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Georgina Clare Luck

**CHORAL CATHEDRAL MUSIC IN  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND:**

**An examination into the diversity and potential of  
contemporary choral-writing at the end  
of the twentieth century**

Thesis for the degree of Master of Arts  
2000

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VOLUME I of II

University of Durham  
Music Department



17 JAN 2001

## Abstract

### CHORAL CATHEDRAL MUSIC IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND:

An examination into the diversity and potential of  
contemporary choral-writing at the end of the twentieth century

Georgina Clare Luck

Thesis for the degree of Master of Arts

University of Durham

2000

In 1964, Erik Routley (1917-1982) published a book entitled *Twentieth Century Church Music*, an expansive solo debate on the nature and development of contemporary writing for the Church. Routley said, ‘this is the beginning of a discussion’, yet this remark was to prove ironic: serious criticism of new church music has been minimal since that day, especially within cathedral and high-church circles.

However, this is not to say that cathedral music has become static, or that its new repertoire is unworthy of comment. Indeed, in consideration of the wealth of material produced by composers for the Cathedral in recent years, musical assessment following Routley’s ideas seems long overdue. Thus, to facilitate an accurate assessment of cathedral music in the present day, the thesis begins by recalling Routley’s ‘discussion’, and detailing the pathway of contemporary cathedral music repertoire over the last thirty-six years. The appendix, the *Sacred Choral Music Catalogue*, compiled by the author, takes 1965 as its starting point, listing the majority of modern choral cathedral music currently in British circulation to aid the reader’s knowledge of the repertoire.

Thus, guiding the reader through the diversity associated with contemporary cathedral music, assessing the style and potential of contemporary composers and evaluating the place of the Cathedral in modern-day secular society, the thesis examines the contributions of six composers: Tavener, Pärt, Harvey, Weir, Swayne and Ridout. It seeks to show that cathedral music continues to thrive, and that despite the age-old conflict between tradition and innovation, the genre remains far from the decline that many have predicted.

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The Appendix (*SCMC*) is located in Volume II.

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 St. Woolos' Cathedral, Newport  
 Wells Cathedral  
 Worcester Cathedral  
 York Minster

## Interviewees:

Richard Barnes, Cathedral Music Ltd, Chichester  
 David Flood, Organist of Canterbury Cathedral  
 John Henderson, Honorary Librarian of the Royal School of Church Music  
 James Lancelot, Organist of Durham Cathedral  
 Rev. Alan Luff, Canon of Llandaff Cathedral  
 Andrew Millington, Organist of Guildford Cathedral  
 Timothy Noon, Sub-Organist of Canterbury Cathedral  
 John Patton, Winchester (author of *Eighty-Eight Years of Cathedral*)  
 Alan Thurlow, Organist of Chichester Cathedral  
 Allan Wicks, Organist of Canterbury Cathedral, retired

## PREFACE

*Dedicated to my father*

In 1964, Erik Routley (1917-1982) published a book entitled *Twentieth Century Church Music*, an expansive solo debate on the nature and development of contemporary writing for the Church. Routley said, 'this is the beginning of a discussion', yet this remark was to prove ironic: serious criticism of new church music has been minimal since that day, especially within cathedral and high-church circles.

However, this is not to say that cathedral music has become static, or that its new repertoire is unworthy of comment. Indeed, in consideration of the wealth of material produced by composers for the Cathedral in recent years, musical assessment following Routley's ideas seems long overdue. Without criticism and discussion, awareness of contemporary sacred work is far from widespread, making it difficult for new music to attract substantial recognition.

Consequently, to facilitate an accurate assessment of cathedral music in the 1990s, it seems logical to begin by recalling Routley's 'discussion', detailing the pathway of contemporary cathedral music repertoire over the last thirty-five years. The *Sacred Choral Music Catalogue (SCMC)* of Volume II takes 1965 as its starting point, listing the majority of modern choral cathedral music currently in British circulation to aid the reader's knowledge of the repertoire. (Further details concerning the scope of the Catalogue and the methodology behind its construction can be found in the Introduction to Volume II.)

Guiding the reader through the diversity associated with contemporary cathedral music, this thesis aims to shed light on the more successful sacred choral contributions of today, supported by consultation with cathedral musicians, composers and clergy and examination of scores. However, given this study's limited length and the vast quantity of material that the term 'contemporary choral cathedral music' implies, the research professes only to be a *selective* appraisal of the compositional approaches currently gaining the Church's attention.

My thanks to Professor David Greer and Dr Jeremy Dibble for their guidance and all those who have assisted me in my work.

I declare that this work is my own, and does not contain any unacknowledged material from other sources.

Georgina C. Luck

St. John's College, Durham  
January 2000

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## CHAPTER ONE

### After Routley: Influences on Contemporary Cathedral Music since 1965

In the last fifty years, musical development within the Church of England has been a law unto itself, its diversity unmatched by that of any other age. This has, to a certain extent, been fuelled by liturgical change and an increased reliance upon music (particularly in cathedrals) to represent sacred tradition whilst reinventing itself in new and vibrant ways to appeal to outsiders. However, many would contend that the ‘alarming creativeness’<sup>1</sup> of much modern cathedral music exists irrespectively of the Church and is rather a ‘symptom of the time’, accentuated by a cultural shift from modernism to post-modernism, the expectation of the arrival of the new millennium and an increasingly computerised, technological age.<sup>2</sup>

However, following this assertion that contemporary cathedral music is representative not only of the Christian community of which it is a part but of society too, it is curious that it has not attracted more critical interest over the last fifty years. Indeed, *The Musical Times* and *The Church Times* have provided a consistent (though small) forum for debate on all forms of church music this century,<sup>3</sup> yet independent evaluators (as distinct from these publications) have been few and far between. The last major evaluator of high-church and cathedral music this century, therefore, is widely regarded as Erik Routley (1917-1982), whose research has remained vital in the assessment of modern cathedral music for over



<sup>1</sup> Routley, Erik: *Twentieth Century Church Music* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1964b), 210.

<sup>2</sup> As Erik Routley said in 1968: ‘we see the pressure of our time in the greatly accelerated speed of experiment which the musicians are permitting themselves’. From *Words, Music and the Church* (USA: Abingdon Press, 1968 / London: Herbert Jenkins, 1969), 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> Also *Choir and Organ* magazine (Orpheus Publications Ltd), founded in 1993.



thirty years (despite the majority of it being written as long ago as the fifties and sixties).<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that the main reason for the continued influence of his work is due to the lack of material by others that exists to counter it. However, the issues surrounding contemporary cathedral music have not changed immensely since Routley's day; since his research considers church music before his time as well as speculating on the music of the future, there is much that can be gained from re-examining his conclusions, even a generation on.

Thus, in order to understand the contemporary cathedral music of today, the first chapter will begin by presenting a portrait of Routley's life and work, drawing on his observations to consider issues that have dominated cathedral music over the last thirty-five years. In common with the issues of Routley's age, these include the decline of the Church of England (Section 1.2), the fashion for compositional individualism (1.4), the effect of Stanford's 'Renaissance' on newer music (1.5) and the influence of both modernist and post-modernist thought (1.6). However, the chapter will also encompass several issues specifically related to the cathedral music of the present generation, being the effect of liturgical change since 1980 (1.3), compositional diversity and the deficiency of new musical criticism (1.4), providing a background to the contemporary music to be investigated in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Nicholas Temperley's name has been entwined with the subject of parish church music for twenty years in response to his book *Music of the English Parish Church*, still the most recent major evaluation of the topic.

## 1.1 The Work of Erik Routley (1917-1982)

Born in 1917, Erik Routley lived most of his young life in southern England. His family was religious, and he became familiar with church music from a very young age, being encouraged to attend church every week. He was educated at Lancing College in Sussex, and gained a place at the age of nineteen to study theology at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he obtained both his BA (1940) and MA (1943).

For the next few years, Routley served as a minister of the Congregational Union of England and Wales,<sup>5</sup> holding posts at Wednesbury (1943-1945) and Dartford (1945-1948), but opted thereafter to return to Oxford to take up a position as Lecturer in Church History, Chaplain, Director of Music and Librarian for Mansfield College, where he remained for eleven years. During his time there, Routley also read theological studies, completed his DPhil in 1952,<sup>6</sup> and produced no less than eleven books, most notably *The Church and Music* (1950). He also contributed to the successful *Congregational Praise Hymnal* (1953) and the *University Carol Book* (1961). However, it was the thirteen books that he produced during subsequent years in Edinburgh (1959-1967) and Newcastle (1967-1974) for which he is perhaps better known, including *Church Music and Theology* (1959), *Words, Music and the Church* (1969) and *Twentieth Century Church Music* (1964), a work of particular relevance to this study which eventually became his most popular book on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>7</sup>

In 1965, Routley was honoured as the first non-Anglican Fellow of the RSCM, and was elected President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales

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<sup>5</sup> Latterly the Congregational Church in England and Wales.

<sup>6</sup> Published as *The Music of Christian Hymnody* (Independent Press, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Ray: 'Foreword', Routley, Erik: *Christian Hymns Observed: When in Our Music God is Glorified* (New Jersey: Prestige Publications, 1982), ii.

from 1970-71. When the Congregational Church became the United Reformed Church (URC) in 1972, he became Chairman of Doctrine and Worship Committee of the new denomination. Also, during the 1960s and early 1970s, Routley made several trips to lecture on the relationship between theology and music in the USA, and migrated to America in 1974, accepting his first professional musical employment as Professor of Church Music and Director of the Chapel of Westminster Choir College. Throughout the remainder of his life, he preached, lectured, participated in and led the musical worship of the College, producing a number of hymn supplements that have ensured his reputation as a composer (as well as a hymnologist and theologian) ever since.

While we must not forget that Routley's main specialism was actually hymnody, his observations on the progress of all spheres of church music mean that his work is of great value to every part of the Church. Having produced over forty publications between 1930 and 1982, and given that his role has not been superseded by any other figure since his death, it is little wonder that Routley has become by far the most well known church music critic of the age. Indeed, what the hymn-writer Fred Pratt Green wrote of his character might equally be applied to Routley's career: 'He was, of all of us, the most alive...: What he deserves of us is celebration'.<sup>8</sup>

All of Routley's books have one element in common – their debate and discussion concerning the task of ensuring a continually effective musical repertoire in both the Cathedral and the Parish. Here, Routley is clearly influenced by C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), whose ruminations are often quoted in his work.<sup>9</sup> Curiously,

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<sup>8</sup> From Fred Pratt Green's poem, *In Memory of Erik Routley* (October 1982), pasted inside a copy of Routley's *Hymns Today and Tomorrow* (London: Abingdon Press Ltd, 1964a) held at the Pratt Green Music Collection at Palace Green Library, Durham University.

<sup>9</sup> Notably in *Church Music and Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1959) and its revision, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (Illinois: Agape, 1978).

however, C.S. Lewis is famed for his dislike of every form of church music (supposedly due to his hatred of mediocre compositions and substandard renditions). This cannot be claimed of Routley, yet it indicates a similarly strong desire for musical craftsmanship and quality at every turn, a principle that lies at the heart of all Routley's thoughts on the subject.

Routley demonstrates a steadfast belief in church music's potential (despite the various problems and challenges that he discusses) and his aims for the future of church music are always positive. His work suggests a deep-rooted conviction that true harmonisation of theology and music is possible to attain, building on the foundations of a firm Christian faith. This is perhaps best expressed by the concluding passage of *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (1978):

What, then, should the church musician be doing? The only answer is to exorcise as far as possible divisive attitudes and thoughts, and to celebrate that which is really the common music of as many kinds of people as possible.... Offer them in contemporary language the eternal truths of the faith and the unchanging moralities agreed on by all the great civilizations of the world. They are waiting for a reconciliatory and accepting music which will nourish their Christian growth'.<sup>10</sup>

His hopes also reveal a tendency towards idealism, occasionally lending his work an air of 'topical journalism' (being very much a part of its time) aside from the more 'universal' theological postulations for which he is better renowned. However, this should not be misconstrued as negative. Nearly twenty years after Routley's death, scholars and musicians have much to gain from paying particular attention to such idealism: there is much to conclude about the pathway of sacred music over the last generation, looking at the differences between Routley's optimism and that of contemporary figures within the Church today.

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<sup>10</sup> Routley 1978, 136-7.

Similarly, his predictive speculation on the future of church music has become more relevant than ever, since it relates directly to the music of the current generation. There is a danger that Routley's speculation might, if taken literally thirty years on, prompt a false understanding of the way in which church music has *actually* progressed, this century. However, the writing makes a clear distinction between fact and opinion, and Routley is unafraid to acknowledge that such idealism and speculation might render the work inaccurate in the face of future musical development.<sup>11</sup> In the preface to his very last publication, *Christian Hymns Observed* (1982), he writes: 'I cannot promise that this is my last book...: how good it would be if it were! It's possible that what I learn from critics may cause me to write another that corrects this one'.<sup>12</sup>

Of the whole of Routley's output, approximately one third is dedicated to cathedral and high-church repertoire aside from parish music and hymnology. Some of this centres on the history of Christian music and the sacred European classical tradition,<sup>13</sup> while the rest is dedicated to theological debate on the relationship between music and the Church. Yet it is the work in which Routley takes contemporary music as his main focus or conclusion with which this study is most interested. This includes the final chapter of *The Church and Music* (1950), 'The Return of the Carol', *The English Carol* (1958), 'Whither from Here?', *Christian Hymns Observed* (1982), *Words, Music and the Church* (1968/9), and of course, his most famous book on the subject, *Twentieth Century Church Music* (1964).

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, re-writes of several of his early titles show that this has already been the case.

<sup>12</sup> Routley 1982, vii.

<sup>13</sup> See *Words, Music and the Church* (USA: Abingdon Press, 1968 / London: Herbert Jenkins, 1969), *The Church and Music: An Enquiry into the History, the Nature, and the Scope of Christian Judgement on Music* (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1950) and *The English Carol* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1958).

The first volume in a series entitled 'Studies in Church Music' (produced under the General Editorship of Erik Routley and published by Herbert Jenkins Ltd. in the mid-sixties), *Twentieth Century Church Music* was heralded as the beginning of a discussion which would feature contributions from other famous writers such as Peter Le Huray, Arthur Hutchings and Christopher Dearnley. The project, a sociological and theological study of contemporary sacred music in Britain, was not only ambitious, but quite possibly the most extensive examination of its kind this century. Its subject is approximated only by the 1975 publication, *Protestant Church Music: A History* edited by Friedrich Blume, which at any rate is far more concerned with the history of church music than contemporary affairs.

Contrary to the implications of its title, however, the scope of *Twentieth Century Church Music* is actually the music of the first two thirds of the century (from the death of Queen Victoria to the 1960s) and not the century as a whole. Yet Routley is adamant to point out that the book is primarily concerned with contemporary issues, and is therefore not a 'history', but more 'an unfinished story'.<sup>14</sup> He is, however, prepared to acknowledge that 'it could be the basis of future history, even if it be used by a future historian as a demonstration of the curious opinions of a contemporary'.<sup>15</sup>

The book is in four parts: choral music of the early part of the century (including Vaughan Williams and Holst), the succeeding generation of composers (Howells, Walton, Britten and Joubert), modernist experimentation (Messiaen, Tippett, Birtwistle) and the evolution of lighter, more expendable music in the Parish including the folk-mass and worship-song.<sup>16</sup> Examining a selection of

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<sup>14</sup> Routley 1964b, 210.

<sup>15</sup> Routley 1964b, 8.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting that the first three-quarters of the book are exclusively dedicated to high-church and cathedral repertoire, an early indication, perhaps, of the significance of the changes that have taken place in sacred classical music repertoire in comparison with the Parish, this century.

compositional styles in each chapter, Routley analyses with reference to scores, focusing upon musical strengths rather than negative attributes. He does not seek to highlight the faults of modern music, but prefers to concentrate on its creativity and potential; thus, his optimism concerning the future of church music is clearly displayed.

The sociological aspect of the book, meanwhile, is highlighted by a belief that the age is like no other before it. Routley concludes: 'you can compare this age with no other: for if others have been equally energetic in music, and if in others the church has had a good share of the best music, in no other has the church involved itself so completely in the musical affairs of the secular world'.<sup>17</sup> If this conclusion is correct, it is little wonder, therefore, that so many of the composers featured in the study are as well known for their secular repertoire as for their sacred. According to Routley, this involvement with secular music has brought many new influences into the Church, and is a central cause of 'the effect... of a social revolution of which only a few lonely prophets were dreaming in 1900'.<sup>18</sup> This is one issue that will be much discussed during the course of this thesis.

At heart, it would seem that Routley was not only an idealist but a reconciler and pacifier too, and, as is mentioned in the Preface, he intended his work to be the beginning of a discussion that would continue long after his time. While this has not entirely been the case so far, it is hoped that by re-examining his ideas at the end of the twentieth century, we might shed further light on issues that (in common with Routley's era) continue to govern the development of sacred classical music (cathedral music) today.

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<sup>17</sup> Routley 1964b, 210.

<sup>18</sup> Routley 1964b, 19.

## 1.2 The Place of the Cathedral and its Music in Contemporary British Culture

As Routley once wrote, 'the difference between this and any other age is that there are combined in it a musical vitality which no age has exceeded, a swiftness of communication which no age has approached, and a situation of peril and precariousness in church institutions which at least has not been matched since the days of Constantine the Great'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, we are forever hearing that England has slipped from faith to a disbelieving, 'post-Christian', agnostic age, and talk of the Church of England as the country's 'established' Church no longer seems accurate when one regards the small percentage of the population that actively supports it. 'For the first time since the days of Constantine it is possible for a man to live a complete life (humanly speaking) without any kind of reference to the Christian church',<sup>20</sup> which is neither positive for Christianity nor its music. Consequently, the Church's loss of so many followers over the last fifty years has become one of the major dilemmas of the day.

Regarding the Church's decline, however, one would imagine that England's cathedrals, churches and sacred-art traditions would be quickly abandoned and forgotten by a 'post-Christian' nation. Yet curiously, much as we may choose to ignore what Christianity stands for and what the Church has to say, there remains an undeniable fondness within society for the idea of a God and the religious way of life that society once promoted. Indeed, the lingering desire for mysticism, spirituality and stable belief in the last forty years has been a significant factor in ensuring the Church of England's continued survival, despite the enormous number of followers that it has lost. In this respect, it would seem that the Church's position in society is rather stronger than its critics assert.

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<sup>19</sup> Routley 1964b, 210.

<sup>20</sup> Routley 1950, 200.



The public's respect for cathedrals, in particular, seems just as constant as ever. Yet this is perhaps not surprising. For two thousand years, Christianity has had immeasurable influence on society and a profound effect on Western culture, religiously, sociologically and artistically too, provoking intense creativity and scholarship. In the Cathedral, this is exemplified by the tradition of high-art and music that has dominated the style of its worship for centuries:

A Cathedral brings together the best that human beings can do. The best in wood, in stone, in glass, in architecture as well. The best words for the prayers and readings, the best music, whether played or sung; the best cloth for our robes, the best movements to convey or praise. As soon as we enter this place we are being called to look at things in a new way.... All the human creativity around us in this Cathedral is like a veil through which we may be more easily aware of God who is among us.<sup>21</sup>

With a professional choir leading most services, cathedral choral music has become, for many, the archetypal intercessor, promoting and inspiring private prayer and worship through reflection and contemplation. Indeed, for many people, this is one of the Church's most valued aspects,<sup>22</sup> the cathedral choir representing 'a "tradition of faith"...unique to the Church of England, which now speaks to more and more people from other traditions that either have lost or never had this glorious habit'.<sup>23</sup> Regarding this and the fact that cathedrals also play host to much of the finest art and music that the Western world has ever produced, imagining England without these establishments is a near impossible task. As Lewis suggests, their contribution is the more significant 'because of a world-wide recognition that they represent something truly unique'.<sup>24</sup> Society's lingering enthusiasm for

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<sup>21</sup> Jones, Keith (Dean of Exeter Cathedral): Notes on an Evensong prayer leaflet (1990s).

<sup>22</sup> It seems curious, then, that the Anglican Church should have become unequalled in its nurture and promotion of such a rich musical heritage.

<sup>23</sup> Dearnley, Christopher: 'English Choral Music: A Glorious Habit', Robin Sheldon (editor), *In Spirit and in Truth: Exploring Directions in Music in Worship Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 120.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, Jeffrey: 'Change and Challenge', *Choir and Organ* (August 1993), 6.

‘spirituality’, then, can do nothing but benefit them; their artistic magnificence can perhaps provide inspiration for people of any faith.

