (October, 1902), 221.

⁸⁴ See, for example, ‘Breathing and Style’, *The Vocalist*, 1.8 (November, 1902), 252-3.

which tours of the ‘places of music’ in England are recounted to the interested ‘stroller’,⁸⁵ but the first issue also institutes a feature called ‘On Busking’ (placed just two pages before Vaughan Williams’s essay, ‘A School of English Music’). The piece reads as a curious introduction to the practice and meaning of ‘busking’: where ‘trained vocalists’ – ‘artistes’ – assume the “toga” of itinerant musicians... visit[ing] seaside towns...and render[ing] the latest popular songs in finished style’. As such, the tale provides a narrative of adventure: a tale of friendship and of communal endeavour in the face of stringent competition and difficulty. Further, the tale also reads as a ‘call to the road’, a call to the revival of English minstrelsy, and to a tradition of English song-making ‘under wide azure sky’.⁸⁶

Perhaps one of the most telling of these tales of musical travel is that entitled ‘An Old Broadwood’, published on the same page as Vaughan Williams’s article ‘The Soporific Finale’ in the first edition of *The Vocalist*. This tale details the bicycle journey of two ‘musicians and friends’, who take to the road upon these ‘infernal machines’, carrying ‘the defiling dust of London and the irreverent curiosity of the tourist right into the heart of the Cotswolds’. After some cycling, as the author reports,

our vandals course was arrested. In the middle of a wood of slim beeches a steep path led down to a small village... It was not beautiful, not interesting, nor historical. No, it was real unspoilt country...

There remained but one thing to complete the enchantment, namely, a real country tea with real country eggs and bread; and where should this be found but in the parlour of the village shop, aromatic with the delicious cool stuffiness which can only be found in the country cottage. It was here that we discovered what was the real object of our pilgrimage. Surrounded by family photographs and china gods bought at Gloucester fair, there stood a ‘square’ pianoforte, standing on four plain unturned legs, and with two little drawers on each side in which to keep music – what we had so often heard described but never seen. Its case was black with age and its notes yellow with disuse, and above the keys ran a strip of soft satin-wood bearing the inscription ‘Johannes Broadwood *fecit*, 1792’...

What fate had led two musicians to a cottage where the treasured possession was not a grandfather’s clock or an oak dresser, but a Broadwood pianoforte? What pictures it called up of Vauxhall Gardens, of Muzio Clementi...How real the last century’s music sounded on those metallic wires...Did the first pianoforte makers try to make the new instrument sound like the old, or was it age which produced that mellow twang? With what joy did we rack our brains for all the Mozart and Haydn we knew by heart – what did it matter if many of the notes would not

⁸⁵ See, for example, ‘From the Concert Room’, *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 29.

⁸⁶ ‘On Busking’, *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 5.

sound, and the rest were out of tune? The feeling was there, the true feeling of the eighteenth century, and that was enough for us.

But all enchantments must end sooner or later, so...we climbed the hill again, fastened on our trouser clips, and were once more tourists.⁸⁷

A cynic might suggest that the reverse side of the journal's title page, replete with a large advertisement for Broadwood Pianofortes, provides the impetus for such a tale. Nevertheless, its content and the manner of its telling is suggestive once more of *The Vocalist's* progressive participation in the construction of a particular mythology of 'rural' England, and of the 'ancient' music to be awakened therein. In exploring the countryside, the two musicians unearth a means of reawakening a forgotten, silent music, pregnant in English instruments fallen into disuse. The tale allows the reclamation and appropriation of an eighteenth-century musical tradition – a tradition of performance – in hands of English makers. The recollection of Vauxhall Gardens – itself a lost place of out-door musical 'enchantment', mapped as a rural space in the heart of an urban landscape – is remembered here, and awakens a spirit of authenticity in the 'tourists' on their infernal machines.

As Howkins has pointed out, 'in the heart of the "south country", at Haselmere, Arnold Dolmetsch began to make and play "ancient" musical instruments' enabling authentic performances [of recently re-discovered madrigals and songs by 'Tudor' composers] to take place.⁸⁸ As Howkins continues

it was not just to a dead past that those who sought to create a new Englishness turned. If the countryside, and the easily accessible 'south country' in particular, was the source of the English race, it was also the source of English culture. Culture was to be found in the arts of the countryside and its people.⁸⁹

In this sense, *The Vocalist's* tale prefigures later, inter-war accounts of the country as 'a site of holidays and leisure', demonstrating 'a growing ideal of discovering rural England as it

⁸⁷ 'An Old Broadwood', *The Vocalist*, 1.1 (April, 1902), 30-1.

⁸⁸ Howkins, in Colls and Dodd (eds.) (1986), 72.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

“really was”, unspoilt and natural’.⁹⁰ The tale of the Old Broadwood teaches that music is inherent in this Cotswold village, its culture hidden and silent, but there for the taking. Its celebration of the authentic and creative inspiration of a bygone age is replete with nostalgia; and yet, the invitation to explore and unearth such music is a call to the future of English music.

This call to the future of a ‘natural’ English music becomes clear in other tales of travel, where the music of nature – the ‘teeming voice’ of nature – is imagined in encounters between ‘Nature and the Artist’. In this particular account of rural journey, one Dora Tickell relates the story of three artists – a painter, a poet, and a musician – and their quest for artistic ‘inspiration’. As Tickell imagines, the artists argue as to the relative merits of their respective arts, when suddenly

there came to them a magic voice that said:
‘I will show you something greater.’
So they three left their canvasses and their lyrics and their instruments and followed the voice. It led them far away from the city where they dwelt, through widening streets and scattered dwelling-places, till they came far out into the land of meadow and hedgerow, where broad streams wander amid beds of bright-hued flowers...⁹¹

The tale is resonant with the songs of ‘a thousand nature voices’ of the land: the trees ‘wave their long-stemmed leaves with melodious singing’; the grasshoppers ‘sing with antiphonal chanting’; the music of the streams ‘throb’ in the ears of the musician, such that ‘its splashing and hissing and its seething frothy waters beat new-found harmonies into his artist-brain’. Indeed, as Tickell underlines, ‘[nature’s] song was a song mightier than any he [the musician-artist] had as yet dreamed of, so that he longed to return to his city and his instrument and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 83. It is also worthy of note that as Simon Featherstone underlines, such ‘English’ journeys were to be unplanned, unscheduled, and lacking any specific premise. Implicitly, however, those who undertook these journeys sought to rediscover the lost and ‘secret’ England of the countryside, as this author assesses. See Featherstone (2009), 67. That the musicians of this tale should stumble upon this treasure of English craftsmanship is an early example of such tales.

⁹¹ Dora Tickell, *The Vocalist*, 2.19 (October, 1903), 222-3.

speak to the world of this mighty thing he knew’.

Ultimately, the tale underlines the extent to which ‘the breath of inspiration’ and ‘the breath of life’ are inherent in the countryside: a ‘power’ from which a ‘three-fold art is born’. Each of the artists seeks to capture this music in their work, but they are rendered ‘dumb as a child that has learnt no speech’ when faced with ‘that silence unlike all other silences, when Nature broods o’er the earth with her mother-wings, and paint and rejoicings are hush’d all alike to stillness’.⁹² While the presence of the Romantic sublime is clear in the tale, its emphasis upon the ‘breath of life’ and of a ‘vital spirit’ also speaks of a powerful vitalist impulse that was prominent in England during the opening years of the twentieth century, and whose influence upon Vaughan Williams’s thinking is clear in the extent to which he emphasized the ‘living body’ of a musical work, and the ‘vital impulse’ to be promoted in national music.⁹³ These themes illuminate numerous discourses surrounding the art of singing in England at this time. The tale offered above, moreover, provides an especially powerful counterpoint to Vaughan Williams’s vision of ‘silence’ in his song ‘Silent Noon’, premiered the same year that Tickell’s tale of a vital and ‘inspiring’ nature was published, and explored below.

The Nature of an English Voice

A number of the ‘singing manuals’ discussed below imagined the performance of an English singing voice as itself a ‘voice of nature’, and one already inherent in the singing body. This voice was often called forth through processes defined as akin to, or performed within, an experience of the landscape and its exploration. In these texts there emerges an idea of the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ That Vaughan Williams was perhaps interested in, or influenced by, Henri Bergson’s concept of the *élan vital* is suggested by the way in which he corresponded with Dr Charles Myers (a Cambridge anthropologist and ethnomusicologist) regarding one of the author’s pamphlets (possibly, according to Cobbe’s annotation, *On the Absurdity of any Mind-Body Relation*) during 1933. See Hugh Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 217-8, letter number 234. Myers argued that any idea of a ‘relation’ between body and mind was absurd: body and mind were one. See Charles S. Myers, *The Absurdity of any Mind-Body Relation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932). Though Vaughan Williams’s letter to Myers offers no discussion of the details of the pamphlet, he underlines that he had read it twice and enjoyed it. Bergson’s theory of the *élan vital* is expounded in *Creative Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1911).

musical voice with which Vaughan Williams perhaps became familiar, if not in his lessons in singing and ‘voice production’ in 1902, then through his work with prominent singers such as Plunket Greene and Gervase Elwes. Though unlike Plunket Greene, Elwes kept his construction of an English voice for the concert platform and wrote no extensive tract on the subject, Vaughan Williams’s tribute to this singer provides a glimpse of the ways in which Elwes’s possession of a particular kind of English voice was valued by the composer, such that the premiere of *On Wenlock Edge* was in 1909 entrusted to this celebrated tenor.⁹⁴

Like travelogues and tales of rural adventure, the publication of texts concerning the production of the voice emerged most powerfully during the inter-war years. By the 1930s, as Simon Featherstone suggests, a ‘crisis of English speech’ was recognized by elocutionists such as Kate Emil-Behnke, who offered ‘a bleak analysis of the national speaking body’, with its ‘flat chests, round backs, stretched, weak muscles...’⁹⁵ A concern about the proper delivery of the English voice both in speaking and singing was related to ideas of physical well-being (and by the same token, was expressed in warnings of physical and moral degeneration, as was implicit in Plunket Greene’s reference to ‘dyspepsia’ at the opening of this Chapter). As Featherstone further suggests, urgent issues concerning questions of English speech were raised by educational theorists and linguists as early as the first decade of the century, as is clear from texts such as *The Pronunciation of English* by Daniel Jones (a lecturer in phonetics at University College, London), published during 1909.⁹⁶ The derivation of these ideas from the earliest years of 1902 is also clear from the articles on ‘voice production’ published in *The Vocalist*.

It is significant that in many of these guides to the production of the voice, the alignment of ‘singing’ with ‘voice production’ is confirmed in collaborations between

⁹⁴ Gervase Henry Cary-Elwes (1866 – 1921) died at the height of his career, aged just 54. Following recitals in New York and at Princeton, Elwes was travelling to Boston and upon arrival at Boston Back Bay Station, was involved in a tragic accident, falling from the platform onto the rails as a train was passing. He was taken to hospital but his injuries proved fatal. For a detailed account of Elwes’s life and death, see Winefride Elwes and Richard Elwes, *Gervase Elwes: The Story of His Life* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1935), especially 270-1. This biography is also noteworthy in that it collects and reprints a host of concert reviews which detail contemporaneous responses to the style and nature of Elwes’s singing, both in England and abroad.

⁹⁵ Featherstone (2009), 141-2

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

prominent professors of singing, on the one hand, and medical doctors, on the other. A significant example is *The Control of the Breath*, aimed essentially at ‘the student of singing, elocution, or physical culture’.⁹⁷ Such texts habitually begin with a testament to the extent to which ‘[m]any books have been written on the subject; medical men, singing masters, singers, and teachers of physical culture have all contributed to the list’, giving a ‘theoretical explanation of the mechanical processes and his practical deductions drawn therefrom’, in texts aimed essentially at ‘the average singing student’.⁹⁸ While these texts appear to have been aimed primarily at students for whom singing was a relatively serious pursuit, other texts emerging during this period also include those such as Walter Twinning’s *The Amateur Vocalist: A Guide to Singing with Useful Hints on Voice Production, Song Interpretation, etc.*,⁹⁹ or Madge Wells’s *Singers! A Word! Allow Me!*,¹⁰⁰ both of which were ostensibly aimed at the very beginner, bearing a transparent and accessible language. Importantly, it is clear, however, that regardless of the intended consumer, these manuals promote broadly similar ideas about the production of an English voice.

The particular kind of voice encouraged in these manuals is exemplified by the opening pronouncements of *The ‘Central Point’ in Beautiful Voice Production*, which begins from the premise that ‘[t]he description of the special manipulation of the human voice instrument’ is the subject of the text, which searches for the production of ‘a sound possessing perfect firmness, solidity, depth, volume, penetration, power and beauty – a real, honest, robust, enduring, seasoned voice’. In this reading, voice production is defined as ‘a special branch of the great art of singing’, the process comprising of ‘the planning, the building up of, and then the playing upon a perfect

⁹⁷ See, for example, George Dodds and James Dunlop Lickley, *The Control of the Breath: An Elementary Manual for Singers and Speakers* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925), in which Dodds, an ‘associate of the Royal College of Music, Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music’, collaborates with Lickley, ‘M.D., Lecturer on Applied Anatomy, University of Durham College of Medicine’. See also Edgar T. Evetts and Robert A. Worthington, *The Mechanics of Singing* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1928), wherein Evetts is ‘Director of Singing and Lecturer in Phonology at the Incorporated London Academy of Music’, and Worthington, O. B. E., M. B. (Cantab), F. R. C. S., is ‘Surgeon to the Throat, Nose, & Ear Department, Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital. Lecturer in Vocal Physiology, Incorporated London Academy of Music’.

⁹⁸ Dodds and Lickley (1925), vii.

⁹⁹ Walter S. Twinning, *The Amateur Vocalist: A Guide to Singing with Useful Hints on Voice Production, Song Interpretation, etc* (London: William Reeves, 1931).

¹⁰⁰ Madge Wells, *Singers! A Word! Allow Me!* (London: Cary & Co., 1931).

musical instrument'. Thereafter, as this author suggests, '[w]hen this instrument is built, and under control, there comes the question of its use for the interpretation of vocal compositions. This is a distinct branch called artistic rendering. It comprises the subjects of time, rhythm, phrasing, expression, etc.'¹⁰¹

As the authors of the more 'scientific' textbooks make clear, there emerged some controversy as to whether or not 'it was unwise to attempt to instruct the student in the anatomy and physiology of the respiratory and vocal organs', detractors contending that

this scientific knowledge interferes with the artistic development of the voice, and, in support of their view, they can instance any brilliant artists who are totally ignorant of the vocal structures.¹⁰²

As Dodds and Lickley argued, however,

every art which hopes to progress must be built on firm scientific principles. The ordinary singer needs much assistance in developing his highest vocal possibilities.¹⁰³

Plunket Greene often castigated 'vocal charlatans', objecting that the 'breathing faddist' interfered with the 'natural' production of the voice:

Bad voice-production tells its tale in time and gives the student physical warning; he sees the cracks in the walls and clears out...

Singing is the finest natural exercise in the world. It may be hard to separate cause and effect, but the fact remains that public singers, in spite of late hours, bad air, nervous strain, and a life spent in trains and hotels, are, as a rule, unwarrantably and disgustingly healthy...The English singer is as sound a good fellow in mind as he is in body.

It is not the faddist who has made singing the finest exercise in the world; it is Nature. She has told all living things to breathe in the way that gives them least trouble.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ H. Travers Adams, *The 'Central Point' in Beautiful Voice Production* (London: William Reeves, 1926), 3-4.

¹⁰² Dodds and Lickley (1925), vii.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Plunket Greene (1912), 289-90.

This construction of the English singer as ‘a sound good fellow’, healthy in body and mind, stakes an important claim for a ‘natural’ mode of singing: one which is promoted as the source of physical and psychological health, in spite of the ‘bad air’, ‘nervous strain’, and extensive travel undertaken by singers in increasingly modernized conditions. Ironically, however, this ‘natural’ voice was sought as much by the so-called ‘breathing faddists’ for whom Plunket Greene has such disdain, as by the promoters of musical revival. As is clear in Travers Adams’s ‘scientific’ guide to *Beautiful Voice Production*, the forging of a ‘real’, ‘honest’, ‘robust’, ‘enduring’, ‘seasoned’, and ‘penetrating’ voice was a project nurtured across a broad range of such discourses: a project underlined by the communicative capacity of this honest, or authentic, utterance.

While figures such as Plunket Greene may have appeared cautious, at times, in adopting a ‘scientific’ model of voice production as part of the practice of singing and teaching, he nevertheless joined with a broad range of singers, teachers, phonologists, and composers in the establishment in 1913 of ‘The Society of English Singers’, under the guidance of an honorary secretary, William Arthur Aikin.¹⁰⁵ This figure, as Percy Scholes makes clear, was perhaps the most prominent among the ‘scientific’ school of voice production, his cornerstone text *The Voice: An Introduction to Practical Phonology* (1910) shaping ideas of voice production and singing throughout the first part of the century.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, members of this society ranked among them not only performers and promoters of English song – including Plunket Greene, Gervase Elwes, Francis Harford, and Campbell McInnes – but also singing professors employed at the London conservatoires of music, including Dawson Freer, Gregory Hast, and Charles Kennedy Scott (whose views on singing are considered below). It is of some further interest that song composers such as Charles

¹⁰⁵ For an outline of the aims of this society at its inauguration, and a list of its original members, see W. A. Aikin, ‘The Society of English Singers’, *The Musical Times*, 57.881 (July, 1916), 319-28. As this introductory manifesto underlines, the society aimed to establish ‘a style of true English singing’, and thus provided a series of ‘Recommendations on the Education of Singers’, this aimed not to project a ‘censorious attitude’ towards the ‘work of the great schools of music’, but rather, to advance a ‘patriotic desire to see the schools take a strong line that may place them in the front rank of the singing schools of the world’. To this end, advice is offered in matters of ‘voice production’, a notable example of which is found in the directive that ‘[t]he first duty of every English singer is to sing his own language perfectly’.

¹⁰⁶ Scholes (1947), vol. I, 286-7. See also William Arthur Aikin, *The Voice: An Introduction to Practical Phonology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910).

Stanford and Arthur Somervell were also members of this society, which saw a parallel expression in the field of literature in the establishment of 'The Society for Pure English', also inaugurated during 1913 at the suggestion of Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate.

A central theme of the ideas surrounding the 'English' voice during these years is, as Plunket Greene suggested above, the extent to which singing is encouraged as a natural extension of speech – a form of heightened, direct, communicative speech, but also, one possessed by and intelligible to all: a function of simple, pragmatic acts of the body. In the first part of his article 'The Future of the English Song', Plunket Greene stressed that

[s]ong is to man, if he did but know it, as natural as speech...every normal child has music in him and a voice wherewith to give it life; that singing can be learned in youth as easily as speech...so far from its being the special gift of abnormalities it is the possession of every man who is not born either tone-deaf or a congenital idiot...[t]he one to be pitied is he who has allowed one of Nature's most beautiful endowments to perish from atrophy.¹⁰⁷

This was the message emphasized throughout his texts, which, characterized by a thoroughly unequal approach both to sex and race, nevertheless foreground the accessible and natural function of song for all people. In *Interpretation in Song* (1912), Plunket Greene emphasized the same point of departure: namely, that 'singing is speech beautified', and crucially that 'the main function of the human voice is to communicate'.¹⁰⁸

Gregory Hast, professor of singing at the Guildhall School of Music, expressed this sentiment in similar terms in 1925, when he emphasized that singing was '[a] story told or a message given straight from man to man', and that

Singing is glorified speech....Many people approach the act of singing as a tremendous business. It is quite a usual thing to see a singer walk to the piano in a perfectly easy, natural and graceful manner, and then, just

¹⁰⁷ Plunket Greene, 'The Future of the English Song: I The Singer and the Public' (1920), 19-26, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Plunket Greene (1912).

before the song begins, the body stiffens, the arms become rigid, the hands, perhaps, clenched tightly, the face and jaw and throat and the whole box of tricks become set fast, a frown makes its appearance, and a look of dull solemnity takes the place of the bright and natural smile. The singer is making the awful, though silent, announcement, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I am about to sing'. Why all the fuss? How much better it would be if he would retain his natural ease and attitude, and simply open his mouth and sing. The ease and naturalness of the performance is half the battle, and the message of the song will go straight to the hearts of the listeners if it is unhampered by the whole cargo of unnecessary contortions, all of which are detrimental to the production of a beautiful tone.¹⁰⁹

Here, an emphasis upon the natural delivery of song in the physical deportment of the body is clear, this a theme of many such texts. As was noted above, Plunket Greene maintained that the production of the voice should be 'the unconscious response to the play of [the singer's] feeling'. As he qualified, however, '[a]ll such physical response, and all facial expression, should be unconscious and automatic; for the very idea of artificiality is abhorrent'.¹¹⁰

Along similar lines, H. C. Colles underlined in *Voice and Verse* that

since to sing is a natural activity of mankind, like walking, talking, and making love (a fact which singing-teachers would do well to remember at the present day), there always was an intuitive and unpremeditated art of the people which joined melody with whatever language it was natural to them to use...¹¹¹

Colles's study is worthy of attention, for it stands as a history of music told through the lens of an essentially vocal perspective.¹¹² As he emphasized, the essence of the book was to enforce the vocal basis of music as a natural emotional outpouring of the human body:

The major premise of the argument to which I invite attention in the following pages is that music is not based on an elaborate theory worked out scientifically by experts, but on human impulses finding expression through the voice and answering to human needs which vary with

¹⁰⁹ Harry Gregory Hast, *The Singer's Art: Letters from a Singing Master* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925), 16-17.

¹¹⁰ Plunket Greene (1912), 16.

¹¹¹ Colles (1928), 19.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, especially 'The Nature of the Case', 1-17.

circumstances; that instrumental music is merely an extension of vocal music.¹¹³

The decidedly Spencerian bent of so many of these vocal manuals underlines the ideal of a particular kind of embodied communicative voice. Charles Kennedy Scott, a prominent English choral conductor, emphasized in *Word and Tone: An English Method of Vocal Technique for Solo Singers and Choralists* that

The best singing comes from a desire to communicate something, from the sheer joy of singing. Dante said that 'it is more human to be heard than to hear'... In singing we wish to communicate something to the hearer. There is no other reason for singing. Yet we can only do this with pure vowels and clear consonants. How few singers satisfy us on the score of intelligibility alone!...Just as the singer desires his notes to sink into the soul of the listener, so they must sink into himself.¹¹⁴

The Reverend William Charles Gib, a well-known vocal trainer and authority on the art of voice production, maintained that 'any production of the voice is designed for the purpose of self-expression, and of the enactment of a spiritual and embodied communion between men'. An important tenet of his theories, drawn together posthumously in *Vocal Success or Thinking and Feeling in Speech and Song including a chapter on Ideal Breathing for Health* (1922), may be demonstrated by the following:

[t]here are probably few subjects round which so much controversy has raged as that of the production of the singing and speaking voice... There is no more vital need than that students should be rightly equipped, if they are to express themselves naturally and easily... Thus he will realise the connection of his thought with his feeling and the modulation of his tone... True expression needs originality and naturalness... Vocal expression is the manifestation through the modulations of tone, of what we think, feel and are...¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁴ Charles Kennedy Scott, *Word and Tone: An English Method of Vocal Technique for Solo Singers and Choralists*, 2 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1933), vol. I, 126-31.

¹¹⁵ Charles Gib, *Vocal Success, or Thinking and Feeling in Speech and Song, including a Chapter on Ideal Breathing for Health* (London: Williams Reeves, 1922), preface, vii-ix, and 2.

The great art of manifesting our thoughts and feelings through the voice, brings soul face to face with soul, and causes us to lose sight of the means by which thoughts cross from one to another. The fundamental problem therefore for the singer, speaker, reciter and reader, is to bring the voice and body under the domination of the soul....You have nature close at hand to study: you have divine instincts throbbing in your breasts which need spontaneous expression.¹¹⁶

The emphasis upon a 'spontaneous' mode of self-expression is significant here, and correlates with Vaughan Williams's ideal for a national music which 'spoke', naturally and unpremeditatedly, from singer to hearer, bringing, as Gib has it, 'soul face to face with soul'.¹¹⁷ This relates, in turn, to Plunket Greene's reminder that 'singer and listener sing, in reality, in sympathy', and to his idea of 'magnetism' between a singer and the audience. As Plunket Greene further underlined, this magnetism was a form of 'attraction', though 'its application is unconscious and spontaneous'.¹¹⁸

In a similar fashion, Dawson Freer, a professor of singing at the Royal College of Music, advocated that a performer must 'sense' an audience in singing, advising in his *The Teaching of Interpretation of Song* that the singer learns

almost unconsciously [to] adapt himself to [the audience's] understanding...the sensation of being in sympathy with an audience is a feeling of being at one with it. For an emotion experienced simultaneously by two or more people is a fire which melts their individualities and fuses them into one entity.¹¹⁹

The Spencerian emphasis is again unmistakable here, and confirms an idea of voice, and of singing, in which a musical community is enacted by the experience of 'sympathetic' emotions in the performance of vocal sound.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 67-8.

¹¹⁷ A further emphasis upon the 'spontaneous' expression of emotion is also found in Madge Wells's decidedly more accessible text, in which she underlines the constant refrain that singing must be 'intelligible', and that words must be heard: 'How often I have heard singers with lusty voices pouring forth in sonorous tones a jargon of words quite unintelligible...Do not sacrifice tone for pronunciation...Production and pronunciation go hand in hand, and the result will be spontaneity of expression, agreeably pleasing to the ear'. See Wells (1931), 8-9.

¹¹⁸ Plunket Greene (1912), 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Dawson Freer, *The Teaching of Interpretation in Song: A Guide for Teachers and Students* (London: Evans Brothers, 1924), 90-1.

Such ideals clearly relate to the rhetoric of Vaughan Williams's folkloristic ideals, and demonstrate the extent to which the project of defining an English voice during this period was inspired by, and inextricably arose from, the idea of the 'ancestral voices' called forth by the folk revival. As Freer maintained, the production of voice should be 'the sound body by means of which the indwelling soul expresses itself'.¹²⁰ Plunket Greene made a bald connection between the idea of 'folk song', and 'art song' when he claimed that '[s]ongs are the property of a commune of individualists. They belong to all alike, and each is the private possession of the singer who sings it'.¹²¹

In many ways, the most obvious departure in these manuals, as compared with the preoccupations of earlier community vocal education movements such as the 'Tonic Sol-Fa' system, is this very emphasis upon individual interpretation, and upon a discovery and communication of individual emotional expression. Simultaneously, the particular control of these emotions is crucial, as Dawson Freer maintained. There must be an 'intellectual' and 'disciplined' emotion and expression in singing, and indeed, a number of these manuals display anxiety towards

the physical excitement engendered by the sound vibrations. To feed the emotions and to starve the intellect has the usual dangerous result of poisoning sound judgement and letting loose undisciplined emotions. True art is not violent in its appeal, but persuasive; for art is a union of intellectual form and emotional expression, and it is the former that prevents emotion from becoming hysteria.¹²²

Yet even with this in mind, there emerges simultaneously an overwhelming insistence that singing must contain both the emotions and the physicality of the singer's body, and further his 'creative spirit'. Indeed, Freer himself emphasized this when he devoted a chapter of his study to 'The

¹²⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹²¹ Plunket Greene (1912), 2.

¹²² Freer (1924), 58. It is provocative that Freer warns against hysteria in his instruction to the student singer. In this way, his anxiety regarding singing and both uncontained emotion and sexual pleasure is clear. The notion of hysteria and the hysterical voice possessed erotic connotations at this time, in part as related to the writings of Sigmund Freud. For an illuminating study of hysteria in English cultural and literary imagination during the latter half of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth century, see Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850 – 1915* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

Liberation of the Emotions’, where the student is encouraged to think as a ‘creator’, ‘liberating his inward spirit’. As Freer maintains under his subtitles ‘sincerity’, ‘self-consciousness’, and ‘the cure of artificiality’:

[the artist] feels the desire for self-expression...The point is that the feeling of the student must be sincere...Until a student can express himself as a human being, he cannot express himself as an artist...the [artist] desires to make others share his emotional experiences, and in order to do so seeks for a perfect form in which to imprison the feelings of his heart. When that form has been found, Beauty is created. Both for the creative artist and his interpreter human feeling must be the well-spring of all artistic activity...People must be persuaded to let themselves feel and then taught how to control those feelings, for without control there is no proportion kept, and the keeping of proportion is the creation of form.¹²³

Freer also underlines this creative instinct in the process of communication, when he argues that the job of the singer is to ‘recapture’ the essence of the composer’s inspiration, projecting

those emotional experiences which were engendered by the study of the song he is singing. The other part of him acts as a kind of ‘censor’. The more subconscious the function of the ‘censor’, the greater the artistry. The feeling of spontaneity should never be absent from a performance, but the inspiration of the moment will not serve as a substitute for careful study... The ‘censor’ to which reference has been made is responsible for...that subconscious sense of the effect produced in the auditorium. Without this latter ‘sense’ a performer’s work does not ‘get over the footlights’. If this sense is overdeveloped, artistry degenerates into showmanship. When showmanship enters in at the door, sincerity flies out of the window.¹²⁴

Again, the important categories of ‘sincerity’ and ‘spontaneity’ emerge once more, and make clear the extent to which the rhetoric surrounding the ‘natural’ music of folk communities reached powerfully into the heart of ideas of the English singing voice.

It might be considered that as related to this folkloristic ideal, a growing emphasis was placed during this period upon the necessity that a composer leave ‘space’ in the song for the

¹²³ Freer (1924), 22-5.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 90.

contribution or creation of the individual performer. This seems to have been considered a characteristic of ‘good’ English songs, as becomes clear in William Fothergill Robinson’s ‘Four Lectures on English Song’ (1914), in which this member of The Society of English Singers sought to explicate the characteristics of the ‘healthy babe of English song’ that was ‘growing up in our midst’. As Robinson underlined, ‘[t]he composer himself, ably supported by the more educated public, is making greater demands upon the singers; the composer claims that interpretation should be ranked among the singer’s highest gifts’.¹²⁵ That songs were valued on the basis of how far they left ‘the artist interpreting them’ an ‘individuality of his own’ is underlined in such terms by Gregory Hast, who maintained that in interpretation, ‘[t]he artist must not slavishly follow the marks of the composers, and should not hesitate to alter or ignore them if they interfere with his intelligent reading of the song. Some modern composers smother their works all over with marks of expression to such an extent as to leave the artist interpreting them no individuality of his own’. Thus, he encourages the singer to ‘wipe out’ all the composer’s markings, and to ‘work out his own scheme of interpretation’, for ‘[t]hen the song will become a living and interesting thing’.¹²⁶

The ideal that song should be an extension of, or performance of, the singer’s body – itself a living organism – was endemic in these manuals. As Kennedy Scott emphasized, notes themselves should be assimilated into the physicality of the human body, for ‘a note does not really *live* till it has registered spiritual feeling and intensity’. A ‘good note’, as he maintains, is ‘an emotion, a strenuous breath, not so many vibrations to the second. Feeling is the only thing that really cements notes together’.¹²⁷ As he continues,

Notes should have a bony structure; they should not be just flesh and fat, though these softer substances can, as it were, clothe the hard framework of the sound.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ William Fothergill Robinson, *Four Lectures on English Song* (Oxford: Messers Acott & Co., 1914), 32.

¹²⁶ Hast (1925), 67.

¹²⁷ Kennedy Scott (1928), vol. I, 124.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

Provocatively, ideas of the nation as itself a ‘living body’ were prevalent throughout the years under discussion, and were also prominent in the rhetoric of the folk revival.¹²⁹ Arthur Mee, for example, considered ‘The Great Truth that a Nation is like a Living Body’ in one of his forty-one volumes about the counties of England (published from 1908 onwards), also devoting attention to ‘How our Own Body Helps us to Study the Life of a Nation’, and ‘The Life of the Body and the Life of the Nation’. Reminding the reader that ‘we are members one of another...[e]ach of us is part of a great whole’, he continued that

in a sense, a nation is like a great living creature...we learn that the living body, though it is a whole, is made up of parts called cells, which are themselves alive; and we have only begun to understand the living body since we learned something about the nature of the cells which make it up...So, also, we may imagine that the nation is a living body, but we shall never really understand the life of a nation till we understand the nature of the persons who make it up. That is the great key which governs all true thinking about a nation; and that is why we have been very carefully studying the lives, the bodies and the minds of ourselves, so as to lead up to the study of the nation of which each one of us, young or old, is a part...¹³⁰

Such ideas provide a powerful context within which to locate an emphasis in the teaching of English singing upon exploring the workings of the body (this typified by Plunket Greene’s invitation, at the opening of this chapter, to ‘run your hands down your body’ to find the diaphragm, the ‘powerhouse’ of emotional reserve). As Mee maintained, it is in this way that an understanding of the nation as a community is obtained. That the singing voice was also imagined as crucial to the enactment of union between men – where ‘we are members of one another’ – brings such discourses into a provocative dialogue with this important invention of an idea of English nation.

The implication of the landscape in the body of songful community thus completes a process of performing man’s return to the land. It is Plunket Greene who explores this concept most

¹²⁹ See Sykes (1993).

¹³⁰ Arthur Mee, ‘The Nation is a Living Body’, from *The Children’s Encyclopaedia*, reprinted in Giles and Middleton (eds.) (1995), 63-5.

powerfully, through his idea of the ‘atmosphere’ of a song, and his notion that this atmosphere was for the ‘pioneering discovery’ of the singer. Songs are characterized as ‘a little drama, or picture, or colour study’, a place where ‘for every treasure that [the singer] discovers he knows the earth to hold a thousand more’.¹³¹ The journey through song is in this way imagined as one whereby the spatial quality of the song – its soundscape and expressive realm – is to be ‘imprinted’ in the body of the singer, as much as mapped as a place to search for musical meaning in interpretation. The forward movement of the phrase, for example, and the communication of a particular relation between notes, is crucial to such discovery, as is the treatment of the song as a series of parts which make up a ‘whole’. Defining the ‘atmosphere’ of a song, Plunket Greene explains that

[e]very song has an *Atmosphere* of its own; that is, a something all-pervading to which all detail is subordinate...

It follows that every song must be treated as a *whole*...

A musical phrase is made up of a number of notes. The singer does not think of those notes separately; he thinks of the phrase as a whole, and the song is to the phrase what the phrase is to the note...

If the singer has imagination, atmosphere will come to meet him half-way. Its fascination will lure him on and lead him into fairy-land. A thousand feet may have worn the path bare before him, but to him all is virgin soil. In after life the memory of that moment will thrill him, when first the mists lifted, and the *Wanderlust* entered into his soul...

The singer must visualize his scene [of the song], and paint [it] upon his inner vision...(Plunket Greene’s emphasis).¹³²

Thereafter, the singer continues to illuminate the process of discovering the terrain of the song, advising that

Most songs carry their atmosphere on the surface. They tell their own tale, and the singer has but to follow the beaten track. But to the student they cannot compare for interest with those in which he has to look for it.

There is one thing that will help him in the search. Every song has a signpost hidden somewhere. The student, in the process of absorbing his song, will find that gradually, imperceptibly, one sentence or phrase, generally in music and words alike, will begin to stand out, to impress itself upon him as typical of the atmosphere of the whole... This sentence is the key to the song – the *master-phrase*. Every voice has a master-note which shows the character of the whole... even when the atmosphere is most subtle [in a song], the student hardly needs look for it. The signpost will loom up through the darkness...¹³³

¹³¹ Plunket Greene (1912), 2.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

In these accounts, the student is encouraged to imagine song as a land of rural discovery, and one to be assimilated to the very character of his voice. The journey towards finding the essence of the song – its ‘master-phrase’ – is one which is found in many of these manuals. Gregory Hast, for example, opined that

[t]he path to be trodden by the artist gifted with the power of interpretation runs through fairyland and will reveal to him at every turn new beauties and opportunities for expressing them. It is a land unknown to the mere vocalist. It is the thing that makes singing worth while to the one with limited vocal powers.¹³⁴

Here, the journey becomes also one of ‘understanding’ the song, or of finding its hidden beauties. Like Plunket Greene, Hast associated the landscape of song with a ‘fairyland’, a well-established Victorian and Edwardian topic concerned with escapist lands of fantasy and lost beauty.¹³⁵ For Hast, too, the process of charting this lost rural space involves finding the song’s ‘the phrase of phrases’:

Often we find several complete and distinct preliminary phrases leading up to a principal or dominating one, the whole making up what we may term a ‘phrase of phrases’. Of course that dominating phrase is the ‘crown of the arch’ and has to be built up to on definite lines, or we may find that it falls flat when we reach it. The manner of achieving this must be left to the intelligent discretion of the artist...[i]t will not be enough merely to phrase them without any definite purpose in view.¹³⁶

Such spatial and architectural metaphors appear with some consistency throughout such monographs. In a study by Hubert Brown, for example, the discovery of the song’s basic shape – its climaxes and structural terrain – is imagined as an act of ‘walking up a steep hill,

¹³⁴ Hast (1925), 65.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹³⁶ Hast (1925), 42-3. Plunket Greene also viewed the process of interpreting a song in architectural terms, noting that ‘the masterpieces of song are inexhaustible and, if he prove himself worthy, the architects of his own time [i.e. composers] may choose him [the singer] for their master-builder’. Plunket Greene also maintained that ‘[p]hrases are the bricks out of which interpretation is built’. See Plunket Greene (1912), 1, and 8. This statement clearly betrays the prevalent idea that the singer was the ‘maker’ of song, realizing the ‘plans’ – or frame – of the composer. Indeed, the spatial concept inherent in these metaphors speaks powerfully to the ‘place’ or ‘land’ of song that seems important to emerging ideas of English song and its aesthetic qualities.

the top of which appears to be the highest point to be reached; but on reaching this top, we find a sudden short dip, followed by another hill, rising above the first, and not to be seen below...’ The ‘summits’ of these hills, as Brown makes clear, offer moments of ‘clarity’ in the projection and ownership of interpretation: the discoveries of the pioneer.¹³⁷

The conception of song as a rural or architectural space, to be discovered and searched for hidden beauty, speaks powerfully to the rural pursuits of contemporary English life, as much as to the ‘pastoral’ mode of music supposedly developed during these years. It is notable that for Dawson Freer, the process of teaching itself was akin to that of a journey: one taken with the student. He encourages the teacher to

meet [the student] on his own ground, convince him that you and he are working for the same end; but that the path he has chosen, though it seems to offer some present reward to himself, does not really lead to the Land of his Desire...Although the distant goal may not be fully realised, some knowledge of its worth will prevent the traveller from abandoning his journey, and no task will be too mean that serves to hasten him on.¹³⁸

As was suggested at the outset, such songful journeys thus became those in which singer, teacher, and listener were bound as one in their search for creative ‘inspiration’.

That this ‘unconscious’ spirit of inspiration and discovery was also imagined as a ‘physical’ act of endeavour is confirmed by Plunket Greene, who insisted that ‘[t]he singer will find at the end of his song, if he has been in the mood, that every muscle in his body has been stretched taut in unconscious response to the play of feeling’.¹³⁹ Indeed, the production of ‘tone’ was also encouraged through reference to an idea of the qualities and physical experience of a natural landscape. The following from the study of Chares Kennedy Scott are indicative of this trope:

¹³⁷ Hubert Brown, *The Principles of Expression in Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 55-6.

¹³⁸ Freer (1924), 44. In a similar manner, Plunket Greene suggested that the professional singer should, if he was not ‘a traitor’, take seriously the business of performing ‘artistic’ songs, with full knowledge of their appropriate interpretation, for ‘the public looks to him for guidance and follows his path’. Plunket Greene also conceived of the process of learning the art of singing as one in which the teacher ‘gives [the student] a tune to whistle to his stride or, best of all, shows him fresh lands to explore’. See Plunket Greene (1912), xi-xii.

¹³⁹ Plunket Greene (1912), 15-16.

An open note can be likened to something borne upon the crest of a wave; a covered note, to that thing when it has descended into the trough.¹⁴⁰

A cold, clear, shallow voice cannot move comfortably. Its tendency is to set like ice. Anything like a smooth, quick recitative or monotone of words is impossible to it. It simply has no flow...Only warmth and depth of tone can give it fluidity.¹⁴¹

A well-set voice may be likened to a tree firmly rooted at its base, but luxuriating above into spreading branches and soft foliage.¹⁴²

A perfect note scarcely seems to have vibration, it is so smooth, so wedded and woven into the surrounding air. It does not fret or grate upon you; it envelops you without your being aware of what is causing it, like a spiritual presence.¹⁴³

The final reference, here, to the voice as a ‘spiritual presence’ articulates not only the belief that a voice should be drawn from the very ‘atmosphere’ of nature, but further, emphasizes once more the idea of ‘the breath of life’, or the ‘vital spark’ to be expressed in the voice, and to be ‘breathed’ into the song.

It was noted above that Vaughan Williams himself had undertaken a course in ‘voice production’ by way of preparation for his Bournemouth lectures in 1902, having already received singing lessons sometime during that year. His ideas about singing and the production of the voice are subsequently rather difficult to trace, though there emerge occasions upon which his comments on singing invite consideration. When offering Cecil Sharp his thoughts on the pamphlet *Folk Singing in Schools* in 1913, he emphasized the importance of ‘good voice production’, advising Sharp that

this seems to me a most important part of a child’s education. You seem to me to give the words ‘voice production’ an evil connotation because so much so-called voice production is bad and unnecessary – but surely real voice production – the encouragement of a full clear pleasant sound whether in speaking or singing, and (as you yourself say) of clear enunciation, is *absolutely necessary* and a most important part of the development of the child’s best nature (Vaughan Williams’s emphasis).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Kennedy Scott, vol. I (1928), 125.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 126.

¹⁴² Ibid., 127.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 132.

¹⁴⁴ Vaughan Williams, in correspondence with Cecil Sharp, cited by Kennedy (1980), 102-3. It is noteworthy that Vaughan Williams in fact advised Sharp to remove the reference to ‘voice production’ in this text, on the grounds

In 1921, Vaughan Williams offered a tribute to Gervase Elwes upon the singer's sudden and untimely death. Here, the composer praises precisely those qualities lauded in contemporaneous ideas of the English voice. Emphasizing 'what a struggle' Elwes had encountered in order to 'rise superior to the insincere ideals and ephemeral judgements of the world in which he lived', Vaughan Williams praised the quality of Elwes's singing in the following terms:

The grosser aspects of passion and feeling were repugnant to him, and the transparent sincerity and honesty of his nature made it impossible for him to simulate those emotions. The strength of his art lay in his power of making the candour and uprightness of his character an actual part of his singing...This, then, is the key to Elwes' greatness as a singer, the indivisible connection of his life and his art; it was not necessary for him to put on singing like a garment; he sang as he spoke, from the heart. For him to sing as he spoke was easier than for some singers, because Elwes did not have to learn correct English as a foreign language. Not the least of his claims to our grateful remembrance will be that he was one of the band of pioneers in the fight against 'singers' [sic] English; he realised what a wonderful vehicle for musical sound our noble language is and refused to degrade it into a kind of bastard Italian.¹⁴⁵

Emphasizing the 'indivisible connection of his life and his art', Vaughan Williams's praise of the 'sincerity' and 'honesty' expressed through the voice of a spirit of 'candour' and 'uprightness' betrays a clear correlation with the ideas of an 'unconscious', 'natural', and 'penetrating' singing voice, as outlined above. Indeed, as the composer continued

It was the personal quality which told in the actual quality of his singing voice. In one way it was not a great voice; it was not very powerful, although it had a peculiar carrying quality, and judged as a mere instrument it may not have been of outstanding beauty, but it was Elwes' own voice, it had a beauty which was more precious than that of vocal sound; that golden tone could only come from a golden heart...His beautiful diction made every word tell...He was an indefatigable searcher after new songs...¹⁴⁶

that Sharp gave it 'an evil connotation'. He also advises that Sharp should 'omit the distinction between "town" and "country" song', for '[t]he distinction is between spontaneous, traditional, oral music and deliberate, written, conscious music'.

¹⁴⁵ Vaughan Williams, 'Gervase Elwes' (1921), in Manning (ed.) (2008), 57-9. Vaughan Williams's statement that 'the grosser aspects of passion and feeling were repugnant' to Elwes may relate as much to the composer's participation in the definition of an emerging aesthetics of 'English' singing, as to the fact that Elwes was not known for singing opera: his career lay in the song and oratorio repertoires.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 58-9.

Vaughan Williams himself was captivated by a voice which ‘sang as it spoke’: a voice called forth ‘from the heart’, and with a clear articulation of English words.¹⁴⁷ Elwes’s voice ‘told’ – it had a ‘carrying quality’ – and even if the sound was not beautiful or powerful in a conventional sense, it was the ‘tone’ of ‘sincerity’ and ‘honesty’. It was not artificial, assumed, ‘worn like a garment’, but was a natural expression of his ‘golden heart’. Further, Elwes was praised for his avid ‘searching’ for new songs: a pioneer of songful discovery, and one to whom numerous English composers turned for the performance of their songs.

It will be suggested below that such ideals inform a number of Vaughan Williams’s early songs: ideals that were noted and praised in contemporaneous accounts of a new and uncompromising voice in English music. This study of vocal culture also enables a context within which to consider the extent to which the voices of multiple English musicians were staged, and heard, in these early communal songs. As such, it becomes possible to explore a mode of song that became, itself, a performance of ‘the personal style of English musicians’, and a sounding of an ‘English’ voice.

Indeed while bringing the discussions unfolded throughout this chapter to bear upon an interpretation of Vaughan Williams’s music is complex, the above perspectives on ‘song’ and on an ‘English voice’ illuminate certain processes and materials of the composer’s early art songs that demand both consideration and interpretation. Though the texts explored above did not emerge in vast numbers until the second decade of the century, it is significant that their ideals can be traced to the period during which Vaughan Williams was composing his earliest songs, and the time during which he undertook lessons in voice production. Further, many of these guides to song performance refer to Vaughan Williams’s songs as those particularly suitable in teaching. As such, it becomes clear that the composition, interpretation, and performance of song existed in a complex dialogue in English musical culture during these years – a dialogue itself performed in the composer’s earliest works.

¹⁴⁷ Plunket Greene, for example, also devoted a section of his 1912 monograph to ‘Purity of Diction’, in which the correct pronunciation of English vowels was given particular emphasis, and advice offered accordingly. See Plunket Greene (1912), 107-13.

Part II

Departures, Dwellings, and Destinations: A View of the Early Songs

Vaughan Williams's songs represent something of an uncharted region in studies of the composer's music, at least as far as detailed critical and interpretative accounts of their themes, narratives, and aesthetic preoccupations are concerned.¹⁴⁸ That said, certain tropes of their reception are rehearsed with some consistency. Banfield's comment on the *Songs of Travel* provides a useful point of departure:

Songs of Travel placed Vaughan Williams at the forefront of critical and appreciative notice; they were seen on every piano, fresh in matter and manner yet seeming to bear the consoling weight of Romantic experience....¹⁴⁹

...a work as fertile in Romantic wayfaring images for early-20-th century England as was *Die Winterreise* [sic] for an early-19-th century Vienna. The images themselves are different – Edwardian and inter-war England dreamt of open roads, gently flowing rivers, thatched cottages, Irish country lasses and gipsy caravans and canaries...rather than frozen streams, linden trees and hurdy-gurdies – but the Wanderer impulse, associated with both joy and sorrow, pervades...perhaps it is part of an escapist dream...¹⁵⁰

Banfield finds a rather stereotypically 'pastoral' appropriation of a Romantic wayfaring tradition in the Stevenson settings, and his sense of songs 'fresh in matter and manner yet seeming to bear the consoling weight of Romantic experience' is evocative of Alain Frogley's suggestion of a 'freshness' in these songs one that is again rather uncomfortably invoked in relation to their apparent mediation and transformation of inherited models:

¹⁴⁸ A consultation of Eric Saylor's 2011 entry on Vaughan Williams for *Oxford Bibliographies Online* makes clear the paucity of detailed attention devoted to these early cycles, as much as to the composer's songs more broadly. See Eric Saylor, 'Songs', in 'Ralph Vaughan Williams', *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Music*, 5-Feb-2013. To Saylor's list of four brief articles and chapters might also be added 'Ralph Vaughan Williams (1972-1958)', in Hold (2002), 102-23; George R. Tibbetts, 'Culture and the Sublime: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *The House of Life* as an Expression of English Experience', in Anna-Therese Tymieniecka (ed.) *The Poetry of Life in Literature* (London: Kluwer Academic, 2000), 179-85; and Eric Hazelwood, 'Vaughan Williams, Stevenson, and *Songs of Travel*', *Journal of the RVW Society*, 44 (February, 2009), 9-10.

¹⁴⁹ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 74.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

[Linden Lea] has an open-air freshness and an attachment to simple things, but is also related to the domestic (drawing-room) song forms of the time. This vein is extended and broadened in the *Songs of Travel* (Stevenson, 1901-4), which have likewise retained their early popularity. These have a moving eloquence... there is also a received Romanticism of a kind that disappeared under the impact of folksong and of Elizabethan music. This is also marked in the rather less sharply focused Rossetti cycle *The House of Life* (1903), from which 'Silent Noon' has remained popular.¹⁵¹

The suggestion of an 'open-air' and 'fresh' quality in these cycles is a commonplace of their reception: Trevor Hold also finds an 'extrovert, open-air' impulse in a number of the *Travel* songs, for example.¹⁵² Such criticism reflects, in turn, responses to the premiere of these songs, where 'open-air' became a means of characterizing their novelty,¹⁵³ as much as the manner of their performance in the hands of singers such as Harry Plunket Greene (to whom, as is noted, Vaughan Williams later dedicated the Stevenson cycle).¹⁵⁴ As is implicit above, however, the more recent appropriation of such 'freshness' aligns this quality with a somewhat uncritical appeal to the supposed pastoralism of this music, as critics rather underplay the sense of originality communicated by a mode of song which seemed, to contemporaneous listeners, newly 'direct', 'real', 'lacking in sentiment', and 'full of an energetic life'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, 'Vaughan Williams, Ralph', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (Oxford University Press) Web. 21-Jan-2013.

¹⁵² Hold (2002), 109. Similarly, Michael Kennedy attributes an 'outdoor' quality to 'Bright is the Ring of Words', though offers no explanation of this characterization: see Kennedy (1980), 81. As Roger Savage has underlined, the 'open-air' life of gypsy travellers became emblematic in England of a series of values and aspirations during the early years of the century, including ideals of companionship, communion with nature, and a spirit of 'trackless adventure'. See Savage (2002).

¹⁵³ Georgia Pearce noted 'songs of robustness and fresh air' in her review of the Stevenson settings. Pearce's review, entitled 'Music Notes', is collected in the composer's scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2, annotated '9.12.04'. It is further significant that when reflecting upon the early years of her husband's career, Joy Finzi remembered that 'the order of the day [during the early 1920s] was "out-of-door" music', this an interesting signal to the contemporaneous designation of the 'pastoral' mode of English music, as Stephen Banfield implies in the chapter from which this quotation is drawn: see Banfield, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 204. This term may perhaps be added to Saylor's comprehensive discussion of the ways in which the English 'pastoral' has been explored in the field, including the emergence of the term and its apparent meanings in early twentieth-century discourse: see Saylor (2008).

¹⁵⁴ As Stuart Wilson remarked, 'The effect of [Plunket] Greene on his generation was remarkable: it was due... above all to his fresh-air outlook which banished the hackneyed insincerities of the shop-ballad and raised the standards of public taste'. As quoted by Rufus Hallmark, 'Ralph Vaughan Williams, Robert Louis Stevenson, and their *Songs of Travel*', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 138, and 153, n.47.

