Music, Landscape, and the Sound of Place: On Hearing Delius's *Song of the High Hills*

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One of the most poignant scenes in Ken Russell's 1968 film *Delius: Song of Summer* depicts the ailing composer being carried in a wicker chair to the summit of the mountain behind his Norwegian cabin by his wife Jelka and his close friend Percy Grainger.[1] From here, as the mist clears, Delius can gaze one final time across the broad Gudbrandsdal and watch the sun set behind the distant Norwegian fells.[2] The sequence is conceived as a flashback, synchronized with extracts from Delius's 1911 work for chorus and orchestra *The Song of the High Hills*. The arduous ascent is followed by a revelatory moment of

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[1] For a brief discussion of the Delius film in the context of Russell's other work, see Michael Adams's review article, "Ken Russell: Musical Mythmaker," *Notes* 66 (September 2009): 143–63, esp. 149–51.

[2] The cottage was called "Højfagerli" and was built in 1921 at Lesjaskog in the Gudbrandsdal, the wide central valley that runs down the center of southern Norway. See Asbjørn Ø. Eriksen, "Delius and Norway," *The Delius Society Journal* [hereafter *DSJ*] 138 (2005): 19–25 for a summary of Delius's relationship with the country.

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arrival at the summit as the clouds part, the panorama briefly visible before the mists rise once more and the party descends. Jelka's bathetic aside as the episode concludes ("and going back, I slid down the mountain on my backside!") firmly re-grounds the filmic narrative; but the haunting affect of the sequence remains long after the music has faded away and the details of the event have been forgotten. Hearing *The Song of the High Hills*, through Russell's film, offers us a compelling glimpse into aspects of Delius's biography and reception. It also prompts deeper reflection about the relationship between music, landscape, and the idea of place. This essay works back from the film, through the early prominence of Norway in Delius's creative career, before presenting a close reading of *The Song of the High Hills*. Hearing the work from this perspective promotes a keener understanding of our phenomenological engagement with sound and the natural environment, and underscores the parallels between Delius's music and contemporary developments in continental philosophy, notably the writing of Henri Bergson.

Shot partly on location in the English Lake District, one of Russell's favorite sites of alpine fantasy, *Delius: Song of Summer* can be understood on multiple levels. Most broadly, the film belongs to a particularly powerful moment in British musical historiography, a point at the end of the 1960s when the work of figures such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Delius were beginning to receive revisionary critical attention from scholars such as Michael Kennedy.[3] Music that had previously seemed emblematic of an insular or provincial Englishness was now heard as fractured or provocative: one of the central thrusts of Russell's film is its characteristically playful spirit of social satire and critique, the anti-establishment morality of Delius's artistic circle in Grez-sur-Loing sharply juxtaposed against Eric Fenby's more conservative Yorkshire background. Delius, for Russell, becomes a thinly disguised voice for the spirit of the late 1960s, the "song of summer," desolately echoing the more contemporary psychedelic "summer of love."

But the *Song of the High Hills* sequence is more complex, both in terms of its placement within Russell's film and as an episode in Delius's biography. The ascent is described in at least two sources: in Fenby's well-known memoir, *Delius as I Knew Him*, which served as the basis for Russell's

[3] See, for example, Kennedy's highly influential *Portrait of Elgar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), one of the first biographies to advance a melancholic image of the composer. The shift of tone exemplified by Kennedy's book is discussed briefly in Mathew Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144–45, where it is related to the Mahler revival, another of Ken Russell's preoccupations. Russell's work might also be interpreted as part of a general neo-pastoral turn in the late 1960s. See Stephen Daniels, "Suburban Pastoral: Strawberry Fields Forever and Sixties Memory," *Cultural Geographies 13* (2006): 28–54.

treatment, and in a letter from Jelka Delius to Marie Clews dated 4 August 1923:

> Fred was *longing* to go up the mountain side and up a high mountain back of our hut, because there is a heavenly view on the High Snow-mountains and a great solitude with no human trace up there. So Percy arranged a chair and two poles thro [sic] it and straps and ropes for us all three, Percy in front, Senta and I at the back, all strapped in like horses and so we carried Fred up to the top and down again. With wraps and overcoat, our lunch etc., to carry it was an awfully heavy job.[4]

For Fenby, writing in 1936 (two years after Delius's death), however, the event had already begun to gain a greater poetic scale and ambition. Quoting from Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," the final poem in his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Fenby dwells on the symbolic affect of the ascent in a manner that anticipates Russell's cinematic treatment:

> As they neared the summit all had seemed in vain, for enormous clouds now piled themselves up as if to spite the very mountains their grandeur, so jealously did they hide the sun from view. But at the great moment, "knowing that Nature never did betray the heart that loved her," not even so far as to deny this singer a last sight of the high hills whose song he had sung, the clouds dispersed at her bidding, and the dreamer revelled in his sunset. Within a few minutes a dense mist had settled over the scene, and the party began the perilous descent.[5]

Discerning parallels and points of divergence between these three responses to the same biographical episode provides insight into the themes and trajectories that have directed much writing on Delius: Jelka's emphasis on physical exertion and bodily strain in counterpoint with Fenby's transcendental evocation of the English Romantic Sublime and Russell's whimsical nostalgic mood of retrospection. But the ascent is arguably more significant as a critical threshold for contemplating the centrality of landscape and place in Delius's music, and in particular for examining the relationship between Delius, Norway, and *The Song of the High Hills*. As Jelka's letter reveals, the climb was in some respects already a retrospective journey, an attempt to regain the rich texture and materiality of Delius's earlier trips to Norway as a young man. The going-down of the sun becomes a powerfully Nietzschean vision, Delius's own going-down (*untergehen*) in the spirit of Nietzsche's earthy prophet Zarathustra,

[4] Lionel Carley, *Delius: A Life in Letters, Vol. II, 1909–1934* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1988), 276.

[5] Eric Fenby, *Delius as I Knew Him* (London: Quality Press, 1936, repr. 1948), 75. The quotation is from lines 122–23 of Wordsworth's poem.

the paradoxical dawn of a new creative age and the animating spirit of Delius's protean *Mass of Life* (1905) based on texts from Nietzsche's book.[6] The climb is equally the physical trace of Delius's presence on the mountainside, the dying light on the summit painfully symbolic of Delius's own incipient blindness and incapacity. It is by navigating this fourfold orientation—body, mind, place, and memory—that the analysis of works such as *The Song of the High Hills* raises more pressing questions of musical meaning, representation, and our relationship with the natural environment. It also inspires a more complex awareness of our sense of place, both historical and imagined, as a mode of reception and as an interpretative tool for approaching Delius's music. Russell's film thus serves both as a point of summation, gathering together various critical strands and preoccupations in the early reception of Delius's work, and as a provocative starting point for exploring the layers of memory and remembrance associated with Delius's musical geographies.

On the Heights

Delius's early encounters with the Norwegian landscape were as an apprentice in his father's textile business.[7] His first visit to Scandinavia took place in 1881, when he travelled to Norrköping in southern Sweden via Gothenburg and Stockholm, returning to England via Bergen on the Norwegian west coast. He paid a second visit to Scandinavia the following year before leaving for Solana Grove, Florida, on 2 March 1884. Delius then returned to Norway for a walking tour across the Hardangervidda (a high-mountain plateau in southern Norway) in 1887, having enrolled at the Leipzig conservatoire the previous year.[8] Delius's diary record of the trip includes musical sketches, later transcribed by Robert Threlfall, and a number of poignant pencil illustrations, including distant views of the valley beneath a mountain hut in the western fells (fig. 1).[9] Delius's diary entries reveal a keen aesthetic feeling for the Norwegian landscape. On 20 July, for example, he noted:

[6] For a preliminary discussion of Delius's interest in Nietzsche and the latter's influence on *The Mass of Life*, see W. H. Haddon Squire, "Delius and Nietzsche," *Tempo* (New Series) 7 (1948): 27–30.

[7] For more information on Delius's relationship with Norway, see Rachel Lowe, "Frederick Delius and Norway," *Studies in Music* 6 (1972): 27–41.

