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What is English music? The l/wentieth Century Experience

Kaj je angleška glasba? Izkušnja 20. stoletja

Ključne besede: angleška glasba, ljudska glasba, vokalna glasba, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gerald Finzi, Edward Elgar, Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten

IZVLEČEK

Mnogo držav je v 19- stoletju želelo uveljaviti svoj nacionalni karakter in glasba je ponujala eno izmed možnih poti. Razlikujemo lahko štiri načine, na katere je mogoče z glasbo vzpostaviti nacionalni karakter: skladatelji lahko uporabljajo ljudsko glasbo, svojo glasbo lahko izpeljujejo iz ljudska glasbe, lahko uglasbijo nacionalno besedilo, zadnja možnost pa najdemo v asociacijah določene glasbe s specifičnimi tradicionalnimi nacionalnimi dogodki in slovesnostmi. Avtor pretresa v nadaljevanju te štiri možnosti vzpostavljanja angleškosti v glasbi 20. stoletja.

Many countries in the 19th century wanted to assert their national character, with music being one way of doing so. We can distinguish four ways in which in music national identity can be established: composers may use the folk music, they can base their music on folk music, they can set the words of a nation to music and the last possibility can be found in the idea of an association of certain music with specific events and festivities in a tradition. The author discusses in detail these four possibilities of the establishment of Englishness in music in 20th century.

Keywords: English music, folk music, vocal music,

Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gerald Finzi, Edward Elgar,

ABSTRACT

' ... to tend your soft spot for Englishness ...'

With the rise in European nationalism during the Nineteenth Century, there was an inevitable search for features to support the nationalistic ideas in individual countries. While political aspirations, especially independence from a small number of ruling nations, were a dominant feature of this movement, there was also a desire to reinforce the identity of each potential nation-state. Certainly under the rule of, for example, the Habsburg Empire, many areas retained their linguistic identity and, as soon as this empire collapsed, they were able to assume some kind of self-assertion. But long before this happened, after the First World War, this character was being established firmly in the consciousness of people locally. One area in which some national identity could be discerned was that of music.

One of the first ways in which national identity can be established is in the use of *folk music*. In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries in continental Europe, there was considerable interest in folk music. The collections and notations of the giants of early folk music collection in mainland Europe, Belâ Bartök, Zoltan Kodâly, Franjo Kuhač and many others, gave musicians much material on which to work. How this material was used varied enomiously. Clearly the musicians themselves, the early ethnomusicologists, would study the music for its own sake, making a note of its features and devising classifications to rationalise its techniques and to ensure that it would never be lost to memory. The folk traditions, even in the later Nineteenth Century, were dying out and there was a possibility that the music could be lost forever.

There was also a second development: many serious composers felt that the way forward from Romanticism was to base their music on folk music and this in itself was some guarantee that the music would reflect the character of the composer's own nation or national group. Music could be composed which derived some characteristics from folk music itself but which did not actually use folk music melodies. Composers such as Bartok and Kodâly would employ such methods in their own music. Bartok in particular did not use much original folk music in his own 'art' compositions, but maintained a loose connection with the techniques and style of folk music, particularly that of his native Hungary.

A third way in which music can be connected with nationalism is in setting words of a nation to music. It is sometimes felt that music which sets the words of a nation or national group in the native language produces music that belongs to or reflects the national character of that group. Languages have many different inflections, accents and varied vowel sounds all of which can be mirrored in music setting those words. This is not a new idea, but one that could usefully be employed to create some kind of national music. As an extension of this line of investigation, it has also been thought that, by some form of connection, composers who set music with local words would also create music which transferred these characteristics to music which did not set words. This is less easy to substantiate but enough evidence exists to support the theory to some extent.

A fourth major connection can be found in the idea of an association of certain music with specific events, festivities and the like, in a tradition. Some features of music can evoke certain feelings of nationalism in its listeners. This response is often peculiar to the native people of a particular national group, but it is often veiy strong indeed. Whether there is any connection with characteristics derived from folk music or not is always a possibility that is worth investigation. It is also reasonable to suspect that there is nothing in this music to connect it with folk music nor even to a relationship with the composer's setting of words of his native language.

The four headings to be used in this study are as follows:

1	Folk music
2	Music derived from Folk music
3	Word setting
4	Associations

Fig. 1 Topics to study Englishuess

1. Folk Music

It was not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that there was a desire to Compose music that was recognisably 'English'. There had, of course, been many composers in other countries at this time who wanted to compose music that showed some kind of national identity, for example. Smetana and Dvorak. For the English the catalyst was the collection and notation of folk music, both songs and dances, by a group of outstanding musicians who wanted, as everywhere else in the world, to preserve the music for posterity before its exponents died and the music with them. Eric Blom dates the beginning of the folk music revival to 1898 when the English Folk Song Society was established. Without any doubt, however, it began many years before, when collectors such as Frank Kidson, Lucy Broadwood, the Rev S. Baring-Gould and others started to search for and notate English folk songs. It continued with considerable purpose with the most famous of all the collectors, Cecil Shaip (1859-1924), who from 1905 onwards dedicated his life to this very activity. Alongside him were the Australian-born Percy Grainger (1882-1961) and the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958).

It was felt, and quite justifiably so, that the use of English folk song would lend a sense of authenticity to composed music. Of course, there are a number of ways in which this can be done. The *first* consists of straightforward arrangements and groupings of songs. Sometimes these are lightly arranged or scored songs or instrumental transcriptions of songs which depart from the original, as far as that can be determined, only in minor ways with the structure and nature of the melody kept intact and with no other material added. The *second* way is to vary the theme in anything from modest changes to full-scale formal variations. A *third* way is to add other material as a contrast while quoting the original in fairly literal form. The *fourth* main manner of using folk song in ait music is to extract melodic segments or phrases and treat them in some kind of symphonic method. A fifth technique to be discussed under a separate heading is to use melodic fragments or complete melodies that resemble folk song which, however, are not authentic but 'invented' in folk style.