¹⁵⁵ A critic for *The Daily News* found in Vaughan Williams's songs a 'particularly noticeable lack of sentiment', giving voice to songs both 'original and real...full of an energetic life'. As collected in the composer's scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2, annotated 'Daily News, 3.12.04', the review entitled 'Bechstein Hall: Two Song Cycles'.

By contrast, the novelty of the Rossetti sequence elicited some confusion.¹⁵⁶ While the ‘beauty’ and ‘modernity’ of this ‘clever’ cycle was praised by a number of critics, others found a certain ‘absence of melody’ in the setting of ‘abstract’ sonnets which, in stark contrast to the ‘singable’ travel cycle seemed somehow to demand an almost ‘orchestral palette of tone colour’, stretching the resources both of singer and pianist to an extent that somehow overwhelmed the song form. Indeed, one critic suggested that *The House of Life* was evocative of a ‘tone poem’ rather than a series of songs: a peculiarly novel musical discourse in which the meaning of the text was not conventionally realized.¹⁵⁷

Such reception may be interpreted as a reflection of these songs’ complex and contrasting mediation of an ‘experiential’ artistic realm: one that seems to negotiate the very terms of a ‘popular’ mode of ‘rural’ art song by staging a number of the songful ideals outlined both in Vaughan Williams’s writings, and in an English culture of discourses surrounding vocal performance. As Herman Ould assessed in his 1928 survey of Vaughan Williams’s songs, the *Travel* cycle bears songs that are ‘tuneful, singable, even catchy, yet they show musicianship which would be quite beyond the capacity of a mere ballad-writer’.¹⁵⁸ That Vaughan Williams offered in these works a mode of newly ‘artistic’ yet also ‘popular’ song – and songs which seemed to issue an invitation to their singing – was thus detected contemporaneously. The ‘singable’ quality apparently communicated by the *Songs of Travel* is explored and contrasted with peculiarities noted in the Rossetti sonnets: ¹⁵⁹ primarily their preoccupation with static, ‘pulsating’ sound, which as Banfield suggests, pointed to Vaughan Williams’s rejection of nineteenth-century models.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ For the rather mixed critical reception of *The House of Life*, see Kennedy (1980), 52.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Kennedy reprints fragments of a review from *The Times*, whose critic drew attention to the way in which ‘the cycle’s complexities and its breadth of colour seem to demand an orchestral medium’. See Kennedy (1980), 52. The characterization of the cycle as a ‘tone poem’ is found in Georgia Pearce’s review ‘Music Notes’, as collected in the composer’s scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2.

¹⁵⁸ Herman Ould, ‘The Songs of Ralph Vaughan Williams’, *The English Review*, 46 (1928), 606-7.

¹⁵⁹ A critic for the *Musical Record* found *Songs of Travel* to be ‘by far the most vocal’ of the two cycles, and suggested that the sonnet form was ‘not the happiest or the most suitable for lyrical treatment’. He also noted of the Rossetti cycle that ‘[o]n the whole, I found the uncommon harmonic blending of Mr. Vaughan Williams’s accompaniments more striking than the vocal melodies of his songs’. As collected in the composer’s scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2, annotated ‘January 1905’.

¹⁶⁰ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 81.

This in turn invites discussion of the manner in which these songs can be explored as those which stage and communicate a sense of the presence of musical experience, both of singer and of listener. The discussion highlights a series of gestures and processes that seem to challenge the generalization of these songs as simply those of a ‘Romantic self-communing’, as suggested by Stephen Banfield, probing the quality of an ‘extrovert’, ‘open-air freshness’ which seems contemporaneously to have articulated a sense of these songs’ departure from earlier models. In foregrounding a ‘real’ and ‘energetic’ immediacy, it might be suggested that such songs take inspiration from ‘the very sincerity of the folk-singer’, as Banfield himself intuits,¹⁶¹ implicating the voices and bodies of an idealized participant community in their gestures and propositions. While the question of a ‘folk song influence’ in these songs might indeed be minimal in their surface materials, the immediacy of musical experience variously communicated by both cycles might be proposed as an underlying aesthetic preoccupation that demands subtle elaboration.¹⁶² Such a perspective also provides a means of exploring these songs’ self-definition against a powerful Germanic heritage, re-configuring ideas of romantic love to a communal expression of embodied union, and one enacted on the site of the land. Indeed, these songs perform the configuration of a community of singers, listeners, and ‘creators’ on the site of an English land of song.

¹⁶¹ See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 76.

¹⁶² As A. E. F. Dickinson noted, claims made for ‘a traditional element’ or ‘the vernacular touch’ in the composer’s early songs are problematic, and in suggesting a ‘folky style’ in these works, critics such as ‘Young and others’ offer but ‘slender evidence’. See Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 144. The complex presence of a ‘folk song influence’ in these songs is complicated by the manner in which both cycles were composed in a piecemeal fashion, spanning the years between 1901 and 1904, and as was suggested above, thus spanning the years in which Vaughan Williams denounced and subsequently converted to folk song, and still later became himself an active collector of such songs (in December 1903). For full details of the composition and publication history of these two cycles, see Michael Kennedy 24-6. As Banfield suggests, this was ‘a crucial but in some ways perplexing phase in Vaughan Williams’s development’: a point when ‘[f]olksong was looming larger on [his] horizon, although at first with a certain ambivalence’. Making fleeting reference to Kennedy’s discussion of both ‘A School of English Music’ and the lectures of 1902, he emphasizes that the composer’s collecting activities ‘complicated the issue further’, and that Vaughan Williams’s early songs ‘reflect this transitional state’. See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 76. Beyond this pronouncement, however, no explicit exploration of this ‘transitional state’ is explored in Banfield’s readings of these songs.

A Journey Through Song

Perhaps the most provocative gesture of Vaughan Williams's early song cycles in the context of the ideals outlined above is the way in which both the *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life* conclude with what Michael Kennedy has called 'a key-motive for expressing jubilation throughout Vaughan Williams's life': a descending, 'chiming' melodic figure present in a great many of his works.¹⁶³ Significantly, as Kennedy makes clear, this figure became the opening melody of the hymn 'Sine Nomine', as first published in *The English Hymnal* in 1906.¹⁶⁴

While a number of critics have highlighted the reminiscence – or less anachronistically, the foreshadowing – of this hymn as the melodic basis of 'Bright is the Ring of Words' (at the conclusion of *Songs of Travel*), its more direct evocation in 'Love's Last Gifts', the final song of the Rossetti settings, has curiously not been interpreted in its presentation of a corresponding final gesture.¹⁶⁵ To this end, Example 2.1 displays the 'Sine Nomine' fragment (as indicated by the bracketed annotation). Examples 2.2a, 2.2b, and 2.3 display this fragment's treatment, in turn, at the conclusions of the songs of both cycles.



Example 2.1, 'Sine Nomine', bars 1-2.

¹⁶³ See Kennedy (1980), 79, 81, and 85. Kennedy finds this melodic fragment in both *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life*, as well as in *O Taste and See*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 'and many other works'.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁶⁵ See Hold (2002), 112, and Banfield (1985), vol. I, 86. Kennedy makes explicit the presence of what he labels 'the "Sine Nomine" motif' in both cycles, though similarly offers no interpretation of the narrative signal suggested by the corresponding conclusions of two cycles composed contemporaneously. See Kennedy (1980), 79 and 81.

Moderato risoluto *f* 5

Voice

Bright is the ring of words — when the right man rings them,

Piano

f *risoluto*

Example 2.2a 'Bright is the Ring of Words', from *Songs of Travel*, bars 1-5. Reproduced by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

35

Voice

The lov - - er lin - gers and

la melodia ben marcato

Piano

p

pp molto più lento 40

Voice

sings, — And the maid re - mem - - - bers.

colla voce

Pno.

pp molto più lento *rall.* 3

Example 2.2b, 'Bright is the Ring of Words', from *Songs of Travel*, bars 34-40 (the song's conclusion). Reproduced by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

Tempo I

80 *p* *mf* 85

Voice

Take my last gift; Take my last gift;

Piano

p *mf*

ff 90 *freely*

thy heart hath sung my praise, thy heart hath sung my

ff *p* *colla voce*

95 100

praise"

p *pp* *smorzando*

Example 2.3 'Love's Last Gift', from *The House of Life*, bars 80-103 (the song's conclusion).

Words by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams

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The 'Sine Nomine' fragment is also found at the opening of this song, and articulates its structural divisions, as at bar 54.

That Vaughan Williams appended, at some unknown point, a further song to the Stevenson cycle in the form of ‘I have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope’ may perhaps have discouraged any critical comment on these cycles’ corresponding conclusions.¹⁶⁶ It should be noted, however, that the final gesture offered by the appended conclusion to the *Songs of Travel* is a quotation of ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’, after which a brief reminiscence of the ‘tread’ figure from the opening of ‘The Vagabond’ is reiterated. The figure is evocative of the tread figure which concludes the last three bars of ‘Love’s Last Gift’ at *The House of Life*’s conclusion (as is shown in Example 2.3, above): a sense of the completion of a journey that is appropriate to the *Travel* cycle, but somewhat less obvious a conclusion for the more elusive and abstract sonnets of the Rossetti settings.

Like so many of Vaughan Williams’s works bearing this quotation – often accompanied, as in ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’, with an evocation of bells – it is significant that the ‘Sine Nomine’ fragment which both opens and concludes the final song of *The House of Life* is set to text that proclaims the power of song and of singing: in this case, it is set to Rossetti’s lines ‘Love to his singer held a glistening leaf’, and at the song’s conclusion, ‘Take my last gift...thy heart hath sung my praise.’¹⁶⁷ A corresponding ode to the song is found climactically in ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’, as set to Stevenson’s poem:

Bright is the Ring of Words
 When the right man rings them,
 F the fall of songs
 When the singer sings them.
 Still they are caroled and said –
 On wings they are carried –
 After the singer is dead
 And the maker buried.

¹⁶⁶ Rufus Hallmark has demonstrated that despite the publication of *Songs of Travel* in two separate books, the songs were originally performed and conceived as a complete cycle, and were eventually published as such. See Hallmark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 129-56. As Hallmark discusses at length, there still exists some doubt as to whether this song was composed alongside the others in the cycle, or composed and appended some fifty years later. See Hallmark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 129-56. An examination of the manuscripts in the British Library suggests that these songs were composed concurrently, however, as Vaughan Williams used the same ink, differing pen nibs, and curiously distinctive music paper (twelve staves on heavy paper) for this final song: the same paper as that employed for the composition of ‘The Vagabond’, ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’, and ‘The Roadside Fire’. See BL, London. Add. MS. 62906: 1901-1904.

¹⁶⁷ Vaughan Williams, ‘Love’s Last Gift’ from *The House of Life* (London: Edwin Ashdown, 1933), bars 6-10, and 80-95. The figure is also articulated at bar 54, and here is set to the text “‘All are my blooms; and all sweet blooms of love/To thee I gave while Spring and Summer sang””.

The final stanza of this poem bears the concluding lines:

The lover lingers and sings,
And the maid remembers.

In light of Vaughan Williams's belief that a national music must 'grow' from a culture of music-making – realizing, in the experience of 'actual sound', an ideal of musical citizenship, or of 'loving one another through our art' – the question of how such narratives might be interpreted is provocative. These cycles present a series of songs that culminate in a robust and syllabic tune: one subsequently included as the basis of a new English hymn for communal Church singing. It was suggested above that Vaughan Williams's dedication to the development of communal singing – as powerfully nurtured through his project with *The English Hymnal* – was crucial to his ideal of establishing a tradition of 'artistic' musical experience and participation.¹⁶⁸ The 'Sine Nomine' fragment might be considered, in this context, as an evocation of the song as sung: a reference to the communal performance and embodiment of the song, enacted in a climactic, syllabic melody which invites both participation and engagement.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, it stands as an invitation to its singing, as much as to the symbolic completion of a journey.

In crafting a textual narrative which in both cases concludes with a proclamation of the power of love's union and triumph over death, moreover, it might be considered that a number of insights may be gleaned from a consideration of these cycles as narratives which seem consciously to enact the composer's ideals of a growth towards establishing a tradition

¹⁶⁸ As Vaughan Williams made explicit with the publication of the *Hymnal*: 'Is it not worth while [sic] making a vigorous effort today for the sake of establishing a good tradition?' See Vaughan Williams, 'Preface to *The English Hymnal*', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 31-7, 33.

¹⁶⁹ As was noted above, Vaughan Williams emphasized in 1912 that the 'raw material' of the 'church hymn' had 'something to say' to English listeners. Contemporaneous critics sensed that this fragment had much to say: 'a simple and direct air' of some beauty, as one critic maintained, and a welcome conclusion to an otherwise rather baffling cycle. See 'A Rossetti Cycle', as collected in the composer's scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2. It might be suggested that the familiarity borne of singing this hymn – which was to become one of the most celebrated of *The English Hymnal* – awakened a particular 'participation' in the hearing of these art songs, especially in the years in which they gained, themselves, considerable popularity (as was the fate of the *Travel* cycle in particular).

of robust English music: a ‘living’ tradition of song-making, as nourished through the publication of *The English Hymnal* itself. The self-consciousness of Vaughan Williams’s textual setting at the conclusion of ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’ is in fact suggested in his tribute to Gervase Elwes, in which the composer begins by appending an epigraph from an ‘Old Carol’, as follows:

‘The bells of paradise, I heard them ring’.

Thereafter, he begins

That Gervase Elwes heard those bells continually ringing in his heart was clear to anyone who knew him, or had a conversation with him, and more especially to all those who heard him sing...It is sometimes thought that when a singer ceases to sing his art dies with him. This is not so. A great singer leaves a tradition behind him which carries on from generation to generation, long after the sound of his own voice is silent:

*Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them:
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them;
Still they are carolled and said,
On wings they are carried,
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.*¹⁷⁰

While this introduction may read as a slightly eccentric tribute to a singer whose untimely death elicited such poetic acclaim, the alignment of the act of singing with the evocation of the bells which chime through the opening of ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’ – as much as through the heart and body of the singer – is surely interesting. The ‘tradition’ of song left behind by this maker rings on in the triumph of this cycle’s conclusion: one which inscribes and at once performs, in its journey towards a climactic song for singing, a confirmation of the song’s embodied presence and possibility. The manner in which Vaughan Williams articulates the tradition of song ‘carrying on from generation to generation’, moreover, invites

¹⁷⁰ Vaughan Williams, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 57-9. (The punctuation of the poem as quoted in this article is the composer’s own).

an unmistakable correspondence with his theories of the evolutionary growth of folk song: it is a reminiscence of the folk revival's belief in musical evolution through oral tradition, and through the emotional contribution of generations of makers.

In these cycles, this ideal is appropriated in a newly and consciously 'artistic' participatory song: songs embedded within cycles which enact a progress, or journey, towards the achievement of a communal, ritual tradition, inviting an experience of singing where 'the bells of paradise' will be heard to ring. The manner in which this mode of Edenic community song seems continually to stage and invite an experience of singing – and further of listening – invites consideration at various points throughout these cycles, as is shown in a discussion of individual songs below.

Songs of Travel

While both *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life* have traditionally been considered to represent what Rufus Hallmark has called 'a collection of loosely related mood pictures', this author contends that through studying the manner in which Vaughan Williams re-orders the poems of Stevenson's travel set, a narrative can be discerned in the singer's journey through *Songs of Travel* (if not *The House of Life*).¹⁷¹ According to Hallmark's analysis, '[w]hile the Stevenson collection has no presumption to narrative, Vaughan Williams's cycle suggests stages in the vagabond-artist's career', and tracing the preoccupations of the wandering protagonist as the cycle unfolds, he continues that

a connotation of the vagabond spirit of the protagonist that comes through the imagery and events of the poems...[is] imbued with images of creativity...[he] arguably represents the artist, who stands on the edge of society, dips his bread in the river, makes

¹⁷¹ Hallmark implies that *The House of Life* is best characterized as a loosely related series of reflections rather than an integrated narrative. Offering an account of the premiere of these cycles on Monday December 2nd, 1904, at London's Bechstein Hall, he notes that 'The programme...featured Vaughan Williams's two recently completed cycles, *House of Life* [sic] and *Songs of Travel*...With regards to the purported narrative content of *Songs of Travel*, it is worth noting that the programme informs the audience that "The songs of this cycle will be sung in continuity". No such comment is appended to the listing of *House of Life*, which is subtitled only "A Cycle of Sonnets"'. See Hallmark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 135. The corresponding conclusions of these works seems to invite a rather different reading, as is suggested below.

palaces in the wild, has dreams, rises in the night to see the stars, and transmutes his experience into art. This is most explicitly felt in the penultimate song, 'Bright is the Ring of Words', but it can be perceived in many of the others as well.¹⁷²

Hallmark's narrative is suggestive of the argument outlined above: a sense of these songs' self-referential tracing of an artistic act of creation, the staging of a narrative detailing the artist's journey towards finding an authentic voice. The idea of Vaughan Williams's 'pioneering' presence in his music is a trope of critical reception, usually aligned with the composer's preoccupation with 'spiritual journeys' more broadly: as Roger Savage has put it, 'the idea of a daring journey that takes a single-minded traveller from the limiting, unfulfilling here-and-now towards a higher fruition and awareness that he may or may not ultimately achieve... after 1901 such an aspiring journey was to become a "grand narrative" of the composer's fifty years, recurring in different guises and in many major pieces.'¹⁷³

In 1963, A. E. F Dickinson was more explicit in his configuration of the composer's creative act as one of daring exploration when under a subtitle 'Man in Music' he suggested that

[Vaughan Williams's] characteristic figure was first the pioneer, as in the Whitman settings, later to become the pious Pilgrim to the heavenly city, but also the dauntless spirit of the Antarctic heroes who did not come back. As a variant, there was the proud Vagabond...¹⁷⁴

A still more provocative statement was issued by James Day in his monograph 'Englishness in Music', in which he considered that

[o]nly in one aspect was Vaughan Williams an explorer in the physical sense – that of actually collecting folk-songs from folk musicians – but he could still explore new intellectual and spiritual horizons, becoming, as it were, a kind of David Livingstone of the human spirit... he composed a song-cycle to poems by R. Louis Stevenson called *Songs of Travel* in which he nails what were to become his artistic colours firmly to the mast: the idea of the traveller who is prepared to risk all in the quest for aesthetic and spiritual truth.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Hallmark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 133.

¹⁷³ Savage (2002), 388.

¹⁷⁴ Dickinson (1963), 99.

¹⁷⁵ James Day, 'Englishness' in *Music from Elizabethan times to Elgar, Tippett and Britten* (London: Thames Publishing, 1999), 176. Day's view might be challenged, however, in light of the fact that Vaughan Williams was

Though such characterizations are uncritical in their intimation of the presence of the composer's voice in his works – his narratives an act of creation in exploring and charting the unknown aesthetic wilderness of national music, and of his own creative potential – these ideas continue to play an important role in shaping responses to the 'Englishness' of his music, as much as the particular 'robust', 'direct', and 'downright' voice singing in the *Songs of Travel* in particular. Rufus Hallmark re-inscribes this view when he suggests that 'The Vagabond' claims acquaintance with a particularly English traveller, and

strikes a familiar chord in late-nineteenth century English literature that is different from the German wayfarer; or at least it is less like Müller and Schubert's unhappy *Wanderer*... This English vagabond may have its roots in the popular novels of George Borrow – *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* – and be a cousin to Matthew Arnold's 'Scholar Gypsy'... The vagabond spirit... corresponds to Vaughan Williams's own fondness for countryside treks as well as for the metaphysical journeys that one finds in several other works...¹⁷⁶

While a literary context is admittedly relevant (for Vaughan Williams, like many English song composers of this period, was preoccupied with confronting a weighty tradition of English poetry that had not been extensively explored in nineteenth-century musical setting), the manner in which Hallmark embarks upon his characterization of the cycle's singer bears rich elaboration in terms of the 'artist-vagabond', or journeying pioneer, singing in English musical culture at this time. As was clear above, the 'pioneer' was a figure aligned with the singer in song manuals published by prominent figures such as Plunket Greene. In light of such characterizations, it may be interpreted that the way in which 'The Vagabond' sings in the *Songs of Travel* suggests that these songs propose less a 'representation' of an artist figure, and more an embodiment or immediate performance of a particular singing voice, and an invitation to join the singer in a journey through song.

It is of no small significance that 'The Vagabond' is a blank figure whose status as such is announced by a bald title: one which accommodates a complex of singers, as

a true 'explorer' when he went to war in 1914.

¹⁷⁶ Hallmark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 133-4.

Hallmark justly notes. The directives to the singer issued in contemporaneous song culture serve further to equate the Vagabond's journey as one of companionable community endeavour: one whose journey invites a rather different exploration of 'landscape' than that imagined by scholars such as Banfield and Hallmark. The act of making, embodying, communicating, and 'understanding' song was located as a mode of moving through a landscape both inner and outer, as has been noted. The song became a musical space to be explored, its meaning 'discovered' in the creative act of singing (like the discovery of folk song, whose possibilities were to be re-awakened in its return to the 'mouths of the people'). This act of song was thus one of community union between composer, performer, and listener. A vision of musical communion, community, and experiential intelligibility is confirmed in the *Songs of Travel*'s hymn-like conclusion, whereby the deathly connotations of a pastoral mode (heralded by the fatalistic opening horncall of 'The Vagabond') are conquered in the final hymn of embodied song. The conclusion of the singer's journey is the triumph of song as sung: the performance of a narrative towards the enactment of musical community, and in this, the recovery of a union between man and nature.

Accordingly, the mode of journey and the mode of singing embodied by the *Songs of Travel* might be reconsidered: a journey through song that is foregrounded by the cycle's incessant 'tread' figures.¹⁷⁷ In this reading, the Vagabond who sets forth at the opening of the journey issues a call from his first breath: a call to the road, issued both to the singer and to the listener; a grimly determined song sung out – and at once syllabically tramped into – the unknown region to which he sets forth:

Give to me the life I love, let the lave go by me,
 Give the jolly heavn's above, and the byway nigh me,
 Bed in the bush with stars to see, bread I dip in the river,
 There's the life for a man like me, there's the life forever.

¹⁷⁷ These are found throughout the cycle, and are obviously articulated in 'The Vagabond' and 'The Roadside Fire'. A pulsating variant may also be found in 'Youth and Love' and 'In Dreams', and a processional, congregational mode of 'marching' in 'Bright is the Ring of Words'. As Banfield suggests, 'Like Schubert, Vaughan Williams sets store by his musical tramping figures as a force running through the cycle.' See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 84.

**Allegro moderato
(alla marcia)**

5

Voice

Piano

p ma sempre marcato

sempre pesante il basso

risoluto

Give to me the life I love, Let the lave go by me,

Pno.

Example 2.4, ‘The Vagabond’, from *Songs of Travel*, bars 1-9. Reproduced by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

The Vagabond’s song is an embodied act: it actualizes the psychological longing of Stevenson’s poems (poems already pervaded by pre-existing songs, ‘The Vagabond’ composed by Stevenson ‘to an air of Schubert’). The singing of song here becomes a performance, in which the singer calls out to a listener, seeking communion with and resolute location in the land: a musical life and a song ‘embedded’ in a future sense of place, from which the traveller draws both fortitude and nourishment (bread) to go on, but also, in which he finds rest and as the cycle’s conclusion makes clear, triumph in the attainment of the ‘life’ of his communal song. The song’s opening heraldic gesture might be heard, in this context, as a gesture of announcement: the relocation of man in communion with the land. The ‘explorer’ or ‘pioneer’ is invited to the journey – is set on his way – by the piano’s tramping left hand;

the singer falls into step with a companion; the piano's right hand sounds a horn call which seems to announce the presence of this figure, as much as the presence of a robust voice with 'something to say'.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, a rhetoric of discovery and creation seems periodically traced and articulated through this journey: a sense of consciously mapping a progress away from the Romantic tradition that is arguably referenced at the opening of both these cycles. The blank 'Vagabond' figure – whose bald title and austere song calls attention to his status as a symbol of a wayfaring tradition, an emptied symbol open both to re-inscription and inhabitation – might be contrasted with the tender evocation of a *Dichterliebe*-like piano prelude at the opening of *The House of Life* (as shown in Example 2.6, below). The cycle's conclusion, however, as that of the *Songs of Travel*, confirms the success of a procession away from the dominance of 'foreign models': it enacts and makes real the achievement of an English tradition in its climactic conclusion – a 'simple air' for singing, and one later embedded in the voices who sang from *The English Hymnal*.

The breaking out from such beginnings is a mode of conscious departure: the English wayfarer does not reveal a song – or a journey – of retrospection; it reveals nothing of an inward, 'psychological' narration or revelation. Rather, it sings out as the journey unfolds, and calls for the musical life ahead. This song is not sung by the brook; it does not conclude in the silence of a mechanical barrel organ, with which the lonely Schubertian Wanderer implied by Hallmark's interpretation – the 'artist on the edge of society' – cannot commune. It is resolutely tramped into the singer's body, and concludes in a communal hymn of thanksgiving, led by the pioneering, democratic composer-singer, collecting his singers as he proceeds.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ In a review of the cycle's premiere, one critic noted that the 'directness' of the composer's voice was such that 'Mr. Vaughan Williams's music strikes deep into the heart and intelligence of his hearers. He has something definite to say, something definite to tell us, and he tells it in a very interesting manner'. See Georgia Pearce, [review] entitled 'Music Notes', as collected in the composer's scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2. Frank Howes also discerned the communication of a definite message in the *Songs of Travel*, declaring that 'the authentic Vaughan Williams appears [here] with all the ninetyish atmosphere dispersed and proclaiming...the new era'. See Howes (1954), 238.

¹⁷⁹ It might be argued that James Day also finds something of a self-consciousness in the confrontation of a *Lieder* tradition in the *Songs of Travel* when he notes that '[s]ome of these songs are in fact much closer to the tradition of

It is notable that the song of the Vagabond gains momentum and perhaps companionship in its singing as the cycle unfolds: as Herman Ould made clear, the ‘singable’, ‘memorable’ songs of this cycle are interspersed with the more introspective, ‘difficult’ songs evocative of those collected in *The House of Life*.¹⁸⁰ It is noted by Banfield that the opening ‘tramping’ figure of ‘The Vagabond’ is traced throughout the cycle, developing into a ‘jog-trot’ evocative of a ‘boogie-woogie bass’ in ‘The Roadside Fire’.¹⁸¹ In light of Plunket Greene’s discussion of this song – whose journeying reference to the ‘Roadside’ replaced Stevenson’s title ‘I Will Make You Brooches’ – it might be suggested that the mode of journey communicated by such tread figures, as much as the mode of song communicated by the cycle as a whole, gains rather a different perspective.

Indeed, Plunket Greene refers to this song as particularly informative to the journey of English singing, reminding the singer of the movement to be communicated through the interpretation of a phrase. Having noted that ‘the singer must never stop the march of a song’, he elaborates upon the singer’s ‘fun’ in lengthening notes on the words ‘blows’ and ‘flows’, as invited by the melodic contours which rise to these words (see Example 2.5, below). At such moments, Plunket Greene makes suggests that the very materials of the song seem alive to their experiential possibilities, as realized by a sensitive singer:

[rhythm] enjoyed the excitement of standing on that slippery rock [the lengthened note] so much the first time that it means to stay even longer the second time, and to get nearer to the edge.¹⁸²

German *Lied* than either Vaughan Williams’s other early songs or the works of many contemporaries... The hero of the *Songs of Travel*, indeed, is a rather less self-pitying cousin to that of *Winterreise*...tougher and more resilient. Moreover, we actually get some idea of what he has to offer in the way of emotional attraction to the girl: we *actually hear him woo her* before he goes on his way...’ (emphasis mine). See Day (1998), 113.

¹⁸⁰ See Ould (1928), 606-7.

¹⁸¹ See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 84.

¹⁸² Plunket Greene (1912), 74.

Noting that these phrases grow in intensity, he characterizes the gathering momentum of the song through a further invocation of its ‘living presence’, suggesting that both singer and listener experience

word balancing word, phrase balancing phrase, verse balancing verse, and one and all *pushing on*, [the lengthened notes] damming the stream for a moment merely to make the head of water greater and rush it on to the inevitable end. The composer did not write these pauses; he knew better... He left them to the interpreter (Plunket Greene’s emphasis).¹⁸³

Here the musical motion inherent but latent in the song – as brought to fruition in the act of singing – is embedded within an experience of the landscape, or the seascape: with the ‘gush’ or ‘flow’ of water, or an embodied act of movement.¹⁸⁴ In turn, the singer, through his song, is returned to the land. In that such ‘singable’ songs are interspersed with their more introspective counterparts, we might interpret that the composer accompanies the listener through a journey of appreciation in these songs of rhythmic tramping: a ‘guide to that region’, as issued through the singing of, and embodied participation in, a journey through song.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 73-4. It is interesting that Charles Kennedy Scott issued a similar directive to the singer under the heading ‘Flow of Tone’: ‘[o]ne of the most precious qualities in singing is the easy liquid *flow* of notes and words...A voice which has not this flow is like a shallow mountain stream bustling its way over pebbles and boulders, full of life as it may be, but never revealing the majesty of the great river into which the smaller streams finally collect...consonants and vowels [should] move in a single stream, or rather the stream of sound will permeate every word and member of each word and both singer and listener will be at ease.’ See Kennedy Scott, vol. I (1933), 73.

¹⁸⁴ In describing the ‘essential qualities’ of music, Vaughan Williams himself made clear that ‘The Greek word *rhythmos* means “flow”; so flow may be taken to be an essential part of rhythm’. He also draws attention to the way in which Frank Howes, in his study of music and psychology, called rhythm ‘an innate faculty for the apprehension of time’, foregrounding the experience of a listener as central to the essence of rhythm in music. See Vaughan Williams, ‘What is Music?’ from *The Making of Music*, in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 209, and Howes (1926).

Example 2.5, 'The Roadside Fire', from *Songs of Travel*, bars 22-29. Reproduced by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

The House of Life

While *Songs of Travel* can in this way be considered to stage certain acts of singing – indeed their own singing – and to explore ideals of song as a communicable, intelligible invitation to the discovery and singing of English music, a rather different notion of musical embodiment and of implicating a creative experience of performance – and of listening – within the concerns and aesthetic space of the music can also be discerned in *The House of Life*. The spatial and dynamic conception both of song and singing (articulated in the pedagogical manuals explored above) is particularly rich in its provision of a context for the more complex experiential or phenomenological realm traversed in this cycle, comprising songs which seem to owe more to the second book of *Travel* songs in their contemplative

communication of a sense of ‘pure stasis’: ‘a new feeling for space and silence’, as Banfield has put it of a song that lies at the heart of the cycle, ‘Love’s Minstrels’.¹⁸⁵

The harmonic stasis undoubtedly characteristic of this song can be discerned from the opening of the cycle: a sense of what in Vaughan Williams’s later works has been probed as a preoccupation with pure, pulsating sound.¹⁸⁶ The opening song, ‘Love-Sight’, begins with a long prelude which after the articulation of two ideas in C major shifts rather abruptly to a static movement on oscillating quavers: an achievement of the A major promised by the key signature but curiously negated by the c and g naturals clear throughout the opening of the song (see Example 2.6, below). As the music settles into the gentle, pulsating quaver motion at bar 12, a sense that this is the ‘real’ beginning of the song unfolds a rather disjointed perspective, in retrospect, upon the opening ideas: a sense that they were somehow appended later. As Banfield has suggested, these ideas may be labeled ‘the tenderness of love’ (bars 1-5) and ‘death in love’ (bars 6-11), according to their treatment alongside the text. The two ideas return in the final song of the cycle, but this time ‘crystallized’ into a new theme of ‘attained spirituality’, the ‘Sine Nomine’ theme.¹⁸⁷ In this way, the opening bars of the cycle function as a frame: a point from which music progresses towards a final consummation. Significantly, the material of this final song is again evocative of the song as sung: the singing of a community hymn.

¹⁸⁵ See Banfield (1985), vol. I, 81. It is noteworthy that Vaughan Williams changed the title of Rossetti’s poem in selecting a title for this song, substituting the original ‘Passion and Worship’ for a signal to the ‘minstrels’ referenced in the poem, and to the performances of competing love songs enacted in Vaughan Williams’s setting.

¹⁸⁶ See Grimley (2008), 126-32.

¹⁸⁷ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 82.

Andante con moto ma non troppo

5

Voice

Piano

pp teneramente e molto sostenuto

p dolce

10

15

pp molto legato

tranquillamente ma con profonda espressione

p

20

When_____ do I see_____ thee most, be - lov - ed one?_____

Example 2.6, 'Love-Sight', from *The House of Life*, bars 1-21.

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The cycle's culmination in a sense of 'attained spirituality' invites consideration in light of the contexts outlined above, for this gesture might again be read as the articulation of a further narrative of communion: an enactment of musical community that is cast symbolically in the communion of lovers explored in each of the sonnets. The enactment of embodied union upon Rossetti's 'altar of love' speaks powerfully to the reconfiguration, containment, but also powerful expression of human emotion explored in Vaughan Williams's setting of these sonnets: songs whose exploration of musical and textual 'meaning' becomes a mode of discourse upon the possibility of community – and communication – in song.

The sense of still, pulsating motion at the opening of the cycle dominates a number of these songs. This functions as a musical configuration of man's immediate relationship with the landscape, in a comparable fashion to that explored in *Songs of Travel*. In 'Love-Sight', the first song of *The House of Life*, the oscillating quavers of the piano's right hand are modified with the entry of the left- to enrich the gradual articulation of the home key, establishing the 'place' of the music. Through layering planes of oscillating sound, Vaughan Williams creates a sense of depth (see example 2.6, above, at bars 12-17). The gentle energy of blank, static quavers suggests a distillation of some natural impulse: a humming of the 'atmosphere', a reveling in 'actual sound', or an intimation of what Plunket Greene in his discussion of the 'atmosphere' of the second song 'Silent Noon' called a 'heat-haze and human throb'.¹⁸⁸

This pulsating figure, similarly found throughout 'Youth and Love' and 'In Dreams', lacks the sense of forward movement created by metrical irregularities in the Stevenson songs.¹⁸⁹ There is often a stillness and a sense of dwelling in the richness of sound in *The House of Life*, which may perhaps be related to Vaughan Williams's preoccupation with the 'emotion' contained in 'the actual tones of the human voice': an overwhelming human

¹⁸⁸ Plunket Greene (1912), 2. It seems likely that there is also inherent in Plunket Greene's characterization a sexual connotation.

¹⁸⁹ See 'Youth and Love', bars 1-5, for example, and 'In Dreams', from bar 1 onwards, where the incessant syncopation of the piano's right hand communicates a sense of compulsive forward-movement.

emotion which is the subject of Rossetti's sonnets throughout. In these songs' focus upon the 'actual sound' of musical tone, they can be interpreted as a musical realization of Rossetti's exploration of the transcendent possibilities of human love.

The sense of an envelopment of the body – and of an immediacy and union in the experience of hearing and creating – is perhaps most languorously articulated in 'Silent Noon'. Here, a celebration of the union of lovers and the role of music in its attainment can be interpreted as the focus of the song's performance of a 'song of love'. As Plunket Greene suggests, there is an overwhelming sense of living presence pulsating through the rich, densely scored chords of the song's opening: an enclosed, enveloped space, in which the ritualistic reiterations of E-flat major chords communicates a sense that their primary function is gestural: gestures of sonorous immediacy (see Example 2.7, below). The close scoring of these chords in the middle register of the piano is an important colour shift from the tenderly bright A major of the previous song, whose concluding high register enables a shift to the sense of a rooted re-establishment of place, as much as the opening of a new space.¹⁹⁰

The song's introduction seems to beat with the heart, lodging the music in the body and the body in the space of the song (as Plunket Greene intuited). This is confirmed by the way the voice part enters, gently tracing a melody from the top line of the introductory chords (which appeared at first simply to outline a harmonic motion). As such, a voluptuous sense of union is unmistakable.

¹⁹⁰ It is interesting to speculate upon how Vaughan Williams may have viewed the practice of transposition, for both 'Silent Noon' and 'Linden Lea' were issued in a variety of keys and remain frequently performed in keys other than those designated by the composer originally. In the case of *The House of Life*, it may be remarked that the relation between the open, celestial A major at the conclusion of 'Love-Sight', and warm E-flat major at the opening of 'Silent Noon', presents a particular and important shift of tonal and emotional colour. When 'Silent Noon' is performed in the sharp-side key of G major, for example (as remains common today), the song presents a startlingly different proposition to that intended by Vaughan Williams. It is provocative to consider, therefore, how he may have responded to the transposition of a single song within the context of a performance of an entire cycle.

Largo sostenuto

5

mf Your hands lie o - pen in the long fresh

mp *sonore*

simile

10

grass, The fin-ger points look through like ro - sy blooms: Your eyes smile peace.

pp

pp

mf

Ed. *

Example 2.7, 'Silent Noon', from *The House of Life*, bars 1-11.

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The mode of the text is also complicit in this immediacy: it emerges from the space of resonant sound, blank of any but a gestural evocation of an experience of the scene, whose specificity only unfolds retrospectively – revealed gradually – as the voice speaks in the time of living presence, intimating an observation to a direct, though unknown, 'you' in the present moment: 'your hands lie open in the long fresh grass/the finger-points look through like rosy blooms, your eyes smile peace'.

The text's elliptical invocation of 'finger-points' hints at the intimate union both of man and woman, and of man and nature. The highly symbolic, even abstract mode of this poetry – itself a rejection of conventional modes of representation – leaves a space in which the music goes beyond the 'meaning' of the words, according to Vaughan Williams's ideal: it

serves to heighten their emotion, to clarify the particularity of their meaning.¹⁹¹ In the composer's setting, the static pulsation of the opening chords might be interpreted as a distillation or evocation of the intimate, shared experience of dwelling in the natural world: one that is implied in the text, whose description unfolds only in the time and experiential gestures of the music, an embodiment or capturing of the music of nature, and an enactment – rather than a representation – of the union of lovers in the land.

It is only with the change of perspective – the startling shift to G major at bar 19 – that the location of the scene, the landscape picture, opens out both to the lovers of the song and to the listener/viewer: 'all round our nest, far as the eye can pass, are golden king-cup fields with silver edge, where the cowparsley skirts the hawthorn hedge. 'Tis visible silence' (see Example 2.8, below, at bars 23-36). This moment is evocative of some shift of consciousness, a breaking through, a moment of creation or enlightenment: the opening of a vista hitherto undisclosed to the 'eye' of the lovers in their union. The enclosure of this union is confirmed in the incessant presence of the E-flat major chords, which provide in the opening paragraph a boundary for the scene, and for a listener's musical experience. This harmonic boundary is both traced and tested in its tentative probing (as at bars 8-11, in example 2.7, above), after which the reiteration of E-flat major confirms a sense of return, or the circular mapping of a space.

The way in which the harmony moves throughout the section following the harmonic shift at bars 18-19 works in this context to confirm the communication of some creative breaking out: a sense of the creative knowledge and enlightenment gained, perhaps, through the bliss of shared experience. Shifting modes almost imperceptibly in its fluidity, and by simply raising or flattening a third as in bars 36-7, the music performs a dazzling series of shifting perspectives to great emotional and sensual effect: nuances of colour and tones of

¹⁹¹ See, for example, Vaughan Williams, 'The Words of Wagner's Music Dramas', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 133-51. In 'What is Music?', he begins by stating that 'Music has meaning, though not that can be expressed in words. Mendelssohn used to say that the meaning of music was too precise for words'. See *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 206. This forms part of Vaughan Williams's introduction to a late telling of the preacher tale in 1954.

emotion, experienced at a glance.

15

The pas-ture gleams and glooms 'Neath bil - low-ing skies that scat-ter and a -

cresc

Poco più mosso 20

mass.
f

simile
pp

25

All round our nest, far as the eye can pass, are

p

30

gold - en king-cup fields with sil - ver edge, Where the cow - pars - ley

Example 2.8, 'Silent Noon', from *The House of Life*, bars 12-35.

35

skirts the haw - thorn hedge. 'Tis vis - i - ble si - lence,

pp *pp poco rall*

pp *poco rall.*

40

still as the hour - glass.

più p *a tempo* *cresc*

Quasi Recitative 45

Deep in the sun-search'd growths the drag - on-fly hangs

pp una corda

50

like a blue thread loos-en'd from the sky:

pp

Example 2.8 (continued), 'Silent Noon', from *The House of Life*, bars 36-52.

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Such observations of a ‘visual’ quality are habitually invoked in accounts of ‘Silent Noon’: Michael Kennedy suggested that it is ‘one of the first pieces of music by Vaughan Williams which captures a moment of eternity and holds it in musical terms for perpetual contemplation’.¹⁹² In a recent chapter on the figure of music in Rossetti’s poetry, Phyllis Weliver suggests that Rossetti was also drawn to ‘the perfect moments of music’, his sonnet sequence *The House of Life* a performative exploration of this subject, where the sonnet itself is defined as ‘a moment’s monument’.¹⁹³ Yet the particular nature of this song’s musical ‘capture’ of a timeless ‘moment’ demands more interpretation. As becomes clear, ‘Silent Noon’ signals an awareness of its own materials as music, offering a further music – an actual music, the singing of the song – to that enacted in Rossetti’s poem.

With this in mind, the exaggerated sense of creative progress communicated through the harmonic exploration following bar 19 is significant, a gesture critics found disturbing when the cycle was premiered.¹⁹⁴ Vaughan Williams begins by oscillating between G major and B minor (bars 19-28), moving through a swift shift to B major (bars 28-9), followed by a climb to C major (achieved at bar 33), shifting with startling immediacy to C minor at ‘still’ (bar 37), through which A-flat major is opened out on the pivot of common tones on ‘hour glass’ (bar 39), a Schumannesque shift to the submediant that creates a sense of entering a space, a moment of release or again, of creative enlightenment.¹⁹⁵ The sense of ‘climb’ in this section, particularly through bars 41 to 43 makes immediate a sense of creative ‘progress’ and exploration in the song: a gestural progress which is evocative of Hubert Brown’s directive, noted above, that a singer should explore the song in a means akin to climbing a hill, searching for its moments of ‘clarity’, and in this, for the singer’s own creative inspiration.

¹⁹² See Kennedy (1980), 78.

¹⁹³ Phyllis Weliver, ‘The “silent song” of D. G. Rossetti’s *The House of Life*’, in Phyllis Weliver (ed.), *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 194-212, 194.

¹⁹⁴ In a review of the cycle as a whole, one critic found that ‘this music is inclined to be restless – in fact, a trifle disturbing – through too frequent transitions from key to key’. As collected in the composer’s scrapbook: BL, London. MS. Mus. 1714/11/2/2, annotated ‘Modern Society, 10.12.04’. It might be interpreted that it was also the sensuous eroticism communicated by the restless key transitions in ‘Silent Noon’ that this critic found ‘disturbing’.

¹⁹⁵ The invocation of a creative restlessness in this music is reminiscent of James Day’s sense that in the *Songs of Travel*, the composer makes clear ‘the theme of the restless search for an unknown ideal’. See Day (1998), 112.

The immediacy of embodied musical experience communicated by this musical progress is persistent until the opening returns at bars 60-1, this time with piano and voice singing together from the outset (see Example 2.9, below):

Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower
This close-companion'd inarticulate hour,
When twofold silence was the song of love.

The textual change to the past-tense suggests that a different voice – a narrative voice – has entered the music here, reflecting upon a moment where ‘two-fold silence *was* the song of love’ (emphasis mine). This encourages the listener to reflect upon what has been heard thus far: the ‘song of love’ now glorified in the text. In this moment, the musical setting suggests that the ‘silence’ of the opening – a silence of semantic meaning in the blank, ‘musical’ statement of the introductory chords – ‘was’, indeed, ‘the song of love’, or the music of union and place, intuited by Plunket Greene in the articulation of a living ‘throb’ in the song’s opening chords. The ‘musical’ sense of embodied union intuited in this blank yet gesturally meaningful opening – the ‘heat-haze of human throb’, a ‘close-companion’d, inarticulate hour’ – is confirmed retrospectively by the text. In this sense, a song within a song is articulated by the final return, a simple and also a complex ternary construction. As Stephen Banfield suggests, the ‘deliberately episodic’ nature of the song’s construction is brought to fruition at this moment of return, when ‘the description without warning switches to the past tense...creating the realization of a moment held for ever in the present tense of memory’.¹⁹⁶

While Banfield offers no further illumination of this tantalizing remark, the way in which the return of the opening conveys a sense of calling forth and ‘reliving’ a memory – a memory of an earlier music (in the opening verses of the song) – is powerful. In this, the music is able to make real its quality as a memory ‘held’ in the ‘present moment’: a reference to but also a reawakening of a distant, primordial song: one ‘always there’, as though

¹⁹⁶ Banfield (1985), vol. I, 80.

hovering in the background.

The performative quality of this final song of return – its mode of musical enactment – is ensured by the overwhelming sense of *musical* return to the tonic E-flat major enabled by the exaggerated harmonic circling of the previous section. The gestural sense of journey performed throughout the section following bar 19 renders the rediscovery of the opening realm an overwhelmingly joyous moment of re-entering a place once known but temporarily forgotten: a rediscovery through the exploration and charting of an harmonically unknown region.

In this context, the return of the E-flat major chords completes a process of harmonic circling that seems to map a route around the lovers throughout the song, as much as the hearer experiencing the music's progress: an envelopment of composer, performer, and listener, and a consummation of the union promised by the text. When the opening material returns at 'O! clasp we to our hearts', the music does not precede the textual explanation of the scene, but brings forth the voice to actualize and perform the vocal exclamation only invited by the poetic statement: a joyous vocal expression and invitation to the poem's 'oh!', inviting the listener to 'clasp we to our hearts', to sing of the union of lovers and listener/viewers embraced in the 'close companion'd, inarticulate hour'.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Hubert Foss sensed the song's communal invitation to the bodily embrace of its message in 1950 (even if he did not accept this invitation) when he suggested of this moment that '...if it does not clasp me to its heart, at least the dragonfly hangs like a blue thread'. See Foss (1950), 83. Foss's comment is suggestive once more of the way in which this song seems to attempt an enactment of the lovers' experience of Rossetti's landscape: the dragonfly's presence is, as Foss rather flippantly articulates, made 'real' and immediate in 'Silent Noon'.

55 *f* *p*

So — this wing'd hour is dropt to us from a - bove,

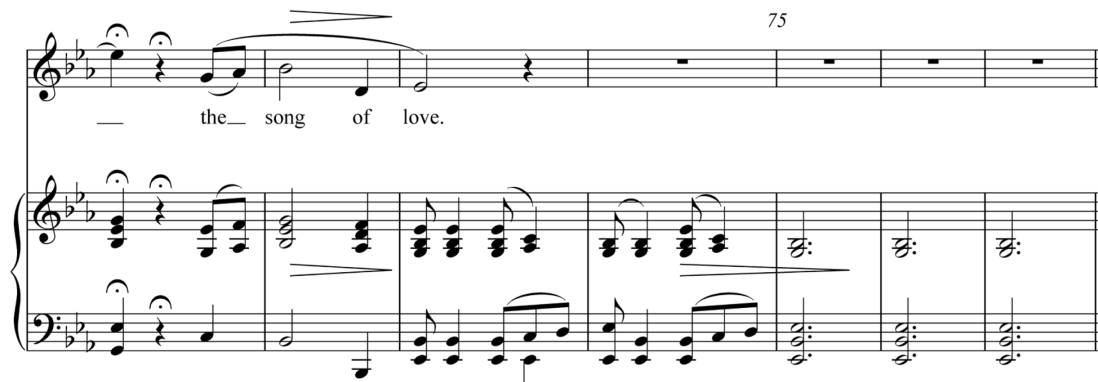
60 *poco rall.* *mf* *a tempo*

Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for — death - less dower, This close-com

poco rall. *mf* *sonore*

65 *pp* 70

pan - ion'd in - ar - ti - cu - late hour, When two - fold si - lence was the song —



Example 2.9, 'Silent Noon', from *The House of Life*, bars 53-77 (the song's conclusion).

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This is a moment of *jouissance*: an inarticulate exclamation that sums up an inarticulate hour. Such joy is overwhelming as the union of man, woman, land, and music – as tentatively intuited from the start – is here sung out in a moment of 'unconscious' realization.¹⁹⁸ In this moment of a song remembered and re-sung, singer and hearer are awakened to the embodied intelligibility of the opening music: a 'knowable' music whose familiarity is confirmed through an experience of journey through the song. The music of nature is captured in the inspiration of the singer whose journey is complete.

In this reading, 'Silent Noon' might be considered a complex reconfiguration of the mode of 'love' and the mode of 'song' explored in Germanic love-cycles such as

¹⁹⁸ Vaughan Williams provides an even more sensuous and protracted enactment of 'Silent Noon's' 'oh' in his cantata *Willow-wood* (1902-3), one of the most patently erotic of his scores. Here, the composer sets the four 'Willowood' sonnets from Rossetti's *The House of Life*, scoring the cantata for baritone solo, female chorus, and orchestra. (The cantata was originally scored for baritone or mezzo soprano and piano, and was premiered but not published as such. It was orchestrated and published in 1908-9.) The first sonnet evokes the 'passionate voice' of love: one whose 'lute' remains 'silent', though within it the 'secret things' love has to 'tell' are nevertheless 'audible'. The cantata progresses from this moment of musical 'silence' – related by baritone and orchestra only – through a performance of love's 'singing', which is promised in the second sonnet and enacted in the third. Notably, Rossetti casts this song of love in quotation marks (as also in 'Love's Last Gift', the final poem selected by Vaughan Williams for his song cycle *The House of Life*). In this way, Rossetti designates a different poetic voice here. It is significant that Vaughan Williams responds to the multiple voices of Rossetti's poem by bringing the wordless female chorus in *Willow-wood* to offer a sensual plenitude of voices, in this way highlighting a different 'mode' of music for the performance of the poem's song. See Vaughan Williams, *Willow-wood* (London: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1909). Vaughan Williams often emphasizes a voluptuous and erotic quality in works concerned self-referentially with the act of artistic creation or musical performance, as is clear, for example, in *Serenade to Music* and *Epithalamion*.

Dichterliebe, and further a reconfiguration of Romantic representations of musical landscape and the place of man therein. The song bears a mode of music that communicates its sonic primacy and material meaning in a complex dialogue with the semantics of the text. The possibility of union suggested both by the text and by the composer's theorized ideals – a performance of 'loving one another through our art' – is enacted in the progress of this song: one in which the intimate experience of the lovers becomes shared, through the voice, with a community of listeners.

This is also an exploration of the soundscape or 'atmosphere' of the song: its experiential possibilities as made and heard. The journey from a bodily and blankly 'primitive' musical realm becomes a charted space which is familiar, 'lived' in, and thus consciously intelligible by its final return, its conclusion celebrating the rediscovery of a communal 'song of love', whose community performance – 'oh! clasp we to our hearts' – is a striking articulation of something both new and simultaneously 'always known'. This consummation, as was noted above, is echoed and confirmed at the very end of the cycle. Thus, 'Silent Noon' stages a process of recovery but also of exploration: the recovery, reawakening, and re-mapping of a communal, embodied music, and the mapping of its future in a mode of lived musical experience – a musical ritual of participation in music-making, the experience of which guarantees the intelligibility of its materials, of a community art music. In this way, the song might be read as a didactic performance of the composer's ideals, glorifying and enabling a mode of immediate, democratic, artistic musical experience: an experience of the space both of music, and of landscape.

