A COMPARISON OF ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES IN THE MUSIC OF
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND BRITTEN
THROUGH ANALYSIS OF THEIR FESTIVAL TE DEUMS

by

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Joni Lynn Jensen
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Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten were two of the most prominent and popular composers in England in the first half of the twentieth century; however, their musical styles represent two different schools of thought, pastoralism and modernism. Despite their differences, they had much in common. They attended the same school; were heirs of a movement to promote English music, the English Musical Renaissance; and greatly admired their predecessor Henry Purcell. This document investigates how these two composers formulated diverse compositional styles even though they shared a common musical heritage.

The investigation in this document is two-part. First, the investigation depicts the origin and formulation of both composers’ styles through a discussion and comparison of their musical backgrounds, teachers, influences, and ideals. This discussion includes information on their personal training and ideas, as well as influential movements, composers, and teachers. The second portion includes analysis and comparison of Vaughan Williams’ and Britten’s Festival Te Deums. The document includes a discussion of the origin of the Te Deum text and history of musical settings. Specific elements of the Festival Te Deums are discussed, compared, and traced to possible origins of influence in each composer’s heritage. This document includes an analysis of Purcell’s Te Deum in comparison to the Vaughan Williams and Britten settings as a demonstration of the affects of a common influence on their music.
The influences and ideals of each composer clearly manifest themselves in their respective *Festival Te Deums*. The analysis confirms there are obvious differences in their respective musical ideas; however, the effects of similar influences on their musical styles are not always similar. Although Vaughan Williams and Britten followed the principles of the English Musical Renaissance and emulated Purcell, each composer was so distinct in his musical interpretation that it is difficult to recognize the similar influences in the music itself. In this way, both remained committed to their heritage, but each developed a unique musical voice.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten are often identified as two of the greatest English composers of the twentieth century; however, they are also labeled as representatives of quite different schools of musical thought. Simply stated, Vaughan Williams was a pastoralist\(^1\) and Britten, a conservative modernist.\(^2\) Their individual musical philosophies, combined with their concurrent popularity, reflect a significant schism in musical thought during the English Musical Renaissance. However, there has been little effort to compare these two composers past their categorization into the two schools of thought.

As different as their styles seem to be, there are striking commonalities in some of the influences on their styles and views. For instance, both composers venerated their British predecessor, Henry Purcell, admired much of his music, and strove to imitate his strengths. The purpose of this document is to investigate how two concurrently popular composers with seemingly disparate styles can claim similar influences and ideas. I will


examine this seeming incongruity through research into Vaughan Williams’ and Britten’s environments, influences, and their individual musical inclinations combined with an analysis which compares their *Festival Te Deums*.

Existing Literature

Scholars have written much on the individual styles of Vaughan Williams and Britten; however, a majority of the stylistic observations are dispersed comments in articles about their works and their multiple respective biographies. The biographies of each composer are also the most thorough resources in addressing the various influences of movements, composers, and teachers on the styles of Vaughan Williams and Britten. Others have focused more specifically on the works of each composer, such as Kennedy’s book[^3] on the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Adams[^4] wrote an article on the use of Biblical texts by Vaughan Williams, Bray[^5] focused on liturgical canticle settings, and Edwardes[^6] studied three choral works of Vaughan Williams in relation to his war experiences.


Research on Britten’s works has been even more extensive than on Vaughan Williams’ works. Two books focused specifically on Britten’s compositions. Peter Evans’s book encompassed Britten’s complete output, with particular emphasis on the operas. Editors Mitchell and Keller compiled commentaries on specific works by Britten. Some studies are devoted to sacred choral works by Britten; Goetz concentrated on short pieces and Hurstad on choral works with organ.

As for research on settings of the Te Deum text, there have been numerous writings. There are countless studies on the Te Deum historically; these studies discuss its origins and catalogue musical settings of the text. In addition to encyclopedias and dictionaries, McGowan studied sixteenth-century polyphonic settings, and Stein

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investigated French Baroque settings of the Te Deum. In his dissertation, Jacobs\(^\text{13}\) discussed English festival Te Deums of the Baroque period. Oma Davis\(^\text{14}\) wrote a history of the Te Deum hymn in ceremonial settings since 1600 and catalogued Te Deums held in the Library of Congress. Several authors also have focused specifically on settings of the Te Deum in the twentieth century. Stanley Wicks\(^\text{15}\) studied those by British and American composers; he closely analyzed selected pieces, none of which were by Britten or Vaughan Williams. Marie Pooler\(^\text{16}\) analyzed specific Te Deums by Britten, Leo Sowerby, Halsey Stevens, and Vincent Persichetti. Arthur Crighton\(^\text{17}\) studied the use of the Te Deum in English coronations of the twentieth century, including works by Parry, Stanford, Walton, and Vaughan Williams. Jane Andrews\(^\text{18}\), in her dissertation, discussed

\(^{13}\)Frank Charles Jacobs, “English Festival Te Deums of the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries” (D.M.A. diss., University of Illinois, 1974).

\(^{14}\)Oma Grier Davis, “A Selected, Annotated Bibliography of Te Deums in the Library of Congress, and a History of this Hymn in Ceremonial Music Since 1600” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1967).


\(^{16}\)Marie Pooler, “Analysis of Choral Settings of the ‘Te Deum’ by the Contemporary Composers Benjamin Britten, Leo Sowerby, Halsey Stevens, and Vincent Persichetti” (Master's Thesis, California State University at Fullerton, 1971).


the trends in British Te Deums of the twentieth century. Her specific analyses included
the *Festival Te Deums* of both Vaughan Williams and Britten.

Although several of the resources mentioned above include discussion or analysis
of the *Festival Te Deums* of Vaughan Williams and Britten, they often contain simple
observations about commissions for which these works were written or state general
characteristics. Some of the analyses are more in depth; however, observations of the
works appear in an isolated setting. These observations contain descriptions of the
properties the *Festival Te Deums* carefully, but with little consideration or discussion of
stylistic influences, commonalities, or contrasts. This study will provide that discussion
and comparison. As far as it is possible to tell, there have been no studies devoted to a
comparison of these two composers’ styles, influences, or works.
CHAPTER 2: MUSICAL ATMOSPHERE

In order to accurately compare the origins of Vaughan Williams’ and Britten’s styles, one must understand the environments in which they were raised and worked. Both men were affected by the music around them, and both formed their opinions and preferences from those experiences. The musical atmosphere of England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had many facets; however, England inherited much of its music and musical style at this time from German innovators. Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner had great influence over musicians’ styles and preferences; the majority of English composers worked firmly in Romantic and Early Post-Romantic traditions. There are several musical movements that entered England’s turn-of-the-century culture, making it a fertile ground for continued and new creativity.

Nationalism

Nationalism became a strong force in European music as musicians in individual countries sought to nationalize their musical efforts. Beginning with the popularity of Lieder, Germany had long been focused on a proud, native tradition. Composers gladly continued to represent their national heritage through music in many ways, such as by using historical themes and folk-influenced melodies. Russia soon broke off into nationalism with an even greater fervor. These efforts began mainly in stage music, with composers such as Mikhail Glinka, Aleksandr Dargomïzhsky, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky.
Enthusiasm expanded into other genres, and composers, especially those of the ‘mighty handful,’ began to incorporate folk-music styles into their compositions. Modest Musorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Aleksandr Skryabin also emerged from this movement. Similar national efforts occurred in Czechoslovakia with Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Leoš Janáček; in Finland with Jean Sibelius; and in Norway with Edvard Grieg. English composers joined the Nationalist trend later than most. English Nationalist efforts came in two separate movements, the English Musical Renaissance and the Folk-song Movement.

English Musical Renaissance

The English Musical Renaissance was a movement in England from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century whose function was to promote and renew musical composition, by native composers, in a distinctly English style. Since the 1700's, England had experienced a lack of consistent musical environment and an absence of native composers. When music did have social priority, England thrived on imports such as George Frideric Handel and Felix Mendelssohn. By the time of the Victorian era, people often viewed music as suspect, because of its inherent emotional power. At this time, a career composition was practically unheard of. Victorians

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19 Hughes and Stradling, 4.
deemed music appropriate only as a hobby and as more suited to women.\textsuperscript{20} Day blames the “apparent dearth of genuinely original creative musical talent [on] the lack of a proper career structure for trained musicians.”\textsuperscript{21} It was out of this environment that the English Musical Renaissance emerged. Several innovators initiated its earliest moments. Through the endeavors of Henry Cole (1808-82) and George Grove (1820-1900), came the beginnings of a new conservatory-like music school in England.\textsuperscript{22} A new resource, the \textit{Dictionary of Music and Musicians}, was published through the efforts of Grove; it represented a great effort to promote the native English musical environment.\textsuperscript{23} The establishment of the Royal College of Music in 1883, staffed by the preeminent English musicians and composers of the day, gave strength to the Renaissance as the school prepared the next generation of musicians and composers according to nationalistic trends.

Possible reasons for this new interest in English music are varied. Many saw the Renaissance as a reaction to 200 years of continental music imports, and a reflection of other nationalistic music movements in the western world.\textsuperscript{24} Much of the country united


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 19-21.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 24-26.

\textsuperscript{24} Trend, 6.
in shunning continental advances in music, especially those of the Second Viennese School. Often composers found little support or success if they followed or promoted these trends, and were accused of being non-English. This not only created a demand for new English music, but also revived interest in music previously written by native English composers. Musicians referred all the way back to the last great English composer, Henry Purcell (1659-1695), and the Tudor composers before him, as inspiration. They admired these composers for their unique national styles and strove to imitate their settings of English language and poetry.

Composers also found it beneficial to consider the audience when composing. “Most concurred with Stanford’s view that without milk there could be no cream. And central to their search for a suitable artistic language was a desire to speak in a way that the general musical public could understand, the composers themselves often taking on an educational role in this respect.”25 The general feeling was that of optimism and excitement as composers, musicians, the public, and political leaders joined in this national cause.

Vaughan Williams and Britten entered the musical world as students of this movement. The earliest generation in the English Musical Renaissance included composers such as Hubert Parry, Charles Villiers Stanford, Edward Elgar, Frederick Delius, and the entrepreneur Grove. Both Parry and Stanford were associated with the Royal College of Music. Vaughan Williams entered the movement as a student of both

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composers in the 1890’s, and his contemporaries included composers Gustav Holst, Arnold Bax, John Ireland, and Frank Bridge. Vaughan Williams’ popularity as a composer, however, did not truly begin until the 1920’s. Britten, much younger than Vaughan Williams, began serious study of composition as a child in 1928, with Frank Bridge. In 1930, Britten entered the Royal College of Music and studied with another contemporary of Vaughan Williams, John Ireland. Vaughan Williams sat on several of his committees at the college. However, Britten became popular as a young composer, beginning in the 1930's. Although these two composers were from different generations of the English Musical Renaissance, they were contemporaries by way of concurrent success, from the mid 1930's until Vaughan Williams’ death in 1958.