If we consider direct musical quotations first, we have Vaughan Williams's English Folk. Songs Suite of 1923 for military band which includes the songs Seventeen Come Sunday, My bonny boy and Folk Songs from Somerset in a fairly literal form. As the English musicologist Michael Kennedy wrote without any hint of criticism: 'The Suite of English Folk Songs makes no attempt to develop the tunes or to rhapsodize upon them; it is merely a series of good tunes, strung together with ait and artifice.' There are many examples of this treatment of folk songs, including some among the works of Vaughan Williams, which need not detain us here. In many cases by English composers, folk songs which have been notated from the performances of solo singers have later been presented by English composers with new piano accompaniments. Although these are usu-

Eric Blom: Music in England (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942), p.182

Michael Kennedy: Tlje Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2/1980), p. 178

ally completely new and many add a new dimension to the music, sometimes unacceptable the melody is normally retained intact. There are considerable numbers of these types of arrangements, by such composers as Vaughan Williams and, much later in the 20th century, by Benjamin Britten. Their purpose is to make the folk songs more popular and performable, without them lying dormant in unperformable printed collections.

The second method is more fruitful in its examples of transferring national characteristics to art music by using forms of variation to extend the original to a greater length. Taking a few selected examples we can see how this process works. An early 20th-century example of this type came about as the result of competition sponsored by the chamber music enthusiast W.W. Cobbett,3 who was particularly keen to encourage the one-movement Phantasy, as a tribute to and in imitation of the Elizabethan fantasy of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The idea of the fantasia was very strong in England at this time and one on folk song suited the spirit of the age. For example, in 1916 a Cobbett award for a Phantasy for string quartet based on British folk songs was given to Herbert Howells. Vaughan Williams composed two fantasias in 1910, the Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis, one of the glories of the English string orchestra repertory, and also the Fantasia on English Folk Song: Studies for an English Ballad Opera, The Fantasia on Greensleeves of 1934 for 2 flutes, strings and harp, taken from the composer's opera Sir John in Love, uses the famous anonymous tune Greensleeves and treats it in a very freely varied way. Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus for strings and harp of 1939 integrates the melody in a much more symphonic but also an improvisatory way and is a pointer to the technique of variation of folk song derivatives. Dites and Lazarus in some ways typifies the type of English folk song that Vaughan Williams found appealing (Ex. 1). Like many such songs it is anacmsic, following the way that the English language uses the definite and indefinite article (which become the up-beat) and various prepositions before the important noun or verb which will inevitably take the stress at the beginning of a bar. The movement of the melody is generally by step with few large leaps and moving up and down in wave shapes. Significantly, too, it is in the Dorian mode which gives the music with its chosen harmonies a major-minor key ambiguity which Vaughan Williams was to exploit to such great effect in his Symphony No.6. The melody is extended by quasi-improvisation and the extraction of fragments, but the music is never allowed to sound anything other than continuous. It radiates a musical and textural luminescence that is an important feature of Vaughan Williams's orchestral music. A final example is an orchestral work that derives its inspiration from a folk song discovered by Percy Grainger in Lincolnshire. Called Brigg Fair, after the town of Brigg where it was discovered, it is a pleasant and gentle song, again in the Dorian mode, that starts without an anacrusis, and moves gently by step.4 It made an ideal start for what Frederick Delius (1862-1934) also called Brigg Fair and subtitled 'An English Rhapsody,' which he composed in 1907. The work's construction is an amalgam of two types of treatment, variation and episodic, the second and third types. In the first instance, there is the theme and seventeen free variations. However, Delius also composed five pastoral episodes in which the flutes and clarinets imitate the birds suggested in the second stanza ('the lark in the morning'); an introduction, an extended middle section after variation 6, two linking sections, the first between variations 12 and 13, and the second between variations 16 and 17, and a final coda. This hybrid form works very well, giving us two ways of communicating Englishness, by the village folksong, and by the country

Walter Willson Cohhett (-.) was a British businessman and amateur violinist. His chamber music prizes encouraged the composition of a number of excellent pieces, including four by Frank Bridge (.1879-1941.1, the teacher of Benjamin Britten.

The words of the first verse of the song dictate the metre:

It was on the lift' of august
The weather fine and fair
Unto Brigg Fair I did repair
For Love I was inclined.

sounds. A episodic work in which variation is not employed as a major technique is a short orchestral work called *ne Banks of Green Willow by* George Butterworth (1885-1916).³ The folk song of the same name is used to enclose a more dramatic and thematically unconnected middle section based on another folk song called *Green Bushes*. Other composers used English folk music to add a national flavour to the sound. For example, in the finale of the *St Paul's Suite* for strings of 1912-13 by Gustav Holst (1874-1934), the main theme is a folk dance melody in 6/8 time called the 'Dargason' which first appeared in the1651 edition of John Playford's *The English Dancing Master*. As a bonus Hoist ingeniously used the folk song *Greensleeves* (in 3/4 time) as a counterpoint later in the movement.

The fourth form of folk music quotation can be found in a number of works in which only parts of melodies are used. A good example of this is the work that Britten composed in his last decade: Suite on English Folk Tunes 14 time there was... "b Like Hoist, Britten used dancing tunes from John Playford's 17th century anthology, but almost always made fragmentary use of the seven chosen melodies. He also used three original folk songs, but it was only in the final movement that Britten chose to use a complete melody, the haunting song called 'Lord Melbourne' notated by Percy Grainger. It was scored for english horn in the most memorable way, in the words of Peter Evans: 'not so much harmonized as freely suspended from a string texture of interweaving ostinati. The melody is framed by snatches of a dance tune, 'Epping Forest', but its climax recurs and is extended by a process of fantasy in which the impassive pedal at last gives way to a harmonic circuit; the poignancy of the moment seems to illuminate the Hardy quotation which provides the work's subtitle, 'A time there was..." The poet Thomas Hardy was to play a significant if inadvertent part in the resurgence of English song, as will be noted later.