By setting a performance of musical recovery as the focus of Vaughan Williams's landscape, this song works to align the immediacy of a musical experience with a primordial experience of the land, which in turn becomes evocative of what Anne Whiston Spira has called 'the language of landscape'. As she suggests

Landscape was the original dwelling; humans evolved among plants and animals, under the sky, upon the earth, near water. Everyone carries that legacy in body and mind. Humans touched, saw, heard, smelled, tasted, lived in, and shaped landscapes before the species had words to describe what it did. Landscapes were the first human texts, read before the invention of other signs and symbols....Landscape, as language, makes thought tangible and imagination possible...the idea of landscape recovers the dynamic connection between place and those who dwell there...¹⁹⁹

Such a language speaks powerfully to the mode of musical intelligibility and the musical 'language' articulated by this song, and relates its aesthetic preoccupations back to Vaughan Williams's tale of the primordial song – the original musical language – emerging from the embodied expression of 'unconscious' musical communication, a mode of heightened emotional 'speech' enacted on the site of a primordial land. The emotional 'excitement' or intensity of the song's text becomes transmuted into the throbbing energy of 'actual sound': an immediacy of gestural and sonic expression that is both 'inarticulate' and yet at once, powerfully communicative.

In appropriating a primordial impulse in English art music in this way, 'Silent Noon', like *Songs of Travel*, can be shown to mediate a broader social preoccupation with recapturing and reconstructing the values and rituals of an idealized rural past: a nationalistic assertion of cultural values and a definition of English identity. In a song in which the experience of making and hearing music is communicated in gestures which become less representations of the natural world than evocations of rural experience and of communion on the site of the land, this song recasts a mode of love and a mode of song which might be seen as a complex performance of English musical identity: the recasting of a dominant *Lieder* tradition in a mode of participatory English art, in which an emotional experience of union is contained within the site of the land (as much as the space of the Church). As such, these songs stage the singing of an 'authentic' English voice, as 'Silent Noon' recovers, creates,

¹⁹⁹ Anne Whiston Spira, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 15-18.

and performs a complex mode of ‘national song’: a gesture which looks to the past, but in complex ways, brings the ‘spirit’ of ‘authentic’ ancestral voices powerfully into the present.

It is fitting, by way of conclusion, to refer the reader to Vaughan Williams’s characterization of the experience of ‘making’ music:

A sheet of printed music is like a map where you see a series of conventional signs, by which the skilled map reader will know that the road he is on will go north or south, that at one moment he will go up a steep hill and that at another he will cross a river by a bridge. That this town has a church, and that that village has an inn. Or to use another simile, heard music has the same relation to the printed notes as a railway journey has to a timetable. But the printed notes are no more music than the map is the country which it represents or the timetable the journey which it indicates.

We may imagine that in primitive times – and indeed it still happens when someone sits down at the pianoforte and improvises – the invention and production of sound may have been simultaneous, that there was no differentiation between the performer and the composer...[the artist] must make a synthesis between the thing to be expressed and the means of expression.²⁰⁰

This study of song and its singing has enabled a consideration of the extent to which Vaughan Williams’s early songs virtually generated their own existence, becoming expressions of and invitations to their own singing. The study has further provided an exploration of the ways in which a mode of communal, communicative, and performative national music emerged in a complex dialogue between Vaughan Williams’s stated ideals; between a culture of discourses surrounding both an ‘English’ voice and ideas of broader cultural ‘Englishness’; and between the responses of English critics, who heard a new and ‘direct voice’, ‘speaking’ in these works. The intersections of these ideas open a critical space in which the interpretation of musical gesture can be offered. It is the project of the following chapter to offer further such

²⁰⁰ Vaughan Williams, ‘Some Tentative Ideas on the Origins of Music’, from ‘National Music’ (1932): see *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 13-14. In ‘The Letter and the Spirit’ (1920), Vaughan Williams had similarly imagined the act of journeying through a musical work in the moment of its performance and hearing, elaborating that ‘[t]he expert map reader can tell fairly exactly what sort of country he is going to visit, whether it is hilly or flat, whether the hills are steep or gradual, whether it is wooded or bare, what the roads are likely to be; but can he experience from a map the spiritual exaltation when a wonderful view spreads before his eyes, or the joy of careering downhill on a bicycle, or, above all, the sense of rest and comfort induced by the factual realization of those prophetic letters “P.H.”?’ See *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 125.

readings, asking how ‘song’ and ‘voice’ played roles in Vaughan Williams’s negotiation of ‘national’ music more broadly. It will become clear that the insights offered here provide a series of approaches to recovering the singing of English voices in a host of Vaughan Williams’s works.

Chapter 3

Songs of English Voices

This chapter considers the extent to which and the ways in which many of Vaughan Williams's early works draw attention to themselves as 'sites' for the performance of song: works which frame songs and voices such that their possible place in regenerating national life and art is not only foregrounded or presented, but also performed or 'enacted'. In this way, the chapter considers how various of the composer's works can be heard as those concerned with the very act of making music.

As has been posited above, Vaughan Williams sought to capture and project in his music an authorial voice akin to that of the singer, celebrating in this voice a means of inviting the unconscious and embodied singing of a listener: an invitation that was to implicate the voice and experience of both performer and hearer in its very materials and narratives. This ideal was in turn brought into dialogue with a study of the ways in which the utterance of an 'unconscious', 'natural', and 'direct' singing voice became inherent in an idea of 'song' as a broad cultural practice: one which also mediated ideas of rural English identity, foregrounding the embodied intelligibility of singing as a function of its particularly regenerative Englishness. In the reading of Vaughan Williams's songs offered thereafter, it was contended that these works engaged contemporaneous ideas of voice and its singing, performing a retrieval, or re-sounding, of an 'authentic' English voice, and demonstrating the regenerative role of such performance by inviting a community of listeners to the space, and landscape, of its song. As such, a performative and phenomenological quality found a nexus in which the voices of the past were sung – or rung – into the present.

With all this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that critics have often heard the presence of a 'direct' quality in Vaughan Williams's music, as much as a 'singable' invitation to its participation (as was clear through a consideration of the early reception of the *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life*). Vaughan Williams's works have long been considered to bear

multiple voices, staging personae other than, or supplementary to, that of the composer's own. In that these works are those concerned centrally with song materials, the works of potential interest are numerous.

It might be considered, for example, that the earliest reviews of the first of Vaughan Williams's orchestral *Norfolk Rhapsodies* (premiered at the Promenade Concerts of 1906) posed provocative questions regarding the status of a consistent authorial voice as projected by the work, a critic for *The Times* judging that while Vaughan Williams had 'shirked a great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the composer's responsibility' in treating folk tunes, his presentation of this material was such that 'the conception of the piece [was] quite his own'. That said, as the critic further underlined, the work also projected a sense of 'people sitting round and suggesting what song shall be sung'.¹

The negative reaction of *The Times* critic was a familiar refrain among detractors of Vaughan Williams's folkloristic project, and marks a tradition of reception that found a creative poverty in the composer's authorial voice, signalled by his reaching for the songs and voices of ancestral folk communities. Yet, as is simultaneously clear in the ambivalence of this critic's response, these works seem to stage song materials with some complexity, such that the presence of numerous voices are discernible in their materials – the voices both of Vaughan Williams himself, and of ancestral singers communicating in convivial dialogue. In this way, such responses invite consideration of the complexity of this music's singing: one that, if approached from the perspective adopted throughout this study, poses important questions regarding the ways in which multiple voices seem to be projected by this music, and how they might be discerned as such.²

To the extent that Vaughan Williams's pre-War works were premiered before, or in a dialogue with, the supposed cultural construction of his national identity as a 'sincere'

¹ Cited in Kennedy (1980), 87.

² In recent years, Anthony Newton has explored the way in which the Norfolk Rhapsodies present 'existing' songs according to the particular generic principle of the 'rhapsody': namely, its derivation from an idea of the 'recited' Greek epic. See 'Vaughan Williams and the Idea of Folk Song in the Norfolk Rhapsodies', *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 46 (October, 2009), 3-6, 3. Though Newton does not interrogate the implications of the idea that a rhapsody implies an 'oration' on the subject of the Norfolk tunes treated, it is provocative that he begins tentatively to discuss the way in which a performative or speaking quality is discernible in these works.

composer speaking with an ‘authentic’ English voice (as Frogley and Hinnells have suggested), the works of this period present sites upon which a dialogue between the creation and reception of Vaughan Williams’s music can begin to be unfolded. As shall be demonstrated, works such as *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907) and *A Sea Symphony* (1910) were considered from their earliest performances to stage and project the embodied force of a performing and even listening public. It will be posited here that with such perspectives in mind, it is profitable to explore once more the extent to which, and the ways in which, Vaughan Williams’s musical materials might be shown themselves to project a powerful idea of song and its singing: a projection that raises questions about the ways in which scholars might define the ‘sincere’ or ‘authentic’ utterance of his music. In this way, the current chapter continues to probe the nature of Vaughan Williams’s ‘authorial voice’, and how the multiple voices surrounding his music may be recovered.

Multiple Voices

In recent years, scholars have often pointed to the presence and performance of multiple voices in Vaughan Williams’s music, though tentatively and implicitly. In a chapter contributed to Alain Frogley’s *Vaughan Williams Studies*, Anthony Pople drew together the ‘vocal’, ‘singing’, ‘speaking’, ‘anthropomorphic’, ‘energetic’ and ‘spatial’ qualities noted in a tradition of English responses to the orchestral *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910; rev. 1919), demonstrating that from its earliest reviews, listeners heard in this work not only the voices but the spaces of English singing (both land and Church).³ In turn, Pople evokes an implicit dialogue between these responses and the narrative presentation of material in the *Fantasia*, suggesting that the composer seeks to ‘expound to the listener’ an evolutionary ideal of English music’s growth from folk song, through plainsong, to the ‘convivial’ textures of contrapuntal music. As such, Pople argues that Vaughan Williams projected here a ‘didactic presentation’ of his ideas of musical evolution, shaping a series of instrumental

³ See Pople, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), 47-80.

gestures which seem consciously to evoke modes of English vocal performance. In this way, the work becomes a discourse not only upon Tallis's song but upon a tradition of English music-making.⁴

In as far as this reading highlights the self-consciousness of the *Tallis Fantasia's* presentation of an idea of 'song' and of its constituent, performative voices, Pople's work is intriguing. His study details a reception history that attests to the hearing of multiple voices 'energetically' singing in this spatial work. Yet his approach to the discussion of musical materials unfolds only the 'representation' of certain textures of convivial music-making, for example, thus removing the problematic question of the spatial and performative mode of 'enactment' arguably referenced in contemporaneous responses to the work.⁵ As such, Pople locates the *Fantasia's* apparent projection of the singing voice as a product simply of the narrative presentation of the Tallis hymn's unfolding, this elaborated as a corollary to Vaughan Williams's evolutionary writings. The responses of contemporaneous listeners are conjectured in their 'likely associations' of vocal textures with this music (as much as, implicitly, listeners' awareness of Vaughan Williams's writings). In this way, the broader and complex tradition of reception explored at the outset – and the ways in which this work communicates its sense of 'energy', its 'spoken' narration, and its singing by numerous voices – is left only partially explored.

A comparable approach is found in George Revill's reading of *The Lark Ascending* (1914, rev. 1920), a work which, as is also explored by Simon Shaw-Miller, seems to stage a

⁴ Lionel Pike has also identified the *Tallis Fantasia* as a work which seems somehow to discourse upon the materials of Tallis's Third Mode Hymn: a work which explores the compositional construction of this borrowed song as a means of generating new musical material. See Pike, 'Tallis – Vaughan Williams – Howells: Reflections on Mode Three', *Tempo* (New Series), 149 (June, 1984), 2-13.

⁵ Claims of a certain 'energy' and 'space' in the *Tallis Fantasia* – as much as of its communication of a spoken or singing quality, or sense of 'iteration' – are clear in American responses to the work, as Allan Atlas has made clear. See 'On the Reception of the *Tallis Fantasia* in New York, 1922-1929', *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 48 (June, 2010), 8-11. It is perhaps for this reason that Atlas has also devoted attention, elsewhere, to the way in which the *Tallis Fantasia* communicates its sense of space, irrespective of the 'constructions' of English critics. Atlas argues that the spatial quality of this music might be elaborated through recourse to an examination of its proportional construction: one which might be shown to have been modelled according to the dimensions of Gloucester Cathedral, wherein the work received its premiere. See Atlas, 'On the Structure and Proportions of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135.1 (May, 2010), 115-44.

performance of the lark's song, such that its voice becomes not a representation, as Shaw-Miller underlines, but rather, an 'analogue', or an 'anthropomorphism'.⁶ Interestingly, Ursula Vaughan Williams attested in 1964 to the way in which here, 'the violin [had] become both the bird's song and its flight, being, rather than illustrating, the poem from which the title was taken'.⁷ As Revill considers, through exploring the complexity of Vaughan Williams's approach to an idea of folk song (as expounded in his writings), and by considering these ideas as part of the invention of 'Englishness' in early twentieth-century musical culture (a process in which history, landscape, and language became conjoined), the presentation of the solo violin's isolated, free, and unbarred lyrical voice is suggestive of a gesture of 'free speech': one whose presentation on a stringed instrument (played by the composer himself) invites the listener to hear this voice as that of its composer, who 'speaks', or 'takes flight', in dialogue with the 'communal' force, or land, of the orchestra. Thus, a processes of 'being' and 'becoming' seems inherent in this work, as numerous critics have suggested.⁸

As Revill's reading also makes clear, however, it might be considered that irrespective of the contemporaneous discourses of 'national music' that are apparently referenced by the work's gestures, its negotiation of a relationship between individual voice and collective mass is such that the presentation of lyrical material evokes, itself, the 'flight' of a lark from the earth-bound voices of the land: a symbolic 'representation' which becomes also an 'act' of 'unspeakable' musical speech.⁹ Given that Vaughan Williams prefaced the work with a quotation in which the singing of the lark is foregrounded, it is perhaps unsurprising that such readings have emerged.¹⁰ Yet these responses are also testament to the

⁶ Shaw-Miller, in S. Shaw-Miller and S. Smiles (eds.) (2010), 136. As Shaw-Miller elaborates, Vaughan Williams adapted his conception of folk song during the first decade of the century, incorporating not tunes he had collected himself, but rather 'develop[ing] original themes modeled on a more generic conception of folk material, gained through the familiarity he acquired by collecting it. This generic approach is also true of the song of the lark. It is not an attempt to emulate the feverish song of the lark as it attempts to distract us from the location of its nest. The lark is as a symbol; it is an analogue, not a representation. Indeed, it is this anthropomorphism, the cultural moulding of nature that, for Vaughan Williams, locks the interdependence of man and nature together, and forms a synthesis...'

⁷ U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 156.

⁸ Shaw-Miller, in Shaw-Miller and Smiles (eds.) (2010), 136.

⁹ See Revill (1991), 27-9.

¹⁰ The poetic epigraph, derived from George Meredith's eponymous poem, reads as follows: 'He rises and begins to round/He drops the silver chain of sound,/Of many links without a break./ In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake./ For Singing till his heaven fills,/ 'Tis love of earth that he instils,/And ever winging up and up./Our valley is his

extent to which the presentation of lyrical material in this score draws attention to an idea of singing – and of speaking – which engages a complex dialogue with the textual epigraph, with the cultural context in which the music emerged, but also with its particular presentation of an idea of song, and the tension explored in the work between isolated, lyrical melody, and its assimilation by the ‘community’ of a mass orchestra.

Eric Saylor has reached further than all these studies in his reading of the performance of multiple voices in the pre-War opera *Hugh the Drover* (1914, rev. 1924), one of two operas he explores as part of a rare study of how precisely Vaughan Williams sought to assimilate but further ‘teach’ the regenerative power of ‘folk song’ as part of his creation of a vernacular for English music.¹¹ As Saylor identifies, within the vocal world of opera, the singing of folk songs assume, at various moments, a complex ‘diegetic’ function: moments wherein the characters ‘spontaneously’ and ‘unconsciously’ recognize the singing of song as a performance (though the dialogue and broader plot does not recognize nor clearly facilitate them as such). Importantly, Saylor suggests that such moments are ‘framed off’ from the musical progress, set into relief by the recession of orchestral support, for example, thus presenting a different musical space. A song of blossoming flowers, for instance, entices a musical reaction from a chorus of voices, who themselves ‘grow’ – unconsciously – in response to the performance of a folk song. As Saylor interprets in this novel reading,

this hints at the inspiring and expressive power Vaughan Williams believed such tunes possessed, but also... [the chorus] represent a sort of idealized English audience – the type that would react enthusiastically to their own nation’s music – that the composer hoped would arise when sufficiently primed by exposure to indigenous, high-quality music.¹²

golden cup,/And he the wine which overflows,/To lift us with him as he goes./Till lost on his aerial rings,/In light, and then in fancy sings’. See Vaughan Williams, *The Lark Ascending* (1925; rev. ed. London: Oxford University Press, 2005). Michael Kennedy’s Foreword to this edition of the work discusses the revisions to both music and textual epigraph, as undertaken by Vaughan Williams after the First World War. It is worth noting that Vaughan Williams’s concern with the materiality of sound perhaps informed his selection of a quotation, the ‘chirrup, whistle, slur and shake’ a further invitation to consider the performative mode explored by this music.

¹¹ Eric Saylor, ‘Dramatic Applications of Folk Song in Vaughan Williams’s Operas *Hugh The Drover* and *Sir John in Love*’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 134.1 (April, 2009), 37-83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50.

In that Saylor makes reference to ‘diegetic’ and ‘non-diegetic’ voices, it is surprising that he, like Pople, is nevertheless tentative in theorizing the extent to which the voices of an ‘ideal audience’ assume a complex presence within the statement of the musical work. As is clear in Saylor’s reading, such voices take on a role in ‘speaking’ the message of Vaughan Williams’s musical project to an audience (as much as becoming that audience themselves). This process becomes part of a narrative or performance that lies outside, or supplementary to, the dramatic narrative of the opera. In that these voices offer an ‘unconscious’ musical response within the drama (which often does not call for a song), they make a statement of cultural promise for the growth of English music. As such, these songs and voices are bestowed a particular and important agency of their own.

The multiple voices surrounding these works demand further attention, for the notion that Vaughan Williams’s music seems to project a ‘representation’ of an ideal English audience can be shown, rather differently, to suggest a process of enactment, in which listeners are evoked, or ‘made real’, through the foregrounding of a particular performance of communal song. In order that the cultural study of English voices offered above is brought fully to fruition, and the complex cultural forces impacting upon the reception of this music are unfolded, attention is devoted not to the instrumental works noted above, but to the composer’s early and large-scale works with voices. Noting the extent to which a host of contemporary critics heard a ‘physical’ and ‘energetic’ quality in the treatment of voices in these works, such traditions of reception are brought into dialogue with a study of various tropes of these works’ narrative and gestural profiles.

These tropes include, once more, the final hymn of thanksgiving encountered in the song cycles above. Such conclusions are a prominent though almost entirely unexplored feature of a broad range of the composer’s music, vocal and instrumental, early and late (as is further considered in the following chapter). Their presence, however, is startlingly ubiquitous in the works composed, primarily for performance at the English Music Festival, during the years preceding the First World War. It is noted, moreover, that in each case, this

hymn figure is accompanied by the evocation of bells (as explicitly in ‘Bright is the Ring of Words’, and rather differently submerged in the tender emotion of ‘Love’s Last Gift’). Broadly speaking, this gesture is evoked with startling consistency, quoting either a ‘real’ English hymn (namely ‘Sine Nomine’), or a reference to hymnic textures and texts, and accompanied not by percussive bells but by a musical evocation of the pealing of bells, at the conclusions of the cantata *Willow-wood* (1903); the Piano Quintet (1903); the ‘Song for Chorus and Orchestra’, *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907); the song cycle for tenor, string quartet, and piano, *On Wenlock Edge* (1909); the *Five Mystical Songs* for tenor, orchestra, and chorus (1911); the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* for baritone, chorus, and orchestra (1912); and the *Four Hymns* for tenor, solo oboe, and piano (1914).

The ubiquity of such gestures calls attention to their significance, as further does their placing at the conclusions of these works: a point of culmination indicative of the possible meanings embodied by the larger narratives traced. Further, the materials themselves call attention to their unusual status, for these hymns and bells become implicated in intensely ‘physical’ presentations of vocal conclusion. This was noted a stark and novel feature by contemporaneous critics. In that the culmination of such narratives seems to implicate ‘real life’ materials of an English singing culture within the progress of the music, such conclusions seem to communicate a different musical space: a space of musical ‘enactment’, in which the voices of both performers and audience are projected. As such, it is suggested that these narratives of song take enrichment from, and become performances of, the very ‘life’ of English music-making.

The multiple voices discerned in these works are explored not only by engaging a dialogue between analysis of musical gesture, interpretation of reception, and a consideration of various ‘inventions’ of English musical tradition apparently engaged and referenced by this music, but further by unfolding the extent to which the poetry selected for setting by Vaughan Williams communicates a powerfully oratorical performance (as has been theorized by literary scholars in the work of Walt Whitman in particular). Such theories are complemented

throughout by insights derived from theories of ‘voice’ in musicological study: theories which thus enable a closer attention to the musical presentation of the various ‘voices’ projected by the materials of Vaughan Williams’s works.

Especially formative here are insights derived from Julian Johnson’s study of Mahler’s ‘voices’, this useful not least because it explores the ways in which some music becomes able to ‘narrate’ and ‘enact’, or perform, its materials.¹³ As Johnson considers, Mahler’s music has, like that of Vaughan Williams, often been considered to ‘speak’, and to project multiple voices, often giving forth ‘performances’ of song, and highlighting the projection in such moments of a division of a unitary, or consistent, authorial voice. In that Johnson’s study devotes sustained attention to the analysis of gesture, topic, and genre, and to how sudden changes in musical materials can underline the projection of multiple musical voices, his approach to the recovery of the voices of a body of music similarly concerned with ‘song’ – and further, with its own capacity to ‘speak’ – allows a consideration of how Vaughan Williams’s musical voices might be explored and discerned as such.

Vaughan Williams’s Narratives of Song

That song is a central category of Vaughan Williams’s music is boldly signalled by his first major work, *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907). This piece presents a particularly powerful example of Vaughan Williams’s evocation of the performance of communal song: a pointedly subtitled ‘Song for Chorus and Orchestra’, and one in which, according both to contemporaneous and more recent critics, Vaughan Williams ‘burst forth’ to find his authentic voice.¹⁴

¹³ See Julian Johnson, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ As Ursula Vaughan Williams underlined, when this work was premiered, it ‘made clear that a new voice was speaking with authority and originality’. See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 79. Michael Kennedy attests to a tradition of such responses when he notes that ‘because so many [of Vaughan Williams’s] early works were suppressed there is a tendency to imagine that the composer suddenly and surprisingly burst forth in about 1907...’. As Kennedy maintains, however, ‘the years of chrysalis were not barren and fruitless’. See Kennedy (1980), 22.

The work's perplexing – because apparently inappropriate – generic label has troubled critics on numerous occasions, for the work is scored not for the solo, subjective voice of a song, but, as its subtitle underlines, the communal forces of chorus and orchestra. This title is an important generic and aesthetic signal, for the subjective lyrical voice of a solo song is 'expanded', as Julian Johnson has it, and projected into the 'external', 'objective', and multi-voiced realm of a choral-instrumental medium. This expansion of the lyrical subject – and its viability as performed by a communal mass – becomes the goal of the work's narrative journey.¹⁵

The scoring of *Toward the Unknown Region* for chorus and orchestra invites the listener to identify with the work as a familiar staple of nineteenth-century music for festival performance: a cantata, rather than a song (this also confirmed in its expansive – but not monumental – length). To this end, critics have habitually over-written Vaughan Williams's generic designation, as is clear in the earliest reviews of the work's premiere, in which the critic for *The Times*, for example, referred to the work as self-evidently a 'little Cantata'.¹⁶ James Day has since opined that the expansive scope of the work is such that *Toward the Unknown Region* reaches the status of 'a choral sinfonietta', this characterization indicative, in turn, of a host of critical responses.¹⁷

¹⁵ As Johnson suggests, Mahler's music seems frequently to explore a tension between the isolated, embodied voice of the lyrical singer, and the communal, 'objective', multi-voiced realm of a larger performing force (and in the case of a symphony, the 'discursive' process of an orchestra). In Johnson's reading, the transplantation of the lyrical, personal, subjective statement of song into the more public, communal, and objective form of the symphony, for example, suggests that song becomes, in such contexts, a 'polyphonic' presentation: not only in the sense that such songs are 'expanded' by contrapuntal voices, but also, in that they are presented such that they are 'many-voiced', as articulated through the exchange of orchestral sonorities, for example, or of sharp contrasts in musical material. As Johnson assesses, '[o]n the one hand, this turns [song materials] into a collective rather than an individual song; on the other hand, the musical subject is itself made polyphonic'. Johnson's work explores the ways in which through sudden changes in 'kinds' of musical materials – especially sharp shifts in topic, genre, gesture, or 'tones' of musical voice – Mahler's music articulates the presence of numerous subjectivities, the individual subjectivity carried by a lyrical melody expanded such that it loses its particularity. The narrating voice of songs which are, as in Vaughan Williams's early song cycles, presented as self-referential performances (often through textual reference) are implicated in the framing of such performances, or 'enactments'. See Johnson (2009), and in particular Chapter 1, 'Mahler and the Musical Voice', 3-40.

¹⁶ Quoted in Kennedy (1980), 88. *Toward the Unknown Region* was premiered at the Leeds Festival on October 10th, 1907.

¹⁷ Day (1998), 126. A. E. F. Dickinson also referred unflinchingly to the work as a 'cantata', without reference to its subtitle: see Dickinson (1963), 180. More recently, Charles Edward McGuire designates *Toward the Unknown Region* a 'small, orchestrated part-song'. See McGuire, 'Vaughan Williams and the English Music Festival: 1910', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 235-268, 236-7.

It is interesting, however, that commentators have simultaneously pointed to the way in which at certain moments, and in various ways, *Toward the Unknown Region* calls attention to its status as a song, despite – or in dialogue with – its expansive scoring. Michael Kennedy has observed that the work’s culmination in ‘a great tune’ communicates a sense that ‘*Toward the Unknown Region* is a song, not a cantata.’¹⁸ In similar terms, Frank Howes affirmed that ‘[t]his great tune is a song tune, and the Cantata, we now recall, is not on its title-page called a cantata but a Song for chorus and orchestra.’¹⁹ Further, James Day himself noted that the ‘curious lyricism’ of the work signalled its communication of a strangely composite choral voice: one which shaped the very formal propositions of the work as a whole:

In form, the ‘song’ (or cantata) is curiously lyrical, despite the large forces and the looseness of the rhythm of the stanzas...English music had not produced a massive and broad and bare choral style like this one since the days of Purcell, save in the work of the imported Handel...it is indeed a song, a choral song, but not the less an expression of words by the singing voice.²⁰

It is in many ways unsurprising that critics have discerned a certain instability in the work’s generic placement, for its projection of an eerily composite yet rhythmically free choral voice – the lyrical voice of a solo singer, expanded into the unison, communal voice of a chorus – defines the very aesthetic statement of the work, as is signalled not only by its subtitle, but by the way in which the work stages the entry of the voices. The manner in which this starkly exposed and fragile voice proceeds – ‘dares’ – to ‘walk out’ toward the unknown region becomes the narrative drama of the work’s unfolding, this confirmed in a final hymn whose claim to ‘burst forth’ in songful affirmation suggests that the dare has reaped rich rewards.

¹⁸ Kennedy (1980), 114.

¹⁹ Howes (1954), 126.

²⁰ Day (1998), 88. It is interesting that in the 1961 edition of this study, Day refers to the work, without qualification, as ‘a song for chorus and orchestra’, also noting that ‘its central feature is a great flowing melody which was later detached and arranged as a unison song.’ See Day (1961), 97.

As was inherent in the responses both of Michael Kennedy and Ursula Vaughan Williams above, critics have often read the narrative of *Toward the Unknown Region* as a statement of the composer's confident affirmation of the growth and vitality of his own authorial voice (and further, of the voice of a 'native' music). Day underlines that 'the text and the title of the work proclaim in unmistakable terms the challenge that [Vaughan Williams] had set himself'.²¹ The alignment of the work's 'dare' with the composer's own creative exploration – an uncharted advance into the 'unknown region' of a future English music – is endemic in responses to a number of Vaughan Williams's 'journeying' works (as was noted above), but it is particularly pervasive in the reception of this piece. As Frank Howes maintained,

the words of *Toward the Unknown Region*...have become [Vaughan Williams's] motto for life, since at the age of eighty he was still pressing forward. His roots are firmly grounded in tradition but his mind, as will appear from a survey of the symphonies alone, is always turned towards the future.²²

Later in this study, Howes also attested to the 'sincerity' of the composer's voice in the journey taken by *Toward the Unknown Region*: a voice heard 'speaking' through the music. Noting the 'arresting' effect of this voice and its ability to communicate with an urgency whose direct force and novelty remained undimmed fifty years later, he mused that

[i]t is easy to feel the newness nearly half a century later because the directness, the sincerity, the impact of personality comes straight at the listener out of the opening fanfare and never thereafter flags or is dimmed as the interpretation of the words is expanded.²³

Howes rehearses a familiar appeal to the 'sincerity' and the 'directness' of Vaughan Williams's authorial voice, and its ability to 'speak' with 'arresting', or physical, power. As

²¹ Day (1998), 125.

²² Howes (1952), 9.

²³ Ibid., 124.

noted above, Howes has been considered a particularly crucial figure in constructing an idea of this music's status as an utterance of the 'authentic English voice'. It might be suggested, however, that the treatment of voices in this work serves itself to invite consideration of the manner in which the materials of its song are framed, such that its singers are able, somehow, to 'speak', or assert their physical presences (as Howes seems to imply).

It is interesting, however, that there is a certain evasiveness in Howes's response with regard to whose 'personality' comes 'straight at the listener' after the opening fanfare, singing through the 'expanded' interpretation of the song's opening verse. The work itself announces that it is the voice of the communal mass who arrest the listener, speaking starkly and with the breath-taking directness an uncompromising invitation to the journey: 'Darest thou now, O soul/Walk out with me...?' (see Example 3.1, below). The massed forces of the chorus, singing in bare, syllabic unison, is a striking proposition of the work's opening. Framed by a fatalistic trumpet fanfare similar to that sounded at the opening of 'The Vagabond', this narrative voice enters not as a robust and resolute presence, but rather as a strangely subdued choral voice, the orchestra falling silent with the entry of the voices following the elegiac introduction (as is clear in Example 3.1). The unusual effect of this composite voice offers a curious counterpoint to the invitation, in Whitman's text, to walk out with the 'me' toward the unknown region ahead. The passage of this communal voice towards fulfilment, where finally 'we burst forth' in a quotation of the hymn 'Sine Nomine', becomes a comment upon the vitality of its statement as a choral song: a narrative of the growth of its singing, and one which is foregrounded through the particular treatment of Whitman's poem. As such, *Toward the Unknown Region*'s obvious debt to Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* – 'Blest pair of Sirens...Voice and Verse' – further enforces this celebration of song, as much as of the singer's voice.

Grave ma non troppo $\text{♩} = 50$

Piccola
Pausa

5

Horns *sonore*

p sostenuto

p pesante

Strings pizz.
10

S.

A.

T.

B.

Orch.

simile

A

p sostenuto

Dar - est thou now, O soul, walk out with

p sostenuto

Dar - est thou now, O soul, walk out with

p sostenuto

Dar - est thou now, O soul, walk out with

p sostenuto

Dar - est thou now, O soul, walk out with

A

p

Example 3.1, *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 1-13.
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As Charles Edward McGuire has pointed out in his detailed reading of the work, *Toward the Unknown Region*'s narrative is traced through a series of contrapuntal expansions and extensions of this 'forthright' unison song, the poem's first verse presented simply and directly as the first verse of a solo song over 9 bars (bars 12-20).²⁴ The text traces a narrative of journey and trackless exploration: an exploration of the 'unknown region' where 'neither ground is for the feet ... Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,/... are in that land.' The immediacy of this textual invitation is heightened by the syllabic directness of the choral voice. In this way, a stark, challenging, and infinitely 'intelligible' utterance issues a call to the 'sympathetic' listener – as imagined in Plunket Greene's (and indeed Vaughan Williams's) idealized relationship between singer and listener – to 'walk out' with the massed community voice, 'toward the unknown region'.

Vaughan Williams has selected a text here wherein a demand to communal endeavor is issued, but further in which the threat of what lies ahead is the 'voiceless' danger of this land (its absence both of 'ground for the feet/nor any path to follow', and of any communal sentiment, or 'touch of human hand'). Though Whitman's texts are often rich in references to the song and to the voice (as is explored in more detail below), Vaughan Williams's musical treatment of this moment of 'voiceless land' is noteworthy. At the point at which the chorus invokes the threat that 'no voice is *sounding*' in this land, a chant-like, homophonic statement of D major (within the opening D minor) brings these words prominently to the fore (at bar 29). As though responding to the threat of this land without music, in which there is 'no map' and 'no guide', the composite voice suddenly divides for the first time (at bar 30), and articulated by a double bar, the chorus bloom into precisely the contrapuntal, communal experience referenced in the absent 'touch of human hand' (and the absence of that embodiment of nature found in Rossetti's 'Silent Noon', for here there is in Whitman's vision no 'face with blooming flesh').

²⁴ Charles Edward McGuire, 'Vaughan Williams and the English Music Festival', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 237.

McGuire has pointed to the strangeness of this gesture, though dismisses it as merely a ‘heavy handed’, ‘pictorial element’: one whose ‘ironic brilliance’ is noted though not interpreted within the broader narrative of the work’s progression.²⁵ ‘Irony’ seems an inadequate characterization of this elegiac, expressive division of the composite voice, however. Although as McGuire underlines, the turn towards the major here (as articulated by the change in time signature) seems at odds with the evocation of a ‘voiceless land’ (as is the direction that the voices sing *cantabile* for the first time, having previously articulated a *parlando* song), the effect is surely less than optimistic. All too soon the momentum of this moment of communal singing – a moment of contrapuntal ‘daring’ to rise to the challenge of the voiceless land – is lost as an extended instrumental passage emerges (at bar 51). Rich with the melodies of the voices, this *cantabile* instrumental passage claims these songs for itself. This too seems similarly to lose momentum after some bars, however, winding down in a dissolution of its melodic voice, through a series of descending gestures and receding dynamics, to a strangely awkward retake of the opening.

The re-sounding of the opening elegiac instrumental motif, and the fatalistic trumpet fanfare with pizzicato bass, heralds the return at bar 60 of the starkly fragile unison voice, as staged in a second verse, again articulated by a double bar and a return to the original key signature: ‘I know it not, O soul’. This is a further attempt at the ‘dare’, but an expression also of doubt. Indeed, this is followed by an expression of textual anxiety – ‘all is blank before us’ – and again this exists in curious dialogue with the ‘optimistic’ flowering of that same choral counterpoint, as a more extended attempt to chart the ‘unknown region’ with the songs of the contrapuntal mass is staged this time. It is significant, however, that almost too frequently these attempts dissolve in a recession both of dynamics and gesture. The fragility of the choral force in its attempts to advance through the unknown region becomes, in this way, the dramatic force of the narrative’s unfolding, the articulation of a second recession staging a frustrated advance of the choral voice. (See Example 3.2, below).

²⁵ McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 238.

a tempo

85 *ppp*

S. all waits un -

A. *p* all waits un - dreamed of *ppp*

T. *ppp* all waits un - dreamed of

B. *ppp* all waits un - dreamed of

Orch. *p* *ppp* Brass

90

S. dreamed of in that re - gion,

A. in that reg - ion,

T. *p* in that reg - ion,

B. *p* in that reg - ion

Orch. *poco f agitato* Strings

Example 3.2, *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 84-91

p parlando (dark tone)

S. that in - ac - ces - si - ble land.

p parlando (dark tone)

A. that in - ac - ces - si - ble land.

p parlando (dark tone)

T. that in - ac - ces - si - ble

p parlando (dark tone)

B. that in - ac - ces - si - ble

Orch.

3 dim.

95 *rall.*

S.

A.

pp

T. land.

pp

B. land.

Orch.

p

pp

rall.

Example 3.2 (continued), *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 92-97
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Within this second verse, however, a statement of what ‘waits undreamed of’ in the land ahead has been highlighted: a moment which prefigures a turning point in the narrative. With the words ‘all waits undreamed of’, an evocation of a fanfare in distant brass calls the listener’s attention. Its placing here, as shown by the brackets in bars 85-7 of Example 3.2, signals the purpose of these recessions. What ‘waits undreamed of’ in that ‘inaccessible land’ is promised with this fanfare: namely, the robust choral hymn that follows in the final staging of the voice’s ‘dare’. Indeed, this fanfare later heralds the arrival of the concluding hymn of thanksgiving. As such, it becomes clear in retrospect that this first, distant fanfare promises the powerful communal song – waiting ‘undreamed of’ at the end of the work – that is delivered finally by the robust choral forces.

At the first sounding of this distant fanfare, however, the darkly ‘spoken’ moment that follows in the choir (shown in Example 3.2) serves thus as an enactment of the inaccessibility of this songful future land, at least at this point in the music. This inaccessibility is highlighted by the *pianississimo* voices, which seem somehow disembodied against the elaborate melodiousness of the violins. These instrumental songs, in turn, highlight the reticence of the human singing voice, an important factor in the profoundly elegiac effect of these passages.

In the music which follows that shown in Example 3.2, the final attempt at the ‘dare’ of Whitman’s text is marked with a new purpose, and it is here that the listener is alerted to the way in which the distant fragment of ‘undreamed of’ trumpet fanfare has functioned as the manifestation of a ‘dream’ of what lies ahead: the robust communal song this fanfare celebrates in the peroration towards which the music now inexorably moves, its purpose marked by a newly contrapuntal opening to the verse (in contrast to the unison articulations of the previous structural divisions). Moving forward from ‘Til when the ties loosen’, both voices and instruments grow rapidly through a passage of ‘mounting energy’, as McGuire suggests,²⁶ the sopranos reaching at the final phase of this growth at *poco animando* to a top A, reaching thus to the outer limits of the range delineated for the voices so far, and somehow

²⁶ McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 238.

reaching forward into a realm more ‘present’ than that implied in the distance of the muted voices of the previous section (see Example 3.3).

The musical score for Example 3.3, bars 111-3, is presented in a standard musical notation format. It includes staves for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Orchestra (Orch.). The tempo is marked 'Poco animando'. The lyrics are 'nor an - y bounds bound - ing us. Then,'. The music features a dramatic unison pause on the word 'Then,' followed by a fortissimo (f) chord. The orchestra includes a brass section with a crescendo (cresc.) and a 3-measure rest.

Example 3.3, *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 111-3.
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This moment of vocal ‘breaking out’ is set to Whitman’s statement that there are now no ‘bonds bounding *us*’ (emphasis mine): the moment of spiritual freedom and communal consummation. Immediately that this moment of ‘breaking out’ is articulated with the soprano top A, the basses, followed by tenors, altos, and finally sopranos themselves, declaim forcefully and expectantly ‘then’. In this highly dramatic and expectant unison pause – wherein the massed voices hold a prolonged, bare, and *fortissimo brillante* chord – the

orchestra underlines the huge tension communicated through the extensive vocal projection of ‘then’ in an active series of heraldic fanfares: a building of tension which allows the massing of an energy thereafter to ‘erupt’ at precisely that moment where ‘we burst forth’ is declaimed with overwhelming and joyous exuberance. This statement of ‘bursting forth’ is articulated not simply in ‘a peroration that contains elements reminiscent of a march, a hymn, and an anthem’, as McGuire has it, but significantly bursts forth into the real-life realm of the hymn ‘Sine Nomine’.²⁷

At this moment, it becomes clear that as Kennedy has suggested, the ‘Sine Nomine’ fragment was in fact present in elegiac form from the opening, as articulated in the descending instrumental motif that frames each of the vocal attempts at the ‘dare’ (this is highlighted by the bracket in the first bar of Example 3.1, above). While McGuire does not draw attention to the quotation of the ‘Sine Nomine’ motif, the evocation here of a hymn which had in the previous year been published in *The English Hymnal* has not escaped the notice of other critics. Indeed Michael Kennedy is one of many who have noted, if not interpreted, the allusion to this melodic fragment.²⁸ (See example 3.4, below).

Thus it seems that the final song presents a reinterpretation of the mournful instrumental opening, the moment towards which the song as a whole has been moving: an attainment of the song as made and performed by the vocal force, and in its familiarity as a ‘tune’ from the *Hymnal*, one that may have invited some recognition and ‘experiential’ participation from a listener – a confirmation of the intelligibility of a progression through the work, as interpreted in the song cycles above. Indeed, the ‘bursting forth’ of the communal musical voice into the ‘real life’ realm of English music is underlined not only by the construction of an overwhelmingly energetic eruption of embodied tension (as many contemporaneous critics noted, and as becomes clear in the reception of the work, detailed

²⁷ Ibid., 238.

²⁸ See Kennedy (1980), 113-4. Percy Young also pointed to this allusion of ‘Sine Nomine’, characterizing the song as ‘a singer’s tune’. Like Kennedy, Young also finds the fragment at the introduction to the *Tallis Fantasia*. See Young (1953), 34, and Kennedy (1980), 124. As was noted above, this hymn fragment is found throughout Vaughan Williams’s music by numerous critics: Day, for example, finds the ‘alleluias’ from the hymn at the climax of the first movement of the Fifth symphony, as well as, rather differently, in the theme of the ‘Benedictus’ from the Mass in G minor. See Day (1961), 156, and 99.

below), but is further articulated through the present tense of Whitman's verse in the final two stanzas of the poem: 'we burst forth, we float in time and space'.

Maestoso moderato. ♩=108

ff brillante

Then, _____

O

ff molto allarg. a tempo

Then we burst forth, _____

Maestoso moderato. ♩=108

ff molto allarg. a tempo

111111

O

Example 3.4, *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 117-27.
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To confirm the performative, real life burst of this final ‘peroration’ – and to underline the tune’s quality as a call to the listener – the orchestra transforms the hymn fragment into a peel of bells (as is shown by the motifs annotated with a bracket in Example 3.5). This gesture of bell-ringing, as was observed at the conclusions of the song cycles above, was aligned in Vaughan Williams’s imagination with precisely that act of song, or ‘carolling’, that is identified in this reading: an affirmation in singing that would ‘ring on’ from generation to generation, leaving behind a robust ‘tradition’ long after the maker was buried.

Julian Johnson has suggested that while ‘[b]ells may denote the human world of religion’, they also represent a broader gesture of calling, like that of the horn call, or the fanfare in particular: ‘a collective call’, announcing ‘moments of arrival, as is often the case in a symphonic context, where structural climaxes are marked by fanfares as something sought or awaited’. Such calls, as Johnson suggests, also underline a ‘complex layering of semiotic activity’, for

their literal quality, drawn from the realities of urban and rural life, seems to suggest an almost theatrical narration. At the same time, the manner in which their constituent materials are taken up into the otherwise abstract musical process of the symphony seems to distance them from such programmatic directness. Drawn into a purely aesthetic world, such calls move between the real and the aesthetic, the direct and the symbolic. They enrich the purely aesthetic with elements of the real at the same time as they question the nature of the aesthetic.²⁹

Johnson refers here to the use of actual, percussive bells within a symphonic context. Vaughan Williams’s orchestral evocation of fanfare-like bells within the vocal, texted account of a journey whose ‘eminently perceivable narrative’ is clear³⁰ is a far cry from the more ‘abstract’ world of a symphonic statement. And yet, Johnson’s discussion of bells, fanfares, and calls in Mahler’s music speaks provocatively to Vaughan Williams’s evocation of an idea or symbolic presentation of bells within the aesthetic world of a vocal-instrumental work,

²⁹ Johnson (2009), 53-4.

³⁰ McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 237.

especially given that these bells are heard in conjunction with the evocation of a ‘real life’ hymn, whose singing here by multiple, energetic, and contrapuntal voices is powerfully and forcefully projected, and articulated by the different generic space of the hymn. As such, this ‘different mode’ of music (as Johnson has it) seems to traverse, in this moment, a liminal space, wherein the ‘realities’ of English religious, cultural, and musical life are literally ‘raised up to the level of great art’, according to Vaughan Williams’s ideal.

Though *Toward the Unknown Region* explores a rather different conception to Johnson’s suggestion of such ‘real life’ elements in Mahler’s music, this communal hymn and its accompanying bells can be read, nevertheless, as an enrichment of the aesthetic statement of this work: the culmination of a narrative which seeks the real life enrichment of English music through the performance of the communal song. In this way, such gestures call into question the purely aesthetic status of Vaughan Williams’s works, as much as the complex status of ‘song’ as a cultural and aesthetic category of his music. While Johnson locates such processes in Mahler’s music as part of often ironic ‘fractures’ and ‘distancings’ of a consistent musical voice, dissolving into numerous and fragmented musical voices on so many occasions, for Vaughan Williams (at least in works composed before the War), such a process works rather as an affirmative birth or configuration of multiple, participatory, and performative voices. In that the composer’s voice is in this sense ‘eroded’, as Johnson implies, the effect is one of communal voices taking forth the mantle of creative progress, and in their singing, they are ‘equipt at last’ to do so.

In calling forth this final hymn – a ‘different kind’ of music, a march, a hymn, an anthem, as McGuire has it – this moment articulates a more ‘external’, performative, and robust identity for the lyrical choral voice presented thus far. As Johnson contends in his theory of musical voice, such changes of musical material designate spaces of ‘enactment’, in which a multiplicity of musical voices can be projected: those of a narrative of ‘voiceless’ journey giving way to an enactment of a robust singing. In this reading, the triumphant articulation of this extensive final hymn celebrates the overwhelming success and creative vitality of the communal voice, progressing from the opening instrumental fragment, through

vocal endeavour in the ‘voiceless land’ of a past land without music, into the present – and future – of a musical life ‘equal, equipt at last’ with a communal, English, and further, material and communicative voice.

With this in mind, it might be suggested that quite apart from conceding to Vaughan Williams’s ideal that the conclusion of a work should contain something familiar – a tune to ‘wake up’ the unmusical listener – this final hymn foregrounds with exaggerated emphasis the ‘actual sound’ of the human voice: a performative immediacy that works in its evocation of the real life materials and space of the Church to implicate and reach out to both performer and listener. A song performed on the site of a once voiceless land, its final consummation – ‘o joy o fruit of all’ – brings its voice to fruition, the land without music now resonant, once more, with the voices of English musicians.

A Tradition of Reception

If such a reading might, on one level, seem rather to overstate the novelty of Vaughan Williams’s first success on a large canvas, we might consider that the contemporaneous reception of *Toward the Unknown Region* emphasized perhaps above all the embodied vigour of the extended and exuberant conclusion. McGuire has recently claimed that this work was ‘precisely the type of work that audiences – and festival committees – expected from an English composer’ in 1907, conceding that only the ‘short philosophical poem’ marked a departure from the conventional festival fare. Interestingly, however, McGuire also notes the novelty of what he calls the ‘dual expansion’ approach to text setting: a structure whereby the repetition of textual fragments works as part of a progressive expansion and extension of the vocal line.³¹ As has been suggested, this might be read as an expression of the growth of the song that is the subject of this work. Further, though McGuire opines that ‘the textures Vaughan Williams used were entirely typical in contemporary choral composition: free

³¹ McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 238. As Michael Kennedy also underlines, ‘the work is built in sections, based on the opening melody’. See Kennedy (1980), 113.

counterpoint alternating with poignant homophony and triumphant monophony',³² it might be considered that the deployment of such 'textures' – considered here as different 'kinds' of music, giving forth multiple singing voices – presents an approach that was indeed novel: one which, as Foreman has noted, 'transcended' its time in making an appeal to listeners on all levels, this clear in the evocation of the hymn neither mentioned nor interpreted by McGuire.

Indeed the power of this final gesture of calling was not lost on contemporary critics, who discerned a distinct and performative novelty in *Toward the Unknown Region*. In a response to its premiere, the critic for *The Times*, for example, drew attention to the embodied vocal power of the work's extraordinary conclusion, noting that the music

ends in an almost hysterical outburst suggesting an apotheosis of muscular vigour. In the art of piling climax upon climax and of carrying our feelings irresistibly forward from beginning to end the composer is already a master.³³

It is interesting that this critic attests here to the force with which the music 'carries our feelings irresistibly forward', his invocation of a 'muscular vigour' suggestive not only of the embodied experience of a listener, but of both the creative strength of the composer and the material act of the performer. The overwhelming vocality of this conclusion is recognized in the sense of an 'hysterical outburst': a sense that a voice 'bursts out' at this moment, such that it 'carries' with it the experience of a listener. This striking and extensive conclusion – a celebratory flowering which unfolds over 89 bars, longer by far than any two other verses of the piece combined – clearly heralded something new. Praising the work as an expression of the 'perfect maturity of [Vaughan Williams's] genius, the art that conceals art most effectually', this critic also points both to the 'natural' world of an emerging pastoral ethos, and further, in his reference to 'the art that conceals art', to the ruralist discourses of the

³² McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 238.

³³ Cited in Kennedy (1980), 88.

singing manuals discussed in the previous Chapter. The performative mode of this ‘hysterical’ final ‘peroration’ seems to have engaged contemporaneous ideas of an English mode of singing and voice production, as critics intuited that this music was one somehow alive to its identity as a site for the singing of ‘natural’, ‘direct’, and embodied English voices.

In a similar fashion, both James Day and Wilfrid Mellers have since found a certain ‘energy’ in this music, and locate its presence at moments where the choral voices assert their sonic resonance most forcefully. Day suggested that ‘[t]he post-Romantic chromaticism of the inner parts is used to impart a surge and onward flow to the music’, also drawing attention to the ‘spaciousness’ and ‘aspiring strength’ of the work’s final passages.³⁴ Mellers, aligning this ‘onward flow’ with the enactment – as much as thematizing – of a journey, suggested that ‘although not extended, the work attempts a journey into the unknown parallel to that of *Gerontius*’, the ‘most thrilling music’ occurring when, with the “‘bounds bounding us” broken, we “float” through chromatic sequences that are supposed to demolish time and space’. Further, he notes that as the choral texture becomes fugal, the chorus expanding from its unison song, ‘[u]pwardly arpeggiated entries carry us forward...the surge growing stronger...with each forward aspiration’.³⁵

Along similar lines, A. E. F. Dickinson expressed an admiration for the arresting and physical effect of *Toward the Unknown Region*’s conclusion (in spite a general distaste for the work), noting of the ‘grand epilogue’ that this music ‘sends a spasm of raw experience’.³⁶ Even more explicit was Hubert Foss’s testament to the inescapably performative force of the multiple voices singing at this conclusion, suggesting that its expressive drive emerged from the ‘actual sound’ of a choral mass, noting that

[t]he long song of the choir is immensely effective, and only praise is meant by my comment that the part-writing relies more on the singers’ lungs than upon rule-of-thumb. An expressional *tour de force*, it all sounds

³⁴ Day (1998), 125.

³⁵ Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), 18-9.