Naturally, Christians would contend that art is not the most important issue here, for despite its struggles, the Church’s religion has not died yet, and Christianity continues to thrive among its members. Yet regarding the Church in a national light, it seems important to note that in this age of individual freedom and personal choice, cathedrals are increasingly relied upon (aside from their religious role) to preserve the links with artistic tradition and the country’s social past that might otherwise be lost. The Church and its cathedrals are intrinsic to history, culture and national identity, and for this reason, they cannot easily be neglected.

This does not of course mean, however, that the Cathedral’s role is simply to recall the past, since it is still very much a part of the worshipping community of today. Tradition alone cannot be relied upon to appeal to modern-day society, and for this reason, new music, in particular, has become important in demonstrating that the Church of England can be relevant to the contemporary world, despite being focused on events that took place two thousand years ago. For art is at its most powerful as a contemporary voice, and can reflect the very essence of the Christian religion, being ‘always constant and ever new’.<sup>25</sup> There seems little doubt that new music will continue to prove vital in keeping the Church alive.

### **1.3 Liturgical Change and the Cathedral/Parish Divide**

Liturgical change has had a great impact on the style (and standard) of religious music over the last fifty years. Negatively, in the Roman Catholic Church, the

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<sup>25</sup> Duchesneau, Claude and Veuthey, Michael: *Music and Liturgy*, translated by Paul Inwood (Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1992), 63.

sudden change away from Latin to the exclusive use of English liturgy following Vatican II has left little opportunity for the continued use of plainchant and traditional Latin settings from as long ago as the Middle Ages. Since Latin and the sacred classical music tradition have, until now, been so fundamental to the Roman Catholic service, it seems disastrous from a historical perspective that both should be abandoned with such swiftness. Consequently, the musical tradition has been dissipated to the extent that the music most commonly used in English Roman Catholic parishes today is now rarely anything but ephemeral, and it is sure to take much time for composers to adapt to the change.

Contrastingly, in the Church of England, liturgical development has taken a very different turn. Until fairly recently, Latin was not formally accepted in Anglican cathedrals or parishes at all (despite its common use in oratories and Roman Catholic cathedrals), it being considered ‘a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church... to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understandeth by the people’.<sup>26</sup> Yet over the last generation (perhaps as a reaction to Roman Catholic developments), the Church of England has become increasingly tolerant of Latin, leading to its gradual integration within cathedrals and high-church parishes.<sup>27</sup> Whilst bringing into question the Church’s established creed, this has nonetheless provided new access to the wealth of historical Latin music abandoned by the Roman Catholics. Furthermore, it has come to provide a welcome degree of constancy, as a *lingua franca*<sup>28</sup> altered little since biblical times, symbolising the steadfastness of the Church, uniting Christians throughout time.

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<sup>26</sup> From the 24th Article of Religion of 1562, The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

<sup>27</sup> The resistance to Latin has always been due to the importance placed on accessibility of the words – Latin texts could communicate very little to the uneducated. However, where foreign texts are used nowadays, it is customary for translations to be provided for the congregation, either orally or in writing.

<sup>28</sup> *In Tune With Heaven: The Report of the Archbishop’s Commission of Church Music* (London: Church House Publishing & Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 125.

The Parish, however, has been slower to warm to the adoption of Latin, yet it is important to remember that its style of worship is significantly different from that of the Cathedral.<sup>29</sup> In the Parish, services have always been a conglomeration of many people's contributions, and paid musicians other than the organist are rare; there is far more emphasis on participation of the whole assembly through hymns (or more recently worship-songs) than the congregational passivity typical of the Cathedral, and emphasis on group involvement has meant that the vernacular has always been preferable to Latin. Also, following a dramatic reduction in the number of parishes regularly using high-church choral music in the last fifty years, forms of worship in the Cathedral and the Parish have been drawn ever further apart.

In the 1960s, this divide was accentuated by a general trend seeking to update communion rites and general liturgy, making language and music more accessible and appropriate to the needs of a modern-day congregation. Thus, with parishes being moved away from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP), liturgical renewal has involved the emergence of several new versions culminating in the Alternative Service Book of 1980 (ASB). However, the liturgy is still undergoing alteration; ASB Liturgy 2000, *Common Worship*, is currently being drafted for

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<sup>29</sup> Only in the nineteenth-century did the Oxford Movement's attempts to forge closer links between cathedrals and parishes bring the two traditions closer together. The Cathedral's musical tradition was adopted by smaller churches, leading to a standardisation of the organ and sung services in parishes throughout Britain. Yet while much musical repertoire of the last century became commonly shared between the Cathedral and the Parish, the Oxford Movement's influence did not survive for long, and by the beginning of the twentieth-century, most parish churches could no longer afford to be 'miniature cathedrals': the inevitable decline of choral services in the Parish set in by the 1920s.

circulation by 2001.<sup>30</sup>

In the Cathedral, ASB liturgy is most usually adopted for Sunday services, but unlike in the Parish, BCP is still commonly used for Evensongs and early morning Eucharists, providing continued opportunity for the use of music designed around older liturgy as well as the new. This, and the now accepted inclusion of Latin has given cathedrals access to a far greater musical palette than was previously known, and also offers composers the chance to produce music which, through its language alone, is of great diversity.

However, interestingly, if we look at the music that is detailed in the *SCMC*, it would seem that contemporary composers are far more at ease writing music using older language than that of today. It is evident from the titles alone that many texts are in Latin, BCP or taken from passages in the original King James I translation of the Bible in preference to ASB and contemporary language. Some composers, such as William Mathias and Alan Ridout, apparently use next to no modern-day language at all, with all of their works being written in Latin, or beginning with the BCP-type declamation, 'O', with frequent occurrences of 'thee' and 'thou'. The fact that there are almost exactly the same amount of *Missa Brevis* settings as there are of the *Mass* is also very revealing. As much as the Church is eager for settings of its newly-created liturgy, it would seem that composers find far more inspiration in the languages of the past.

The concept of romanticism is one major difference between Latin and English,

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<sup>30</sup> New music in the Parish in response to the new liturgy has encouraged an influx of 'evangelical pop' and the repetitive music of communities such as Taizé and Iona. While accessibility is not necessarily a negative musical quality and the Parish has much to teach cathedrals about involving congregations, it is hard to conceive that such music will ever be embraced within the cathedral musical tradition. Despite serving a particular purpose in the Parish, it risks being rapidly outdated, and its simplicity, repetitiveness and common performance using guitars, woodwind and drums (as opposed to the organ) render it far closer in style to secular pop-music than sacred classical art.

BCP and ASB, the Original King James and many newer translations of the Bible.<sup>31</sup> Yet apart from the fact that the more ancient versions hark back to a time of faith and constancy which the creative artist may find appealing, many also claim that the older versions are more flowing than the new, their rhythms more easily suited to musical accompaniment than the more 'literal' modern settings. In this respect, Fellowes's prophecy that 'twentieth-century composers... might find in setting the language of our own time that it is not sufficient to be "reverent" if the result is merely dull'<sup>32</sup> may not be wholly inaccurate. Yet another reason for the lack of enthusiasm among cathedral composers to experiment with ASB is the familiarity of the old, providing more opportunity to explore with musical techniques than newer or more unfamiliar texts allow. Indeed, as Judith Weir's *Ascending Into Heaven* indicates (see Section 3.3), well-established or 'comfortable-sounding' language such as the medieval Latin she adopts can provide a valuable sense of constancy for striking or unfamiliar musical design to take place without undue disruption to the flow of a service.

However, this is not to say that modern liturgy will never prove attractive to future generations of cathedral composers. As Berio suggests, when music measures itself against words, 'it does so to affirm... the diversity of its meaning',<sup>33</sup> and modern liturgy may well prove itself a suitable base for this to occur, if only through its simplicity. The Church has expected all musicians to warm to ASB texts with immediacy, though as Alan Luff notes, it is not the first time that composers have been slow to respond to 'new' liturgy:

It took half a century after the first English Prayer Book of 1549 before much really distinguished music was written for it, and

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<sup>31</sup> An indication that cathedral composition has not left the Romantic Age entirely behind.

<sup>32</sup> Fellowes, Edmund H: *English Cathedral Music*, revised by J.A. Westrup (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1969), 261-262.

<sup>33</sup> Berio, Luciano; 'Eco in Ascolto', translated by David Osmond Smith, *Contemporary Music Review*, 5 (1989), 8.

although the two leading musicians of the period, Tallis and Byrd, wrote for English texts, clearly they were not committed to English the way they were to Latin.<sup>34</sup>

If we are to believe those philosophers who assert that romanticism is on the wane, then the literalism and utilitarianism that is so often recognised of ASB and the more modern translations of the Bible may come to mirror the style of musical composition itself. Alternatively, the literalism of texts may allow composers to reach out in more dramatically experimental ways with their music, using modern language's simplicity as an outer layer beneath which creativity is absolute (an approach which is already adopted by Jonathan Harvey in his more serialist works). At any rate, it would seem that a degree of constancy is necessary for the best art to flourish, and in this respect, time may very well be the solution to the problem.

#### **1.4 Diversity of Compositional Approach and Deficiency of Musical Criticism**

It is popularly assumed that there has been little musical progress within the Cathedral over the last thirty-five years, yet we seek to assert here, as Routley did, that 'there has been no age so full of surprises, and so full of creative promise, as our own'.<sup>35</sup> Among contemporary composers, writing for the Cathedral remains popular for several reasons.

Firstly (with the exception of the Commonwealth-Protectorate era under Cromwell), cathedral music is an unbroken tradition spanning hundreds of years, and at no point during that time has there been a total silence in contemporary output. The professional cathedral choir, having survived alongside this tradition, strives to be of the finest quality and is in a better position than most amateur choirs to learn and sing difficult music well. While cathedral buildings are often of

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<sup>34</sup> Luff, Alan: 'Ways Forward in the Cathedral', *The Musical Times* (December 1981), 845.

<sup>35</sup> Routley 1964b, 7.

huge dimensions, the cathedral choir usually performs in the confined space of the quire, using relatively small forces (eight to ten men and up to twenty boys<sup>36</sup>), accompanied only by an organ for the majority of services. In fact, far from the grandiose scale one might imagine, one could actually describe the context of the cathedral music as intimately ‘chamber-like’. However, the dimensional size and choral expertise offer ample opportunity for large-scale works to be performed too. Ultimately, the Cathedral provides significant potential for originality and innovation.

Secondly, the Church’s particular demands provide, in themselves, an attractive challenge to the composer. The incentive to write for the Cathedral is the chance for the composer to contribute to a prestigious musical heritage. Texts are set many times by composers eager to establish the most convincing ‘solution’, with the simple aim of ‘being the best’. Even in the last generation, as the *SCMC* indicates, composers have produced at least eighteen new settings of *God be in my Head*, thirteen settings of *Adam Lay-Ybounden*, thirty-one settings of *The Lord’s Prayer* and countless new interpretations of the canticles<sup>37</sup> and prayer responses. An added incentive is that while secular music can rarely be guaranteed certainty of performance or fame, the best cathedral music will live and be performed for as

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<sup>36</sup> One must acknowledge, here, the beginning of another significant turning-point for cathedral music – the arrival of female choristers. Currently, the debate is so fierce that it is impossible to judge from an uncoloured perspective whether this introduction is right or wrong. Arguments do not only concern issues of equality versus tradition, but the musical implications of girls’ voices and mixed voices in terms of timbre. This leads us to wonder whether cathedral composers might in time begin to experiment with the possibilities of this sound as distinctive from the sound of the all-male choir, providing new paths for cathedral music altogether, despite others’ claim that there is little timbre-difference at all. It may be helpful to refer to the findings of the Cathedral Organists Association meeting in Edinburgh in 1991, as reported by Timothy Byram-Wigfield (Organist of St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh) in *Choir and Organ*, 1 (November 1993), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Nine types of canticle are included under this heading: *Venite Exultemus Domino* (O Come, Let Us Sing Unto the Lord); *Te Deum Laudamus* (We Praise Thee, O God); *Benedicite, Omnia Opera* (O All Ye Works of the Lord, Bless Ye the Lord); *Benedictus* (Blessed Be the Lord God of Israel); *Jubilate Deo* (O Be Joyful in the Lord); *Cantate Domino* (O Sing Unto the Lord); *Deus Misereatur* (God be Merciful Unto Us and Bless Us); *Magnificat* (My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord) and *Nunc Dimittis* (Lord, Now Lettest Thou Thy Servant).



long as the tradition lasts, cross-pollination of material (transported from cathedral to cathedral by organists and publishers) further ensuring its survival.

Thirdly, being required for such specific demands, cathedral music either succeeds or fails in its role. Since there is little room to preserve the unsuccessful (or that which provokes merely an apathetic response), there is a continual demand for new and adventurous works in order to maintain its reputation as a craft of the finest quality. This reputation, in itself, sets a high precedent for all new works to follow.

However, despite the popularity of writing for the Cathedral, pinpointing a single, outstanding composer today to lead the tradition forwards (as was identified of Stanford and Vaughan Williams earlier this century) is not currently possible. The *SCMC* shows at a glance that contemporary composition is far from restricted to a handful – there are hundreds of writers, all with widely differing voices, contributing to the tradition today. Without the lead of a particular composer, the necessity for today's church composers to find their own, individual voices has led to a situation of 'stylistic polylingualism'<sup>38</sup> unparalleled in any other era. Consequently, new music defies straightforward categorisation, and diversity has thus become quickly regarded as a hindrance to the cathedral tradition's development.

In Section 1.1, it was stated that Routley believed *Twentieth Century Church Music* to be the beginning of a discussion concerning the church music of the age. Yet despite this, in the last thirty-five years, the academic world has remained largely silent in its analysis, evaluation and criticism of modern cathedral music, apart from occasional articles in journals such as *Choir and Organ* and *The*

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<sup>38</sup> Stacey, Peter F: 'Music and Text: History and Analysis', *Contemporary Music Review*, 5 (1989), 13-14.

*Musical Times*. Perhaps the general acceptance that cathedral music (which by its very nature has always been retrospective and conservative) could never keep pace with constantly changing developments in twentieth-century secular music has had its part in contributing to this apparent lack of interest. Yet the diversity of the music of the last generation has undoubtedly provoked a reluctance to speculate upon the state of contemporary cathedral music or to set the criteria by which it should be judged.

Some have argued that in order for cathedral music to progress any further, it is vital to discover ‘a latter-day Tye or Tallis, on whom a William Byrd or Orlando Gibbons may build’.<sup>39</sup> Thus, some scholars continue to search for a particular style that can be identified as ‘the definitive cathedral music of today’. Yet in consideration of current music’s polylingualism, this might easily be interpreted as naïve, for modern music (as a reflection of the times) will be full of diversity for as long as diversity remains the era’s greatest hallmark.

An alternative view is that with so many talented composers now focusing upon cathedral music, far from greeting the decline of the tradition that many have feared, this enormous output of religious material could herald fresh ideas, and with it, new directions for future creativity. Furthermore, the need for a varied repertoire to suit a varied congregation means that there is room for several styles to flourish at once. Thus, diversity need not necessarily be viewed as a hindrance: it does, at least, present a myriad of possibilities for the future of the tradition.

Nevertheless, the silence over new music has meant that many fine compositions written over the last generation are still awaiting evaluation, making it difficult for cathedral musicians to choose new repertoire with a substantial knowledge of the

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<sup>39</sup> Shaw, H Watkins: ‘Church Music in England from the Reformation to the Present Day’, Friedrich Blume (editor), *Protestant Church Music: A History* (London Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1975), 732.

repertoire. Consequently, this presents two dangers. Firstly, the lack of resources available that might help to determine what is good and what is not mean that publishers' advertising is becoming increasingly influential; however, the music with the most effective advertising is not *necessarily* that which is of the best quality. Secondly, without guidance, musicians and clergy might lose faith in modern music's potential and focus instead on performing older music that they can rely on to be well received, a disastrous consequence if cathedral music is to remain relevant to today.<sup>40</sup> If the tradition is to progress from hereon, musicians must be looking in the right direction; thus, it is crucial that apathy among critics should be targeted with swiftness. As Routley believed, 'nothing is more important than that the conversation should not stop. Disagreement and dissent will not stop it, [but] patronage and contempt will'.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, it is hoped that this work may offer some enlightenment into the diversity of contemporary cathedral music, enabling the music of a few of the generation's most successful writers to be identified and considered at last.

### **1.5 The Existing Tradition and the Influence of the New Renaissance**

Regarding the quality and success of music written for the Cathedral over the last hundred years, the music from the first half of the twentieth century must be considered a vital factor in influencing the nature and design (and indeed, setbacks)

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<sup>40</sup> While many cathedrals are quick to encourage new repertoire, it has become apparent during the course of this investigation that a few (notably Chelmsford Cathedral, New College, Oxford and Exeter Cathedral) seem almost exclusively concerned with older (Tudor, Victorian and Stanfordian) music, indicating, perhaps, a subdued fear of the untried. However, since much contemporary music is scored specifically for choir and organ and is of moderate in length, it cannot be too great a challenge for cathedrals to find contemporary music to complement their existing repertoire, and with the increasing influence of sacred music publishers (see Section 5.2), it is far from 'out-of-reach'. Some directors have found that premiering new works in the winter (when congregations are smaller) counters the problem of mass negative reaction, enabling choirs to reuse the more successful music with confidence at busier times.

<sup>41</sup> Routley 1964b, 213.

of more contemporary cathedral music. Thus, a brief description of the music of the existing tradition is necessary in order to view the music of the day in a historical light.

Hailed by many as a new musical 'renaissance' instigated by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) and his pupils, the religious choral music of the first half of the twentieth century was principally a reaction against the sentimentality and excessive musical romanticism of the sacred music of Victorian times. Though styles of individual composers differ, musical approaches were united by ideas flowing from the English Tudor renaissance (particularly the music of Tallis and Byrd). As Edmund Fellowes notes, the composers held 'the same ideals in their effort to provide music worthy of its supreme purpose, that of contributing something of beauty to the act of worship'.<sup>42</sup>

Of this group, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) demonstrated great admiration for the ideals of the Tudor composers, desiring beauty harmonically, melodically and formally in all his work. Following the quest for a new musical approach to religious texts, he asserted his own musical style, clearly influenced by folk-song and characterised by huge, soaring melodies.<sup>43</sup> Yet since both he and Herbert Howells (1892-1983) sought to resurrect the long-forgotten principles of the great English Tudor composers drawing greatly on what had gone before, there has subsequently been much debate as to whether the music could ever claim to be anything 'new'. Indeed, though his longer works justify his style more convincingly, Vaughan Williams's shorter anthems and church works are especially demonstrative of his antiquarian tendencies, and it is probably for this reason that

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<sup>42</sup> Fellowes 1969, 9.

<sup>43</sup> In actual fact, however, the folkish element of his work was adapted not from Tudor design, but from ancient folk-song ballads of the late Middle Ages, whilst the harmonic design was influenced by Impressionism.

as with much religious music of the age, his cathedral works (while successful) could never compete with the experimentalist originality prevalent in contemporary secular music of the time. For this reason, Vaughan Williams became (somewhat unfairly) considered within the Church not so much an imaginative new voice in his own right as ‘the greatest populariser of a new idiom that was really ancient’.<sup>44</sup>

Conservatism, one might say, is only ever to be expected in cathedral music. It is, after all, required to illustrate a Christian message of salvation that is already two thousand years old; one would imagine that it should necessarily represent the constancy and stability that the religion promotes. If the music is to become a part of the Anglican *tradition*, too, it should logically be sensitive to and reflective of the religious music that it follows, drawing upon the existing musical heritage and maintaining its retrospective air. (Very little wields so much influence over modern cathedral music as that which comes directly before it, sparking empathetic or reactionary results.) However, regarding the enormous changes in the climate of society in the last half-century, for modern music today to take such a backward-looking stance as the music of Vaughan Williams had a generation ago would make it seem more ‘out-of-date’ than ever. Indeed, it is debatable whether this approach would ever gain such recognition if it were devised today; the current fashion for eclecticism now dictates that there are many other genres to be drawn upon from the cathedral tradition alone.

Therefore, though the music of the new renaissance was very successful in its time, the popular assumption that it is the *definitive* musical contribution of this century is clearly unjust; it belongs to a different era.<sup>45</sup> While Stanford’s services

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<sup>44</sup> Routley 1964b, 26.

<sup>45</sup> There remains a great deal of sentimentality surrounding the music of the new renaissance, the music’s beauty representing steadfast determination in opposing experimentation with the *avant-garde*, and its affiliations with patriotism representing ‘the old England’ and a very definite national identity.

remain well-used in the Cathedral, most contemporary composers are just as influenced by the music of later composers such as Britten, Tippett, Jackson, Mathias and Leighton, to name but a few. Yet it has often been said that the reason why newer cathedral music has taken so much time to gain the faith of musicians and clergy is due to the new renaissance that it follows.