[8] A rich account of the trip can be found in Roger Buckley, "Through Norway in Delius's Footsteps," *DSJ* 99 (1989): 3–18, and 100 (1989): 3–14. The northeastern edge of the Hardangervidda was later used as a film set for the ice planet Hoth in Irvin Kershner's installment for the first Star Wars trilogy, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

[9] Robert Threlfall, *Delius's Musical Apprenticeship* (London: The Delius Trust, 1994), 118–52.

FIGURE 1. Delius: Pencil sketch from the Red Notebook (courtesy Grainger Museum Collection, University of Melbourne, and with kind permission of the Delius Trust)



> The view down towards Etne is magnificent. The sun for a moment flashes a few rays over the long valley. I from amongst the clouds, look now on almost a fairylike scene—the light & shade effects I never saw before, but only for a few minutes, & then all is again bleak & misty, & I am getting wet through, with a cold wind sweeping down the mountain. At last I am on top. Oh! how cold & bleak! A sheep now & again runs away, frightened. Now I descend, dripping wet & in a short time come, so to speak, out of the clouds, & have a magnificent view of Skånevik fjord, all coloured deep blue, for the sun is shining there. In a few moments I have come from Winter to Summer—the contrast is admirable. I pass a lovely little foss [waterfall], & then a gaard [farm] or 2, & at length Skånevik begins. Lovely little place, on the slope towards the fjord, beautifully cultivated gaards in number, & here and there a Sæter [high pasture land or meadow] in sight—high up, amongst the hills to the right.[10]

Delius's accounts of the Norwegian landscape are paradigmatic in their combination of nature epiphany (the sudden blossoming of a heightened communion with the surrounding landscape) with a sensitivity to the local topography and notes on local customs and traditions he encountered en route, including a village wedding and the domestic routines and rituals of agricultural life. But they also point to the legacy of late nineteenth-century travel writing on Norway, and to the country's growing international significance as a tourist destination.[11] The formation of the Norwegian Tourist Society (*Den Norske Turistforening*) in 1868 was an early attempt to cater to the rapidly growing domestic and international tourist trade, which increasingly saw the Norwegian mountains as an attractive destination, but it also sought to foster a nascent national pride rooted in notions of landscape and shared cultural heritage.[12] The Norwegian landscape thus served both as a commodity, a potential source of external income at a time when large-scale emigration had had a profound effect on the rural economy in the West, and increasingly as a realm for the expansion of a particular cultural-political imagination, intimately bound up with the desire for Norwegian self-determination and the emergence of Norway as a modern European nation state.

Norway had long held a particular fascination for the British imagination, from early accounts of voyages beyond the Arctic Circle, such as De Capell Brooke's *Travels Through Sweden, Norway, and Finnmark, to the North Cape* (1823) to topographic surveys of the Scandinavian peninsula, such as Sir George Everest's *Journey through Norway, Lapland, and Part of Sweden,*

[10] Lionel Carley, *Delius: A Life in Letters, Vol. I, 1862–1908* (London: Scolar, 1983), 385–86.

[11] On the relationship between tourism, landscape, and musical composition, see Annika Lindskog, "Composing Landscapes: Musical Memories from Nineteenth-Century Norwegian Mountain-Scapes," *Landscape History* 34 (2013): 43–60, esp. 49–50.

[12] Eriksen, "Delius and Norway," 20.

with Remarks on the Geology of the Country (1829). Other significant resources included specialist guides for hunters and game-stalkers, such as Llewellyn Lloyd's *Field Sports in the North of Europe* (1830), and volumes of the *Alpine Journal* dedicated to the Norwegian mountains (1865–77). More casual visitors could consult generic picturesque guides, such as William Mattieu Williams's *Through Norway with a Knapsack* (revised edition, 1877), and the same author's intriguingly titled *Through Norway with Ladies* (1877).

Charles Frances Keary's 1892 volume, *Norway and the Norwegians*, unveils Norway explicitly as "that Switzerland of the North, that Switzerland by the Sea."[13] Keary was the librettist of Delius's second opera *Koanga*, and the author of the original version of the libretto for *The Village Romeo and Juliet*. Keary shared Delius's enthusiasm for Norway and its landscape, even if he was not as attuned to the sounds of Norwegian music as the composer. The opening pages of his guide draw together many of the predominant strands in writing on Norway from earlier in the century, especially the apparent contradiction between the geological antiquity of the physical landscape and Norway's relative newness as an emergent European nation state.[14] The Norwegian landscape for Keary embodies both the beginning and end of human time: an unreachably distant geological past and a sense of imminent collapse or obliteration. "[I]t is the immense antiquity of the Scandinavian countries which is brought home to you," Keary suggests, invoking once more the image of the Alpine sublime: "Waterfalls which fell as they fall to-day ages before man set foot upon the soil."[15] This visual spectacle of epic geological processes provides the setting for a carefully choreographed history of heroic action. Norway becomes a glamorous domain of Vikings and savage Norsemen: "a land whose sons have done great things abroad, and formed a heroic character at home."[16] Nevertheless, it is the idea of the landscape animated by the spirits and ghosts of a much older age that remains the prevalent image in Keary's mind:

> No land seems more suited as a home for creatures of popular superstition than this land; and till the other day almost, we may believe (from these Folk-Tales that have been handed down to us) these frowning cliffs and sequestered valleys were still for the peasant inhabited by the beings who figure in most Teutonic mythologies; that on the hills dwelt *Thursar* (Monsters) or Trolls; in the valleys or beneath the earth dwelt *Ælfar*, elves, and fairies.[17]

[13] C. F. Keary, *Norway and the Norwegians* (London: Percival and Co., 1892), 7.

[14] Norway gained independence from Sweden only in 1905. In 1897 Delius himself became unwittingly entangled in the campaign for political self-determination with his music for Gunnar Heiberg's play *Folkeraadet*.

[15] Keary, *Norway*, 4.

[16] Ibid., 22.

[17] Ibid., 58.

The Norwegian landscape for Keary thus serves several purposes. It offers not simply a picturesque site for leisure and recreation, a bracing alternative to the more crowded paths of Switzerland and the Italian lakes, but acts rather as the originary source and as a contemporary model for a distinctively northern European worldview: Norway hence becomes the rugged crucible for a wider European cultural practice and imagination.

A more ideologically problematic encounter with Norway's natural environment can be found in Abel Chapman's closely contemporary field guide, *Wild Norway*, which offers a suitably stirring account of adventures in the Norwegian wilderness. The sonorous tone of Chapman's writing is evident in chapters such as "Reindeer Hunting in Ryfylke" and "Hunting Camps on the Hardanger Vidde," which make boastful claims about the number of animals killed in a single shoot, and features paeans to "the wonderful power and precision of that beautiful weapon, the modern Express rifle."[18] Norway here serves as nothing more than a playground for the colonial imagination. Chapman's trail notes, however, also contain more remarkable and penetrating descriptions of Norwegian ecology. The account of his first reindeer-hunting trip, for example, combines a careful scientific attention to botanical detail, noting indigenous flora with their proper Latin names, with a more poetic sense of topography, tumbling in and out of the channels draining the high moorland and contemplating the textures and colors of the surrounding environment. This aesthetic mode of response is intensified in a later chapter, evocatively titled "Summer Rambles on the Sürendal Fjelds," which begins with a richly alliterative description of the arduous ascent to the bleak plateau and ends with a vision of the landscape as an animated realm, a secretive half-imagined space of wide horizons and contemplative immersion:

> Beyond Nyegaard Sæter, where a vociferous pair of whimbrels were nesting, we reached the fjeld proper—rough moor, heath-clad and "horrid" with the stiff scrub of creeping birch. It was singular to see quite large trees trained flat on the ground by winter's snows, and