Folk-song Movement

Nationalistic trends in England at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century also included a revival of interest in English folk song. Many might incorrectly label this the Folk-song Movement as part of the English Musical Renaissance, but the Folk-song Movement developed somewhat separately from the English Musical Renaissance until the beginning of the twentieth century. Oddly, an exiled German voiced the need for greater attention to the native music of England. Carl Engel (1818-1882) lived in South Kensington beginning in the 1840’s, and spent his time studying national musics of the world. He wrote a series of articles in the 1870’s in *Musical Times* about national music. In these articles, Engel “explained how the Germans had led the way in ‘national music’ research, with the Russians and the French not far
behind. In Britain, the Scots and Welsh had documented their own traditions. “26 However, he stated, “It seems rather singular that England should not possess any printed collection of its national songs with the airs as they are sung at the present day; while almost every other European nation possesses several comprehensive works of this kind.”27 He continued, admonishing English musicians to spend time collecting their native music. Researchers heeded his advice and published several anthologies from 1889 to 1893. This renewed interest lead to the formation of the Folk-song Society in 1898, including Stanford and Parry as members.

The most notable advocate of the movement was Cecil Sharp (1859-1924). Scholar and Cambridge graduate, Sharp had the drive to promote collection, publication, support, and use of folk music. His own efforts included collecting “4977 tunes, of which he published 1118 and provided accompaniments for 501.”28 He also attempted to persuade musical institutions and their leaders, such as Stanford, to include the study of folk repertoire in their music curriculums. “The tone of these exchanges was uncompromising, as Sharp questioned the Renaissance’s achievements and its complacency with regard to the new movement.”29 Sharp did what was necessary to promote the teaching of folk music and dance not only in higher institutions, but also to

26 Hughes and Stradling, 78.

27 Ibid., 78.


29 Hughes and Stradling, 80.
children in the schools. In this sense, he wished to make the native music of England part of the lives of the people again. Vaughan Williams joined the folk-music movement in 1903 and was a staunch supporter of Sharp’s views. He and several other composers, including Holst and Percy Grainger began to incorporate these native tunes into their own music, in quotations and in style. Thus, the movement to re-associate England with its native melodies became an important part of the country’s mainstream art music.

Second Viennese School

Important to the musical climate in the early twentieth century were the innovations of the Second Viennese School, particularly the work of Arnold Schoenberg. Around 1908, seeking to find musical voice for expressionist views, Schoenberg began experimenting with atonality. This new philosophy brought about what Schoenberg called ‘the emancipation of the dissonance,’ in which composers created music independent of the tonal system.

After several years of becoming acquainted with new sound possibilities, Schoenberg found a need for organization within this freedom. He subsequently developed serialism, around 1921. This was a way to use and organize all notes of the chromatic scale in a row as a basis for composition. Schoenberg had two prominent students, Alban Berg and Anton Webern, who joined with him in exploration of these new styles. This movement was quite localized at first, but serious international interest increased after World War II. Musicians considered these new techniques to be on the forefront of musical development from this time until the 1950’s. Both atonality and
serialism gave composers tools to be musically expressive beyond the realm of tonality, and opened a completely new sound palette for them to explore.

Summary

Nationalism, the English Musical Renaissance, the Folk-song Movement, and the Second Viennese School were the most prominent influences on the musical atmosphere of England in the early twentieth century. They were not necessarily congruous, although the English Musical Renaissance and the English Folk-Song Movement shared several common interests. However, each motivated musicians of the time to explore new musical possibilities and find an individual voice. The English Musical Renaissance encouraged a national style and native foundations, and inspired composers to break away from the dominance of other national schools of music. Proponents of the Folk-song Movement advocated for the use of England’s native music as fodder for musical education and creation. The innovations of the Second Viennese School gave composers the freedom to express themselves outside the realm of tonality. These various influences certainly affected Vaughan Williams and Britten as they sought to find their respective niches in the musical world.
CHAPTER 3: RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Life

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on October 12, 1872 in Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, England. His family, on both sides, had long traditions of hard work and strong convictions; many of his relatives were prominent scientists, artists, and scholars. His father was the town rector and a respected man, but he died when Vaughan Williams was three. Vaughan Williams’ mother, who was related to the Darwins and thus a woman of some means, raised Ralph and his siblings virtually by herself. Vaughan Williams began music lessons at age six under the tutelage of his aunt, who taught him the basics of piano and composition; he added violin to his studies in the next year. In 1883, he entered preparatory school at Rottingdean where, despite the strict atmosphere, he enjoyed studying piano with A. C. West and violin with W. M. Quirke. Here he experienced his first public performances on violin in the school recitals, and through his study and concert going, began his lifelong love of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Wagner.

He progressed to the Charterhouse school in 1887, and played violin and viola in the orchestra. He also continued composing, and attended many concerts in his leisure time. Viola came to be his favorite instrument in these years, and he became quite a
proficient player. However, a performing career was not considered appropriate for one of his family background and status.\textsuperscript{30}

Vaughan Williams began his study at the Royal College of Music in 1890. He studied harmony with F.E. Gladstone, organ with Walter Parratt, and composition with Parry. Vaughan Williams entered Trinity College, Cambridge University in 1892, but he continued studying composition with Parry. At Trinity, he studied history (as he was required to study another subject before being allowed to pursue music), then worked towards his music baccalaureate. He completed the music degree in 1894, but stayed an additional year to finish his baccalaureate in arts. Charles Wood was his composition instructor at Cambridge, and was a skilled teacher in technique and compositional craft. Vaughan Williams also greatly benefited from the informal music-making in the community of Cambridge.\textsuperscript{31} He participated through conducting a Sunday choral society, and observed by attending many concerts in the area. In 1895, he returned to the Royal College of Music where he studied composition with Stanford, and where he began his long admiration of the composer Purcell. It was during this second period at the Royal College of Music that he formed valuable friendships with colleagues including John Ireland and Gustav Holst. He also was hired to play organ at St. Barnabas Church, even though his organ teacher at Cambridge, Alan Gray, noted, “I can never trust him to play a

\textsuperscript{30} Day, 8.

\textsuperscript{31} Day, 16.
simple service for me without some dread as to what he may do.”\textsuperscript{32} The teacher’s sentiments were accurate; in summary, Vaughan Williams did not enjoy, or excel in the position.

After completing his studies at the Royal College of Music, Vaughan Williams married Adeline Fisher in 1897. The couple then traveled to Berlin where Vaughan Williams studied with Max Bruch. In a year, Ralph and Adeline returned to England, and Vaughan Williams busied himself with his doctoral exercise, a mass setting for orchestra, choir, and soloists. He finished the work in 1899 and graduated in 1901; his graduation year also marked the first publication of one of his works, the song \textit{Linden Lea}. With his schooling completed, and still searching for a unique voice, Vaughan Williams began collecting folk songs in 1903; he followed the admonition of fellow collector, Cecil Sharp, whom he first met in 1900. Vaughan Williams spent much of his free time in the next ten years collecting songs; in the end, his collection totaled 810.

1904 was an important year for Vaughan Williams because he began work on compiling and editing the \textit{English Hymnal} and saw the genesis of the Leigh Hill Festival. His work on the \textit{English Hymnal} gave Vaughan Williams the opportunity to research many melodies and increase the quality of music in the church. Vaughan Williams’ sister created the Leigh Hill Festival to give local choirs in his community an opportunity to compete with each other, and to join together to perform a larger work. Vaughan

Williams guided every festival until 1953, and was the catalyst for its growth into a major event. In the next year, Vaughan Williams also began work editing Purcell’s *Welcome Songs* for publication. He published these in two parts. This opportunity gave Vaughan Williams even more appreciation for Purcell’s skills as a composer.

Vaughan Williams moved to Paris in 1907 to study composition with Maurice Ravel. Upon returning to England in 1908, he continued work as a conductor, adjudicator, and folk-song collector until 1914, when England joined World War I. Heeding governmental calls, Vaughan Williams volunteered for the Field Ambulance Core, where he served until 1918. When he returned from military service, he was almost immediately appointed professor of composition at the Royal College of Music, and received an honorary doctorate from Oxford. The next thirty years were marked with growing success and popularity as Vaughan Williams continued composing, including works for coronations, films, and commissions. He became the conductor of the local Bach Choir; co-edited the Oxford *Book of Carols*; became president of the English Folk Dance and Song Society; lectured at higher educational institutions; and received the Order of Merit, an award given by a monarch for exceptional work in the arts. From 1920 to 1950, many considered Vaughan Williams to be the leading English composer, and an appropriate heir to the concepts of the English Musical Renaissance. In 1951, his first wife, Adeline, died, but Vaughan Williams, at the age of 81, found another companion in Ursula Wood, whom he married in 1953. After years of hard work and in the admiration of peers and the public, Vaughan Williams died in London in 1958.
Development, Style, and Preferences

Vaughan Williams’ first compositional efforts were sporadic and inconsistent in style and quality. Gwen Raverat, a cousin of Vaughan Williams, remembered from her childhood “overhearing scraps of conversation about ‘that foolish young man, Ralph Vaughan Williams’, who would go on working at music when ‘he was so hopelessly bad at it’.”33 Speaking of his very first work, *The Robin’s Nest*, biographer James Day even stated that it “can hardly be said to show any signs of precocious genius.”34 Despite this, Vaughan Williams was committed to pursuing music as a career, and entered the Royal College of Music.

Although he passed his initial theory courses, Day states that Vaughan Williams’ surviving exercises “show no shred of evidence of the great composer who was to come.”35 Vaughan Williams continued to struggle in his compositional efforts throughout his years in school. After finishing initial courses, he began studying composition with Hubert Parry.

Hubert Parry (1848-1918) (who originally worked as an underwriter but abandoned that career to be a musician) was greatly influenced by Brahms, Franz Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and especially Wagner. He was also quite a music scholar, contributing over 100 articles to Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. As well as being a


34 Day, 4.
professor at, and eventually director of, the Royal College of Music, he also held the Heather Professor of Music chair at Oxford, received honorary doctorates from Oxford and Cambridge, and was knighted for his contribution to British music. In his music, Parry combined elements of English tradition from John Stainer and S.S. Wesley, and continental composers Wagner and Brahms. His music is primarily tonal with points of more dissonant writing. He was interested in, and creative with, the structure of musical forms, and wrote both instrumental and choral music. Parry also held to the philosophical tenets of musical evolutionism, that music evolved just as living organisms. He therefore encouraged training and tradition, as well as balancing technique and emotion in music. He was a strong contributor to the English Musical Renaissance, writing the piece that many label as the commencement of the movement, *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound* (1880).36

Remembering his impression of Parry and his musical principles, Vaughan Williams said:

I was quite prepared to join with the other young students of the Royal College of Music in worshipping at that shrine, and I think I can truly say that I have never been disloyal to it. Perhaps I can no longer…swallow Parry’s music whole as I did then; but I … solemnly declare … that ‘Blest Pair of Sirens’ is my favourite piece of music written by an Englishman.”37


Vaughan Williams was always faithful to his teacher’s ideals if not always impressed with his music. Michael Trend states:

Ralph Vaughan Williams went to Parry because he was impressed with his devotion to the art of music. Parry inspired in Vaughan Williams the idea that an artist must be loyal to his art, and the younger man picked up from his teacher the search for a ‘characteristic’ music… He subscribed to his teacher’s view that style was ‘ultimately national’ and appreciated the ‘peculiarly English’ quality of Parry’s music.38

Parry emphasized proper formal construction in music; he taught composers to give their works form, even if done so in an unusual manner, instead of randomly writing. He also thought that choral music was the most democratic of the musical genres, most easily accessed by willing participants, with training or without, and encouraged his students to “write choral music as befits an Englishman and a democrat.”39 Vaughan Williams certainly took this as wise advice, writing an abundance of choral music throughout his career.