Over the last hundred years, the music of Stanford and his contemporaries has enjoyed much performance. Indeed, at least one of Stanford's Evening Services in either B flat or C has been recorded in the top three most frequently performed service settings in every survey this century: 1938, 1958 and 1986,<sup>46</sup> indicating little change in cathedrals' musical taste since the first survey of 1898. It also suggests that (for daily services, at least) sticking to a well-known formula is generally preferable to experimentation.<sup>47</sup>

Since Stanford's music is known to all and is regarded by many 'the hallmark of the cathedral music tradition', there seems little need to replace it while it remains so popular. Consequently, little room has been made for contemporary works within everyday services, and newer music is typically held back for occasional use. Yet while this may appear an adequate solution, allowing the two styles to exist alongside each other, it has made it difficult for new music to obtain a place within the Cathedral's core-repertoire.

In recent years, the situation is made more complex by the 'rediscovery' of Stanford and his contemporaries, now recognised as 'the latest thing' by many academics. It has consequently taken much time for individuals to recognise that one century might be able to offer anything of any other significance that can stand

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<sup>46</sup> Patton, John: *Eighty-Eight Years of Cathedral Music: 1898-1986: A Comparison With Previous Music Surveys of 1898, 1938 and 1958* (Winchester: John Patton, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> With the demanding timetable of the average cathedral choir, it is appealing to directors to 'play safe', relying on well-known, familiar repertoire to find favour time and time again.

apart from the former era. As Michael Nicholas remarks, ‘only in the 20th Century has the conservative tendency in church music been allowed to gain such a wide following, whether through desire for an easier life, through ignorance or technical inadequacy’.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, as it has already been stated, the last fifty years have witnessed many changes in society, technology, fashion and all spheres of art. Cathedral composers today are therefore subject to many influences from beyond the Cathedral’s educated, élitist circle, encouraged by the growth in mass communication and the fashion for eclecticism (particularly prominent in secular music over the last decade). Thus, while much may be learnt from the Cathedral’s existing musical tradition, changing times have called (quite literally) for changing tunes.<sup>49</sup>

For this reason, new cathedral music is far more closely related to contemporary secular art and ‘the outside world’ than ‘new renaissance’ music could ever have been. This is demonstrated not least by the polytonal explorations of Weir, the *avant-garde* compositional backgrounds of Harvey and Macmillan and the fascination with mysticism evident in the music of Tavener, Pärt and many others, drawing the boundaries of secular, sacred and spiritual closer together. As Routley acknowledged in 1964, ‘the church as an institution has lost that conceded remoteness which has made it able in other ages to turn a deaf ear to anything it considered “profane”.... It can be for no other reason that “sacred” and “secular” are nowadays so thoroughly mixed up in church art’.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Nicholas, Michael: ‘Broadside: Rethink or Rehash’, *Choir and Organ* 6 (January 1988), back page.

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, amongst modern repertoire, there is now a lack of music that follows a direct and unhindered line from Stanford; the Victorian domination over musical style in the Cathedral is giving way at last.

<sup>50</sup> Routley 1964, 210-211.

In the last ten years, the 1992 Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church Music (described as 'a reappraisal of the role of music for worship in the midst of a social, liturgical and musical revolution'<sup>51</sup> and the third of its kind this century<sup>52</sup>) was an important step for the Church of England in asserting its continued support for the furtherance of the cathedral music tradition. Positively, its identification of funding as one of the main problems facing new music ('in the Commission's view [the] level of expenditure by the Church on music is woefully inadequate'<sup>53</sup>) has now led the way towards new commissions, new recordings, and the further purchase of new works.

Thirty years ago, funding was not seen so much as a great issue; certainly, it is something rarely mentioned by Routley in his work. Of course, much of the music of the more 'expensive' art-composers of the time (being heavily *avant-garde*) was unsuitable for use in the Cathedral, and the Church was far more reliant on the manifold works of a few individuals than today. Yet as the Cathedral is now discovering, it does not do to neglect the continuation of contemporary art, for the problem never disappears entirely, and will eventually begin to escalate. With the current post-modernist tendency to draw upon many contemporary compositional approaches at once, funding has become a complex issue, yet without funding, it is nearly impossible for the tradition to progress. Thankfully, the tradition is now moving forward once more.

As a result, little by little, contemporary music is being permitted to establish a place for itself in the music tradition independently of the new renaissance. With an increasing number of cathedral recordings featuring new musical works and publishing companies dedicated almost entirely to contemporary music (most

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<sup>51</sup> *In Tune With Heaven* 1992, back cover.

<sup>52</sup> Similar musical reports by the Archbishops' Commission were carried out in 1922 and 1948.

<sup>53</sup> *In Tune With Heaven* 1992, 228.



famously Kevin Mayhew Ltd.) now gaining in following, musicians and composers united in the quest for a music to reflect today are gradually putting paid to speculation that cathedral music is past its peak. Thus, in spite of the musical, sociological and ecumenical reforms that this century has brought, there is irrefutably room for hope.

### 1.6 Modernism and Post-Modernism

The final great factor in the development of contemporary cathedral music over the last generation lies in the transition between modernism, the *avant-garde* and post-modernism. 'Modernism', as it has come to be known, emerged in music with the twelve-tone experimentations of Schoenberg in the 1920s, yet by this time, it was already a familiar concept in literary and art circles, having been in existence for over twenty years. It stands apart from other artistic genres through its insistence on the reconciliation of reason and emotion (often through alternative tonality and structural form).

Following explorations with Impressionism and modality, modernism quickly progressed towards experimentation with atonality and discarding of predictable form, leading to the emergence of the *avant-garde*. Like 'standard' modernism, *avant-gardism* sought to reconcile reason and emotion, yet often achieved this using such exclusive and impenetrable methods that its form could not be comprehended by the ordinary listener at all; Adorno described the genre as the opposition and negation of society itself.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, breaking with tradition, discarding the familiar and challenging the accepted boundaries of art and the

aesthetic, *avant-garde* music has found it difficult to make an impact on the Cathedral, for which communication is so necessary.<sup>55</sup>

Yet although it is said that ‘atonal church music... is hardly to be found at all’<sup>56</sup> and there have been relatively few commissions for *avant-garde* works in the last fifty years, this is not to say that modernism is, or should ever be, ignored. As Peter Bürger suggests, the *avant-garde* is only the extreme face of the modernist genre,<sup>57</sup> and there is no reason why the music that draws more from ‘pure’ modernist principles (seeking to reconcile rather than oppose) should not be embraced by the Cathedral. Admittedly, for more *avant-garde* writers, this is some concession to make in order to achieve musical success – for Birtwistle, Ferneyhough and Finnissy, in particular, the compromise has proved too great for them to contribute to Cathedral repertoire on more than a few occasions – yet as Routley observes:

It is natural that composers in this idiom should find it a taxing discipline to write for the church. It is surprising that any of them have the patience to do so. But they will find publication only if there seems to be some prior probability that their work is performable by any church choir. To achieve some sort of practicability within the routine of even a choir of high musical capacity, and some remote chance of appreciation by those who overhear the choir’s music, places a discipline upon such composers which it is gratifying to find that they do not all reject as irksome.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Interviews with cathedral organists reveal a widespread opinion that it is hard for *avant-garde* music to gain a popular place in standard musical repertoire due to the distraction that can be caused through dissonance, lack of easily interpretable form and sheer technical difficulty. Also, in order to facilitate worship as effectively as possible, aesthetic appeal and familiarity (both of which the *avant-garde* rejects) are important factors.

Furthermore, the *avant-garde*’s tendency to react against historical practices means that the chain of continuity forming the Anglican Cathedral’s musical tradition would be broken if the genre were ever to become predominant. This may, in part, account for the popularity of the ‘new renaissance’ in the Cathedral during the middle of the twentieth century, being a reaction against *avant-gardism* (then the most popular secular art-fashion of the time) and the reason why cathedral music has become viewed as so conservative.

<sup>56</sup> Routley 1950, 207-208.

<sup>57</sup> Bürger, Peter: *Theory of the Avant Garde* (1974), translated Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> Routley 1964b, 143.

Despite the negative reputation that it has attracted this century by many within the Church, it could be said that modernism has much in common with the ideals of the Anglican musical tradition: its clear-sighted methodology and construction have the capacity to communicate bold statements that may (when applied correctly) be particularly effective in a religious environment. Paul Robertson's article, 'Music as a Model of the Human Psyche'<sup>59</sup> draws some interesting links between mathematics, religion and music, suggesting that much may be gained from mathematics when applied to music in a religious context (mathematics being behind much *avant-garde* and modernist music). Consonant harmony, too (while commonplace in the Cathedral), is by no means an essential requirement for contemporary religious music, and the atonal creativity displayed in the modernist works of Tippett (a disciple of Schoenberg) and Maxwell Davies (after Messiaen) thirty years ago, together with the more recent contributions of Harvey and Macmillan, demonstrate that dissonance can be used in the cathedral to great effect. (This issue will be addressed in detail during Chapter Three.)

In itself, however, 'modernism' is a misleading word, for the newness and finality associated with its meaning led to the widespread belief, until recent years, that it could never be superseded. Yet its involvement with the *avant-garde* (demanding constantly different techniques to achieve the new) means that it is unlikely that the genre could last forever, its originality and startling style dampened through familiarity. Also, continuing to conform to expectations of the genre as 'confrontational' makes such composing increasingly (and uncharacteristically) restrictive. Thus, it is necessary for music to progress beyond modernism if it is to remain free.

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<sup>59</sup> Robertson, Paul: 'Music as a Model for the Human Psyche', *Contemporary Music Review*, 14 (1996) Parts 1-2, 11-37.

Routley's observations on the nature of modernism are helpful here, for at the time he was writing, modernism was still very much the art of the day. Recognising the genre as an artist's attempt at the avoidance of cliché,<sup>60</sup> he writes, 'the modern musician has found the root of cliché in the cadence, and this he has first attacked.... Secondly, rhythm has come under criticism.... But from there the musicians have proceeded to "total organisation"'.<sup>61</sup> Thus, if art is to avoid becoming defunct when all possibilities of 'cliché avoidance' have been exhausted, there is little alternative than for a reactionary genre to emerge that will re-use all that was discarded and integrate it in <sup>K</sup>new, communicative way. Indeed, following change in fashion and society since the sixties, there has been a growing desire to find a music that does not isolate but can communicate, reflecting the progress of society through combining ideas from other cultures apart from our own. Consequently, this has led to the emergence of 'post-modernism'.

In uniting all peoples, post-modernism is, as Lyotard believed, the Western world's expression and celebration of diversity in which every element of creativity is valid, no matter its origin.<sup>62</sup> In the wake of the *avant-garde*, many consider it essential that post-modernism recaptures the imagination of the people if art-music is to survive. Yet whereas the *avant-garde* tendency to oppose and negate created a divide between the artist and consumer, musician and congregation, post-modernism contrastingly succeeds by being *of* rather than *above* the people, which has significant implications for the Church. The arrival of a post-modernist genre heralding art-music both sympathetic to the idea of communication and keen in its promotion of wholeness and beauty correlates well with many of the Cathedral's

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<sup>60</sup> In response to Roger Sessions essay, 'The Problems and Issues Facing the Composer Today' in the American symposium edited by P.H. Lang, *Problems of Modern Music* (New York: W.W. Norton Co, Norton Library Paperback 115)

<sup>61</sup> Routley 1964b, 116.

<sup>62</sup> This would suggest that the diversity inherent in contemporary cathedral repertoire is actually in line with the fashion of the era.

long-held values and may be assumed with ease into the cathedral tradition. Thus, there is much that post-modernism and contemporary sacred art-music stand to gain from one other.<sup>63</sup>

Post-modernism's insistence on variety and diversity holds the potential for much creativity using influences from other eras, cultures and traditions.<sup>64</sup> Following this trend, cathedral composers are drawing upon music from the secular world, other Churches and traditions more than ever before, which is bound to have a favourable effect on the Cathedral's capacity to appeal to outsiders. As Naisbitt has predicted, 'the most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur, not because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human'.<sup>65</sup> With world-wide communication opening the door to influences from around the world, there is more opportunity than ever for the tradition to progress with originality and confidence, causing dramatic and welcome changes in the music's relationship with the Church and the worshipping community.

## 1.7 Outline of Succeeding Chapters

Given that the topic 'contemporary choral cathedral music' covers such a wide range of music, the next three chapters of the thesis will be dedicated to addressing

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<sup>63</sup> As it will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two, the Cathedral already benefits greatly from the post-modernist tendency for music and art to be made appropriate for consumption on the world market. Meanwhile, society's current tendency towards a rediscovery of spirituality also means that (regarding the cathedral tradition as a successful genre in its own right) the post-modernism culture has been quick to adapting the Church's musical tradition to create its own spiritual-sounding music for secular consumption, benefiting its own means.

<sup>64</sup> Incidentally, one could well regard the music of the new 'renaissance' as being a direct precursor to post-modernism. Through encouraging beauty as the artist's creation, seeking to communicate and shunning modernist methods, the blend of renaissance music, Tudor music and folk-song are an effective synthesis of many different musical influences. This correlates well with post-modernism's emphasis on eclecticism.

<sup>65</sup> Naisbitt, John: *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), quoted in Virgil Funk (editor), 'The Future of Church Music', Funk, Virgil (ed), *Sung Liturgy Towards 2000 AD* (Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1991), 97.

the styles of particular composers, focusing on a variety of approaches that reflect the diversity of the time. Thus, composers will be examined in three groups, forming the basis for the three central chapters:

Composers of Mystical, Spiritual and Minimalist tendencies:

Chapter Two will focus upon the sacred music of two composers, John Tavener and Arvo Pärt, examining the style in light of its success within and without the Church of England, aided by media promotion. It also investigates the genre's links with Orthodoxy and early music, and the outer simplicity that characterises their work.

British 'Radical' Composers:

Chapter Three will embrace contemporary 'secular-field' composers approaching cathedral music as an art-form<sup>66</sup> and applying new and complex styles to the idiom, examining the contributions of Jonathan Harvey, Giles Swayne and Judith Weir. Encompassing a wide range of styles and influences, the chapter aims to show that such radical innovation is necessary to ensure that cathedral music continues to challenge the boundaries of the accepted, encouraging new sacred repertoire to fulfil its creative and developmental potential.

'Sacred Specialist' Composers:

Chapter Four will look at the music of the largest group of composers, generally better recognised for their contributions to sacred music than secular, encompassing the older generation of cathedral writers and many organists and in-house composers. Examining a cross-section of the genre, the chapter will focus on

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<sup>66</sup> As opposed to a purely functional genre.

the music of John Rutter and Alan Ridout. It recognises that this group of writers is dedicated to building upon foundations laid down by previous generations and more radical contemporary writers, fashioning ideas to be practical for everyday use.

Thus, through detailed assessment of the style and potential of contemporary composers and evaluation of the place of the Cathedral in modern-day secular society, the thesis attempts to reconcile cathedral music to itself once more, much in the same way as Routley sought to do thirty-five years ago. Consequently, it seeks to show that cathedral music continues to thrive as a well-respected art-form, and that despite the age-old conflict between tradition and innovation, the genre remains far from the decline that many have predicted.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Mystical, Spiritual and Minimalist Tendencies: The Music of Tavener and Pärt

This chapter focuses on the music of two of the most prominent composers of so-called 'spiritual minimalist' music, John Tavener and Arvo Pärt. It discusses the considerable attention of the media, assessing the factors leading to the emergence of the genre and examining the two composers' music with reference to relevant scores.

#### 2.1 Media Attention

Twentieth-century Britain has witnessed an era of unparalleled technological advancement, the influence of which has never been more prevalent in Western society than today, with the last half-century having witnessed the evolution of mass-communication, mass-production, mass-consumption and the world-market. This efficiency, however, has not been all to our benefit; it has also led to increased levels of speed, quicker cars, faster computers, busier work-schedules and meals-on-the-go, all contributing to a frantic pace of life that many observe to be increasingly difficult to keep up with.

Regarding this change in society, Alvin Toffler identifies the widespread condition of 'Future Shock', 'the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, pressure on the individual in Western society is leading to levels of stress and breakdown reportedly higher than ever before, leaving little opportunity for optimism. Society has also been coloured, in the last half-century, by a growing

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<sup>1</sup> Toffler, Alvin: *Future Shock* (London: Bodley Head, 1970).



tendency towards secularism and a postmodernist approach to life ('whatever works for you'), and negatively for the Church, the wave of liberalist tolerance for other religions and atheistic creeds is clearly at odds with Christianity.

Standing within our Western society, there seems little chance for escape, which perhaps provides some justification for the desire manifest within society to alleviate our stressful condition. It is certainly no coincidence that the promotion of religious music within secular society has increased in recent years alongside the marketing of free-religion, personal meditation and art. In media terminology, all of these provide necessary opportunities for the individual to rise above his or her daily life to reach into 'the extra dimension'.<sup>2</sup> Cathedral music has benefited a great deal from its promotion in the secular market, and while there is a danger that out of its natural context such music can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood by an unknowing audience, its appeal reveals an unmistakable fascination for spiritual music (if not directly Christianity itself) that is of great promise to the Church.

Over the last twenty years, spiritual minimalism, of all styles of cathedral music, has clearly attracted the media's and the music industry's greatest interest. This is not surprising, for there could perhaps be no better remedy for a society plagued with stress than that which is characterised by simplicity, stillness and peace. Spiritual minimalism's 'exotic' musical sounds, together with its foreign (sometimes religiously ambiguous) texts and Greek Orthodox / medieval influence, render it so different from stereotypical English church music that it seems refreshingly 'new'; it is easy to see how it has managed to capture such attention.

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<sup>2</sup> The acknowledgement of this 'extra dimension' in such an agnostic age is interesting. Our society has evidently not completely managed to discard the idea of the 'unseen' as an entity in its own right.

Yet unlike any other musical genre, the cause of spiritual minimalism's initial success belongs not to the Church, but rather to its extensive promotion by the music industry as 'spiritual' classical music. At this point, a little needs to be said about the nature of the media's promotion of cathedral music. Traditionally, the media and the music industry have not hesitated in promoting religious music to the secular market, though this decade has been unique in witnessing the shift of cathedral music from a specialist to a more mainstream classical market. Consequently, to encourage larger sales, the music industry has tended to focus on the music's aesthetic appeal and 'classical' crafting rather than on its religious content. Paradoxically, however, much as many spiritual minimalist works have been classed by some of their composers as 'concert music' and *not* as being specifically religious,<sup>3</sup> the industry's marketing of the style has been peculiarly anomalous to its usual methods, actually emphasising its ties with religion.

The genre is so commonly discussed in conjunction with spirituality and proclaimed in almost every CD booklet and magazine article on the topic that it is as if its success in the classical market rests almost entirely on the power of this advertising. Indeed, John Tavener's Christian Orthodox belief, at the heart of his compositional image over the last twenty years, has certainly not proved anything of a hindrance to his fame or credibility as a composer in the classical field. In 1998, his popularity, reflected in record sales following the funeral of Diana, Princess of the Wales even justified him worthy of the title of 'Britain's most popular contemporary composer'.<sup>4</sup>

Yet regarding spiritual minimalism's route to fame via mainly secular circles in Britain, the fact that not all the music is overtly 'religious' naturally leads to speculation that the Church of England's decision to adopt this genre as its own

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<sup>3</sup> Notably Arvo Pärt and Henryk Górecki.

<sup>4</sup> Haydon, Geoffrey: *John Tavener: Glimpses of Paradise* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), back cover of Indigo reprint, 1998.

could be a tactical move to stir outside interest in cathedral music.<sup>5</sup> Not only might the genre's commercial success help to draw people to the Church, but the swift adoption of the music within English cathedrals is beneficial in allowing the Church to be perceived as the assumed proponent and chief promoter of this successful style. Having said this, the Cathedral's preference for John Tavener and Arvo Pärt over most of their contemporaries would suggest that there is, in fact, an underlying desire for the music to be perceived as 'Christian' – Tavener and Pärt remain among the only openly Christian composers of the genre. It is interesting, however, to consider that Tavener's music is frequently constructed around the prayers of saints, poetry and the liturgy of the Orthodox Church, but as the *CSCM* reveals, rarely *biblical* texts.<sup>6</sup>

Tavener's music may be perceived as Christian, yet despite Pärt's opinion that his own pieces are more 'concert music' than Christian, Pärt's music is characterised by biblical passages a great deal more. Consequently, it is fair to say that Pärt's sacred music holds more relevance for the Church of England than many of Tavener's compositions. Curiously, of the two, it is Tavener who has achieved the greater success in the Cathedral. Perhaps this is a reflection of the fact that Tavener is English and therefore his music can be more easily incorporated into the Cathedral's musical tradition, despite foreign influences. On the other hand, it could be due to the size of Tavener's output, notably larger than Pärt's. Yet one cannot help but speculate that it has been the media's publicity of Tavener's existing reputation as a classical composer that has allowed his music to win the respect of the Anglican Church so readily. Pärt, as an 'unknown' foreigner, has been judged more cautiously by the Church, ironic when one considers that the texts of his music deem his work far more justifiable for use in

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<sup>5</sup> It is logical to utilise that which is popular and can be allied to a Christian identity, even if it has not been composed specifically for that purpose.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of the *Canticle of the Mother of God* (1976) and *The Lord's Prayer* (1982).