2. Folk music derivatives

The second heading of this study represents the fifth method of using folk music. In the first half of the 20th century a great deal of English music was composed that did not literally quote folk music, but sounded as if it were folk music. This illusion suited the spirit of the time, because it was generally thought to capture the essence of Englishness. Tunes would be written that moved gently by step without any strong contrasts, and often cast in the Dorian mode or at least with some features of it appearing from time to time. Eric Blom points to something of its purpose when he wrote the following:

And folk music will continue to inspire composers, though the best of those who have been so inspired, as for instance Vaughan Williams and Hoist, have shown that it is its spirit and feeling and flavour, allowed to act on their individual inspiration, rather than any direct borrowing which is most fruitful.⁸

A few examples will help to make this clear. As Blom notes above, it was Vaughan Williams who again made the biggest steps in this direction. A minor masterpiece of his from f914 gives some indication. Similar technically in some ways to *Brigg Fair* by Delius is *The Lark Ascending* for violin and small orchestra by Vaughan Williams, but with one makl difference: there is no original folk song involved. Vaughan Williams invented folk-song like melodies to contrast with his bird-song phrases that the violin plays at the beginning and ending of the work. Yet this is

Butterworth fought in the First World War and distinguished himself at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, hut was killed soon afterwards by
a sniper's bullet near Pozières.
 The third movement called Hankin Booby was composed in 1967, the other four movements in the autumn of 1974. The quotation is from

a poem by Thomas Hardy (see below)

Peter Evans: 7 — i'. / of Benjamin Britten (London: Dent, 1979), p.339 Eric Blom: Music in England (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), p.187

not a criticism because the music sounds pastoral in character and in the words of many commentators quintessentially English. Michael Kennedy put it succinctly when he described it as 'an idyll of transformed folk song'.

A parallel with the finale of Hoist's St Paul's Suite can be found in the finale of the Concerto for Double String Orchestra of 1939 by Michael Tippett (1905-93). Here Tippett invents his own folk-like tunes and makes his own contrapuntal juxtapositions in a typically skilful way. What is found here is a slow-moving tune from the slow movement combined with the finale's themes in an exuberant closing section that stimulates the normally colourful words of Wilfred Meilers to a paean of praise that might seem surprisingly exaggerated:

Finally, in the coda, the song tune proves to be a derivative of the folk-song melody of the slow movement, now sounding powerfully, joyously, purged of all hint of nostalgia, and accompanied on the other orchestra by a thrilling medley of 6/8 rhythms against the song's 2/4 lilt ... So it's true to say that this work has remade England's past in the light of her present. It's our music, a song-dance of joy, growing from the knowledge - in our nerves and blood - that what we were we still potentially are. 1"

Perhaps we can see the same processes of invented 'folk tunes' at work in Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony* of 1922, although a much more developed and strikingly modern example is to be found in the first movement of his Symphony No.6 of 1946. The clash of the opening keys of F minor and E minor is distinctly discordant, but in some ways the position of a folk-like tune as a contrasting subject has something of the same disturbing feeling. While at its first appearance, it is clearly cast in the Dorian mode, its impression in the symphonic context is of a minor-key melody with flattened sevenths (Ex.2a). But when it reappears at the end of the movement, it is now mostly in the major key of E with lush triadic harmonies to give it a strong English pastoral sound (Ex.2b). We can see this as perhaps a memory of what was (compare with the Britten Suite discussed above) as opposed to the horrors of war that have often been associated with this symphony. Deryck Cooke expressed this very vividly about the theme's first appearance:

At last, over the relentlessly galumphing rhythm, the final main theme of the movement enters in a broad, relaxed, flowing 6/4; deriving from the pure strain of English folk song, it established the traditional, 'strong' dominant key (B *minor*), and seems to evoke, amid all the welter, a vision of a vanished world.'11

With the death of Vaughan Williams in 1958, English folk music and its derivatives fell out of fashion. It was no longer felt necessary to establish one's national identity in music in this way, although there were composers who continued with this tradition. However, they were less influential than Vaughan Williams was. Added to this was the appointment of William Glock as Controller of Music at the BBC, whose mission, together with that of his assistant Hans Keller, was to increase awareness of modemist music from Central Europe and elsewhere at the expense of those who looked to English folk music for their inspiration. Many composers were thus excluded from broadcasts by the BBC, especially those who were following the folk-music connections. The music of composers such as Elisabeth Lutyens who had studied with Webern was now able to blossom, but her music could hardly be thought of as distinctly English. She will

¹ Michael Kennedy in notes for compact disc Sir Adrian Boillt conducts Vailghan Williams, Dutton CDBP 9703 (Watford, UK, 2000)

Wilfred Meilers: 'Four Orchestral Works', in Ian Kemp (ed.) Michael Tippett a Symposium on his Sixtieth Binhday (London: Faher, 1965).
p. 167

Deryck Cooke: V:e Language of Music (London: Oxford LTniversity Press, 1959). p.257

also be remembered as the inventor of the mildly vulgar epithet which she used for the music of the English pastoral tradition, which she referred to collectively as 'cowpat music'. 12

3. Word settings

For the third heading we return to vocal music. Corresponding approximately chronologically with the revival of folk music is the beginning of the 19th-century renaissance in English music as a serious art form. The exact time that this took place is not important, but there are a number of pointers to suggest that the last two decades of the 19th century was the time that this arose. The composition by Hubert Parry in 1888-89 of his Symphony No.3, which he called 'The English' is significant. While his general style and formal control was completely that of the 19th-century romantics, his choice of melodic material was more in keeping with the character of English folk dances with clipped phrases and short paragraphs. Blom points to the first performance of Parry's Prometheus Bound at the Hereford Three Choirs Festival in 1880 as another indicator. 13 What is important in this revival of English musical fortunes is that composers wanted to ensure that the English character was established. In addition to the folk music developments already noted, the most obvious and immediate way was to set English words to music. It was this that acted as a catalyst to the large number of talented creative musicians in the last years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th. The blossoming of song writing at this time was amazing if one takes into account that England was considered 'Das Land ohne Musik'14 for much of the 19th century.