[18] Chapman, *Wild Norway* (London: Arnold, 1897), 40. The most egregious example of Chapman's imperialist world view is found in chapter 16, "The Highlands of the Swedish Divide," where he writes (pp. 242–43): "Our aim had been to penetrate truly virgin ground, and in that we succeeded. No English sportsman had ever before invaded the solitudes of Muru. We had left behind those hunter's horrors—population, cultivation, and so forth; but in passing beyond the line where even the hardy Norseman, inured to unequal strife, ceases to wrestle with impossible odds, we found ourselves confronted with a new and unexpected terror—the Lapp. These savages wander at will over the North Scandinavian backwoods and highlands, pasturing their herds of deer regardless of private rights or property, and innocent of the nature or existence of law. I do not infer that they deliberately break the laws. They are many degrees too low down the scale for that." The conjunction of Northern natural setting and such racialist essentialism reflects a number of problematic assumptions about national character prevalent in writing on Scandinavia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

> merely raising their latest shoots heavenwards in a half-apologetic sort of way. Then came stretches of dry, hummocky moss, alternating with marsh and bog, where black, miry waters oozed out from under patches of snow, and where, in sheltered nooks, a few stunted pines found root-hold, and bramblings sang. Moss and moor were diversified by sterile, stony regions where great grey rocks protruded, and the snow lay in broad sweeps. Here we chanced on a wheatear's nest, which already contained callow young, though literally islanded amidst snowfields. At the highest point passed (two thousand feet), willow-wrens were singing, and the few other birds seen included ryper, golden plovers, and a distant-soaring buzzard.[19]

It is this ecstatic sense of being-in-place that fosters Chapman's emergent awareness of the Norwegian soundscape. At a particular break in the trail, he stops and notes the ambient quality of the birdsong; the shift from the vociferous chatter (effectively unpitched "white noise") of the early stages of the ascent to the more finely granulated melody on the high moorland signals a significant change of aesthetic gear, a sudden raising and intensification of the level of perceptual awareness triggered by the feeling of isolation:

> All round this lonely tarn there resounded the spring-note of the whimbrel—a note which at first rather resembles that of the curlew, but modulates into a delicious liquid ripple, an intonation of, though quite distinct from, the bird's autumnal note.[20]

This account, in which the limpid waters of the tarn reflectively become the "liquid ripple" of the whimbrel's song, draws on a rich heritage of ornithological poetry in nineteenth-century literature, from the skylarks of the early romantics to the more visionary birds of George Meredith and Gerard Manley Hopkins.[21]

The sound of the whimbrel in the Norwegian fells remains a haunting presence in Chapman's volume. Like many nineteenth-century writers before him, however, Chapman's account otherwise struggles to contain or frame his response to the Norwegian landscape adequately; such special moments of sonic saturation aside, Chapman's text repeatedly fails to grasp the layered textures of the landscape in their full depth and complexity. The commanding mountain vistas frequently invoked at the start of Chapman's field notes are repeatedly revealed as transient or

[19] Ibid., 10.
[20] Ibid., 115.
[21] George Meredith's 1895 poem *The Lark Ascending* was the basis for Ralph Vaughan William's ecstatic tone poem of 1914–20, roughly contemporary with Delius's *Song of the High Hills*. Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Windhover* (1877) is a similarly intense evocation of the bird as divine spirit.

illusory, no more than a series of passing impressions and intense sensory episodes, their impact upon the reader's imagination deep but their effect uncertain. This disorientation, which had eluded Chapman's grasp, points precisely toward those qualities to which Delius responded acoustically when confronted by the same landscapes.

Singing the High Hills

Norway had a complex impact upon Delius's creative imagination. Fenby later argued that "in many ways I think that apart from the natural scenery, the love of place and so on, the musical influence of Norway or the Scandinavians was somewhat disastrous to Delius."[22] His earliest Norwegian works date from shortly after his first visits to the western mountains—settings of poems by Bjørnsen, Ibsen, and others, inspired partly by his walking tours and also by the circle of Scandinavian musicians that he met at the Leipzig conservatoire, including Christian Sinding, Johan Halvorsen, and the violinist Arve Arvesen. But it was Delius's first meeting with Edvard Grieg in autumn 1887 that arguably had the most formative influence on his compositional development: Grieg served both as a compositional model and also as an agent for processing and synthesizing Delius's impressions of the Norwegian landscape. In a letter dated 13 February 1888, Grieg wrote to his close friend and neighbor Frants Beyer, referring to Delius's trek the previous summer: "I am just back from a long afternoon walk in lovely spring weather together with Sinding and the Hardangervidde-man." Grieg enthused, "This English-American [sic], deeply musical, splendid Hardangervidde-man . . . You must get to know him. He is like us in nothing but feeling! But in the end that's everything!"[23] Delius, in response, wrote to Grieg from Brittany in August 1888: "How glad I shall be to set foot on Norwegian moorland again & to look over the wide distances. Are we going to the Jotunheim? next summer? Yes! Sinding must come with us too—that will be splendid."[24] In October he added: "One must breathe pure air before one can think purely. I feel so well in mind & body when nature is beautiful."[25] The visit to Jotunheim took place the following summer, Delius meeting Grieg at Troldhaugen, and then travelling east with Sinding. Delius tracked the trip in his diary, noting with satisfaction on Friday 26 July: "Made the ascent of Stugunøsi & had great panorama of Jotunheim"; and on the

[22] "Eric Fenby in Interview with Robert Layton," *DSJ* 106 (1991): 3–11, esp. 10.

[23] Carley, *A Life in Letters, I,* 13–14. Grieg presumably refers to Delius as "English-American" because of Delius's formative years in Florida and Virginia in 1884–86.

[24] Ibid., 23.

[25] Letter to Grieg dated 19 October, in ibid., 25.

following Monday: "Grand march on a vidder [sic]. Arrived at Gjendeboden 6pm. Dinner 7.30. Quiet chat with Grieg & Sinding."[26]

The immediate musical results of these tours included the melodrama *På Vidderne* ("On the Heights," composed June–October 1888), based on Ibsen's poetic account of a young hero's erotic adventures in the Norwegian mountains, an encounter in which the protagonist ultimately abandons earthly love for lone communion with the natural world;[27] and incomplete sketches for a short orchestral piece simply titled "Jotunheim," dated "Aug 1889, Leirungs Hytte, Jotunheim, Norge."[28] What emerges from these early works and from subsequent compositions that draw on a similar set of images and musical materials, including the concert overture *Over the Hills and Far Away* (1893–94), is a complex creative response to the Norwegian landscape: breezy images of the "wide distances" and of heroic endeavor (for example, the richly orchestrated brass theme in the later orchestral version of *På Vidderne*, 1892) in counterpoint with moments of heightened lyric intensity, often associated with notions of memory and loss or abandonment. Similar dualisms characterize Grieg's music. Writing to Grieg from Paris in early June 1889, Delius confessed: "For months now our meeting in Glorious Norway has been my be all & end all. How I long once again to wipe all the dust & dirt from my feet, & to set foot on the fresh, fragrant moorland! How splendid if we can live for a while in this hut & enjoy something of the uncivilized life."[29] Delius's letter reveals a set of assumptions about the North related to the image of the landscape as a place of sensory purity and immediacy.[30] Yet the idea of the Norwegian landscape that emerges from Grieg's music, and which proved especially influential for Delius, is a particular narrative mode, the combination of cyclic, strophic, and more linear goal-directed formal shapes, as well as a distinctive series of harmonic strategies and registral play, involving widely spaced textures, slow or static harmonic rhythm, and echoing horn calls or other nature sounds.[31] The experience of being in the Norwegian landscape, for both Delius and Grieg, is associated with

[26] Ibid., 399–400.

[27] See Rolf Stang, "*På Vidderne* in Historical Perspective," *DSJ* 108 (1992): 3–8; and, especially, Annika Lindskog's rich analysis, "Narrating Place and Perspective: Frederick Delius and Ibsen's Paa Vidderne," *Scandinavica*, 52 (2013), http://www.scandinavica.net/2013-1-lindskog-annika.php (consulted 23 April 2014).

[28] Threlfall, *Delius's Musical Apprenticeship*, 135.

[29] Carley, *A Life in Letters, I,* 41.

[30] This was part of a broader cultural construction of the North, as Peter Davidson has shown: "a place of extremes that is also a place of wonders." See Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 9.