English services than that of Tavener. However, since the media has aided both composers' music in allowing it to achieve such great popularity with 'the masses', it seems reasonable, in claiming itself to be 'sacred' if not specifically 'church music', that it has been adopted into cathedral repertoire. The use of this music, whilst also achieving success in the commercial market, contributes to the possibility of increased widespread support for contemporary sacred music and continued respect for cathedrals.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Tavener and Pärt: Compositional Backgrounds

John Tavener was born into a Presbyterian family in North London in 1944, and lived in Wembley Park for forty-seven years. Having experimented with the piano from an early age, he won a music scholarship to enter Highgate School for his secondary education, receiving the opportunity to write a number of compositions for the school, as well as for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Frognall, Hampstead. Though accepted by the Royal Academy of Music to study piano in 1962, he soon realised that it was composition (rather than a career in performance) that he wished to pursue. Thus, whilst at the Academy, he received lessons from Sir Lennox Berkeley and David Lumsdaine, and as well as focusing on contemporary serial techniques was introduced to Messiaen, Boulez and Ligeti. He subsequently achieved fame with the success of a biblical fantasy on the story of Jonah, *The Whale* (1966), and *In Alium* (1968), a piece of huge dimensions for solo voice and orchestra, commissioned by the BBC for performance at the 1968 Proms.

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<sup>7</sup> It seems appropriate to note, here, that while Henryk Górecki shares a great deal in common with these two composers, little of his repertoire can be made easily suitable for cathedral services because of its subject matter and vast scoring. Thus, he remains better known as an orchestral composer, and is yet to make a significant impression in the Church of England, despite rising to fame as a classical composer with the music industry in a similar way to Tavener and Pärt.

However, these early pieces are not close in style to the approach that has popularised Tavener in the last twenty years. Indeed, Tavener now claims that these pieces, for all their pictorial symbolism and modernist clarity, are the ones from which he now feels furthest removed (despite *The Whale*'s notable success with cathedrals across the country during the seventies and eighties). The turning point in Tavener's career was *Ultimos Ritos* (1972), the culmination of his experimentation with drama and spatial effect. The score dictates that individual performers should be placed at the extreme ends of the building, with the main body of the performers placed centrally, in the shape of a cross. Though the music's style is tonally free and still clearly influenced by modernist methods, it is the aura of inward reflection and the powerful dwelling on a spiritual theme expressed in this piece which was to characterise the sacred music by which Tavener has since become better known.

Yet the main change in Tavener's compositional approach occurred with his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1976, following a request to create a musical setting for the Orthodox liturgy in English, *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (1977). Since then, he has found great inspiration in the constancy of the Orthodox Church and its traditional music's meditative qualities, using Greek modes and Orthodox liturgy, as well as Russian Znamenny chant (See Section 2.3), to interesting effect. Tavener has always been a composer motivated to write by external inspiration and meaningful incidents, but religion has helped to teach him to access his inner energy, perhaps accounting for the peaceful, mystical air that characterises his later works.

Arvo Pärt's background, however, is very different from that of Tavener, strange when we consider how similar their musical outlooks have come to be. Born in 1935, Pärt was brought up in Paide, some fifty miles south-east of Tallinn, the

capital of Estonia. At the time, Estonia was still very much under the influence of the Russian Empire, following the end of the First World War. At school, Pärt learned the piano and acquired a thorough knowledge of music theory. His Estonian musical education focused upon Russian masters and Russian teaching, though he was introduced to Western classical music, too, since the country still counted itself a Germanic nation at heart.

In 1956, Pärt began undergraduate study of music at the Music Middle School in Tallinn, and was accepted into the Tallinn Conservatory in 1957 to study composition with Heino Eller (1887-1970), Estonia's leading composer of the time. During the 1960s, Pärt produced a number of compositions using twelve-tone serial and collage techniques, yet at that time he was not remotely interested in the early music which would dominate his later works. His music received wide performance and acclaim across various Soviet States, and would no doubt have continued to do so had it not been for the composition of one of his largest works, *Credo* (1968), for piano, chorus and orchestra.

*Credo*, composed atonally, seems to symbolise Pärt's disillusionment and dissatisfaction with life. Indeed, the creation of this piece marked a spiritual and mental crisis in Pärt's life, quite apart from heralding the end of the compositional approach he had sought to conquer. It was only with his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1972, a remarriage, and subsequent 'cleansing' study of Gregorian chant and early music during the 1970s that allowed him to discover a new focus to his work. He has since emerged as a composer of an original style somewhat allied to minimalism, which captures an air of stillness and contemplation using a self-invented technique, 'tintinnabulum'.

It is interesting that neither composer began his musical career with a fascination for spirituality or religion, but both have independently found their way to

experiment with religious chants and modes, having become disenchanted with the potential of serialism. Though Pärt is Estonian and Tavener English, both composers have also appeared to ‘borrow’ from each other’s religious musical backgrounds in forming their own compositional styles. That Pärt was not more musically influenced by the Orthodox religion he was surrounded by at a young age is curious. Perhaps this is because he was primarily exposed to the Russian Orthodox Church, which has not upheld traditional Orthodox musical chant to the same extent as the Greek Orthodox Church (Tavener’s main influence). Instead, Pärt’s religious music over the last twenty years has drawn more from Western plainchant and the Gregorian modes. Regarded by many scholars as the musical foundation of the Western classical music tradition over the last six hundred years. Logically, one would suppose by looking at their home backgrounds that this should be of greater interest to Tavener, yet Tavener has long since abandoned his Western Church upbringing, drawing instead on Orthodoxy. Thus, the two composers have ‘swapped’ traditions, yet in doing so, they have arrived at remarkably comparable musical outlooks. Indeed, despite the cultural differences, there is a great deal of similarity between their musical styles.

Since the composers’ musical approaches have altered so drastically since the start of their careers, this chapter is only concerned with their later music that has come to be known as ‘spiritual minimalism’. This includes the music that Tavener has written since his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977, and Pärt’s ‘tintinnabuli’ music<sup>8</sup> since the affirmation of the style in *Missa Syllabica* and *Cantate Domino* in 1977. Due to the extreme length and vast instrumental scoring of many of their works, it is the smaller anthems that have achieved the

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Tintinnabuli’ is the adjective adopted by Paul Hillier in his book, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997b).

greatest attention in the Cathedral. Therefore, it is these works that will be primarily discussed during the course of this chapter.

### 2.3 Orthodox Influence

The Orthodox Church is one of the largest Christian denominations in the world today.<sup>9</sup> Its practices of worship are noticeably different from that of the Roman, Anglican and other Protestant Churches, since much of its tradition stems directly from its beginnings as an established Church of the Byzantine Empire in 395. The importance of preserving ancient ritual and musical procedures has meant that the Orthodox Church has altered very little over the last thousand years. Having long been held as the most conservative of all Christian Churches, it stands firmly by its inherited principles, preserving a sense of ‘authenticity’ through links with past tradition. For this reason, Orthodoxy is considered perhaps nearest related to early Christian practice of all Christian denominations today. The Western Churches, having undergone so many alterations to liturgy, music, worship and attitude to secular society over the centuries, have never been able to uphold such a direct link with their early beginnings, particularly since the Reformation.

Regarding the differences in ritual and tradition between the two Churches, it is surprising that Orthodox music holds so much attraction for the Church of England, at the opposite end of the Christian spectrum. The Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission (founded in 1973 and subsequently held yearly) has increased theological discussion between the two denominations, but this has so far only served to acknowledge ‘the existence of serious doctrinal, dogmatic, canonical and liturgical differences of a fundamental nature [between the

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<sup>9</sup> Under this bracket include the *autocephalous* (self-governing) Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Russia, Georgia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hellas (Greece), Albania, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Orthodox Church in America; also the *autonomous* Churches of Finland, Sinai and Japan, whose bishops are sanctioned by the relevant autocephalous Church that has granted its autonomy.



Churches]... that are practically ineliminable'.<sup>10</sup> Yet though expectations of the musician differ with each denomination, both Churches recognise that the music itself should be used primarily to facilitate prayer and accompany liturgy. It seems reasonable, therefore, for Orthodox music to be suitable to be adapted for use in the Church of England.

The Anglican Church's willingness for its cathedral music 'to meet more people on their journey [without] diminution in the quality of its offering'<sup>11</sup> has encouraged the integration of Orthodox-inspired music into standard repertoire. Its attraction no doubt stems from its simplicity and its use of sacred medieval chants and modes which have not been directly upheld by the Western Churches since the Reformation.<sup>12</sup> The West's constant development of musical approach, in an attempt to 'keep with the times', follows an evangelical understanding that Christ's message to secular society will be at its most effective if it is made relevant to the modern world. (Incidentally, the fact that the Orthodox Church is *revered*, rather than ridiculed, for refusing to sacrifice its authenticity and musical origins has often been missed.) Consequently, the alteration to its musical tradition alongside Western classical music since the Middle Ages is a fundamental reason why the Orthodox and Western Churches' musical traditions have grown so far apart. However, since the music of both traditions springs mainly from medieval chant (e.g. Gregorian, Byzantine, Russian Znamenny), there is a sense that this link with plainchant somehow means that the cathedral tradition is not so far removed from Orthodox musical tradition as we might imagine. Since Orthodox music has changed so little in comparison to Western

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<sup>10</sup> *The Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church*, 68, quoted in Gordienko, S.N. and Novikov, M.P; 'The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad', Alexander Preobrazhensky (editor), *The Russian Orthodox Church: 10th to 20th Centuries* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 395-396.

<sup>11</sup> *In Tune With Heaven* 1992, 226.

<sup>12</sup> Gregorian Chant and its Latin texts were largely replaced by Anglican Chant to accompany the psalms, after 1700. There has only been a slight resurrection of Gregorian chant in Britain this century by the Roman Catholic Church, promoted by the Society of St. Gregory.

Church music over the last thousand years, its absorption into the Church of England thus provides the Western Church with an excellent opportunity to rediscover its own musical past.

The Orthodox religion, unlike the Anglican Church, dictates that its musical chants and modes are sacred, having been handed down to man by God in ancient times. Therefore, there has always been much resistance to the idea of drawing influence from modern classical Western music: 'Music written outside a sacred tradition of chant... is not connected with the realm of truth'.<sup>13</sup> However, though the Greek Orthodox Church has managed to retain Byzantine Chant as the basis for all its music, this has been far from the case with the Russian Orthodox Church. Its Znamenny chants, modes characterised by melodic patterns rather than harmonic scales, were superseded in the nineteenth century by the introduction of Bakhmetev's *Obikhod*, a collection of newer and 'prettier' melodic lines. Katelsky's chant arrangements in the 1890s with strong, thick harmonies were intended to be sung by huge choral forces quite apart from the solo-line plus drone tradition of the earlier Church. This, together with nineteenth century German influence (bass-doubling and vertical chord patterns) has ensured that the tradition of plainsong has been largely lost. Indeed, the musical contributions of Glinka, Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky do not closely resemble traditional Russian Orthodox music, despite their Russian backgrounds. It is for this reason that, while Tavener is a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is *Greek* Orthodox music that has had by far the greatest influence on him since his conversion to the Church.

Since the Greek Orthodox Church uses music for no other purpose than to complement liturgy, the restrictions placed on the music's requirements are far stricter than those laid down by any other Christian Church. Indeed, the role of the

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<sup>13</sup> Tavener, John: *Sacred Music in the 20th Century* (date unknown), 8.

musician as anonymous and selfless is very different from that in the Anglican Cathedral. Drawing solely from Byzantine chants, music is designed to submit to words at all times – excessive polyphony is strictly forbidden. Consequently, this leaves little room for the voice of the composer, who receives little fame: the music is utilitarian and cannot demand attention for itself.

Very often in Christian commentaries on composing for the Church, it is assumed that given such overwhelming responsibility in the success of a service, church musicians should be necessarily Christian. The argument is that unlike secular music, religious music is not written for its own ends. Thus, composers and performers should not expect praise for themselves, for the music should be centred on God.

Indeed, the Orthodox Church, and John Tavener in particular,<sup>14</sup> would no doubt agree with this idea. However, one cannot help but think that this is somewhat idealised. While music is used for sacred means, it seems unlikely that the majority of Western composers approach their musical work with such pious intentions. Nevertheless, Tavener's principles are obviously not lost on the Western Church. Perhaps, as it has already been mentioned, his beliefs have actually been a factor in aiding his music's success within the Church. Certainly, the discussions by the media that his opinions have generated are a good promotion for Christian morality.

However, despite Orthodox rules, there is a general acceptance in England that Christian belief need not necessarily be a prerequisite for Western composers of Christian music. Colin Thompson insists:

The great artists of our own time may not always be orthodox Christians and the unfamiliar techniques they use can seem so beyond our reach that we are tempted to dismiss them. But they

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<sup>14</sup> This is expressed a great deal by Haydon (1995); Tavener places great importance on prayer and the necessity of God's support in order to create the most worthy music for worship.

often have a deep spiritual awareness and the gift of communicating it in a new and startling fashion.<sup>15</sup>

If the Church were to restrict composition to a handful of 'known followers', creativity would be very much reduced, and it would also render a great deal of existing music unusable. Another point is that musicians' general respect for the Christian religion (if not faith itself) is expressed through the pride of compositional and performing standards, which cannot conceivably prevent the worshipping community from benefiting.

Within the Church of England, the general belief seems to be that response to music is an individual, personal affair. It would therefore be both inappropriate and impossible to lay down hard and fast rules identifying who should and should not be able to contribute musically to the service, and neither can it be anyone's place to be able to do so: 'The judgement of who is and who is not a Christian is not within the power of Christian or pagan'.<sup>16</sup> The theologian Edward Matthews adds, 'the musician worships best when ministering to the worship needs of the whole community and in doing so builds up the body of Christ on earth'.<sup>17</sup> Whatever individual faith, working together for the good of music within the Church should apparently not be regarded as anything but positive. With the evangelical pro-Christian argument, the debate ends with a similar conclusion: 'Here is the truth of the matter: Everything is secular, but everything can be used to celebrate Jesus Christ.'<sup>18</sup>

Despite Orthodox belief, there is a widespread understanding in the Church of England that music on its own is neither sacred nor profane, and that it is music's purpose and context that govern whether or not it performs a religious role.

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<sup>15</sup> Thompson, Colin P: 'Art in Christian Worship', Robertson 1990, 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Routley 1950, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Matthews, Edward: 'Music and Ministry', Robertson 1990, 50-51.

<sup>18</sup> Costa, Eugenio: 'Music at the Crossroads: Liturgy and Culture', Funk, Virgil (ed), *Sung Liturgy Towards 2000 A.D.*, Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1991, 65-76.

Music's contribution to Christian worship may be deemed 'spiritual', but this cannot constitute it as actually *sacred*.<sup>19</sup> Orthodox composers, however, believe that all music that uses ancient chant is fundamentally religious. Indeed, for Tavener, it is the application of traditional chant in his work (and not the words) that shows his music to be 'sacred'. He proclaims, 'Throw the *ison* and chant out, and you will begin the drift into mid-sea with no anchor, and the ego, self-indulgence, and other diabolical assaults will creep in'.<sup>20</sup> Despite the differences in opinion, there is no doubt that this debate on the musician's role in the Church has helped to intensify interest in the music over the last decade.

Having considered the fundamental nature of the Orthodox Church and its musical tradition, it seems appropriate to consider the claim made by the media, and by many within the Anglican Church, that Tavener is an Orthodox composer. As has already been mentioned, Tavener converted to the Russian Orthodox Church following a request to create a musical setting for the Orthodox liturgy in English, *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (1977). It should be noted that such a request would not have been a possibility within the Greek Orthodox Church; indeed, it is still exceedingly unusual for a Western composer to be commissioned to write for any Orthodox service, even in the Russian Church.

With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that Tavener was particularly careful to retain the essence of traditional Orthodoxy as much as possible in his treatment of Znamenny and Byzantine chant. Yet his musical creation was so sparse and the chant so prominent that the Russian Orthodox choirmaster in London actually declared that it was far beyond the scope of the singers – 'The sparseness was

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<sup>19</sup> Consequently, there seems little reason why music composed within secular circles, still being intrinsically 'neutral', should not be adapted for sacred use. The success of Scott Joplin's *The Entertainer*, arranged by John Bertalot as a choir version of the Prodigal Son, is a perfect example that such music can work within the Church; however, it is interesting to note that religious tunes rarely infiltrate into secular music in the same way.

<sup>20</sup> Tavener, John: *Sacred Music in the 20th Century* (date unknown), 4.

upsetting to a choir fed on lush harmonies, and the progressions were not what their ears were used to'.<sup>21</sup> This emphasises just how far the music of the Russian Church has moved from traditional Orthodoxy.

Since that time, Tavener has continued to create music as authentically near to traditional Orthodox music, with its prominent chants and accompanying drones (*isons*), as possible. Yet though he continues to use Greek texts, has used several translations of Orthodox prayers by Mother Thekla of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption, Buckinghamshire, and continues to give his pieces Orthodox labels such as 'Ikon', 'Akathist' and 'Apolytikion', he has had little in the way of further Orthodox commissions from either the Greek or Russian Church. Therefore, while Tavener remarks that 'the Anglican Church, with the finest choral tradition in the world, is... the most open and generous to other traditions',<sup>22</sup> it is debatable whether his music can be termed as 'Orthodox' with any accuracy. Since his music has received such small success within Orthodox circles, there is little to suggest that Tavener's music is worthy of the title 'Orthodox', or is at all reminiscent of true 'Orthodox' style. As a Western-born composer, it is logical that the avant-garde classical tradition that Tavener claims to have shed still remains at the heart of his music. With this in mind, it must be assumed that rather than its claims as literal Orthodox music, it is the *essence* of Orthodoxy (simplicity and wholeness) in Tavener's music that has proved so attractive within the Church of England. Having been educated as a serialist composer, encompassing religious influences from other cultures in pieces such as *Celtic Requiem* (1969) and *Sixteen Haiku of Seferis* (1984), Tavener might be more accurately described as a 'Western pluralist'. His music is of a far more composite origin than we might be led to imagine, and for this reason, his later

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<sup>21</sup> Haydon 1995, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Tavener, John: *Sacred Music in the 20th Century* (date unknown), 7.

works are perhaps best thought of as an expression of ‘otherness’, capturing the attention of society and the Church of England through their affiliation with religion and spirituality on a general level.

## 2.4 Musical Style

In the media’s popularised search for a window ‘out of the everyday gloom’, the minimalist/spiritualist genre has been recognised for its ability to conjure meditative reflection through clarity and simplicity, something that is often interpreted as ‘spiritual’ when it is regarded in conjunction with orthodox religion. (In a religious context, it is this musical ‘clarity’ that aids prayerful focus.) Therefore, as we examine Tavener’s and Pärt’s music, it is worth emphasising that unlike other contemporary sacred genres, spiritual minimalism’s nature (and success) does not lie in endless layers of detail and complexity, but rather in its minimalist profundity.

John Tavener is perhaps best known within the Cathedral for the success of numerous iconic anthems, based on the principles of Orthodox iconic art (see Section 2.5). No doubt their success is partly due to their brevity, being suitable for use as anthems and (where their content is more specific) particular feast days. Yet since the aim of each piece is to be as whole and complete within itself as possible to achieve a feeling of constancy and calm, the iconic works act as miniature manifestations of Tavener’s whole musical style.

*Ikon of Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne* (1986) was commissioned by James Lancelot of Durham Cathedral for the 1300th anniversary of the death of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, 20th March 1987. It is designed as an icon to focus upon all sides of St. Cuthbert’s life, the words addressing the saint portraying scenes his life as a shepherd, pastor and recluse, and particularly emphasising his

relationship with the sea. As Tavener explains, ‘this *Ikon of St. Cuthbert*, an ikon of music and words in the place of wood and paint, seeks to recall, in its stylised form, [St. Cuthbert’s] personal aura’.<sup>23</sup>

This, one might imagine, would not be too popular with the Protestant side of the Church, since while St. Cuthbert’s spirit is referred to as ‘you’ and ‘Holy Father’, God receives little mention other than in passing as ‘Him’ and as an indirect subject in the refrain, ‘Holy Father of Lindisfarne, pray to God for us’, until the very end of the piece: ‘Glory be to Thee O God’. However, this is perfectly in line with Orthodox theology, and is perhaps no different from what might be heard in the Roman Catholic Church today. The Anglican Cathedral, priding itself on its broad Christian outlook, accepts Tavener’s liturgy, giving it the benefit of the doubt.