³⁶ Dickinson (1963), 179.

far better than it reads: which is what good music, especially choral music, always does.³⁷

Tellingly, Foss also heard a specific invitation to the performative space of the music, issued by the exaggerated vocality of the work's robust conclusion:

we come in this music to the moment when we can all join in with the chorus's words, 'Then we burst forth, we float, in time and space'. In fact, we burst forth very successfully, but float a little to excess, in our desire to be 'equal, equipt at last'.³⁸

This too was echoed by Simona Pakenham, who suggested that the work as a whole was 'in the words of a Stevenson poem [Vaughan Williams] set about this time, "a fine song for singing, a brave song to hear"...this broad inviting song was the first step on a journey that led him further and further off the beaten tracks of his teachers and contemporaries into remote regions....'³⁹

That it was the 'texture' of the work – rather than any demands of its harmonic language – that articulated its statement of a 'new era' was sensed by Dickinson, who suggested that *Toward the Unknown Region* was

fresh but tentative, without any radical renunciation of the major and minor scales in the related key-system. That, in spite of this, it served, where Parry's aspiring prophetic cantatas had failed, to evoke and conserve assurances of a vague call to a new, inaccessible life, cannot be referred to Whitman's superior vocability. As the humblest choirmaster discovers, in unison, polyphony and accessory colour, the writing for each voice is compulsive...⁴⁰

The work's vocal 'compulsion' is attributed by Young not to the 'vocability' and dynamic language of Whitman's text, but rather to the materiality of the treatment of voices: a materiality that seems to have captured the imagination of critics on countless occasions.

³⁷ Foss (1950), 90.

³⁸ Ibid., 88.

³⁹ Simona Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of his Music* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1957), 29.

⁴⁰ Dickinson (1963), 179.

Dickinson's implicit suggestion that the 'tentative' ethos of the work is a mark of its comparative immaturity is, in light of the reading above, rather more successfully considered as an aesthetic proposition appropriate both to the narrative of the text, and the underlying 'journey' of the musical voices.

It is noteworthy that even the most recent critics, anxious as to uncritical constructions of 'Englishness' in Vaughan Williams's music, hear the physical force inherent in *Toward the Unknown Region's* conception. Alain Frogley and Hugh Ottaway attest to the work's departure from earlier models along similar lines, emphasizing its unmistakable 'physical exhilaration' and 'vitality', maintaining that

Whitman's emphasis on the unity of being and the brotherhood of man comes through strongly, and the vitality of the best things in it has proved enduring. Whatever the indebtedness to Parry and Stanford, and in the finale to Elgar, there is no mistaking the physical exhilaration or the visionary rapture.⁴¹

The sense that a 'physical exhilaration' was communicated by such music becomes deeply implicated in the work's ability to 'speak' to a listener, to lead a hearer through the music's journey. What precisely the 'vision' communicated by this journey entails, while frequently referenced and assumed by critics, becomes in this reading a journey towards a community enacted in song, and a performance of the robust community voice.

Exploring the Communal Voice

In the wake of Vaughan Williams's composition of *Toward the Unknown Region*, such gestures and narratives emerge prominently in a host of his works. It might be ventured that the majority of Vaughan Williams's music composed before the First World War

⁴¹ Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, 'Vaughan Williams, Ralph', Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online (Oxford University Press) Web. Accessed 21-Jan-2013.

communicates a self-referential exploration or expansion of song in some way, combining orchestral forces with voices in order to stage and reconfigure the construction of a communal, 'external' lyric voice, and culminating in precisely the hymn of thanksgiving found at the conclusion of *Toward the Unknown Region*. The concluding hymns of these works might be considered insignificant, were it not for the frequency with which they appear: a frequency matched by the constant suggestion, in responses to such works, of their communication of a certain 'energy'. The framing of multiple voices in these works, marking certain 'spaces' for the performance of song, becomes a trope of their 'enactments' of community music.

The *Five Mystical Songs* (1911) represent a similar 'expansion' of the song's generic propositions. Vaughan Williams's composition of a cycle of five songs predominantly for solo baritone, supported by orchestra and by an optional (though 'desirable') choir of mixed voices, seems to pose an exploration in which the lyrical voice of the solo singer engages once more with the propositions of the text, and with the treatment of the choral force. Though a choral-orchestral conception of a song for soloist, chorus, and orchestra was certainly not novel in itself at this time (take Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet* as one example), the baritone solo in the *Five Mystical Songs* bears much of the burden of the musical statement, the chorus remaining silent for long passages within the work's narrative. This might be considered a novel gesture, given the work's composition for the Three Choirs Festival.

This cycle participates in an enactment of songful growth and performance, wherein the status of the solo voice with relation to the voices of chorus and orchestra is constantly renegotiated, culminating in a stylistically 'boisterous' and wholly different mode of exuberant, extroverted, unified choral singing: one which proclaims, self-referentially, 'Let all the world in Every Corner Sing' at the conclusion of the cycle. The exposure of the word 'sing' at this moment in the final choral hymn finds the orchestra starkly silenced, a practice observed by Vaughan Williams at significant textual moments in *Toward the Unknown*

Region (this clear at 6 bars after figure E in the last of the *Five Mystical Songs*).⁴² This final song's status as one which stages a different mode or 'kind' of song, within the larger song cycle, is heralded by its title, 'Antiphon', a generic label which refers to a particular kind of communal and congregational 'response'. Later performed individually as a Church anthem, the text 'Let all the World in Every Corner Sing' signals the status of this song as one which presents itself as a 'real-life' hymn once more, for this is the text of a hymn published in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, as well as in *The English Hymnal*. The different mode of music enacted in this song also makes reference, it might be interpreted, to its title: to the 'Antiphon's invitation to the responses of a congregation of singers and listeners.

Indeed it is also significant, in this context, that an evocation of pealing bells is once more clear throughout the choral articulations of the 'Let all the World' motto declaimed from the opening of the song, the generation of a ringing peal of bells growing from an opening, expectant *pianissimo* murmur on *tremolando* strings, whose energetic vibrations mount an unstoppable wave of energy to give forth an overwhelming projection of the communal choral entry, which 'bursts through' into the realm of a present music. Replete with textual references to the democratic, inclusive, and intelligible song sung here – 'the Church with psalms must shout/no one can keep them out' – this song enacts the text's promise that 'his praises will grow on the earth', a reinterpretation, at the conclusion of the work, of the reticent, isolated song of 'flowers' offered in the second of the poems selected from George Herbert's *The Temple*.

The cycle traces the fate of the song through a narrative of five carefully arranged poems once more: 'Easter' is followed by 'I got me flowers', 'Love bade me welcome', 'The Call', and finally, 'Antiphon'. Like *Toward the Unknown Region* (which, as was noted, was framed by the 'performative' material of the hymn figure from 'Sine Nomine'), the first song, 'Easter', features an opening in which an oratorical command is issued directly, this pertaining once more to the act of song: 'Rise heart the Lord is risen/sing His praise without

⁴² See Vaughan Williams, *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), vocal score (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1911), 27.

delays'. The choral voices' response to this call to 'sing His praise' answers the demand immediately – they too have heard this call. As such, the listener is alerted to the way in which what follows will be an act of songful praise. The first song functions as an announcement of the singing that is to follow.

Notably, this songful performance is also enacted within the first song itself. Following his call to the act of singing, the baritone further commands 'awake my lute, and struggle for the part, with all thy art'. The performance of the lute is underlined pictorially by the strains of the harp, and as Kennedy suggests, this moment is framed as a different musical space by the way in which both key and rhythm change, the harp imparting a newly 'sensuous tone'.⁴³ In turn, the baritone's call to 'consort both heart and lute' is prompted by the consort of the chorus, after which the baritone offers the call to 'twist a song, Pleasant and long: Or since all music is but three parts vied, And multiplied'. Again, the choral forces enter at this moment to perform the 'multiplied' song in a four-part, homorhythmic statement. The song ends *pianissimo*, with the baritone supported by the foundation of the chorus.

Thereafter, a series of performances of song seem to be staged, these highlighted by the way in which the voice of the chorus is largely absent in the following songs, wherein Vaughan Williams portrays a strange communion of the solo singer with himself. This sense of inwardness is poignantly articulated by the sparse but textually significant entries of the choir. In 'I got me flowers', for example, the isolated and melancholic lyrical voice of the solo baritone sings of the 'flowers' of the folk song, it might be argued (for the 'wild flower' was a persistent metaphor both of folk song and 'art song' in Vaughan Williams's writings).⁴⁴ A folkloristic performance is here underlined by the bardic accompaniment of the harp (or the lute introduced in the previous song), as much as the humming voices of the chorus familiar

⁴³ Kennedy (1980), 132. See Vaughan Williams, 'Easter', in *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), vocal score (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1911), 7, bars 44-6. At bar 44, the change of both key and time signature is articulated. At bar 45, the command 'Awake, my lute' is issued by the baritone.

⁴⁴ See, for example, 'English Folk-Songs' (1912), wherein Vaughan Williams considered the importance of reviving folk song, arguing that any attempt to fashion a national musical utterance upon folk song when its presence in English life was minimal would be akin to a process of 'trying to make an elaborate garden where no wild flowers will grow. Or perhaps I should say, to imagine it is possible to create garden flowers without the wild flowers as their prototypes. If the study of music in England is to be merely the artificial cultivation of a taste which finds no response in our own selves, far better give up this pretence of being musical...' See Vaughan Williams, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 185-200, 197-8.

from the composer's folk song arrangements. The song ends as the chorus declaim with a sudden switch to a robust, direct, and syllabic voice, 'There is but one, and one forever'.⁴⁵ As Kennedy suggests, the 'Sine Nomine' allusion is prominent once more in this final 'affirmation'.⁴⁶

In the third song, 'Love Bade Me Welcome', a poem is set in which, as Helen Vendler has suggested, Herbert's lyric voice is staged in an intimate colloquy with the voice of God.⁴⁷ Vendler argues that Herbert's poems are frequently concerned with a rhetoric and mode of speech which construct, within such dialogues, a listening presence which responds to the oratorical poetic subject. In Vaughan Williams's setting of this poem, the chorus are absent until the very end of the song: a telling compositional choice, given the way in which the poem clearly calls for two separate personae. The chorus are called, finally, to bring consummation to the conclusion, wordlessly singing a quotation of the pre-existing plainsong melody, 'O Sacrum Convivium'. In this way, the choir articulate a different musical space once again, in which the intimate final communion of God and 'guest' in the poem are performed at the song's conclusion.⁴⁸

The dialogue of the poem is enacted at the scene of a heavenly banquet, at which are present Herbert's lyric persona, the guest, and the constructed God, the listener.⁴⁹ The final communion of both subjectivities in the statement 'you must come down and taste my meat' articulates not only a powerful statement of eucharistic union, but as related to this, a striking correlation with the dialogue of communal love and nourishment, an allegory of which is

⁴⁵ See Vaughan Williams, 'I got me Flowers', *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), vocal score (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1911), 14. The final choral statement is found in the final four bars of the song, wherein a change of key, texture, and a sudden *forte* dynamic again articulates the sense of the different musical space projected.

⁴⁶ Kennedy (1980), 132.

⁴⁷ Helen Vendler, *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashberry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially Chapter One, 'George Herbert and God', 9-30. Herbert's poem 'Love (III)' (set by Vaughan Williams in 'Love Bade me Welcome') is discussed at 24-6.

⁴⁸ See Vaughan Williams, 'Love Bade Me Welcome', from *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), vocal score (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1911), 19. The plainsong quotation is again articulated by a change of key, dynamic, and textural force, as the chorus enter with a wordless, homorhythmic statement, which punctuates the baritone's final verse. See bar 64 to the end of the song.

⁴⁹ As Vendler suggests, the word 'love' often stands in Herbert's poetry for 'a talisman of mutuality', 'an identity of feeling'. As such, the 'friend' is often figured through a particular mode of dialogue (as in 'Love (III)'), in which 'the friend is the completion – in meaning, in surge of feeling, and in consonance – of the other. The presence of the invisible listener is made palpable on Herbert's page by God's participation in their jointly written poem'. See Vendler (2005), 16.

found in 'Dives and Lazarus' and explored in a number of Vaughan Williams's hymns (as was noted above). This strange reconfiguration of erotic love perhaps owes as much to a Rossettian vision of embodied union on the 'altar of love' (albeit cast within the tender beauty of Herbert's verse), as to the severe austerity of the Biblical parable.

In the penultimate song, 'The Call' – a call for love and joy –, the chorus does not appear at all. Thus it might be interpreted that when the 'Antiphon' is finally affirmed, it is triumphant: sung *only* by the chorus, its recurring motto, 'Let all the world in every corner sing', functions as a response to the isolated baritone's 'Call', the 'loving of one another through our art', enacted in this intelligible, participatory, and different mode of concluding song. In this reading, the 'flowers' of the second song evolve through the plainsong singing of a pre-existing song, 'O Sacrum Convivium', to their final, literal fruition in the 'Antiphon', the chorus declaiming 'His praises may grow on the earth'. As such, the growth of the song seems to enact Vaughan Williams's belief in the oral evolution of music from folk song, via plainsong, into church polyphony, and finally, to an enrichment of the music of the present day.

Thus the future of English music seems optimistically affirmed and enacted within the narrative of Vaughan Williams's *Five Mystical Songs*: the force of a communal ancestral voice is called forth, from the 'awakening' of the 'song' and the 'lute', through to the robust present of a 'real-life' hymn. The large-scale narrative of the cycle seems to communicate a sense that the inward, lyric voice of the singer can only reach true communion and intimacy in communication through the communal support of the chorus, which draws out the dormant English voice, and calls it forth to sing its sustenance into the present. Like the lyric voice of Herbert, searching for an ideal intimacy with an audience – inventing a series of tones and a language enabling an intimacy between man and God not offered by the church – Vaughan Williams sought also in his music to redefine a relationship with the listener of both present and future: a redefinition of socio-musical relations, or modes of musical speaking and hearing. As Kennedy has suggested, the composer was 'attracted to Herbert because the poet

himself was a musician who, it is said, recognized not a science only “but a divine voice”.⁵⁰ In this cycle of songs, the culmination of the singer’s search for communion with a listener is confirmed in a complex negotiation of the idea of the communal musical voice, both through the narrative of individual songs, and across the broader trajectory of the cycle. In its conclusion, *Five Mystical Songs* makes actual the ‘singing’ of Herbert (as in the setting of Stevenson’s poem to a pre-existent tune), becoming a statement of the ‘vital’ present and future of English music.

To cite and discuss the many instances of such narratives in Vaughan Williams’s music is beyond the scope of the study at hand. It is illuminating, however, to offer a brief discussion both of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (1912) and the *Four Hymns* (1914). The *Fantasia* presents and arranges a series of folk carols in such a way that the work traces a narrative culminating in both a robust vocal peroration and a ringing peal of bells. These bells play an important role in the sense of ‘enactment’ or ‘performance’ that is communicated by the presentation of voices at the work’s conclusion, tellingly fashioned from the carol ‘On Christmas Night all Christians Sing’. As Julian Johnson suggests in the quotation offered above, bells are drawn from the ‘realities’ of rural and urban life. They are used here by Vaughan Williams as part of a celebration in which a narrative of music’s evolution culminates in the song’s ‘singing into being’: its performance in the ‘present’.

The *Fantasia* traces a journey from the isolated statement of a primitive folk carol to the overwhelming exaltation of a final vocal outpouring, in which the registral, dynamic, and contrapuntal ‘raising’ of voice parts affirms vocal triumph, in spite of the manner in which this fades briefly to silence with a final ‘Amen’. The work begins, rather like the *Tallis Fantasia*, by calling forth a primordial song. A lone, isolated solo cello winds out a modal melody which, with the entry of the solo baritone, emerges as the folk carol ‘This is the Truth’. This tune seems to call itself into existence, constructing itself as it unwinds, and communicating a sense of drawing into the present a primeval song. The work’s opening is in

⁵⁰ Kennedy (1980), 131-2.

this way evocative of an idea of music's evolution through the oral contributions of ancestral voices.⁵¹

The carol's voice is delivered by the solo baritone and thereafter by the chorus, who process through a contrapuntal treatment of 'Come all you worthy gentlemen' and 'Here we come a-wassailing': a presentation that works once more to stage a celebratory, didactic performance of the composer's evolutionary views of music (in this instance, the oral derivation of two tunes from an apparently common source).⁵² Thereafter, the promised coming of the 'wassailing' voices from a distance (underlined by the humming and distant choral voices at the opening), is confirmed in the robust and *fortissimo* pealing of both voices and bells in a final, contrapuntal peroration, where from 'God bless the ruler of this house' real bells are rung as the sopranos reach to glorious high register with the statement 'And we wish them a happy new year'. The outpouring of voice here confirms the communal performance of 'all Christians singing', as strains of 'The First Nowell' are also heard.⁵³

Vaughan Williams's arrangement of the folk song texts appears to trace a religious allegory through the work, moreover, his musical play of darkness and light derived, perhaps, from the imagery of the first two chapters of the Book of John. The composer was later to derive text from this source for the 'Epilogue' of *Hodie*, his 1954 celebration of the Nativity and a work which also culminates in a robust vocal peroration, complete with percussive bells. In the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, an important theological intent seems implicit in Vaughan Williams's move from the post-lapsarian 'darkness' of the isolated modal opening – in which the 'sin' of man caused the 'ruin' of 'Paradise' – to the 'light' of the final, more

⁵¹ As James Day suggests of the opening of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, 'the solo cello introduction unwinds itself, a fragment of its first phrase evolving via a small rhythmic change...and finally, by a kind of musical pun, into the carol 'The Truth Sent From Above'. See Day (1998), 125. It is important that Vaughan Williams frequently referred to this tune as an example of the evolution of music through performance, wherein singers adapted elements according to the needs of their 'unconscious' expression. With this in mind, the musical kinship of 'This is the Truth' and 'Bushes and Briars' is often noted by the composer. See, for example, Vaughan Williams, 'English Folk-Songs', *The Music Student*, 4.6-11 (1912), 247-6, 283-4, 317-8, 347, 387, 413-4; reprinted in Manning (ed.) (2008), 185-200, 196. This article was published during the same year that the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* was premiered.

⁵² Day maintains that 'Vaughan Williams unobtrusively draws attention to the family resemblance between two of his chosen tunes by juxtaposing and contrasting 'Come all you worthy gentlemen' and 'Here we come a-wassailing'...and introduces another carol that he himself had collected, 'On Christmas night all Christians sing', which is in turn intertwined with 'God bless the master of this house' and 'The First Nowell'. See Day (1998), 125-6.

⁵³ See *Vaughan Williams, Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1924).

diatonic vocal outpouring, in which the community of carol singers proclaim ‘From out of darkness we have light, which makes the angels sing this night’.

In this way, the work’s narrative takes the carol singers from the dark isolation of ruined Paradise into the bounty of the ‘master’s house’, through the redemptive light brought with the birth of Christ. In the final carol, the singers proclaim, ‘When sin departs before thy grace, Then life and health come in its place’. Significantly, it is music that has brought the singers from darkness into the light: the call to ‘all ye worthy gentlemen’ in the second carol is interspersed with fragments derived from the carol ‘Here we come a-wassailing’ (specifically, when the singers reiterate ‘O we wish you the comfort and tidings of joy’). In this way, the implication of ‘wassailing’ leads finally to the explicit evocation of ‘all Christians singing’ upon hearing news of the birth of Christ. The subdued return to the solo baritone’s final ‘Amen’, accompanied by humming chorus, seems to suggest that the singers go back into the darkness refreshed on their journey. As has been discussed above, the idea of spiritual wandering and pilgrimage was central to Vaughan Williams’s music.

Michael Kennedy has interpreted that at the conclusion of the *Fantasia*, ‘the wassailers’ voices vanish into the distance, across the snow-covered fields into the night’. James Day interprets further that this gesture is evoked in order to ‘indicate that there is greater meaning to the Christmas story than just an occasion for wassailing and a “good sing”’.⁵⁴ While the work’s conclusion might be interpreted more precisely in terms of the theological terms offered above, the suggestion in both these accounts of variously ‘distant’ and finally robust voices is illuminating, and appropriate to the way in which multiple musical voices are projected by this score, bringing the carols into the performative ‘light’ of the present day. As H. C. Colles proclaimed in a review of the work for *The Times*, Vaughan Williams seemed again to give over his authorial voice to the singers of his music, lamenting that

⁵⁴ Day (1998), 126, referencing Kennedy (1980).

a composer who has so much that is interesting to say should refrain from saying it and should devote his efforts to the arrangement of other people's tunes...⁵⁵

Though such responses might be read as purely censorious, they also attest to the extent to which the complexity of Vaughan Williams's 'authorial voice' was recognized by contemporaneous critics. In light of the narrative presentation of muted wordless voices journeying into the foreground through an overwhelming songful outburst, the sense of communal creative authorship is powerful. This reading is also consonant, moreover, with an emphasis in John's Gospel upon the notion of incarnation: of 'the word made flesh'. Vaughan Williams made recourse to the concept of 'logos' in his writings as a means of emphasizing the 'living' quality of the 'spoken word': 'the utterings of a living and abiding voice', as Vaughan Williams put it in *National Music*, and a concept he compared to performed music (as is further noted below). Vaughan Williams explored this idea as part of a celebration of the oral tradition and evolution of folk song, maintaining that these songs are thus of 'communal authorship' by virtue of their existence within a tradition of performance.⁵⁶

With this in mind, it might be considered that responses to the corporeal and multiple presence of singers in works such as the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* demand further interpretation than is conventionally allowed, especially for a work whose simple, tuneful, and singable quality masks a complex historicist presentation of the materials of ancestral voices: voices of past, present, and future, and of composer, performer, and listener. In that the work traces a further presentation of an evolutionary communal narrative and its growth from the folk carol, Vaughan Williams once more affirms the role of ancestral songs in the future of twentieth-century English music, enacting the vitality of performed song as the crux of the *Fantasia*'s musical and theological allegory.

⁵⁵ Cited in Kennedy (1980), 134.

⁵⁶ See Vaughan Williams, 'The Evolution of the Folk-Song', in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 28-39, 29.

Even more complex are the *Four Hymns* for solo tenor, viola, and piano. Vaughan Williams began their composition directly having completed the *Five Mystical Songs*, though they were not finished until 1914, and not published until 1920. The *Hymns* clearly belong to a different phase of the composer's career,⁵⁷ and yet it is noteworthy that Vaughan Williams continues to play here with the narrative structure traced in previous works, the last of these hymns, tellingly entitled 'Evening Hymn', was included in Robert Bridges' *Yattendon Hymnal*, and was also included in *The English Hymnal*.⁵⁸

Bridges' poetry was explicitly connected to a revivalist and nationalistic project whose austere ambition rivalled that of Percy Dearmer. He was also powerfully aligned with the contemporary ruralist movement (like Housman and Hardy). While the first three *Hymns* set poems by seventeenth-century hymn writers, the final *Hymn* is a setting of a text translated from the Greek by a prominent twentieth-century English poet (Bridges had been made Poet Laureate during the previous year). The setting culminates, moreover, in an obvious evocation of bells: one highly reminiscent of the continuous pealing of bells evoked at the conclusion of the Piano Quintet (1903), and also (though rather more exotically) at the conclusion of *Flos Campi* (1925), as is discussed below.⁵⁹

The significance of these bells lies in the way in which Vaughan Williams evokes the very specific patterns of English change-ringing, which he would have heard in his early childhood at Down Ampney. While many composers draw upon bells in their music, the British tradition of change-ringing involves bells which are tuned to the standard octave, and which are rung in set sequences to a set rhythm. Vaughan Williams's evocation of descending peals of bells in a variety of his works lies squarely within this tradition.⁶⁰ Such bells are

⁵⁷ It might be suggested that these works betray Ravel's influence.

⁵⁸ See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 138. As Ursula Vaughan Williams underlines, the *Four Hymns* are again settings of 'romantic poems of divine love and longing'.

⁵⁹ Also important in this regard are the bells found in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1906 – 1949; premiered in 1951), and its related 'pastoral episode', *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922). An abrupt ringing out of the final hymn and climactic bells in the piano during the final section of the late *Fantasia on the 'old 104th' Psalm Tune*, for piano, chorus, and orchestra (1949), might also be noted here. John Bunyan himself was fascinated by bells throughout his life, as he relates in his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (8th ed., London: The Religious Tract Society, 1905), 33. Bells play an important part in celebrating moments of joy and arrival in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, moreover.

⁶⁰ For a detailed account of English bell-ringing and the particular bell-sequences typical to the tradition, see Ron Johnston, *Bell-ringing: The English Art of Change-ringing* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986).

prominently evoked at the conclusion of the *Four Hymns* in order to articulate the culmination of a narrative. It is significant that the goal of this narrative is a hymn associated both with ruralism and with musical reform.

Provocative, moreover, is the way in which these are not hymns in any conventional sense: they are intimate, small-scale songs for solo tenor, viola, and piano. As such, the generic designation of the title's 'hymns' is interesting. While this may be taken simply to refer to the sacred and devotional nature of the texts set, such a proposition is undermined by the designation of the final hymn as such: that is, as a different mode of hymn. 'Evening Hymn' brings a communion between voice and viola that is constantly negotiated throughout the preceding songs. In this way, an idea of 'hymnic' communion between voices seems to lie at the heart of the cycle, as is also communicated by the strange counterpoint explored between voice and instrument throughout these songs: a sense that the capacity of the viola to 'sing' is being posited against the actual singing voice of the tenor. This relationship between voice and viola is further considered in the reading of *Flos Campi* offered in the following chapter. As will be discussed further at that point, the viola was Vaughan Williams's instrument of choice, reserved for his most intimate musical utterances. Unlike the presentation of voice and instrument explored in *Flos Campi*, however, the *Four Hymns* conclude with a song of a vocal-instrumental union.⁶¹

Before turning, finally, to a consideration of *A Sea Symphony* – a work in which 'song' becomes instrumental in forging a statement of large-scale symphonic community – it is useful to consider a further site upon which song was nourished in Vaughan Williams's imagination during the early years of his career: namely, in the poetry of Walt Whitman. The embodied songs performed by this singer, lurking behind the arresting, performative voice discerned in *Toward the Unknown Region* (as much as in the host of works considered here) demand attention. This performative voice has been rather neglected in accounts of Vaughan Williams's devotion to Whitman, especially in the years before the First World War. The

⁶¹ See Vaughan Williams, *Four Hymns* (London: Boosey & Co., 1920).

ways in which Whitman's poetry stages an oratorical immediacy and embodied projection of both authorial and listening voices is an important counterpoint to that of both Vaughan Williams's writings and his music. A consideration of Whitman's poetic voice thus provides a context within which to explore the multiple voices projected by the massive song of Vaughan Williams's earliest symphonic utterance.

Whitman's Narratives of Song

Whitman's poetry has long considered a powerful influence upon Vaughan Williams's imagination, especially during the early years of his career.⁶² Michael Kennedy has highlighted the extent to which the composer's fascination with this poetry approached the status of a 'mania', especially during the period from 1905 and 1907, the 'peak period of Vaughan Williams's commitment to folk song', and the period in which

the mature Vaughan Williams emerged. He wrote three *Norfolk Rhapsodies* and his 'Whitmania' was first effectively channelled into a short choral work for the 1907 Leeds Festival.⁶³

As Kennedy notes, the impact of Whitman co-existed in its most intensive form with Vaughan Williams's most active desire to preserve the voices of English folk singers (the years of his concentrated folk collection spanning 1903 to 1913, thus mapping precisely the period under discussion in the current chapter).⁶⁴ With this in mind, it is curious that the links between Vaughan Williams's interest in Whitman's poetry, and concurrently with the songs and voices of folk singers, has not been probed nor considered, despite the way in which the

⁶² Alain Frogley, for example, suggests that 'Whitman had a more wide-ranging impact on Vaughan Williams than on any other major composer, and helped propel his development towards an individual compositional voice more than any other author whom the composer set'. See Frogley, "'O Farther Sail": Vaughan Williams and Whitman', in Julian Rushton (ed.), *Let Beauty Awake: Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Literature* (London: Elgar Editions, 2010), 77-95, 80.

⁶³ Kennedy (1980), 87.

⁶⁴ Ursula Vaughan Williams suggests that Vaughan Williams began work on his first Whitman setting, *Toward the Unknown Region*, in '1904 or early 1905', just a year, therefore, after his earliest activity as a collector of folk songs. See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 78.

appeal of Whitman for British composers (and for Vaughan Williams in particular) has in recent years received some attention.

Indeed, it might be suggested that the field now possesses a series of familiar accounts of Whitman's role in nourishing the music of English composers during the early years of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Stephen Town, in his discussion of Whitman's impact on the genesis of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*, accounts for the importance of the poet's verse in terms of the manner in which 'Whitman's work became something of a *cause célèbre* among the British literati',⁶⁶ its frequent setting by a host of British composers elevating the poetry to the status, as Eric Saylor has it, of 'an English cultural institution'.⁶⁷ As Alain Frogley summarizes, moreover, a number of 'key elements' are prevalent in accounts of Vaughan Williams's particular attraction to this poet, including

Whitman's all-encompassing post-Christian sense of spiritual quest; his unifying embrace of both the mystical and the mundane; his visionary conception of democracy; his view of national identity within an inclusive global fraternity; and a startlingly fresh and fluid approach to poetic metre and diction, which includes a fascination with repetition, end-sopped lines, organic constructions, and other features that for many invite analogies with music.⁶⁸

As Stephen Town makes clear, such accounts are derived in part from John Addington Symonds's influential study *Walt Whitman* (1893),⁶⁹ which powerfully shaped the reception of the poet's work in England during Vaughan Williams's lifetime. Symonds underlines the

⁶⁵ As Kennedy asserted in 1964, 'Walt Whitman's poetry played a major role in the renaissance of British music in the early twentieth century'. See Kennedy (1980), 82. The most detailed and nuanced of recent accounts of Vaughan Williams's interest in Whitman are those of Byron Adams: see Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2000), and 'Scripture, Church and Culture', in Frogley (ed.) (1996), especially 103-5. See also Alain Frogley, *Vaughan Williams and America*, a documentary and seven programmes broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in March and April 1994. Roger Savage devotes attention to the literary sources relevant to Vaughan Williams's music in 'While the Moon Shines Gold': Vaughan Williams and Literature: An Overview', in Rushton (ed.) (2010), 43-64. Further discussion of Vaughan Williams's literary interests can be found in William Kimmell, 'Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words', *Music & Letters*, 19.2 (April, 1938), 132-42; Ursula Vaughan Williams, 'Ralph Vaughan Williams and his Choice of Words for Music', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 99 (1972-3), 81-9; and Byron Adams, '"By Season Season'd": Shakespeare and Vaughan Williams', *John Donne Journal*, 25 (2006), 183-97.

⁶⁶ See Stephen Town, '"Full of Fresh Thoughts": Vaughan Williams, Whitman, and the Genesis of A Sea Symphony', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 73-102, 73.

⁶⁷ Saylor (2003), 48.

⁶⁸ Frogley, in Rushton (ed.) (2010), 80-1.

⁶⁹ See John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman: A Study* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893).

central themes of Whitman's verse as traversing issues of 'religion and the idea of the universe'; 'personality or the awareness of self and sex'; 'love, deviating into amativeness of sexual love and the adhesiveness of comradeship'; and a pervasive emphasis upon 'democracy, or the theory of brotherhood and human equality'.⁷⁰

While Vaughan Williams's corresponding ideals of community and democracy have been highlighted by recent critics, both Adams and Town have also underlined the extent to which the composer's music (like that of other early twentieth-century English composers) betrays a highly selective treatment of the central characteristics of Whitman's work as outlined by Symonds. As these authors suggest, the sexualized content of the poet's verse caused 'fear' in early twentieth-century English society, many composers turning to Whitman, rather, as an 'alternative to biblical texts that yet would express both the spiritual restlessness and "evolutionary" optimism of their times', or as Adams further has it, a 'symbolic and mystical poetry that was resonant and new...In Whitman [British composers] found a poet at once democratic, mystical, and "evolutionary"'.⁷¹

It is perhaps only Michael Kennedy who brings the 'evolutionary' ideals of Whitman into dialogue with Vaughan Williams's interest in folk song. In his account, the alignment is both uncomfortable and rather vague, but correlates in important ways with Adams's suggestion of a 'sanitized' English response to Whitman:

The reason for Whitman's appeal to Vaughan Williams is fairly obvious, apart from the sheer technical challenge to his musical powers. In Vaughan Williams's nature there was a strong vein of mysticism veiled by a thoroughly down-to-earth commonsense approach to his art...he believed in the strength of national roots and he looked to the past in order to venture into the future. It is possible that the Rossettis' medievalism had some appeal for him before he discovered, in folk song, a truer traditionalism. Whitman presented a love of nature plus a combination of plain statement with mystical yearnings; he drew, like the folk singers, on vivid verbal material shorn of academicism. It is, therefore, significant that Vaughan Williams's first settings of Whitman were coincident with his first folk song collecting year.⁷²

⁷⁰ As quoted by Town, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 74.

⁷¹ Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2010), 29.

⁷² Kennedy (1980), 82.

Kennedy implicitly brings Vaughan Williams's preoccupation with journeys from 'past to present' into dialogue with the composer's concurrent interest in folk song by emphasizing his interest in 'traditionalism', 'nature', and in a 'common sense down-to-earth approach to his art'. As such, this account may be considered complementary to that of Adams, and specifically, to the latter's proposition that English composers interpreted and reconstructed Whitman according to then-dominant ideas of English – and English musical – identity: namely, that 'downright', 'rustic', 'common-sense' approach of a culture committed to an idealized vision of an innocent and 'earlier' rural England.

As Adams suggests, a verse saturated with the presence of the 'extravagantly sexualized' human body was treated in such a way that such bodies were omitted in favour of a poetry which 'sang of the soul'.⁷³ Stephen Town has corroborated Adams's view that the British compositional response to Whitman was underlined by a pronounced and highly Victorian 'discomfort' at the bodily implications of this poetry, or as Adams further has it, the 'arrant and shameless homoerotic exhibitionism' of this verse, which was evaded with 'prudish reserve' by composers such as Charles Stanford. As Adams continues, this 'reserve' and 'panic' was heightened by the trials of Oscar Wilde, thus consolidating an artistic trend away from the aesthetic movement of the 1890s – and thus the poetry of Rossetti, as Kennedy hints – to a particular and 'sanitized' version of Walt Whitman: one which, as Adams maintains, saw British composers casting the poet as 'a disembodied visionary'. Indeed, Adams goes as far as to suggest that in Vaughan Williams's setting of *Toward the Unknown Region*, the composer 'vitiates the poetry with the music', thus 'utterly missing Whitman's conception of death as a "bursting forth", a delirious species of cosmic orgasm'. As this author concludes, '[t]he peroration of *Toward the Unknown Region*, a dignified and touching tribute to Parry, hardly suggests the ecstatic ejaculation of the soul into the universe'.⁷⁴

⁷³ Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2010), especially 30-1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

Yet Vaughan Williams's musical response to Whitman's poetry cannot so easily be shorn of a profoundly physical and energetic realization of the poet's ideas of union, both with man and with the land. It has been noted that contemporaneous critics heard in the peroration of *Toward the Unknown Region* an almost 'hysterical' sense of bursting forth: a 'muscular', 'human' celebration which importantly was focused around the exaggerated vocality of conclusion. While Vaughan Williams indeed selected in this poem a text free of any such sexualized bodily content – and removed Whitman's 'embarrassing' references to the 'gaseous, mineral processes' in his selection of text for *A Sea Symphony*'s second movement, for example – the presence, in both these works, of a particular kind of body is nevertheless unavoidable.

Indeed the singing body is overwhelmingly prominent in both *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony*. This presence is clear not only in Vaughan Williams's music but has in recent years been theorized extensively in the 'dynamic' poetry of Whitman, as literary critics find a powerful and performative projection of 'voice' in this work: the oratorical, spoken, and communicative voice of a poet who, like Herbert, constructs also the responses – and even the material presences – of his listeners. The demands and responses issued by Whitman's voices might be heard to work in powerful collaboration with those of Vaughan Williams's music, and further sing of the responses of contemporaneous listeners.

As Kennedy's account of Vaughan Williams and Whitman makes clear, a rather easy alignment of Whitman's use of 'verbal material shorn of academicism' with Vaughan Williams's interest in folk songs and dialects has been assumed on many occasions.⁷⁵ Yet the particular presence of music in Whitman's verse would appear to have been far more pervasive than critics of Vaughan Williams have noted, its emphasis upon song and singing both definitive and unmistakable. Whitman's interest in singers and singing was such that it

⁷⁵ Eric Saylor suggests that Whitman's appeal to numerous British composers lay in his poems' 'length and metrical unpredictability', which 'suggested novel rhythmic effects when set to music, a trait shared by the Authorized Bible'. See Saylor (2003), 50. Frogley also attests to the 'bracing, down-to-earth, and largely optimistic' tone of Whitman's verse, as much as to the 'rugged prose-like rhythms and arresting diction', which 'presented a stark contrast to the genteel regularity of most contemporary verse'. See Frogley, in Rushton (ed.), 82.

powerfully influenced the expression of his own poetic voice, as he himself suggested: '[b]ut not for the opera, I could never have written *Leaves of Grass*', he confided to his friend John Townsend Trowbridge.⁷⁶ When confiding to his friend Horace Traubel, he maintained that the influence of music would be overwhelmingly obvious in this monumental collection of poems: an influence especially clear to a musician:

My younger life was so saturated with the emotions, raptures, uplifts, of such musical experiences that it would be surprising indeed if all my future work had not been coloured by them. A real musician running through *Leaves of Grass* – a philosopher musician – could put his finger on this and that everywhere in the text no doubt as indicating the activity of the influences I have spoken of.⁷⁷

With such pronouncements in mind, scholars interested in Whitman's verse have habitually emphasized the extent to which music and in particular, the singing voice, was a constant theme of the poet's work: one which, amidst a general reticence in discussing influences upon his verse, he was happy to underline with consistency. As Donald Stauffer suggests,

Italian opera and opera singers were an important influence on Whitman's creative development during those crucial years in the early 1850s when *Leaves of Grass* was germinating. Probably no other single influence is more important than this one. When we consider how many poems Whitman calls songs or chants, and how many references he makes to the voice and to singing, we come to realize that music and singing were central to the creation of his poetry... Even a quick glance at Whitman's poems will show the extent to which he thought of them in musical terms: from 'Song of Myself' and the numerous other songs, to 'Chants Democratic' and hundreds of references to the voice, singing, carols, hymns, choruses, musical instruments and the like. Operatic singing in particular, with its emotions, its atmosphere of close rapport between singer and audience, and its varied styles—particularly recitative and aria—is the ground upon which Whitman built many of his poems.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ As quoted in Robert D. Faner, *Walt Whitman & Opera* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), v. The statement is derived from John Townsend Trowbridge, 'Reminiscences of Walt Whitman', *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXIX, 166 (February, 1902).

⁷⁷ As quoted in Faner (1951), v. This statement is derived from Horace L. Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 3 vols. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1908), vol. II, 173.

⁷⁸ Donald Barlow Stauffer, 'Opera and Opera Singers', in J. R. LeMaster and Donald Kummings (eds.), *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopaedia* (New York: Garland Publishing Ltd., 1998), 484-6, 484. See also Larry D. Griffin, 'Human Voice', Robert Strassburg, 'Music, Whitman and', and John B. Mason, 'Oratory' in this volume: 287-8, 437-9, and 489-90, respectively.

Like Vaughan Williams and in turn, the surreptitious song composer of the Bournemouth lectures, Whitman too was ‘inspired’ by the ‘shock of sound’, whether heightened in the arias of Italian opera, or as projected in music played in everyday life, nourishing his creative impulse and striking deep and ‘unconsciously’ into his poetic voice. Stauffer continues that:

The moods awakened in [Whitman] by music played and sung in the streets, in the theater and in private shaped many of the poems he wrote. His own voice, ‘orotund sweeping and final’, was a response to the almost mystical ecstasy he experienced when listening to grand opera and the singing of his favorite tenors and sopranos. In his manuscript notebooks he wrote of ‘the chanted Hymn whose tremendous sentiment shall uncage in my breast a thousand wide-winged strengths and unknown ardors and terrible ecstasies’.⁷⁹

Robert Faner has implied that it was specifically the communicative and emotional quality of voice – the ‘close rapport between singer and audience’, as Stauffer underlined – that fuelled Whitman’s vocal obsession, ‘capturing the heart and the imagination’ of the poet. As Faner suggests,

his life-long interest in vocalism is of fundamental importance in his work. He had been preoccupied with the voice early in his career. Before the development of his enthusiasm for opera he had speculated about the voice as it was employed both in oratory and on the dramatic stage. He had apparently always been peculiarly sensitive to vocal sounds. The voice seemed to create in him not only an emotional response but a bodily one as well; the most intense and tumultuous feelings could be aroused in him by a beautiful and controlled voice. Lines from the poem ‘Vocalism’ illustrate his reactions:

‘O what is it that makes me tremble so at voices?
Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her
I shall follow,
As the water follows the moon, silently, with fluid steps,
Anywhere around the globe’.⁸⁰

Such ideas correlate powerfully with an early twentieth-century idea of song and voice in England, and with Vaughan Williams’s desire to ‘speak’ to a listener in emotional, embodied terms to which all could respond.

⁷⁹ Stauffer, in LeMaster and Kummings (eds.), 484.

⁸⁰ Faner (1951), 56.

Significantly, critics have emphasized the ways in which ‘voice’ elicited the same response from Whitman that he sought to elicit, in turn, with his poetry. J. R. LeMaster, in a chapter surveying the critical tradition surrounding Whitman and oratory, notes that this is a contested subject, though maintains that ‘one thing on which scholars seem to agree is that Whitman believed he had an important message he needed to communicate to the American people – and that he was determined that he would be heard’.⁸¹ The message of such voices, moreover, was one bound up with the very quality of the voice, or its ‘tone’: one which, as Whitman insisted, should bear a direct, natural, and unmediated self-expression; a free, flowing artlessness; an emotional, self-expressive, but also a functional, communicative, and pragmatic purpose; and indeed, in this, a certain ‘unconscious’ quality.

The poet recalled, on one occasion, overhearing his sister’s voice: ‘she is walking in the next room, singing it [her baby] to sleep in her arms – she has a fine contralto voice & is singing beautifully, unconsciously. It does me good too’.⁸² Speaking of the similarly ‘nourishing’ voice of Alessandro Bettini, the poet’s favourite tenor, he wrote that ‘the singing of this man has breathing blood within it’.⁸³ His obsession with the quality of Marietta Alboni’s voice was celebrated in ‘Proud Music of the Storm’ (1869). Here, in a poem placed before ‘Passage to India’ (from which Vaughan Williams derived the text for *A Sea Symphony*’s finale), Whitman attests once more to the voice’s capacity to reveal the ‘self’ of the singer:

The teeming lady comes
The lustrous orb, Venus contralto, the blooming mother,
Sister of loftiest gods, Alboni’s self I hear.⁸⁴

In such ‘teeming’, resonant voices, Whitman found those same qualities sought by English musicians in expressive, embodied voices. Commenting on the singing of the

⁸¹ J. R. LeMaster, ‘Oratory’, in Donald D. Kummings (ed.), *A Companion to Walt Whitman* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005). Blackwell Reference Online. Accessed 3-Feb-2013.

⁸² As quoted in Faner (1951), 57.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁴ See Walt Whitman, ‘Proud Music of the Storm’, in *Leaves of Grass* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; rev. ed., 2009), 310-15, 313.

Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, he maintained that ‘there was a vacuum in the head of the performance...It was the beauty of Adam before God breathed into his nostrils’.⁸⁵ Whitman, like English singers, demanded a measure of ethical responsibility in the kind of expressive statement issued by the voice (despite the often overwhelming ebullience of his verse – one which almost dissolves into prose on many occasions, such is the energy of its unfolding).

It is notable, moreover, that Whitman also demanded an uncompromising ‘naturalness’ in singing, for as he maintained,

[i]n the good Italian singer, the mouth, lips, check, etc., are at ease, perhaps illumined with a gentle smile even during astonishing vocal performances. The back of the mouth, the throat, great interior energy and muscular alertness are necessary, all under the espionage of a severe taste, permitting no extreme attempts, but pleasing and natural simple effects.⁸⁶

Enraptured by the ‘liquid flow’ of natural, easy voices, Whitman was also inspired by the material, bodily richness of such voices, and was inclined to ‘go away from books, and walk amidst the strong coarse talk of men as they give muscle and bone to every word they speak’.⁸⁷ This again is highly reminiscent of the ideals of early twentieth-century English vocal teachers such as Plunket Greene, and indeed of Vaughan Williams’s own concept of the ‘tunes’ sung by an English people:

[tunes] which are good for singing...tunes which really belong to us because they have been sung for generations of our forefathers...tunes with real blood in their veins and real muscles in their limbs.⁸⁸

As Faner, James Perrin Warren, and Mark Bauerlein have demonstrated, Whitman’s interest in the dynamic, speaking, singing quality of voices informed the very structure of his

⁸⁵ As quoted in Faner (1951), 58.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁷ As quoted in James Perrin Warren, *Walt Whitman’s Language Experiment* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 10.

⁸⁸ Vaughan Williams, from a Talk on Folk-Song Music for the BBC, included in Cobbe (ed.) (2008), number 336, 298-9, 298.

poetry.⁸⁹ Indeed the performative quality of Whitman's poetry has become the subject of much criticism.⁹⁰ Bauerlein notes that within *Leaves of Grass*, 'stylistic and thematic techniques are used to highlight speech' in particular. Offering a summary of the considerable body of criticism dedicated to exploring these techniques, he suggests that central among them is Whitman's explicit exaltation of speech at the expense of writing, proposing that this poetry betrays Whitman's trust in the 'unmediated power of speech', recognizing that 'writing threatens this power. Because writing separates the author from both his own language and from his audience', precluding 'an immediate communal experience – exactly what Whitman wants to inspire in his readers'. Speech, as Bauerlein summarizes through recourse to the readings of numerous critics,

takes place with the fact while writing takes place after the fact, involving a reconstruction of and separation from presence...Writing refers to a remembered past, speech inhabits a living present. Speech then becomes Whitman's major tactical motif in 'Song of Myself' that harmonizes and consolidates society into a unified 'interpretive community'...The intended effect of these stylistic and thematic motifs is, of course, to make the reader feel (literally, if you will), the presence of Whitman and to force him (or at least to coerce him) to respond accordingly. Speech offered Whitman a powerful incantatory pathway undeviatingly into the psyche of his individual readers...Sound raised to the level of a 'hum' of the 'valed voice', the 'password primeval', reintegrates 'old and young'...into a community of visionaries whose voices are lifted together in a 'chant democratic'.⁹¹

Again, the correspondences with Vaughan Williams's ideals – as realized in his music – are evident. The composer's suspicion regarding those who approached music simply in its 'letter' – ignoring its performative aspects – was such that he was at pains to insist that unless actual sound was made and heard, music did not exist, and a spiritual and 'intelligible' connection with a hearer could not be enacted. As has been traced throughout this study,

⁸⁹ See Mark Bauerline, 'The Written Orator of "Song of Myself": A Recent Trend of Whitman Criticism', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 3.3 (December, 1986), 1-14.

⁹⁰ See Bauerline (1986) for an account of such work. See also Michael Sowder, *Whitman's Ecstatic Union: Conversion and Ideology in 'Leaves of Grass'* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). This study explores the 'dynamic' quality of Whitman's verse and the extent to which it sought to enact a 'union' with and even religious 'conversion' in his listeners.

⁹¹ Bauerline (1986), 2-3.

Vaughan Williams, as part of a broader culture of musical revival, sought in the performative experience of music a means of communicating deep into the ‘primeval soul’ of a listener, drawing together an embodied community of ‘voices lifted together’. In that such voices became implicit in the gestures and narratives of his music – and thus, in Vaughan Williams’s own enactment of an ‘interpretative listening community’ – Whitman’s verse can be credited with a powerful role in shaping the conception of a great number of Vaughan Williams’s early works.⁹²

Indeed, it might be posited that Vaughan Williams sought out this quality in the poets he elected to set. Helen Vendler found in George Herbert’s poetry the communication of a particular authorial voice, which implicated the voices of its hearers within its poetic structures. Vendler devotes further attention to Whitman’s concern to communicate and enact a union with a ‘listener’, positing that both poets forge ‘tones of voice’ through which to enact this relationship in their verse. She characterizes such poets as inventors of language that will enact, on the page, an intimacy they lack in life. Mapping the relationship of these poets with their chosen listeners, she argues that both Herbert and Whitman create ‘forms and speech of ideal intimacy, thus setting forth the possibility of a more complete and satisfactory human interchange’. As such, they become poets who seek not simply to *express* social relations but to *redefine* them’.⁹³

In common with many commentators, Vendler suggests that there is a ‘dynamic’ quality in Whitman’s verse, and like that of Herbert his poetry works to address ‘not a living person, but leap[s] across time and space to speak to invisible listeners, seeking an ideal intimacy’. While Herbert speaks ‘vertically’, as she has it, to God, Whitman reaches out to the reader of the future. As such, she suggests that he is able in poems such as ‘Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry’ to bring his listeners into ‘sensuous existence’, defining his authorial voice

⁹² It is noteworthy that Ursula Vaughan Williams attested to Vaughan Williams’s experience of hearing Whitman’s verse recited by his friend Raymond Duncan during the first decade of the century. As she reports, this figure was a frequent visitor to the composer’s home at Cheyne Walk, London, and Duncan’s performance of Whitman’s ‘A Song of Joys’ seemed to have made a lasting impression upon Vaughan Williams. See U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 94.

⁹³ Vendler (2005), especially 1-4.

through a communication with their actualized presence. Her reading of *Leaves of Grass* proceeds from the proposition that these poems betray an ‘obsessive’ lyric impulse, wherein Whitman evokes ‘the ideal addressee...creating and sustaining an intimacy that more and more casts itself from present hope into future dream’.⁹⁴

It is in precisely the dynamic quality of this verse – one which enacts a move from past to present and future, or from authorial voice to constructed addressee – that critics have found the profound expression of Whitman’s evolutionary views of history, nation, and language, and in this the intensely communicative quality of his community voice. James Warren has pointed out how Whitman had claimed towards the end of his life that *Leaves of Grass* ‘should somehow meet the needs of “the new worlds, the new times, the new peoples, the new vista”’, creating ‘new potentialities of speech’ by drawing sustenance from the very peoples by whom it has been used. As Whitman maintained,

the history of language embraces...the whole of the rest. It is the history of the movements and developments of men and women over the entire earth. In its doings every thing appears to move from east to west as the light does...The English language seems curiously to have flowed through the ages, especially towards America, for present use, and for centuries and centuries of future use; it is so composed of all the varieties that preceded it, and so absorbs what is needed by it.⁹⁵

As Warren thus interprets,

[t]he chronological structure of the sentence [in Whitman’s poetry] takes us from retrospect to prospect, from the history of the English language to the ‘new vista’ of English America. In addition, Whitman’s history emphasizes the active qualities of the English language. Flowing, composing, and absorbing, language takes on the characteristics of a self-directed, purposive entity...language is figured as a natural being, one that ‘appears to move from east to west as the light does’.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Vendler (2005), 4. It is interesting that in Vendler isolates Whitman’s ‘A Noiseless Patient Spider’ as a work of particular interest, arguing that such ideals of community in communication become thematized in this poem, in which a ‘gossamer thread’ is woven between poet and addressee. As Vendler interprets, ‘[t]he tones summoned up characterize not only their utterer but also his relation to his addressee, creating on the page the nature of the ties between them’. See Vendler (2005), 7, and 56. It is worth recalling that the idea of a ‘gossamer thread’ also informed Plunket Greene’s conception of the ‘magnetism’ enacted between the creative singer and listener in the sounding of the singing voice, where in turn audience and singer sing together, ‘in sympathy’.