[31] See Daniel M. Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006) for a detailed analysis of Grieg's response to the Norwegian landscape, and also Lindskog, "Composing Landscapes," 51–57.

rapture and epiphany, but frequently also with the threat of loss and of formal or expressive collapse: it is precisely the tension between these feelings of immersion and physical strain that best captures the scale and texture of the Norwegian environment.

Delius's most profound and searching response to Norway is arguably encountered in his later work, written after Grieg's death in 1907, pre-eminently *The Song of the High Hills*. Delius had undertaken a tour of Rondane and the Gudbrandsdal in central Norway in summer 1911, staying at a health resort where he completed the first version of his final opera, *Fennimore and Gerda* (after the 1880 novel *Niels Lyhne* by Danish author Jens Peter Jacobsen), and it was here that he began to think about a new large-scale work for chorus and orchestra. The first documentary evidence of the work can be found in his correspondence with Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock). In a letter dated 4 December, for example, Delius wrote acerbically, "I do not believe in any music constructed knowingly on any Harmonic scheme whatsoever. All the people who write about the Harmonic system or try to invent other systems quarter tones etc. Dont [sic] seem to have anything to say on Music—Systems are put together from the compositions of inspired musicians," adding at the end, "I am working on a new choral work," a reference that most likely refers to early sketches for *The Song of the High Hills*.[32] Further evidence about the compositional genesis and design of the work emerged the following summer, when Delius wrote again to Heseltine (23 June):

> I consider Nietzsche the only free thinker of modern times & for me the most sympathetic one—He is at the same time such a poet. He feels nature. I believe, myself, in no doctrine whatsoever & in nothing but Nature & the great forces of Nature—I believe in complete annihilation as far as our personal consciousness goes. . . . I am working hard on a new Choral & Orchestral work & am already far advanced. . . . At the end of next month I intend going to Norway for a 3 weeks walking tour in the mountains—Doesn't it tempt you? I love Norway and the Norwegian peasants.[33]

Documentary evidence suggests that the first full draft of *The Song of the High Hills* was completed by the end of 1912, work having been undertaken in a single broad sweep over several months.[34] The music

[32] Carley, *A Life in Letters, II,* 79.
[33] Ibid., 86, 89.
[34] The music's compositional genesis has been traced in detail by Martin Lee-Browne in "Origins and First Performances—and Some Puzzles," *DSJ* 138 (2005): 28–55. The proofs were carefully checked by Heseltine and Henry Balfour Gardiner during winter 1913–14, before the score was published by Leuckart in Leipzig. The version that is performed today is based on Thomas Beecham's revision of the score.

nevertheless had to wait until 1920 before its first performance, the delay caused by World War I and associated difficulties in securing parts and physical resources for a new large-scale work. The premiere finally took place on 26 February at the Queens' Hall, London, at the inaugural concert of the new Philharmonic Choir conducted by Albert Coates. In a letter to Norman O'Neill, dated 10 February, shortly before the premiere, Delius wrote succinctly:

> I want the note on The Song of the h. hills [sic] to be as short & simple as possible—I have tried to express the joy & exhilaration one feels in the Mountains & also the loneliness & melancholy of the high Solitudes & the grandeur of the wide far distances. The human voices represent man in Nature; an episode, which becomes fainter & then disappears altogether.[35]

Delius's reluctance to elaborate further upon the meaning of the work is telling, not least given the apparently confessional nature of the music. In a later letter dated 16 December 1922 to Percy Grainger, who rehearsed the chorus for the first German performance in Frankfurt on 1 March the following year, Delius wrote, "I was deeply touched by your letter and that you had gone over to London specially to hear the Song of the High Hills. I think it is one of my works in which I have expressed myself most completely."[36]

Press reception following the London premiere was broadly favorable, echoing the composer's own note and commenting in particular on the innovative writing for the chorus. Alfred Kalisch, for example, wrote in the reviews section of the *Musical Times*:

> Mr Delius was the hero, too of the new Philharmonic Concert on February 26, when the new Philharmonic Choir, organized by Mr Charles Kennedy Scott, sang for the first time his "Song of the High Hills," which is a record of the composer's impressions of Norwegian mountain solitudes on a balmy summer night. For a brief moment the voice of Man intrudes, but grows fainter and fainter. A part of the work is in Delius's usual vein, but in the choral numbers he displays an amount of vigour unusual with him, and there is an unaccompanied section culminating in a massive climax which will probably be judged in future to be the strongest music he has ever composed. An interesting point about the work is that the chorus sings no words, only varying vowel sounds.[37]

[35] Carley, *A Life in Letters, II,* 228.
[36] Ibid., 260.
[37] *The Musical Times* 61, no. 926 (April 1920): 247–48. Obvious precursors for Delius's treatment of the chorus include Debussy's "Sirènes," from his *Nocturnes* (1899), and Ravel's ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912). For a comprehensive discussion of precursors and models, see Guido Heldt, "Delius' *Song of the High Hills* und die Idee einer Vokalmusik ohne Worte," in

Later commentators, up to and including Ken Russell and Christopher Palmer, have readily heard *The Song of the High Hills* as a programmatic or pictorial account of a day in the mountains, beginning with an arduous ascent, contemplating the view from the summit plateau, and closing with an evening descent, while similarly expressing unease over aspects of the work's bodily character. Thomas Beecham, who had accompanied Delius on a walking tour of Jotunheim in 1908, described how "the ascent and descent from the High Hills is cunningly depicted in music of a totally different character from that which greets us when the summit has been attained, where we have a magical sequence of sounds and echoes, both vocal and instrumental, all culminating in a great outburst of tone that seems to flood the entire landscape."[38] For Beecham, the central moment of orientation is the first entry of the choir, "a stroke of genius, and of its kind without equal, either in him or any other composer." Yet for Beecham this cannot compensate for the enervating demands of other parts of the score: "It may be that the purely instrumental portion of the middle section is slightly redundant, but it is within the discretion of a judicious conductor to effect some abbreviation here."[39] A dedicated but hardly impartial supporter of Delius's music, Beecham was reluctant to elevate *The Song of the High Hills* into his pantheon, suggesting perhaps that the music's ambiguous combination of abstraction and vivid pictorialism made it difficult to assimilate effectively.[40] Eric Fenby shared similar reservations, attempting to steer a careful critical line between the music's absolute and programmatic character. As Fenby explained, "It is the mood of landscape rather than its pictorial image that Delius seeks to evoke." In the following sentence he turns crucially to a more conditional position: "If tonal structures can be the source of such insights, the attraction of Delius's music for those whose aesthetic awareness is not bounded completely by music is readily understood."[41] For Fenby, *The Song of the High Hills* thus forms an apotheosis or creative high point, but it also signals a crisis of representation, constantly threatening to over-exert its means of production or aesthetic frame. Fenby fears becoming lost no less than the *Times's* critic following the work's premiere. The solution, Fenby proposes, is to hear the work as sublime in

Frederick Delius. Musik-Konzepte (Neue Folge), 141/142, ed. Ulrich Tadday (Munich: Edition Text & Kritik, 2008), 53–81.

[38] Thomas Beecham, *Frederick Delius* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1959, repr. Severn House, 1975), 168.

[39] Ibid.

[40] It is also possible that for Beecham the work was inextricably linked with the strain of a walking tour of the Norwegian mountains that he undertook with Delius in 1908. See Carley, *A Life in Letters*, I, 368–69.

[41] *Fenby on Delius*, ed. Stephen Lloyd (London: Thames Publishing, 1996), 184. Quoted in Leigh-Browne, "Origins and First Performances," 53.

the Wordsworthian sense, the feeling of immensity and overflowing vastness associated ultimately not with physical or emotional ecstasy but rather a transcendental pantheistic communion with nature:

> In no other work does Delius convey the sense of "wide open spaces" more imaginatively than in *The Song of the High Hills*. . . . We set out with him in good heart until the pace slows before immensities of peak and cloud in the growing orchestral rapture of the hill-song. Then through cooler heights of mist and snow we climb to full sublimity. A myriad voices emerge from afar till the grandeur of nature is matched in song. The vision fades as the human voices are lost in the hills and are heard no more. We begin the descent the way we came, still musing on life and its mystery.[42]

For Fenby, physical elevation ultimately symbolizes coolness, brilliance, and luminosity. The music suggests a process of crystallization rather than saturation or immersion. The feeling of being amid the mountains, their vast solitude and open space, points toward the clarity of Delius's compositional thought, his communication with the spiritual and the divine, rather than to the music's potentially more threatening affective or physical bodily strain.