Although Vaughan Williams studied mainly with Parry, he also learned from other experiences at the Royal College of Music and at Cambridge. For a time he studied with Stanford, where he must have gained much of his resiliency to criticism. Many of his students, including Vaughan Williams, thought Stanford was harsh and narrow-minded, but according to Vaughan Williams, Stanford’s qualities of certainty and

38 Trend, 97.

directness were also what made him a good teacher.\textsuperscript{40} He helped students to distinguish between youthful, fanciful attempts and those of a higher quality. Vaughan Williams, however, was stubborn and rejected much of Stanford’s help, especially in the area of technical development. He later regretted this rejection.\textsuperscript{41} Vaughan Williams also honed his skills in harmony, organ, and conducting while in school, but most importantly, he gained a group of colleagues from whom to draw support. It was at this time that his lifelong friendship with Gustav Holst began. They often relied on each other to share in the hardships of composition, to discuss concepts and trends, and especially to act as sounding boards for each other’s compositions. They called these meetings ‘field days,’ often trading suggestions and criticisms, and working together to improve their compositions.

In order to expand his experience and style, Vaughan Williams went to Europe to study composition, first with Max Bruch and then with Maurice Ravel. Vaughan Williams noted that the most beneficial element of his time with Bruch was a reassurance in his abilities. He said, “Max Bruch encouraged me, and I had never had much encouragement before.”\textsuperscript{42} He went to study with Ravel in Paris because he felt that he had become “lumpy and stodgy” and that “a little French polish” would do him some


\textsuperscript{41} Trend, 97.

\textsuperscript{42} Kennedy, 43.
good. Ravel persuaded Vaughan Williams to become less dependent on the contrapuntal Teutonic manner, and taught that development should not occur for its own sake, but for the sake of arriving at something better. Ravel also did much to help Vaughan Williams in orchestration, guiding him to find the colors he desired.

One of the most important influences on Vaughan Williams’ music and views was his interest in folk-song, which caused many to label him a pastoralist. In 1903, Vaughan Williams was still trying to find his voice. Barclay Squire, a critic of the time, said of him, “His work, so far as one can judge, is at present rather undecided in its tendencies.” Vaughan Williams lamented his problems to Holst, and both composers sought for someone to lead them in a new ‘English’ direction. They considered Elgar, Wood, and many other English musicians they admired. Hughes and Stradling describe the outcome of Vaughan Williams’ searching; “What actually ‘happened’ to Vaughan Williams — was folksong.” The folk melodies and their origins affected Vaughan Williams so greatly that he concluded that “any school of national music must be fashioned on the basis of the raw material of its own national song.”

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43 Trend, 98.

44 Vaughan Williams, National Music and Other Essays, 191.

45 Kennedy, 54.

46 Hughes and Stradling, 80.

melodies and began to use them as themes and as inspiration for his own music. He became so passionate as to say:

The composer must love the tunes of his own country and they must become an integral part of himself. There are, of course, hangers-on of the folk-song movement who want to be ‘in the swim’ and think they can do so by occasionally superimposing a modal cadence, or what they imagine to be a country dance rhythm, on to their cosmopolitan style compounded of every composer from Wagner to Stravinsky. These people, of course, have sinned against the light.48

His intent was to become so integrated in his environment that his music would then be a pure expression of the community.

Vaughan Williams also found inspiration in other composers. In studying Bach, he learned to manipulate harmonically defined counterpoint. In Wagner, he discovered a powerful use of nationalistic elements as a basis for art. He learned the value of restraint from Brahms, and Giuseppe Verdi opened his mind to the fact that nothing in music is base if it is true to self. Vaughan Williams also gained much from the study of previous English masters, in particular, Henry Purcell.

While Vaughan Williams attended the Royal College of Music there was a revival of Purcell’s music. He and Holst participated in a production of *Dido and Aeneas*, and, as stated by his wife “from then on he and von Holst were firm devotees of Purcell’s music.”49 Vaughan Williams became more personally involved in the Purcell revival when he was asked to edit Purcell’s *Welcome Odes* for publication. In Purcell, Vaughan Williams and many other composers found a model in setting the English language.

Vaughan Williams once stated that Purcell was “not only our greatest composer but one of the greatest composers the world has ever seen,” and that England had allowed “one of the greatest geniuses of music to languish unwept, unhonoured and almost unsung.”

Vaughan Williams also developed several of his own ideas that guided his music. The ideals of the Folk-song Movement found a champion in Vaughan Williams, but he expanded his view of the value of folk music past collecting and publishing. He integrated his discovered melodies so far into his style, that the characteristics and feelings of English folk song permeated even his completely original works. He encouraged composers, saying:

> What a composer has to do is to find out the real message he has to convey to the community and say it directly and without equivocation …. If the roots of your art are firmly planted in your own soil and that soil has anything individual to give you, you may still gain the whole world and not lose your own souls.”

This was a step towards Vaughan Williams’ final goal. He stated, “Until our music becomes a really spontaneous expression, first of ourselves, next of our community, then and then only of the world, in fact until it is as unpremediated as that of the folk-singer, it will not be vital.”

Besides his strong views on folk song, he was also interested in music’s practical purposes, and in finding what was appropriate and enjoyable for the community. He often

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49 U. Vaughan Williams, 44.

50 Kennedy, 375.

51 Ibid., 38.

52 Trend, 101.
wrote several versions of a work, typically with multiple accompanimental options, to make the music more accessible for amateur performance. His style was based on the Teutonic traditions of his teachers; however, his use of folk music often drew him to modes and altered tones.

It took Vaughan Williams some time to find his individual voice. He was often accused of being an amateur, but as Alain Frogley put it, “Because he was an intuitive artist, little disposed to theorize, except about the human and social aspects of music, he was never inhibited by fears of inconsistency, stylistic or otherwise.” He held to his belief that “there is nothing in itself that is ‘common or unclean’, indeed that there are no canons of art except that contained in the well-worn tag, ‘To thine own self be true.’” In fact, he was suspicious of those who were overly concerned with technical composition. He said, “I think that composers are much too fond of going to concerts—I am speaking now, of course of the technically equipped composer. What the artist should be concerned with is the raw material.” Vaughan Williams followed these principles and they served him well. He was easily the most popular composer in England from the 1920’s to the 1940’s, replacing Elgar as the leading composer of English music.

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53 Ottoway and Frogley.


55 Ibid., 10.
CHAPTER 4: BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Life

Benjamin Edward Britten was born on November 22, 1913, St. Cecilia’s day, in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England. His mother was the secretary of the Lowestoft Choral Society; in such an environment, he was exposed to music early. He was encouraged from his very first musical attempts. He began taking piano lessons and composing at age five, and continued to consistently do both from then on. Britten entered preparatory school at South Lodge in 1922. He continued composing and added viola lessons to his musical education.

In 1923, at age ten, he first experienced the music of Frank Bridge. Britten was impressed, and later, upon hearing Bridge’s *The Sea*, said that he had been “knocked sideways” by the bright orchestral work.\(^{56}\) In 1928, he began regular study with Bridge, often spending school holidays working with and learning from him.

By 1930, Britten was an experienced composer, and at the encouragement of Bridge, applied to the Royal College of Music. He was admitted with an open scholarship. Arthur Benjamin was his piano teacher, under whose tutelage he became quite expert. Britten studied composition with John Ireland. Although his time with Ireland seemed less than productive, Britten still found success at the Royal College of

Music. His opportunities to associate with other musicians and to have his compositions performed were probably the greatest benefits of his time there. In his second year, he won the Farrar Prize for composition, and by 1932, his compositions were being broadcast and performed by professionals. One compositional award Britten received provided funds for him to study abroad. Britten requested to study with Alban Berg in Vienna; however, an unknown professor from the school intervened, convinced his mother that this was not in his best interest, and she disallowed his choice.

Somewhat bitter from the denial to study with Berg, Britten left the school in 1933, and began work as an independent composer. From 1934-1939 he worked for the General Post Office (G.P.O.) film unit. Composing incidental music for 16 films, Britten was able to collaborate with contemporary artists, including the poet W. H. Auden, with whom he would collaborate on several other compositions throughout his career. Britten’s work in film music gave him valuable exposure to a large audience of listeners and musicians. He was so successful that he was able to sign a contract with the publishing company Boosey & Hawkes in 1936.

In 1937, Britten met tenor Peter Pears (1910-1986) who became Britten’s life-long companion and collaborator. Britten’s interest in vocal music undoubtedly increased because of his relationship with Pears, whose voice came to be closely associated with Britten’s music in the public eye. Composing for the G.P.O. and

independently, Britten established himself with his professionalism and reliability, by making deadlines, and by being extremely productive.

In 1939, as World War II moved closer to England, Britten and Pears followed the example of Auden and went to North America. They moved back and forth between the United States and Canada, eventually settling in New York in Auden’s community of artists. Britten was still productive and found much success, even having his *Sinfonia da Requiem* premiered by the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. He also formed a friendship with Aaron Copland. Feeling homesick, Britten and Pears moved back to England in 1942.

In 1943, Sergey Koussevitzky commissioned Britten to write the opera *Peter Grimes*. Its subsequent completion and success in 1945 confirmed Britten’s place as a new leader in English music. For the next twenty years, Britten continued to compose actively and his popularity increased. He focused on writing operas, and toured often. He also founded the Aldeburgh Festival in 1947, which provided a gathering opportunity for artists and friends in East Anglia. In the 1950’s, Britten’s career as a performer expanded, as he became an acclaimed accompanist.

Britten composed his *War Requiem* in 1961 after an influential association with Russians Mstislav Rostropovich and Dmitry Shostakovich. In 1965, he changed publishers to Faber Music, became a member of the Faber Music board, and was very active in his position. He was awarded several honors including the Order of Merit in

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58 Kildea, 224.
1965 for his outstanding contribution to the arts in England, and was made Baron of Aldeburgh in 1976. He was the first composer to receive such an honor. Although ailing from heart disease, which doctors first diagnosed in 1972, Britten continued to compose and tour, until his death on December 7, 1976.

Development, Style, and Preferences

Britten began composing at a very young age; his efforts, however, were precocious and his output prolific from the start. Composers who influenced his early style included Wolfgang A. Mozart, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Brahms, and Ludwig van Beethoven. As he continued composing, he often modeled his music after recently studied composers. By the time he began his training with Bridge in 1928, he already had quite a portfolio, including songs, sonatas, quartets, fantasies, a mass, and a symphony.

Frank Bridge (1879-1941) was a violinist, conductor, and composer educated at the Royal College of Music, and was firmly grounded in the English Musical Renaissance tradition. He was a very talented performer and conductor, and distinguished himself with his ability to succeed in performances with very little preparation time. Bridge composed a great deal of chamber music, and possessed not only a strong technique, but also an awareness of what would satisfy both performer and audience.59

His initial style reflected the music of Brahms, Stanford, and possibly Gabriel Fauré. His music is clear and well organized, but he remained sensitive to dramatic or poetic considerations.