⁹⁵ As quoted in Warren (2005), 9.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 9.

Vaughan Williams also conceived of the evolution of music as one imagined as a natural being, ‘flowing’ through the ages.⁹⁷ As was suggested in the quotation above, moreover, he imagined ancestral songs as ‘living’ tunes, with ‘muscles’ in their limbs: ‘marching’ tunes, ‘tunes to help us through the ordeal’, tunes which ‘really belong to us’, for they had been the property of ‘a generation of our forefathers’. Vaughan Williams’s ideal of music as made and heard was one rooted in the model of an aural evolution akin to that of folk performance, evolving as a process of ‘natural selection’ according to the expressive character and demands of the people who made it, and thus bearing a residue of such voices as ‘absorbed’ into their materials. This was a character he also found in the development of literature or, more specifically, language, as he emphasized in his lecture ‘The Evolution of the Folk-song’. He lauded here the ‘strength and accuracy of oral tradition’, explaining that ‘almost up to the time of the invention of printing more trust was placed in the spoken than the written word. The Greek word Logos [sic] means a living thing, the spoken word’,⁹⁸ and suggesting, via Gilbert Murray, that the great national literature of the Bible and Homer

have behind them not the imagination of one great poet, but the accumulated emotion, one may almost say, of the many successive generations who have read and learned and themselves afresh re-created the old majesty and loveliness...There is in them, as it were, the spiritual life-blood of a people.⁹⁹

He also maintained that the songs of ancestral voices were ‘a liberating and not a fettering influence’, and one which ‘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’.¹⁰⁰ The ‘vistas’ of abstract music had been invoked by Vaughan Williams in the Bournemouth lectures of 1902: the vista of an unintelligible realm for the unmusical listener who would, through the song, be

⁹⁷ See, for example, the composer’s suggestion that ‘our national art...must take its part in the great stream that has flowed through the centuries’. Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 155.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Vaughan Williams, ‘Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note’, in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 129-53, 142.

‘awakened’ to the possibilities of a musical world of the future, as cultivated through active engagement with the singing and hearing of a vocal music which ‘turns us back on our real selves’.

Like Vaughan Williams, Whitman recognized the physically healing effect of hearing music, lauding its place in a socially utopic future by claiming that ‘[y]ou listen to music, and...A New World – a liquid world – rushes like a torrent through you’, conveying a sense that music will ‘never cease – but rather it must become more and more common, and more and more perfect, until the ability to sing well, and play on some instrument, shall be as much a matter of course as the ability to read’.¹⁰¹ Again, Vaughan Williams similarly maintained that listeners should make music in order that English composers would be ‘generated’ from a community in which their works might also be thus understood.

By evoking the oratorical qualities of Whitman’s vision of language moving through the ages, ‘absorbing’ all that it needed, the processional, performative, and multi-vocal qualities of the works discussed may be viewed from a further important context. The journeys of these works seem to enact the procession of the song towards its future in the present (indeed ‘procession’ is a word continually highlighted by Vaughan Williams in both the Scherzo and the Finale of *A Sea Symphony*). Like the *Tallis Fantasia*, these works do not simply trace the evolution of song, but rather project a narrative of song’s performance, from the folk song, through the plainsong, to the enactment of a present singing.

This is a powerful preoccupation of *A Sea Symphony*, which similarly exposes an idea of folk song in the first movement, of plainsong or chant in the second, a contrapuntal exchange of voices and instruments in the third, and an enactment of the performative presence of a robust final song at its conclusion. The way in which Vaughan Williams exploits precisely that quality of a present tense in the final stages of his Whitman works

¹⁰¹ Walt Whitman, ‘The Opera’, in Emroy Holloway and Ralph Adimari (eds.), *New York Dissected* (New York: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, 1936), 18-23, 22-3.

seems itself alive to this quality of the poet's speech, for as Bauerline suggests, a technique used to highlight – or enact – this quality habitually sees Whitman use the simple present and imperative verb tenses, as in 'I celebrate myself...': a technique which 'rejuvenates the act expressed every time a reader comes across it...the imperatives, less commanding than assuringly inviting, allow Whitman to achieve the kind of attention-grabbing authority a skilful orator exercises upon his listeners'.¹⁰² The dynamic qualities of the present tense are frequently used in the communicative emphasis upon the 'actual sound' of musical voices, as foregrounded in the finales of Vaughan Williams's works: an emphasis upon song in the culmination of *A Sea Symphony* which sings, as Whitman expressed in 'Song of Myself', an epitome of both artists' narratives of song:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

In this quotation, the essence of Whitman's narratives of song are epitomized: song as a means of drawing together past, present, and future into one resonant, teeming body. As Bauerline assesses, Whitman seeks, in 'Song of Myself', to 'share the experience' of this singing.¹⁰³

This is an enactment played out in the overwhelming material vocality emphasized from the very opening of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*. Indeed the following reading explores a number of instances in which Vaughan Williams's music seems itself to respond to – or complete and enact – the performative desires of Whitman's poetry. In Vaughan Williams's symphonic songs, the overwhelming performativity of musical sound is emphasized such that 'every molecule' belonging to the singer seems 'as good' to belong to the listener. At the opening of *A Sea Symphony*, the emphasis is thrown powerfully upon the actual, exhilarating sound of the performing mass, its oratorical command – 'Behold the sea' – speaking with an immediacy that is echoed in *Toward the Unknown Region*'s 'Dare', or in

¹⁰² Bauerline (1986), 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

Five Mystical Songs's 'Rise'. A raw, molecular energy is projected here, such that Whitman's 'behold' becomes an urgent and powerfully immediate communication. This vocal projection also becomes the narrative goal of the work as a whole, and as such becomes a further celebration of the singing of song itself.

A Sea Symphony

Nearly halfway through the final movement of Vaughan Williams's first symphony, the forces of chorus, semi chorus, solo baritone, solo soprano, and orchestra are drawn together in a determined effort to hymn the arrival of 'the poet worthy the name/The true son of God, singing his songs'. As Kennedy has noted, this overwhelming climax bursts forth in 'a moment of ecstasy with an elaborate melisma on the word "singing":¹⁰⁴ again, as in accounts of *Toward the Unknown Region*, a gesture which Andrew Herbert has interpreted as the composer's proclamation of the robust vitality of his own compositional voice.¹⁰⁵ Yet the word 'melisma' underplays the extensive and intense outburst by the multiple voices of this finale, which, following an expectant and almost theatrical pause on the singing of 'finally', are projected through a series of fanfares wherein the energy of the performing mass is accumulated and released with ecstatic urgency.

Within the symphony's extensive narrative, there exist a number of gestures and tropes which point to the work's essential conception in song. *A Sea Symphony* emerged from an explicit plan for a large-scale symphonic work that was simultaneously rooted in an idea of

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy (1980), 130.

¹⁰⁵ While this has been merely implied in some accounts, Andrew Herbert has suggested in his study of a theme employed in an early work called *The Solent* that Vaughan Williams associated his own persona and 'journey of self-discovery' with this theme, as is clear in the setting of Whitman's text in the piece. Herbert also demonstrates that Vaughan Williams uses the theme at precisely the moment at which he evokes in the finale of *A Sea Symphony* the text 'the true song of God shall come/Singing his songs'. As Herbert interprets, by using the 'Solent theme' at this point, Vaughan Williams seems to make Whitman's eulogy 'potentially self-referential', and as this author concludes, '[w]hilst perhaps closer to a Freudian slip than any conscious declaration, the drawing together of Whitman's singer and Vaughan Williams's singing is thought-provoking'. See Andrew Herbert, 'Unfinished Business: the Evolution of the 'Solent' Theme', in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 69-90, 80.

song, a point clear in the manuscript sources that reveal the work's long gestation. As Lionel Pike has noted, 'the title did not settle as *A Sea Symphony* for some time: the manuscript sketches – there is a large number of them – also contain such titles as *Symphony of the Sea*, *Walt Whitman – Sea Songs*, *Songs of the Sea*, and one sketch is headed *Notes for Whitman*.'¹⁰⁶ Andrew Herbert suggests that the work began as 'Notes for choral work Songs of the Sea'.¹⁰⁷ As is signalled by Pike's reference to the shifting 'titles' of the work, however, no comment on the curious intersection of the different generic propositions represented by song and symphony has been offered in accounts of the work, though its validity and credibility as a conventional symphonic statement (rather than again, a cantata or an oratorio) has been questioned in almost every account of the work available.¹⁰⁸

Ursula Vaughan Williams's description of the work's origins underlines a specifically choral and multi-vocal conception that has perhaps masked the symphony's apparent beginnings as an idea for an expansion of the isolated voice of a lyrical song. Inspired by the 'fresh thoughts' of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, this work was to be, as Ursula Vaughan Williams emphasized, a 'big choral work about the sea – the sea itself and the sea of time, infinity, and mankind...an ambitious and terrifying project, for the scope was to be unlike that of any choral work he had yet attempted'.¹⁰⁹ Without doubt, *A Sea Symphony* issues an invitation, self-evidently, to be heard as a large-scale vocal statement (rather than as a

¹⁰⁶ Lionel Pike, *Vaughan Williams and the Symphony* (London: Tocatta Press, 2003), 24, n.2

¹⁰⁷ See Andrew Herbert, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 75.

¹⁰⁸ Critics have habitually suggested that *A Sea Symphony* makes a problematic claim to symphonic status, its predominantly choral treatment of ideas and its inclusion of vocal soloists existing in a tense relation with the work's title as a 'Symphony'. Percy Young, for example, suggested that 'we prefer to consider [*A Sea Symphony*] a choral work rather than, more absolutely, a symphony'. See Young (1953), 48. In a study devoted entirely to Vaughan Williams's symphonies, Lionel Pike baldly questioned his own rationale in including the work for discussion, asking 'is it really a symphony?', and arguing that 'there can be no feeling that the argument is carried on from one movement to another – no feeling that the movements belong together, or that the finale summarises and resolves the ideas and arguments of the foregoing movements'. See Pike (2003), 27-8. Charles Edward McGuire pointed out that '[c]alling the work a symphony is problematic', for '[f]irst and foremost, the orchestra is never the main musical focus; it performs a secondary role to the chorus and the soloists throughout...it rarely raises above functioning as an accompaniment. The orchestra is given no opportunity for extended development of the compositional material.' Arguing further that '[t]he composition is a multi-movement work that, as Oliver Neighbour and others have suggested, is a hybrid of the secular cantata and some elements of symphonic procedure', he adds in a footnote that while Frank Howes had in 1954 attempted to 'make the case that despite the fact that the chorus is the work's underlying force, the composition is still symphonic because of the forms it uses throughout', Howes 'does not or cannot explain the lack of satisfying development or the terse returns that occur throughout the composition'. See McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 263-4, n. 14. It might be noted that quite aside from the composer's title, the forms and techniques of motivic development that Vaughan Williams uses throughout confirms the necessity of taking seriously *A Sea Symphony*'s claims to symphonic status.

¹⁰⁹ Ursula Vaughan Williams (1964), 65.

symphony as conventionally understood): one that claims kinship with both the oratorio and cantata, this clear not only in its scoring for chorus, orchestra, and soloists, but further in the way in which the voices play the central role in advancing musical ideas, and are placed in the foreground throughout. Yet the extent to which this ‘ambitious’ and ‘terrifying’ musical statement retains its commitment to a presentation and performance of various ‘recitatives’, ‘carols’, ‘chants’, duets, hymns, and broad, melodic songs, is important. As Hubert Foss maintained, ‘*A Sea Symphony* begins and ends as a song, and as a song it is huge.’¹¹⁰

In many ways, this symphony is not only pervaded by songs, but differently, proceeds such that lyrical materials are not subsumed into a discursive symphonic statement but remain, often complete, within the various ‘scenes’ of the work’s progress. This is particularly clear in the first movement. Following the breath-taking opening (another of Vaughan Williams’s mediant-shift ‘breakthroughs’, which critics heard as ‘pictorial’ to the extent that a sense of ‘drawing back a curtain’ was communicated in this gesture),¹¹¹ the music sets forth with a huge, broad, and sweeping melodic outpouring: one which seems to move with a ‘surge’, as Pike has it, from a gesture which itself calls the attention of the listener to the massive choral forces (the opening of this melody is shown in Example 3.7a). In this way, the scene is set, after a momentous vocal outburst, for a focus upon both the sounding quality of the singing voice and its songs (this, in many ways, the material upon which the symphony seems to discourse throughout).¹¹²

The ‘rounded’ statement and frequent recalling of broad melodies for voices has for some commentators posed the central problem to the work’s credibility in its claims to

¹¹⁰ Foss (1950), 91. Elliott S. Schwartz viewed *A Sea Symphony* as an inevitable result of ‘the composer’s natural inclination toward vocal composition’. See Schwartz, *The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964), 20.

¹¹¹ The critic reporting on the premiere of the work for *The Times* noted that ‘[t]he opening two chords produced an almost visual effect upon the hearers, as though a curtain were drawn back and the expanse of the sea revealed’. As Quoted in Kennedy (1980), 98.

¹¹² See Pike (2003), 31. Pike’s discussion of *A Sea Symphony* is notable for the attention the author devotes to Vaughan Williams’s preoccupation with ‘the expansive type of tune, often associated with public school hymns’, which ‘always fascinated Vaughan Williams’. Pike characterizes the opening melody of the symphony as one such tune, and finds numerous others in the work, including in the Trio of the Scherzo. Interestingly, he suggests that songs often seem to ‘intrude’ into the progress of the music, communicating a sense that they don’t quite ‘fit’. This becomes important in light of the discussion below.

symphonic status. As McGuire has demonstrated, the first movement proceeds in a series of defined sections, punctuated by the orchestra. Thus, he maintains that *A Sea Symphony* seems wilfully to resist certain ‘fundamental elements of symphonic procedure’, important among which is the presentation of the orchestra, which rarely rises above its function as an accompaniment, being offered ‘no opportunity for extended development of the compositional material’. As McGuire elaborates, ‘the few segments where Vaughan Williams uses sequential repetition and fragmentation occur only within transitional sections, and these usually follow a pattern of winding down before the next large choral or solo section begins’.¹¹³

One of the most interesting aspects of McGuire’s analysis in the context of the current study is the way in which he detects a process wherein the orchestra functions to ‘wind down’ the ‘rhythmic motion’, or vocal energy, of the various vocal sections, this apparent from the very beginning of the work. The opening’s choral outburst, unadorned by the orchestra and followed by the broad song ‘And on its limitless heaving breast, the ships’, is energetically staged and unfolded, but subsequently diffused in a similar process of paring back or dissolving the energy of these statements as is found in *Toward the Unknown Region*.¹¹⁴ In the opening paragraph of *A Sea Symphony*, this functions to reassemble the energetic potency of the repetition of this vocal outburst (in the bar before letter D): an oratorical gesture of emphasis, and one which confirms the intensely material idea of ‘voice’ that permeates the work as a whole. Indeed, as McGuire observes, ‘[m]ost of the other major transitions of *A Sea Symphony* work in a similar fashion: a grand shift in rhythm brings about an abrupt structural decrescendo, after which Vaughan Williams begins the next textural section or recapitulates the previous one’.¹¹⁵

It might be interpreted that this process works to present the orchestra such that they ‘stage’ or narrate the various performances of song in this movement. This is clear in the

¹¹³ McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 240.

¹¹⁴ See Vaughan Williams, *A Sea Symphony* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1918), 3-15. The articulation, through vocal and instrumental recession, of this opening paragraph occurs between letters C and D in this score, as the orchestra articulates a powerful descending sequence, which serves to mount a restatement of the opening, at the upbeat to a bar before letter D, ‘Largamente’.

¹¹⁵ See McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 239-42.

double presentation of the opening song. Having restated the initial ‘Behold’ and the following broad melodic statement (shown in Example 3.7a), the music gives way to a shift in scene, as the orchestra ‘winds down’ in a more powerful diffusion of energy than that heard earlier. At figure E, *Molto tranquillo*, solo clarinet, horn, and bassoon emerge from the texture to offer sighing reminiscences of the opening massed melody, *tremolando* strings providing a muted accompaniment as the dynamics recede quickly from *fortississimo* to *pianississimo*.

The sense of a dissolution of the powerful, massed voices of the opening song stages the entry here of a new scene, or musical space, which is articulated with a double bar, a change of tempo, and a shift from the diatonic D major to the modal realm of a new song. At this point, the solo baritone steps forward to sing ‘a short, brief recitative’ in the form of an obvious evocation of folk song or sea song. The brief prefiguring of the song’s opening fifth in the orchestra works to present a kind of rustic fanfare, staging the entry of a robust and resolute voice (as at the opening of the *Songs of Travel*). In this way, a solo voice is given a platform both by the orchestra, but also by the entire opening portion, which acts as in earlier works to set the scene, and to draw attention to the materiality of the singing that will follow.¹¹⁶

Accordingly, the larger structure of the work might be considered, and the significance of the way in which the selected portions of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* betray a narrative of growth through song. Sections of Whitman’s poems ‘Song of the Exposition’ and ‘Songs for All Seas, All Ships’ are brought together for the symphony’s first movement, the symphonic exposition, ‘Song for All Seas’ (or all vocal genres);¹¹⁷ ‘On the Beach at Night,

¹¹⁶ See *A Sea Symphony* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1918), 15-22, figures D to G, which encompasses the restatement of the opening paragraph; the dissolution of this paragraph by the orchestra; and the launching of the baritone’s folkloristic ‘recitative’.

¹¹⁷ As A. E. F. Dickinson suggested, the choice of ‘Song of the Exposition’ was an ‘odd’ one for English composers at this time. See Dickinson (1963), 183. A. V. Butcher also remarked in his 1947 survey ‘Walt Whitman and the English Composer’ that ‘Song of the Exposition’ was not a poem usually set by English composers. See ‘Walt Whitman and the British Composer’, *Music & Letters*, 28.2 (April, 1947), 154-67. There is a sense, indeed, that the title of this poem marks an important signal to Vaughan Williams’s conception of a symphonic exposition pervaded by songs.

Alone' is taken for the dark second movement, wherein the baritone's brooding chant, devoid of the lyricism of the communal songs of the first movement, marks the isolation of vocal 'threat'; 'After the Sea-Ship' for the composer's scherzo, 'The Waves', a playful choral evocation in which the chorus strive towards an instrumental status in the often unintelligible feats of rapid diction here; and 'Passage to India' for the finale, 'The Explorers', where, as is noted, the massed force of the communal voice in its song is proclaimed in a self-referential ode to its own capacity to sing.

In that the symphony traces a narrative from an 'Exposition' filled with song, through death and solitude, to a final triumph following the arrival of 'the true Son of God singing his songs', Vaughan Williams arranges the text in such a fashion that the forces of chorus and orchestra culminate in a song of thanksgiving. At the finale's *Largamente*, the subdued communal song that had opened the finale (shown in Example 3.7b, below), is re-interpreted in what now becomes a broad, anthem-like expansion of the lyrical voice (Example 3.9, below), whose emphasis upon 'singing' at 'singing his songs' reaches out to the limits of the vocal range, as found in *Toward the Unknown Region* (Example 3.6). The use of such extended registers, especially for the higher voices, was chastised in contemporaneous reviews (as is demonstrated in the following section). Crucially, Vaughan Williams's vocal writing here brings the word 'songs' once more to the foreground, free of any orchestral support. As such, it becomes the very pinnacle of this climax (shown at 3 bars before letter K, below).

As the orchestra announce the arrival of 'the poet', the voices make a dramatic contrast to the orchestra in a stunning assertion of the power of voice and of breath. As is clear at 3 bars before K, the orchestra play on the second beat of the bar, functioning here in an apparently complementary punctuation of the voices' statement, which, having reached their goal in 'singing their songs', are supported in celebration by the ceremonial fanfare of the orchestral force, entering after the chorus sing the word 'songs'. Once 'songs' have been sung, however, the dialogue at K ceases, the actual 'song' now 'finally' realized by the voices prompting the choir to enter prematurely, as if impatiently interrupting the orchestra.

Soprano
 Alto
 Tenor
 Bass

sing-ing his songs, sing - ing sing - - ing, sing -
 sing-ing his songs, sing - ing sing - - ing, sing -
 sing-ing his songs, sing - ing sing - - ing, sing -
 sing-ing his songs, sing - ing sing - - ing, sing -

Organ
 Orch.

ff
 ff
 ff

K

The musical score is for a vocal ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and instrumental accompaniment (Organ and Orchestra). The vocal parts are in G major and 4/4 time. They sing the lyrics "sing-ing his songs, sing - ing sing - - ing, sing -". The vocal lines feature triplets and sustained notes. The Organ and Orchestra provide accompaniment with a forte (ff) dynamic. The Organ part includes a 'K' marking above the staff. The Orchestra part consists of piano accompaniment for the vocal lines.

Allegro animato ♩=140

S. ing, sing - ing sing - - ing his songs.

A. ing, sing - ing sing - - ing his songs.

T. ing, sing - ing sing - - ing his songs.

B. ing, sing - ing sing - - ing his songs.

Allegro animato ♩=140

Org.

Ped.

Orch.

Example 3.6, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, beginning at 4 bars before figure K.
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In this way, the chorus seem to expose the orchestra's inability to sing a text, denying the instruments their role in the celebration. Instruments seem almost to equal the choir throughout the Scherzo, in which the percussive qualities of singing voices are often submerged by the singing of the orchestra. By contrast, in the finale's climactic section, the choral voices proclaim in a massive outburst the superiority of voices over instruments. Once this vocal climax arrives, the orchestra returns to its ancillary role as accompaniment to the voices, a role from which it had emerged in the third movement. Here, after the unequivocally composite, lyrical statement of 'singing his songs', the orchestra recalls the opening movement's broad song, a wave-like triplet figure that rises to a final peak wherein the singers raise their voices, proclaiming their central role as deliverers of Whitman's text.

As if the extreme gestural energy of the ‘singing’ in this finale were not enough, the announcement of choral pre-eminence sets the stage for even greater grandeur. The finale begins by further developing material from the previous three movements, and presents these new developments in such a manner that they have the force of remembered song. First, the elegiac song ‘O vast rondure’ evokes the opening movement’s lyrical first subject (as is clear in examples 3.7a and 3.7b, below). The presentation of the song as a memory, or recalling, is highlighted in its *piano* re-interpretation at the opening of the finale. As is characteristic of the work, a different space or mode of song is soon articulated at 3 bars after B of this final movement, a shift confirmed by the double bar and the move from the diatonic E-flat to the modal chanting of a series of monotone intonations for male chorus, a passage evocative of the opening of the second movement, whose correspondence is also heightened by both sections’ orchestral ‘rocking’ figures, which precede the entry of the voices. The familiar ‘walking’ figure from the second movement is also re-introduced by a bass-line playing *pizzicato*, functioning to underline the ‘appearance’ of ‘Adam and Eve and their myriad progeny’ in the final movement: a procession which now breaks into a march.

The march does not proceed far, however, for the ‘never happy hearts’ of the processing wanderers of the text cry an ‘incessant refrain’, as warned by the male voices, whose text has introduced here, ‘Down from the garden of Asia descending, As Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them, Wandering, yearning, with restless explorations, With questionings...with sad, incessant refrain’. Indeed, this ‘refrain’ is thereafter articulated in perhaps the eeriest moment of the work, as a semi-chorus of female voices interrupt this procession, at 3 bars after figure E, with an enactment of this refrain: ‘wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither oh mocking life?’ This, a different, performative space of the ‘refrain’, is not only marked by the *pianississimo*, but further by a double bar, a change in time signature, and finally by the instruction that these voices should remain inaudible in their entry, ‘until the orchestra leaves off’ (see Example 3.8, below).

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Vlms & Piccolo

Full Orch.

poco f ma dolce

poco f ma dolce

poco f ma dolce

poco f ma dolce

f cantabile

And on its lim-it-less, heav-ing breast, the

And on its

And on its

And on its

Example 3.7a, *A Sea Symphony*, movement 1, bars 7-9.

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The bracketed motif is clearly derived from Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900).

Grave e molto Adagio ♩ = 44

p sostenuto

Choir

O vast Ron-dure, swim-ming in space,

p sostenuto

Organ & Strings

Example 3.7b, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, bars 1-2.

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ppp

Sop. I
Where - - - - - fore un - sat - is - fied

Sop. II
Where - - - - - fore un - sat - is - fied

Semi-Chorus

Alto I
Where - - - - - fore un - sat - is - fied

Alto II
Where - - - - - fore un - sat - is - fied

Strings
ppp

S.
soul? ____ whith - - - ther O mock - ing life? ____

S.
soul? whith - er O mock - ing life?

A.
soul? whith - er O mock - ing life?

A.
soul? whith - er O mock - ing life?

pp

* Note. This Semi Chorus should consist of 16 voices; 4 to a part. The opening chord should be inaudible until the orchestra leaves off. If necessary a harmonium may accompany the opening chord only, or may play two bars before hand.

Example 3.8, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, 3 bars after letter E.
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The effect here is such that the refrain emerges as though overheard, the ethereal high register of the women's voices a stark contrast to the robust corporeality of the male chorus in low register. The otherworldly, distant quality of the women's voices is characterized as a different mode of song, its unstable and shifting time signatures again contrasting the squareness that Vaughan Williams assigns the male voices. The moment emerges as if from a distance, both spatially and temporally, the open mouths of a visible yet virtually inaudible chorus a curious image when such an effect is given in performance.¹¹⁸ As such, this moment functions as a performance, within the symphonic progress, of the text's 'refrain'.

The way in which this distant song functions as a moment of performance, or enactment, is further articulated by the dissolution of the refrain to an isolated soprano G, after which a pause again marks this space as fundamentally different to the music which precedes and follows it. The ensuing return of the sombre narration of the male chorus – with a return to its own time signature – confirms the import of this performed song, as it resumes by asking, 'who shall soothe these feverish children?' A 'feverish' absence seems to have been articulated in the elegiac calling of disembodied voices from afar, the song of 'unsatisfied souls' clearly heard as a song within the broader progress of the movement.

These calls inspire the beginning of a fitful progression towards the huge and climactic peroration, and there can indeed be little doubt that the male chorus, like the audience, have heard the calls of these 'unsatisfied souls', as the basses affirm thereafter, 'yet soul be sure, the first intent remains, and shall be carried out, perhaps even now the time has arrived'. Here, the music breaks into a further reference to an earlier movement, recalling the energetic mode of the third movement, the textual reference to 'after the seas are all cross'd' corresponding to the third movement's text, 'after the sea ship', referencing also the textural

¹¹⁸ It seems possible that during Vaughan Williams's lifetime, this distant semi-chorus was actually sung off-stage. As A. V. Butcher suggested when discussing *A Sea Symphony* in an article on Whitman and English composers, these lines were, to his understanding, sung by 'a hidden choir'. See Butcher (1947), 154-67, 156.

scrubbing of the strings, leading inevitably to the point at which ‘finally’ arrives, *fortissimo*. Finally, he who shall soothe these souls has arrived, singing a song which becomes a huge and powerful anthem (see example 3.9, below).

The anthem performed after ‘finally’ becomes, in this way, a reinterpretation not only of the opening song of the movement, but also of the opening song of the work as a whole, its triplet figure resolutely, syllabically, and exaggeratedly projected in this massive communal climax, with the return of the opening’s clashing cymbals and brass fanfares. As such, this point of focus within the finale affirms the overwhelmingly performative statement of the opening: a moment of ‘breaking through’ into a performative realm of song, and one whose fate has here been traced and confirmed, the ‘melismas’ on ‘singing’ evoking, in the pealing entries of the voices, a sense of final, ringing affirmation.

As such, it might be suggested that the extensive preparation of the finale’s climax plays with the temporal spaces of recollected, overheard songs in such a way that recalling the journey of previous movements is not sufficient to stage the ‘enactment’ of a different kind of performative song. The space of the semi-chorus’s ethereal, disembodied calls hastens a process through which ‘finally’, the communal, embodied, performative status of its ‘refrain’ is reached, the effect inescapably one of breaking through, this confirmed in the music’s banishment of instrumental celebration, the chorus equipped to sing without orchestral support.

It the music that follows this great climax, it is significant, then, that the soprano and baritone soloists, singing separately in the earlier scenes of the work, are brought together, communing in an amorous operatic duet, the embodied union of their voices vividly expressing Whitman’s text, ‘I pressing thee to me’. At ‘carolling free, singing a song of God/Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration’, moreover, the two voices are brought together in a voluptuous unison song, during which the orchestra offers but a platform for this celebration. See examples 3.10a and 3.10b, below.

Example 3.9, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, 19 bars before letter I.
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Example 3.9 (continued), *A Sea Symphony*, finale, 19 bars before letter I.
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Example 3.10a, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, figure M.
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Example 3.10b, *A Sea Symphony*, finale, 11 bars before figure O.
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As in *Toward the Unknown Region*, the text has been paced in such a way that the selected portion from Whitman's *Leaves* has moved to the present tense at precisely the moment at which the journey embodied by the chorus towards this 'final' song – where 'the true son of God *shall* come singing his songs' – is no longer promised to come, but happens in the present. Following the communal utterance of 'singing his songs', these songs become 'our songs', in which the song gives thanks for the safe delivery of the ships' crew. It might further be suggested that this moment delivers a union between communal man and the voice of mother-nature, as an extensive series of pastoral melodies on a variety of solo instruments confirms a sense, immediately thereafter, of utopic future.¹¹⁹ Though the work ends not in triumph but in profound, unsettling mystery, even foreboding, the power of *A Sea Symphony*'s presentation of the singing voice remains a definitive aspect of the work's essential character and statement. The finale's massive climax – an ode to song itself – affirms the status of song as a broadly affirmative presence within Vaughan Williams's earliest symphonic utterance.

A Tradition of Reception

Following a performance of *A Sea Symphony* in Cambridge during 1911, Ursula Vaughan Williams relates that the composer had taken particular pleasure in learning that the chorus had been 'fresh and lovely in its tone – the band small but so good and the whole thing so spontaneous and vigorous'. Indeed, the composer related these comments in a letter to the conductor of the performance in April of that year.¹²⁰ While it might be suggested that Vaughan Williams can be seen here to propagate an early construction of the 'spontaneous' vigour of his own music, it is interesting that the critic for *The Manchester Guardian* also

¹¹⁹ See Vaughan Williams, *A Sea Symphony* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd., 1918, 261-63, 9 bars before letter P, wherein lyrical solo woodwinds and solo violin articulate an extended and isolated gesture of pastoral idyll.

¹²⁰ As quoted in U. Vaughan Williams (1964), 96.

discerned a ‘boisterous energy’ and ‘vital spirit’ in this work, as articulated in a review published the day following its premiere at the Leeds Festival in October 1910.¹²¹

Commentators have habitually heard the presence of a human spirit and physical energy in this music, a quality praised in spite of the extent to which the work was considered to challenge the capacities of both choir and orchestra beyond their natural limits. Lucy Broadwood expressed precisely this wonder at the extremities of *A Sea Symphony*’s vocal performativity in a letter written to Vaughan Williams. Here, she communicated her sense of the score’s difficulty for the chorus, and in particular the demands it seemed to make upon the performer’s body:

You are every bit as wicked as most composers of your time in expecting human larynxes to adapt themselves to impossible feats and to stretch or contract their vocal chords to notes not in their registers, but the Leeds chorus and your two soloists (tho’ they may send their throat doctors’ bills to you later!) did wonders and wove themselves with glorious energy into the lovely texture of the whole.¹²²

Percy Young recorded the response of a critic who had similar reservations:

Sometimes one could not hear the music because of the sound – it was an unanalysable, thunderous sea. One is almost tempted to imagine that modern audiences must suffer from deafness, inasmuch as some modern music finds it necessary to make this almost frantic appeal for hearing.¹²³

This suggestion of an energetic mass of sound speaks powerfully to the treatment of the voice in *A Sea Symphony*, highlighting the work’s urgent and particular command or ‘appeal’ to be heard. Numerous critics at the work’s same premiere attested to the ‘difficulty’ and ‘extremity’ – if not explicit ‘energy’ – of this new symphony, and further to its presentation of the multiple voices of performer and listener.

¹²¹ See ‘Leeds Musical Festival: Dr. Vaughan Williams “Sea Symphony”’, *The Manchester Guardian*, October 13th, 1910, 9.

¹²² As quoted in Ursula Vaughan Williams (1964), 89-90.

¹²³ Cited in Young (1953), 50.

The critic for the *Liverpool Daily Post* noted that

From the point of view of the chorus, the symphony is largely a thing of problems, with its almost endless scheme of changing rhythms and shifting tonalities, nor has the composer been too kindly disposed to the voices themselves. Top As from the sopranos are almost as plentiful as blackberries in autumn, and Dr. Vaughan Williams has not hesitated to insist upon them singing B natural in more than one part of the score. From this it may be reasonably inferred that the new symphony will not be lightly undertaken by the average choral society. As rendered this evening, however, the choir were equal to all demands, and the sopranos quite excelled themselves.¹²⁴

The vocal extremities recognized in this review function as a signal to the work's 'raising' of the choral medium to a new level both of difficulty, but also of aesthetic quality. The critic for *The Yorkshire Post* reported that

Since his *Toward the Unknown Region* of 1907 [Vaughan Williams] has gone much further in the direction of acquiring a distinctive idiom for the expression of his ideas, and one result is that his music, being less conventional in mould, is much more difficult of execution, and to some extent more obscure of interpretation.¹²⁵

If the sheer physicality of *A Sea Symphony* was not enough to convince listeners and critics of its glorification of the choral force as a sounding mass, Vaughan Williams was undoubtedly aware of the famed and distinctive tone quality possessed by such Yorkshire Choirs as the Leeds Chorus. This chorus performed annually not only new English music (and had premiered *Toward the Unknown Region* in 1907), but further performed large tracts drawn from a canonic body of English festival repertoire at each successive festival. While the vastness, the freedom, and the novelty of *A Sea Symphony*'s vocal treatment was in the aftermath of its premiere commented upon with some consistency, national critics – as much as local commentators – displayed a preoccupation as much with the quality and aesthetic vitality of the choral force interpreting the standard concert fare at each Festival performance,

¹²⁴ As quoted in *The Yorkshire Post*, Friday, October 14th, 1910, 7.

¹²⁵ *The Yorkshire Post*, Thursday, October 13th, 1910, 7.

as with the novelties of newly composed music.¹²⁶ This betrays a critical preoccupation that is suggestive of the extent to which the vocal character and excellence of this performing force acquired itself, a canonic status.

The emphasis placed by reviewers and listeners upon the quality of the Northern voice is worthy of attention, for the foregrounding of vocal tone speaks powerfully to the overwhelming vocal plenitude celebrated both by *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony*. It is also a further demonstration of the extent to which the uncovering of an English voice played a powerful role in celebrations of English musical vitality during these years. In the aftermath of the 1910 premiere, the *Yorkshire Post* gathered reviews of the festival from across the country, noting that the national press also remained eager to comment upon the vitality of an English tradition of choral performance, the *Morning Post* maintaining that

Yorkshire singers have always been held up as models to other choralists...the Leeds tone is unlike any other choir for the reason that Yorkshire voices are unlike any other voices, and the hearer was at once arrested and gratified by the extraordinary perfection of balance...the sound is there, and of quality as can be heard nowhere else. The sopranos have a fresh and ringing tone, and move without effort; the tenors are of the true tenor timbre, the contraltos rich and flexible, and the basses of fine solidity and depth that carry conviction.¹²⁷

The *Birmingham Post* had also devoted comment to the standard of the chorus, noting that

The voices seem uniformly good. The tenors have an unusual fullness and roundness of tone, and the basses are incomparable, as these Yorkshire basses always are. Their tone is so magnificent that it would be a treat to hear them simply sing the alphabet for ten minutes to the diatonic scale.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Charles Edward McGuire, for example, suggests that Festival audiences expected a performance of both Handel and Mendelssohn oratorios, which became 'the foundation of all Festival programmes' to the extent that 'it was long suspected that a festival would fail aesthetically and financially if they were omitted'. McGuire, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 245.

¹²⁷ As quoted in *The Yorkshire Post*, Friday, 14th October, 1910, 7. This glorification of the Northern voice forms part of the legacy of the controversy provoked by Elgar's claim that music-making in the Northern festivals was superior to that of Southern festivals. In a letter about the Morecambe Music Festival, quoted by *The Musical Times* on July 1st, 1903, Elgar had said: 'Some day the Press will awaken to the fact, already known abroad and to some few in England, that the living centre of music in Great Britain is not London, but somewhere farther North'. See Percy M. Young (1968), 'Preface', xvii.

¹²⁸ As quoted in *The Yorkshire Post*, Friday, 14th October, 1910, 7.

The *Liverpool Daily Post* expressed wonder at the mystery of the Northern voice, speculating that its particular tone colour might draw its sustenance from the Northern landscape, musing that

[s]ome day, perhaps, expert physiologists will tell us why it is that Yorkshire breeds better voices than do the neighbouring counties. It may be that the bracing atmosphere of the moor exudes some magic property which, like the air of the hills of Wales, is helpful to rich vocal equipment; or it may be, as already suggested, that local musicians quicken the musical impulse. Speculations aside, however, it is impossible to question the exceptional fitness of Yorkshire singers for choral undertakings on a large scale...¹²⁹

While one might argue that *A Sea Symphony*'s intensely exaggerated and performative singing quality might thus be attributed to Vaughan Williams's characteristically pragmatic desire to fully exploit the instrumental and vocal forces available to him, it might be countered that the narratives embodied by the works discussed in this chapter point to a rather more general glorification of an English choral voice: the setting of a stage upon which the voices of the North – voices which, as Percy Scholes observed, had from around 1830 led a revival in the standard of large-scale choral singing in England – could be set forth as the future of English music. Indeed, the famed voices of Yorkshire choruses had been praised in a manner quite different from earlier reviews for an 'artistry' possessed by each member of the mass: a 'rare gift of heart-art in music', as one critic for *The Musical Times* put it in a review of the Sheffield Chorus's performance of Handel's *Messiah*.¹³⁰

It might further be suggested that these critics seem also to discern something of the 'fresh' and 'out-of doors' quality of the vocal treatment here, as noted in the early reception of Vaughan Williams's songs. The critic for the *Liverpool Daily Post* was moved to muse upon the extent to which the voices singing in this work had been nourished by the air of the

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Scholes (1947), vol. I, 'The New Standard in Choral Performance', 45. As Scholes makes clear some pages later in 'The North Versus South Controversy', the 'contentious subject' of 'the vaunted superiority of Northern voices and Northern singing over Southern' was one which emerged in the English press during the 1920s in particular, and was one which originated in the late eighteenth century. For further examples of the perceived superiority of Northern singing, see Scholes (1947), vol. I, 49-51.

Yorkshire moors, and as the critic quoted by Percy Young suggested (above), the ‘sound’ of the work was ‘an unanalysable, thunderous sea’. While a consideration of the emerging ‘pastoral’ quality of Vaughan Williams’s music of this period has not been considered in detail in the current chapter, it might be briefly noted that the spatial and ‘visual’ quality communicated by *A Sea Symphony*’s opening was discerned by critics in the very outburst of the choral force: a statement of the sea that – in dialogue with the clashing of cymbals, the sweeping melodic curve of the opening melody, and the signal of the work’s title – evoked an image or experience that lay powerfully in the energy, ‘freshness’, and vocal tone of the projected mass of ‘natural’ voices. Whitman’s own concept of man as one with nature – as continuous with its material energy – informs the work’s aesthetic statement. As M. Jimmie Killingsworth suggests,

in his treatment of nature, [Whitman] varies from his Romantic predecessors...*Leaves of Grass* treats the natural world as the body of the earth, an eroticized material entity with a character that alternately entices and resists the poet’s curious questions and probings. The human body, with its spontaneously responsive and richly sensual impulses, is treated as continuous with nature... [Whitman] discovers in himself the same energies and materials that bring the earth to life...an understanding of nature as integral and inescapable...(literally ‘that which surrounds us’).¹³¹

Vaughan Williams selected texts for the very opening of the symphony that celebrate the myriad ways in which Whitman extols the ‘heaving breast’ of the ocean, which gives forth its ‘chant’ for all nations. The sea is personified as ‘laughing’ in the scherzo, the final movement proclaiming a union of poetic voice and ‘soul’, who ‘sailing the seas or walking the hills’, proclaims that ‘thoughts, silent thoughts of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing, bear me indeed as through the regions infinite, whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over ...’ The work performs a sense that ‘a vast similitude interlocks all’, as man, nature, and the voices of land and sea are celebrated in an energetic and cosmic immediacy.

¹³¹ M. Jimmie Killingsworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19-20.

That more recent critics have responded to the bodily immediacy of this work is thus unsurprising. For Wilfrid Mellers, *Toward the Unknown Region*'s journey towards 'spiritual fulfilment' resulted only in 'a pompous and circumstantial march' – a human destination, and one not so very unknown.¹³² In *A Sea Symphony*, on the other hand, Mellers finds, like many critics before him, a more explicit and pervasive musical energy: one which, as generated in conjunction with 'Whitman's anthropomorphic imagery' (which 'gives physicality to the musical gestures'), is also enacted from the opening's vocal outburst. The pregnant fanfare chords offered by the brass seem to store a potential energy, which offer 'a trigger for release'. Thereafter, Mellers hears the energy of a performing mass 'surging' through choric textures, as

[w]e soon realize that the swing of the unconscious sea here offers a freedom beyond that aspired to in the earlier Whitman piece. Fugato, as the choric voices enter, springs from an upward pentatonic phrase but modulates, chromatically and enharmonically, with irresistible impetus, as the 'white sails belly' and the steam ships 'come and go' on the 'dusky and undulating sea'. Whitman's anthropomorphic imagery gives physicality to the musical gestures...¹³³

Mellers's analysis of *A Sea Symphony* abounds in such dynamic adjectives, reflecting a response to the musical energy and physicality of this work that reaches beyond his suggestion of Whitman's provision of 'anthropomorphic imagery'. Mellers responds here to a 'live', resonant sonic energy that accords with the responses of countless other critics.¹³⁴

Dickinson also found in the first movement a 'boisterous flow of imagery and declamation, choral and solo, propelled by orchestral motives as convenient',¹³⁵ this 'boisterousness' returning in particular during the scherzo – a 'boisterousness' also discerned by Frank Howes in the work's finale, whose 'vitality' he compared with that of 'Let all the

¹³² Mellers (1989), 19.

¹³³ Mellers (1989), 20.

¹³⁴ As Scott Goddard suggested, in *A Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams 'makes closer contact with the poet's spiritual explorations reported in Whitman's direct speech. To such vernacular Vaughan Williams's music complies with unusual felicity and force'. See Scott Goddard, 'Vaughan Williams, O.M.', in A. L. Bacharach (ed.), *British Music of Our Time* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1946), 83-98, 85.

¹³⁵ Dickinson (1963), 183-4.

World in Every Corner Sing’, the last of the *Five Mystical Songs*.¹³⁶ As Michael Kennedy pointed out with regards to ‘Antiphon’, ‘the exultant mood of this song was to be many times repeated in later works’. Kennedy also emphasizes the extent to which a sufficiently vigorous vocal realization of this work underpins its aesthetic essence, declaring

Its rather noisy heartiness does not always ring true if the performance is loosely conducted and raggedly sung. Nowadays we recognize this exuberant, bell-chiming, rhythmical music as V. W. [sic] in his ‘open-air service’ mood. When the songs first appeared, the idiom of ‘Antiphon’ was remarked upon as ‘strange’ to most English composers.¹³⁷

In this, Kennedy makes reference to the strangeness of the sudden outburst embodied by the last of the *Five Mystical Songs*, rather in the manner in which critics responded to the conclusion of *Toward the Unknown Region*. In his evocation of an ‘open-air service mood’, Kennedy recalls Vaughan Williams’s tale of the open-air preacher, whose unconscious, communicative song was discussed at length in an earlier chapter. Hubert Foss also discerned in *A Sea Symphony* something akin to Kennedy’s ‘noisy’ characterization, considering that the symphony represented a ‘development’ of *Toward the Unknown Region*’s decisive turn away from the methods of an earlier choral tradition, asserting that

[i]f in 1907 Vaughan Williams opened the windows upon the stuffy chambers of the outworn Victorian tradition of English choral music, in 1910 he laid it bare to the four winds of heaven, with Whitman adding the energy of human directive force to the natural ebullience of the sea air...The scale is large, and there is a flood of musical invention.¹³⁸

Alive to the extent to which the novelty of this work and its ‘massive choral treatment’ had, over the course of fifty years, been somewhat dulled, Foss reminds the reader of the ‘shocking’ aural experience of this work for listeners in 1910, maintaining that while its

¹³⁶ Howes (1958), 133.

¹³⁷ Kennedy (1980), 133.

¹³⁸ Foss (1950), 92.

large-scale choral proposition may have seemed, by 1950, to represent an outmoded idiom, the energy of its message remains constant in its expression of an arresting physicality:

...to-day we find *A Sea Symphony* safe and comfortable in idiom, disturbing only in the gusty vigour of its spirit. When, 'forty years on', one experiences the work again in the shock of aural perception, one is conscious of its magnitude – though it is, one finds, larger in conception than in achievement...the musical effect is, each time anew, one of unquenchable freshness. The audience leaves the hall mentally drenched in salt spray.¹³⁹

The powerful effect of this music, as Foss implies, derives largely from the overwhelming residue of, and demand for, physical exertion that is inherent in the score's words and music. Having claimed that the symphony 'begins and ends as a song, and as a song it is huge', he continues to exclaim, '[w]hat selfless outpouring of voice it demands! Every square inch of lung, every foot-pound of diaphragm pressure, will hardly suffice'.¹⁴⁰

Thus, like so many of Vaughan Williams's pre-War works, *A Sea Symphony* presents a celebration of the very act of singing. By staging the performative voices of community music in this way, the work becomes a symphonic voice which draws upon the voice of the community – and the historical sustenance of voices past, present, and future – as both its narrative energy and climactic goal. To the extent that such narratives stage an idea and practice of English voice that was under construction during this period, the works discussed in this chapter claim a 'speaking' quality that works both on its own terms, and in a dialogue with the culture in which such ideas emerged. The enacting or re-enacting of an historical journey from past to present can also be seen to engage a broader series of 'inventions' of English musical tradition, as shall be further detailed in the concluding remarks, below. As

¹³⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁴⁰ Foss (1950), 91.

such, Vaughan Williams's early narratives of song become one of a series of contemporaneous practices, or performances, of English cultural identity.¹⁴¹

English Narratives of Song: Concluding Remarks

Aside from the 'invention' of English folk song, perhaps one of the most prominent cultural traditions forged through narratives of early twentieth-century musical identity was the continuity of an English choral tradition (a narrative which became a practice of re-enactment through the regeneration of English choral music throughout the opening decade of the century). Vaughan Williams himself laid claim to the vitality of this ancestral heritage as a material from which English composers might draw sustenance, in a well-known and often-quoted passage from his 'Musical Autobiography':

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 Battishill 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.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ For the essential study of the various ceremonies, rituals, and performances considered instrumental in inventing early twentieth-century national identities, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.) (1983). An important invention of English tradition that cannot be discussed in the current thesis but which is undoubtedly relevant to the narratives explored in the works considered here is the invention of the Edwardian Pageant Play in 1905. This genre, which achieved wildly popular success during the opening decade of the century, involved the community 're-enactment' of a local historical past, as writers carved narratives from local events into a play which brought the glories of an English past to bear upon the performance of a prosperous future. Importantly, the finale of the play, staged out of doors, saw the gathering together of the hundreds of local performers involved in the play, as both audience and actors sang a hymn on the site of a place of historic importance (often the local church). This collapse of spectator and performer in an act of singing was habitually accompanied by the pealing of bells. The genre's aims and myriad features are detailed in the autobiography of Louis Napoleon Parker, a prominent director and writer of Pageant Plays from 1905 onwards: see Parker, *Several of My Lives* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1928). Paul Readman devotes considerable attention to the significance of the pageant play in English culture of the early twentieth century in his article 'The Place of the Past in English Culture c. 1890-1914', *Past & Present*, 186 (February, 2005), 147-200. See also Meghan Lau, 'Performing History: The War-Time Pageants of Louis Napoleon Parker', *Modern Drama*, 54.3 (Fall, 2011), 265-86. That Vaughan Williams was himself involved in pageantry throughout his life is clear from his work on *The Pilgrim's Progress* project (1906), as much as from his composition of music for two pageant plays during the inter-war years. See Renne Stewart, 'Ralph Vaughan Williams and the two Surrey Pageants: *The Abinger Pageant* (1934) and *England's Pleasant Land* (1938)', *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 53 (February, 2012), 22-3.

¹⁴² Vaughan Williams, 'Musical Autobiography' (1950), as quoted by Dibble, in Foreman (ed.) (1998), 38.

As the composer further emphasized in his article ‘Elizabethan Music and the Modern World’, the vital impulse of the choral tradition was rooted as much in the compositional glories of the past as in an ethos of convivial music-making, this the very essence from which ancestral English music arose. As Vaughan Williams maintained, this music lay dormant within an English spirit, and required only re-awakening:

What we have done before we can do again. We feel we have the heart of the matter in us...In the present circumstances, we must not expect to find it in the great places of the world or in the front page of the daily paper, but if we look behind the scenes at the local competition festival, the village choral society, our schools and universities, who will dare to say that music is not with us a living art?...If the people are to believe [the composer] he must speak the language of the people...Here is what we can learn from the Elizabethans. They knew nothing of international celebrities or of world movements in art, but wherever four or five people were gathered together they wished to make music on those instruments which heaven had provided for them – their own natural voices. And who was to invent that music for them?...they knew they only had to go into the next street and call Mr Byrd or Mr Weelkes or Mr Wilbye, who could set our own incomparable poetry to their own incomparable music – incomparable indeed, for it ventured into regions undreamt of by our continental contemporaries...it had something better than all this, something common to all English literature and art – the spirit of gay and careless adventure, bound by no academic restrictions...The Elizabethan composers wanted just to express themselves and the words which they set for their neighbours to sing...¹⁴³

While the fashion for madrigal singing came to Britain from Italy, it is interesting that Vaughan Williams stages here an invention of Elizabethan Englishness: one which enforces, once again, the act of English music-making as one rooted in vocal, careless, and trackless adventure. This is also noted by David Maw, who highlights in his study of the twentieth-century instrumental ‘Phantasy’ the desire of composers to re-enact the convivial, performative mode of Elizabethan vocal music as a spur to the composition of new English chamber music. As Maw asserts of this ‘invented’ genre:

the ideal of community and music-making were not just a socialist, post-Victorian ideal of moral improvement, but also, were bound up in the historical appeals to the Golden age of Tudor music.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Manning (ed.) (2008), 69-70.

¹⁴⁴ David Maw, “‘Phantasy Mania’: Quest for National Style”, in Emma Hornby and David Maw (eds.), *Essays on*

Maw reflects that contemporary figures such as W. H. Harris found that the ‘Tudor’ period represented ‘the beginning of a spirit of comradeship’, where

From Elizabethan times when men delighted in their ‘consort of viols’...Englishmen have loved to co-operate and make music together, and some of the most characteristically English forms, e.g. the glee, the part-song, the instrumental Phantasy, are possessed of the sporting spirit....And whether it be in the ringing of a peal of bells, in a game of cricket, football, or the more serious game of war, the elements of fair-play, endurance, and comradeship must enter.¹⁴⁵

Taken together, such narratives participate in a particular invention of musical Englishness by revivalists of the early twentieth century: one which again engaged contemporaneous ideas of the discovery of a lost and earlier England through journeys of ‘gay and careless adventure’. As Vaughan Williams suggests, the practice and ethics of Elizabethan ‘comradeship’ and ‘endurance’ were predicated upon the use of the ‘natural instrument’ of the human voice. As Maw maintains, such ideals were encouraged by Walter Cobbett’s ‘Phantasy’ competition, through which the vocal forms of the Elizabethans provided the impetus to re-enactment and regeneration.