Delius himself appears to have been less clear about the music's meaning. Sketches in the British Library and at the Grainger Museum in Melbourne reveal that he considered calling the work "Song of Nature," "Mountain Voices," "Mountain Song," and "Song of the Mountain," echoing Mahler's closely contemporary "Song of the Earth" (1908–9), Richard Strauss's *Alpensinfonie* (1915), or Siegmund von Hausegger's *Natursymphonie* for chorus and large orchestra (1911).[43] The work was further to have been cast in three movements, provisionally titled "Fjeld Einsamkeit/Early Dawn," "Midday," and "Twilight Night."[44] Delius's eventual choice of title underscores the music's hybrid generic character: Robert Matthew-Walker has insightfully described the *The Song of the High Hills* as "a large-scale wordless Symphony for chorus and orchestra," aligning the music within a rich post-Lisztian tradition of transcendental works inspired by pantheistic nature visions.[45] But the title also underpins

[42] Lloyd, *Fenby on Delius*, 184–85.

[43] Heldt, "Delius' *Song of the High Hills*," 55. Heldt argues later, however, that "one should not regard *The Song of the High Hills* as Delius's *Alpine Symphony*, nor as a sequence of clearly identifiable pictures and scenes, in order to retain the metaphor of wandering through shifting situations and moods as a meaningful way of accessing the piece" (my translation; p. 68).

[44] The relevant source is in the Grainger Archive at the University of Melbourne, MG C2/DELI-27-2[-2], and is a torn A6 leaf, annotated in ink "Original Sketch for/'Song of the High Hills'/in Delius's handwriting./Eric Fenby/23 Sept., 1948."

[45] Robert Matthew-Walker, "Aspects of *The Song of the Hills*: A Symphony for Two Orchestras (In Tribute to Edvard Grieg)," *DSJ* 138 (2005): 68–74.

the ambiguity of the work's design and affect, its obvious concern with representation alongside its resistance to straightforward pictorial interpretation. As Guido Heldt has observed, the idea of song is particularly acute:

> The title's emphasis on the physical nature of music foregrounded by the presence of the chorus and the prominence elsewhere in the score of strongly marked vocalistic instrumental lines so the whole work appears to "sing." The elocutionary force of such singing, however, is undercut both by the lack of words—it is never revealed what the song is singing about, its precise role within any paralinguistic narrative consequently cloudy and unclear—and by the music's fluctuating drift between a sense of emergence and withdrawal. Delius's song, it seems, is in a constant process of entropy or decay, fading toward an infinite horizon before its proper outline can be discerned.[46]

These tensions can be traced through closer analytical attention to the music. Paul Guinery hears the piece in three main sections, "each of them further subdivided: an arch-like structure in which the central keystone is an extended outpouring of essentially slow-moving music," a reading coordinated around the threefold stages of ascent, summit panorama, and descent as Delius's first sketches suggest.[47] As Matthew Walker argues, however, *The Song of the High Hills* is concerned less with a simple linear unfolding than with the recollection of past events and their emotional affect.[48] As my formal chart suggests (fig. 2), the work can be understood as a complex multi-parametrical hybrid, a single sustained movement that combines elements of different genres, formal shapes, and harmonic processes. Tonally, much of the music is controlled by the poles of Richard Cohn's northern hexatonic system, beginning off-pitch in G minor, and then rotating through E (major/minor)—C (major)—G♯ minor.[49] Other complementary tonal reference points outside the hexatonic sphere are stressed at pivotal moments in the music's trajectory, notably D Dorian, A Lydian, and other flat-side keys (F and E♭), and much of the music's color is generated by the tension between diatonic-chromatic voice leading and vertical modal

[46] Heldt, "Delius' *Song of the High Hills*," 53–55.

[47] Paul Guinery, "*The Song of the High Hills*: A Musical Analysis," *DSJ* 138 (2005): 57.

[48] Matthew-Walker, "Aspects," 71. Matthew-Walker notes that the work "contains several references to, if not direct quotations from, Grieg's music," without actually indicating which particular pieces Delius evokes. Three obvious candidates (not mentioned by Matthew-Walker in his essay) are the Ballade in G minor, op. 24; *Den Bergtekne* ("The Mountain Thrall"), op. 32; and the String Quartet, op. 27, in addition to the lyric piece "Aften på Höyfjellet," op. 68/4, suggested by Palmer.

[49] For a foundational summary of Neo-Riemannian theory that suggests some rich parallels with Delius's work, see Richard Cohn, "Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004): 285–323.

FIGURE 2. Delius: *Song of the High Hills*, formal map

Figure/Measure Number	*Formal Section*	*Key/Mode*	*Affect*
M. 1 ff.	INTRODUCTION	G minor—E♭7	unsettled, melancholic
Fig. 2/M. 19		F minor	expectant
Fig. 4/M. 39	RHAPSODY	E/C	tranquillo—accumulative
Fig. 7+8/M. 72	Breakthrough!	E Lydian	ecstatic (Kulokk)
Fig. 8+7/M. 81	Afterglow	V9/E	rapturous
Fig. 11/M. 107	IDYLL	C	luminous
Fig. 14+3/M. 133	RHAPSODY	E/C	accumulative
Fig. 16+8/M. 155	Apotheosis	D Dorian	ecstatic—deflected!
Fig. 17+6/M. 163	HILL SONG	D Dorian	"The wide far distance"
M. 173	Variation 1	D Dorian/minor	stern (woodwind)
M. 181	Variation 2	G minor	warming (strings)
M. 191	Variation 3	D Dorian/minor	dying away (trumpet theme)
Fig. 21+4/M. 200	IDYLL	D major/pentatonic	enchantment (harp/celesta)
Fig. 23+3/M. 217		D Dorian	nature music
Fig. 27+7/M. 254	HILL SONG [Variation 4]	E♭ minor	haunted (tenor solo)
Fig. 30/M. 278	Variation 5	E Dorian	stern (solo choir)
Fig. 31/M. 286	Variation 6	E Dorian	warming (choir and brass)
Fig. 32/M. 294	Variations 7/8	E Dorian	accumulative—ecstatic
Fig. 35/M. 319	REPRISE [INTRODUCTION]	E minor	deflected!
Fig. 37+7/M. 341	RHAPSODY	F	accumulative—exultant
Fig. 45+4/M. 404	Breakthrough!	A Lydian	radiant (Kulokk)
Fig. 47+2/M. 418 A	fterglow	C♯ minor	losing energy
Fig. 49/M. 430	CODA	G♯ Dorian	distant—dying away

collections: a continual cycling through a process of sequential yearning, ecstatic revelation, idyllic afterglow, and expectant re-flowering.

This sophisticated meshing of different harmonic systems is supported by the music's layering of formal prototypes and generic models, an alternating interwoven threefold sequence of rhapsody, idyll, and hill song (theme-and-variations).[50] The introduction evokes a cold present tense, a mood of depression that suggests a low creative dynamic (ex. 1). The feeling of lassitude is emphasized by the sighing appoggiaturas and downward registral trajectory, as well as by the dark scoring (strings and lower woodwinds). The sequential replaying of this initial paragraph provides the music's first forward momentum, but it is only through the gradual emergence of an E/C major hexatonic complex, suggesting a singing-into-being and the beginning of a more dynamic narrative process, that it begins to gain any real energy. This transformative shift of state generates the real start of the piece, at figure 4, a swaying rhapsody whose initial sense of melodic repose swiftly gives way to a more strenuous process of bass-driven sequential accumulation. The opening's listlessness has been replaced by a more energized creative flux. The immediate goal of this process is an ecstatic textural and registral breakthrough at figure 7, the moment at which the pent-up E major potential of the music at figure 2 is finally released and dissipated (ex. 2).