Bridge’s Piano Sonata marked the movement into his later style. As with many musicians, World War I greatly affected him, and he developed the need to express his feelings through more extreme musical language. He experimented with methods championed by the Second Viennese School, using atonality, bi-tonality, and serialism, and he especially admired the work of Berg. Bridge had greater freedom and used less repetition in his later style because he preferred a more fluid and spontaneous expression. His compositions, however, were always well organized, often based on short themes or small intervallic sets. He had a special affinity for arch forms, bitonality, and the use of pedal tones. Bridge’s music continued to be very well crafted, but his change in style did not coincide with British musical trends. Though a student and follower of the English Musical Renaissance, he was open to continental innovations, and always aware of the value of well-crafted, performer- and audience-considerate music. Bridge was a strict teacher to Britten, but was also his friend, encouraging him in his efforts and guiding him in his creative growth.

Bridge demanded much from his young student, training him in technique and the value of professionalism. “Bridge insisted on a thorough knowledge of the craft as well as of the art of composition; he influenced the direction of his pupil’s curiosity about

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60 Ibid.
other music, but never at any time attempted to alter the natural course of his musical inclination.” Bridge evidently treated his young student as an adult. As one researcher put it, “There was no molly-coddling.” However, he became friend as well as teacher to the young student. He encouraged Britten to find himself and always to be true to that knowledge.

Bridge opened Britten’s mind to contemporary trends in music, particularly those of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School. Bridge was opposed to many of the precepts of the Folk-song Movement and possibly influenced his student in this regard. Studying composition with a professional musician taught Britten the value of writing gracefully for different mediums. Britten was considerate of voices and instruments, and used his idiomatic compositional knowledge to influence the tone of his works. Bridge taught and mentored Britten for many years beyond his schooling and was a strong and positive influence on his music and life. He often championed and defended Britten to other musicians and was a life-long friend.

When Britten entered the Royal College of Music, he studied composition with John Ireland and piano with Arthur Benjamin. He said of these two teachers, “They were both kind to me and really nurtured me very gently through a very, very difficult musical adolescence which I was going through at that time.” However, Britten’s time at the

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61 Mitchell and Keller, 2.
62 Barnett.
63 Kildea, 148.
Royal College of Music was not always positive; he simply said, “I feel I didn’t learn very much at the Royal College.” His lessons with Ireland had little effect on Britten’s compositional style. Ireland wrote in a letter “With me he spent a good deal of time over counterpoint, fugue and allied subjects before I let him loose, so to speak, to go his own way. I do not think he was influenced in matters of style by … myself.” Elaborating on his time at the Royal College of Music, Britten stated:

I was rather a failure as a student. The trouble was, I had been studying with Bridge since I was a young boy. Bridge’s approach was that of the highly professional international musician. The attitude of most of the Royal College of Music students was amateurish and folksy. That made me feel highly intolerant.

By this point, he had formulated his ideas and technique, and was ready to begin a career in composition.

Although his experiences at the Royal College of Music were not as helpful as he would have liked, Britten found inspiration and influence from other sources. Under Bridge’s tutelage, his mind and ear continued to be opened to modern techniques coming from the continent that were so widely shunned by the majority of English composers of the time. This familiarized him with experimental music, bitonality, serialism, and other advances. His willingness to consider this music gave him more tools with which to

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64 Ibid., 223.


66 Ibid., 171.
write. He never turned himself over completely to any one movement, but used elements from each of them.

Britten admittedly admired many composers and claimed influences from several. Most importantly, besides Bridge, Britten learned to “love the clear and the resonant” from Schubert, Mozart, Claude Debussy, and Igor Stravinsky; he admired the ability to find unique orchestral colors and melodic sensitivity of Gustav Mahler; and looked to Purcell for how to properly set the English language.67 Describing his feelings, Britten stated, “Purcell is a great master at handling the English language in song, and I learned much from him. I recall a critic once asking me from whom I had learned to set English poetry to music. I told him Purcell; he was amazed. I suppose he expected me to say folk music and Vaughan Williams.”68

Britten did more than just seek to emulate Purcell’s text setting sensitivities in his own music, but wished that the art of doing so again would pervade English dramatic music. In an article about Peter Grimes, he wrote:

In the past hundred years, English writing for the voice has been dominated by strict subservience to logical speech-rhythms, despite the fact that accentuation according to sense often contradicts the accentuation demanded by emotional content. Good recitative should transform the natural intonations and rhythms of everyday speech into memorable musical phrases (as with Purcell), but in more stylized music, the composer should not deliberately avoid unnatural stresses if the prosody of the poem and the emotional situation demand them, nor be afraid of a high-handed treatment of works, which may need prolongation far beyond

67 Kildea, 244-45.

68 Ibid., 239
their common speech-length, or a speed of delivery that would be impossible in
conversation.69

Britten’s esteem for Purcell is obvious; he stated several times that Purcell was
the last significant figure in English music. Through his performance and arrangement of
much of Purcell’s vocal music, Britten found his own connection to the nationalist
movement. Britten said he also liked Purcell because “He was open to many influences,
he was a practical composer, a theatre composer, wrote for the home — all that I find
immensely sympathetic. Above all, I love his setting of words. I had never realized
before I first met Purcell’s music that words could be set with such ingenuity, with such
colour.”70 Britten’s love for, and emulation of Purcell is clearly seen in his own setting of
the English language.

Britten’s personal convictions contributed greatly to his music. In a letter to
Imogen Holst, Britten’s former assistant, he spoke of the recent changes in musical
thought. He wrote:

It is so very exciting. It is of course in all the arts, but in music, particularly, it’s
this acceptance of ‘freedom’ without any arbitrary restrictions, this simplicity, this
contact with the audiences of our own time, and of people like ourselves, this
seriousness and above all this professionalism.71

These elements list different aspects of Britten’s musical philosophy. Freedom, in
Britten’s sense was the absence of ‘-isms’. Although many continental and native

69 Ibid., 50.
70 Ibid, 163.
71 Mitchell, 1162.
movements influenced him, he never adhered to one completely because it restricted his
ability to use a variety of tools to reach his desired musical outcome. It is this approach
that pushed him away from the Folk-song Movement; he was suspicious of the
restrictions placed on music by limiting its foundations to a small and dying musical
tradition. He felt so strongly that in his article “England and the Folk-Art Problem,” after
discussing many problems he saw in folk song, he stated, “All these characteristics tend
to make folksong a most restricting influence, which, as a matter of fact, is no doubt what
many composers have wanted. Lacking the necessary discipline they forget that
discipline must come from within.”

Britten fought continually to simplify his own music, looking for magic and
efficiency. He said, “Music for me is clarification; I try to clarify, to refine …. My
technique is to tear all the waste away; to achieve perfect clarity of expression, that is my
aim.” Britten also believed that the composer should be a servant of the community,
that music should be accessible as well as being able to meet the aesthetic beliefs of the
composer, thus pleasing the amateur and the artist. He said, “I want to serve the
community …. Today it is the community, or all of us in our own small ways, that orders
the artist about. And I do not think that is such a bad thing either. It is not a bad thing for

72 Kildea 32-33.
73 Trend, 233.
74 Kildea, 227.
an artist to try to serve all sorts of different people.”75 In this vein, Britten especially enjoyed composing for children and beginning musicians.

He was against absolute music, or music for music’s sake, saying once “I think everyone really agrees … that art is a communication. Otherwise artists would not bother to make art, they would just think about it.”76 He also sought to clarify musical sentiments and make music more accessible to people by focusing on text setting. He said, “One of my chief aims is to try and restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom, and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell.”77

Professionalism was very important to Britten with regard to technical preparation and acumen. Describing his compositional habits, he said, “usually I have the music complete in my mind before putting pencil to paper. That doesn’t mean that every note has been composed, perhaps not one has, but I have worked out questions of form, texture, character, and so forth, in a very precise way so that I know exactly what effects I want and how I am going to achieve them.”78 Many viewed Britten’s music as cold or clever because he prepared it so meticulously.

76 Ibid, 236.
77 Ibid, 50
78 Ibid, 231.
Despite varying opinions about his music, Britten became the most popular English composer from the mid 1940’s to the 1970’s. In fact, his popularity was not restricted to England, which was unusual at the time. As one scholar put it, “Britten sounds a new note in twentieth-century English music. None of his contemporaries has managed with such awesome brilliance to return English music to the main stream of European culture.”79 Certainly, his success, in and out of England, indicated that the English Musical Renaissance had succeeded in creating quality British music, and put the country back into respected musical standing.

79 Mitchell, 52.
CHAPTER 5: BACKGROUND COMPARISON

Comparison

It is obvious that these two composers each achieved greatness in his own way. Each respected the other, but their basic musical values were quite different. In writing vocal music, Vaughan Williams thought melody was all-important while Britten felt the same way about the text. This difference is augmented by the fact that Vaughan Williams described his approach to choral/orchestral music as symphonic, while Britten approached all of his texted works from a dramatic viewpoint. Vaughan Williams thought that Britten’s music was cold because of the emphasis on technique; Britten thought the music of Vaughan Williams was amateurish. Author Mervyn Cooke described their views on each other thus:

Vaughan Williams is reputed to have referred to the young Britten’s music as ‘very clever but beastly,’ lamenting the fact that an English public schoolboy of his age should be writing ‘this kind of music.’ For his part, Britten felt Vaughan Williams’ music to be blighted by ‘technical incompetence,’ and declared that his own attempt ‘to develop a consciously controlled professional technique … was a struggle away from everything Vaughan Williams seemed to stand for,’\(^80\)

Despite these differences, they shared many ideals. Each composer was an heir of the English Musical Renaissance, searching for a distinct voice and fighting against the stigma that England was the ‘land without music.’ Vaughan Williams and Britten agreed

that composers should be in touch with the community, and that they should serve the community and write accessible music. They were sensitive to the fact that changes in the music might be needed for amateur performance and so, often wrote adaptable scores. Each honored his heritage by setting large amounts of English poetry. They jointly disagreed with the principle of absolute music, and most importantly, they both held to the tenet that one should stay true to self in the compositional process.

It is easy to see that these commonalities and contrasts in ideas came in large part from their influences. The Folk-song Movement greatly influenced Vaughan Williams while Britten worked to meet the technical expectations of his teacher. The music of the Romantic era was the foundation for Vaughan Williams style, while Britten admired Classical composers and modern innovators on the continent. Vaughan Williams sought to break free from non-English inspiration and techniques, Britten embraced a wide variety of techniques for their effects and strengths. They were, however, both educated at the same institution, and took common principles from the English Musical Renaissance. Their propensity for setting English texts, and views on music for the community grew out of this movement. One of the most significant common influences was their joint admiration for their musical progenitor, Purcell. His dramatic style, harmonic nuance, penchant for virtuosity and brilliance, and incredible sensitivity to textual treatment had great influence on both composers. One scholar stated, “It would be hard to overemphasize in particular the importance of Purcell in this respect . . . for it
was, above all, Purcell’s wonderful facility and success in setting English texts that composers of this period so admired and wished to emulate in their own work.”