It is interesting, moreover, that along with the endeavours of war and sport, the ringing of bells was evoked by Harris as a particularly English pursuit, and one which also demanded the traditional English qualities of ‘fair-play, endurance, and comradeship’. As was earlier mentioned, Vaughan Williams imagined an emotional connection between the ringing of bells and the act of song, celebrating a tradition of music left behind by the ‘song maker’, ‘long after the maker is buried’. While in that instance, his alignment of bells and music-making was brought into dialogue with his notion of the oral evolution of folk song, it may be posited here that such bells were also aligned during this period with the Elizabethan choral tradition, which in turn was credited with expressing a spirit of comradeship claimed in

the History of English Music (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 97-121, 100-1.

¹⁴⁵ As cited by Maw, in Hornby and Maw (eds.) (2010), 100-1.

constructions both of English musical and broader cultural identity.¹⁴⁶

Vaughan Williams's ambition to 're-enact' historical models of music-making is suggested by the manner in which, during 1902, he composed a 'madrigal' entitled 'Ring Out Your Bells', a setting of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet, dedicated to the Magpie Madrigal Society.¹⁴⁷ Here, he imitates the style of the Elizabethan part song. The text provocatively tells of love that is dead; at the end, however, the singers sing out that 'love is not dead/Love is not dead, but sleepeth...' According to Vaughan Williams's ideals of 'loving one another through our art', an idea of communion in song – and the ringing of bells – points to a project of reawakening a mode of English music that is inherent in communal music-making: one which marks the culmination of the narratives of his works.

It might also be considered that the journey embodied by the singer, led by their 'local leader' in the practice of English choral singing, is itself enacted in the narratives of the works explored above, as becomes clear through consideration of Vaughan Williams's tale of his engagement with the Abinger Chorus in their preparation for a local festival. Here, an act of musical creation, participation, and understanding is imagined as one of endurance and journey: one which results in the achievement of a mode of spiritual and musical enrichment and 'understanding', promising a vital English future. In an account of the arduous struggle involved in preparing for festival performance, Vaughan Williams maintains that months of toil would culminate in a final evening concert, whereby 'choirs from towns and villages around spend the day singing in competition and we have a concert, in the evening, at which

¹⁴⁶ For further discussion of bells in the English imagination, particularly as relevant to definitions of Elizabethan national identity, see David Cressy, *Bonfires & Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004). Bells have long been associated with vocal music-making in the English imagination. By way of preface to his 2002 work *The Ringing Isle* (for symphonic wind band), the British composer Jonathan Dove explained that the title of his piece was derived from the way in which 'Handel called Britain "the ringing isle", because when he came to live here, he heard bells ringing everywhere: great bells in towers, and hand bells in some of the first houses he visited. The sound of people ringing the changes is a peculiarly British sound of celebration, and it is the sound of communal music-making, so it seemed a good starting point for a piece celebrating British musical life. The Ringing Isle also conjures up an image of some magical island, and although I have borrowed some change-ringing phrases...I was also musically wondering what it might feel like, perhaps on an ocean voyage, to discover such an island'. See Jonathan Dove, *The Ringing Isle* (London: Faber Music, 2003).

¹⁴⁷ See Kennedy (1996), 15. Published in 1904-5 by J. Laudy & Co. (London), in 'Part Songs by Modern Composers', no. 41.

all the choirs join and sing in one body'.¹⁴⁸ In his article, 'Local Musicians', the journey towards musical vitality is mapped as a broader allegory of English musical endeavor, from which, as Vaughan Williams explains, national music would thereafter flourish:

It is my privilege once a year to conduct our local choirs in concerts of great music...

My business on these occasions, is to come in at the last minute, wave a stick about and say 'very good', but I know well that the real hard work has been done elsewhere, namely at those weekly winter evenings with their devoted leaders and enthusiastic singers who for the sake of music will after a hard day's work endure arduous toil and drudgery for an end which only gradually appears in view.

Week by week these dedicated hierophants trudge miles through mud and snow to a cold but stuffy village schoolroom lit by one smelly oil-lamp which usually goes out half-way through.

The only accompaniment is a strange array of broken keys and snapped wires which was once a pianoforte. They are but a small body, there are probably only two tenors and one of these being the village doctor, is invariably called out in the middle...

However, nothing daunts us (if I may for the moment identify myself with this glorious company of apostles). There we sit, week after week, wrestling with this strange mystery of music...

We are not experts, many of us have at first but the vaguest idea of what sounds are represented by these curious little black blobs and straight stems at which we stare, but this weakness is also our strength; until we have made these sounds bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, we cannot attempt to sing them...

For a while we work by faith alone, but one day suddenly revelation comes to us, the notes we are singing are, all at once, not mere sounds, but symbols of a new world, something beyond mundane experience. We have looked through the 'magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn'.

But the end is not yet. On a certain day in spring we shall meet all the other small bands of singers who like us have been struggling alone.

Then we shall realize the profound mathematical formula of all choral singing: $2+2=40$. By the very force of numbers we have each magnified our own power and imagination tenfold. Not that we have lost our own individuality, but that we have merged it in harmonious concord with the other devotees who like us have been working hard to the same end. (Is this not perhaps a microcosm of what we all wish for the whole world?)

By faith, hope and love we have achieved that, compared with which the achievements of the greatest virtuoso, if he be not also informed by these three, is but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. We have unlocked the heart of music's mystery, we have found our faith and have proclaimed it all to such as have ears to hear...

History emanates from the parish pump. We musicians of hundreds of Abingers all over the country are making history because we are laying well and truly those foundations from which alone the great artist can spring.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Vaughan Williams, 'Making Your Own Music', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 75-8, 77.

¹⁴⁹ Vaughan Williams, 'Local Musicians' (1939), in Manning (ed.) (2008), 79-81, 80-81.

While extensive, this account is worth recalling in this way for it speaks powerfully of the journey embodied by the textures, images, and large-scale narratives of music-making projected by a number of Vaughan Williams's pre-War works. The arrival of the 'true song of God singing his songs' is indeed a statement of powerful authorial intent, but it is significant that *A Sea Symphony* traces this musical narrative in such a way that its strength is shown to derive from the voices of those who have followed the lead of the sopranos and baritones: the 'professionals', who become 'guides' to that region. It is the voices of English musicians that are ultimately staged in symphonic climax: a climax which sings of the utopian future of English music.

The spatial quality of Vaughan Williams's vocal statements enact the spaces of music-making itself, moreover, and thus become performances of English history. Such temporal and spatial images of musical community were promoted elsewhere by Vaughan Williams in 'Making Your Own Music', wherein he imagined a Whitmanesque society of music-making as

a great pyramid with its apex in the clouds among the great names of art and its base firmly fixed on the groundwork of our music-making. And below that again the sure foundation of those melodies which our forefathers made and which still live for us to hear, to love and above all to sing.¹⁵⁰

Vaughan Williams imagined the historical progress of music – its future success and vitality – in terms of the rise and fall of the 'waves' produced by the makers of music, an image which again seems to offer a powerful reference to the ways in which, for example, the 'carolling' of the soloists in the finale of *A Sea Symphony* are heard, following the monumental strength of the communal voice's 'singing'. In this way, the music stages these voices as the pinnacle of the pyramid, or of a musical wave:

¹⁵⁰ Vaughan Williams, 'Making Your Own Music' (1939), in Manning (ed.) (2007), 78.

In England we are too apt to think of music in terms of the cosmopolitan celebrities of the Queen's Hall and the Covent Garden Opera. These are, so to speak, the crest of the wave, but behind that crest must be the driving force which makes the body of the wave. It is below the surface that we must look for the power which occasionally throws up a Schnabel, a Sibelius, or a Toscanini. What makes me hope for the musical future of any country is not the distinguished names which appear on the front page of the newspapers, but the music that is going on at home, in the schools, and in the local choral societies.

Can we expect garden flowers to grow in soil so barren that wild flowers cannot exist there?¹⁵¹

The narratives of Vaughan Williams's works, performed in festivals for which he himself prepared amateur choirs throughout his life (even after becoming a composer of international repute), must surely have invited the creative participation of English singers and listeners with considerable power. Such narratives serve to include and honour the creative contribution of English voices in a music designed for, and performative of, its cultural affirmation of English identity.

Yet as has become clear throughout this study, the preoccupation with material sound that informed the composer's essential understanding of music was itself important in promoting the 'spoken' invitation to the participation of English musicians, their voices invited and implicated in the 'present' moments of his works. As such, these English narratives of song work as part of a larger dialogue through which Vaughan Williams defines the speaking of an 'authentic English voice'. The narratives of his early works project a communicative quality that themselves illuminate the ways in which an 'intelligible', 'robust', 'sincere', and 'spontaneous' music became, in various ways, statements of this music's 'Englishness'. While the 'idealized' mode of the composer's early works has here been re-inscribed – a 'vision of Albion' against which, as several authors have recently suggested, detractors of Vaughan Williams have rallied – it is important to note that the composer's Edenic vision of England was more historically informed than has previously been acknowledged. This chapter demonstrates that Vaughan Williams's music became a discourse upon the vitality of English musical culture, and thus upon the aesthetic vitality of

¹⁵¹ Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 5-6.

its own vocal materials. So powerful was the singing of Vaughan Williams's music that, as is shown in in the following chapter, the composer both references and challenges this utopian vision of English musical future in his post-War works: a challenge issued once more through the presentation of multiple voices and songs. This statement of vital musical future could not, in the wake of the horrors of the First World War, speak with so confident a song of affirmation.

Chapter 4

Songs of Desire and Lament: Voices of Post-War England

Framing the final movement of Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* (1916-1921), a solo voice intones a wordless cantilena, as though from great distance, against the muted, hollow roll of a drum.¹ The entry of the human voice – literally distant, its human source removed as it vocalizes off-stage – offers a haunting opening gesture: one that returns at the end of the movement, its drum roll replaced by strings in high register. Thus the song revokes the symphony's hymn-like climax and the music recedes, finally, into silence.

The expressive ambivalence of this high, wordless voice, its embodied presence thrown into question, has preoccupied writers on countless occasions, yet few have offered a detailed or adequate interpretation of its complex aesthetic statement, which in both its expressive and structural instability presents a profoundly equivocal final gesture. In traditional accounts, critics have been almost reluctant to probe the disturbing presence of this wordless voice, simultaneously acknowledging its ambivalent 'disembodied' statement, while clinging, in the final reading, to an optimistic interpretation of the despoiled pastoral landscape evoked by this work, the concluding vocalise an affirmative testament to the place of man therein. Wilfrid Mellers's response is typical in this respect. Having characterized the vocal solo as 'a disembodied song that ring[s] over the ravaged fields', he concludes that the gesture ultimately signifies 'some essential bond of blessedness between man and nature', and finally that '[i]nnocence survives horror, and the angel-lark promises a birth'.²

Michael Kennedy presents a similar account in an article commemorating fifty years of the composer's death, in which he describes how 'a girl's voice rhapsodizes over the battlefield in a funeral lament',³ a characterization suggestive of Roger Savage's claim that the solo voice can be heard as 'a keening soprano solo-nymph', weeping, as Daniel Grimley interprets, at the tomb of the pastoral hero in a Theocritian arcadia.⁴ Like Mellers, however,

¹ This cantilena is usually sung by a soprano, but Vaughan Williams also sanctioned the use of a tenor.

² Mellers (1989), 91-3.

³ Kennedy, 'The Vaughan Williams Identity', *Gramophone*, 86 (August, 2008), 36-9, 37.

⁴ Savage, as quoted and paraphrased by Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 166.

Kennedy insists that despite the invocation of deathly lament, ‘the symphony is certainly not nihilistic’. This calls to mind his suggestion in the 1964 monograph that the off-stage cantilena is ‘unbearably poignant...like a lament for the flowers of the forest cut down in the 1914-18 war; yet the grief is somehow transcended and becomes more cosmic than personal without losing intensity.’⁵

Such characterizations are endemic as critics and scholars habitually identify the entry of this voice as a significant symbol of human presence while at once sensing but ultimately refusing its role in undermining the *Pastoral*’s ability to give forth a final embodied song. In 1953, Percy Young acknowledged that ‘the distant voice...can also sound inhuman... The incantation is – *senza misura* – as of a primitive hymn.’ Typically, however, he concludes that ‘in contrast to that which ends *Riders to the Sea* it is ignorant of tragedy’.⁶ A similar response is found in Hubert Foss’s study of 1950. Having baldly recognized the song as ‘a disembodiment’, he interprets the vocal entry as somehow evocative of a heightened sense of spiritual fulfilment: ‘the spirit of man ecstasized as in a morality’.⁷ This is somewhat at odds with Frank Howes’s characterization of the concluding cantilena’s affirmation, which in this reading becomes a statement of man’s physical connection with the land. As Howes suggests, while ‘the clarinet is allowed to deputize for [the voice’s] wordless cantilena’, in practice ‘it never is so sung’, for ‘[t]he effect is to be that of a human figure as part of the landscape’.⁸

In recent years, stringent attempts to rethink the ‘idealized’ rural mode supposedly typified by works such as *A Pastoral Symphony* have convincingly demonstrated that far from presenting an ahistorical retreat into an ahistorical, regenerative rural past, this work

⁵ Kennedy (1980), 171.

⁶ Young (1953), 154.

⁷ Foss (1950), 135.

⁸ Howes (1954), 28. Also notable here is Lionel Pike’s characterization of the *Pastoral Symphony*’s voice as a ‘disembodiment’: one which this author compares to the vocalise introduced in the second movement of Carl Nielsen’s *Sinfonia espansiva* (1911-12). As Pike suggests, Vaughan Williams’s wordless soprano is employed to ‘an entirely different purpose and result’, for while ‘Nielsen provides human warmth, especially since the lines are sung in duet by a male and a female voice, Vaughan Williams, by contrast, offers a wordless lamentation, not in a warm and fully orchestrated E flat like Nielsen, but disembodied (“distant” in Vaughan Williams’s direction), over nothing but a drum roll, and in a modal idiom. It is not plainsong but a timeless, keening, kind of lamentation. Personally, I do not find the result “human”, as Frank Howes does...’ See Pike (2003), 100.

embodies a particularly powerful expression of Vaughan Williams's 'painful' pastoral visions, in which a 'sense of loss and of man's ambivalent place in a fallen world' is redolent in the work's conception.⁹ In many ways the most dominant and today contested category to which an 'English' musical style has traditionally been referred, the genre of the pastoral has become the object of numerous studies which seek to probe the ways in which Vaughan Williams's evocations of landscape become, especially after the First World War, 'fractured' responses to earlier ideals.¹⁰ These are works that seem to display an ambivalent attitude towards traditional materials and processes, both as historically embodied by the pastoral genre, and by the musical language of the composer's earlier works. As such the 'pastoral' presents a rich site upon which to explore Vaughan Williams's aesthetically – and socially – 'progressive' statements, and indeed *A Pastoral Symphony* has become something of a focal point for critics who seek to relocate Vaughan Williams's national music within debates surrounding aesthetic modernity (discourses from which he has been excluded for some years).¹¹

That said, it is notable that even in readings which make claims for the progressive and 'abstract' dimensions of the composer's Third Symphony, discussion of its concluding song and the possible role of this voice in the articulation of a 'broken' evocation of landscape are tentative to say the least. In his 2010 study of a 'dark pastoral' in twentieth-century English music, Simon Shaw-Miller reaches little further than Wilfrid Mellers in offering an interpretation of the symphony's concluding gesture, treating the final voice evasively, such that its role in affirming an optimistic 'benediction' hangs rather awkwardly over the silence articulated precisely through the hushed statement of this poignant cantilena:

⁹ Frogley, in *BBC Music Magazine* (July, 1993), 33, as quoted in James Day (1998), 102.

¹⁰ See, for example, Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010).

¹¹ Eric Saylor suggests that 'the modernism of the *Pastoral Symphony* is not represented in the form of radical change to Vaughan Williams's musical language...but rather, as [Christopher] Butler suggests, of allusions to past practices in a contemporary context.' Saylor continues that '[m]any conventions of musical pastoralism are present' in this work, including 'the stark solos for trumpet and soprano in the second and fourth movements'. Yet the author concludes, '[Vaughan Williams] was faced with...figuring out whether his art was still relevant. In fact, his concerns are those of a modernist, driven by the need to make sense of an alienating postwar world while armed with only prewar artistic experience'. See Saylor (2008), 48-9.

The last movement, which pulls together elements of the previous movement, offers the briefest of pauses (a literal breath), with a soft drum roll on A, over which an offstage human voice sings a wordless pentatonic rhapsody. Again, the voice gives a tangible sense of space as it is positioned away from the orchestra, singing across the distance, as a lark. A short bridging passage brings us to the main subject: a stately, gently unfolding, pentatonic melody in two asymmetrical phrases, first in the woodwind, and then the *pianissimo* brass and strings further the benediction. This melody, blossoming as it does throughout the whole orchestra, cannot help but stand as a communal counterpoint to the lone human voice at the opening and close of the movement. A more agitated middle section follows in contrast, travelling through a number of modulations, until a unison passage at the climax subsides into a restatement of the benediction. The movement ends as it began, with a lone, distant, human voice over the thinnest of harmonic pedals.¹²

While Shaw-Miller acknowledges a certain isolation as heralded by the solo voice – an alienated ‘counterpoint’ to the ‘communal’ statement of the instrumental progress – his sense that the voice sings ‘as a lark’, affirming a final ‘benediction’, seems somewhat inappropriate given the ‘lone, distant’ conclusion, in which the human voice in fact sings registrally beneath (rather than above) ‘the thinnest of harmonic pedals’. Though it is not explicit in his reading, Shaw-Miller points in this way to the extent to which the ‘blossoming’ orchestral melodies (elsewhere described as ‘generative’ and ‘organic’) exist in painful dialogue with the isolated, distant voice, which seems indeed to evoke the ‘lark’ of earlier works – a song in full flight, and yet, one whose ‘free expression’ articulates, for many critics, a painful sense of absence.

It is perhaps Daniel Grimley’s reading that poses the most detailed and provocative characterization of the *Pastoral Symphony*’s concluding voice: one which explores the way in which the song is able at once to absorb and to disdain a myriad of responses to its disembodied articulation of human presence. As this author suggests,

the pitch structure of the opening solo suggests a more troubled or ambivalent vision than [Wilfrid] Mellers proposes: commonly analysed as an A Aeolian collection, the solo might be profitably conceived, as Christopher Mark has suggested, as the combination of two related pentatonic collections (based on D and E). The more complex modal formation creates an underlying instability, which suggests that the solo can be heard both as a sensual, eroticized voice (siren), and also as an absence or lack of presence, similar to the unearthly, non-human effect of the female choir ululating above the moan of the wind machine at the end

¹² Simon Shaw Miller, in Shaw-Miller and Smiles (eds.) (2010), 146.

of the *Sinfonia Antartica* (a work which revisits much of the emotional territory of the Third Symphony). Like the trumpet cadenza in the second movement, the solo voice is also concerned with the process of recollection, remembrance, and passing away. And its modernist sense of disembodiment and haunting strikingly parallels a strangely arcadian advertisement for the Darbycord recordable gramophone printed in the *Illustrated London News*, 29 April 1922 (a few months after the premiere of the symphony), which offered customers the chance to ‘photograph’ their voice so that ‘the songs and sayings of the little ones, the precious gems of fleeting childhood, and the memories of the “Golden Age” can be preserved’...Vaughan Williams’s evocation of an ‘air from another planet’ does perhaps suggest, as Mellers’s analysis implies, the passage through purgatory into a further realm beyond immediate perception. But if the ending acts like a threshold to a new world, it is one whose essential character is silence.¹³

Grimley points to much that will be unfolded in the current chapter. Acknowledging the complex manner in which *A Pastoral Symphony*’s concluding voice seems to function as both a gesture of ‘erotic’ vocal plenitude and simultaneously as a disembodied gesture of ‘decay’, this reading demands considerable elaboration, especially given the extent to which its claim for a plentiful yet somehow absent voice appears to have been latent in the work’s earliest reception. As critics discerned in reviews of the work’s premiere, the symphony bears an almost excessive lyricism throughout – an instrumental evocation of a generative, plentiful song.¹⁴ In this context, the final presentation of an actual human voice is indeed evocative of a ‘recollection’ – a memory, as in earlier works, of the ‘songs and voices of a “Golden Age”’ (these in part evoked by the excessive lyricism of the symphony’s earlier movements). The current study will consider further the possible substance, or nature, of the final recollection of the human voice: one whose apparent reference to the role of song in both English culture, and in Vaughan Williams’s early works, is painfully challenged.

By drawing attention to the ‘sirenic’ quality of the symphony’s concluding vocalise, Grimley tacitly acknowledges the extent to which the voice in *A Pastoral Symphony* exploits

¹³ Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 167-8.

¹⁴ As Herbert Howells remarked in an extraordinary review of the symphony’s premiere, there is a sense in the work of “‘Tune” which never ceases. One after another come tributary themes, short in themselves, and so fashioned so as to throw one into doubting their being new; one suspects that, in them, what was a part has become a whole’. See Howells, ‘Vaughan Williams’s “Pastoral Symphony”’, *Music & Letters*, 3.2 (April, 1922), 124. It is interesting that Howells later notes that ‘[t]here are perhaps too many co-existent tunes for even the experienced listener’. This sense that Vaughan Williams’s inter-war works both court and obscure a listener’s ‘songful’ experience will be unfolded throughout this chapter. See Howells (1922), 130.

its own capacity to call attention to its quality as an utterance of the human voice: a different mode of music, heightened through its unadorned, wordless presentation, free of any but the starkest timpanum accompaniment, and framed away from the larger instrumental progress.¹⁵ In this way, the framing cantilena becomes what Carolyn Abbate would in an operatic context call the ‘voice-object’, where the material voice is presented such that it forces its performative human quality into the foreground of a listener’s experience:

[t]here is a radical autonomization of the human voice that occurs, in varying degrees, in all vocal music. The sound of the singing voice becomes, as it were, a ‘voice-object’ and the sole object of the listener’s attention. This attention is thus drawn away from words, plot, character, and even from music as it resides in the orchestra, or music as formal gestures or abstract shape...When opera allows itself to project this voice-object, it also runs into peril – for, according to Michael Poizat, the ‘presence of the performer’ may well suddenly intrude to impede the listener’s contemplation...¹⁶

Vaughan Williams frequently provided what might be considered a different, communal ‘voice object’ at the culmination of works such as *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony*, where the ‘physical effect’ of musical sound (this the broad essence Abbate seeks to capture in her study) is laid bare, the listener invited to the performative space of the music. In *A Pastoral Symphony*, the concluding song seems again to inhabit a different musical space from that which it precedes and follows, its first entry issuing a plangent appeal to the embodied experience of a listener: a moment of ‘high poetry in this exquisite abstraction’, according to Scott Goddard.¹⁷

And yet, while the textless isolation of this voice marks out its very performative immediacy, this also contributes to its distanced, disembodied status: a status which disdains any invitation to participation, either from the listener to whom it appears to call (or at least to present its vocal materiality), as much as to the inescapably ‘tuneful’ instrumental progress

¹⁵ As Grimley emphasizes, ‘the whole movement is predicated on several binary oppositions: retrospection and renewal, stability and growth or decay. This structure is reinforced by the basic opposition of two contrasting types of material: the improvisatory opening, with its prominent cantilena for solo soprano, and the Moderato maestoso that follows, a slow sarabande where the whole orchestra moves forwards with a single sense of purpose.’ See Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 166.

¹⁶ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10-11.

¹⁷ Goddard, in Bacharach (ed.) (1946), 92.

from which it is separated. In this reading, the concluding cantilena announces itself as a material vocal presence that is, at once, a disembodied absence: one that is particularly painful as the conclusion to a work which, as Herbert Howells intuited (and as Grimley elaborates), is generated from ‘a sense of “Tune” which never ceases’.

As such, the concluding song seems to function as an ‘uncanny’ and ‘terrifying’ voice, in Abbate’s theory, for ‘it threatens to bear *too* great an emotional charge, becoming pure unfolded cry.’ Indeed, the *Pastoral*’s voice functions as the overwhelming arrival of a vocal reality evoked but not realized throughout the lyrical instrumental progress of the work, while simultaneously undermining this function, not only through its unstable harmonic profile, but through its disembodied, textless, unseen presence. In opera, such a voice becomes, as Abbate suggests,

not a character-presence but an irrational nonbeing, terrifying because the locus of the voice is now not a character, not human, and somehow not present. This same uncanny effect, I would claim, can govern moments marked by a singing voice in instrumental (that is, nonvocal, textless music). This fear [is] instilled by a voice *without* a physically present human character...¹⁸

It is perhaps the supreme disjunction of *A Pastoral Symphony* that while its instrumental melodies seem continually to imply a human subjectivity and a communal, contrapuntal statement, these melodies bear less a ‘terrifying’ presence (even in light of their unstable modal presentation) than the final delivery of the human voice: one which cannot sustain a function enforced either in an English culture of song-making, or as performed in Vaughan Williams’s pre-War works. As Grimley suggests, this voice is both sirenic and fleeting. It is evocative of the ‘lark’ taking flight: a moment of ‘birth’, as Mellers underlines – the birth of a voice sought by the instrumental melodies ‘sung’ throughout. Yet it exists – harmonically, structurally, and gesturally – in a dislocated relationship to all that has come before. It presents itself as a moment of recession, like the fading and unreachable songs of a distant rural past. This picture of history, and of the communicative voice staged in earlier

¹⁸ Abbate (1991), 11.

narratives, exists in fragments, shards whose reconfiguration lies continually both within and beyond the reach of the listener.

H. C. Colles sensed something of this when he claimed an inherently vocal and songful tradition for English music in his 1928 monograph, *Voice and Verse*. Taking this symphony as a quintessentially ‘English’ expression, he maintained that

Vaughan Williams’s Pastoral Symphony [sic.], for example, though written for a modern orchestra, is vocal through and through and entirely in line with that English tradition which we have traced through generations of song. British audiences are only in danger of confounding it with the music which seems eccentric or iconoclastic because they have so completely forgotten their native tradition.¹⁹

Given that the overwhelming lyricism of this work was noted from its earliest reviews, it is difficult to imagine how a listener could avoid some awareness of the English ‘vocal tradition’ referenced throughout *A Pastoral Symphony*. As Percy Young asserted (and as Colles paradoxically emphasizes), the music seems to draw attention to its melodious, song-like quality such that it becomes an inescapable invocation of tradition, and furthermore an invitation to the listener’s experience of such tradition:

[t]he composer sees over the scene the idea which created the scenery, with which he identifies himself and, for that matter, us. We are, further, identified with a tradition, the reflective tradition which distinguishes English lyricism...thus the beginning, thus the end of the symphony’ [and at this point he quotes the soprano solos].²⁰

With this in mind, Colles’s sense that the listener is somehow distanced from their ‘native’ lyrical tradition points to *A Pastoral Symphony*’s complex presentation of an idea of communal song and of its singing. The conclusion of the work communicates a powerful sense that the ‘traditional’ function of song has been only partially recollected, the final appearance of the voice a futile and frustrated gesture of failure.

¹⁹ Colles (1928), 164.

²⁰ Young (1953), 148.

As James Day has written, the wordless voice articulates, ‘paradoxically enough’, a sense of ‘remoteness’ found throughout the work, providing the thematic material from which ‘the most impassioned climax in the finale’ is derived.²¹ In that the communal symphonic climax is denied through precisely the material of a voice whose human singing the work has sought to reach, this final vocalise can be considered the symphony’s supreme moment of disjunction: a powerful gesture of an embodied voice masking its intelligible, unmediated, and expressive bodily function.

Hubert Foss heard in the work’s treatment of song-like materials a distancing of conventional modes of musical ‘speech’. As he maintained,

[t]he idiom [of the symphony] itself, personal though it be, is not unfamiliar – that is to say, the words themselves are not strange, so much as the way they are grouped into sentences, paragraphs, and chapters...The texture of the *Pastoral* is almost entirely melodic and contrapuntal. “Tune” never ceases’, writes Doctor Howells...But here are melody and counterpoint with a difference...Melisma abounds, both in the form of figuration in accompaniment and in the veiling of subsidiary melodic phrases, and also in frequent recitative passages for solo instruments, which find their final development in the long solo passages for soprano voice that envelop the last movement.²²

As mentioned above, Foss had characterized the vocalist’s solo passages as a supreme gesture of ‘disembodiment’. In his reading, the symphony’s finale becomes a comment on its own capacity to sustain a communal, songful statement, and in this a comment upon its ability to communicate in an ‘intelligible’, or familiar, language of song. Indeed both Foss and Colles seem to question *A Pastoral Symphony*’s ability to ‘speak’ in ‘familiar’ terms, and furthermore its willingness to allow a listener to engage with its apparently unstable presentation of song. In the context of a study concerned throughout with the ‘intelligibility’

²¹ Day (1998), 195. Howells also suggested that the voice gives birth to a ‘vocal’ theme which informs the finale’s lyrical instrumental melodies throughout: ‘the theme is more and more urgently insisted upon...lifting itself on the whole body of strings and the higher wood-wind to a great pitch of intensity – octaves, amazingly bright, untrammelled by harmony for the most part. Out of it a sort of roof is fashioned to overhang the principal subject. Of the main theme itself there is a full statement, and with it a final climax of sound, still polyphonic. The end itself is a gradual elimination of all complexity of line and colour. Only a very soft A, held by the violins, and under it the voice singing again the greater part of its introductory theme – that is the end of the symphony’. See Howells (1922), 131-2.

²² Foss (1950), 135-6.

of Vaughan Williams's songful 'utterance', such readings offer a powerful comment on the manner of the symphony's 'abstraction', presenting a rather different picture of the work's supposed modernity than is held in current research.

This chapter will present not further comment on *A Pastoral Symphony*, but rather will explore Vaughan Williams's use of wordless, distant, and ambivalent voices in other pastoral visions of the post-War period: visions in which a similarly fractured presentation of an earlier vocal ideal contributes to the complex re-inflection of the genre as in pre-War works imagined. Daniel Goldmark has observed that the evocation of 'disembodied' wordless voices can be seen as a trope of Vaughan Williams's post-War music: voices whose presentation seem ultimately derived from the concluding voice of *A Pastoral Symphony*.²³ In Goldmark's reading, the prominence of these voices is attributed to the impact of Continental Modernism upon Vaughan Williams's inter-war style:

Vaughan Williams originally used a wordless chamber chorus in the overtly erotic *Flos Campi*, for chamber orchestra, chorus, and solo viola, in 1925. Kennedy points out that this 'was the first of his works to show, foremost of its qualities, a preoccupation with sonorities'. Vaughan Williams's familiarity and love of the choral idiom surely gave him added insight as to how best to employ the aural characteristics of the chorus at crucial moments throughout the score. Rather than leave the chorus completely without a storytelling voice, however, Vaughan Williams articulated an implied narrative by marking each of the score's five [sic] sections with a quotation from the Song of Solomon. A dozen years later he used textless voices again, this time in a more explicitly dramatic idiom: his one-act opera *Riders to the Sea* (1937). In this instance Vaughan Williams combined both Debussy's use of a textless *women's* choir in a concert piece, evoking ideas of the untamed ocean, with Ravel's later use of an off-stage choir in a staged and dramatic work, to add another level of intensity to the music. As in *Flos Campi*... a sense of despair also seems implicit in the voices, however, much like the mournful sound of keening, in this case over the men's deaths around which the plot revolves...we can see that the wordless choir has become a trope for the composer, representing the idea of 'man against nature' which comes up repeatedly in Vaughan Williams's works, and which would be the central theme of *Scott*.²⁴

²³ Walter Aaron Clark also makes this brief and unexplored suggestion in a chapter on Vaughan Williams's opera *Riders to the Sea*, adding in a footnote that the observation derives from a comment by Byron Adams. See Walter Aaron Clark, 'Vaughan Williams and the "night side of nature": Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 55-71, 68 and 70, n.28.

²⁴ Daniel Goldmark, 'Music, Film, and Vaughan Williams', in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 207-33, 225.

Though a preoccupation with ‘sonorities’ also pervades earlier works such as *Willow-wood*, *On Wenlock Edge*, and the *Tallis Fantasia* (as much as the earliest of the composer’s song cycles), it is important that as Goldmark implies, wordless and distant voices seem to draw attention to themselves as sites upon which a relation between man and nature is re-negotiated in Vaughan Williams’s post-War landscapes. While Goldmark attributes the expressive ‘intensity’ of these voices to their deployment as colouristic features akin to those used by Continental composers, his simultaneous acknowledgement of their role in articulating an ‘implicit’ sense of loss or ‘despair’ is left entirely unexplored.²⁵

Building upon Goldmark’s observations, the structural and expressive treatment of wordless and ambivalent voices in both *Flos Campi* (1925) and *Riders to the Sea* (1925-37) will be here considered, providing a perspective from which to view the question of how ‘national song’ is framed and self-consciously questioned in Vaughan Williams’s inter-war works. It is suggested that Vaughan Williams’s ambivalent treatment of song is such that voices are able, as in *A Pastoral Symphony*, to communicate a sense both of embodied presence and of disembodied alienation. Read as part of their particularly English culture and history, a study of voices in two works conceived not ‘a dozen years apart’, but rather in the same year,²⁶ offers a powerful means of probing how Vaughan Williams can be seen to revisit earlier expressive and technical practices, reconfiguring a ‘vision of Albion’ sustained by a community in song. In turn, this chapter includes a consideration of the ways in which the composer’s presentation of song again engages broader trends of contemporaneous cultural identity.

²⁵ A trend towards emphasizing the ways in which various practices of Vaughan Williams’s music might be likened to procedures of Continental Modernism has in recent years become a prominent trope of studies intent upon challenging the negative connotations of Vaughan Williams’s ‘pastoral’ music. This approach is discerned in Daniel Grimley’s reading of *A Pastoral Symphony*: see Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010). See also Saylor (2003), especially Chapter 4, ‘Modernity and the Nation: the *Mass in G* and *Sancta Civitas*’, 115-53, in which this author seeks to establish Vaughan Williams’s ‘modernity’ in part through recourse to the comparison of various procedures of his works with those of composers such as Debussy and Ravel. A further discussion of Vaughan Williams in the context of recent conceptions of musical modernism is offered below.

²⁶ Though *Riders to the Sea* was not premiered until 1937, the work was conceived as early as 1925, as Michael Kennedy has suggested. Walter Clark has demonstrated through a valuable study of the scarce and fragmented sketches for the work that Vaughan Williams was working extensively on the score during 1926-7. See Kennedy (1980), 229, and Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 57.

As Judy Giles and Tim Middleton have emphasized in their study of ‘Englishness’ after the First World War, national cultural expressions saw a ‘sustained questioning of the viability and validity of pre-War versions of Englishness’, for

[t]he disillusioned mood of post-First World War England...produced a climate which, by the late 1930s, meant that expressions of national identity could no longer take the form of patriotic heroism or celebrations of the nation’s progress.²⁷

In as far as Vaughan Williams’s questioning of an earlier vision of national musical growth is habitually focused around an ambivalent vocal conception, it is suggested that a songful tradition of musical ‘speech’ is both referenced and undermined. The works considered here – as much as contemporaneous works such as the ‘oratorio’ *Sancta Civitas* (1926) – seemed to court responses to their ambivalent forms of musical communication. This in turn raises questions about the extent to which the reception of this music points as much to the materials of Vaughan Williams’s works as to an emerging construction of the composer’s musical ‘Englishness’. While Hubert Foss heard a ‘quiet sincerity’ in *A Pastoral Symphony*,²⁸ it was clear above that he, like other authors, found in the score a reconfigured mode of musical ‘speech’. Such observations were rehearsed in response to a number of Vaughan Williams’s post-War ‘pastoral’ works.

As such, the readings offered below contribute not only to an ongoing discussion surrounding the role of the First World War in the development of a ‘modern’ English music,²⁹ but further, pay detailed attention to an English cultural voice in the dialogue between ‘notions of Englishness and a more Continental modernism’ in Vaughan Williams’s music, as was noted by Grimley in his discussion of *A Pastoral Symphony*.³⁰ A study of this

²⁷ Giles and Middleton (eds.) (1995), 7.

²⁸ As quoted by Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 149-50. Grimley also notes that Herbert Howells referred to the ‘plain speaking’ quality of *A Pastoral Symphony*: a statement somewhat undermined by Howells’s acknowledgement, as noted above, that the work presented ‘too many co-existent tunes’, such that even an experienced listener would find the work difficult to grasp.

²⁹ See Saylor (2008), and Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010).

³⁰ Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 148.

kind nourishes an understanding of these works as self-referential comments on the familiar and ‘intelligible’ materials and practices of a pre-War idea of musical Englishness. Drawing together the associations and aspirations embodied by ‘song’ in English musical culture, these works seem to comment upon the future of an English national music, becoming expressions of a distinctively English statement of musical modernity.

With this in mind, it is pertinent to consider further how conceptions of musical ‘Modernism’ – particularly those of ‘British Modernism’ – have been defined in recent scholarship. Over the past two decades, a number of scholars have challenged the way in which narratives of musical modernism have traditionally been told. Influenced by postmodernist theory, evolutionary accounts of ‘Modernism’ as a set of identifiable (and usually ‘extreme’) creative techniques – practiced centrally by a handful of High Modernist composers, notably Schoenberg and Stravinsky – have given way to a less conservative, less monolithic, and more local conception.³¹ As Byron Adams has assessed, what has instead developed is ‘a bracing if paradoxical postmodern theory of historical narrative that is capacious enough to encompass a plethora of “modernisms”’.³²

In his review of the 2010 collection *British Music and Modernism* (a volume expressive of this shift in scholarly emphasis),³³ Adams eloquently observes that discourses surrounding musical modernism have broadened such that a series of ‘national schools’ of modernism have been provisionally proposed and are increasingly discussed.³⁴ While the very notion of British modernism remains a contested issue, many scholars of British music remain robustly committed to asking why British music has for so long remained excluded

³¹ See, for example, Frogley, in Frogley (ed.) (1996).

³² See Byron Adams, [Review] of Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Music and Modernism, 1895 – 1960*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 64.3 (Fall, 2011), 741-5, 742.

³³ See Riley (ed.) (2010).

³⁴ Such conceptions were emergent in the work of figures such as James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also Jennifer R. Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). More recent studies include J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar: Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Johnson (2009); and Daniel M. Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010). See also Grimley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The intersections of nationalism and modernism in the field of literature have been examined by Joshua Esty in his important study, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). See also David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-30* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

from accounts of twentieth-century modernism, and how researchers might set about reassessing the ways in which British composers engaged with ideas of modernism – and moreover modernity – on aesthetically-, culturally-, and historically situated terms.

An important point of focus for this work remains *The Musical Quarterly*'s 2008 issue, 'British Musical Modernism'. Here, contributors offered a series of responses to ideas of modernism and modernity that are particularly relevant to the present discussion. Important among these responses are examinations of the essential modernity of the category of the 'pastoral',³⁵ including Eric Saylor's discussion of this category as one especially suited to expressions of loss (in particular the loss of a more 'innocent' world, real or imagined); nostalgia; and alienation.³⁶ Saylor argues that composers including Vaughan Williams 'ma[d]e sense of an alienating postwar world while armed only with prewar artistic experience', baldly characterizing such concerns as 'those of a modernist'.³⁷ Saylor's research is consonant with that of Daniel Grimley, who highlights 'Vaughan Williams's innovative re-imagining of the musical pastoral and its associated images of loss and withdrawal'.³⁸ For Grimley, as for Saylor, Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* can be understood as an attempt to confront modernity (or historical change) by 'retaining a grasp of a set of supposedly shared core values'.³⁹ Moreover, Grimley historicizes and interrogates the symphony's traditional reception, contending that this work represents less 'an exclusively English idiom', and rather

reveals tensions between inward and outward impulses, between notions of Englishness and a more cosmopolitan Continental European modernism, which in turn reflect a dialogue between abstraction and representation, tradition and innovation, stability and instability.⁴⁰

³⁵ See Saylor (2008) and Barone (2008).

³⁶ Saylor (2008), 49. A nuanced discussion of nostalgia as a condition of modernity can be found in Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). Daniel Grimley enforces an important premise of 'modernism' when he suggests that a 'critical edge' defines modernist attitudes and practices: 'the sense of mind that is somehow sharply fractured from its immediate cultural environment and hence alienated'. See Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 5.

³⁷ Saylor (2008), 49.

³⁸ Grimley, in Riley (ed.) (2010), 149.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

As Jennifer Doctor pointed out in her article for *The Musical Quarterly*'s British Modernism issue, a 'dichotomy of modernization and traditional ideals...remained a relentless unfolding legacy of the Edwardian age within English culture even after World War I', elaborating that 'until the end of World War II, these musical dichotomies existed side by side, quite comfortably...' ⁴¹ By analyzing the programming and technological transmission policies of the Promenade concerts (in association with the BBC), Doctor considers how British musical culture engaged with broader aesthetics of 'modernism' as understood and defined contemporaneously (and especially during the Second World War). ⁴² Her emphasis upon the practices of British musical culture and upon providing a culturally specific understanding of 'modernism' is of particular relevance to the current study. Doctor's introduction of the notion of 'parataxis', moreover, enables an understanding of the manner in which Vaughan Williams's music can be seen both to re-inscribe and to challenge pre-War values and practices relating to the 'popularity' and 'intelligibility' of 'song'.

Quoting Susan Stanford Friedman, Doctor defines parataxis as the 'juxtaposing of things without providing connectives': a process of modernist art developed to 'disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality, and perspective'. ⁴³ While her invocation of this concept facilitates her assessment of the varied nature of BBC programming (alongside its modernizing impulse for technological transmission) within 'a viable and compelling modernist definition', its use as a broader context within which to understand the variously 'traditional' and 'innovative' aspects of Vaughan Williams's treatment of an earlier idea of 'song' and 'voice' might here be considered. This in turn allows a perspective from which to

⁴¹ Jennifer Doctor, 'The Parataxis of "British Musical Modernism"', *The Musical Quarterly*, 91.1-2 (Spring-Summer, 2008), 89-115, 89. Heather Wiebe similarly locates her recent study of the music of Benjamin Britten as part of a process of re-evaluating English responses to modernism, considering 'how Britten's music grappled with the problem of building musical culture in the wartime and postwar years' by 'addressing ideas of community, ritual, and the deep English past'. See Wiebe, *Britten's Unquiet Pasts: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

⁴² This article is related to Doctor's earlier study of British musical culture during the inter-war years: see Doctor (1999). Her monograph represents an invaluable challenge to the supposed parochialism of British musical culture by offering a more accurate picture of musical life in early twentieth-century Britain than has hitherto been available. For further discussion of British responses to ideas of the 'modern' during the early twentieth century, see Matthew Riley, 'Liberal Critics and Modern Music in the Post-Victorian Age', in Matthew Riley (ed.) (2010), 13-30, and Meirion Hughes, "'A thoroughgoing modern": Elgar Reception in the *Manchester Guardian*, 1896-1908', in Riley (ed.) (2010), 31-48.

⁴³ Doctor (2008), 91.

understand the conflicting critical responses to the ‘modern’ aspects of *Flos Campi* in particular.

It has been demonstrated throughout this study that ‘song’ emerged as both a cultural idea and a practice of English musical culture, and that its associations and attendant values can be shown to have played an important role in Vaughan Williams’s presentation of melodic and ‘song-like’ materials (and further, a central role in the reception of his music by contemporaneous critics). It will be argued below that the composer’s innovative re-imagining of an idea of ‘song’ is a powerful though hitherto unexplored factor in the modernity of his music.

Flos Campi

Flos Campi presents Vaughan Williams’s most complex negotiation of an idea of song and of its singing, embodying a presentation of musical voice that goes to the heart of its perplexing discourse upon the nature of musical utterance. Dedicated to Lionel Tertis and premiered on October 10th, 1925 under Henry Wood, *Flos Campi* has bewildered a host of writers. As Stephen Town has recently observed, ‘attempts to understand and elucidate its meaning’ seem somehow both invited and frustrated by its complex and overwhelmingly ‘sensuous’ pastoral vision:⁴⁴ a vision inspired, as Wilfrid Mellers put it, by ‘that wondrously physical-metaphysical hymn, the Song of Songs’.⁴⁵

The most perplexing aspects of the work’s communication of musical meaning have traditionally been identified in its deployment of an ‘ambiguous’ wordless choir,⁴⁶ whose vocalizing seems to enact an unstable dialogue with both the overwhelming lyricism of the declamatory song of the solo viola,⁴⁷ and with the series of quotations which form epigraphs

⁴⁴ Stephen Town, ‘*Flos Campi* by Ralph Vaughan Williams: “From Raw Intimations to Homogenous Experience”’, in *An Imperishable Heritage. British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson: A Study of Selected Works* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 105-34, 107.

⁴⁵ Mellers (1989), 107.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁷ Simona Pakenham suggested that ‘the viola, its voice husky with passion, sings its ecstatic rhapsody’. As quoted in Kennedy (1980), 213.

to each of the six movements. In a review of the work's premiere, H. C. Colles commented upon just this projection of disjunction between voice, instrument, and text. Writing for *The Times* on October 25th, 1925, Colles discerned that '[t]he composer has wilfully surrounded the flowers of his musical thought with a thorny hedge of riddles'.⁴⁸ Offering further comment in a discussion published some five days later, he noted that the wordless voices posed a particularly enigmatic gesture, for

[t]he ear, which will be content to take a melody simply as a melody from Mr Tertis's viola, feels that the same melody sung to 'Ah' or with closed lips by voices has not the same eloquence, because the voices could do something more with it...

Its composer has made matters worse by his references to the *Song of Solomon* which, whether given seriously or not, are certainly not explanatory. He has, rather, wilfully raised barriers in the minds of his hearers which the music itself may not be strong enough to sweep away.⁴⁹

In both reviews, Colles articulates his sense that *Flos Campi* created a certain aesthetic distance between it and the listener in its distanced presentation of musical intelligibility. The viola's song becomes a complex foil to a set of vocal statements which present an under-developed – because wordless – mode of singing. Colles implies that this becomes a 'barrier' to the listener's experience, and one that is further heightened by the displaced textual epigraphs: fragments which, in his apparent frustration, Colles seems to dismiss as 'an afterthought' appended to the work following its composition (as he conjectures later in the second review).

A number of critics have since recapitulated a similar set of observations, either marginalizing these epigraphs entirely, or battling to uncover a possible relation between the 'riddle' of their sequence and the unsettling, disembodied use of voices. A. E. F. Dickinson characterized these epigraphs as 'stray verses',⁵⁰ and along similar lines, Frank Howes insisted that their role was sufficiently vague that they demanded no particular attention. Writing in 1937, Howes assessed that

⁴⁸ H. C. Colles, as quoted in Kennedy (1980), 190.

⁴⁹ H. C. Colles, as quoted by Kennedy (1980), 190-1.

⁵⁰ Dickinson (1963), 234.

[t]here is...no need to look for a connected chain of thought behind the six numbers of this suite for solo viola, voices, and small orchestra, nor to puzzle over the interconnections of the quotations from the Vulgate which are their superscriptions. They are translations of poetic imagery into music.⁵¹

While this reading has some currency (not least with the composer's stated antipathy towards any 'simple' narrative of musical meaning in mind),⁵² it might be possible that there is also a more specific project at work in the dialogue between voice, poem, and song in this suite. This idea is further elucidated through consideration of the way in which, as Dickinson elaborated, the voices in this work seem strangely disembodied, for 'they carry no privilege of expression'.⁵³

Hubert Foss offered an intriguing response to the 'inexpressive' quality of these voices when he pointed to the strangeness of this work's vocal conception, concluding that while *Flos Campi* 'speaks to us with something of [a] mystical afflatus – ecstatic, feverless, rich, contemplative' – it embodies 'a strange concatenation of qualities: universal yet personal in speech, unappealing, it is endearing in its beauty...'⁵⁴ His sense that the work both 'speaks' and is at once 'unappealing' is later explained, for he continues that

[t]he viola, singing its long quiet line of melody and arabesque, is supported by a choir of singers, who imitate their leader by intoning sounds without words...the oddity of the thing is that the vocalizers on "ah" and "ooh" give us a refracted impression of the words quoted before each of the pictures. They enounce no intelligible consonants, refer to no associative logotypes; but they tell us in a quaint and vague new musical language the meaning of their prefaces. The aural values of every note are delicately balanced, for *Flos Campi* is a study in pure sound.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Frank Howes, *The Later Works of R. Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 6-7.

⁵² For a nuanced discussion of Vaughan Williams's complex position on the issue of 'programme' music, see Oliver Neighbour, in Frogley (ed.) (1996), and Frogley (1987).

⁵³ Dickinson (1963), 234.

⁵⁴ Foss (1950), 156-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 157-8.

As Stephen Town has recently observed in a detailed outline both of the work's critical history and the manuscripts extant from its conception, Vaughan Williams's meticulous approach to the deployment of forces in *Flos Campi* – specifying precisely how many voices and instruments were necessary to its realization in performance – has led critics to emphasize its overwhelming preoccupation with the qualities of 'pure sound'. As such, its voices have commonly been analysed as gestures of expressive 'colour'.⁵⁶ Yet as is discerned in Foss's account, these voices seem also to play a dramatic role in projecting that same sense of poise between embodiment and disembodiment that has been interpreted in *A Pastoral Symphony*. As becomes clear in the reading of *Flos Campi* offered below, this vocal presentation might profitably be interpreted as a more specific project of musical 'Englishness': a re-inflection of an English lyrical tradition, such that the tension between voices and viola engages an idea of song highlighted by the fragmentary texts from the Latin Vulgate (in which the poem is entitled, significantly, the 'Song of Songs', rather than the 'Song of Solomon' as found in the Authorized version).

Percy Young observed in 1953 something of what follows in the reading below when he opined that

the relation between music and text is left in suspense by the fact that the chorus is employed as a feature of the orchestral texture with much more singleness of purpose than had ever hitherto been the case. The art lies not in using voices thus, but in impressing on the listener the subtle contact between voice and instrument which makes such intimacy of union so effectively possible. The unification is brought about, in no small measure, by the central force of the solo viola which is of stringed instruments the most colourful, holding within its nature that of the human voice.⁵⁷

A search for union between the lover and beloved of the 'Song of Songs' lies at the heart of *Flos Campi*, as in so many of Vaughan Williams's works. This desire for union also goes to the heart of the ambiguous relationship negotiated between voice and instrument. The

⁵⁶ See Town (2012), 106-13. Dickinson reacted against such characterizations in 1963, maintaining that 'the voice [in *Flos Campi*] is properly treated as a medium of declamation and affirmation, not of quasi-instrumental expression'. This offers a curious paradox in light of his statement noted above. See Dickinson (1963), 233-4.

⁵⁷ Young (1953), 61.

achievement of embodied unity and community through song, enacted in a land at once voluptuous and unspoiled, is a guiding premise of the work's progress. While the seemingly haphazard Biblical quotations have caused critical frustration, an interrogation of the poetic 'song' from which these epigraphs are drawn – as much as a consideration of the 'obscure' title *Flos Campi* – offers important insights into the work's profound ambivalences. In this way, its capacity both to speak to, and yet also to deny, the songful experience of a hearer is illuminated.