Typically for Tavener, the piece is constructed using Greek Orthodox form, in this instance following the pattern of a Byzantine Canon. At the start of the score, we realise that the piece is not a true canon, but rather, it takes its structural organisation from the traditional Orthodox layout, split into twenty-four sections with very few bar lines in sight. Each section is allotted with a Greek title expressing its particular purpose. The piece therefore comprises an ‘Irmos’ (introductory verse), a series of ‘Troparions’ and a ‘Kathisma’ (putting Cuthbert into context as a holy man and saint), a ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and ‘Kontakion’ (described as a ‘stylised Eulogy’) all interwoven with a series of Refrains. The detail of information given here about the layout suggests Tavener’s keenness for the piece to seem as approachable as possible for English musicians to tackle with confidence, as well as encouraging appreciation of such methodology and the value of adhering tradition.

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<sup>23</sup> Tavener, John: *Ikon of Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne for Unaccompanied Choir: SATTB* (London: Chester Music, 1992), ii.



The piece itself reveals a great deal about Tavener's style. Though not strictly based around Greek chant,<sup>24</sup> his style is nevertheless influenced by traditional approach. Particularly noticeable is the lack of rhythmic invention, for throughout the piece, the beat remains focused on slow crotchets and minims reminiscent of plainchant. The voices move together, and the beat is only subdivided into quavers where the words become animated or the natural flow of the words demands it. Semiquavers, in this instance, are reserved for very occasional word-painting. In fact, they occur only to illustrate 'gushed' (Troparion 5, page 4) and 'Praise the Lord' (Troparion 7, page 6). This stasis provides the piece with majesty and stillness wholly representative of iconic art.

Fig. 1: Irmos, *Ikon of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne*, page 1 (© Chester Music 1992)

IRMOS

$\text{♩} = \text{c.76}$  (always freely)

*f* molto sonore

B 1 2

Is - ra - el passed dry\_ shod through the sea,

and your foot - - steps trod the sands of Lin - - dis - farne.

As the piece begins, we see immediate evidence of mirror-writing in the Irmos of page 1 (Figure 1), reaffirmed in the Kontakion on page 4. The mirror-writing technique is present in many of Tavener's works, and here it opens the piece by creating a sense of unity, the men's voices symmetrically focussed around a low C. C is perhaps the most important note of the piece, for though the Refrains are constantly in A minor, the Troparions are split between C major (four times) and A flat major (four times). C is, therefore, the only common triadic note of each of these keys, and is it is this note which binds the sections of the first seven pages of

<sup>24</sup> These are more apparent in *Funeral Ikos* (1981) and the *Orthodox Vigil Service* (1984).

the piece. It is only with the last refrain's glorifying praise that we are finally presented with A major, at the bottom of page seven. Thus, the common tone is shifted away from C to A and C sharp jointly, reinforced by the mirror-writing in the 'Alleluia' section which ends the piece. Here, the soprano line is constructed around C sharp while the bass line, mirrored, serves A (Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Alleluia, *Ikon of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne*, page 8 (© Chester Music 1992)

Sing three times:  
 1st time *p*  
 2nd time *mf*  
 3rd time *molto f*

rall. (last time only)

Alleluia, alleluia, Al - le - lu - i - a. Glory be to Thee O God.

Alleluia, alleluia, Al - le - lu - i - a. Glory be to Thee O God.

That the third (C natural, then C sharp) plays such an important role here is a reflection of the importance of the triad in Orthodox music. Other signs of this influence occur in the melismatic vocal lines and a lack of true polyphony.

Repetition, an important feature of the *Ikon of St. Cuthbert*, also occurs in many other works, repetitive patterns and harmonic series suggesting 'an awareness of time quite different from the materiality of Western "clock" time...[yet] just as real to the person who experiences it'.<sup>25</sup> This helps to enhance a feeling of peace and stasis, and is no doubt the major reason why the style is described as 'minimalist', with little connection to the modernist genre of minimalism. In the Orthodox Church, repetition and ritual are fundamental to prayer. One line may be repeated hundreds of times with little variation, in contemplation of the mystery of Christ. This is greatly reflected in Tavener's most

<sup>25</sup> Hillier 1997b, 17.

radical work, *Prayer for the World* (1981). Lasting a full seventy minutes, the only text throughout the entire piece is ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’.

Tavener’s style is based on triadic symmetry and parallelism, and palindromic design, particularly prevalent in the cello line of *Akathist of Thanksgiving* (1986). The music rarely modulates, but will often suddenly ‘begin again’ in a new key, creating a clean break between sections. *Angels* (1985), however, is presented somewhat differently. Rather than conflicting harmonic design, the piece is held together by the presence of an *ison* (or drone): an E at the bass of the texture, presented in the organ part and lasting the entire length of the piece. Here, the *ison* acts as the note from which all other music comes – symbolic, perhaps, of belief in the eternal presence of God, from whom all life arises, and provides the piece with a clear sense of harmonic design and order. It is broken only on page seven by the female voices’ interlude, illustrating the Annunciation, which serves in shifting the key from E major to E minor, yet maintains the tonal balance for the *ison* to re-emerge at the bottom of page eight.

Yet though it has been said that Tavener uses relatively simple methods, this does not mean that the effect is always straightforward. In *Hymn to the Mother of God* (1985), the chant presented by the first choir is major, homophonic and triadic, but Tavener creates more of a feeling of stasis by thickening the texture, the second choir echoing the first a bar behind in exact imitation. Consequently, triadic chords are in constant conflict, and thus, the piece is provided with a sense of mysticism through a cloudy texture and lack of harmonic clarity.

Many of the attributes of Tavener’s style can also be detected in Pärt’s work, yet when one thinks of Pärt’s musical approaches, one of the first things that comes to mind is his self-invented technique, ‘tintinnabulum’. A prominent feature of his

later music, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the principle behind it. The word is derived from ‘tintinnabulation’ or the ringing or pealing of bells; bell-ringing, as the most ancient form of instrumentalism within the Christian Church, is deeply religious. Thus, it seems appropriate that the tintinnabulum style should be interpreted as providing such a sense of the ‘spiritual’. (Tavener, incidentally, also confesses to using bells, in order to recreate something deeply Russian<sup>26</sup>). Pärt understands that the sound of a bell can be perceived from the outside or the inside. After the initial *Klang*, the harmonics that remain draw the listener into the sound of the actual bell so that ‘nothing is outside, nothing is inside; for what is outside is inside’.<sup>27</sup>

*I am the True Vine*, a short anthem for SSATBB, is a setting of John 15:1-14, Jesus’ parable of the Vine and the Branches. It was commissioned by Norwich Cathedral to celebrate the nine-hundredth anniversary of its foundation in 1996, and it illustrates many features of Pärt’s style. Immediately noticeable is the score’s indication of continual time-signature changes, occurring almost every bar, which at first glance appear to be a reminder of Pärt’s original modernist leanings. However, on closer examination, there is little recognisable methodology to these changes other than to serve the words; the rhythmic unpredictability merely keeps the listener alert, contrasting with the harmony’s repetitive, minimalist style.

During the piece, male and female voices work against each other as pairs, for whenever the relationship of a fifth is presented by tenor and bass parts, the soprano and alto lines respond in thirds, and vice versa. The voices enter gradually in an upward, then downward fashion with no variation, resulting in an undulating pattern on the page similar to the rippling sound-waves of a bell after

<sup>26</sup> Crowthers, Malcolm: ‘All at Sea?’, *The Musical Times*, 135 (1994), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Hillier 1997b, 19.

its initial *Klang*. The pages are also filled with hints of palindromic patterning, yet none of these structures are exact; they simply add to a sense of oscillation, a hint of the presence, perhaps, of tintinnabuli style (see Figure 3). This piece, as it will be seen, is also built around two notes in conflict with each other in a manner similar to the Doppler effect. For though the notes are not presented as constant drones in this instance, their presence is eternally implied through harmonic invention, springing entirely as it does out of the essence of these tones.

Fig. 3: *I am the True Vine*, bars 1-14 (© Universal Edition 1996)

The image displays two systems of a musical score for the piece "I am the True Vine". The first system, labeled with a circled Roman numeral 'I', covers bars 1 through 7. It features four vocal staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenore, and Basso. Above the Soprano staff, the numbers 3, 4, p, 6, 3, 4, 2, 3 are written, indicating fingerings or dynamics. The lyrics for each voice part are: Soprano: "the true vine. and my -band-"; Alto: "the true vine. my Fa - ther -band-"; Tenore: "am the true Fa - ther is hus - band-"; Basso: "I am Fa - ther is the hus-". The second system, labeled with a circled Roman numeral 'II', covers bars 8 through 14. It features four vocal staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenore (T), and Basso (B). Above the Soprano staff, the numbers 6, 4, 6, 2, 3, 2 are written. The lyrics for each voice part are: Soprano: "- man. Ev - ery branch not fruit he"; Alto: "- man. Ev - branch in me not fruit he"; Tenore: "- man. in me that -eth not fruit"; Basso: "- man. in me that bear-eth".

Although the rhythm and note-values cleverly disguise this, Pärt's setting of the biblical passage is essentially strophic, with three 'verses'. Though Pärt has

inserted rests at random, augmenting and diminishing the note-values to prevent this from being easily audible, it can be seen from the score that the first verse (bars 1-62) holds the main subject matter from which all else comes. Incidentally, this reflects the character of the passage itself, for as it says in John 15:5, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches...without me ye can do nothing'. The choir's notes, and the order in which they occur, remain largely identical in verses two (bars 63-128) and three (bars 129-190). Yet instead of discussing these similarities (the very reason for the music's harmonic stillness of sound), it is more beneficial to examine the differences between each verse, and the way in which these inconsistencies are designed to govern the tonal character of the piece.

The harmonic design of the piece, to the ear, is one of stillness and stasis. However, it is far more detailed than this in reality. At the start of the work (as in Figure 3), the key towards which the piece is focused is G, prominently presented in the bass entry of bar one and confirmed by the immediate arrival of its fifth, D, in the tenor line of bar two. However, with the perfect cadence into the relative minor, E, at bar six, Pärt signifies that G major will not be permitted to rest unchallenged. Indeed, the conflict between the two tones lasts for the entirety of the piece, and it is not clear until the final bar whether E or G will dominate. The piece is clearly diatonic (*not* modal, as many wrongly assume of Pärt's music in general), swinging between G major and E minor throughout. To continue this unusual play between the two tonalities, the verse is designed to end with a major third of D, capable of resolving to either key (bar 62). The second verse is the section where the main conflict between the two tonalities occurs. At the start of the second verse (bar 63), G major is reasserted in an almost identical tonal fashion to the first verse,<sup>28</sup> though this tonality is confused by the presence of a

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<sup>28</sup> With the exception of the presence of a C in Bar 92 instead of the B that was the case in Bar 29.

bass drone on E from bar 95. The contest, in turn, by the soprano drone on D (the fifth of G major) from bar 104 (Figure 4a), continuing for two bars after the bass drone ceases at bar 127, allows the arrival of the third verse in bar 129 to be stated in G major once again (Figure 4b), drawing the listener into the expectation that G has emerged as the predominant key.

Fig. 4a: *I am the True Vine*, bars 101-107 (© Universal Edition 1996)

4 6

S  
div. ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

A  
ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

T  
ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

B  
div. ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Fig. 4b: *I am the True Vine*, bars 126-130 (© Universal Edition 1996)

126 6 4

S  
div. my love.

A  
lov- con - tin - ue my love.

T  
lov- you: con - tin - in my love.

B  
div. -ed you: ye in

lov - ed you: ye in

However, the third verse's tonality, proceeding in the same manner as that of verse one until five bars before the end, now causes a thickening of texture at bar 188, the reappearance of the bass drone from verse two and the final presence of an F sharp in the alto part of bar 191 dictating that the piece's resolution is actually to be E minor (Figure 5). Aurally, such strategic modulation is not obvious to the ear. However, the listener will no doubt be aware of a feeling of placidity and solemnity caused by the eventual dominance of this minor key, and perhaps a vague remembrance of the 'brighter' air with which the piece began.

Fig. 5: *I am the True Vine*, bar 185 to the end of the piece (© Universal Edition 1996)

The musical score shows the vocal lines and bass drone for the final section of the piece. The Soprano part begins with a melodic line in bar 185, followed by the Alto and Tenor parts. The lyrics are: "my friends, if ye do what - ev - er I com - mand you." The bass part features a drone on the F# note starting in bar 188. The score includes bar numbers 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, and 192. Above the vocal staves, the number of notes per bar is indicated: 7, 4, 3, 4, 2, 4, 6.

Deliberately avoiding linear tension and release with modulation, cadence and resolution, tintinnabulum is a static and non-developmental style, perhaps best employed to express the eternal in much the same way as Tavener's *ison*. *Missa Syllabica* (1977) demonstrates this to the extreme, for nothing but the implied chord of D minor is voiced for thirteen minutes, during the six inner movements. The sense of the spiritual is conveyed through stasis in much the same way as Tavener's triadic Orthodox approach. However, rather than being based around triads, Pärt's music is more concerned with the sounding out of a single note in its relationship with the octave, the fifth, and to a certain extent the third, since these are the principal intervals of the harmonic series heard in the sound of a bell.



Though his music sounds diatonic, it results in triadic harmonies that are *incidental* to the piece's framework rather than *integral*, echoing the principles of early music writing and the medieval process of parallel imitation in Gregorian chant from which Pärt draws so much of his style.

We have so far drawn a substantial link between Tavener and Orthodoxy. It is also possible to find parallels between both the composers and early Christian music, especially regarding their music's overt simplicity and wholeness. Yet despite the many similarities between the two composers, it remains the case that despite his Eastern background, Orthodoxy is not one of Arvo Pärt's main influences. Rather, with its sparse melodic lines and chant writing, his music is particularly allied to medieval music. Compositionally, Pärt might well be compared to Josquin Desprèz, who employed similar use of parallelism (harmonisation at the fifth, fourth and octave), melodic treatment and mirror-writing. Pärt's notation is also often very similar to traditional Gregorian chant notation. As in the score at the opening of *Summa* (1977), it is sometimes only necessary for him to write a line of note-heads indicating pitch-direction of the chant's movement and counter-voice patterning, leaving significant freedom for rhythmic interpretation and vocal improvisation. However, unlike Tavener, who in a number of his pieces has used real Orthodox chants, there is little evidence that Pärt actually uses Gregorian chant in his own works. It would seem that instead of copying medieval music exactly, he prefers to draw instead upon early music's main characteristics. It is through combining them with tintinnabulum that he creates this unique and contemporary sound.

## 2.5 The Relationship with Silence and Mysticism

Over the last twenty years, Tavener and Pärt's compositional styles have been given many names. However, the terms 'spiritual minimalists', 'religious pluralists' and 'mystic musicians' are not precise enough to satisfy a reasonable definition. Hillier comments that 'labels in music are like clichés in conversation. They are not entirely empty of meaning, but the information they convey depends as much on the context in which they are uttered as on the ideas they denote'.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it seems necessary to examine the features of 'spiritual minimalism' to attempt an assessment of its place within the Cathedral with accuracy.

Orthodox music can be defined by three major characteristics: stillness, simplicity and mysticism. 'Mysticism' is not a very helpful word for us, since like the term 'spirituality', it acts as a cloudy definition of that side of religion that cannot be seen, but only felt: while mysticism is very important within religion, it is often perceived as beginning in mist and ending in schism.<sup>30</sup> Yet though the term is treated with caution by both the Western Church and the academic world, mysticism and spirituality are essential to Orthodox compositional ethos and way of life. Orthodox music attempts to move the listener 'beyond' his own self, though it does not do this as we might expect, through intricacy and complexity. Instead, it avoids excessive decoration, and simplicity reveals inner qualities that some might say is suitably reflective of the inner self. As Hillier perceives it:

How we live depends on our relationship with death; how we make music depends on our relationship with silence.... [The] music seems to me to testify to this concept in which silence and death are creatively linked, and thereby to reaffirm the spiritual basis of our existence, in all its frailty and potential beauty.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hillier 1997b, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Harvey, Jonathan: 'Introduction', *Contemporary Music Review*, 14 (1996), Parts 1-2, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Hillier 1997b, 1.

The understanding of silence, here, is important, and provokes exploration. There has been great debate over the last generation concerning the relationship between silence and music. With Cage's composition, 4'33'' exposing silence in its most extreme form, we have been brought to realise (as Cage apparently did) that 'the piece is not silent at all, but rather a revelation of the sounds an audience would normally disregard or treat as disturbance'.<sup>32</sup> This prompts the realisation that *true* silence (the absence of all noise and the presence of 'nothing') can never actually be known to us in this life.

The analogies that Hillier draws between music and life, silence and death are perceptive. Silence (and stillness, for that matter), like death, can represent to the individual nothingness, the ultimate essence, or both, and is therefore capable of allying itself at once to atheistic realism and religious contentment. Being neither sacred nor secular and not created by man, perceived even when it cannot *truly* be heard, silence is, in a sense, 'undefinable'. Following Platonic theory, it merely exists of its own accord on a level above and beyond our own comprehension; in Tavener's language, it is 'uncreated'.<sup>33</sup>

Though silence in conjunction with music can be used as an atheistic tool to suggest the existence of 'nothingness', it is most usually interpretable as being representative of some kind of 'presence' (within religion, 'divine presence'). This is because using silence in music as representing 'nothingness' does not work well, since silence surrounds it, and any piece concerned with nothingness is therefore merely a vacuum of sound. Thus, it is more logical (as Cage's work suggests) for silence to be considered as a presence, though music must be sensitive to silence if their relationship is to be of any significance. With this in

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<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, Paul: *Modern Music and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>33</sup> According to Tavener's own definition of the 'uncreated' in reference to his pieces based on uncreated light and eros in Griffiths, Paul: *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s in Conversation with Paul Griffiths* (London: Faber Music, 1985), 112.

mind, Maxwell Steer concludes that ‘if we are considering the character of music at its most profound then the interruption of silence must be a *sacred* art [my italics] fully attuned to the needs of the psyché and bearing in mind the primordial sound and source of all vitality – breath – a word synonymous with spirit and energy’.<sup>34</sup>

Such philosophy may seem unnecessarily complex, but it leads us to the essential philosophy of spiritual minimalism: ‘whatever interrupts silence needs to be in tune with the ebb and flow of silence’ (perceived here as a type of sound existing within time).<sup>35</sup> Since the genre approaches silence as the starting point for all sound and music, the musical effects of stillness and holiness come easily. Though silence itself is not often used *in* a piece, the music’s character is as such that it never feels far away, and it is this which provides the genre with such a strong sense of musical spirituality and mysticism accessible to peoples of any faith. Thus, it is the inner core of contemplative peace that enables the music to express so much with so little.

Tavener and Part’s relationship with mysticism, too, is also very important. Mysticism, as a fundamental piece of the Orthodox Church, is essentially the involvement of the mind to come to know God through meditation and contemplation. With music, it involves silence, simplicity and stillness, providing a sense of divine calm (and the numinous) through which mystical contemplation can occur. In this sense, the three elements in music provide a similar function to iconism, the ‘truly meditative art’.<sup>36</sup> For the Orthodox worshipper, icons provide

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<sup>34</sup> Steer, Maxwell: ‘See Through Music (Notes From an Unpopular Composer), *Contemporary Music Review Volume 14* (1996), 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Griffiths 1985, 108.

inspirational ‘windows to God’.<sup>37</sup> ‘The icon is the supreme example of Christian art, of transcendence and transfiguration’.<sup>38</sup>

Tavener’s creation of the musical icon takes simplicity and stillness as its core, capturing a sense of the constant and pure, and emphasising the relationship between music and art and colour, the ‘uncreated’ essence.<sup>39</sup> It would seem that the iconic philosophy is at the very heart of spiritual minimalism; perhaps it is the fact that mysticism is not restricted to the specifically *Christian* experience that has enabled this ‘iconic’ music to thrive not just within the Church, but the secular market, too. As Martland notes:

This kind of vision is not necessarily to be determined by religious dogma or church-going: instead it is a mode of perception that converges on the divine. It is a visionary style of knowledge as distinct from a factual one, able to see the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, or, as Blake put it, ‘Heaven in a grain of sand’.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.6 Evaluation of Success

It has been said that Tavener’s and Pärt’s larger works are not designed to be anything other than concert material. Yet the influence of religious chant and Orthodox simplicity surely makes it harder for the music to be able to ‘enthral’ the secular listener within the context of a concert. Fundamental simplicity and a lack of harmonic movement cannot guarantee to capture conscious attention as would be necessary outside of prayer and meditation. As Wickham remarks, ‘to try to freeze a moment of music so that it can be a static moment of reverence is like

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Brian Keeble, editor of John Tavener’s book, *The Music of Silence* (London: Faber and Faber 1999, 115) also draws an analogy between the icon and traditional chant. Thus, use of chant in both Tavener and Pärt’s music is particularly significant here, for ‘chant, in the same way as do ikons, resists the sort of critical assessment to which the modern mind has become habituated’.