Henry Purcell

Life

Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was born in London circa September 10, 1659 to a family of court musicians. As a youth, he was a member of the Chapel Royal as a chorister, until his voice broke in 1673. At this point, he was assigned to be the assistant and successor to John Hingeston, keeper of the king’s keyboard and wind instruments. Purcell’s succession did not occur until 1683. Purcell began the serious study of music and composition after leaving the choir. It is likely that the great composers associated with the court, John Blow and Christopher Gibbons, taught him. He was also highly influenced by Matthew Locke. As instrumental training in the Chapel was often part of a musician’s study, it is probable that he took lessons in violin, bass viol, lute, theorbo, all keyboard instruments, singing, and theory. He emerged as a talented keyboardist, and remained active as a performer throughout his life.

In 1677, Purcell replaced Locke as composer for the violin band at court. This was most likely the first position open in the court after his eighteenth birthday, since Purcell seemed to spend much more time writing sacred music than music for string.

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81 Trend, 8.
ensemble. Partbooks and libraries show that Purcell was already involved in writing music for Westminster Abbey at this time, since several of his anthems, organ music, and records of tuning services are recorded there. Purcell succeeded Blow as the organist of Westminster in 1679, and remained in that position for the remainder of his life. He married Frances Peters in 1680, and in the same year, he wrote his first major work for the court, a welcome song for Charles II. Because of Purcell’s subsequent success, he was admitted as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, becoming one of the organists in 1682, and received his sacrament certificate in the same year. From this time until 1685, Purcell’s main duties were that of a court composer.

The ascension of James II to the throne in 1685 did not officially change Purcell’s duties as a court musician. Because James II was Catholic and had little interest in music, however, the quantity of music in the court declined. Court musicians were paid less and given a higher variety of responsibilities. Records list Purcell himself as a harpsichordist; he was most likely paired with a bass viol to play continuo for the main vocal soloists of the court. His sacred output greatly decreased because of the lack of demand for new Anglican music in the court. By the time of the exile of James II in 1688, music had fallen into decline in the court, and continued to do so under the next monarchs, William and Mary. Purcell remained a court composer, writing odes and other courtly music, but had to find supplementary income elsewhere. He did this through

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greater involvement in writing for the theater, which continued from 1690 until his death. By this point, he was also in demand as a teacher. Purcell was active until his sudden illness and death in 1695.

*Style*

Purcell’s musical style is difficult to summarize succinctly. The great variety of music around him influenced his style. This included the English polyphonic tradition, dating from his youth in the Chapel Royal; the influx of French ideas through his teachers; and his committed admiration for many aspects of the Italian instrumental and vocal styles. Purcell developed his style throughout his life, adapting to the demands placed on him, and using what was most appropriate from his palette of expressive possibilities. Despite this diversity, Purcell’s music is unique and distinguished by several consistent characteristics. One author states “Purcell’s musical style is, in fact, a synthesis of English, French and Italian elements and, in the words of Lorenzo Bianconi, is ‘voraciously heterogeneous and versatile, to the point at which the strength of the composer’s own personal imprint of melodic and harmonic invention becomes the only truly recognizable factor.’” Purcell was able to integrate many ideas into his style, but remain true to his own innovations and awareness of what was practical and appropriate.

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83 Holman, 16.
84 Burden, *The Purcell Companion*, 27.
As mentioned in the above quote, Purcell’s harmonic treatment is individual. Certainly, his harmonic language fits within the patterns of mid-Baroque practice; however, he was quite able to use distinct progressions and dissonances in such a way as to create a new and poignant style of expression. He was also consistent in the assignment of certain keys for emotional effect, and organized his harmonic changes according to shifts in dramatic expression.

It was Purcell’s commitment to dramatic expression that distinguished him from his contemporaries and from other English composers. This characteristic, especially when featured in the setting of text, seemed not only to influence harmony, but all aspects of the music. Tempo, rhythm, texture, and form were all tools to express dramatic and textual sentiment. These elements changed frequently in his music, so that he often divided his pieces into several smaller, distinct, and highly organized segments. Other composers admire in particular, Purcell’s compositions for voice, and the textual declamation therein. Not only did he set text with appropriate word stress and inflection, but he also infused the melodies and rhythms with its emotional character. This aspect, above all else in Purcell’s style, is what has influenced and inspired composers and musicians, Vaughan Williams and Britten included, to study and emulate his music.

Summary

The experiences, influences, and ideas of Vaughan Williams and Britten guided them into their unique compositional styles. Purcell’s music and style influenced both composers’ text-setting styles. In the analysis below, these varying factors become
clearly manifested in the music itself. Similarities and differences in the settings reflect the common and disparate factors noted in the background comparison, and will further show the intricacies of each composer’s style.
CHAPTER 6: TE DEUM BACKGROUND

Text

The *Te Deum* or *Te Deum Laudamus* is originally a Latin hymn of rhythmical prose. It has been used in church services since the fifth century in Latin and eventually in vulgate languages, and is the most well known of the non-biblical hymns. The text, however, is of unknown origins. Although scholars have researched the subject extensively, authorship remains uncertain. Many ancient sources list the prose as being spontaneously composed by St. Ambrose and St. Augustine at the latter’s baptism. In fact, the text has been listed under the name *Hymnus Ambrosianus*. Researchers have also attributed the text to St. Hilary of Poitier, Bishop Sisebut, and St. Abundius of Como. Because the text is rhythmical prose, however, it is unlikely that any of these people or Ambrose wrote it, since it was their habit to write in the classical meters.85 Several early Irish manuscripts list Nicetas as the author. Researchers Morin and Burn have concluded that this is most likely Bishop Nicetas of Remesiana (now Yugoslavia) who lived *circa* 335-414. This is more likely, since there are passages in the hymn that reflect similar ideas and grammar to those found in the writing of Nicetas in his work *On

85 Andrews, 10.
Divine Names.\footnote{Andrews, 9.} As thorough as the research has been, none of it is conclusive. The most likely answer is that the hymn is a compilation from several sources.

There are several facts that do tie authorship to the fifth century or earlier. The opening section shows great similarities to some of the offices, including baptismal services, of the Greek Orthodox Church that originated before the fourth or fifth centuries.\footnote{Rev. John Henry Blunt, ed., \textit{The annotated book of common prayer: being an historical, ritual, and theological commentary on the devotional system of the Church of England}, 7\textsuperscript{th} ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1876), 10-11.} The very first reference to the hymn in extant sources is by St. Caesarius, who in 502 A.D. ordained its inclusion in the Sunday morning service. Thus, the hymn had appropriate time to gain popularity previous to this date. Verses 7-9 of the hymn very closely correspond to St. Cyprian’s \textit{de Mortalite} (c. 252), so the prose was probably written after this work.\footnote{John Julian, ed., \textit{A dictionary of hymnology, setting forth the origin and history of Christian hymns of all ages and nations}, 2d ed. (London: Murray, 1907. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 1119.} This information leads to the conclusion that the date of authorship is around 400-450 A.D.

The text is in three main sections. Verses 1-13 are praise to God the Father. The last three of these, verses 10-13, are a Trinitarian doxology most likely added after the original composition. This section also includes the verses similar to St. Cyprian’s writings. Verses 14-21 are in praise of Christ. They address “Christ’s incarnation, death,
resurrection, ascension, and returning as a Judge, much like the Apostles’ Creed.”

Verses 22-29 make up the final section, consisting of several psalm verses in which the poet asks for mercy and blessings. Again, this section was probably added later through versicles and responses. The chart below, made by Ron Jeffers, summarizes the form.

| I | verses 1-10: an ancient hymn to God the Father |
|   | verses 5-6: the Tersanctus (Trisagion, or Thrice Holy) |
|   | verses 7-9: from St. Cyprian’s *de Mortalite* (A.D. 252) |
|   | verses 11-13: a later appended Trinitarian doxology |

| II | verses 14-21: Christological hymn (added in the 4th century) |

| III | verses 22-29: a series of petitions taken from passages in the psalms (Psalms 27:9, 114:2, 122:3, 33:22, and 30:2 [Vulgate]) |

The modernly accepted Latin text is as follows:

**I**

Te Deum laudamus: te Dominum confitemur.  
Te aeternum patrem, omnis terra veneratur.  
Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates: tibi cherubim et seraphim, incessabili voce proclamant:  
“Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.  
Pleni sunt caeli et terra majestatis gloriae tuae.”

Te gloriosus Apostolorum chorus,  
te prophetarum laudabilis numerus,  
te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus.

---

89 Andrews, 13.

90 Ibid.

Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur Ecclesia,
Patrem immensae majestatis;
venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium;
Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum.

II
Tu rex gloriae, Christe.
Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius.
Tu, ad liberandum suscepturus hominem, non horruisti Virginis uterum.

Tu, devicto mortis aculeo, aperuisti credentibus regna caelorum.
Tu ad dexteram Dei sedes, in gloria Patris.

Judson crederis esse venturus.
Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.
Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari.

III
Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuae.
Et rege eos, et extolle illos usque in aeternum.
Per singulos dies benedicimus te;
et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum, et in saeculum saeculi.

Dignare, Domine, die isto sine peccato nos custodire.
Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.
Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos, quemadmodum speravimus in te.
In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum.

In the Catholic liturgy, the Te Deum is sung every morning during Matins. At the time of the Reformation in England, the new church leaders adapted many of the traditions of the Catholic Church for their use. The Te Deum survived this transition and is sung every day as part of the Morning Service. However, Anglicans use the English translation instead of Latin. The translation was included in the First Book of Common
Prayer of 1549, and has changed little since. The translator of the hymn is unknown.

Below is the English translation most commonly used today.

I

We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.
To Thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens and all the powers therein.
To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry,
Holy, Holy, Holy: Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy Glory.
The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee.
The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee;
The Father of an infinite Majesty;
Thine honourable, true, and only Son;
Also the Holy Ghost: the Comforter.

II

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s womb.
When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.
We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints in glory everlasting.

III

O Lord, save Thy people: and bless Thine heritage.
Govern them and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify Thee;
and we worship Thy Name, ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us: as our trust is in Thee.
O Lord, in Thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded.

Musical Settings

As with other hymns, the Te Deum was originally chanted. In the fifteenth century, although the extant works are rare, harmonic settings emerged by way of fauxbourdon through composers such as Gilles Binchois. 92 This expanded to liturgical, polyphonic settings in the sixteenth century. Composers included John Sheppard, John Taverner, Giovanni Anerio, Costanzo Festa, Orlandus Lassus, and Jakob Handl. 93 In the time of the Reformation, settings also emerged in German and English, and eventually in other languages as well. Often, however, composers based these settings on the chant melody and in a simple style.

The Baroque era brought more changes in the setting of the Te Deum text. In addition to using instrumental accompaniments and increasingly elaborate styles, composers began setting the hymn for non-liturgical occasions, such as festivals and celebrations. Composers often titled these non-liturgical settings ‘Festival Te Deum’ because of their celebratory manner and different function from the liturgical Te Deum. Carl Heinrich Graun, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Orazio Benevoli, and Purcell wrote such Te


93 Ibid.
Deums. Purcell’s was the first of its kind, in English, with instruments, and for a festival. Handel also wrote three festival Te Deums following the example of Purcell.