One of the most important aspects of this renaissance of song writing was the use of the poetry of many outstanding English writers. The catalyst for this resurgence in song writing was the English language and its huge storehouse of excellent poetry. In a short essay such as this it is impossible to do justice to the wide variety of composers and vety large number of songs involved; moreover, even in a book of over 600 pages Stephen Banfield has to admit to many omissions.¹⁵ A selection of examples under different topics can give some idea of the techniques involved.

Composers were very selective in the words that they set to music in the first half of the 20th century. Many of the same poets attracted English composers at this time, especially those whose work reflected the spirit of the age. One of the first to appeal to composers in the early years of the 20th century was A.E.Housman, the whose collection of 63 poems with the title Shropshire Lad was published in 1896 at the author's expense. They are described in Hoe Oxford Companion to English Literature as 'spare and nostalgic verses, based largely on ballad-forms, and mainly set in a half-imaginary Shropshire, a 'land of lost content', and often addressed to, or spoken by, a farm boy or a soldier. Stephen Banfield remarks on one quality in the poems, 'pastoralism mixed with a strong flavour of fatalistic, fin-de-siècle gloom.' These poems were enormously popular in their time and attracted the attention of dozens of different English composers. From this large number, two composers' outstanding settings are selected to represent the kind of Englishness that was carried over from the subject of the poetry to the music to which it was set. The composer George Butterworth chose six poems from this collection for his song-cycle called Six Songs from 14 Shropshire Lad' Mid another five for Bredon Hill' and Other Songs, both sets

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Tije Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'cowpat' as: 'a flat round piece of cow-dung'.

Eric Blom: Music in England (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942), p.163

This pithet was reportedly invented by the 19th-century German conductor Hans von Bülow.

Stephen Banfield: Sensibility and English Song (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.x

Alfred Edward Housman (.1859-1936) was appointed Professor of Latin in London L'Iniversity in 1892, but was much more noted for his English poetry.

The <Oxford Companion to English Literature, ed Margaret Drabble (Oxford L'Iniversity Press: Oxford, 5/1985), p.477
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composed in the years 1909-11. Ralph Vaughan Williams took six poems for his song-cycle On Wenlock Edge of 1908-9. Here we will examine Six Songs from 14 Shropshire Lad'and On Wenlock Edge. 19

Butterworth keeps his settings as miniatures and his piano accompaniments vety sparing. This has the advantage of not detracting from the sound or meaning of the words, yet the composer still has the ability to project the musical side of things in melodic invention that enhances the English language. In the first song. Loveliest of trees, the mysterious atmosphere is conveyed by this unadorned vocal line, and in the fifth, the rolling rhythms of the words of The lads in their hundreds is emphasised by the triple rhythm and rising and falling of the melody in a way that follows the words to perfection. At no point in this cycle does one lose either the sound or the meaning of the words. Housman's ambiguities are projected without complication. The settings of the six songs of Vaughan Williams's On Wenlock Edge me much more extended, have much longer passages of instrumental independence, employ a string quartet in addition to the piano, and last about twice as long as Butterworth's six songs. Above all they have a dramatic interpretation which adds a new dimension to Housman's poetry. The purists found that Vaughan Williams's music overpowered Housman's understated verses, but the final result is incredibly vivid. Like Butterworth, however, he made sure that the words were never obscured and often kept to a monotone or at least within a small range to ensure their clarity.

One other composer whose mastery of the setting of the English language is greatly underrated is Gerald Finzi (1901-56). Nowhere is this more apparent than in his settings of the English poet Thomas Traherne (1637-74) in his song cycle for high voice²" and string orchestra called Dies Natalis, completed in 1939. Traherne was a visionary poet whose verses display a calm exuberance that Finzi admired and suited his style very well. Those that he chose to set present a child's vision of the world in all its innocence and glory and his music reflects this. The string orchestra is richly scored, but with a radiance and luminescence to which Vaughan Williams aspired. The setting of the words shows this English calm and reticence in a very measured way. Two characteristics in this setting of English words are especially notable: the flexibility of rhythm that Finzi used to convey the subtle nuances of verbal sound, and an inspired and almost improvisatory emphasis on certain words and syllables that for Finzi carried special significance both for their sound and for their meaning. The first example (Ex. 3a) from the opening vocal section called 'Rhapsody' presents a basic 6/8 time which is frequently divided into what is in effect 2/4 time in order to accommodate the different metres and stresses of the poetry and to project the sound of the words with the greatest possible clarity. The means that a composer can use to emphasise a word or a syllable are numerous: a note can be sung more loudly; it can be sustained; it can be sung at a higher pitch. In the central section of the third movement called 'The Rapture', Finzi uses all three techniques, but principally the long note. In the first part of the example (Ex.3b), words such as 'God', 'sent', 'Gift', 'praise', 'name' are selected as well as the second syllables of 'above' and 'enflame'. In the second part of the example, the words 'Stars', 'Sun', and 'Love' rise in pitch with each phrase. It would be very difficult, though not impossible, to replicate this phrasing in another language as it is so directly tailored to the metre, stresses and sonority of the English language. This is what makes this music particularly 'English'.

In addition to his settings of Traherne's writings, Finzi used large numbers of poems by the English novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Why he set over 50 of Hardy's poems to

These two sets have only one poem in common. Is my teamploughing? Banfield also chose these two sets for particular mention as enhancing English music in the early 20th century 1 cit. p.244-45.).

Finzi was happy with soprano or tenor, hut recently this has been almost exclusively monopolised by the tenors, Wilfred Brown, John Mark Ainsley, Ian Bostridge and others.

music has never been fully explained;²¹ the poet's rather epigrammatic style does not lend itself easily to Finzi's broader, but simple melodic shapes, yet the composer was able to show his mastery in three song-cycles, each consisting of ten songs, published in his lifetime, and two shorter ones assembled after his premature death in 1956.