<sup>38</sup> Tavener, quoted by Roderic Dunnett in ‘Eternal Truths Set to Music’, *The Church Times* (7/8/1992), 20.

<sup>39</sup> Again, according to Tavener’s own definition of the ‘uncreated’. Griffiths 1985, 112.

<sup>40</sup> Martland, Steve: ‘Extreme Conditions, Extreme Responses’, M. Finnissy and P. Wright (editors), *New Music ’89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15.

trying to distil the sensuousness of the Tristan chord... by putting an eternal pause mark over it'.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, despite its outwardly 'static' sound, the genre is still immensely popular in performance outside the Church. Indeed, it is stirring reaction, appreciation and optimism across the whole of society, and returning to ideas put forward in the first section of the chapter, it would seem that it is, indeed, the simplicity, stillness and spirituality that have allowed spiritual minimalism to achieve such success. Since then, the music is apparently so capable of stirring such feeling within contemporary society, it seems unsurprising that these writers, in their popularity, should be so relished by the Church.

Following the widespread recognition that the music is so unrepresentative of our own existing Western musical culture, many critics have sought links between spiritual minimalism and the music of the Far East. Nevertheless, both Pärt and Tavener affirm that they have not been influenced by Asian music any more than African – it is clear that their music is nothing like as pluralist as it may appear, and that they are not drawing on the music of the world *around* them at all, as is often mistaken. It would seem, however, that since shedding their former dodecaphonic musical languages, through their separate study of traditional and early Christian music and religion, Tavener and Pärt have chanced upon fresh musical influences in the music of the past. They are, essentially, moulding music from the traditional concepts of sung chant-form, simplicity and the pride of religion. Yet most importantly of all, through their rediscovery of the value of the numinous, they are finally enabling the essence of religious music to be recaptured by the people of today.

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<sup>41</sup> Wickham, Edward: 'I Heard Eternity the Other Night', *The Church Times* (20/10/95), 20.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Three ‘Radical’ Composers: Harvey, Swayne and Weir

This chapter examines the cathedral contributions of three contemporary British composers – Jonathan Harvey, Giles Swayne and Judith Weir. Representative of a group of individuals (including James Macmillan and Diana Burrell) whose music has been familiar to cathedrals for several years, the composers are united by innovative choral techniques, bold dissonances and audacious harmony, constantly testing the Cathedral’s notoriously narrow tolerance of ‘the radically new’.

Of all these composers, Jonathan Harvey is perhaps the best-known to the Church of England (Macmillan might be considered equally successful, though his music has achieved greater success within the Roman Catholic Church). In Britain’s Anglican cathedrals in 1998, four of Harvey’s anthems were performed at twenty-six locations over the year. Giles Swayne’s work achieved nine performances and Judith Weir’s, seven, yet despite several articles proclaiming her success,<sup>1</sup> Burrell’s music was only heard four times, whilst Macmillan’s only three times, at St. Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Peterborough. Macmillan and Burrell must be noted for their contributions to cathedral repertoire, but it is in light of this evidence that the chapter focuses more greatly on the achievements of the other three.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, Michael Nicholas’ appraisal of Diana Burrell in ‘Broad-sides’, *Choir and Organ*, 6 (March 1998), back page.

<sup>2</sup> All sources from Patton, John: *A Hundred Years of Cathedral Music, 1898-1998: A Comparison With Previous Music Surveys of 1898, 1938, 1958 and 1986* (Winchester: John Patton, not yet published).

### 3.1 Jonathan Harvey (b. 1939)

Jonathan Harvey was born in Sutton Coldfield in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War Two. His father was a businessman in Walsall who composed in his spare time, writing music that Harvey delighted in as a boy. He describes it as ‘rather mystical nature music: the forms were very anti-German, very fragmentary and fugitive’.<sup>3</sup> Experimenting with composition from a very early age, Harvey tried to imitate this work, also drawing from the family’s extensive classical record collection.

In 1950 at the age of eleven, he went to St. Michael’s College, Tenbury, to take up a place as a chorister, and subsequently received lessons in composition with the choirmaster. Here, he listened to a great deal of music at libraries and on the radio, equipping him with a wealth of ideas that would later form the basis for his complex compositional language. The ritual of daily services at St. Michael’s undoubtedly instigated Harvey’s interest in the spiritual. However, his early works are not representative of this interest, perhaps because his musical education was based so greatly on the Western classical tradition.

This continued during his time as an undergraduate at Cambridge, too. Erwin Stein, a composition teacher there, was particularly keen for Harvey to follow the Western discipline, and having gradually introduced him to Schoenberg, Harvey was then educated in Second Viennese School techniques by Hans Keller, who encouraged him to maintain a ‘conservative’, systematic approach to writing. Consequently, this dominated his style for several years to come.

After leaving Cambridge, Harvey moved to Glasgow University to pursue a thesis entitled ‘The Composer’s Idea of his Inspiration’, demonstrating a keen interest in music philosophy. He went on, in 1964, to lecture at Southampton

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<sup>3</sup> Griffiths 1985, 46.



University, the same year in which his composition, *Triptych*, for five wind and piano, was performed by the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM). Shortly after this, he obtained the support of Novello Publishers, and gradually, his music began to gain in recognition.

However, in 1966, Harvey's style underwent a radical change of course with a visit to Darmstadt. 'Converted' by the acoustic and electronic experiments of Stockhausen, this was echoed three years later by a similar encounter with the electronic and computer works of Milton Babbitt. Harvey saw many possibilities in these experimentations for his own work, the *avant-garde* leading the way to a unique musical language in which complexity and intricacy would be entwined with spirituality, at a higher level of consciousness and understanding. His explorations with computer and electronic music illustrate this well, as the titles of *Inner Light II* (1973) and *III* (1977), *From Silence* (1988) and *Ritual Melodies* (1989) suggest. After fourteen years at Southampton, he went to the University of Sussex in 1977, where he was made a Professor of Music in 1980. Since then, he has recently moved to the University of Stanford, California, where he now lectures in composition, also being involved with the Center for Computer Research into Music and Acoustics. It is clear that his involvement with electronics and modernist spirituality (now influenced by the concept of Buddhist Karma) is far from a thing of the past.

Harvey's sacred works, naturally also concerned with spirituality, are varied in style and subject matter, though many of the pieces were commissioned by one individual, Martin Neary, the organist of Winchester Cathedral during the seventies and eighties. On reflection, it is to Harvey's credit that his music has become so frequently performed at cathedrals across the country, and not just in

Winchester. However, there is little doubt that his recognition as a composer of sacred music was significantly aided by the success of *The Angels* (1994), written for King's College, Cambridge for the 'Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' Christmas service in 1994.

The sacred pieces span the length of Harvey's career, yet whilst having been written alongside his electronic and computer music, all the pieces written for the Cathedral are simply scored for choir and organ. The works are concise, demonstrate a concern for the needs of the performers, and are therefore highly suitable for services – unusual for an *avant-garde* composer who might more logically be concerned with *l'art pour l'art*. However, Harvey never negates his *avant-garde* approach in these works; his compositional identity is merely compressed. As we will see, he realises that the *avant-garde* can be used in a cathedral context to good effect – for him, music does not necessarily have to be tonal or 'traditional' in order to communicate.

Harvey tells us that '[a] work has to be about something: it has to have a split-second identity'.<sup>4</sup> Following this reasoning, it is not surprising to find that his anthems are concise and self-contained, the words acting as a springboard for creativity and each piece offering a different glimpse of his compositional character. By examining several of these pieces, it is therefore possible to build up an impression of Harvey's musical language. We will begin by examining one of Harvey's most successful works: *I Love the Lord* (1976).

*I Love the Lord* is an unaccompanied anthem for SSAATTBB, written for the Winchester Cathedral Choir. It is a setting of Psalm 116, vv. 1-4, 7-9, in which the psalmist tells of a time of personal crisis ('the sorrows of death compassed me and the pains of hell gat hold upon me', v. 3) which caused him to call upon the Lord,

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<sup>4</sup> Griffiths 1985, 53.



two opening verses (bars 1-11) are built upon a G major triad; the main choir's arpeggiatic figure illustrating 'therefore will I call upon him as long as I live' (bars 9-11) acts as a joyous fanfare of praise (Figure 6).

It is only at bar 14, in fact, with the main choir's utterance of the word 'death', that harmonic impurity is born, with the arrival of G flat, B flat and E flat suggesting a conflicting tonal centre – G flat or E flat. At first, this appears to be only a fluctuating augmentation of the G triad, yet at the word 'hell' in bar 23, the main choir's harmony becomes more ambiguous. The bass begins to descend; sharps and flats occur at once; lines move chromatically and in step-wise motion to form clusters, all serving to negate the previous authority of G major.

As the psalmist's account of despair and sorrow progresses on pages 4 and 5, the listener is comforted somewhat by the soloists' intermittent triadic refrain, 'I love the Lord'. However, during the main choir's plea for help, even this is overcome, becoming a wavering, unison line at bar 42 and tailing off into a single D by bar 44. Harvey offers no distance from this scene of despair, and the scene is made to seem even more poignant by the two soprano solo lines' actual abandonment of the refrain, sympathetically echoing the tail-end of the main choir's petition, 'deliver my soul', on pages seven and eight (Figure 7).

Symbolically, by the time the G major refrain reappears in the solo choir at bar 50 following this despair, the main choir's harmony has 'fallen' to a tonality approaching the relative minor, E. Yet since the triad of E minor appears here only in its first and second inversions with a juxtaposed C sharp (augmented sixth), this key is never totally confirmed. Our attention, instead, remains upon the 'idealistic' perfection of G major until its eventual disappearance in bar 69.



main choir's last four bars, a hummed G major triad, also suggest regained peace with God, while the presence of a G flat, B flat and E flat in the solo choir (bars 82-83) before the final resolution to G serve as a fitting reminder of the torment that has been.

Love's constancy, as expressed in *I Love the Lord* with the G major refrain, is also a feature of *The Dove Descending* (1974). Though the piece is through-composed with little repetition, Harvey's treatment of the word 'love' is particularly striking, emerging twice amidst forte passages as a *ppp* chord (bars 37-39 and 43-44). Whilst emphasising love's stillness and beauty in this instance, the context of this treatment also indicates a considerable enthusiasm for contrast and drama. This is displayed in all his works through word-painting, harmony and dynamics, of which *Thou Mastering Me God* (1989) is a particularly good example. Such drama in this way lends Harvey's work strong ties to that of Benjamin Britten.

Another of Harvey's experiments with tonality is expressed in the anthem *Come, Holy Ghost* (1984) for SSAATTBB, a setting of Bishop J. Cosin's text based on the prayer, *Veni Creator Spiritus*. However, whereas *I Love the Lord* is constructed around a particular chord, this piece takes melody as its starting-point. At first, the work appears freely written. A modal plainsong melody in the bass-line on the first two pages is accompanied by a high drone in the tenor and alto parts, and is subsequently imitated throughout the choir, building up a free-moving, increasingly dissonant texture. Neume-notation of the original plainsong line also allows Harvey to interpret rhythms freely, realised on pages 11 to 13 by a direction for each soprano to sing the allocated plainsong phrase in independent time, blurring the line and achieving colourful harmonic ambiguity, punctuated by static, clear-cut chromatic lines beneath. From pages 14 to 16, however, the

soprano line is static, while transposed plainsong fragments beneath are simultaneously set against each other, creating a more defined chromatic section before the return to the original plainsong line in unison by the end of the piece.

Harvey's approach to early music, here, seems at first to bear some similarity to the techniques of Arvo Pärt. However, a link with the spiritual minimalist genre is dubious, considering Harvey's expansive use of chromaticism and a general avoidance of stasis. Although the piece achieves a sense of mysticism, this is through very different means from Pärt's music. Harvey is more concerned, here, with uniting the purity of early sacred music with the vision of the new. He remarks, 'I searched for a way to make plainsong lines... float in pentatonic space and yet take in the passionate world of chromaticism... I wanted it to be eternal without forgetting our slavery to time. Such was the paradoxical dark into which I pushed out'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is necessary to understand that Harvey's work is not about stillness; instead, it plays with musical expectation and constantly aims to expand the boundaries of acceptability.

Thus far, however, despite Harvey's considerable reputation as an *avant-garde* composer, we have not seen any evidence of serial technique in his music for the Church. However, *O Jesu, Nomen Dulce* (1979), is one such example. Regarding the fact that so little atonal cathedral music has found success in the Cathedral, this piece is particularly bold and its effectiveness commendable. Yet despite the twelve-tone construction, its sound is less challenging to the ear than might be anticipated. This is due to attractively lyrical (though serialist) melodic lines, and a homophonic passage on the final page working towards a heard 'resolution' of B flat major, second inversion, though the piece is not 'in' any key. The repetitive use of F as a starting point for the iterations of 'Jesu' (Figure 8) on the first

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey, Jonathan: 'An Approach to Church Music', *The Musical Times*, 131 (1990a), 55.

*♩ = 60*  
 SOPRANO *p* O Je - su. *p* no - men dul - ce.  
 ALTO *p* O Je - su. *p* no - men dul. *a few* *all*  
 TENOR *p* O Je - su.  
 BASS *p* O Je - su.

*a little slower* *a tempo* *mf pp* *a few* *mp*  
 Je - su no - men  
 ce. Je - su  
 Je - su  
 Je - su

*all*  
 ad - mir - a - - - - - mi - ra - bi - le.  
 a ad - - - - - mi - ra - bi - le.

*p* *pp* *f* *all*  
 Je - su. no - men con - for - - -  
 Je - su.  
 Je - su.  
 Je - su.  
 Je - su. con - for -

*sempre f* *(f)* *pp* *ppp*  
 - tans. Je - su.  
 Je - su.  
 Je - su.  
 - tans. Je - su.

*mp cresc.* *mp cresc.* *mp cresc.* *mp cresc.*  
 quid en - im ca - - -  
 quid en - im ca - - -  
 quid en - im ca - - -  
 quid en - iu ca - - -

Fig. 8: O Jesu Nomen Dulce, pages 1-2



two pages leads the ear to wonder whether this is in some way harmonically linked to the final chord as a kind of anticipatory dominant. Such links are apparently illusions, though one cannot help but wonder whether Harvey has included these details to create a subconscious sense of tonal security. They draw the cathedral listener away from focusing on the ‘foreignness’ of atonality in a sacred setting, thus allowing the piece a greater opportunity to succeed.

One look at the score, however, reveals Harvey’s *avant-garde* techniques in full display, with immense stylistic complexity. Curiously, however, the work is characterised by surprisingly melodic lines, that (while atonal) seem to resemble folksong. Appoggiatura embellishments also lend the music an air of improvisation, preventing the music from seeming artificially constructed, despite its atonal language. As these embellishments become more frequent, the melodies even resemble birdsong – no doubt representative of the influence of Messiaen.

Harvey’s attention to detail in *O Jesu, Nomen Dulce* is impeccable. The repetition of the word ‘Jesu’ in the opening section is a starting point from which all tonal developments expand and progress, and this idea is echoed on page six in drawing the initiated ideas together before the static final section begins (bar 64). All twelve semitones are introduced within the first six bars, and the subsequent melismatic lines in each voice-part being fragments of the three serialist rows that characterise the piece from the bottom of page two onwards.

The three main serial rows, each lasting around six bars in length, occur in totality four times throughout the piece and are each made up of nine semitones: A (0, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11), B (0, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) and C (0, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Always presented in conjunction with one other, they are characterised by rhythms and bar patterns that never change, and the recurrence of these rows therefore acts as an effective focus for the ear. However, each recapitulation is

varied through one tone-row in turn being doubled at its octave, sung by two voice-parts while the other tone-rows are distributed to the remaining voice-parts accordingly. This means that the timbre of the reprise constantly alters, and that by the end of the piece, each voice part has sung all three rows at least once. In the first version of this important passage (bar 22), A is allocated to the alto and bass parts, while the second time (bar 27), row B appears in the soprano and tenor lines and the third time (bar 35), row C is doubled by tenor and bass. At the passage's fourth occurrence (bar 57), Row A is doubled once again, but in the alto and bass parts, with new appoggiaic figures adding a sense of fresh lyricism to the lines, preventing conscious realisation of the extent of Harvey's methodical planning (Figure 9).

Fig. 9: *O Jesu Nomen Dulce*, the three rows

The figure displays three rows of musical notation, labeled A, B, and C, each with two staves of music and corresponding lyrics. Row A is marked *mp cresc.* and includes the lyrics: "quid eu - im ca - - - - - ni - tur sua - vius?". Row B is marked *mf cresc.* and includes the lyrics: "quid au - - - - - di - tur ju - cun - dius?". Row C is marked *mf cresc.* and includes the lyrics: "quid co - - - - - gi - ta - - - - - tur dul - cius?". The notation includes various time signatures (3/8, 6/8, 3/4, 2/4) and dynamic markings.

One would imagine that the depth of atonal systematic organisation seen here is in danger of appearing too abstract and consequently unnecessary. Yet these serial rows, in conjunction with each other, are not merely designed to impress the critic of form – they are functional in that their repetition is what holds the piece together. In fact, the four occurrences of the section are used to illustrate the four most poignant lines of the text, that, in conjunction with the Harvey's repeated use of the word 'Jesu', allow the message of the text to be clearly comprehended. The four lines (three questions and the answer) drawn together by the refrain, make perfect sense:

'What indeed is more delightful to sing?'  
 'What is more pleasing to Hear?'  
 'What is sweeter to think on?'  
 'Jesu... Joy of my heart'.

As has been discussed in Chapter One, atonality and the *avant-garde* are not generally perceived as 'communicative', and are not an obvious background of influences for the successful cathedral composer that Harvey has become. Yet while many within the Church of England have often been eager to cast aside the *avant-garde* without consideration, Harvey insists that the genre's exclusiveness and intensity is better suited to underline the spiritual than they imagine. Of his own experience of the *avant-garde*, he comments:

One heard sounds that were extremely beautiful, that sucked one in, in which one could exist as if they were another kind of reality. And I felt even in the more serial and strict works this love of sound for its spiritual nature, for its paradoxical ability both to speak of something beyond and to be itself more intensely.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Griffiths 1985, 51.

However, it is Harvey's self-confessed desire to retain a 'sense of simple spontaneity within an intellectual framework'<sup>7</sup> that draws him apart from other composers of the *avant-garde*. Though his cathedral music repertoire shows indications of the modernist school of thought and a free approach to tonality, his eagerness to create a music that is suitable for its surroundings has allowed him to create a style that, whilst 'inward' in complexity, nevertheless holds the capacity to speak outwardly. This is also fuelled by an eagerness to 'communicate' to others the capacity of the traditionally 'incommunicable':

The magic is in the composer inviting people to expand their individuality into a new region and thereby experience selflessness, egolessness, without losing the sense of a connection....

This can be achieved when unfamiliar sounds take one, literally, into an unfamiliar world. The art of the great composer is to make music so strong that it takes people ever further towards this egolessness which is not nevertheless a loss of the larger self.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, *O Jesu, Nomen Dulce* is important in demonstrating that, contrary to popular supposition, atonal music can be effective in the Church when it is applied in a sensitive and careful manner.

It is obvious to see that every one of Harvey's pieces is unique, and such innovation and originality thus allies his style simultaneously with the *avant-garde*, early music, folksong, and (with the influence of Britten) even the existing cathedral tradition. Consequently, Harvey is a difficult composer to 'pigeon-hole', for he is forever stretching musical boundaries: 'I cannot embark on any piece unless I have this sense of pushing out into the dark, the excitement of looking for the physically new'.<sup>9</sup> The examination of the music in this section reveals

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Griffiths 1985, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey 1990a, 55.

a remarkable ability to use harmony, texture, melody timbre and texture convincingly in many ways. Yet despite many stylistic guises, the pieces are united by their wholeness and self-sufficiency. It would seem that Harvey realises that in order to be effective, a miniature work must be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself; or, as Schlegel expresses it, rather like a hedgehog.<sup>10</sup>

Yet without a doubt, Harvey's greatest achievement stems from his ability to successfully entwine *avant-garde* approach with the cathedral music tradition, a feat which is both rare and of tremendous significance for the cathedral music of the future. Concerning his *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (1978), Harvey expresses this perfectly:

Anyone who knows both the world of *avant-garde* music and the world of Anglican church music cannot fail to be struck by the sad fact that much exciting music of spiritual import hasn't a hope of entering those time-honoured and notoriously conservative portals. Or has it? The vision of our great cathedrals as once again the spearhead of all that is adventurous, imaginative and sacred in our torn culture helped me to write this piece, by no means 'adventurous' by *avant-garde* standards, but certainly exploiting vocal possibilities rarely if ever encountered in liturgical Anglican Evening Canticles before. It embodies a hope'.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2 Giles Swayne (b. 1946)

Giles Swayne was born in Stevenage in 1946, but spent the majority of his early years growing up in Liverpool. Having received piano lessons from the age of eight, Swayne was a musical child, yet it was curiously not until he left school that he decided to pursue music as a career. Upon finishing school in 1963, he

<sup>10</sup> From Friedrich Schlegel's 206th Aetheneum fragment, *Aetheneum Fragments* (1798).