In his programme note for a 1927 performance of *Flos Campi*, Vaughan Williams made clear that a certain critical confusion was elicited by the work from the first. Protesting that the piece was '*not*, as critics have assumed, about buttercups and daisies', nor either did it have any 'ecclesiastical basis', he nevertheless expressed his disappointment that

[w]hen this work was first produced two years ago, the composer discovered that most people were not well enough acquainted with the Vulgate (or perhaps even its English equivalent) to enable them to complete for themselves the quotations from the 'Canticum Canticorum', indications of which are the mottoes at the head of each movement of the Suite.⁵⁸

This account is as mysterious as the music itself. That the composer translated the epigraphs in this programme note is important (as is his suggestion that readers should be able to 'complete' the broader context from which these epigraphs were drawn). While simplistic assumptions of the 'rural idyll' engendered by *A Pastoral Symphony*'s title were long left uncorrected by Vaughan Williams, the role of these textual signposts in *Flos Campi* would seem to be crucial to the composer's presentation of the work. Upon closer examination, the epigraphs selected have again been carefully chosen so as to forge a loose narrative through the movements. The narrative of the work will be examined here, after which the relationship of these epigraphs to certain musical junctures can be explored. Enriched through recourse to

⁵⁸ See Vaughan Williams, 'Flos Campi', in Manning (ed.) (2008), 347-50.

a particularly insightful reading of the poem by Francis Landy, such a reading promises rich insights into this sensuously exotic and erotic song of songs.⁵⁹

The suite comprises six movements or ‘images’ running one into the other without pause. The chorus, SATB, is divided into eight parts at various points. However, the articulation of distance is apparent at their very conception, for not only are they wordless, often directed to sing with closed lips (in which their human sound is both muted and transformed), but they also seem continually unable to sustain the sort of thematic function articulated by the viola. Indeed, though Dickinson suggested that ‘the voice is properly treated as a medium of declamation and affirmation’, their function here is one both of promise and of absence. This presages an idea that permeates the work’s essential conception.

The opening movement evokes a bruised and disquieting idyll. As Kennedy has suggested, ‘this great movement is headed by the words about the coming of Spring’,⁶⁰ and both the text and the pastoral evocation of the oboe’s song might well point to a vision of renewal, or dawn (a similar gesture to that of the opening of *A Pastoral Symphony*, as Daniel Grimley has observed).⁶¹ The oboe’s primordial, ritualistic invocation of a shepherd’s call is almost immediately ‘answered’ (as Vaughan Williams tellingly stated in his programme note) by the viola.⁶² The duet occupies a free, *senza misura* introduction, in which a suspension of tonal centricity enhances the sense of unease. This is compounded by the fact that the instruments outline declamatory vocal calls that are inherently frustrated: given that these are instrumental – not ‘actual’ – voices, the sense of absence and of yearning for fulfilment is potent. This is an idea that pervades the work as a whole, and is emphasized by

⁵⁹ Byron Adams has noted that ‘an undated letter from Ursula Vaughan Williams to Michael Kennedy throws light on the unusual circumstances surrounding the genesis of *Flos Campi*: “He behaved rather badly, I think, to a woman who was obviously rather in love with him, as he used to go & see her rather a lot then, to work himself up into the terrific state he needed to be in to be able to write it – but he never went far enough to get actually involved – rather a tight-rope performance. He was much surprised when I said I thought it very immoral to go so far & no further!”’ See Adams, in Kramer (2010), 41, n. 34.

⁶⁰ Kennedy (1980), 212.

⁶¹ Grimley, in Riley (ed.), 162.

⁶² See Vaughan Williams, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 348.

the viola's second declamatory statement at bar 5, an imploring call, though still *piano*, doubled this time by a flute which is to 'follow viola' at the unison (see example 4.1, below).

The ungrounded, unstable character of this opening relates in part to the way in which there is no cadential structure in the opening *senza misura* duet. Further, the material that follows with the entry of the flute confirms the presence of octatonic pitch collections, these only implied by the emphasis upon the tritone within the opening duet, where within the E-focused melody of the oboe (pitched against the F-focused melody of the viola), the oboe's frequent focus upon D is set against the prominent A-flat of the viola's call (see example 4.1, bar 1). With the entry of the flute, this implicit reference to an octatonic sound world is confirmed by Vaughan Williams's combination of two octatonic pitch collections.⁶³

Vaughan Williams's direction that the solo flute should 'follow' the viola at this point is significant. In this, the composer opens an evocative space for the presence or expressive voice of the human performer. It should be remembered that the viola was Vaughan Williams's instrument of choice, as was noted above, and with this in mind, it might be suggested that the composer projects himself into the subjectivity of the male viola in *Flos Campi*. As Vaughan Williams outlined in his writings, the idea of human fallibility in performance was formative to his conception of a work.⁶⁴ Here, it is enacted as the flute

⁶³ As Walter Aaron Clark has pointed out in a chapter on Vaughan Williams's use of octatonic pitch collections in *Riders to the Sea*, 'the octatonic scale contains a tritone between the first and fifth degrees of the scale, the "tonic" and "dominant", which is an important factor in creating the dark mood of this work'. As Clark elaborates, 'the octatonic is among the "darkest" of scales precisely because it combines the minor scale with the absence of a true dominant'. He notes in this chapter that there exist three octatonic collections: collection I, [1,2,4,5,7,8,10,11]; collection II, [2,3,5,6,8,9,11,0]; and collection III, [0,1,3,4,6,7,9,10]. See Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 60 and 70, n. 27. In bar 5 through to the first note of bar 8 of *Flos Campi* (shown in example 4.1, below), Vaughan Williams draws upon collection III: (C-sharp (D-flat); E-flat; G-flat (F-sharp); G; A; B-flat). From the C in bar 8 through to the end of bar 10, Vaughan Williams derives his material predominantly from Collection II (F; A-flat (G-sharp); A; B; C), with the exception of the B-flat and G in bar 8, which are a reminiscence of the earlier Collection III, or may be considered 'passing notes' within Collection II. The use of such collections in *Flos Campi* might be understood as a powerful source of the score's erotic and exotic sensuality, though they have not traditionally been identified in *Flos Campi*. The image of Vaughan Williams as a musical reactionary may have discouraged enquiry into his use of compositional techniques commonly associated with 'progressive' Continental composers such as Ravel, Stravinsky, and Bartók. Vaughan Williams used octatonic pitch collections in a number of works composed during the 1920s and 1930s, and as Byron Adams has pointed out, he experimented with such materials in works composed as early as 1908, specifically in the second movement of the String Quartet in G minor. As Adams explores in some detail, Vaughan Williams's use of octatonicism was an important legacy of his study with Ravel during 1908. Encouraged to study the music of the Russian Kutchka, Adams highlights the way in which octatonicism was used by composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov to evoke the legendary and the fantastic. In Ravel's own music, an exotic and erotic atmosphere is created through the use of such scales. See Adams, 'Vaughan Williams's musical apprenticeship', in Frogley and Thomson (eds.) (2013). 29-55.

⁶⁴ As Vaughan Williams wrote when exploring how the sound of an instrument could 'stimulate' a composer's imagination: 'Hubert Parry used to say that the beauty of the French horn was partly due to its human fallibility. Is not this true, to a certain extent, of all instrumental playing? Does not the thrill of sixteen violins playing together come from the fact that they are not scientifically in tune with each other? Would not the wonderful surge of the

destabilizes its unison with the viola by realizing the composer's direction to 'follow' but a fraction behind its leader. This opening became notorious as a supreme gesture of British musical 'modernism' in contemporary discourse,⁶⁵ and its harmonic profile underlines an instability which threatens the sense of separation, melancholy, erotic yearning, and loss that pervades the score as a whole.⁶⁶

As is clear in example 4.1, the calls of the opening instruments are thereafter imitated by the strings (who repeat the viola and flute's octatonic melody in first inversion triads), the wind later joining this progress to move towards a *forte* climax in the bar before figure 2, wherein a restatement of the opening triplet motif is declaimed with some urgency by the viola in unison with the strings, *fortissimo*, doubled here by the trumpet marked *molto sostenuto*.

This moment of arrival heralds the first entry of the wordless voices, who sing to 'ah' not a statement of the motivic material of the duet, but rather a thematically blank series of vocalizations (this clear in example 4.2, below).⁶⁷ Their entry outlines a tritone between G and D-flat, and in this sense, they appear to attempt a communion with the viola's tritone, though do not concede to its D and A-flat melody. The viola continues to pour out a declamatory song, periodically dovetailing to reach the pitches of the voices (as at five bars before figure 3). It finds no union with their gestures, however. Each force seems unable to reconcile itself to the mode of the other, for while they appear to seek reconciliation, this is frequently frustrated, the viola and voices operating on gesturally different premises: the viola a carrier of thematic material, the voices a projection of pure human sound.

opening of Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony be lost if the violoncellos and basses moved from note to note with mathematical exactness at the same moment? An orchestra must not become a perfect machine'. See 'How Do We Make Music?', from *The Making of Music*, in Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 223.

⁶⁵ See Colles (1934), 13.

⁶⁶ Walter Aaron Clark draws upon Richard Taruskin's suggestion that in Stravinsky's *Firebird* (which Vaughan Williams admired), octatonicism symbolizes 'dark forces', while diatonicism represents the 'daylight world'. In this way, Clark explores the extent to which Vaughan Williams's use of octatonic pitch materials informs the projection of a 'dark' or ruined conception of nature in the opera. A similar process can be identified in his treatment of an idea of nature and of the 'pastoral' in *Flos Campi*. See Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 61.

⁶⁷ Vaughan Williams's use of wordless voices may be considered a debt to Ravel's 1912 ballet (or 'symphonie choréographique'), *Daphnis et Chloé*, in which wordless voices are similarly used to evoke erotic yearning. Vaughan Williams's use of wordless voices originates in the cantata *Willow-wood*, and as was earlier noted, this score is, like *Flos Campi*, heavily concerned with the erotic.

Lento (senza misura)

Viola Solo

Oboe

(Tempo)

Str.

Fag.

Flute (solo)
follow Viola

1

Str. *p*

Cl.

Example 4.1, *Flos Campi*, movement 1, opening bars.
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Example 4.2, *Flos Campi*, movement 1, 9 bars before figure 3.

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The climax described in the prose is brought to its head at the beginning of this example, after which the voices enter with their thematically blank vocalizations.

Presently, however, the chorus seems to concede to a more declamatory function as they articulate a falling-second motif: a pathetic, anguished, *pianissimo* gesture of despair (as indicated by the bracket in example 4.2). A thematic musical voice like that of the woodwind seems an alien utterance to these actual human voices. Thus, while the entry of voices seems to bring a vocal reality sought but lacking from the opening (as is suggested by the declamatory instrumental gestures), this vocal delivery is one that cannot find union with the viola's song. Thereafter, the viola seems also to abandon any hope of communion with this mass and fluid force, as it dissolves in a descending melody and diminishing dynamic: a gesture evocative of a dissolution of its voice, such that there is a profound sense of futility inherent in the conclusion of this movement.

Thereafter, the music changes course, fading into a calm, melismatic haze: a 'released from an almost tortured experience', as Dickinson suggests, bringing a shift of scene and ushering in a second movement (*Andante con moto*).⁶⁸ The tonality is more defined here, and focused around E/G, a moment of fragile consummation is achieved as the voices offer a web of close-range, flowing contrapuntal oscillations, a rather disarming expression of muted human cries laid bare, and yet contained as though held beneath a surface, or heard from a space beyond (see example 4.3a, below). A different relation between the voices and viola seems at work here, for out of this material bed of sound the viola emerges, as though drawing sustenance. For the first time marked *cantabile*, it sings not a tortured call, but a rich, broad, initially conjunct song, exploiting its capacity for an imitation of 'human warmth' noted by Young.⁶⁹ Indeed, the viola seems to evoke the voice of a contralto at this point. Entering at figure 4 (and shown by the bracket in example 4.3a), its tonality finds conciliation with the corresponding harmonic profile of the surrounding voices. This gesture of negotiated community is sustained for some bars, the oboe joining the viola in a further thematic duet. The progress of the section is consummated as the lyrical song emerges, *cantabile*, in both unison voices and viola (shown in example 4.3b, below).

⁶⁸ Dickinson (1963), 236: 'the singers have to accustom themselves, here and elsewhere, to give out an impulsive vocal melody...'

⁶⁹ James Day hears this song as a derivation from the English folk song 'It's a Rosebud in June'. See Day (1961), 75-6.

4

Cor. *ppp*

Harp *ppp*

Soprano *sempre ppp*
(M) closed lips

Alto *sempre ppp*
(M) closed lips

Tenor *sempre ppp*
(M) closed lips

Bass *sempre ppp*
(M) closed lips

Viola solo *p cantabile*

Violin I *sempre ppp*

Violin II *sempre ppp*

Viola *sempre ppp*

Violoncello *sempre ppp*

Double Bass *sempre ppp*
one player

Example 4.3a, *Flos Campi*, movement 2, figure 4.
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Example 4.3b, *Flos Campi*, movement 2, figure 6.

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The effect here is uncanny. While the voices are in union with the viola, conceding to sing its thematic song, their wordless, muted, distant presentation seems exaggerated in contrast to the materiality of the viola, who, unlike the voices, can sing no more than a wordless song. Though a tentative union is achieved, the voices seem to move in tandem with the viola: the forces cannot move in one body. The effect is rather one of bodies moving past one another, the voices shadowing the viola but remaining at arm's length. The full-bodied, material contact of bow and string offers an almost accusatory revelation of the de-centred mass of objective wordless noise, absent of all consonants. The voices communicate a sense of unease, as Colles suggests, when singing a melody to 'ah', for a voice might do more with this melody: it might step over the liminal space of this music's declamatory invitations and offer semantic clarity.

These voices do not offer clarity in either word or gestural tone, however, and the viola's resonant voice highlights this dislocation between lyrical utterance and vocal tone. The uneasy progress soon ceases, as celesta and harp provide a bell-like sonority to conclude a movement which, while ostensibly one of fulfilment, is unresolved.

The lack of closure is extended when the third movement (Lento, Allegro Moderato) delivers the *coup de grace* threatened by the fragile calm and reticent voices of the previous movement. Beginning with a viola cadenza which, in the final bars of the preceding movement, unmistakably recalls the music of the opening, it seems momentarily to regain the E/G song of the second movement. However, the viola cantilena takes a dark turn as the third movement begins, its flattened B tipping the melody into an anguished outpouring pervaded by tritones, bringing now a return to the material of the opening duet. This *senza misura* cry is disturbingly personal, and thereafter an explicit dialogue between viola and female voices occurs, the material here again derived from exotic yet unstable octatonic pitch collections.⁷⁰ The thematic material is derived from the anguished, falling-second 'call' motif, which reaches to a frantic climax that becomes almost hypnotic in its reiterations. This climax is

⁷⁰ From figure 8, for example, the viola's melody is derived from octatonic collection I (C-sharp, D, E, F, A-flat, B). The female voices articulate a series of yearning sighs in parallel first inversion triads, their descending second motifs derived from collections II and III (first soprano and alto voices draw on Collection II, and second soprano draws on collection III for the first three bars after figure 8).

lost almost immediately, however, and the viola articulates a powerful gesture of vocal dissolution with a long, descending, fragmentary utterance through receding dynamics (see example 4.4, below).⁷¹

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system includes parts for Solo Viola, Soprano, Alto, and Full Orch. The Solo Viola part features a long, descending, fragmentary utterance with receding dynamics, marked *ff* and *pp*. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, and Full Orch.) also feature a long, descending, fragmentary utterance, marked *ff*. The second system is marked **9** and *Allegro moderato*. It includes parts for Vla. (Viola), S. (Soprano), and A. (Alto). The Vla. part features a long, descending, fragmentary utterance, marked *p* and *pp*. The S. and A. parts feature a long, descending, fragmentary utterance, marked *p* and *pp*. The third system is marked *poco rit.* and includes parts for Vla., S., and A. The Vla. part features a long, descending, fragmentary utterance, marked *pp* and *pp*. The S. and A. parts feature a long, descending, fragmentary utterance, marked *pp* and *pp*.

Example 4.4 *Flos Campi*, movement 3, 3 bars before figure 9. *Flos Campi* by Ralph Vaughan Williams © Oxford University Press 1928. Extracts reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

⁷¹ The viola's material in this disjunct gesture of frustration is broadly derived from octatonic collection II.

A dialogue resumes, however, and the rest of the movement pivots around this clear attempt at discourse between male viola and female voices. The viola calls out in two further cadenzas, or ‘recitatives’, as Vaughan Williams suggests in his programme note (a further anthropomorphizing of the viola),⁷² the first gravitating to B, the second to C-sharp. Between these statements, the viola sustains a lone pedal as the female voices respond in oscillating vocalizations that capitulate to the move from B to C-sharp.

While the tone of the viola is such that it calls out in a searching gesture of tormented expression, the crowd of wordless, de-centred voices betray rather, a regimented implacability, one fundamentally at odds with the freedom of the *senza misura* questions issued by the viola. The voices’ refusal to capitulate to its thematic mode is clear as they vocalize in an organum-like doubling at the fourth, the viola frustrated again in finding union. Thus, while the dialogue suggests negotiation, and while the vocal reply is delivered, it is at once, disjunctive. This passage suggests that the dialogue is one in which neither voice is able to reach the other, and to reach terms upon which conciliation or an adequate response – a tone of voice – can be found and heard. The music thus recedes, finally, to a further isolated viola pedal.

This point of repose promises a kind of ironic hope, however, for the fourth movement (Moderato alla Marcia) opens with a unified, almost folkloristic song in woodwind and brass, after which the viola enters. The dotted rhythms of this march evoke both aggressive masculinity and perhaps, a sense of battle. As such, the movement might be located as a moment of conflict, appropriate to the dislocation of voice and instrument in evidence thus far.

Ironically, a more defined tonal area, focused around C minor (with a flattened seventh) is retained in much of this passage, this repeatedly articulated by V-I bass progressions. As the music processes forward, the viola repeats the main thematic material, mustering forces with jubilation, the strings and the woodwind joining the music’s progress. The percussion adds bluster to the movement, suggestive, perhaps, of an evocation of display

⁷² See Vaughan Williams, *Flos Campi*, in Manning (ed.) (2008), 347-50, 349.

during a mating ritual. The *pizzicato* strings even convey a suggestion of folk performance. The voices, however, remain absent throughout this oriental procession. The voices cannot be led by the viola, for their function does not sit comfortably with so unequivocal a statement of melody.

By the end of the movement, the strings, winds, and viola sing the melody in triumphant unison, whereupon the voices finally return, moving the music towards a further climactic moment. With a rising flourish of strings, harp and voices – the latter taking up the ‘call’ motif, urging the music forward – the fifth movement arrives in a moment of blossoming vocal outpouring (*Largamente*). Marked *appassionato fortissimo*, this is unmistakably a gesture of arrival, and a pivotal moment of climax within the work as a whole. As Dickinson suggests, ‘there seems to be some suggestion of “Reconciliation”’ here (his reference is to *Dona Nobis Pacem*), the moment ‘eminently vocal in texture’ as the voices are permitted to sing with open lips, and are further allowed a measure of melodic expansion of the kind they have been denied throughout the work thus far.⁷³ The material of this melody is shown at the opening of example 4.5, below.

The intensity of this vocal outpouring – an moment of pure consummation, its evocation of ‘bloom’ contained in the impassioned flourish – is established only to be quickly revoked, however, as the viola’s anguished questioning returns and harmonic slips dissipate the tonal centre. Thus, no reconciliation is possible, and the viola’s calls are taken up in futile imitation by the choir, which again seems unable to console the viola’s increasingly frantic and virtuosic laments, a warning from the tabor providing a kind of tattoo and in this a distorted recollection of the masculine aggression and show of unity displayed in the battle-like previous movement.

While the voices twice recall the blossoming opening (one such recollection is present at the beginning of example 4.5, below), the viola seems increasingly unreachable as it embarks upon an extensive and virtuosic series of outpourings, reaching to its most intense, even neurotic highest register. The voices are able to offer in response only a murmuring oscillating figure, an inarticulate sonority at odds with the viola’s melodic outpouring, one

⁷³ Dickinson (1963), 237.

which searches for a means to transcend its instrumental medium and speak directly to the listener. Indeed, the disjunct rhythmic presentation and impassioned double-stoppings of the viola's declamation communicate a need to break out of a musical discourse, and to find a means to deliver more than it is capable of, reaching to the edges of its expressive limits. The viola here offers a striking contrast to the treatment of voices, whose disembodied murmuring seems paradoxically to highlight their inability or unwillingness to 'speak'. The chorus attempts no comparable expressive communication. Their function as a distant mass of 'actual sound' is hardly a guarantee of intelligibility, though it seems to supply an expressive warmth imitated but not quite achieved by the viola (by virtue of its absence of an actual human tone). See example 4.5, below.

The presentation of voice and viola in these passages (as in the unison song of the second movement) holds the promise of a supreme voice: melodic and uniquely human. And yet, these voices are unable to reconcile, and thus the communication of an embodied, centred voice remains fractured throughout. The frustration involved in this futile search leads eventually to a *fortississimo* passage, quite different from the preceding one, as strings and woodwind reiterate a D and A-flat tritone figure familiar from the opening, followed by viola and then by the voices. Though a moment of climactic fruition is delivered, it cannot be sung as an expression of union, for the jarring and unstable harmonic profile renders their union impossible. Thus, the viola retreats once more, and following the voices in their final articulation of the anguished 'call' motif, dissolves one final time through a chromatic lament that also function as a cadenza, coming to rest on a D.⁷⁴ The voices sing once again with closed lips as the music fades into the last movement, the sopranos repeating an A-D pedal, below which an ambivalent B leaves in doubt the harmonic resting point. See Example 4.6, below.

⁷⁴ This final cadenza in the viola is again derived heavily from octatonic collection II.

17 *Largamente*

Soprano *p* (Ah) *pp* *p*

Alto *p* (Ah) *pp* *p*

Tenor *p* (Ah) *pp* *p*

Bass *p* (Ah) *pp* *p*

Viola *pp* *p* 5

Orch. *pp* Strings Tabor *pp*

S. *mp* *p* closed lips

A. *mp* *p* closed lips

T. *mp* *p* closed lips

B. *mp* *p* closed lips

Vla. *f* 3 *f*

Clarinet *p* *pp*

Example 4.5, *Flos Campi*, movement 5, figure 17 (viola's attempt to 'break out' of its expressive limits).

Example 4.5 (continued).

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The Moderato Tranquillo that emerges in the aftermath of this high drama is a warm hymn or motet of love, cast in a clear D major (the bass pedal stable on D by a bar before figure 23). The bassoon and horn have pre-empted this new song in the concluding bars of the previous movement, and tenderly, the viola provides sings it out in an extended form, after which other instruments take it up one by one, the motet-like texture finally providing harmonious fruition. As Kennedy has pointed out, this movement seems unrelated to the material heard thus far, and yet there is a sense of ‘fulfilment’ as the viola sings this song.⁷⁵ A ‘flow of serene corroborative melody’, according to Dickinson,⁷⁶ there is an unequivocal sense of communion here, and as Young insisted, the movement is ‘symbolic of mystical union and ultimate peace. It is optative but definitive’.⁷⁷ The celesta scales evoke, perhaps, the distant pealing of bells, confirming this enactment of communion. This moment of community seems to reach its culmination as fragments of the ‘alleluias’ from ‘Sine Nomine’ (or from ‘The First Nowell’) are sung at the entry of the voices, confirming a communion heard so often before. See example 4.7, below.

Significantly, this concluding hymn is sung in the ‘breakthrough’ key of D major, which is also found at the conclusion of *Toward the Unknown Region*. The bells here are evocative of gamelan sonorities, as frequently found in the music of Debussy and Ravel.⁷⁸ After the voices have entered in pealing counterpoint, they deliver as in earlier works a reach into their upper registers. In this, they seem to complete a process which again sees the framing of this final movement as a ‘different’ musical space: an harmonically, thematically,

⁷⁵ Kennedy (1980), 213.

⁷⁶ Dickinson (1963), 237.

⁷⁷ Young (1953), 62.

⁷⁸ The Orient has long been associated with erotic desire, abandon, and communion. Edward Said notes that ‘the Orient still seems to suggest [to Western thinking] not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generation energies’. See Said, *Orientalism* (repr. ed. with new Preface, London: Penguin Books, 2003), 188. See also Philip Brett’s discussion of Britten’s use of gamelan-inspired sonorities in his opera *The Turn of the Screw*: Brett, ‘Eros and Orientalism in Britten’s Operas’, in Philip Brett; Elizabeth Wood; and Gary C. Thomas (eds.), *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 234-256, 242-3. It is notable, in light of Vaughan Williams’s final comment upon the sustainability of union in *Flos Campi*, that Britten uses such sonorities in *The Turn of the Screw* when setting Myfanwy Piper’s quotation of Yeats’s words: ‘the ceremony of innocence is drowned’. Mervyn Cooke argues that for Benjamin Britten, the gamelan acquired a ‘special significance’, becoming ‘a symbol of yearning towards an unattainable, perfect goal or ideal.’ See Cooke, *Britten and the Far East: Asian Influences in the Music of Benjamin Britten* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, in conjunction with the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh, 1998), 248.

and gesturally new space in which the final communal song is consummated by the union of voice and viola.

Moderato tranquillo

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Cl., Fag., Cor., Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The second system includes parts for Solo Viola, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is **Moderato tranquillo**. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score shows a transition from a previous section to a new section, with various dynamics and articulations.

First System:

- Cl.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Fag.:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Cor.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Soprano:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*, closed lips.
- Alto:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*, closed lips.
- Tenor:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*, closed lips.
- Bass:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*, closed lips.

Second System:

- Solo Viola:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *p*, *pp*.
- Violin I:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Violin II:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Viola:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Violoncello:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamics: *pp*.
- Double Bass:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. Notes: G3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamics: *ppp*.

Example 4.6, *Flos Campi*, passage leading from the end of movement 5 to the beginning of movement 6.

Example 4.6 (continued).

Example 4.6 (continued).

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As in the works discussed in Chapter 3, the progress of this work traces a journey towards the singing of a communal song. Vaughan Williams appears to have ‘diatonicized’ earlier octatonic material in this final movement, specifically the material exposed by the viola/flute melody found at bar 5 at the opening of the work. This material is recast by way of apparent conclusion in such a way that the pungent tritone (the definitive fifth degree of the octatonic scale) becomes a perfect fifth, a move that is both confirmed and sweetened by the addition of the major sixth (a process of ‘diatonicizing’ that was familiar to students of Ravel). In this way, the ‘darkness’ of the octatonic opening is recast in a moment of ‘light’ and hope, appropriate to the communal consummation apparently sought by the music throughout.

Example 4.7, *Flos Campi*, movement 6, 4 bars before figure 27.

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Painfully and unexpectedly, however, the duet of the opening returns, as though lurking at a distance all the time, re-entering from the shadows (see Example 4.8, below). Recalling its anguished opening song, the oboe now opposes F-natural against the viola's F-sharp, enacting a tritone between the prominent E-flat and A pitches of the oboe and viola melodies, respectively. The key signature, though remaining that of D major, is negated by this loss of tonal centre. Breaking off, the orchestra quickly attempts, with the chorus, to recall the D major hymn, and to reset its course. The pedal C-natural of the chorus spells again a negation that leaves reunion with the viola impossible, however. This return of the opening duet has apparently irrevocably distorted the union obtained by the final communal song, and though the viola resumes the hymn, prompted by a lone flute, it cannot sustain its singing and finally fades out with the voices.

As such, the music communicates a sense that erotic desire cannot be sated for good, but always returns, unsatisfied. The opening duet is re-imagined upon its return, such that voices are now present, and the search for a centred presentation of 'voice' – harmonically and gesturally – is apparently delivered. This final delivery of vocal fruition is supremely disjunctive, however, for while the voices relinquish to an F-sharp triad, offering a hint of B minor, the uncertainty of this ending is unmistakable. The joining of viola and voice – if that was ever the purpose of the work – is delivered by the final duet, in which the voices now play a part. As is clear in both the gestural and harmonic instability of this conclusion, however, the presence of the voices at once deny what they at last bring to fruition.

senza misura

Oboe *pp lontano*

Viola solo *pp lontano*

Violoncello

Double Bass

30 (A Tempo) (Tranquillo)

Fl. *ppp*

Horn *ppp*

Harp *ppp*

S. *ppp* half-closed lips close gradually closed lips

A. *ppp* half-closed lips close gradually closed lips

T. *ppp* half-closed lips close gradually closed lips

B. *ppp* half-closed lips close gradually closed lips

Vla. *ppp*

Vln. I *ppp*

Vln. II *ppp*

Vla. *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Example 4.8, *Flos Campi*, movement 6, 3 bars before figure 30.

The musical score shows a continuation of a piece. It includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Viola (Vla.). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal parts (S., A., T., B.) are in treble clef, and the Viola is in alto clef. The Viola part has the instruction 'con sord.' and 'ppp' (pianissimo) written below it.

Example 4.8 (continued).

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A broad narrative can thus be traced through the work: the ruined ‘pastoral’ in which declamatory and dissonant instrumental voices are frustrated in their search for an ‘actual’ human voice, is followed by a moment of subdued calm with the entry of the human voices and the achievement of a more stable tonal centre. Thereafter, an anguished search for unity between viola and voice brings further moments of apparent unification between forces, even culminating in a diatonically stable communal hymn, or motet: one which offers a quotation of the ‘Sine Nomine’ fragment. Yet the song recedes, ultimately, into a state of disunity brought about by a return of the declamatory duet, now complete with voices.

While countless rather vague attempts to relate the music’s progress to the quotations heading each movement have been offered by various scholars, a satisfactory account of how and why these quotations in particular may have been chosen by Vaughan Williams has yet to be considered.⁷⁹ In what follows, the narrative and gestural progress of the music is explored in light of the broader context of the poetic song. A preoccupation with the voice,

⁷⁹ Dickinson, for example, offers a narrative that traces ‘the pains of separation’ through to ‘devotion’ in a matter of three lines: see Dickinson (1963), 234. More recently, Eric Seddon states simply that ‘the work involves marital ecstasy in the more personal sense’ (i.e. than that evoked in *Sancta Civitas*). See Eric Seddon, ‘*Flos Campi*: The Enigma’, *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, 42 (July, 2008), 4-6, 5.

and with its hearing, is central both to the poem and to Vaughan Williams's apparent response to it. In this, *Flos Campi* gains further profile as a complex musical meditation upon the possibility, and apparent futility, of a utopian vision of a community in song.

A Song of Separation

In essence, the 'Canticum Canticorum' is a love poem: as Francis Landy has interpreted, it is 'the quintessence of love poetry'.⁸⁰ Landy points out that it has no narrative of its own, only a series of anecdotes.⁸¹ According to his account, interpretations of the poem abound: it is a story of a shepherdess who loves a shepherd, but is captured by King Solomon, only to be released when he realises that the temptations of his secular city can offer nothing in comparison with her love for the shepherd and their country life.⁸² Others suggest that it speaks of a utopian state, concerned with the achievement of consummation sustainable only on the land. Landy elaborates that the poem might be read as a reverse of the fall of Genesis, where Eden is regained through the union of the lovers.⁸³ As such, he suggests that the poem's imagery involves love that sustains an entire community, and a community formed on the site of the land:

[t]he discourse of love, of which the Song is a distillation, is created not only by the lovers, is not only the basis of a community predicated on love, first developing from the family...and then the society of lovers to which the Song appeals, but also draws into its orbit things, plants, animals, geography. It can do nothing else: lovers can communicate only through the world...Something happens that is beyond speech...The lovers are two persons, presumably with their own separate biographies, but the poem is their composite speech, expressing a common personality to which they both contribute, to which each is opened up, and which is experienced in relation to the other.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (2nd ed., Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2011), 5.

⁸¹ Landy, 'The Song of Songs', in Robert Atler and Frank Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: William Collins and Sons, 1987), 305-19, especially 306-10.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 310. For a comprehensive discussion of the poem's possible origins, cultural context, purpose, and apparent literary influences, see Landy (2011), 1-20.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.

As Landy emphasizes, the poem tells of a primal relationship between man and nature, and further of man's alienation from the natural state through language: 'the song is concerned as much with the relationship between man and nature – and his alienation from it through language and consciousness, and his participation in it – as it is with that between human beings'.⁸⁵ Thus, the poem celebrates the *act* of song, celebrating the material sound of the words as 'unconsciously' spoken and heard. In this way, the author(s) of the 'Song of Songs' performs a complex denial of articulate language and a celebration of embodied vocal tone. As Landy makes clear,

the song appeals to the sensual ear as much as to the intellect: the reader may be baffled by the words and still respond to their emotional and physical connotations... The poem has an enchanting quality, whatever the precise meaning of the words, that derives in part from its musical quality, its functions as voice...⁸⁶

As in so many of the composer's selected texts, the 'Song of Songs' is powerfully concerned with an idea of song and its singing: a textual 'pointer' to the project of the music in which it stands in dialogue.⁸⁷ The epigraph from Meredith that is affixed to the score of *The Lark Ascending* is famously an ode to song, as was suggested above. Perhaps more pertinent here is the epigraph which heads the oratorio *Sancta Civitas* (1926), becoming a signifier of the 'song' that will follow.⁸⁸ As in *Flos Campi*, however, the 'song' offered by this oratorio is one whose singing is often ambivalent (as signalled by its deployment of a

⁸⁵ Ibid., 306.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁸⁷ Landy opines that 'one may interpret the title [of the poem] as the Song of which all songs are composed, in which they are all included'. See Landy (2011), 5.

⁸⁸ Vaughan Williams appended a fragment from Plato's *Phaedo* as an epigraph to this work, which as placed on the flyleaf of the score was to be contemplated by the listener in a programme note. The selected quotation arises at the point at which Socrates muses on the existence of the afterlife after describing the voyage of the soul to the Elysian Fields. As Eric Saylor has established, Vaughan Williams provided his own translation of Plato's text in his autograph score of the work, as is clear in a copy he gave to Ivy Herbert (now held by the Royal College of Music). The epigraph reads as follows: '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.' As quoted in Saylor (2003), 136. It is interesting, however, that critics frequently offer a slightly modified version of the quotation in their discussion of this work. Frank Howes, for example, offers the following, in which belief is to be held as a 'song' in the heart: 'No reasonable man ought to be dogmatic about the details of what I have just been through, yet something of the sort is the truth about our souls and their habitation after death, since in any event the soul appears to be immortal. So it seems to me that it is right and proper to take the risk of holding this opinion [...] and a man should, as it were, have it as a song in his heart and sing about it'. See Howes (1954), 150.

‘distant chorus’). Indeed, Hubert Colles suggested that ‘the disturbance one feels in listening to the work’ is related to a sense that ‘the new oratorio leaves the impression that after all the composer has been afraid of oratory’.⁸⁹

The relation between textual epigraph and musical process is similar in *Flos Campi*, in which an idea of a voice and of communion through communication is paradoxically both endemic and distanced in its dialogue with the epigraphs from ‘The Song of Songs’. Further, the idea of man finding communion – with woman, with fellow-man, and with the land – is also explicit in this songful ideal. Near the opening of the poem, the Lover (interpreted as the male protagonist in Landy’s reading) proclaims, ‘My beloved...our bed is green/The Beams of our house are cedar and our rafters are fir’.⁹⁰ The image of the bed is located as the site for union, conflated with the land. Thus, the tree and also the flower becomes a central presence. Appropriately, the first quotation selected by the composer can be related to this imagery: the title, ‘Flos Campi’, is taken from the first line of the poem’s second chapter. The phrase reads: ‘I am the rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valley’. The title ‘Flos Campi’ *does* refer to flowers, it might thus be interpreted, but the associations of these flowers (as the composer had perhaps expected audiences to realize) are complex.

Explored in the context of the poem, these words are those of a ‘bridegroom’, claiming for himself the promise of growth: ‘Sharon’ was a fruitful plain. Thus, the vital beauty of the flower is aligned with an invocation of marital consummation. Crucially, these images of growth and community, focused around the flower and the tree, abound in Vaughan Williams’s nationalistic characterization of song, and of its power in nourishing the ‘garden’ of English music (as was noted above). The poem makes explicit the wider spiritual significance, in an allegorical sense, of the wild flower, referencing that symbolism of bridegroom and bride also explored in *Sancta Civitas*: a relationship between man and God. That ‘Flos Campi’ was taken for this work’s title thus promises much for the ‘wild flowers’ of song that will follow.

⁸⁹ As quoted in Kennedy (1980), 194-5.

⁹⁰ See ‘The Song of Solomon’, 1:16-17, in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, with an Introduction and Notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 760-5, 761.

The musical progress seems to leave ambivalent the power of song, however, and the ability of the ‘singers’ to find an embodied voice, or to find a sufficiently communicative delivery of voice. It is significant that the power of song is also left ambivalent in the poem. The ‘Song of Songs’ is a depiction of a post-lapsarian state: a landscape soiled by disunion, and thus, the lovers’ union is threatened. Accordingly, the work begins in a state of de-centred tonal ambiguity, in which two declamatory instruments articulate a jarring duet, projecting an unmistakeable act of calling. Having taken the opening of Chapter 2 for his title, Vaughan Williams brings fragments from Chapter 2:2 and 2:5 for the first quotation:

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. . . Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.

A call for a lover is articulated here, though the caller is ‘sick of love’, thus seeking consolation from and conciliation with nature, from which he is also apparently separated. The articulation of absence in the music, made clear by the declamatory imitation of (absent) voices, is ‘comforted’ by the entry of human voices at the end of the movement. This comfort is confirmed by the moment of harmonic and gestural calm that ensues: one whose quotation is entirely appropriate. Taken from Chapter 2: 11-12, it reads

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

This evanescent moment of reconciliation with nature is expressed in the E/G song murmured by a tapestry of voices at the opening of the second movement. The euphonious counterpoint is entirely appropriate to the imagery of ‘flowers’, ‘songs’, ‘voices’, and ‘hearing’ articulated in the text, as is the temporarily stable harmony. As Landy makes clear, however, the Lover pleads, in the next and final verse of Chapter 2, to *hear* the Beloved’s

voice: in Chapter 2:14 of the ‘Song of Songs’ the beloved’s voice is reticent: ‘let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice’.⁹¹ Thus, the ambivalences of the music – the closed lips, the *pianissimo* dynamics, and the curious inability of voice and instrument to sustain communion – provide a neat parallel to the broader context from which Vaughan Williams derives his textual epigraphs.

It might be suggested that the composer’s heavy annotation of this chapter in his Bible also confirms this reading (annotations which provide a powerful though only partially explored insight into the epigraphs selected for this work).⁹² Next to the quotation selected for the opening movement (Chapter 2:5), he writes ‘sh’ in pencil, and furthermore draws a broad bracket around the verse from Chapters three to seven, thus sketching a thick mark above verse eight, at which point ‘The voice of the beloved!’ is first introduced (this the first reference to the word ‘voice’ found in the poem thus far). ‘Sh’ is also written alongside this bracket. A further annotation, at verse fourteen, is also discernible, this the point at which as Landy opines, the reticence of the Beloved’s voice is made clear in the poem. Here, just below ‘let me hear thy voice’, Vaughan Williams has marked two barely legible words; they appear to read ‘full sing’.⁹³

The singing of the second movement of *Flos Campi* is anything but ‘full’, however, as was noted above. That Vaughan Williams should have marked these passages in this way is indicative perhaps of the extent to which he was negotiating the idea of ‘voice’ among the forces of chorus and viola, and further, negotiating the idea of reticence and ‘full’ singing within the work as a whole.

⁹¹ Landy, in Alter and Kermode (eds.) (1987), 310.

⁹² Byron Adams has opined that the nature of Vaughan Williams’s annotations in his copy of ‘The Song of Solomon’, held in the British Library, suggest that the composer originally planned a sung text for *Flos Campi*. Adams does not offer any description of these annotations, however. See Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2000), 41, note 33. An alternative interpretation of the annotations is offered below. See also Town (2012), 113-5. Town’s chapter on *Flos Campi* includes a reproduction of the first page of the poem as annotated in Vaughan Williams’s bible, though offers no interpretation either of the composer’s markings, nor of his apparent engagement with these epigraphs in his music.

⁹³ See BL, London. Add. MS. 63850. ‘Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Library. Vol. I. *The Holy Bible* (Oxford, n.d.), with “The Song of Solomon”, 569-72, annotated as for a vocal setting’. See in particular, 569-70.

Thus the dialogue between viola and voices that follows in the third movement of the work is entirely apt in light of this ambivalence, as the unresolved search for the Beloved's voice is continued. The collage of texts appended here is again provocative in light of the movement's progress. From Chapters 3:1, 5:8, and 6:1, the composer provides:

I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I found him not . . . 'I charge you,
O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him I am sick
with love' . . . 'Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among
women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with
thee'.

The third movement's recalling of the declamatory opening corresponds to the textual recall of the first movement's quotation: 'tell him I am sick of love'. Another articulation of absence is clear in the viola's jarring, importunate, anguished cadenza: one that is even more painful following the presence of voices throughout the second movement. The dialogue between viola and female voices – and the sense of questioning that ensues – is entirely appropriate to the multiple questions, and voices, articulated by this collection of quotations. They are a series of vocal fragments, articulating numerous voices, though voices that do not speak directly to each other. This is paralleled in the implacability of the organum-like singing of the female voices in this movement: an inadequate and apparently unhearing response to the viola's searching declamations. In light of the fact that, as was suggested above, Vaughan Williams might be considered to have projected himself into the viola, a union of male viola and female voices here leaves the possibility of sexual union and consummation impossible.

Indeed, this movement contains in its multiplicity of musical voices a series of fractured sentences. Young discerned this aspect of *Flos Campi* when he noted that 'this climactic movement, inspired with the prominence of the emotions of the viola, rides above abstraction and gives, by thematic implication, a procession of such personalities, real and unreal, as those of the Song of Solomon'.⁹⁴ He suggests in this that there is a certain

⁹⁴ Young (1953), 63.

‘unreality’ in the evocations of ‘personalities’ here, his characterization surely a reference to the disembodied effect of the voices, as is also noted in his reading.

The fourth movement, in which a topos of masculine aggression is expressed in a paradoxically stable harmony and unified song, appears thus a triumphant resignation to the inability of voices to sustain a song: a triumph of an instrumental community in which true singing, and a mode of communication and understanding, are absent. The quotation can again offer insights. Taken from Chapter 3:7-8, it reads

Behold his bed [palanquin], which is Solomon's, three score valiant men
are about it... They all hold swords, being expert in war.

The quotation evokes a complex notion of display and defense: one that communicates hope, explaining the reconciliation achieved at the start of the next movement. As Landy corroborates, the ‘bed’ mentioned earlier in the poem is here that same site for union (this procession is often read as a marital procession in the broader context of the poem’s Chapter 3). The war-like evocation communicated by the music might in this context be considered one of defense, as the unified song of the orchestra is aptly enlisted as part of the protection of a site of communion between man and woman, and between man and the land. (As related to this interpretation, the movement might also be read as a blustering procession in which the male viola asserts his superiority as part of a mating ritual, as was suggested in the narrative outline of this movement, above). The threat articulated by this movement lies less in the war-like evocation of the march, therefore, than in the absence of the voices throughout. Thus, their return at the movement’s end suggests that the instrumental song is successful, for its vocal climax is allowed, blossoming into a reconciliation that seems now more explicable.

The next movement is prefaced, however, by the following from Chapter 6:13, and 7:1:

Return, return, O Shulamite, Return, return, that we may look upon thee...How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter.

A yearning plea, like the music that follows, this epitaph provides no affirmation of union. The textual call for the Beloved's return is paralleled in the melancholy of the viola. However, as the anguished tone of the Biblical quotation suggests, the female is ultimately fleeting, and thus the frequent attempts to regain the opening of the movement's blossoming outpouring engages a dialogue with the yearning calls articulated in the epitaph: the music's frequent attempts to 'return' to that moment of arrival provide an important parallel to the repetition of 'return' in the yearning epitaph. The unresolved conclusion of the fifth movement, in which union is evasive, is again appropriate to the open-ended drama of the quotation's call.

The calm that follows, responding to the search for the beloved, may be construed, on one level, as a hymn of thanksgiving. The quotation is also unequivocal. Derived from the opening verses of the final Chapter of the poem, 8:6, it reads

Set me as a seal upon thine heart.

The erotic and spiritual conjunction delineated by the text gives the musical hymn a further stability, the ringing of bells confirming, perhaps, the final communion of bridegroom and bride, as the voices and viola find a tenuous consummation: a final negotiation of Vaughan Williams's familiar hymn of thanksgiving. Indeed, strains evocative of 'Sine Nomine' ring out here, as a bell-like entry of multiple voices recalls an earlier and subdued memory of such diatonic hymns in Vaughan Williams's pre-War works.

In this context, the return of the opening duet remains particularly unsettling; indeed, the textual exploration makes the deeply ambiguous ending more curious, for the final epigraph, like the hymn, suggests that union is final. Why, then, is the entry of the human voices in this duet a disjunctive element, denying the D major and the F-sharp of the viola with a negating C-natural? Though this return might be read as a brief shadow that is overcome by a re-assertion of the hymn, the harmonic instability of the conclusion allows no such interpretation. Rather, a contextualization of the final quotation from the ‘Song of Songs’ might shed light upon the music’s unstable, unfinished quality.

On one level, the text of this book of the Bible is a discourse upon song, and thus upon an idea of voice. Vaughan Williams’s selection of the Vulgate’s title, the ‘Song of Songs’, is significant, for it replaces the ‘Song of Solomon’ as translated in the Authorized Version (this the source through which Vaughan Williams approached the poem).⁹⁵ The composer also quotes from the Latin Vulgate in the manuscript of *Flos Campi*.⁹⁶ As Landy suggests, ‘song’ is as a means of achieving conjunction and communication in the poem: it is an ‘unspeakable’, embodied discourse through which the lovers communicate. Though it lacks a teleological narrative, Landy states that the poem *does* have an emotional centre: Chapter 4, where man, woman, brother, sister, family and community are consummated in a union on the site of the land, ‘a fountain sealed, a well of living water’.⁹⁷ However, while the poem finds fulfilment at this centre, the music cannot, for the composer’s third quotation is a collection of fragments that *frame* Chapter 4, articulating its presence but excluding it, forging fragments rather from Chapters 3, 5, and 6. That the musical centre of *Flos Campi* is not sustained – a moment of vocal outpouring and arrival at the start of the fifth movement, almost exactly half way through work – is unsurprising.

⁹⁵ It should be noted, however, that Vaughan Williams could not have approached this text in the Bible in English in any way other than through the Authorized Version in the 1920s.

⁹⁶ See BL, London. MS. Mus. 1584.

⁹⁷ Landy, in Adler and Kermode (eds.) (1987), 313-4.

The final implosion of vocal resources, articulated by the return of the duet, is also less perplexing if read in the broader context of ‘The Song of Songs’. Dickinson argued that the closing quotation, ‘set me as a seal upon thine heart’, affirms the optimism of the music, for in the poem it is immediately followed by ‘for love is stronger than death’. However, it cannot be ignored that the composer *omits* this portion of the verse from the musical work. Further, the poem’s final gesture (the last verse of Chapter 8) is also one of parting (and of renewed erotic yearning), and crucially involves song and its singing and hearing.

As Landy makes clear, the Lover is finally excluded from the garden in ‘The Song of Songs’: ‘the disunity [of the poem] is also that of the lovers, whose work of integration can never be completed’, for ‘finally, he [the Lover] is excluded from the garden in which she is singing to her friends (8:13-14). This concluding scene suggests the status of the poem; the discourse of the lovers separates them.’⁹⁸ With this in mind, the final vocal gesture of *Flos Campi* – a song in which both voices and viola are present – is entirely appropriate: a gesture which powerfully undermines, however, not only the sense of communal singing achieved through the final hymn, but also the overall statement of the work’s intelligibility in this hymn. As Landy further asserts,

the Song closes with the ‘companions’ (in Hebrew the same word as ‘friends’) listening to the Beloved’s voice, in the gardens, which are gardens not only of love but of poetry (8:13). The Beloved’s voice is of course associated with, and survives only in, the Song; the friends listening to her could then include the entire audience of the Song, all of whom participate sympathetically in the experience of the lovers.⁹⁹

In this reading, *Flos Campi* may be considered to be an impassioned discourse upon the very idea of musical community, and of the sustainability of the language of song. While the ‘sympathetic’ singing of a community seems referenced and attempted in the final movement

⁹⁸ Landy, in Adler and Kermode (eds.) (1987), 316.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 317. In his more recent book, Landy reasserts this reading, maintaining that ‘[f]inally, at the end of the Song, the woman’s voice dismisses the man. It looks back, and perhaps is telling of their experience to the friends “listening to her voice”. Yet to him it is no longer audible... the poem begins with the woman’s desire for his kisses; it ends with her singing in the garden, and his fruitless desire to hear...in [Chapter] 8.13, she is in the enclosed garden, surrounded by the listening audience, and he is excluded’. See Landy (2011), 46-7.

of the score, it is significant that their song is ultimately undermined, in line with the way in which the Lover in the poem remains ultimately separate from the Beloved and from the enclosed and delineated community of the garden in which she sings. Song functions as the means through which the Lovers communicate, as well as the means through which the Lover is excluded. Ultimately, this final denial and separation of a community song speaks powerfully both to the appended hymn and to the final duet of *Flos Campi*. The final performance of a diatonic hymn of thanksgiving is not sustained, and the octatonic music of the opening returns, its gestural fragmentation and fading conclusion confirming a dystopic vision, in which the tragedy of unfulfilled desire is at once a broader statement of the failure of the language of song.

In one respect, *Flos Campi* is thus an intricate reading of ‘The Song of Songs’, for song – in both poem and music – provides the way to disjunction and separation. Any suggestion that the quotations are arbitrary cannot be sustained by the evidence of the music. The nuances of the composer’s textual narrative are interrogated by the score. The final gesture of the work provides an interpretation of the poem that leaves the status of the song – and its singing and hearing – deeply ambivalent. The coda – the duet through which erotic union between man and woman might be translated into the union of man and God or man and community on the site of a spoiled utopia – avoids any easy or final consummation. Instead, the music returns to its beginning, so that the eternal cycle of yearning, fulfilled desire, parting, and separation must always be anew. While the duet delivers final vocal fruition – for the voices are at last present in the declamatory duet which evokes but is denied the human voice from the very opening – it also heralds a separation that its very presence promises to heal.

As such, it is perhaps significant that again, the annotations found in the composer’s copy of ‘The Song of Solomon’ seem somewhat to capitulate to this reading. Following the extensive annotations of Chapter 2, the subsequent markings in the poem are found almost exclusively at moments wherein references to ‘voice’ and its hearing are articulated. At

Chapter 4, the supposed ‘heart’ of the poem’s ideal of songful community, Vaughan Williams draws a bracket around verses one to six, these the passages in which the erotic union of lover and beloved is translated into familial love on the site of the land (the poetry here being rich with images of embodied union with the landscape, as found in the poetry both of Rossetti and Whitman). In Chapter 5 of the poem, a heavy line is drawn under the words ‘it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh’ (though it should be noted that the line is drawn as much through the words as beneath them). In Chapter 7, from which Vaughan Williams derives no quotation, he draws a bracket above verse 10, which reads ‘and the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak’. Here, ‘sh’ is found once more. Finally, verses thirteen to fourteen of the final Chapter 8 are also bracketed by Vaughan Williams, these the final passages of the poem, in which the separation of the lovers – and the community – through song is confirmed.¹⁰⁰

While Vaughan Williams’s annotations are again rather unclear, it is significant that the composer’s concern in reading the poem relates to an idea of the voice, and crucially to how it is heard. Stephen Town (like Byron Adams) has suggested that these annotations may have been sketched by Vaughan Williams as part of an earlier plan to set the poem, though no such plans are documented.¹⁰¹ That Vaughan Williams had hoped listeners would be able to ‘complete for themselves’ the quotations from the ‘Song of Songs’ suggests that the work is concerned with inviting and distancing a response to its voices and their role in songful speech.