Of the song-cycle Earth and Air and Rain, Finzi sets Hardy's words syllabically with virtually no form of melisma in recognition of the importance of the word. He follows his words meticulously, using only the form- of emphasis, e.g. lengthening of the notes, already noted in Dies Natalis. Nevertheless, he introduces a freedom in the setting of 'Summer Schemes' by keeping his piano accompaniment strictly in metre, but setting his vocal accents on non-emphasised beats, a form of syncopation that he had made his own. The march-like 'When I set out for Lyonesse' keeps the vocal line firmly anchored to the metrical pattern of the piano. It is firm but understated. Even the exuberant 'Rollicum-Rorum' keeps the tone almost conversational; the jauntiness makes us feel that the poetiy was meant to be set to music because reading or speaking Hardy's verses lacks this spontaneity. Perfection is found in 'Sweet Lizbie Browne', a conversational ballad that simply projects the words through the music, but takes nothing away from Hardy's poetry. Stephen Banfield puts it succinctly:

The purity of Finzi's word setting has often been remarked upon. In addition to shaping his melodic contours to the rise and fall of the conversing or the reciting voice, he is thorough, probably not unconsciously, in his application of the 'for evety syllable-a-note' dictum.²²

Yet in 'The Phantom' and 'The Clock of Years', Finzi excels himself in serious vein, projecting the sinister undertones of the words by careful pacing, supremely judged emphasis and the placing of each note and syllable in an effectively imagined register. 'Proud Songsters' that ends this collection is a gentle reflection on the cycle of nature as found in the world of English country birds, perhaps the essence of Englishness. Similar observations can be made about Finzi's other song-cycles on Hardy's poetry. This essay also inevitably skates over some of the fine settings of English poetry by such composers as Roger Quilter, the tragic figures of Peter Warlock and Ivor Gurney, ²³ and John Ireland.

Following them from the next generation stands the greatest genius of the later 20th century, Benjamin Britten, in his vocal settings of the English language, in his songs with piano, in his songs with orchestra and his operas. This study examines only a small selection which uses words that had already been independently written, rather than those created specially for the music as in most of the operatic librettos. While Britten did on occasion set French and German words, and Latin in his choral works, by far the most common is his use of English words. Here we consider *Winter Words* to poetry by Thomas Hardy, the *Serenade* for tenor, hom and strings and the *Nocturne* for tenor and small orchestra, both including a group of nocturnal poems by different authors, the settings of poetiy by Wilfred Owen in his *War Requiem*, and Britten's one opeia that uses original woids from a play rather than a specially written libietto, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* based on Shakespeaie.

In Winter Words Britten's technique for projecting the English woids is more varied than Finzi's with gieatei use of melisma, laigei intervals and moie chromatic melodic lines as well as a sig-

Stephen Banfield puts forward a number of plausible suggestions in his study of English song. The most compelling is Finzi's optimistic agnosticism which was consistent with Hardy's blunt rejection of Christianity, and Finzi's horror of war, both from the 1914-18 war in which he lost his teacher Ernest Farrar and the approaching Second World War, which was reflected in Hardy's lament for the passing of a golden age in England (op.cit. pp.275-77.).

TM Stephen Banfield: op.cit., p.282

Peter Warlock was the nom-de-pltime of Philip Heseltine (1894-1930), a very talented but unstable composer. Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) suffered from severe shell-shock during the First World War and faced many psychological difficulties right up to his premature death.

nificant amount of 'word-painting'. These features help to convey the spareness of Hardy's words which thinly disguise a pessimism for the future, which can be seen in the following, which ends the first song. At Day-close in November':

I see every tree in my June time
And now they obscure the sky.
And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here.
That none in time will be seen.

Like Finzi, Britten also set 'Proud Songsters' and creates a dramatic and passionate song about the birds, sung mostly in the highest register. Perhaps the most affecting song in the cycle is the last, called 'Before Life and After', which begins with the prophetic words A time there was ...,.'24 These reminiscences tell many things, but in particular the loss of tolerance, a traditional English trait. JTle fortissimo cry at the end on the emotive falling semitone on the words 'How long?', and sung five times as opposed to Hardy's twice, is as powerful an ending as can be imagined.

More typical of Britten's versatility in setting anthologies of English poetry is illustrated in two superb cycles on the theme of night for tenor and small orchestra. The Serenade of 1943 with horn and strings frames settings of six poems with two short horn solos. The metrical freedom which Tennyson's 'Nocturne' elicits from Britten is impressive (Ex.4a), while the sad 'Elegy' by William Blake paints the sinister words of the poem in glowing chromaticism (Ex.4b). The exuberant joy of Ben Johnson's 'Hymn' draws out ecstatic melisma on the words 'excellently bright' (Ex.4c). Another anthology of eight poems is found in Britten's Nocturne of 1958 in which each setting except the first is accompanied by solo instruments in turn (woodwkid, horn, harp and timpani). The first song has strings only and the last, setting Shakespeare's 'When I most wink, then do my eyes best see', which uses the full orchestra. The solo instruments display a considerable amount of word-painting, a technique ultimately derived from the master of English word-setting, Henry Purcell. Britten's daring use of Wilfred Owen's war poetry in his War Requiem of 1961 is mostly set apart from the main choral sections in Latin, though there are thematic and semantic links, with some sections ironically interleaved between the English and Latin settings. The settings for both tenor and baritone, sometimes separately and sometimes together, represent the reconciliation between British (or English) and German antagonists during the World Wars. It was a very English way of conveying the pacifist sentiments of Britten's life-long beliefs and the rapprochement of two peoples after the two World Wars.