<sup>11</sup> Composer's Notes in *Choral Music by Jonathan Harvey*, press-pack (London: Faber Music, 1987).

obtained a place to study classics at Trinity College, Cambridge, but soon changed to music, studying under Raymond Leppard.

Whilst at Cambridge, he was privileged enough to be taught piano externally by Gordon Green. Swayne found academic music at Cambridge somewhat tedious, and while he was interested in rhythm and colour even at this stage, it meant that his compositional output was small. However, influenced by the chamber works of Bartók and Hindemith, he produced several quartets, of which *Sonata for String Quartet* (1968) and *Chamber Music for Strings* (1970) both reached the final round of the BBC Composer's Competition in the years they were written.

Swayne left Cambridge in 1968, and having spent the summer at a conducting course in Siena, he went to the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he resumed piano lessons with Gordon Green and received compositional tuition with Nicholas Maw for three years, as well as Harrison Birtwistle and Alan Bush. Yet though encouraged in a variety of idioms, his output remained relatively small throughout the seventies. From 1972 and 1974 he became a répétiteur at Glyndebourne, and subsequently completed several commissions whilst teaching, also occasionally attending Messiaen's compositional class in Paris. It was then that Swayne took time to experiment with amplification (as in *Pentecost Music*, 1976-1978), atonality and the *avant-garde* approach.

However, it was in 1979 that his compositional career took a significant turn, and it is the music since then with which this chapter is largely concerned. As with Tavener, Pärt and Harvey, this change involved a sudden alteration in Swayne's approach to the *avant-garde*, though unlike the others, this change occurred in response to something totally un-Western: African pygmy-tribe polyphony.

Swayne had been becoming increasingly disenchanted with the world of contemporary art music for several years. Here was something so refreshingly different that it inspired him with a rush of ideas, and the new-found energy immediately found its voice in *CRY* (1980), a demanding work for twenty-eight solo voices, written for performance by the BBC Singers. The work was hailed by many as Swayne's greatest masterwork, especially due to its strength and passion. Stripping away his musical language, Swayne discarded all unessential melodic and harmonic complexity, taking rhythm as the music's core. Based on the Genesis story of Creation, the voices whisper, speak, shout and shriek, whilst accented rhythms and musical detail highlight particularly expressive moments; the sound is powerfully direct. It is hardly surprising that Swayne has subsequently been dubbed a 'rebellious' composer, if only for his courage to stand apart from Western contemporary art and follow his own language instead.

With the success of *CRY*, Swayne decided to explore this new-found musical language, and having resigned from his teaching-post, he travelled to Africa instead, researching and recording the music of the Jola people of Senegal and the Gambia from 1981 to 1982. On his return, however, he found it difficult to write again in the context of Western society, and consequently, he set up a percussion group named 'Square Root', giving concerts performing with a mixture of African drums.

Swayne's music written in the first half of the 1980s is of bold simplicity in texture and harmony, and particularly rebellious in spirit. *Naaotwa Lala* (1984), for example, a piece dedicated to his second wife, was written for the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, though it purposefully excludes cellos and basses and is built entirely around a five-note scale. Swayne was much criticised for such recklessness, yet he insists that this uncompromising approach acted as a

necessary cleansing from all previous associations with ‘serious’ contemporary art before he could follow his own path with a clear mind.<sup>12</sup>

Since his second marriage, Swayne has made his home in Ghana, occupying himself by writing opera and sacred music and returning to Britain for just a few months each year. Since the latter half of the 1980s, his music has become more challenging for performers than ever. *The Silent Land* (1998), a forty-part motet for choir and cello, echoes Thomas Tallis’ *Spem in Alium*, and is of considerable difficulty, demanding great technical, physical and emotional strength not least in maintaining the intensity of lament for a full thirty minutes. Yet as well as this, Swayne’s more recent work is characterised not only by emotion and rhythmic drive, but as we will see, by impeccable attention to detail.

Since *CRY*, Swayne has written several religious pieces, including two masses, a *Magnificat*, *Nunc Dimittis* and several anthems. Not all are designed for use within the Church – interestingly, it is the works written for the concert hall that demonstrate the extent of his sacred style most clearly.

*Missa Tiburtina* (1985), for SATB choir, is perhaps the most famous example of a sacred piece written principally for secular performance. The mass demonstrates striking sociological awareness, bringing to Western attention the ‘forgotten community’ of the people of South Africa, the state the third world countries and the negative effect of man on the world around him. So great is Swayne’s passion in this aim that despite being a mass of an appropriate length for use in a service (fifteen minutes), its subject matter and irony make it far more suitable for the concert hall than the Cathedral. Indeed, Swayne confesses that the mass is almost an anti-mass,<sup>13</sup> and even if the listener was to disregard the irony

<sup>12</sup> Bowen, Meirion: ‘A Cry From the Heart’, article on Giles Swayne, *The Guardian* (17/02/88).

<sup>13</sup> Power, Matthew: ‘Out of Africa’, article on Giles Swayne, *Choir and Organ*, 3 (July 1995), 18.



entirely, it remains inappropriate for the service through drawing intentional attention to itself rather than God. It is easy to lose sight of the music as a carrier for holy words.

Each movement uses a variety of different stylistic methods, but in the knowledge of the irony that is implied, the voices are heard as singing with a tone of resentment and sadness, with minor, harmonic patterns, sorrowful sighs and angry jutting notes. The 'Hosanna' section of the *Benedictus* movement, for instance, while constructed around a major key, is so short and staccato that it seems almost flippant, whilst the choir's deep, jarring groans and the long chromatic cries in the *Agnus Dei* movement express a ominous feeling of death. Such darkness is emphasised by rich harmonic chords, representing the African traditions, religions and ways of life that have been lost through Western repression. *Dona Nobis Pacem*, 'grant us peace', becomes a suitably symbolic people's call for mercy, being sung entirely in this homophonic style; a fitting end to a moving piece.

Swayne's sociological awareness is brought to life through the provision of his own, sombre programme notes with each performance, preparing the listener for the music's powerful emotional force:

The rich nations of the world, out of a mixture of greed, insecurity and muddle-headedness, are starving the poor nations to death... Living in an age of unbelief, we look to man to solve our problems. But this problem (man-made, like most) is too vast and too intractable, and man seems not to have the wit or the will to tackle it.

That is how this piece came about. It is a prayer for sanity, an appeal to a higher authority. While you listen to it (or while you sing it) remember that in the course of its fifteen minutes, 450 children will have died of starvation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> From Swayne's programme notes to *Missa Tiburtina* (1985).

Such a passage is hardly comforting. Yet despite holding an irony that is intentionally uncomfortable for the Westerner and African alike, *Missa Tiburtina* nevertheless leads to a realisation of God's necessity by efficiently humbling the listener. Although in the concert-hall, the audience is led to perceive the mass as a powerful and moving prayer.

The effectiveness of such a deep-rooted subtext is a good example of Swayne's command over the listener's emotion through the intensity of musical directness. Yet *Missa Tiburtina* demonstrates Swayne's compositional style at its most extreme. The religious repertoire that is specifically designed for cathedral use is – perhaps thankfully – slightly more contained.

*Magnificat* (1982), scored for SSAATTBB, was commissioned by Francis Grier for the choir of Christ Church, Oxford. Interestingly, the work was not originally accompanied by a *Nunc Dimittis*, though it is often coupled with his setting written four years later, designed specifically for that purpose. Consequently, however, *Magnificat* carries a strong, independent musical spirit – it is vital to understand it as a piece in its own right.

Written in the wake of *CRY*, the piece's African influence is clearly recognisable; George Hall has commented that the *Magnificat* is 'the ebullience of *CRY* on a miniature scale'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, its exuberant spirit allies it well to the energetic celebration of life expressed in the former work. It similarly encompasses a wide spectrum of colour, timbre and texture. Yet whereas *CRY* moves continually between speech and song, adopting daringly free vocal techniques, *Magnificat* remains sung throughout, and is far less fragmentary in design. It is also not reliant on any further movements to justify unexpected

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<sup>15</sup> Hall, George: CD notes to *The Choral Music of Giles Swayne*, The BBC Singers conducted by Stephen Cleobury (Collins Classics CD 15312, 1998).

changes. Instead, *Magnificat* is a joyful exultation completely in harmony with the message of its text.

Fig. 10: *Magnificat*, opening page (© Novello & Co. Ltd 1986)

The musical score for the opening of *Magnificat* is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked  $\text{♩} = 132$ . The Soprano and Tenor parts begin with a soft *p* dynamic, singing the word "Ma-". The Bass part begins with a loud *f* dynamic, playing a sweeping melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment is marked "Accompt. (for rehearsal only)" and features a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 132$  and a *W6* marking. The second system shows the vocal parts and piano accompaniment continuing. The lyrics are: "-ñi - fi - cat. a - ni - ma me - a Do-mi-num. ma-". The Soprano and Tenor parts sing "Ma - ñi - fi - cat. a - ni - ma". The Bass part sings "Ma - ñi - fi - cat. a - ni - ma". The piano accompaniment continues with a rhythmic pattern of short, detached quavers.

The piece opens with a loud, sweeping melodic phrase, sung by the basses, adopting the tonality of D major (despite the key signature's one sharp). African connotations are implied by the acclamation, 'Wo-e', while the tune's ebullience provides a fitting contrast to the short, detached quavers that characterise Swayne's rendering of the actual prayer (Figure 10). Yet though it is not stated on the score, the tune's origins are far from religious: the melody is actually an African ploughing song. Thus, while the melody brings the setting to life, the piece nevertheless runs a high risk of criticism for the incorporation of such an out-of-context tune. 'Of course, many people in the profession thought I had gone

off my head',<sup>16</sup> Swayne once remarked, and indeed, such knowledge prompts substantial theological questions about whether the tune is intended to complement or distract. Nevertheless, it is a good example of Swayne's tendency to bind elements of African rhythm and song that are unrelated (to religion and each other), making them appear contextual in the eyes of ignorant Westerners. This process, incidentally, resembles the compositional approach of Tavener, who, as we recall from Chapter Two, draws great influence from Greek Orthodox music. There is nothing to guarantee that the sounds produced in Tavener's own work are any more authentically Greek than Swayne's are African. From the *Magnificat*, at least, it would seem that the African feel to Swayne's music is actually created by cunning pastiche.

Here, the *Magnificat* prayer is in Latin, and Swayne interestingly alters the word 'Magnificat' by dropping its 'g': 'Mañificat'. It is unclear why this may be, for while this equips the word with a gentler sound, it is only ever presented here with rhythmical, detached quavers, defying a sense of flow. However, the lack of a 'g' goes some way to prevent the detached syllables from sounding too clipped, so that the listener perceives each syllable as identically balanced.

Naturally enough, rhythm plays a vital role in the work. Yet this is far from complex; in the same way as Swayne's rhythmic detail is usually constructed, it arises almost entirely from simple quaver-patterning rather than detailed syncopation. As the piece progresses, the choir divides, gradually undermining the beat by accenting off-beats caused by individual parts working in canon (a favourite technique of Swayne) though the main beat is never totally eradicated. Changes in time signature at the beginning of each new section liven the flow of the piece, whilst long-held notes sustained through fragmented textures provide a sense of continuity amid the tension of thickening textures and rhythms.

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<sup>16</sup> Swayne in Bowen 1988.

Noticeably, the detached quavers are generally quiet, gradually creating a sense of foreboding through their persistence without being too intrusive. This allows the 'Wo-e' melody and the sustained, long-held notes running through the piece to seem particularly free, in contrast, providing opportunity for the suppressed energy of the more regimented sections to escape.

Harmonically, the piece begins in D major, confirmed by a D / F sharp third in the tenor part of bar nine. However, this does not last long, and since the choir is almost entirely concerned with intervals of fifths, the tonal centre slides easily between an implied D major, A minor, B minor and E minor, with occasional C naturals helping to create a more modal feel, as at bar 40. Thus, 'Wo-e' becomes based on E as early as bar 31, while the choir's suspense-thrilling chant of the Gloria from bar 60 is alternatively built upon the tonality of B. Then at bar 74, a return to D sends a similar cycle into motion, which eventually arrives at an Amen section on E, restricted to a pentatonic scale of D, E, G, A and B for the last six pages (bar 90 to the end). All this method, dictating laws for harmonic development, seems tedious when examined in detail. However, it has the advantage of allowing Swayne to be as creative as he wishes within the confines of his own conditions. As he says, 'it has to be a harmonic world which is balanced by structural control, otherwise the ear would fall back on convention'.<sup>17</sup>

Purposefully, there is therefore little freedom from established rhythm or harmonic modes until the first soprano's final note, releasing the listener back into the world of silence in which the piece began. Yet cleverly, rhythmic intensity does not suddenly cease at this point, but is gradually distilled during the last six pages by the time-signature's alteration to an irregular 5/4 (confusing the beat)

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<sup>17</sup> Swayne in Power 1995, 19.

and the soprano line's gradual climb above the texture. Thus the attention is drawn away from the resolute staccato quaver movement beneath.

*Nunc Dimittis* (1986) for SATB and organ, was written as an afterthought to the *Magnificat* four years later, containing an 'Amen' section built on the same pentatonic scale and decorated with similar melodic motifs, though the piece is more concerned with dissonance (a throwback, perhaps, to Swayne's chromatic language of the 1970s). It is closely related to the *Magnificat* by its rhythm, canonic patterning filling the piece with an even greater feeling of electricity since the choir is divided into three groups rather than two.

It is often taken for granted that the use of such controlled rhythms as expressed so openly in these two pieces is a feature of Swayne's African influence. Indeed, it is a feature of practically every work that he has written since the early 1980s. However, the rhythmic energy also bears a certain similarity to the musical design of the early Tippett – perhaps Swayne's music is not quite as 'new' and 'different' as the media would have us believe. Nevertheless, Swayne's self-confessed African influence is valuable (both within the Cathedral and without) in encouraging a healthy awareness of another culture apart from our own, which is precisely what Swayne attempts to achieve. Whether representative of Western or African roots, the current Western fashion for 'world music', together with the fact that Swayne is still essentially a 'British' composer, is certain to ensure his recognition for many years to come.

In cathedral circles, it is (predictably enough) the vibrant spirit of Swayne's music which has prompted attention. Whereas innumerable cathedral composers have made the words the central focus by surrounding them with passive, ethereal music, Swayne is adamant that music and text should be bound by drama and emotion. The two elements exist at the core of both music and art, and are

essential to religion. It was musical passivity that finally drove Swayne away from the English Church, and with this in mind, it seems unsurprising that he should feel so strongly about changing the tone: ‘It’s that holier-than-thou sound which I’d like to eliminate. I don’t think it’s even appropriate to sacred music; if God’s any good, he’s certainly not “namby-pamby”’.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, Swayne’s music achieves an attractive balance between Western and African sound, though he will always be hindered from writing *authentic* African music by his ‘European imagination’.<sup>19</sup> Yet for the Cathedral, the style is ideal, for it can be perceived as exciting and innovative whilst never seeming ‘too foreign’. For Swayne, this is positive, for as he admits, his central aim is ultimately one of communication (reflected, as we have seen, in such details as the irony of *Missa Tiburtina* and the intensity and joy expressed in the *Magnificat*): ‘I just want my music to be capable of speaking directly to people... to anyone who has ears to hear and is prepared to listen’.<sup>20</sup> Thus, having found in the Anglican Cathedral an audience that is always appreciative of his work, this must be, for Swayne, one of the greatest achievements of all.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3 Judith Weir (b. 1954)

Born into an Aberdeenshire family in 1954, Judith Weir was surrounded by music from an early age. Since her parents were keen amateur musicians, folk music and performing music in the home were a natural part of everyday life, elements that have had a profound influence on Weir's own approach to writing during her career. Though her family moved down from Scotland to north London during her childhood, Weir began composing at secondary school by writing works for her friends to perform, as a way of involving the community around her: 'It was really something of a subversive hobby – I would write an outrageous, anarchic piece for a huge group of friends playing anything from bagpipe chanters to dustbin lids and see if I could get away with it'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, this is something that has lasted; all of Weir's music carries a primary awareness of the performers and the idiom for which she is composing. Never is her music better understood on paper rather than aurally.

Whilst a teenager, Weir lived very near to the home of John Tavener, and regularly took her compositions to him for tuition and advice. Upon leaving school, she went to America, spending a semester at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology studying computer music, followed two years later by a semester at Tanglewood, composing under the guidance of Gunther Schuller. Schuller provided her with the necessary criticism and advice to pinpoint a more absolute style, whilst aiding her to accurately assess her own capabilities.

From 1973 to 1976, Weir studied at Cambridge University, and was tutored by the English composer Robin Holloway. Significantly, Tavener had not been keen on the contemporary work of Stockhausen and the Darmstadt avant-gardists, and this, together with Holloway's sense of tonality and musical line seems to have

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<sup>21</sup> Knighton, Tess: *Judith Weir*, a composer brochure interview (London: Chester Music, 1988).



been the initial cause of her imaginative, clear-cut, ‘harmonic’ musical language. Though she regards her studies in computer music in the States as valuable, that she has not pursued the idiom since is indicative of the enormity of these two composers’ influence, coupled with her inherited Scottish background of melody and folk.

In 1976, Weir was appointed the Composer-in-Residence for the Southern Arts Association, yet despite the title, she feels the maturity of her compositional approach owes a lot more to her time teaching at Glasgow University from 1979 to 1982.<sup>22</sup> Working and living among professional musicians is exactly what Weir needed to refine her writing style and involve herself with performers.

From hereon, her compositional style obtained a firmer character. She wrote for chamber groups, orchestras and choirs too, involving herself with many kinds of musical work, gaining wide experience. From 1983 to 1985, she held an Arts fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, allowing her to dedicate a large amount of time to composing rather than teaching. It was here that she undertook study of Serbian and Croatian folk music, and also obtained interest in the musical dramas of China and medieval texts. Following the latter strand, she then produced *The Consolations of Scholarship* (1985), drawing upon the 13th and 14th century Yuan dramas of China, and subsequently *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987). However, her music rarely quotes directly from folk-song – instead, it is the principle of folk-song that serves more as the inspiration for the long, lyrical melodies around which many of her pieces are built.

In 1988, she was made Composer-in-Residence of the Royal School of Art, Music and Drama, where she remained for three years composing orchestral / ensemble works for a constant flow of commissions. During the 1990s, she has

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

become regarded as an instinctive operatic composer. As well as *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, she has also written three other operatic works, the most notable of which is *The Vanishing Bridegroom* (1990). Closely followed by the ambitious *Heaven ABLAZE in his Breast* (1989) a multimedia work set for amplified SSATBB voices, two pianos and eight dancers. Whilst beginning as a dance, the piece ends as an energetic extravaganza of sound. Its originality and innovation is important, demonstrating that Weir is completely unafraid of merging the boundaries of art, music and dance.

Admittedly, the majority of Weir's output has been for the stage and the opera house. Yet she is nevertheless considered an important composer of Christian music due to a unique combination of dramatic flair, a linear sense of melodic line and creative intricacy in a style that aims to be appreciated by many whilst preventing the music from sounding at all derivative or unoriginal. The greatest confirmation of her status as a sacred writer came four years ago, when she was commissioned by Helmut Rilling to compose a *Sanctus* movement for a sacred concert piece entitled *Requiem of Reconciliation* (1995), for performance as part of a fourteen movement work commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two. Weir was among fourteen contemporary composers from around the world to be involved, including Penderecki, Berio, Nordheim, Schnittke, Rands, Kurtág and Rihm, and the only composer from Great Britain, and was awarded a CBE the same year.

The *Sanctus*, though not actually for the Church, is a fitting representation of Weir's overall style. It places great emphasis on treble sound, being scored for triple woodwind with a full orchestra, two soloists and full chorus, and in its context within the *Requiem*, this brightness of timbre (naturally emphasised by an attractive harmonic language) provides welcome relief from the darkness of the

contributions that precede it. Immense differences in tone and mood between each movement is a symptom of the fact that the composers all worked separately on the project. Although each composer was given a copy of plainsong from the *Liber Usualis* to quote in some way, very few composers made use of the chant. Yet for Weir, as a composer for whom a linear sense is very important, the melody provided an ideal starting point for the movement's construction.