The repeated triplet woodwind figure that calls dramatically across the full body of the orchestra after figure 7, a quotation from the sixth tableau of Delius's earlier melodrama *På Vidderne*, is a mountain sound: a stylized herding call or "Kulokk." Such herding calls in nineteenth-century music conventionally symbolize open space and expressive freedom.[51] In Delius's maximalized transformation of this device, it becomes a powerfully *Tristan*-esque moment of erotic union, whose energy is rapidly discharged even as it suggests the music's first definitive point of tonal arrival. Indeed, the remainder of the work struggles to recapture this early feeling of physical exertion and fulfillment. The passage might

[50] I understand these different generic types in broadly semiotic terms, in relation to established late nineteenth-century categories. A rhapsody here might be understood as music that is harmonically wide-ranging and adventurous, with a strongly generative sense of form and associations of heroism or similar epic narratives; an idyll, in contrast, is harmonically much more static and subdued, with pastoral implications, though it may also be expressively intense; the "Hill Song" is a more obviously performative lyric category, strongly associated with the act of vocalization. For a fascinating discussion of genre, topic, and semiosis in nineteenth-century music, see Matthew Gelbart, "Layers of Representation in Nineteenth-Century Genres: The Case of One Brahms Ballade," in *Representation in Western Music*, ed. Joshua S. Walden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13–32.

[51] Heldt describes this gesture as an "echo of the *Ranz-des-Vaches* tradition" ("Delius' *Song of the High Hills*," 80), drawing on its earlier nineteenth-century legacy and not dwelling on its particular local associations with Norway. On Grieg and *Kulokks*, see Grimley, *Grieg*, 80–82 and 86–98; and Lindskog, "Composing Landscapes," 55–56.

EXAMPLE 1. Delius, *Song of the High Hills*, opening (short score)



also be heard as the sudden sharp bringing into focus of a particular feeling of time and place: not simply the effortful attainment of a mountain peak or summit plateau, but the forceful and unexpected return of a powerful or overwhelming memory. It becomes a point of sensuous

EXAMPLE 2. Delius, *Song of the High Hills* (mm. 64–80), "Kulokk" (short score)



saturation or auditory immersion, whose impact radically destabilizes rather than crystallizes the progress of the music.

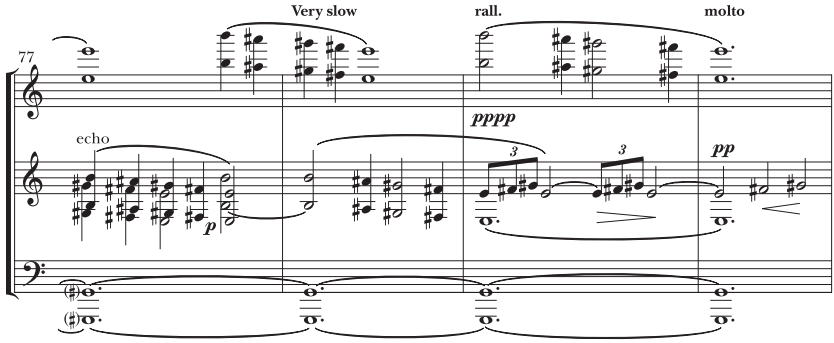
The immediate result of this immersive overloading is a drifting curtain of triadic string sonorities and echoing mountain calls that suggests an enchanted re-hearing of the descending figures of the introduction.

EXAMPLE 2. (*Continued*)



This passage is not so much a continuation of the rhapsody as a re-flowering, the idyllic blossoming of an earthly vision (subsequently realized in the remarkable Vaughan Williams-like passage from m. 107). Its purpose is initially interruption rather than simply withdrawal or retreat,

EXAMPLE 2. (*Continued*)



suspending the obsessive forward motion of the rhapsody. Though the music slowly begins to regain its earlier sequential energy as it re-approaches the Lydian E major of the earlier climax, the expectant ascent is decisively deflected at figure 17, and its new destination is the first entry of the wordless chorus, emerging imperceptibly out of the middle texture in the tenors, directed "to sound as if in the far distance." This is a crucial moment of textural and thematic realignment, the landmark timbral appearance of the chorus paralleled by the first full playing of the Dorian melody in the violins—the Hill Song—that dominates the heart of the piece (ex. 3).[52] Delius's sketch materials for the work include numerous different versions of the theme, for instance treating it in canon before leading into a transposed return of the Introduction without any indication of its later choral setting (ex. 4). It is the entry of the choir, however, that is crucial to its musical and formal affect: the Hill Song serves both as a goal or telos, and as a new starting point for formal elaboration, through a series of increasingly expansive textural and harmonic variations.[53] It can also be heard as a sudden moment of extreme distance or remoteness—Delius's enigmatic subtitle, "The wide far distance—The great solitude," suggests an increase in depth of acoustic field or the opening out of auditory range as much as a widening of prospect or vision. Whether we interpret the voices as nature sounds or traces from a barely remembered past, their half-heard state suggests a sense of the supernatural, of sensuous memory rather than actualized presence.

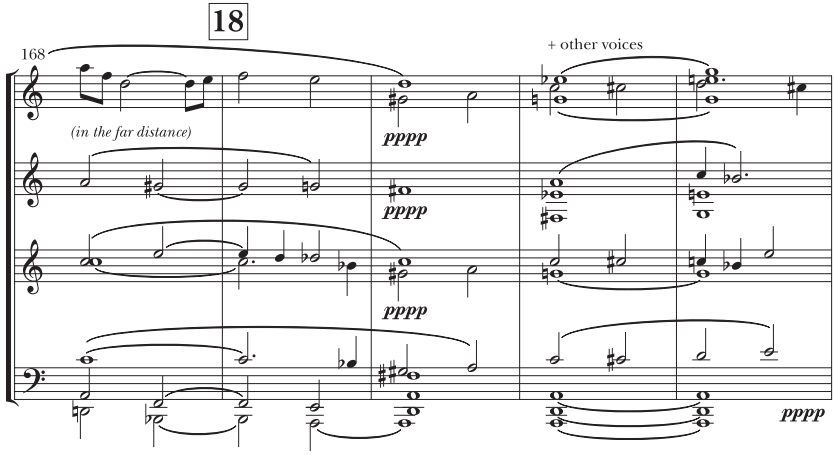
[52] Heldt, "Delius' *Song of the High Hills*," 76–78.

[53] Space sadly does not permit here a more extended analysis of this process of variation, but it is worth noting in passing the harmonic and textural parallels with one of Delius's earlier key works, the orchestral rhapsody *Brigg Fair* (1908). I hope to deal with these issues in greater depth in a forthcoming book-length study, *Delius and the Sound of Place*.

EXAMPLE 3. Delius, *Song of the High Hills* (mm. 155–72), "Hill Song" (short score)



EXAMPLE 3. (*Continued*)



The set of variations that follows suggests a renewed narrative trajectory, but this process of elaboration is abandoned after only three cycles, the momentum dissipated by the return of the idyll after figure 21. As before, this slow moving music suggests a regenerative cycle, a heightened state of sensory awareness delving even deeper into a remembered past. It is at this point that the work formally begins to reverse, returning first to the music of the Hill Song and then to the rhapsody, even as it continues to surge forwards in a series of accumulative waves. There is little resolution of the music's underlying structural and expressive tensions, however, and the end result of the culminating variation of the Hill Song is a crushing return of the introduction at figure 35. The unexpected reprise of the opening music is no stabilizing gesture but is rather profoundly disturbing. Any attempt to try to achieve permanent tonal thematic balance is deflected by the feeling of fateful return, and by memories of previous loss. Even the return of the Kulokk at figure 45, that early moment of radiant arrival, is relatively subdued and abbreviated. The previous ecstasy proves unsustainable, the texture merely a shadow of its former expansiveness. Significantly, there is no final return of the Hill Song—the vision of the wide distance from the plateau obscured, the last entry of the choir (sopranos and tenors) fading away enigmatically. The coda is a bleak epilogue on G♯ Dorian, completing the work's hexatonic cycle. Delius's sketches indicate that this was a relatively late compositional decision; earlier drafts suggest an ending in G major, symmetrically resolving the unstable G-minor music of the Introduction (ex. 5). The decision to conclude a semitone higher might have been the