The music of Britten's operas is justly famous for its ability to make the English word convey a wonderful sense of drama. Only one opera of his, however, does not use a specially prepared libretto derived from a play, a novel or other poems. This is A Midsummer Night's Dream of 1959, which of course, takes the text from Shakespeare's play, suitably abbreviated. What is interesting about Britten's treatment of the words in this opera is the way that he selects an almost innocent phrase and makes it into a motto that dominates a section, giving the whole scene an atmosphere derived from the meaning of the words. Four examples can be used to illustrate this feature. The first gives the evocative phrase 'Ill met by moonlight', sung by Oberon and Tytania, the king and queen of the fairies respectively, with a large rising interval, as they emerge from the wood in a distressed state, while the second presents the four lovers trying to sort out their lives. The flutes and oboes give a wailing four-note cry, falling semitone followed by a rising semitone, to which Lysander adds the words 'How now my love?' This phrase acts as an idée

²⁴ Britten used this as a subtitle for his orchestral suite on folk tunes (see above).

fixe for this scene. Likewise when Oberon is casting his magic spell he sings the words 'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where the Oxlips and the nodding Violet grows'. The melodic line is a sinuous phrase that starts with a tritone and makes the tonality uncertain with alternating minor and major thirds. The fourth example accompanies the 'rustics', the artisans and manual workers who are pretending to be 'cultural' in presenting a play (or in Britten's work an opera) of high artistic pretensions. The words of the title of the play ('of Pyramus and Thisby') are sung to a phrase that might almost have come out one of Mozart's operas and appears again and again as these peasant workers emphasise their aims.

Just as the death of Vaughan Williams in 1958 signalled the demise of folk music in art music, so the death of Benjamin Britten in 1976 gave a clear sign that the golden age of 20th-century English vocal music had lost its chief proponent. It is true that English song still continues, but in a much more fragmented way. For example the outstanding settings of poems by Robert Graves that Hugh Wood (b. 1932) has made over the last 30 years stand high in the history of English music. It would be very difficult, however, to identify an innate English character in this music.

4. Associations

The fourth heading in this study of Englishness in music is the idea that certain types of music become associated with the English character, even if this was not the original idea or intention. The composer who falls into this category to a significant extent is Edward Elgar (1857-1934). A small number of his works have now become indelibly fixed as part of the national character as portrayed in music. The music of a number of other composers has been absorbed into this phenomenon, but it is principally Elgar whose music is thought to represent English national aspirations. While Elgar was slowly establishing his reputation as a composer in the last decade of the 19th century, he composed what he called Variations on an Original Werne for orchestra, subtitled 'Enigma' or Enigma Variations for short. The characters of his friends would feature in each of the variations, with descriptions mostly clearly defined by the composer himself.²⁵ The source of the inspiration for the theme itself, which Elgar hinted at, has always remained a mystery, despite many attempts to solve it.26 Perhaps the most famous of the variations is the ninth, subtitled 'Nimrod'. In mythology Nimrod is the hunter which in German is Der Jäger or Jaeger. Elgar's publisher, Alfred Jaeger, an emigrant from Düsseldorf, was a great supporter of Elgar's music. Thus the variation called 'Nimrod' represents Jaeger and was said by the composer to be a recollection of a stimulating discussion with Jaeger on the subject of the slow movements of Beethoven's music. Although the dignified and mellow slow music does recall, for example, the slow movement of Beethoven's Pathétique Sonata, it also proved itself suitably grand and solemn to be used as a funeral piece for British monarchy. Once it had been performed separately in this way, it became an 'essential' feature for any royal funeral by a form of association, despite the fact that it had arisen completely unambiguously from totally different ideas. This is a good instance of an invented tradition, a phenomenon which has been well investigated by Eric Hobsbawm.²⁷

Within two years of the first performance of the *Enigma Variations*, Elgar set out to compose a number of military marches for orchestra. Eventually he completed five with sketches for

²⁻ Elgar prefaced the score with the following: 'Dedicated to my friends pictured within'.

The most convincing is that by Joseph Cooper who thought that the original theme is a paraphrase of themes of the slow movement of Mozart's Symphony No.38 in D major ('Prague') K 504.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds): V:e Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

a sixth. For each of these Elgar employed the traditional march form, a ternary structure (ABA) with a rousing coda. The central section was normally a quieter contrast to the loud and busy outer sections. In the first of the marches. *Pomp and Circumstance March No.l*, Elgar composed a beautifully phrased and balanced melody that had a strong hamiony and easy memorability (Ex.5). The title that the composer gave to it indicated the general character of the piece; it was not definably English, although the march contained all the stylistic features of the composer's music. Very shortly after its composition, however, the poet A.C. Benson²⁸ devised patriotic words to fit the music, the most famous part being the words that are set to the melody of the central section of the march:

Land of Hope and Glory
Mother of the Free
How shall we extol thee
Who are born of thee?
Wider still and wider
Shall thy bounds be set,
God, who made thee mighty.
Make thee mightier yet.

Despite Jaeger's protests, Elgar included this in his Coronation Ode of f902 for the new King, Edward VII. It became an instant success. Because of this association with glory and royalty, the new arrangement with the words 'Land of Hope and Glory' took on a new role as a stirring statement of English nationality.²⁹ It was subsequently used as part of the celebrations in the last concert of every season of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in London's Queen's Hall (and later the Royal Albert Hall). The suggestion that it no longer appears in this final concert was greeted by almost universal disapproval. A new invented tradition by association had been established. The new situation promoted an Englishness that was never specifically intended in the original music.

This character can be found in numerous pieces by other composers, too. We can sense that Jupiter' from *The Planets* Suite by Gustav Holst (1874-1934) has something in common with Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No.l.* A busy first section leads to a very mellow and memorable theme for the central section (Ex.6). Its scoring, with strings low in the register, doubled by clarinets, bassoons and horns makes it sound much like Elgar's grandest style.³" Yet the music was not especially English until Cecil Spring-Rice³¹ wrote words to fit this melody, with the plan abbreviated and the final cadence smoothed out and rounded off. The words are as follows:

I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above. Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love; The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test. That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best; The love that never falters, the love that pays the price. The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

Arthur Christopher Benson (.1862-1925) published many volumes of biography, reminiscences, and criticism. He was well known for his ability to write public odes.