Many Te Deum settings for festal functions have become standards in choral-orchestral repertoire. Michael and Joseph Haydn and Giuseppe Sarti all wrote settings in the Classical era. The Te Deums of the Romantic era became quite large in scope and scoring, using choir, soloists, and large orchestras. These include settings by Hector Berlioz, Anton Bruckner, Dvorák, and Verdi. Zoltán Kodály continued in this tradition in his 1936 setting. There also are numerous English settings composed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by composers including Parry, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, Britten, William Walton, and William Mathias. Composers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wrote these Te Deum settings most commonly for specific occasions or for the concert hall. The occasions included victory celebrations, commemorations, thanksgivings, papal elections, coronations and enthronements, exhibitions, anniversaries, and festivals.
CHAPTER 7: PURCELL TE DEUM

Background

Purcell’s widow published the *Te Deum Laudamus*, paired with a *Jubilate Deo*, after his death in 1697. The cover page states that Purcell originally wrote the piece for St. Cecilia’s Day in 1694. Records indicate that it was performed at St. Bride’s Church on Fleet Street on November 23 (the day after St. Cecilia’s Day), and subsequently performed again, on December 9 of the same year in the Chapel Royal for monarchs William and Mary.\(^94\) It was an immediate success and had several subsequent performances. Performance of Purcell’s *Te Deum* became a tradition at the newly rebuilt St. Paul’s Cathedral, since musicians there performed the work at the cathedral's first services in 1697. They continued to do so annually at festivals there until 1713 when Handel’s *Utrecht Te Deum* replaced it.\(^95\) The public received Purcell’s piece with much excitement, as was recorded by one writer of the time, Thomas Tudaway. He wrote:

> There is in this Te deum, such a glorious representation, of the Heavenly Choirs, of Cherubins, and Seraphins, falling down before the Throne and singing Holy, Holy, Holy, etc., As hath not been Equalled, by any Foreigner, or Other; He makes the representation thus; He brings in the treble voices, or choristers, singing, to thee Cherubins, and Seraphins, continually do cry; and the great organ, trumpets, the choirs, and at least thirty or forty instruments besides, all join, in most excellent harmony and accord; the choirs singing only the word Holy; Then


\(^{95}\) Ibid., 237.
all pause, and the choirsters repeat again, continually do cry; then, the whole copia sonorum, of voices, and instruments, join again, and sing Holy; this is done three times upon the word Holy only, changing every time the key and accords; then they proceed altogether in chorus with heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy glory; This most beautifull and sublime representation, I dare challenge all the orators, poets, painters etc. of any age whatsoever, to form so lively an idea, of Choirs of Angels singing and paying their Adorations.96

Tudaway claimed it was the first of its kind, using instruments; modern scholars now have confirmed this. Purcell, however, was certainly following the grandiose church and state ceremonial traditions that began in Italy with the Gabriels.97 Purcell’s Te Deum was so popular that it exerted influence over several subsequent Te Deums, including those of Blow, Croft, and Handel. The performing forces include six soloists, a five-voice choir, and a baroque festival orchestra (in this case, two trumpets, four-part strings, and basso continuo). The vocal ranges are moderate, extending from A up to g². In performance, it is approximately 12 minutes in length.

Analysis

The piece begins with an instrumental prelude that leads into the first vocal entrance. Purcell then organizes the work like a large verse anthem, with alternating solo and choral sections. However, there is little repeated musical material from section to section. Instead, the alternation between ensembles is marked not only by the vocal


97 Jacobs, 47; Zimmerman, 237.
texture change, but also by variations in instrumentation, tempo, meter, key, and style.

There are often subdivisions within sections of solo singing, that are varied to suit the sentiment of the text (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1. Purcell *Te Deum*: general attributes of form and composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Vocal Texture</th>
<th>Meter*</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>ATB Trio</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>We praise Thee, O God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>All the world doth worship Thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>AAB Trio</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>To Thee all angels cry aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>SS Duet/Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>To Thee Cheubim… Holy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>A Solo</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Bm</td>
<td>The glorious company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Solo</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>F#m</td>
<td></td>
<td>The goodly fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Solo</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>The noble army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>G/D</td>
<td>The holy Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>AA Duet</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>The Father of an infinite majesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Duet</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Bm</td>
<td>Thine honourable, true and only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA Duet</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also the Holy Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Thou art the King of Glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>AB Duet</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>When Thou took’st upon Thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Duet</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Thou sittest at the right hand of God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATB Trio</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>We believe that Thou shalt come</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Duet</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Make them to be numbered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAB Trio</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>Bm/D</td>
<td>O Lord, save Thy people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Day by day we magnify Thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>A Solo</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>Vouchsafe, O Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>O Lord, in Thee have I trusted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The meters have been adjusted to reflect modern practice.

The accompaniment is generally independent from the vocal parts. Alone, the instruments play a short prelude at the beginning of the work and instrumental *ritornelli* interspersed throughout. Although there are small sections where the accompaniment takes a *colla parte* role, it frequently expands on the choral texture. Often the accompaniment actually converses with the vocal parts by responding or echoing in a similar melodic and harmonic manner. The instrumental texture changes as the work
progresses. Purcell uses several combinations ranging from simple basso continuo accompaniment, to solo instruments, to *tutti* orchestra.

As shown in Figures 7.1 and 7.2, the meter of the piece, between and within some sections, changes. In Figure 7.2, the meter begins in cut time, moves to 3/4, and soon after changes to common time. These changes contribute to proper word stress and affect, but the main effects of the alterations are shifts in tempo. The cut time portions make up the majority of the work, usually reflecting the grand, celebratory nature of the text. The triple meter makes the tempo faster, with a dance-like feeling, while the common time portions reflect a slowing of tempo.

Figure 7.2, Purcell *Te Deum*, mm. 178-193*

* The piano reduction will be used for all figures of the accompaniment in this chapter.
Only two sections are specifically marked with tempo indications; both are in common
time and marked with one word, ‘SLOW.’ The first is in measure 159 for the text ‘When
Thou took’st upon Thee to deliver man,’ and the second is in measure 261 for the text ‘Vouchsafe, O Lord,’ each a more solemn section of the text.

Rhythmically, the work is uncomplicated and straightforward. The full choral sections have little rhythmic variety; however, they are often in the character of a fanfare (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3, Purcell *Te Deum*, mm. 231-233

In the solo sections, as the text becomes more expressive, the rhythms become more complicated. In Figure 7.4, the alto soloist sings a heartfelt plea. There is great rhythmic variety within one phrase in 7.4a. In Figure 7.4b, Purcell uses a ‘Scotch snap’ rhythm on the text ‘mercy.’
There is only one dynamic instruction in the whole work, where Purcell directs the instrumentalists to ‘play soft.’ Otherwise, dynamic variety is created by different layering of forces and texture; combined with the sectionalized nature of the piece, the different ensembles give the effect of terraced dynamics.

Melodies in Purcell’s work are mainly conjunct, even Palestrinian at times (Figure 7.5).
As seen in Figure 7.5, there is an abundance of stepwise motion. In contrapuntal sections, the voices sing imitatively. This is shown in Figure 7.6, where two melodies are treated imitatively. The bass, alto, and soprano I begin with one melody, labeled ‘A’, while the tenor and soprano parts begin on a different, contrasting melody, ‘B.’ Each voice part, with doubling instruments, has both of these melodies in a short (11 measure) passage of counterpoint.
Conversely, in the more majestic sections, the melodies are in the style of a fanfare, with trumpet-like melodies. (Figure 7.3) Purcell increases melodic interest when the text is more expressive; he also uses greater chromaticism and disjunct lines when the text becomes poignant. The melodies of the voice parts portrayed in Figure 7.7 include descending leaps of a diminished fourth; this effect is even more striking when it occurs in imitation and within a work that is generally triumphant.

Figure 7.7 Purcell Te Deum, mm. 163-167
In addition to more chromatic harmonies, Purcell employs more melismatic writing in the setting of texts with poignant sentiments (Figure 7.4).

The harmonic and tonal aspects of the *Te Deum* are typical of the middle Baroque. Because of the celebratory nature of the work, diatonic harmonies dominate the music. The main key for the work is D major. This key is typical of Purcell’s celebratory works, especially those that employ trumpets. Each time the full or tutti ensemble performs, the music returns to this home key. It is during the more poignant solo sections that Purcell expands his tonal and harmonic palette. These sections use the home key of D major, but also make use of A minor, B minor, D minor, and even F# minor. These excursions to the minor mode coincide with Purcell’s use of chromaticism, such as biting dissonances and angular melodic intervals, again to express the textual emotions (Figure 7.7).

It is obvious in this analysis that the setting of the text is central to the purposes of Purcell. This is also evidenced in the actual text treatment. He is dedicated to proper word stress, rarely giving a weak syllable a strong beat or longer note duration, and often paints the words in a specific manner as well. However, the great value in Purcell’s text settings is beyond the accentual appropriateness, it is in the reflection of the textual emotions and sentiments. Methods that Purcell used in his works were text repetition (Figure 7.8);
continuously rhythmic, quick, and often syllabic settings (Figure 7.9);

and varied melismatic writing (Figure 7.4). Purcell adjusted instrumentation and choral texture, varied levels of dissonance, and changed key centers to portray the mood of the text. These and many other textually motivated devices permeate the work, giving each
new text a unique musical expression. It is clear that textual character influenced all aspects of the music.
CHAPTER 8: VAUGHAN WILLIAMS *FESTIVAL TE DEUM*

Background

The *Festival Te Deum: Founded on Traditional Themes* by Vaughan Williams was commissioned for the coronation of King George VI in 1937 and was first performed in Westminster Abbey by a group of performers formed for the occasion. Michael Kennedy observed, “Ralph Vaughn Williams had a ‘soft spot’ for this work. He wrote to Graham Steed…. “I’m so glad your boys like my Te Deum. Most people don’t.” 98 It is true that there are mixed feelings about the piece. Day goes so far to say, “The *Festival Te Deum*… sounds as if Vaughan Williams were on automatic pilot.” 99 On the other hand, Crighton commented, “In his setting of the *Te Deum* for the coronation service of George VI, Vaughan Williams carried this torch to one of the high points in the tradition of English choral music.” 100

Despite the mixed response, Vaughan Williams had hopes that the work would be used again for the 1953 coronation, but his wishes did not prevail. 101 For the 1937 coronation performance, Vaughan Williams wrote a full orchestral scoring, including

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98 Kennedy, 277n.
99 Day, 139.
100 Crighton, 65.
101 Ibid.
three flutes, three oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, organ, and strings.

Upon its publication in 1937, Oxford University Press listed the piece for orchestra or organ and mixed choir, but no organ score exists. In order to perform the piece with organ one must adapt the orchestral reduction included in the choral octavo. The vocal parts extend past typical choral ranges, down to F for the bass section and up to a² for the sopranos. The piece is approximately 7 minutes in duration.

Analysis

The form of the work is ABA¹ with a coda. The three parts of Vaughan Williams’s setting coincide directly with the three divisions of the Te Deum text. There are two sub-sections of the A section. Two prominent themes dominate each sub-section; the first is presented initially in measures 4-8, the second emerges in measures 42-44 (Figure 8.1). The B section consists of alternating portions of chant-like, sectional solos of unison singing, with fanfare-like outbursts. The return of the A material in A¹ is only partial. As the text in the third section of the Te Deum is shorter, Vaughan Williams sets it to music from the first theme only. The coda consists of an instrumental interlude followed by an a cappella, choral setting of the final line of text.