EXAMPLE 4. Delius, sketch for *Song of the High Hills* (British Library), "Hill Song" and opening



result of a fluid, asymmetrical feeling for tonal structure—a desire to avoid the kind of neat, balanced design that G major would have implied. Or it might, more persuasively, have been motivated by the desire to emphasize a sense of distance or remoteness from the work's starting point, in a fresh harmonic terrain that is perpetually renewed. In either case, the sketch materials suggest Delius traversing unfamiliar territory, through forbidding and at times confusing creative terrain. The ending in the final version once more depends on the idea of interpolation—a glimpse of the central idyll from figure 23. The final measures, with their allusion to Percy Grainger's eloquent *Hill Song No. 2,* are marked "verlöschend" (dying away), a direction that suggests the extinguishing

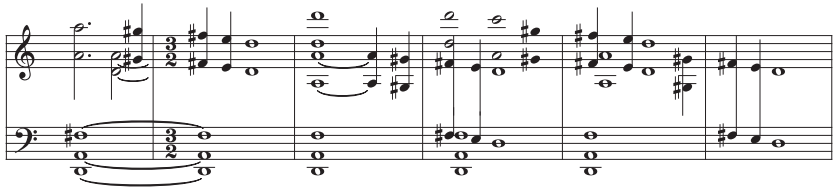
EXAMPLE 5. Delius, sketches for conclusion of *Song of the High Hills* (British Library)

BL TB 13.E folio 1, p. 1



Hill Song
End of 1 Movement
End in G major becoming softer & softer to ***pppp***

BL TB 13.E folio 8 [unnumbered]



of the light or the dimming of creative fire. It suggests not simply a sunset, the gradual fading in the West, but a more heartbreaking feeling of separation. Far from a radiant afterglow, Delius's musical going-down is a complex and ambivalent closing gesture (exx. 6a and 6b), one that leaves the listener lost in the "wide far distance" first heard at the work's heart.

EXAMPLE 6a. Delius, *Song of the High Hills*, conclusion, measures 430–end (short score)



Hearing Landscape: Music, Memory, and the "Wide Far Distance"

As this commentary suggests, the formal trajectory of *The Song of the High Hills* is no simple linear motion across two-dimensional space, but a more complex vertical cycling through a series of rotational planes (or plateaus)

EXAMPLE 6b. Grainger, *Hill-Song No. 2*, conclusion (after two-piano version)



in multiple directions simultaneously. Indeed, conventional Cartesian spatial models, including my own analytical chart, soon become inadequate when trying to describe the music's more complex multiple temporal states and spiraling formal designs. A better conceptual framework for understanding Delius's sense of time and space in *The Song of the High Hills* might be found in contemporary French writing on temporality, advanced most prominently through Henri Bergson's notion of duration ("la durée").[54] Though there is no evidence to suggest that he was familiar with the detail of Bergson's theories, the dissemination of Bergson's work in turn-of-the-century French intellectual circles was sufficiently wide to suggest that Delius may plausibly have encountered the basic principles of his work or have understood its underlying propositions.[55] Invoking

[54] Arved Ashby has recently discussed these same passages from Bergson's work in his study of mechanical recording technology and auditory perception: *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 73–75. Ashby's reading is persuasive, but I am arguing here that Bergson's theories apply equally well to the perception of live acoustic events (and not merely recordings), and that they might offer useful implications for understanding form and perception in early twentieth-century music more generally.

[55] For a thorough analysis of Bergson's legacy and prominence in early twentieth-century French thought, see Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian*

Bergson's writing at this point, then, is not to seek to gain academic leverage with which to promote Delius's music, but rather to examine its individual processes and preoccupations with a finer contextual lens. Central to Bergson's theories is the idea of physical experience or sensation not as a spatial property, something that can be isolated, measured, or quantified, but rather as a dynamic temporal shift, a continually fluctuating series of intensities and qualities. As he wrote in his essay *Time and Free Will*, "Feeling is a living being, which develops, and is therefore always changing. . . . When we separate those moments out, unfurling time into space, the feeling loses its animation and its colour. Then we are left with only the shadow of ourselves."[56] Feeling endures, Bergson suggests: its proper temporal state is duration, rather than space or place. Attempts to express sensation in terms of language, however, are almost always compromised by spatialist patterns of thought and expression.[57] Bergson hence appeals to non-linguistic models, notably melody and dance, to account for sensation as a temporal phenomenon. As Bergson scholar Suzanne Guerlac explains:

> The metaphor of the musical phrase [for Bergson] conveys the notion of ensemble that attaches to the experience of duration, and to the idea of heterogeneous multiplicity—a multiplicity without homogeneity, in which states or feelings overlap or interpenetrate one another, instead of being organized into a distinct succession.[58]

For Bergson, this process of duration as a fluctuating chain of intensities can in turn be modeled through the idea of a gyre or vortex, a revolving dynamic spiral that moves constantly between perception, memory, and experience (fig. 3). "In its usual operations, the energies of the esprit move between the various planes of consciousness indicated by the various conic sections," Bergson suggests. "What distinguishes these sections are differences in tension (or in the focus of attention) which are greater as we approach S, the locus of action, and looser as we approach AB, the psychic level of dream."[59] The essentially temporal nature of experience, its duration, can begin to be understood more clearly: the mind operates through a constant drift to and fro between immediate perception, the memory of

Avant-Garde (Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. the final chapter, "The Politics of Time and Modernity," 168–84.

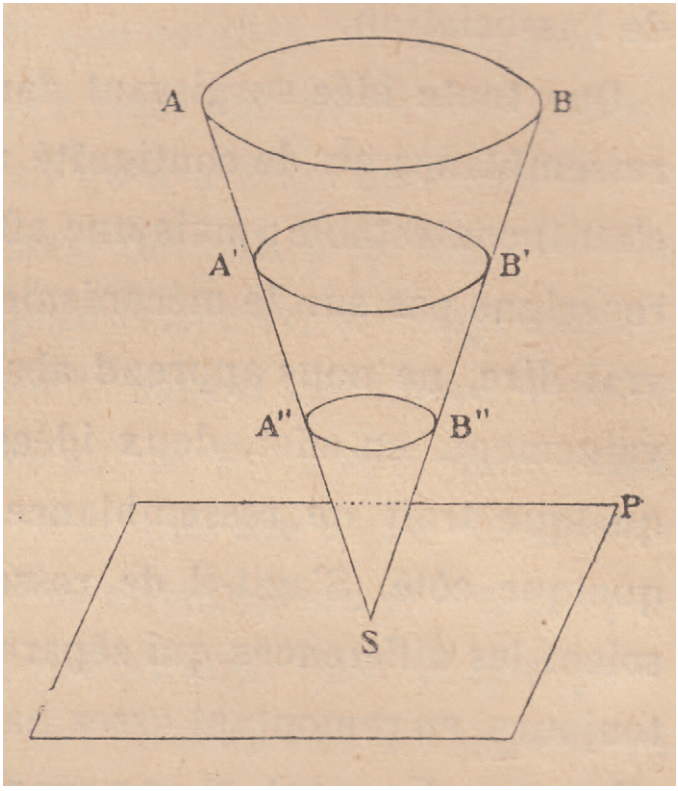
[56] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen, 1913, repr. Dover publ., 2001), 132–33.

[57] Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 130.

[58] Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 67.

[59] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relation Between the Body and the Mind*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 152.

FIGURE 3. Henri Bergson, schematic model of human memory from *Matière et Mémoire* (1896)



past events and experiences that instantaneously shapes such perceptual response, and the expectation of further change or action.[60]

All human experience, Bergson concludes, is predicated on this intermingling of idea and image, of moving into the past and pushing forward into the future. Music hence becomes a central metaphor in Bergson's thought for this double current, the spiral that moves from action to the psychic realm of modeling and imagination and back again. "It is as if the mind were figured as a virtual keyboard instrument," Bergson writes, "which gives a variety of tones to our psychic life," conceiving melody as the fluctuating chain that draws our attention inward even as it projects our musical imagination forward through time.[61]

[60] Ibid., 153.
[61] Ibid., 154.