David Cannadine: 'The British Monarchy c.1820-1977', in Hobsbawm and Ranger: op cit.. p. 136 Elgar often used the word 'Nobilrnente' for this type of music.

Elgar often used the word 'Nobilr Sir Cecil Spring-Rice (1859-1918) And there's another country, I've heard of long ago.

Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;

We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;

Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;

And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase.

And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

The patriotic sentiment is now very obvious and the music has now gained an English character which emanates mostly from the words. In short the setting has been adopted as a patriotic hymn and an evocative national symbol, because of the association of the words with the music

To return to military marches, there have been a number of other such works that create the same effect as Elgar's marches, despite the fact that they have no additional words. The central sections of two Coronation marches. Crown Imperial of 1937 and Orb and Sceptre of 1953, both by William Walton (1902-83), do exactly this. The melody is smoothly played in the low register and in its initial form is scored for clarinets, bassoons and horns with low strings. They are, of course, intended to conjure up national English sentiment just as Elgar's do. Another similar piece is the march that Eric Coates (1886-1957), especially notable for his light music compositions, composed for the 1954 feature film. Hoe Dam Busters; The patriotic and nationalistic tone of the film of a daring wartime air raid on German dams was perfectly captured in Coates's march.

A second topic that must be included under the heading of association is a group of orchestral works that centred on the subject of the city of London. Elgar's *Cockaigne Overture* (subtitled 'In London Town'), first performed in 1901, is simply an affectionate translation into music of some of the sights and sounds of the city at the end of the 19th century. The composer himself said of the work: 'It calls up to my mind all the good humour, jollity, and something deeper in the way of English good fellowship (as it were) abiding still in our capital'.³³

A major work with similar connections is ^4 London Symphony of 1913 by Ralph Vaughan Williams. There has been some controversy, encouraged by the composer, about whether this is a programmatic work or not. Suffice it to say that, like Elgar's Cockaigne Overture, there are themes that can be related to aspects of London's life. The composer, George Butterworth, who was a great friend Vaughan Williams at the time of the symphony's composition and first performance, was very fulsome in his descriptions of what had inspired the composer at various points in the score. We have suggestions of Westminster Chimes, 'an episode of Hampstead Heath high spirits',34 grey skies, various street cries, a mouth-organ and an accordion, and possibly London's ugly underworld. A curious little phrase at the end of the introduction to the first movement proper has the rhythm and notes of the Cockney jingle 'Have a banana'. In short, the connections with pre-First World War days are numerous and identifiable. Yet the work can stand without these associations as an independent symphonic work of large proportions.³³ Despite this, a recent incident reminds us of the power of association of such a work as this. On 19 July 2005, the original version was given its first public performance for over 90 years at a BBC Promenade Concert in the Royal Albert Hall in London. This was less than two weeks after the fatal bombings on the London Underground trains and a bus, and just two days before a failed attempt to repeat the atrocities. Such was the emotional effect on the capacity audience of nearly 7000 people of such a personal work associated with the English capital and its experience

^{~-- &#}x27;2 Associated British Picture Corporation, now available on Warner Bros. DVD.

As quoted by Diana M. McVeagh in Edward Elgar His Life and Music (London: Dent, 1955) p.34

Michael Kennedy: V:e Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams (London: Oxford LTniversity Press, 2/1980), p.137-39
In its recently revived original version, it lasts over an hour.

of the horrors so fresh in everyone's minds that when the work ended, there was total silence for some fifteen seconds before any applause started.

The third work that connects with London by some form of association is by John Ireland (1879-1962) who, despite his name, was emphatically English. He had composed piano works called *London Pieces* in the years 1917-20, and extended these in his *London Overture* for orchestra of 1936. Like the London works of Elgar and Vaughan Williams, it attempted a tribute to London in its choice of themes, but like these works it can also be understood without any necessary local connection.

The third and final example of association to be considered here that identifies English music as such is a type of work sometimes referred to as the 'Cheltenham Symphony'. The Cheltenham Festival, held in the dignified Gloucestershire town in the early summer from 1945 onwards, made a special point of featuring, and later commissioning, works by British, mostly English, composers. Many of these works were symphonies, usually of a fairly traditional style, often neo-classical or neo-romantic. We have, for example, the performance in the late 1940s and 1950s of a collection of 'First' symphonies by various composers: Arthur Benjamin (1948), William Alwyn and Peter Racine Flicker (both 1950), Malcolm Arnold (1951), Geoffrey Bush (1954) and Arthur Butterwoith (1957). Other English symphonies performed during these years were Edmund Rubbra's No.2 (1946), the Third Symphonies of the influential Richard Aiiiell and the traditionalist William Wordsworth (both 1953) and the outstanding Second Symphony of Robert Simpson in 1957.³⁶

After the 1950s, the programming committee was very enthusiastic for performing more advanced music, with the result that the idea of the slightly disparaging term 'Cheltenham Symphony' as a token of English conservatism was beginning to be lost. With the addition to the committee of William Glock, who later transformed the BBC's music output, the Cheltenham Festival would now look to the future and not dwell in the past. Thus in the 1960s there was a more adventurous offering in Malcolm Arnold's Fifth Symphony (1961), Alan Rawsthöme's elliptic and much admired Third Symphony (1964), Gordon Crosse's intense but beautifully sonorous Sinfonia Concertante (1965), John McCabe's intensely moving First Symphony, subtitled 'Elegy' (1966) and Lennox Berkeley's lean and almost Gallic Third Symphony (1969).³⁷

Conclusion

This study of Englishness in music of the 20th century has necessarily been very selective in its choice of examples, but it has attempted to show how the renaissance in English music that started at the end of the 19th century progressed. The fact that one of the most important catalysts was the revival of folk music would be no surprise to anyone studying the development of music in almost an European country during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In England it was handled by the genius of Ralph Vaughan Williams and assisted by the outstanding collecting work of Cecil Sharp and Percy Grainger. With his death, and even before, the movement had lost a lot of momentum. At the same time as folk music was being revived, though, English music generally was increasing in quality, quantity and influence. The lead was given by Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry to start with, and later by the outstanding works of Edward Elgar. The particularly English character was emphasised by a huge flow of vocal music that set the words of English poets in a clear and characterful way, but the generation was severely impeded by

The performance in 1953 of the Second Symphony by the Scottish composer, Iain Hamilton, was also a significant event.