Figure 8.1, Vaughan Williams Festival Te Deum: A section, two main themes

a) mm. 4-8

We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee, to be the Lord.
b) mm. 42-44

The accompaniment of most of the piece is fanfare-like and frequently acts in conversation with the choral singing, often dropping out when the voices enter (Figure 8.2). Brass and percussion dominate these grandiose sections. The accompaniment, for the most part, is musically related to the material of the choir. In the B section, there are quiet portions where Vaughan Williams reduces the accompaniment to a background drone; later it emerges back into the texture for the more robust sections of music (Figure 8.3).
The time signature of the piece is 3/2 throughout, but varying tempos give variety to the meter. Both A sections are marked Andante Risoluto. The B section’s tempo remains the

* The piano reduction will be used for all figures of the accompaniment in this chapter.
same, except for the two chant-like sections marked *poco più lento*. The last part of the coda features a retard into a *Largamente* ending.

Vaughan Williams used straightforward, majestic rhythms with little syncopation. The A sections are filled with fanfare-like rhythms with consistent ornamentation by pairs of sixteenth notes (Figure 8.4). Often the rhythms act independently from the time signature, creating strong agogic accents on beats with less metrical weight. In Figure 8.4, the longer notes and melisma on the words ‘God,’ ‘Thee,’ and ‘Lord’ occur on beats one, two, and three, respectively. This offset of important words gives the feeling of a four-beat bar, instead of three.

Figure 8.4, Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 4-8

![Figure 8.4](image)

The B section begins with grand, declamatory music and quickly transitions down to a calmer, reverent tone. This section alternates between sections of free chant-like rhythms and louder declamatory music. In some instances, textual sensitivity seems to be the reason for these alterations. Vaughan Williams used triplets in the B section, alternating and coinciding with duple subdivisions (Figure 8.5). As mentioned above, this makes the fanfare-like portions of the B section have more momentum, as opposed to the stately, straight rhythms of the A sections. This juxtaposition of duple and triple is a Vaughan Williams characteristic.
The majority of dynamic markings in Vaughan Williams’ work are extreme; fortissimo is the most commonly used. He uses few crescendos and decrescendos, but he places them strategically leading to moments of climax or at stylistic transitions. For the choir, there are only a few articulation markings, and a general marcato indication for most of the A sections. Vaughan Williams, however, meticulously articulates the instrumental parts throughout the work.

As seen in the title, Vaughan Williams based this work on traditional themes, specifically folk-song melodies. Researchers have identified two folk melodies and they only appear in a few phrases of the work. (Figure 8.6a-d) Figure 8.6a is a Dorian melody that is quite directly quoted for the second theme in the A section. Figure 8.6c is the well-known tune “Dives and Lazarus,” which Vaughan Williams used only once in the work (Figure 8.6d).
Figure 8.6, Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*: folk song fragments and corresponding melodies

a) Folk Song “It’s of a rich young farmer”

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (0,0) {\includegraphics{fignumber_8_6_a.png}};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

b) Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 42-44

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (0,0) {\includegraphics{fignumber_8_6_b.png}};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

c) Folk Song “Dives and Lazarus”

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (0,0) {\includegraphics{fignumber_8_6_c.png}};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

d) Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 94-96

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node at (0,0) {\includegraphics{fignumber_8_6_d.png}};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

By his own admission, Vaughan Williams used other folk tunes in the *Festival Te Deum* that researchers have not identified to date; evidently, Vaughan Williams delighted in merging the melodies deep into the music. Sir William McKie remembered the following conversation with Vaughan Williams about the *Festival Te Deum*: “the high point of the afternoon came when he looked at me with a mischievous gleam in his eye and said:
'One of the folk songs I used in it was —, and no one has ever noticed!' This story is spoilt because unfortunately I simply cannot remember the name of the folk song."102 Melodies in the A section coincide with the fanfare-like quality of the music, and are punctuated with a few moments of angularity. The B section melodies are more conjunct, especially suiting the subdued, slower sub-sections (Figure 8.7). Many of the melodies, most likely those of folk-song origin, are based on modal and pentatonic scales. Vaughan Williams uses these melodies in the voices and instruments, developing them, and often adapting them in repetition to fit the text. For the most part, the melodies are set syllabically, except for short ornamental melismas.

Figure 8.7, Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 84-87

Vaughan Williams highlights the melodies in the work with large sections of unison and two-part choral singing. In the A section, the texture of the choral parts changes only through voices breaking off into harmony; however, the setting is always homophonic,
even in the melismas (Figure 8.8). In the B section, Vaughan Williams does make use of some sectional solos, but these quickly change back into the four-part texture.

Figure 8.8, Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 15-20

![Musical notation](image)

Vaughan Williams’ use of modal melodies contributes greatly to the harmonic construct of the work. Although the piece begins and ends in F-centered keys, there are constant wanderings to other tonal centers. This happens quickly, from phrase to phrase or even within a single phrase, following the melodic motion. Vaughan Williams used a
variety of modes, including mixolydian, lydian, dorian, and phrygian, alongside the major and minor tonalities. When the melodies are modal, Vaughan Williams bases the harmonies on the corresponding modes. In figure 8.9, Vaughan Williams harmonizes the Dorian melody in the choir with a Dorian cadence in the organ. Within these different tonalities, the harmonies are mainly consonant, with very little dissonance.

Figure 8.9, Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 42-44

The text of the Te Deum guided Vaughan Williams in many decisions in his setting of this piece. In particular, the text greatly affected the form of the work, and its organization into smaller sections. It also seemed to affect Vaughan Williams’ decisions about general mood of the sections, rhythms, and melodic interest. For example, melismas often highlight important words or phrases in the text, as seen in Figure 8.10, on the text ‘Holy.’
Additionally, Vaughan Williams changes voicing for appropriate text setting, using fewer voice parts for reverent texts and the complete choral ensemble for more triumphant texts. He also incorporates rhythmic and syllabic singing for powerful declamation (Figure 8.6b).

Although Vaughan Williams is generally considerate of proper word stress and appropriate textual mood, his consideration of the text in this work is often subservient to his consideration of the melodies he used. This is demonstrated by his repetition of melodic and harmonic ideas for texts of varying moods, throughout the piece. Overall, the work is stately and celebratory, well suited to a coronation ceremony.
CHAPTER 9: BRITTEN *FESTIVAL TE DEUM*

Background

Benjamin Britten wrote the *Festival Te Deum*, Op. 32 for the Centenary Festival of St. Mark’s Church in Swindon in 1945. McCray said of its first performance, “It was successfully performed there by a rather unsophisticated yet earnest church choir, which further points out Britten’s ability to write complicated, yet easily performable music.”\(^{103}\) Britten, however, remembered the performance a little differently in a letter to Reverend Walter Hussey, writing, “The Swindon Te Deum wasn’t a great success; the choir was completely incompetent, and a great disappointment!”\(^{104}\) Despite its mixed beginnings, the work has been popular ever since, becoming part of standard choral repertoire. The forces used are choir, treble solo, and organ; the ranges are a little more extreme, with E on the bottom for the basses, and b\(^2\) for the sopranos. It is around six minutes in duration.

Analysis

Britten’s form also follows the tripartite character of the text with an ABA\(^1\) form. In Figures 9.1a and 9.1b, both beginnings of the A and A\(^1\) sections respectively, Britten uses similar accompanimental figures and melodic shapes. By the middle of the A\(^1\)


\(^{104}\) Kildea, 1249.
section, however, the music changes; Britten still uses material from the A section, but develops it in a more complicated style.

Figure 9.1, Britten *Festival Te Deum*: A sections similarities

a) mm. 1-4

*The measure numbers in this chapter refer to those of the choral parts, as opposed to the organ part, of Britten’s *Festival Te Deum.*
Britten employs a completely different mood, style, and tonal focus for the B section, although he maintains unity with the A sections through shared motives and similar constructive materials. The return of the A section is a return of style; similar harmonies and accompaniment are used, and melodic shapes are similar, but they are changed to suit the new text.

The accompaniment in the A sections maintains a background drone in 3/4 meter. Its presence is distinguished only by a double grace note figure on each chord (Figure 9.1a). For the beginning portions of each A section, Britten uses long pedal tones
(Figures 9.1a and 9.1b). For the A section, this occurs in measures 1-28, constituting almost a fifth of the complete work. The return of the A section is highlighted by the organ taking over the melody while the choir takes an accompanimental role. Britten derives this organ melody from previously used material from both A sections. Figures 9.2a and 9.2b show the melody in the voices then the melody as used in the pedals of the organ, respectively.

Figure 9.2, Britten Festival Te Deum: melodic transfer

a) mm. 98-100

Contrastingly, in the B section, the organ converses with the choir in a fanfare-like manner, and often drops out when the choir sings (Figure 9.3). Choir and organ
correspond in this section with similar melodic and rhythmic aspects. The organ part intermittently plays *colla parte* with the choir; however, its unique characteristics are maintained throughout.

Figure 9.3, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 74-76

![Figure 9.3](image)

One of the most curious aspects of this piece is Britten’s use of meter. In the A sections, as the organ drones in 3/4, the voices sing in a constantly changing meter. The time signature changes almost every measure (Figure 9.4).

Figure 9.4, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 34-37

![Figure 9.4](image)
This unusual feature, juxtaposing fluidity over constancy, creates freedom in melody and text declamation over a firm groundwork. For the B section, Britten suspends this effect with a unified meter across the ensemble, even though it still changes often.

The A sections are marked *Andante con moto (quasi senza misura)* (eighth note equals 144), encouraging freedom in the choral parts. This freedom is suspended in the B section, marked *Piu mosso ed energico* (quarter note equals 108), which is quite a contrast since the tempo is almost twice as fast as the A sections. Rhythmically, Britten maintains the freedom established by the changing time signature; however, the B section’s rhythms are faster, more constant, and often include syncopations. One more unusual feature of the work is a polyrhythmic portion of the A1 section (Figure 9.5). This occurs when the organ takes over the melody; the voices sing in harmonic homophony, but each part has a slightly different rhythm. In this instance, the technique creates a unique undulation over the melody of the organ. This effect increases in intensity until the voices reach a unified and completely homophonic declamation toward the end of the work.
Figure 9.5, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 103-110
Britten is very specific and prolific in his dynamic markings, reaching both extremes through crescendos and decrescendos. Britten uses articulation markings moderately; he employs them mostly in the more rhythmically active B section. Often the articulations aid in stressing important syllables when a metrical stress might provide a tendency to do otherwise. One impressive crescendo occurs slowly over two pages of music to reach a long, climactic, *fortissimo* declamation (mm. 103-114).

Melodically, Britten based the work on the first figure in the choral parts (Figure 9.6). The intervals and pitches found in that opening melody are the foundation for the entire work.

Figure 9.6, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 3-6

He uses the melody repeatedly in several ways. It appears partially or fully, in retrograde, and intervallically inverted. Britten uses the intervals to create new melodies; for instance, in measures 98-99, he writes a fragment of the melody in inversion (Figure 9.7).

Figure 9.7, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 98-100
Sometimes, the melodies become quite disjunct and may span over an octave in a single phrase or even in one interval (Figure 9.8).

Figure 9.8, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 22-27

Britten also derived the B section’s main melody from the opening figure. He used similar pitches in a slightly different order, as seen in Figure 9.6, the original melody, compared with Figure 9.9, the B section’s theme.