For Delius, composing in the years immediately following the first formulation and dissemination of Bergson's ideas, it is hard not to imagine that he would have been attracted by this more fluid notion of bodily experience and physical sensation, and by the centrality of melody—especially song—in Bergson's thought.[62] It is equally tempting to conceive of the formal shape of *The Song of the High Hills* as a series of spiraling gyres, similar to Bergson's schematic model of human perception.[63] The work's opening, for example, with its staggered sense of multiple beginnings, already suggests some kind of dynamic continuity or flow, even while it also marks a low creative starting point. Similarly, the circular triplets of the Kulokk that emerges dramatically after figure 7 echo in miniature the larger spiraling motion of the complete structure: the Kulokk stands here for perception at its most vivid and immediate. It is then the attempt to recover the immediacy of the Kulokk that prompts the emergence of the Hill Song itself at figure 17, the "wide far distance" conceived as the opening out of a temporal domain or duration, rather than a visual space. And it is the Hill Song in turn that symbolizes the sudden rushing-in of memories and past sensations, the overflowing of perceptual images triggered by the trace of the Kulokk's expressive force that generates the series of textural and harmonic variations that follow.

Applying Bergson's model of perception to *The Song of the High Hills* suggests that Delius's music is concerned not so much with a particular place, the Norwegian mountains, as with a state of mind—or, more accurately, perception and the memory of being-in-place.[64] It is at this level, in other words, that the music resists the kind of pictorial interpretation or framing with which the work has often been associated. But it is precisely this lack of enclosure, alongside the ecstatic attention to sonic detail, in other ways brings the music back toward the idea of landscape and that of earlier responses to travelling through Norway in particular. As cultural geographers John Wylie and Hayden Lorimer have argued,

[62] Bergson uses melody as an analogy through which to explain his idea of duration in *Time and Free Will*: "Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another." 100–101, emphasis original.

[63] On the spiral as early nineteenth-century romantic metaphor, particularly Goethe's notion of "polarity and enhancement" and the idea of ascent, see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 183–86.

[64] Benedict Taylor offers a similar reading of thematic structure in Mendelssohn's work in *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. 54–59.

moving through landscape frequently invites a sense of rapture: "You can open out onto all sorts of serendipities. The landscape is a multiplicity of narratives and perceptions, and you can both lose and find yourself among this multitude."[65] Central to this process of immersion, of negation and becoming, is our experience of sound. "Sounds lend intricate texture to experience," Wylie and Lorimer write. "They fill in the physical details. And sounds give tonal variety to movement. They hang around, for spells seeming intent to follow: as a consorting and companionable presence. Or, they form a gauzy continuance, barely perceptible. There is an endless, amniotic fuzz to be found at the very limits of hearing."[66] Sound hence becomes a form of haunting, a sign of presence that lures the listener into the landscape. It is a means of navigating the landscape, serving as an auditory signpost, but it can also become a siren, leading the unwary walker away from the trodden path into the texture and grain of the landscape. Sound in the landscape, as Wylie and Lorimer explain, can be simultaneously formative and deceptive:

> Sounds baffle and bemuse. They are open to imaginative interpretation. Heard sometimes as sleek and sly: malevolence creeping up, forming into a chill or feeling of company uninvited. During a forest plantation traverse, you realize that route-finding is going awry when the soft, lulling sounds of the breeze shift to a hiss passing through the needles of conifer trees.[67]

For Wylie and Lorimer, sound in the landscape refers to this dual sense of sensory overload and blindness, a lack of clear spatial awareness alongside complete acoustic immersion. "What is 'lost' when listening does not automatically equate to what is 'gained' by seeing, or vice versa," Wylie and Lorimer argue. "Rather, that which is audible to you, from one second to the next, is simultaneously internalized and externalized, rising up and then dissipating, and having no single correspondence with its source."[68] Abel Chapman's evocative account of the whimbrel on the Norwegian fells belongs to this same process of orientation. The first entry of the choir in *The Song of the High Hills* has a similar effect, the imperceptible emergence of the tenor out of the fading residues of the rhapsody's

[65] John Wylie and Hayden Lorimer, "LOOP (A Geography)," *Performance Research* 15 (2010): 6–13, esp. 7. See also John Wylie, "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2005): 234–47, and his luminous survey of different theoretical perspectives and traditions, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), in addition to Hayden Lorimer's "Herding Memories of Humans and Animals," *Environment and Planning D: Culture and Society* 24 (2006): 497–518.

[66] Wylie and Lorimer, "LOOP," 7.

[67] Ibid., 7–8.

[68] Ibid., 11.

apotheosis and the soft first playing of the Hill Song theme on the violins gently catching the auditory attention, the sensuous quality of the wordless chorus irresistibly drawing the ear into the heart of the orchestral texture so that we momentarily lose our acoustic bearings. As Wylie and Lorimer suggest, what results from such close attention to sound is not an actual representation of the landscape, but an imaginary or virtual realm, shaped and formed by the quality of the sound itself:

> Sounds bend the guiding principles for your awareness of scale, shape, surface and substance; sometimes with distorting or deceptive effect. According to environmental conditions and acoustic properties, sounds are thrown, rise and fall, gather, wash, leak out, leap over and topple, issue up from great depths, and follow linear flows or forms. But, what goes canyoning around between the ears is not an accurate impression of the topography in which sound is formed and bears no obvious relation to landscape. It shapes its own distinct topologies and conformations.[69]

It is precisely this attunement to the sonic environment, the sound's duration, that is the proper subject of *The Song of the High Hills*, and that is key to Delius's creative response to the Norwegian landscape. It is the physical sensation of listening—attending to that "endless, amniotic fuzz"—and following the flowing trace of an acoustic memory, which Delius's music seeks to capture and to hold. Listening to the landscape with Delius, and allowing our ears to respond to the complex interweaving topologies of *The Song of the High Hills*, we too become lost in the mountains; however, this is not merely passive immersion. Delius's music, as Ken Russell's film acutely perceives, becomes an active site for listening, its constantly shifting harmonic and timbral layers enveloping us even as we reshape it in our own image. Heard from this point, unfolding through time, the "wide far distance" sounds both infinitely remote and intimately close. It is through the continual shifting back and forth between this solitude and proximity that the landscape of Delius's *Song of the High Hills* most loudly resounds.

ABSTRACT

One of the most poignant scenes in Ken Russell's 1968 film *Delius: Song of Summer* evocatively depicts the ailing composer being carried in a wicker chair to the summit of the mountain behind his Norwegian

[69] Ibid.

cabin. From here, Delius can gaze one final time across the broad Gudbrandsdal and watch the sun set behind the distant Norwegian fells. Contemplating the centrality of Norway in Delius's output, however, raises more pressing questions of musical meaning, representation, and our relationship with the natural environment. It also inspires a more complex awareness of landscape and our sense of place, both historical and imagined, as a mode of reception and an interpretative tool for approaching Delius's music.

This essay focuses on one of Delius's richest but most critically neglected works, *The Song of the High Hills* for orchestra and wordless chorus, composed in 1911 but not premiered until 1920. Drawing on archival materials held at the British Library and the Grainger Museum, Melbourne, I examine the music's compositional genesis and critical reception. Conventionally heard (following Thomas Beecham and Eric Fenby) as an imaginary account of a walking tour in the Norwegian mountains, *The Song of the High Hills* in fact offers a multilayered response to ideas of landscape and nature. Moving beyond pictorial notions of landscape representation, I draw from recent critical literature in cultural geography to account for the music's sense of place. Hearing *The Song of the High Hills* from this perspective promotes a keener understanding of our phenomenological engagement with sound and the natural environment, and underscores the parallels between Delius's work and contemporary developments in continental philosophy, notably the writing of Henri Bergson.

Keywords: cultural geography, Frederick Delius, music and landscape, Norway