⁻¹⁷ There was also the powerful Symphony No.2 by the Welsh composer. Alun Hoddinott, in 1962 and the intense Sinfonia by the Scottish composer, Thea Musgrave, in 1963.

the terrifying consequences of the First World War. Some composers, like George Butterwoith, Ernest Farrar and Denis Browne, died in the conflict and others, like Ivor Gumey, were psychologically damaged by the effects of war. The later developments were dominated by the outstanding gifts for vocal expression of English words of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten. With Britten's passing this era faded, too. The idea of association can be seen in a desire to maintain some form of English nationalism. It remains a form of historic reminiscence or rather some new tradition invented for some less than honourable purpose, for example, political or social. For music in England, and Britain in general, a national character is much less obvious in the later 20th century, and by the early 21st century, a corporate English character is not obvious at all. The quality of the best music is still high, but it does not recognisably belong to England.



Ex.1 Ralph Vaughan Williams: Theme from Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus © Copyright 1940 Oxford University Press.

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Ex. 2a Ralph Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 6 in E minor – first movement subsidiary theme - first appearance

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Ex.2b Ralph Vaughan Williams: Symphony No.6 in E minor – first movement subsidiary theme – last appearance

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Ex.3a Gerald Finzi: *Dies Natalis* – Rhapsody (opening) © Copyright 1946 Boosey and Hawkes Ltd Reproduced by permission of Boosey and Hawkes Ltd



Ex.3b Gerald Finzi: *Dies Natalis* – The Rapture © Copyright 1946 Boosey and Hawkes Ltd Reproduced by permission of Boosey and Hawkes Ltd



Ex.4a Benjamin Britten: Serenade – Nocturne © Copyright 1944 Boosey and Hawkes Ltd Reproduced by permission of Boosey and Hawkes Ltd

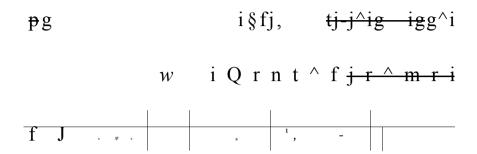
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Ex.4b Benjamin Britten: Serenade - Elegy
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Ex.4c Benjamin Britten: Serenade - Hymn
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Ex.5 Elgar: Pomp and Circumstance March No.1 in D - central section



i."r
$$rrr''ff > |ffpF|Mfrjf \sim > i$$

Ex.6 Hoist: The Planets - Jupiter - central section

POVZETEK

Mnogo držav je v 19. stoletju želelo uveljaviti svoj nacionalni karakter in glasba je ponujala eno izmed možnih poti. V Angliji je bila v poznem 19. in zgodnjem 20. stoletju ljudska glasba pomemben del tega procesa. Najprej se je angleška ljudska glasba uporabljala za preproste obdelave, variacije in epizodne postopke, lahko pa so uporabljali glasbo, ki je navidez zvenela kot ljudska, vendar pa ni šlo avtentične primere ljudska glasbe. Osrednji skladatelj, ki je ljudsko glasbo uporabljal na oba načina, je bil Ralph Vaughan Williams. Tretji pomemben način vzpostavljanja angleškosti v glasbi je potekal prek uglasbljevanja besedil pomembnih pesnikov, med katerimi sta bila najpomembnejša A.E. Housman in Thomas Hardy, čeprav se je uporabljalo tudi besedila številnih drugih pesnikov. V tem pogledu so bili pomembni skladatelji Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gerald Finzi in Benjamin Britten, pozabiti pa ne smemo tudi na druge skladatelje, kot na primer na Petra Warlocka, Ivorja Gurneya, Rogerja Quilterja in Johna Irelanda. Vsebina teh pesmi je bila pogosto povezana z angleškim pogledom na preteklost, ki se je spreminjal, kar je bila tipična tema tega obdobja. Najboljši skladatelji so uspeli prenesti zvok in pomen angleških besed na efektne načine. Četrto polje, prek katerega se je vzpostavljala angleškost v glasbi, je povezana z nekakšno asociacijsko potjo, ki določeno glasbo identificira z nacionalni karakterjem, četudi originalno takšna povezava sploh ni obstajala. Elgarjeva koračnica Pomp and Circumstance No. 1 je bila na primer povezana z angleškostjo šele, ko so dodali patriotsko besedilo in takšna glasba je bila uporabljena ob kronanju kralja Edvarda VII. leta 1902. Druge skladbe so pridobile nacionalni karakter, ko je bilo dodano besedilo ali pa je bil imitiran isti slog oz. karakter. Naslednja asociacija zadeva skladbe, ki so povezane z mestom London, kar naj bi samo po sebi zagotavljalo prirojeno angleškost. Zadnja obravnavana asociacija pa je povezana s t.i. "cheltenhamsko simfonijo", kar je precej žaljiv pridevek, ki se nanaša na konservativne simfonije, izvajane na zgodnjih festivalih angleške glasbe med letoma 1945 in I960 v angleškem mestu Cheltenham. Te štiri specifične povezave z angleškostjo, ljudsko glasbo, imitacijo ljudske glasbe, uglasbitvami in asociacijami so v zadnji četrtini 20. stoletja, ko je angleška glasba postala veliko bolj mednarodna v svojem razgledu, izgubile veliko svojega pomena