Figure 9.9, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 53-56

Britten repeatedly uses this new melody in the B section, with slight variations according to harmonic changes. Britten highlights the dominance of the melodies and text in the A sections with large amounts of unison choral singing. He composed the B section less linearly than the A section, using rhythmic homophony for a more exuberant effect (Figure 9.3). The texture is much thicker here, but Britten tempers it with alternation between choral and accompanimental interjections (Figure 9.3). There is only one polyphonically imitative section in the work; it occurs in the middle of the A section and
lasts one measure in 18/8 time signature. For the return of the A section, the unison choir is replaced briefly with a treble solo as the text becomes more prayerful and personal. For the most part the text is set syllabically, with melismas on important or expressive words, as seen in Figure 9.8 on the word ‘Holy.’

Britten generally focuses the harmonic language of the Festival Te Deum on an E tonal center; E major in the A sections, often with Lydian inflections, and E minor in the B section. Although Britten uses many diatonic elements, he generally does not utilize them in a functional manner. Melodic patterns, long pedal tones, and slowly rising bass lines influence the harmony. This rising figure appears twice in the work, first in the A section by the organ in whole-step motion, and second in the bass vocal part in the A₁ section. The B section’s harmony is more functional in nature; however, Britten also makes use of a quartally structured ostinato-like figure in the bass parts over which the upper voices oscillate (Figure 9.3). Britten uses harmony to enhance the music as a reflection of textual sentiments.

Textual considerations are central to the design of this piece. Proper word stress determines the time signature and rhythms. Britten portrays textual sentiment in these elements as well, along with melody, tempo, harmony, dynamics, and texture. There is little overt text painting; however, each instance is poignant and expressive. For example, Britten wrote a slow melodic descent in the vocal parts on the word ‘Comforter,’ this portrays not only a physical descent of the ‘Comforter.’ The melody’s unusual intervallic content also gives it a mystical character (mm.47-50). However, the depiction of the textual meaning and mood is more prevalent than word painting. For example, Britten
makes use of melismatic writing, most commonly to reflect the mood of the text. In one instance, Britten achieves this not only by setting the melisma on the expression word, ‘O,’ but also by composing it for four voices, in harmony, and moving homophonically, as shown in Figure 9.3. Britten rarely repeated text in his Te Deum setting; however, the polyphonic repetition of the text ‘have mercy upon us’ (Figure 9.10) brings attention to that pleading phrase.

Figure 9.10, Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 108-111

![Musical notation](image)

Again, it is difficult to list the several text-directed decisions in this music; Britten is meticulous and considerate toward the general sentiment of the text. It is easy to see why choirs continue to perform this piece frequently. Its efficient, well-crafted music is quite beautiful and moving; it remains musically appealing to this day.
CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION

Multiple aspects of the *Festival Te Deums* of Vaughan Williams and Britten stem from the composers’ teachers, influences, and musical ideas. A discussion and comparison of these characteristics will aid in the understanding of their styles and origins.

**Vaughan Williams**

Vaughan Williams stays true to principles that Parry taught him. In the *Festival Te Deum*, evidence of Parry’s influence is seen in Vaughan Williams’ organized structure of the work. The piece also fills Parry’s admonition to “write choral music as befits and Englishman and a democrat.” The large amounts of unison and two-part choral writing, and the interchangeable accompaniment options, reflect Vaughan Williams’ belief that music should be easily accessible to amateurs, which emerged from the tenets of the English Musical Renaissance.

The Folk-song Movement’s impact on Vaughan Williams’ setting of the Te Deum is apparent with the inclusion of at least three different traditional English tunes. Evidence of his devotion to the folk melodies is shown in the dominant melodic treatment. The text, although important, is often less so than melodic interest and development in the Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*. In addition, Vaughan Williams’ use of freely changing, modal melodies and harmonies are evidence of the
integration of the sounds of English folk song into his general style and musical language.

Emulation of Purcell also can be seen in several aspects of the music. His use of slower chant-like sections alternating with more declamatory parts shows sensitivity to the text. Vaughan Williams even uses similar devices to Purcell to emphasize textual sentiment. Melismas often highlight important words or phrases in the text, such as in measures 27-28 on the word ‘Holy’ (Figure 10.1). Additionally, Vaughan Williams changes voicing for appropriate text setting, and incorporates rhythmic and syllabic singing for powerful declamation (Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.1 Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 27-28

![Figure 10.1 Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 27-28](image)

Figure 10.2 Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 42-44

![Figure 10.2 Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 42-44](image)
Britten

The influence of teachers and environment on Britten’s style also clearly appears in his music. The tight sense of organization and efficiency in use of musical materials is typical of Britten as encouraged by Bridge. In addition, similar to Bridge, Britten uses long pedal tones. He highlights the dominance of the text and melodic foundations in the A sections with large amounts of unison choral singing; as mentioned above, this also is conducive to performance by amateur choirs. Milner expanded on this aspect of the work, saying that it “illustrate[s] Britten’s fundamental approach when writing for amateur singers: without abdicating his personal idiom, he employed basically uncomplicated material in ways that led the performers out of traditional habits into new awareness of the musical possibilities of the English language, thus persuading them to accept styles and treatment that they would previously have rejected.”

Typical of Britten’s penchant for organization and dominance of the text, as taught to him by Bridge, the *Festival Te Deum* follows the form of the text. Britten sets the work in three main sections. The polyrhythmic portion of the work shows Britten’s use of continental innovations. Harmony in the work also reflects this affinity, since he was open to greater chromaticism and used traditional chords in non-functional ways. Freedom in meter and creativity in metrical combination reflect Britten’s openness to

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more modern techniques combined with a Purcellian sensitivity to text. Britten also uses devices similar to Purcell to set his texts. He utilizes melismatic writing; however, he does not necessarily emphasize words. Like Purcell, he uses it to reflect the glorifying sentiment of the text. Britten’s admiration of Purcell shows itself in all aspects of the piece, since text consideration was fundamental to the composition of the work. Form, rhythm, meter, harmony, melody, and texture all reflect textual sentiments in the spirit of Purcell.

Comparison

The previous analyses show how the influences on, and ideals of Vaughan Williams and Britten had effects on their music. The composers clearly manifest the differences in their approaches in the *Festival Te Deums*. Both honor their respective teachers in formal organization of the music, but Britten reaches an even higher level, heeding Bridge’s emphasis on meticulous technique. Vaughan Williams’ harmonic language and rhythmic simplicity owe much to his Romantic heritage through Parry. Britten also reflects his interest in modern musical techniques, as encouraged by Bridge, in his use of non-functional harmonies and shifting meters. Figures 10.3a and 10.3b show Vaughan Williams’ and Britten’s settings of the same text, respectively. In the Vaughan Williams’ setting, the simple functional harmonies are clear with very little dissonance. In the Britten example, the progression in the organ accompaniment shows the non-functional progression and more chromatic harmonies.
Figure 10.3: harmonic language comparison

a) Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 62-67

b) Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 43-49
Vaughan Williams shows his devotion to folk song melody by infusing his work with traditional tunes, and making these melodies dominant in the music through repetition and unison declamation. Britten conversely focuses on efficiency and simplicity by using a small intervalllic set as the basis for his work. Each composers’ use of modality, interestingly enough, arises from different influences. It emerges through folk-song for Vaughan Williams and through the modern technique of altered scales for Britten.

Elements of common influence on the music of Vaughan Williams and Britten are not as obvious in the music as elements of disparate influences because they are most
often manifested in different manners. Both composers wrote their *Festival Te Deum* for a celebratory event, which represents willingness to write for the community. Despite sharing common celebratory origins, the settings are strikingly different in interpretation. The A sections in Vaughan Williams’ work are declamatory and festive, while the B section is more contemplative. Britten’s setting is opposite; the A sections are more reverent and the B section is more fanfare-like. Another common factor in the *Festival Te Deums* is their accessibility to the amateur choir because of the composers’ use of unison choral singing. Figures 10.4a and 10.4b demonstrate the unison singing and the differing textual interpretation as shown in portions from the beginning of each work.

Figure 10.4: style comparison, unison singing

a) Vaughan Williams *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 4-8
b) Britten *Festival Te Deum*, mm. 1-4

Vaughan Williams showed his flexibility in composing for amateurs to a greater extent, by offering an alternate accompaniment and by writing relatively simple four-part textures.

The influence of Purcellian text depiction in both *Festival Te Deums* is apparent. The composers' perceptions of the text influenced many aspects in both works, such as form, texture, tempo, and rhythm, just as in the Purcell setting. Comparison of the
textual treatment of each piece, however, reveals that the composers’ respective emulation of Purcell manifested itself in different ways. Vaughan Williams’ respect for Purcell is most often seen in his use of compositional devices similar to those used by Purcell, using the words of the text to guide small, specific nuances. At times, Vaughan Williams allows musical aspects, such as a folk song melody, to influence the musical presentation more than he lets textual content guide the musical presentation. Conversely, Britten shows greater adherence to stylistic principles of Purcellian textual treatment, by allowing textual sentiments and moods to influence all aspects of the music. If the textual sentiment calls for a unique treatment, Britten will use all means possible to set it accordingly. His emulation extends to a deeper level of sensitivity, leading to poignant harmonies, melodic variations, and surprising rhythms. Each composer modeled his style after Purcell in his own distinct way, using aspects that best suited his preferences and situations.
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

The discussion of the stylistic origins of these master composers through their respective Festival Te Deum settings has reflected their unique backgrounds. Each setting is unique, and derives from the various influences discussed above. Clearly, their compositional styles indicate significant contrasts in musical thought. These illustrate the perpetual arguments between tradition and innovation, nationalism and internationalism, specialization and eclecticism, and feeling and technique. It is clear that Vaughan Williams and Britten were different in many of their musical beliefs. Perhaps it was their adherence to these ostensibly contrasting views that made their coinciding success possible.

The most striking and consequential discoveries in this comparison, however, are the different ways in which the composers manifest their common influences in their works. The comparison also has shown that those differences in style do not diminish the value and quality of the music. These unique variations are the reasons that many people do not realize the common heritage of Vaughan Williams and Britten. Each composer is so distinct in his musical interpretation that few would realize they had such common influences. For instance, Vaughan Williams incorporates the ideas of Purcell directly, employing many of the specific devices of his predecessor. Although Britten also uses those devices, unlike Vaughan Williams he also emulates Purcell by incorporating Purcell’s dramatic and expressive ideals in all aspects of his music. Secondly, Vaughan
Williams’ urge to make music accessible to the amateur resulted in an exclusion of modern elements, because of their foreign origin, and the incorporation of traditional, home-grown tunes. He established his popularity by using familiar elements to create new music. The same commitment to the amateur in Britten manifested itself in a contrasting way. His inclusionistic and eclectic approach allowed him to use any method to make the music work. With this approach, and with scrupulous technique, Britten was able to create music using the new and old methods, and to write music that was appealing to a variety of tastes.

Finally, each composer held strongly to his belief that a composer should find his personal voice and be true to that awareness in his music. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten discovered their unique voices, were passionate about their views, and held to their principles throughout their careers. Their principles, and the music that subsequently emerged, brought them into the lasting approval of both the general public and musicians internationally. Fulfilling the ideals of the English Musical Renaissance, both are still revered today as leaders in their field. Thus, no matter how different their styles became, many consider both as outstanding and enduring representatives of a new legacy of English music.
REFERENCES