This is reinforced by the manner in which consultation of the manuscript of this work confirms that the original epigraph affixed to the final movement of *Flos Campi* was derived by Vaughan Williams not from Chapter 2:8 of the ‘Song of Songs’ (as included in the final version), but rather, from Chapter 2:16, which reads ‘capite nobis vulpes vulpes parvulas quae demoliuntur vineas nam vinea nostra floruit’, or in English, ‘catch for us the foxes, the

¹⁰⁰ See BL, London. Add. MS. 63850. ‘Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Library. Vol. I. *The Holy Bible* (Oxford, n.d.), with “The Song of Solomon”, 569-72, annotated as for a vocal setting’, 569-72.

¹⁰¹ See Town (2012), 113.

little foxes, that ruin the vines, our vineyards that are in bloom'.¹⁰² Vaughan Williams casts a line through this epigraph in the manuscript, and replaces it with the epigraph from Chapter 2:8 (using black ink, as opposed to the red ink used for all other epigraphs in this score). It is highly revealing, however, that his original conception highlighted the ruin of fruitful vineyards, the bloom of the flower destroyed in this final movement of ambiguous serenity. Even more provocative, with this in mind, is Francis Landy's suggestion that this fragment of the poem has long been considered an allusion to folk song, the most prominent of its numerous folkloristic associations.¹⁰³

This change in the role of song, and of earlier structures of musical communication, can be traced through the expressions of numerous post-War English artists. The role of song – and of the flower – in such expressions, is an important signal to a reconsideration of the post-War English 'pastoral'.

England as Flower

As was posited above, it might be assumed that the title, *Flos Campi*, was intended to refer to 'wild flowers' of a particular kind, and that the work can be read as a comment on the fate of English song: the song that would follow in the musical progress, as much as the songs celebrated at length in Vaughan Williams's writings (and within broader musical culture). The metaphor of wild and garden flowers, reaching back to Carl Engel's work in the nineteenth century, was used by Vaughan Williams as a symbol of musical growth and community, the singing of song a gesture of hope for a generative musical future.¹⁰⁴ In that *Flos Campi* foregrounds frequent attempts to stage song's communal singing – its gestural 'blossoming' at the heart of the work ultimately cut down – this music's comment on an English musical future is paradoxical.

¹⁰² See BL, London. MS. Mus. 1584.

¹⁰³ See Landy (2011), 20.

¹⁰⁴ See page 195 at footnote 46, above, for Vaughan Williams's use of floral imagery in his writings.

At the time of its first performance, critics heard in *Flos Campi* an unnatural, almost degenerate use of the voice, as much as a denial of conventional modes of musical speech. In his 1928 study, *Voice and Verse*, H. C. Colles reacted to the ‘unnatural’ use of the voice without words, maintaining that

the alliance of music with words of some sort to make song is the natural habit of mankind arising out of the structure of the vocal organs, and it is only by an effort of virtuosity that mankind can arrive at singing without the aid of words.

That is possibly the reason why modern choirs and their conductors are so fond of those tortuous ‘um-ings’ and ‘ah-ings’ that modern composers so obligingly write for them. They feel as clever as a performing bear who has learnt to stand on his hind-legs; they also make the listener feel as uncomfortable as the bear looks. Such efforts, whether they regard themselves as flights of genius or as momentary aberrations of sense, are evidently exceptional. They do not impugn the general truth of the saying: No words, no song, to which I have already suggested may be added: No song, no developed art of music.¹⁰⁵

While this author elsewhere celebrated *Flos Campi*’s opening as a powerful gesture of English musical modernity (as was noted above), it seems that a disjunctive presentation of song and the use of wordless chorus signalled a painful denial and ‘aberration of sense’, as was clear also in Colles’s reference to this particular work’s communication of ‘riddles’, raising wilful ‘barriers’ to a listener’s experience.

Significantly, organic metaphors of musical ‘gardens’ and ‘growth’ were endemic in narratives of musical revival in England, and as was outlined in Chapter Two, a new English Eden was imagined in the singing of, and communication through, song. A particularly powerful reference to the ‘Song of Songs’ itself is found in Vernon Blackburn’s celebration of the ‘spring’ of English musical composition. Telling a familiar history of a past musical ‘darkness’, this author rejoices that a ‘sudden’ and ‘unexpected’ growth had emerged in English composition, in which

¹⁰⁵ Colles (1928), 9. It might be suggested here that Colles was also objecting to the wordless chorus in *Flos Campi* because its use was ostensibly a reference to French music: an importation that was not only foreign but overtly sensuous.

seemingly the result of natural law, the leaves and the young flowers of the early buds of our Western music came upon us with a quickness that might have seemed unnatural save for the summer development which has come since. Out of the deadness of Winter there seemed to come the cry: 'The rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land'.¹⁰⁶

Plunket Greene also imagined the growth of English music as one predicated upon the 'English rose' of British song. Launching a bitter diatribe upon the continued prevalence of the royalty ballad and the music-hall song in English culture, he attacked

[t]he drawing room blushes, the organ swells, the pseudo-oriental exotics, the suburban flower-gardens, the mock-heroics, the bastard humour which – lyrics and settings alike – have degraded the word 'patriotism' and made the English rose to stink in our nostrils.¹⁰⁷

The exoticism of *Flos Campi* must surely have disturbed Plunket Greene, communicating, perhaps, a sense of song's displacement from English soil: a 'fairyland' quite unlike that imagined in this singer's earlier writings about the voice.

As Francis Landy opines, the final Chapter of 'The Song of Songs' speaks of gardens 'not only of love, but of poetry'. In that song acts as an agent of fracture amid this garden of rich artistic promise, it might be suggested that *Flos Campi*'s ambivalent treatment of an idea of floral song engages tensions regarding the future of English culture and community more broadly: a response to contemporaneous anxieties surrounding national identity prominent in England following the First World War, and often focused around this very image of the wilting or rotting flower.

As Paul Fussell has written, the English literary pastoral 'has been steeped in...what we can call a unique actual ruralism. When we go through the *Oxford Book of English Verse*,

¹⁰⁶ Vernon Blackburn, 'The Springtide of Music', *The Musical Times*, 43. 723 (May, 1903), 304-6.

¹⁰⁷ Plunket Greene, 'The Future of English Song, Part I: The Song and the Public' (1920), 23.

we find that half the poems are about flowers and that a third seem somehow to involve roses'.¹⁰⁸ He continues, moreover, that

roses were indispensable to the work of the imagination during and after the Great War not because Belgium and France were full of them but because English poetry was, and because since the middle-ages they had connoted 'England' and 'loyalty' and 'sacrifice'...[a] typical use of the rose during the war was to make it virtually equal to the idea of England.¹⁰⁹

The idea of England itself as a flower is one that reaches back to Chaucer. In an intriguing study of floral metaphor in English literature, Amy King has demonstrated that botanical imagery and especially the idea of floral 'bloom' became a powerful symbol of marital and sexual union during the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries (these ideas also found in the work both of Shakespeare and Spencer). As King maintains, such metaphors obtained power such that they attained the status of a vernacular, both as inscribed in the novel and in broader social discourse.¹¹⁰

King also contends, however, that the re-inflection of 'bloom' in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, published three years before *Flos Campi*, speaks of a fragmentation of earlier narratives of literary meaning: a fragmentation made manifest in the very structure of language itself.¹¹¹ Delineating a broad Modernist turn towards experimentation with structures of linguistic grammar and meaning, Daniel Hipp has noted that such verbal fractures can be seen as one response to the traumas of the First World War.¹¹² In that the language of song is the subject upon which *Flos Campi* discourses, the denial of a final, intelligible hymn performs a comparable process of revisiting earlier procedures, narratives, and modes of musical 'speech'. This would encompass the octatonic opening and the wordless, distant chorus, casting both as an invocation and a distancing of 'song'.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 231.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 244.

¹¹⁰ Amy M. King, *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹¹ See King (2005), 'Coda: Later Bloomings', 221-25.

¹¹² See Daniel Hipp, *The Poetry of Shell Shock: Wartime Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney and Siegfried Sassoon* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Co., 2005). See also Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990; Pimlico Edition, 1992).

One might even observe that the floral imagery implicit in *Flos Campi* through its epigraphs – ‘I am the Rose of Sharon’ – participates in a rhetoric of War-time experience. As Fussell elaborates, the rose was ‘indispensable to popular sentimental texts of the war, from the song “Roses of Picardy” to “The Roses Round the Door”’, this a ‘favourite song of men’, as Wilfred Owen reported from France during January 1917, and a song which soldiers ‘s[a]ng everlastingly’.¹¹³ Owen himself wrote a poem entitled ‘Song of Songs’: an atypical and little-known homoerotic love poem whose associations with the War might seem as fragile as those of *Flos Campi*. That a favourite inscription on the Somme headstone was a passage from the reticent second chapter of the ‘Song of Songs’ is surely significant however: the lines ‘Until day break, and the shadows flee away’ were inscribed into the memorials of a generation of lost men.¹¹⁴

The erotics of Vaughan Williams’s ideal of community love have been noted at various points throughout this study, and as Byron Adams has observed, they can be further explored in *Dona Nobis Pacem*, a choral work whose overt response to War presents a rather different setting of Whitman than those early scores explored in Chapter Three.¹¹⁵ *Flos Campi* might be considered to participate, with *Dona Nobis Pacem* (as much as with *Sancta Civitas*), in a complex reimagining of an ideal of musical community prominent in the work of numerous post-War English artists. In this way, these works form not only a complex denial of a musical community predicated upon ‘loving one another through our art’, but further, express the fracture of social cohesion that was endemic in post-War Britain. Through reimagining ideas of song and of signing, these works articulate a different, post-War ‘tone’, as projected by a host of post-War English artists:¹¹⁶ a linguistic gesture of fragmentation that became for Vaughan Williams’s expression of an English voice an assertion both of a powerful individuality and a lack of cohesion.

¹¹³ Fussell (1981), 245.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

¹¹⁵ See Adams, in Kramer (ed.) (2010), 35-6.

¹¹⁶ See Hynes (1992), especially 285.

Riders to the Sea

The ambivalent treatment of the voice in Vaughan Williams's sombre opera *Riders to the Sea* might also be considered in relation to his experiences at the front during the First World War – and perhaps more appropriately, in relation to the experiences of those left behind to re-assemble the fragments left in its wake. Virtually a literal setting of the eponymous play by the Irish poet, playwright, musician, travel writer, and folklorist John Millington Synge (1871-1909), *Riders* gradually reveals the emotional trauma of a community of women paralyzed by grief at the loss of their men to the implacable sea, an inescapable horror whose presence is at once ubiquitous but essentially beyond the immediate experience of the characters.

As related to the famously subdued and reticent treatment of the operatic voice in a work recently described as 'the darkest' of Vaughan Williams's 'pessimistic' rural visions,¹¹⁷ a striking feature of the opera's disturbing intimacy is the extent to which both characters and audience hear the rocking of the sea's waves from a distance throughout, a simple evocation of a natural force that is at once a mechanized shadow cast over the fate of a bereaved community. While in earlier works, the sea had functioned as a musical site whereupon English voices were staged in a performance of energetic vitality – taking embodied sustenance from a symbol of the nation's power and promise for future productivity – the sea is reimagined here by an orchestra which sings thematic material in a manner at variance with characters, who are confined to *parlando* and *arioso* until the very end of the opera.

It is no small irony that in an 'opera' long hailed as Vaughan Williams's most successful essay in the genre¹¹⁸ – a genre whose definitive 'fetishizing' of the tone of the human voice has become an object of preoccupation for a number of scholars in recent

¹¹⁷ Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 55-71, 55-6.

¹¹⁸ As Michael Kennedy has put it, '[t]his is Vaughan Williams's most successful opera, perhaps because the subject – man against nature – was one which always drew strong and characteristic music from him, as in *A Pastoral Symphony* and *Sinfonia Antartica*.' See Kennedy, as quoted in Caireann Shannon, 'The duty of Words to Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*', *The Musicology Review*, Second Issue (2005-6), 47-62, 47-8. Kennedy also characterizes the work as 'Vaughan Williams's masterpiece for the stage'. See Kennedy, 'Vaughan Williams, Ralph', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 4 (New York: Oxford University press, 1997), 906-8, 906.

years¹¹⁹ – the protagonists of *Riders to the Sea* are caught in a web of song in which their struggle, and ultimate failure, to access a measure of lyrical expression and expansion generates a great sense of the opera's understated power. As numerous writers have observed, the distinctive emotional eloquence of the opera lies precisely in the poverty of its vocal writing, such that the score participates in a virtual negation of the genre. As Edmund Rubbra opined in a review of the work's premiere, 'in no sense is this an opera: rather is it spoken drama raised in emotional power and expressiveness to the nth degree'.¹²⁰ Hugh Ottaway later maintained that the expressivity of the opera is cruelly contained in a stunted expression of song, as 'the voices for the most part are restrained and subdued, and never soar away from their earth-bound existence at Maurya's cottage'.¹²¹ This is reminiscent of Frank Howes's sense that *Riders* is 'an opera in recitative, and the voice part never takes wing in song save perhaps at the consummation of tragedy, where Maurya's words rise on a curve of melody *largamente* over diatonic chords'.¹²²

The sense in both these readings that voices are somehow 'restrained' from 'soaring' makes clear a particular critical reaction to the treatment of the voice in this opera: namely, a response to its apparent denial of song's birth and flight, and one which seems promised by the way in which the vocal writing is poised, or tethered, on the cusp of a 'recitative' which seems *about* to take flight.¹²³ Set on a timeless, primal Celtic wilderness off the west coast of Ireland, the opera invites unavoidable comparison with Vaughan Williams's tale of the open-air preacher, whose desire to express his heightened emotion – and to communicate with his hearers – gave forth the flight of his song (and for Vaughan Williams, the mythic origins of music). Both Michael Kennedy and Caireann Shannon have drawn attention to the possible relevance of this tale when discussing this opera, the latter author suggesting that like Synge (and in turn Walt Whitman), Vaughan Williams celebrates here the 'everyday' speech (and

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Abbate (1991), and by the same author, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Michelle Duncan, 'The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 283-306.

¹²⁰ As quoted by Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 59.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹²² Howes (1954), 316.

¹²³ James Day also referred to the treatment of the operatic voice as 'restrained', emphasizing the extent to which Vaughan Williams seems consciously to have avoided the usual operatic conventions in aspects of modulation, harmony, rhythm, and orchestration. See Day (1961), 122-3.

song) of folk communities, the opera's vocal treatment merely an expression, in Shannon's reading, of the composer's 'interest in Gaelic speech rhythms'.¹²⁴

While Shannon offers an insightful account of the extent to which the play's 'inherent musicality' may have appealed to Vaughan Williams – a text, like so many others selected by the composer, in which music pervades the poetic conception – it is a further irony that the treatment of song in this opera seems consciously to deny the performative nature of vocal display. It might be posited that *Riders* denies, in this way, a specific voice: namely, the voice of communal birth and growth found in works such as *The Lark Ascending*. This community, poised at the moment of 'song's' emergence as in the open-air preacher tale, is cruelly re-imagined, a moment of dawn reversed to a portrait of death: a moment frozen in historical time, and an expression of music's evolution cut down, a life cut short, a spirit tethered in a song denied its flight.

Indeed, it has been noted that Robert Colls emphasized the extent to which Celtic peripheries had since the opening of the twentieth century been imagined as “‘a fount whence may well up streams of inspiration” for tired hearts’: a ‘land of song and fable and sea-dashed rocks’, whose ‘people would invigorate the rest’.¹²⁵ To the extent that this work both evokes and denies the singing of a land resplendent in originary song, the opera's vocal treatment is particularly severe and even cruel.

Vaughan Williams's treatment of the operatic voice seems to engage a significant though hitherto neglected feature of Synge's play: namely, the extent to which speech-acts are themselves paramount to the unfolding of the dramatic narrative. As Burt Cardullo has pointed out, the power of speech as a weapon in the plight of the human characters against the merciless power of the sea is a lynchpin in a conception whereby characters both attempt but are unable to speak, pray, and 'keen' for and to each other.¹²⁶ Maurya, the play's protagonist, refuses to offer her blessing to her last living son Bartley when he stubbornly

¹²⁴ Shannon (2005-6), 51.

¹²⁵ Colls (2002), 275-6.

¹²⁶ Burt Cardullo, “‘Riders to the Sea’: A New View”, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 10.1 (June, 1983), 95-112.

insists upon riding down to the Galway boat to Connemara in order to deliver the family's horses for sale at the fair. When upon realizing the danger of sending a son away with 'hard words' in his ears Maurya hastens to the spring-well to deliver both bread and blessing, she is unable upon arrival to offer Bartley a benediction, for the words 'catch in her throat' (due to a fearful vision of her son Michael riding on a grey pony behind Bartley). Thus, he passes, astride his horse, the words unheard. Her guilt is complete, as Cardullo interprets, when at the end of the opera she acknowledges to the dead Bartley that she did pray for him. The mother's words, addressed to the unhearing corpse of her son, hangs over the muted tragedy of the family's ruin however, and in this way the 'drama of an entire community' becomes one enacted through a frustrated series of miscommunications: one which informs the very vocal conception of the opera as a whole.¹²⁷

Indeed, Vaughan Williams (who lost his own father early and was raised by a family of surviving women) realizes this vision of a shattered family – and in broader terms, a fractured community – through a frequent denial of an expressive singing voice. This becomes a powerful and complex enactment not only of a broken vision of community opera, but of the pastoral genre and of the place of song in confirming a bond between man and land. Distant, wordless, and tethered operatic voices contribute at dramatically crucial moments to the unfolding of the opera's narrative, and such tropes are crucial to an understanding of the way in which this work may be considered to express a disfigured vision of a community predicated upon song, as comparable to that explored in *Flos Campi*. With this in mind, it might plausibly be considered that the curious vocal treatment in the opera, as much as its deployment of a keening wordless female chorus, placed at a distance off-stage, participates in a similar process of distortion found in other pastoral works of the 1920s, enacting a desolate post-War landscape – a sullied Eden – in which the mourners battle a terror fuelled as much by having to listen continually to the sound of the sea's untameable power, as by their inability to tame an expression of their emotional response to this grief through a free and emotionally communicative outpouring of embodied, expressive song. In that this vision of a ruined community is staged not in England but in Ireland,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 95.

moreover, this work participates, like *Flos Campi*, in displacing the act of song, the pre-War role of song and singing in configuring community through communication, painfully uprooted.

Perhaps the most dominant trope of the work's ambiguity concerning the voice is signalled by the way in which instrumental voices give stark emphasis to the austerity of the vocal statements, often appearing to sing for the characters and articulating in this way a series of fragmented subjective personae.¹²⁸ The first entry of human voices presents a hushed dialogue cast as recitative by Cathleen and Nora, against nothing but the sound of a sea machine. The characters' heightened speech is something of a jolt when heard in the wake of the lyrical melodies of the bassoon and oboe, which, however mournfully, seem able to express the melancholy that the two sisters cannot express fully to each other. See example 4.9.

Vaughan Williams fashions the first entry of the voice from a thematic fragment that draws its notes solely from octatonic pitch collection III, this the set from which the orchestra's introduction has also been fashioned in part (an exposition that generates much of the significant thematic and harmonic material of the opera, as Walter Aaron Clark has contended).¹²⁹ The sense of rootless alienation inherent in the entry of the voices is related to the octatonic profile of Cathleen's fragmentary, almost spoken vocal line, which, cast against nothing but the hollow, unpitched noise of the sea machine, contributes to the mournful sense of a 'dark', ruined, unstable state. The syllabic fragments of this octatonic vocal entry also offer a stark contrast to the lyrical emphasis upon B-flat aeolian in the preceding bassoon and oboe parts. See example 4.9.

¹²⁸ James Day seems to hint at this treatment when he points to the way in which '[t]he astonishingly effective vocal line, conveying both the atmosphere of plainsong and of Celtic speech at the same time, is backed by uncannily telling orchestration. There are no sensational effects, yet in the way in which two or three solo instruments embellish the voice parts, such details are etched with a master hand'. See Day (1998), 122.

¹²⁹ A detailed harmonic analysis of the opera's prelude can be found in Clark's essay on Vaughan Williams's use of octatonic pitch collections throughout *Riders to the Sea*: see Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 61-5. The octatonic pitch-class set from which Cathleen's vocal entry is derived is collection III (E, F-sharp, A, B-flat, C, D-flat, and E-flat).

Example 4.9, *Riders to the Sea*, figure 2.

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Significantly, these lyrical melodies are articulated most prominently just two bars after the curtain rises to reveal two characters sitting silently. The sense of an instrumental delivery of these characters' inner voices is thus clear from the opening, establishing a curiously

alienating sense of their disembodied, ventriloquized status: a ‘terrifying’, puppet-like presentation, appropriate, perhaps, to Vaughan Williams’s interest in non-expressive Modernist theatre, as confirmed in his communications with Gordon Craig in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

This concept of orchestral ventriloquism underlines the opera throughout, as instrumental melodies either prompt, trace, or supplant the human voice. It is a technique that comes to the fore at crucial moments within the drama, moreover. At figure 11, for example, where Maurya asks where Bartley has gone – ‘where is he himself?’ – this, the dreadful question upon which the first part of the drama hinges, is uttered by Maurya in a restrained *senza misura* fragment on three conjunct pitches in the middle register of her voice. Her free expression is one of speech as the usurping instruments are left to give emotional voice to her emotions. In the two bars before Maurya delivers her measured question, the lower strings offer a threatening account of octatonic collection I (from which the pitches of Maurya’s question are also fashioned).¹³⁰ As Maurya begins the utterance of her question, oboe and *cor anglais* offer at *forte* an anguished wail, reaching into high a register that thereafter outlines an expressive descent through chromatic intervals, drawing attention away from the dull monotone of Maurya’s recitative. In this way, it is as if the instruments are in control of the drama, rather than the characters, who remain at the mercy of merciless natural phenomena.

Such moments also underlie those parts of the text that seem powerfully to evoke a bitter statement of post-War grief on Vaughan Williams’s part: moments wherein the

¹³⁰ The pitches here are, in the vocal part, F-sharp, G-sharp, and A, supported by a D-sharp and C-sharp in the orchestra. See Vaughan Williams, *Riders to the Sea* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 10 (figure 11). As Byron Adams has suggested, Maurya and the pitiless sea are both characterized by music that has its origin in octatonic collection III. Adams elaborates that a motif derived from this collection occurs every time Maurya has a premonition of approaching disaster. See Adams, in Frogley and Thompson (eds.) (2013), 51. While Vaughan Williams draws his material at figure 11 not from collection III but from collection I, it is significant that the octatonic ‘premonition’ motif – a falling three-note fragment comprising a semitone and a minor third – occurs in the lower strings as a threatening preface to Maurya’s crucial question, and has in fact characterized the music exposed since the bar before figure 10 (this a passage in which Maurya attempts to reassure herself that Bartley will not take the dangerous journey to Connemara that day). See 3 bars before figure 11 for a clear exposition of this motif. As Adams elaborates, ‘most psychoanalytic schools treat the sea as a symbol of the submerged unconscious, so that Vaughan Williams’s use of this particular octatonic pitch class uncannily links the sea with Maurya’s deepest fears’. It is important that the instruments, rather than Maurya herself, are given this octatonic motif in the passage that prepares her crucial question, however: an expression of the character’s displaced ‘unconscious’, and a betrayal of her true fears, despite the outward reassurances she offers herself in the vocal part.

composer ‘inexplicably’ modifies Synge’s 1904 text, in Clark’s reading, to the effect that as this author interprets, ‘Vaughan Williams actually obscures the meaning of the dialogue’. For example, Clark points to the way in which

[w]hen Maurya prepares to go after Bartley to give him bread for his journey, Cathleen tells Nora to give their mother the walking stick so she won’t slip ‘on the big stones’. When Maurya declares that ‘in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old’, Vaughan Williams’s libretto withholds a crucial piece of information that Synge provided: the stick was Michael’s.¹³¹

While Clark points to this omission as a deliberate obfuscation of the play’s coherence, he offers no possible reason for such ‘perplexing’ editorial decisions on Vaughan Williams’s part. To an extent, it might be offered that an intended undermining of intelligibility is itself a valid reading. After all, this opera subverts the expectations of ‘opera’ itself, including the enriched expressivity for which the genre is celebrated. Such operatic richness was displayed fully in Vaughan Williams’s pre-War opera *Hugh The Drover*, whose vocal score was complete by 1914. In *Riders to the Sea*, however, conventions are negated and obscurity is used to create further mystery.

From another perspective, Vaughan Williams’s omission of the particularity of what is ‘left behind’ by ‘the young men’ allows this poignant statement to extend to a more general expression of grief: grief for the loss of a generation of men who themselves, left behind their mothers, the ‘old women’ of whom Maurya is arguably a symbol, a symbol of a generation who outlived the young. Clark does not offer the remainder of the quotation at this point, in which Vaughan Williams retains Synge’s lines ‘[i]n the big world, the old people will be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind them for them that do be old.’ In this way, the omission of a reference to Michael’s stick deflects the specificity of Synge’s dialogue, in order to make both a personal and a general statement of post-War grief and loss.

¹³¹ Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.) (2003), 56.

It is interesting that at this moment, Maurya is allowed a more lyrical expression of her grief, as she sings a melody which traces the outline of octave E-flats in broad conjunction with the orchestra's impassioned cries. While the syllabic presentation of Maurya's lament retains the directness of recitative – an infinitely intelligible statement of broad cultural anxiety, which must surely have spoken powerfully to a British audience still mourning the losses in one war, and, perhaps, dreading the possibility of another in 1937 – the material in this moment articulates a concession to the listener: a moment wherein the protagonist is able to access the expansion of her emotional voice, and the listener is invited to share with her in this, one of the first moments of lyrical outpouring of the singing voice exposed in the opera thus far. This becomes a dramatic turning point, moreover, as Maurya thereafter embarks finally upon a dangerous (and unseen) errand down to the water itself.

The denial of lyrical voice may be observed when Maurya returns from the seashore, however, and reveals that she has seen Michael's ghost (at figure 32). Here, she sings a slow, flat intonation as the oboe offers a cry in high register, a descending wail which seems at once to sing a fractured inner voice of the character, while functioning also as a sirenic call of the 'unconscious' sea: the very source of the men's deaths. Maurya's inability to express herself outwardly is further intensified soon afterwards, when she narrates 'and I tried to say "God speed you" but something choked the words in my throat'. Here, the oboe, followed by the flute, enter at the words 'something caught the words in my throat', the instruments singing material derived once more from an octatonic collection.¹³² See example 4.10, below.

Such moments communicate a revelation of the role of these instrumental voices in expressing the characters' inner subjectivities while at once silencing their ability to express these emotions fully. The multiple layers of distanced narrative speech are also important, as Maurya reports her attempted speech-act in the past, a speech unable to communicate the crucial words of benediction, this confirmed when she continues that '[h]e went by quickly,

¹³² The orchestra's melodies at this moment are fashioned from octatonic collection II (pitches A, B, F, E-flat, C, C-flat, A-flat).

and “the blessing of God on you” says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony’.

It is provocative that this moment occurs at the ‘spring well’. Maurya is unable to speak here, and while the voices rising from the water sound out a lament at the conclusion of the opera, they are far from those of the human characters. Unlike Vaughan Williams’s *A Sea Symphony*, an embodied union with nature is impossible in *Riders to the Sea*. The ‘keening’ of Synge’s women in the play – a gesture of crying at the edge of the water – becomes a powerful symbol of the tragedy of the whole community, for the protagonists of the drama cannot express grief through the voice, as can these keening figures. The disembodied voices of the characters are flattened puppet voices, instructed to ‘express freely’ so often, but in a free expression which emerges only from an instrumental ventriloquism.

As Julian Johnson suggests, in Mahler’s music the singer’s recitative voice – ‘the barest kind of telling’ – is often instructed to sing such that ‘[h]uman presence is given by the voice, but the voice is instructed to sing without expression – a distancing, but also a kind of emotional shock, like a trauma recounted in blank tones’.¹³³ It might be interpreted that Vaughan Williams’s presentation of such recitative voices is comparable: a series of puppet characters seem on the one hand to supply, in their delivery of actual voices, the absent presence of ‘tone’ to the sparse, instrumental vocal materials, yet simultaneously, their monotone presentation disallows any but a spoken free-expression. Thus, the voices convey an alienated subjectivity, in which the characters seem ventriloquized by their ostensibly consoling instruments. Supplying the vocal ‘remainder’, instrumental voices become an expressive but disembodied subjectivity, as the opera contains a plenitude of voices, and at once, a striking paucity of centred, nourished song.

¹³³ Johnson (2009), 14.

MAURYA

And I tried to say 'God speed you,' but some-thing choked the words in my

Oboe Flute

Strings

Ww. #

throat

He went by quick-ly and 'the

Strings

pp

bless - ing of God on you' says he and I could say no-thing.

Oboe

pp

Example 4.10, *Riders to the Sea*, 3 bars after figure 33.

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Perhaps the most powerful example of an ambivalent vocal treatment is when the 'unnerving' wordless voices are employed,¹³⁴ this 'keening' heard first by Maurya on her return from the sea; by Nora and Cathleen in the same scene, in which they greet her return and hear of her vision; and thereafter, by an off-stage chorus of female voices, who begin to

¹³⁴ Day (1998), 166.

‘keen’ from afar, their cries only later explained as those of women mourning at the seashore. Here is a further possible expression of Vaughan Williams’s personal response to War, translated into the communal experience of this symbolic rural community. While the voices of an off-stage female chorus have long been considered a pictorial element of the opera – a grief-laden statement, but one which neatly parallels the sounds of the old women mentioned in the text – the extent to which some characters are able to hear these voices, while others appear not to, is crucial. This becomes an expression, once more, of the ways in which these voices articulate partial subjectivities, and multiple, inner voices that they are frequently unable to communicate.

When Maurya returns from the shore, she enters the stage and there is considerable tension as the characters wait for her to speak. For some bars, the bassoon and flute in low register recall the opening, offering a duet which rises to ‘blossom’ such that an oboe gives forth a melancholy cry, descending through an octatonic incantation from *forte* to *piano*.¹³⁵ The silence of the characters at this expectant moment highlights, once more, the role of the instruments in giving voice to their inner emotions. As the dynamic of the oboe drops, Maurya is faintly heard, singing to ‘ah’, a melodic outline which had joined the oboe half way through its second bar, during which Cathleen had also impatiently begun to question her: ‘[y]ou didn’t give him his bit of bread?’

Maurya’s wordless melody, an unusually lyrical (though now wordless) expression of her grief, employs pitches derived from octatonic collection I. As Cathleen continues to express her demands for speech – ‘did you see him riding down?’ – Maurya, in collusion with viola, oboe, and later the flute, continues to offer this haunting, keening wordless melody, as though unable to hear Cathleen, the flute tracing her melody but as has become characteristic, exceeding its lyrical profile (as shown at 4 bars before figure 29). Cathleen finally implores her ‘God forgive you; isn’t it a better thing to tell what you seen, than to be making lamenting?’ (See example 4.11 below). At last, it becomes clear in this that Cathleen hears her mother’s cry as a gesture of lament: a sonic cry now recognized on the stage. Yet

¹³⁵ The material of the instrumental parts at this moment employs octatonic collection II (pitches F-sharp, F, D, C, A, A-flat). See *Riders to the Sea* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 31 (7 bars after figure 28).

for some bars, Cathleen's dialogue and persistent questioning seems to suggest that she is unable to hear her mother's keening: the suggestion is one of Maurya's silence as she sings a lyrically expansive expression of her grief, while Cathleen implores her to offer a response. This moment introduces a crucial role for these wordless vocal wails: their role as a different mode of music from the recitative heard throughout – an expressive cry of the octatonic 'unconscious', perhaps, that is cruelly silenced for some bars once achieved, in the inability of the characters to commune with one another in hearing these cries. This provides a further perspective on the role of frustrated communications as a lynchpin in the dramatic narrative.

Once Cathleen hears these cries, however, Maurya's wails seem to open a floodgate, whereby the allusive plot thus far – the fragmented details of the extent of her loss – are finally revealed plainly to the audience. It is notable that critics tend to relate the narrative of the opera in retrospect: a tale of a mother's loss of all of her sons to the sea. Yet until this moment, the background of this bereavement is only partially understood, for the audience has been given only a series of explanatory fragments. The opera begins with a report of 'her sleeping'; a bundle of clothes, 'Michael's?' – though the audience are unsure as to who Michael is. The unknown plot elements of the opera thus far speak for the inarticulate silence of the voices and their inability to reveal the full trauma of what has occurred. Finally, however, the emergence of Maurya's lamenting in this liminal moment sounds out an inner voice: a voice finally heard by the characters as her own, thus ushering in the old woman's heartrending tale of what has befallen her. This narration is for the audience; the characters have heard it all before and, indeed, experienced the tragedy for themselves.¹³⁶ In this moment, Maurya's nightmare vision, held inside her body, is released by these wailing cries of lament.

¹³⁶ It might also be interpreted that those who have suffered the death of their children often compulsively tell and retell the stories of those deaths. Thus, Cathleen, wearied of a story she undoubtedly hears daily, is tired of her mother's constant lamentations at eight bars after figure 28, as is shown in example 4.11.

Example 4.11, *Riders to the Sea*, 7 bars after figure 28.

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It is significant that Vaughan Williams chooses a text replete throughout with references to ‘crying lamentation’. The opera begins from this proposition: Nora tells of the ‘young priest’ who has brought ‘a shirt and a plain stocking...got off a drowned man in Donegal’. Nora reports, ‘the young priest says he’s known the like of it, “if it’s Michael’s

they are” says he “you can tell herself she’s got a clean burial by the grace of God: and if they’re not his, let no one say a word about them for she’ll be getting her death” says he “with crying lamenting””.¹³⁷ She presents the priest’s voice as a kind of chant, a different mode of music for ‘by the grace of God’. In this way, Nora ventriloquizes the young man’s speech, while setting up the dramatic vocal tension of the work as a whole: her mother’s discovery of the loss of yet another son, and the fear of her ‘crying’. This is clear in example 4.12, below.

The dialogue frequently involves characters ventriloquizing the voices of others, warning of ‘cries’ that will be made and heard if the sea should turn out to have exercised its merciless power once more. At the opening of the opera, Nora debates whether to open the parcel of clothes found in the opening scene, but for fear of waking ‘her’, Cathleen suggests ‘[m]aybe she’d wake up on us, and come in before we’d done. It’s a long time we’ll be, and the two of us crying’. The invocation of ‘crying’, just before figure 8, elicits what might be expected: a lamenting, descending motif in a response from the orchestra and from the voice. Yet this is the story of a cry; it is distanced in this way: the cries of the sisters themselves are not heard until the very end of the opera. When Nora and Cathleen discover that the parcel does contain the clothes of their brother, the cry has been foreshadowed from the opening: it is a dramatic point of arrival for the opera as a whole. This is further confirmed at the moment when this cry is heard from Maurya: the moment feared throughout. Here, an expression of wailing lament gives way to the second part of the drama, and finally, the richly melodic, diatonic background to her serene acceptance of her own impending death and her freedom from the clutches of the cruel sea.

¹³⁷ It is notable that as Nora considers the proposition that ‘if it’s Michael’s [the discovered clothes] are’ – that Michael is indeed lost to the sea – her vocal line is cast in octatonic collection II. In her more hopeful consideration of the priest’s assessment that there is a possibility that the clothes are not Michael’s, this octatonic material is abandoned. The use of octatonic pitches in this way appears once more to underline the premonition of dark events, though in light of the restricted treatment of Nora’s voice in singing these pitches, they remain those of Adams’s suggestion of an unspoken – or un-sung – ‘unconscious’.

NORA

The young priest says he's known the like of it 'If it's Mich-a-el's they are' says he 'you can tell her-self he's got a

Va.

Vc.

D.B.

Flute

NORA

clean bu - ri - al by the grace of God: and if they're not his, let no - one

Va.

Vc.

D.B.

Fl.

NORA

say a word a-bout them, for she'll be get-ting her death', says he 'with cry - ing and lam - en - ting.'

Va.

Vc.

D.B.

6

Example 4.12, *Riders to the Sea*, 9 bars before figure 6.

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In many ways, this moment lies at the heart of the opera, almost exactly half way through the work's progress. At figure 35, a clearer melodic profile articulates a point of structural and narrative arrival as Maurya shares her tale of the lost sons. This is a more diatonic section, in which the orchestra offers the same sort of modal thematic material to

that characterizing the distant vocalise in *A Pastoral Symphony* (see the melodic profile of the first violin at figure 37 ‘gone now, the lot of them’). It is during this narrative that the ‘chorus of women’ (marked ‘offstage distant’ in the score) are heard, and according to Vaughan Williams’s direction, they are ‘almost inaudible at first, gradually getting louder (sing on closed ‘AH’ (er) when soft; open ‘AH’ when loud).’ As the voices grow louder, their distance mitigated, Nora asks ‘did you hear that Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north east?’, and at this point, a solo alto emerges prominently into the foreground, offering a broad and lamenting melodious wail over nothing but the sea machine.

Cathleen herself is restricted to a *senza misura* monotone: ‘[t]here’s someone after crying out by the seashore’. At this point, the orchestra resumes as Maurya continues her narration, apparently unable to hear these voices, whose chorus is reminiscent of that heard in *Flos Campi*: a series of wails, over which Maurya finally reveals that there were ‘two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and crossing themselves and not saying a word’. The wordless voices emerge prominently in the foreground at this moment, with a broad, wordless melody at precisely the moment where Maurya recalls their ‘not saying a word’, a solo contralto articulating a cry in such a way that just before Maurya recounts their silence, the voice reaches forth and breaks out to give an anguished song (as is shown below).

MAURYA
four wo-men com-ing in and they cross-ing them-selves and not say-ing a word...

Contralto solo
Ah

Sop Alto
Ah

Sop Alto
Ah

Orch.
f *p*

Example 4.13, *Riders to the Sea*, 3 bars after figure 40.

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In dialogue with the text, this voice functions ostensibly as the voices of the women Maurya claims to have heard. Yet a communal presentation of voices united in laments that can be heard and shared by the characters on-stage emanates not from the women (who are the figures of narrative, at least until their entry onstage at figure 41), nor either Maurya herself, but an inner, expressive voice whose inability to speak from the characters' bodies is highlighted both by Maurya's text and by her *parlando* recitative.¹³⁸ When finally the 'old women begin coming in one by one', Vaughan Williams directs that 'they sing nothing, they are silent'.

¹³⁸ Through consultation of the manuscript sketches for the opera, Walter Aaron Clark has demonstrated that Vaughan Williams revised his setting of Maurya's words in order to provide a more 'horizontal contour' to her vocal part when she acknowledges and resigns herself to the extent of her loss, this the point towards which the opera moves throughout. Specifically, with the utterance of the words 'they are all gone now' (9-10 bars after figure 42), Clark demonstrates that Vaughan Williams had originally intended to set the word 'all' by allowing the vocal line to rise by an interval of a fifth. In the final version, however, Maurya remains on a monotone A. As Clark interprets, 'Maurya's submission to her tragic destiny is, in the final version, completely devoid of hysteria'. See Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 67.

With the broader narrative's warning of 'cries' in mind, it is significant that the first sounding of the wordless voices occurs precisely where Maurya relates the story of her sons' deaths, and recalls members of the community 'carrying the bodies on one plank'. This is particularly painful when considered in light of Vaughan Williams's duties as an ambulance orderly during the First World War. The prominence of horses in this play is also significant in this sense. The hope of selling horses at Donegal fair is what sends Maurya's final son, Bartley, to his death. As she pleads with him not to go, the futility of these horses in the face of human life becomes painfully urgent: '[i]f it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses, you had itself what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?' In the final account of Bartley's death, it emerges that 'a grey pony' had 'knocked him into the sea', thus the cause of his drowning. This again provides a crucial dramatic turning point, for here begins the final Adagio, the melodic, song-like apotheosis of the opera as a whole, where the orchestra articulates the most conjunct and diatonic thematic material heard in the entire opera. Here, Vaughan Williams's two central tasks during the war are articulated with some vocal significance. As an officer whose duties once included caring for several hundred horses during the second part of the war, Vaughan Williams's choice of this play cannot be without some significance.¹³⁹

Typically, Maurya's final grief is expressed through a reference to her broken voice: 'I'll have no call now...to be crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf in the east' (see figure 43). Vaughan Williams underlines this by bringing the chorus of voices back, and here they are seen on stage, singing in a startling, low tone. The 'old woman' reflects here upon the futility of laments and prayers: vocal acts she had performed to protect her man folk. The 'keening' of old women, heard in earlier moments, is at this point given specific alignment with the textual narrative: 'I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening.' Again, this is an anticipation of

¹³⁹ A detailed account of Vaughan Williams's service during the First World War can be found in Stephen Connock, 'The Edge of Beyond', *Journal of the RVW Society*, 16 (1999), 3-6.

her own silenced voice; there will be no need for further crying. She sings in a stark monotone, heightened against the keening voices onstage. These cries have been heard as a warning of grief to come, but are now sounded out, by instruments, by disembodied voices of the sea, and finally, here, by the chorus of keening women.¹⁴⁰

While this may be interpreted as a pictorial response to the play, the extent to which the temporal realm of the musical narrative casts these acts of ‘keening’ as ones that the protagonist cannot embrace, or acts she had previously embraced, is a powerful and complex gesture of expressive vocal silence. The play concludes as she speaks directly to a dead son: ‘It isn’t that I haven’t prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn’t that I haven’t said prayers in the dead night til you wouldn’t know what I was saying’ (see 5 bars before figure 47). Here, the orchestra merely provides a neutral pedal for her recitative. There is no hint of transcendence here.

Perhaps the most interesting of the composer’s ‘inexplicable’ textual elisions occurs at this point, as Nora reflects in the final passages of the opera upon her mother who is suddenly serene in rest: ‘[s]he’s quiet now and easy. But the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this spring well. It’s getting old she is, and broken’. As Clark suggests, Vaughan Williams supplies a different text to Synge’s play at ‘spring well’, for Synge makes clear that Maurya had loved Michael the best, this apparently an explanation for her silence in this instance.¹⁴¹ Vaughan Williams, on the other hand, substitutes Synge’s explanation for a repetition of text heard earlier in the opera, offering ‘it’s getting old she is, and broken’. Thus, he appears to supply his own explanation for why Maurya does not cry here, as apparently she had in response to Michael’s death. Vaughan Williams has made a complex choice at this point. While the ‘broken’ emotional state of the ‘old woman’ is explicitly located in her inability to cry, it is ironic that again, we do not hear this cry; it has happened in the past. Maurya seems continually unable to express a cry for her sons, and this

¹⁴⁰ It is significant that the material of this final section does not derive, either in the voice parts or the instrumental parts, from octatonic collections. In this way, it might be interpreted that the ‘sounding out’ of inner, ‘unconscious’ octatonic voices – voices aligned with the sea – is confirmed in the harmonic profile of the opera, this entirely appropriate to Maurya’s resignation to the pitiless power of the sea, as much as to her final hearing of – though not communion in singing with – the ‘keening’ voices of a community of women.

¹⁴¹ See Clark, in Adams and Wells (eds.), 57.

is heightened as a poignant song of the strings emerges: a lament, and a songful hymn of conclusion.

In this way, the opera seems largely to be predicated upon the promise, and absence, of lyrical emotional expression by a human voice. This process continues to the conclusion, where Maurya resigns herself with the question ‘what more can we want [i.e. than a clean burial for her sons]? No man can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied’. The voices both of winds and unseen female chorus articulate, for a final time, her mourning, in a broad range of languid melodies, and the work closes as the sounds of the sea machine and the distant offstage voices confirm their status as voices of the sea. These voices are those of an implacable world; they call the community’s men to their deaths, and cruelly prompt the anguished disembodied cries of the women. This is a complex reconfiguration of the music of nature, and of man’s embodiment with the land through song.

NORA

But the day Mi-chael was drowned you could hear her cry - ing out from this to the

CATHLEEN

Spring well It's get-ting old she is, and bro - ken.

Strings

p

Example 4.14, *Riders to the Sea*, 8 bars before figure 48.

Riders to the Sea by Ralph Vaughan Williams to text adapted from J M Synge

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As was noted in the previous chapter, Eric Saylor has observed that in the pre-War opera *Hugh the Drover*, Vaughan Williams stringently sought to forge a ‘community’ opera bearing ‘real’ material of English voices, such that a self-referential presentation of folk song was enacted in the opera’s progress. It might be argued that in this post-War tragedy of an entire community, Vaughan Williams most successfully realizes his ideal of a community opera, in which the ‘real’ music of speech – an originary ancestral voice, albeit in an Irish dialect – is foregrounded as the central impetus of the musical progress. Yet this is achieved at the expense of that which the composer sought above all for ‘national’ music: a community sustained through song, and through its making and material plenitude. It is here that the greatest disturbance of the work may be said to lie: a work in which, like *Flos Campi*, a vision of musical future lies painfully ambivalent. The sounds of a Celtic voice can offer no birth and no future for music in this post-War dystopic wilderness.

Voices of Post-War England: Concluding Remarks

Upon perusing Vaughan Williams’s Bible, the extensive annotations found in ‘The Song of Solomon’ are paralleled by those found in the Book of Revelation, in which again, Vaughan Williams seems frequently concerned with references to song, voice, and to its making and hearing. Though Vaughan Williams does not set the following text in his oratorio *Sancta Civitas*, it is significant that references to hearing the voice of God, the songs of Moses, and the ‘learning’ of song by the ‘people’, are highlighted and emphasized by the annotations found in the oratorio’s textual source:

and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth.¹⁴²

¹⁴² BL, London. Add. MS. 63850. ‘Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Library. Vol. I. *The Holy Bible* (Oxford, n.d.), with “The Song of Solomon”, 569-72, annotated as for a vocal setting’, 1012 (Chapter 14, Verse 3).

As in both *Flos Campi* and *Riders to the Sea*, *Sancta Civitas* explores an ambivalent statement of ‘community’ oratorio,¹⁴³ its presentation of a distant, disembodied choir a further invitation to the exploration of Vaughan Williams’s post-War statements of musical oratory, and a further comment upon the fate of ‘song’ in the development of British music. As was noted above, critics such as H. C. Colles celebrated the modernity of *Flos Campi*’s opening – noting the exploratory treatment of harmony – while elsewhere objecting to the ‘unnatural’ use of the voice without words, and expressing discomfort towards the ‘barriers’ erected by this work’s presentation of an ‘unintelligible’ song without words.

To some extent, such distorted evocations of song and its intelligibility participate in a broader trend towards the modernist fragmentation of structures of linguistic meaning, as is typified in poetry such as T. S. Eliot’s paradigmatic *The Waste Land*. Daniel Hipp has suggested that such poetry, and especially that of war poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Ivor Gurney, betrays an expression of wartime trauma, in which experiences of unspeakable death and destruction became various forms of mutism and disorders of speech, in turn translated into muted and inexpressive artistic voices.¹⁴⁴

The singing manuals explored in the chapter above (texts which flourished during the inter-war years) undoubtedly relate in part to these concerns regarding the degeneration of the voice, as was exemplified by Plunket Greene’s anxiety regarding physical and mental degeneration through an inadequate production of the singing voice. Vaughan Williams gradually lost a great deal of his hearing in the years after his return from the front, and must surely have witnessed unimaginable human suffering. One might speculate that the composer himself is thus likely to have suffered from what might today be considered post-traumatic

¹⁴³ See Charles Edward McGuire, ‘From *The Apostles* to *Sancta Civitas*: The Oratorios of Elgar and Vaughan Williams’, in Norris and Neil (eds.) (2004), 99-115.

¹⁴⁴ See Daniel Hipp, *The Poetry of Shell Shock: Wartime Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney and Siegfried Sassoon* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Co., 2005). This study provides a discussion of mental trauma and art therapy in the years following the First World War, taking T. S. Eliot’s paradigmatic poem *The Waste Land* as a point of departure. Hipp explores the impact of the poet’s own nervous collapse – owing to marital and work-related stresses – on both the process of composition and recovery. More pertinent to the current discussion is that Hipp explores the fragmentation of conventional forms of linguistic structure in the poetry of three War poets through recourse to an exploration of speech disorders and mutism. See, in particular, Hipp’s Introduction, 5-14, in which he locates unexpressive, fractured, and artistically mute poetic voices within the broader trend of such fragmentation in early twentieth-century modernist literature.

stress disorder.¹⁴⁵ It is interesting, in this context, that a certain restrained quality – great emotion under the pressure of suppression – is apparent in both the voices of *Riders to the Sea* and *Flos Campi*. The almost hysterical desire of the viola to reach an adequate expressive voice, as explored in the fifth movement of *Flos Campi* (and displayed in example 4.5, above) is particularly provocative in this respect. It may also be of some significance that Vaughan Williams corresponded with Dr Charles S. Myers during the inter-war years, the doctor who first coined the term ‘shell-shock’ and theorized various disorders of the post-war speaking voice.¹⁴⁶

It might also be suggested that the ambivalent presentation of voices in these works relates to the way in which, as Percy Young observed, choral music ‘gravely declined’ in the years following the War. Returning to England in 1918, Vaughan Williams found ‘a changed world unfavourable to music’.¹⁴⁷ It may be no coincidence that Vaughan Williams’s works seem similarly pessimistic in their comment upon an English musical culture, and upon the vitality of the singing voice.

Yet regardless of the cultural context in which these works emerged, *A Pastoral Symphony*, *Flos Campi*, and *Riders to the Sea* engage, themselves, in a discourse that concerns their very ability to ‘speak’ to a listener. In this way, it might be interpreted that these works, while displaying an harmonic language that is informed by the developments of Continental modernism, are organized around an ambivalent presentation of song and its delivery to a listener. To the extent that Vaughan Williams seems throughout his life to have been preoccupied with the way a musical work could, through its ‘actual sound’, shape the material reality of its broader context, this music makes a powerful statement of its material meaning.

¹⁴⁵ This opinion is expressed, for example, by Byron Adams, who knew Ursula Vaughan Williams personally. I am grateful to Professor Adams for his insights on this matter.

¹⁴⁶ For Vaughan Williams’s correspondence with Charles Myers, an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist as well as a medical doctor, see Cobbe (ed.) (2008), 217-8, letter number 234. For Hipp’s work on Myers, see Hipp (2005), especially 15-6. For Myers’s work on shell-shock, see Charles S. Myers, *Shell Shock in France, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

¹⁴⁷ Young (1953), 56.

As Vaughan Williams maintained,

Modernity does not depend upon 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.¹⁴⁸

Vaughan Williams's disfigured and disembodied presentations of song must be recognized as important gestures of his music's modernity, evoking and simultaneously leaving ambivalent the performance of a vital, intelligible musical future. In this way, the statement of such works becomes a particularly English performance of absence and of silence: a cultural and textual 'vocabulary' of song that speaks a complex language both of promise and denial.

¹⁴⁸ Vaughan Williams, 'Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note', in *National Music and Other Essays* (1996), 129-53, 129.

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