Plainsong is quoted in the first three entries, and subsequently, principal rhythms and motives arise out of quintuplet patterns emerging from the scansion rhythms of 'Sanctus Dominus', 'Deus Sabaoth' and later, 'Pleni sunt caeli'. The music is characterised by a feeling of joy, drama achieved the repetition of these rhythms amid dramatic trumpet fanfares and a *tutti* section of glorious rejoicing. The soloist's passage is characterised by detailed coloratura, in dialogue with the woodwind, before the quintuplet patterns reunite us with the first half of the piece. Three calls of 'Hosanna' act as a fitting end to the movement, echoing the peaceful serenity with which the piece began. The listener is left with a lasting memory of the work's vivacity and visionary spark. This is drama, so to speak, contained within the framework of holiness.

Yet though she has frequently composed large-scale works and is happy to evolve musical ideas over long stretches of time, this is not to say that Weir's smaller works do not contain the same amount of drama, contrast or musical profundity. Indeed, Weir appears comfortable writing in any idiom, and one of her greatest talents is her ability to condense and miniaturise the essence of her style according to the forces, space and time available. What is particularly impressive about the smaller works, therefore, is the detail of construction in every piece.

The two anthems that have received the most attention among cathedrals were written around fifteen years ago. However, the features of the works of the 1980s are still recognisably linked to her style today, for whereas every composer examined thus far has undergone some kind of compositional ‘death’ and ‘renaissance’, Judith Weir has maintained a steadier path. Her musical character has simply matured, becoming more of itself with the passing of time, leaving little reason why these anthems should not still be classed as contemporary repertoire. Neither has Weir ceased writing sacred music for commission since these anthems were produced, as the *Sanctus* shows. It is simply the responsibility of cathedral commissioners to ensure that her talent is not neglected, but realised to its full potential.

Weir’s first major anthem, *Ascending into Heaven* (1983), is a piece for SATB choir and organ, commissioned for performance at the 1983 St. Albans International Organ Festival by the St. Alban’s Abbey Choir, conducted by Stephen Darlington. The prayer describes the scene of Heaven and expresses a longing for the ‘ascent’ to the life to come. The author of the prayer is Hildebert de Lavardin (1056-1133), Bishop of Le Mans and Archbishop of Tours, and the choice of text reflective of Weir’s long-term attraction to medieval writing:

These texts are... free from imagery and metaphor, which certainly English poetry has been so much bound up with.... I think for a composer it is actually very dangerous to set texts which have too much imagery, because already there’s a layer of abstraction, and the music adds another.<sup>23</sup>

*Ascending into Heaven* could not be a better name for Weir’s anthem, for the piece ‘ascends’ in every way. Even on the first page, the lines of the text and its translation have been set at a diagonal angle so that the poetry appears to slope forward; the verse’s layout also mischievously forms the shape of an escalator.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Standing back from the page, the text also resembles the shape of a dove, its wings extended, a symbol of the peace of Heaven, perhaps, that the prayer intends to express (Figure 11).

Fig. 11: *Ascending into Heaven*, text page (© Novello & Co. Ltd 1986)

Me receptet Sion illa	<i>May Sion receive me</i>	
Sion David urbs tranquilla	<i>Sion, the peaceful city of David</i>	
Cujus faber auctor lucis	<i>Whose maker is the creator of light</i>	
Cujus portae lignum crucis	<i>Whose gates are the wood of the cross</i>	
Cujus claves lingua Petri	<i>Whose keys are Peter's word</i>	
Cujus cives semper laeti	<i>Whose citizens are always happy</i>	
Cujus muri lapis vivus	<i>Whose walls are a living stone</i>	
Cujus custos rex festivus	<i>Whose guardian is the ruler of the feast.</i>	
In hac urbe lux solennis	<i>In this city light is undying</i>	
Ver aeternum, pax perennis	<i>Spring eternal, peace perennial</i>	
In hac odor implens caelos	<i>In this city, perfume fills the sky</i>	
In hac festum semper melos	<i>In this city, there is always festive melody.</i>	
Urbs caelestis, urbs beata	<i>Heavenly city, blessed city</i>	
Super Petram collocata	<i>City built upon a rock</i>	
Urbs in portu satis tuto	<i>City built on a safe haven</i>	
De longinquo te saluto	<i>From afar I salute thee</i>	
Te saluto, te suspiro	<i>I salute thee, I sigh for thee,</i>	
Te affecto, te requiro	<i>I aspire to thee, I seek thee</i>	
Quantum tui gratulentur	<i>How much thy people rejoice in thee</i>	
Quam festive conviventur	<i>How merrily they feast</i>	
Quis affectus eos stringat	<i>What desire binds them together</i>	
Aut quae gemma muros pingat	<i>What gems adorn their walls</i>	
Quis chalcedon, quis jacinthus	<i>What chalcedon, what jacinth</i>	
Norunt illi qui sunt intus	<i>Those who dwell within know.</i>	
In plateis hujus urbis	<i>In the streets of this city</i>	
Sociatus piis turbis	<i>Mingling with the bands of the saints</i>	
Cum Moyse et Elia	<i>With Moses and Elijah</i>	
Pium cantem Alleluia	<i>May I sing my devout Alleluia.</i>	

Registration settings for organ are detailed and designed with care, balanced against the choir at all times. The piece opens with an excited upward flurry from the lowest registers of the organ, speeding in pace towards the top where it is met with a outburst from the upper voices: 'Sion', with the incredibly bright syllable, 'zee'. Next, as the organ part prepares to climb again, the choir enters together at the bottom of the second page, glissandoing ecstatically upwards at the very mention of the place. The sound becomes louder, the organ's new-found clusters preparing a glorious way for the arrival of the soprano soloist. All falls silent, and out of the calm comes a gentle voice, declaiming with a flowing melody the glory of the world to come. The 'overture' is complete, yet we have only reached the top of page four: musical detail is incredibly intricate.

Operatic parallels are immediately obvious. Yet though the score's dramatic effect, created through layers of intricate word-painting (even in a small anthem such as this) would take an age to list, we must remember that the emotions, atmospheres and mental pictures that the music implies slip past in a brief moment of real-time. The paragraph above gives some idea of the fastidiousness of Weir's compositional language, but to analyse the entire piece in such detail would be unnecessarily tedious, for these effects are not designed to be the centre of attention in performance, but rather to affect at an unobtrusive, more subconscious level.

In any case, the musical construction of these first four pages actually holds the key to the entire piece. The organ part is concerned with ascension through its registers, pausing only in its upward path to illustrate a moment of peace or to aid the impression given by the words that the speaker is really there (as on page 11, 'In hac caelos': in *this* city, and page 19, 'In plateis hujus urbis': in the streets of *this* city). Register-ascension also occurs in the voices, though in a different way, for the lilting, 'folkish' melody (running as a thread from the beginning to the end with little exact repetition) does not obey the same rules as the organ's tonality. Instead, Weir uses the voice parts to illustrate the author's mental 'nearness' to Heaven. The voice parts ascend together to illustrate glory (page 12, 'In hac festum semper melos': in this city, there is always festal melody), yet more strikingly is the setting of the very middle of the poem (pages 13-16):

Urbs caelestis, urbs beata	<i>Heavenly city, blessed city</i>
Super Petram collocata	<i>City built upon a rock</i>
Urbs in portu satis tuto	<i>City built on a safe haven</i>
De longinquo, te saluto	<i>From afar I salute thee</i>
Te saluto, te suspiro	<i>I salute thee, I sigh for thee</i>
Te affecto, te requiro	<i>I aspire to thee, I seek thee.</i>

Having just been speaking of ‘in this city’ as if he were really there, the author now addresses Heaven again from afar. In contrast to the choir and organ’s high climb on page 13, the tenors and basses now predominate, creating symbolic distance between themselves and Heaven through following an established understanding that Heaven is somewhere in the highest of registers that the male voices are incapable of reaching alone. It is only at the top of page 16, with the final line of this section, therefore, that the voices begin to climb again as a full choir, illustrating the moving declaration reaching out for God, ‘te requiro’ (Figure 12).

Fig. 12: *Ascending into Heaven*, page 16, system 1 (© Novello & Co. Ltd 1986)

The musical score for 'Ascending into Heaven' on page 16, system 1, is presented in a standard musical notation format. It includes four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are 'Te sa - lu - to, sus - pi - ro, re - qui - ro, re - qui - ro'. The vocal parts start with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and gradually increase to forte (f) by the end of the system. The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The score includes dynamic markings such as mp, mf, f, p, pp, and subito, as well as performance instructions like 'niente' and 'subito'. The piano part includes a section for woodwinds: Sw. + 8' Oboe & 8' Flute, Ch. + 4' & 8' Principal.

In the ‘Alleluia’ section (from the middle of page 21), features from the beginning of the piece return, and the organ adopts a similar rising motive to that of the first few bars of the work. With *pianissimo* background chords, however, the choir now converts the excitement that characterises the start of the work into an air of peace, subsequent *glissandi* now being permitted to ascend upwards without limit, perhaps as the title suggests, finally ‘into Heaven’. This idea is

touchingly emphasised by the choir's last three utterances of 'Alleluia' which end on the first syllable of the word, 'A--'. In the drift away to silence, eternal praise is sustained (Figure 13).

Fig. 13: *Ascending into Heaven*, final page (© Novello & Co. Ltd 1986)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are marked with dynamics *f* and *mp*, and the word "niente" is written above the notes. A glissando is indicated by "gliss." with a slur. A note marked "A" is present in each vocal part. The piano accompaniment includes a section marked "Gt." and another marked ".Sw. - all stops + Mixture" with dynamics *mf* and *mp*. The second system continues the vocal parts with dynamics *mp* and *p*, and the piano accompaniment with a section marked "Ch.".

i.e. finish the glissando immediately after the barline

*f* niente *mp* niente

*f* niente *f* niente

*f* niente *f* niente

*f* niente *f* niente

Gt. .Sw. - all stops + Mixture *mf* *mp*

i.e. finish immediately before the barline

*mp* *p* niente

*mp* *p* niente

*f* *mp* niente

*f* *mp* niente

Ch.

It is true that the piece is harmonic, but Weir's harmonic language does not work vertically, but laterally. Similarly to Swayne's musical technique, the piece is not 'in' any key, but conscious tonal harmonies are used to conjure effects of stability, serenity and glory where necessary. However, harmony mostly results



from parts moving freely against each other in their own lateral path, woven around a strong, tuneful melody – harmonies happen incidentally.

However, as it is possible to see from the organ part, the detail of harmonic construction is often astoundingly complex, and for this reason, Weir has often been puzzled by critics eager to bracket her as a straight-forward harmonic composer. Yet as David Wright recognises, ‘Weir’s predilection for relationships and material based around the third (as well as fourths and fifths) make the tonal label rather inevitable’.<sup>24</sup> There is nothing ‘simple’ about the intricate nature of her work, but the fact that she has so often been labelled as a ‘readable’ composer is, perhaps, a testament to her tendency to perfect until the music is so well-designed that on the surface, it seems simpler than ever.

As a British composer, Weir is perhaps best allied to Benjamin Britten in her enthusiasm for opera and ability to write in musical idioms both large and small. It is easy to see, through her music’s clarity, drama and crafted accessibility, why she has become (and has remained) so favoured by many of the musicians of English cathedrals over the last fifteen years. Weir’s concern for writing music that can be as appropriate as possible for its performers means that cathedral choirs can only benefit from her work, for her anthems are exceptional in maximising the cathedral choir’s sound to its best potential without ever demanding too much in terms of technical ability. The care with which her pieces are constructed is also positive for a cathedral tradition so keen to maintain a sense of quality in its newer works. Thus, Weir has remained cherished by the Church – composers of such imagination and integrity are few and far between.

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<sup>24</sup> Wright, David: ‘Weir to Now?’ article on Judith Weir, *The Musical Times*, 134 (1993), 434.

### 3.4 Common Themes

While Harvey, Swayne and Weir's compositional styles differ from one another, all three are linked by one element: communication. Symptomatic of post-modernism, their music is a testament to the fact that many composers are now abandoning modernist exclusivity and are reaching out to audiences instead. Positively, as it was identified in Chapter One, such communicative attributes also mean that post-modern classical art-music can easily be embraced within the Cathedral where modernist and avant-garde music was treated more cautiously. However, the fact that these composers are better known for their secular and concert-hall music than their cathedral repertoire suggest that this is a relatively recent realisation within the Church. This also reflects the small amount of publicity within the cathedral community that accompanies such music, compared with the advertising of secular music elsewhere – it is performance that is this music's greatest promoter.

It has been said that post-modernism unites rather than divides, since it seeks to find a way of making even the most complex of music accessible to the masses. Indeed, this would seem to be the case. What marks these composers out as being particularly special is that they boldly use their compositional skill to combine sacred music with new methods and influences, whilst keeping communication as the central criteria. In their creativeness, they are unafraid to adopt unusual timbres and vocal techniques, whilst remaining sensitive to the needs of cathedral performers and congregations. Their work is the combination of art-music and practicality at its best.

This sensitivity is perhaps most visible in the work of Harvey. Though admitting that he draws much influence from serialism and the *avant-garde*, the musical design of his sacred pieces is such that it is not necessary to have a

graphic understanding of his musical method in order to appreciate them. The compositional construction of the work is always detailed, yet complexity is concealed to a certain extent beneath a smooth musical surface, communicating a particular mood or emotion that captures the listener's attention above all else (a technique that is certainly not representative of his *avant-garde* roots). Thus, with the music's meaning being clearly displayed, inner complexity becomes illustrative detail rather than a distraction. All that remains 'undefinable' to the ear, meanwhile, is appropriately associated with the mystical and numinous.

In this way, it would seem that rhythmic, tonal and structural design can be prevented from being obtrusive when directness and emotional expression are uppermost in the construction of a piece. This trend, in aiding the communication of the work, does not only occur with Harvey, but is also a feature of the other two composers' styles; Swayne's music is typically bound by rhythm whilst Weir's is held together by lateral melody and drama.

Although the three writers' styles differ greatly in sound, they are united by the concern for communication. Interestingly, however, this is not to say that all three merely draw upon Western methods, for as it can be seen, their music arises out of a wide range of influences. For Harvey, this is primarily the *avant-garde*, for Swayne, African rhythm, and for Weir it is operatic drama. The willingness to draw influence from musical cultures and traditions beyond their own and the desire to merge boundaries between separate cultures and traditions parallels the Western preoccupation with other cultures, peoples and eras that has been so evident over the last generation. It could be argued that this, in itself, is yet another symptom of post-modernism. What could be more appropriate, we might ask, for a cathedral tradition now eager to embrace the essence of our time?

On further reflection, the music of these composers is of great value to the Cathedral. Not only does it represent the voices of traditions beyond the Western and religious spheres, but their success in their capacity as classical art-music composers also means that the presence of this music in the Church helps to ensure that the standard of excellence that has come to be associated with the cathedral tradition is upheld by outer influences. Assured, adventurous and original, their work is sure to prove an inspiration for other composers to follow for generations to come, for ‘music breaks barriers; music honours differences; music predicts possibility’.<sup>25</sup>

In recent years, however, the general decline in the funding available for the commissioning of work by these composers has meant greater reliance on less expensive writers who are familiar with the cathedral genre though far less visionary in approach. Here, there is the danger that through neglecting to finance the commissioning of these more famous and talented writers, cathedrals may unintentionally encourage a more narrow, specialised repertoire than is desirable, looking back to old achievements rather than forward to new heights. However, between them, these radical composers are fully capable of asserting and reshaping the direction of cathedral music to lead it forward into the next century with distinction and confidence. All they need to be given is the chance.




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<sup>25</sup> Wyton, Alec: ‘The Episcopal Tradition’, Hoffman, Lawrence A. & Walton, Janet R: *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 283.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The 'Specialist' Cathedral Music Writers: Alan Ridout and John Rutter

Cathedral Choral Services are fundamentally English, unmatched by anything of the kind on the Continent of Europe. There is a vast store of first-rate English music to be drawn upon, and English music must never be allowed to lose its predominant position in the daily Cathedral Services at the expense of foreign compositions – even the best.<sup>1</sup>

So far, we have examined the music of composers whose work is characterised by influences from outside the Cathedral sphere. However, it is all too easy to forget that many of the composers writing for the Cathedral today are not as much concerned with bringing new influences into the Church as with building upon the existing foundations laid down by generations of cathedral composers before them.

During the course of my investigation, I have encountered a widespread belief that such music, being largely composed for utilitarian purposes, is not worthy of comment. Yet in examining contemporary cathedral music as a complete genre, this group of composers (the largest of the three considered) is fundamental to discussion. Further, as this chapter will show, the fact that the music is composed by those who consistently write for this particular means does not necessarily imply that it is inconsequential.

The writers of this genre, specialising in sacred music, are often British cathedral organists writing 'everyday' material for their own choirs, such as Philip Moore (York), Simon Lole (Salisbury) and Paul Trepte (Ely), or composers

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<sup>1</sup> Fellowes, Edmund H., *English Cathedral Music: From Edward VI to Edward VII* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941), 201.

affiliated to a particular cathedral: Tustin Baker (Sheffield), Ronald Perrin (Ripon) and Anthony Piccolo (Canterbury). Until recently, this music was rarely published; since the music was usually designed for a single establishment, it often seemed of little relevance to other places, and where the music was appropriate for wider use, it could be cross-pollinated more directly by organists moving from one cathedral to another. This is a major cause of the wealth of unpublished manuscript scores still hiding in cathedral libraries from many years ago.

However, with newer music, this situation is far less the case. While the sacred choral music departments of some publishing firms (such as Stainer and Bell) have drastically decreased in size over the last thirty years,<sup>2</sup> the influence of publishers upon cathedral repertoire has never been greater. In Britain alone, there are over forty firms publishing contemporary sacred choral music, many of which are also linked to publishing firms abroad. This means that cathedrals can easily obtain new and diverse repertoire without any need for commissioning. Consequently, any 'sacred specialist' composers not in the habit of publishing would be in danger of being left behind; it is no surprise to discover that such works are rapidly finding their way to being published. Indeed, the success of newer companies such as Kevin Mayhew Ltd. and Cathedral Music Ltd. rests almost entirely on the sale of new sacred choral works, and the demand for publication is so great that the process can take anything up to two years. Having consulted publishers and combed the libraries of several cathedrals in England, it would seem that there is very little material written for the Cathedral today that is not considered for publication, whatever its style or seemingly mundane purpose. For example, organists such as Philip Ledger and Stephen Cleobury have

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<sup>2</sup> Following the lack in demand of for 'classical'-crafted sacred music in parishes since the Cathedral/Parish divide and the growth of evangelical-style music since the 1960s.

published their own specialist descants, and the *CSCM* alone records over a hundred currently published sets of Responses.

The music of ‘specialist’ cathedral composers, being designed especially for cathedral choirs and everyday services, makes up by far the largest part of the cathedral music repertoire. Unsurprisingly, the music of these writers differs immensely according to individual talents and tendencies, yet it is united by the common aim of accessibility and total suitability for the cathedral context. Remembering the extensive size of the genre, however, this chapter examines the musical approach as a cross-section, looking at the music of two of the most significant and successful specialist composers of the age: Alan Ridout and John Rutter.

#### **4.1 Alan Ridout (1934-1996)**

Alan John Ridout, the younger of two sons, was born in West Wickam, Kent in 1934. However, most of his youth was spent growing up in the London suburb of Mill Hill. A musical child, Ridout sang everywhere he went, ‘playing with pitches as other children play with bricks or Meccano’,<sup>3</sup> yet despite wanting to play the piano from a very early age, his father prevented him from receiving musical education for several years. It was only due to strong intervention by his mother that Ridout was finally granted lessons at the age of nine, by which time he had already begun to compose, transcribing the musical sounds that he heard in his head using symbols that he had learnt from a music book. By the time he was twelve, Ridout reached Grade Eight standard, and was then taught by Claude de Ville, at the Wigmore Hall Studios in London. During the following years, as well as writing music, Ridout became familiar with the music of Wood, Stanford and

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<sup>3</sup> Ridout, Alan: *A Composer's Life* (London: Thames Publishing, 1995), 12.

other Victorian church composers through singing as a chorister at St. Michael's and All Angels, Mill Hill.

In 1946, Ridout was accepted into Haberdasher's Aske's School in Hampstead, where he received extra tuition in harmony and counterpoint, and quickly began to establish a sense of compositional identity. Though a rebellious teenager, Ridout tried to learn how pieces were constructed, illicitly purchasing miniature scores with money 'borrowed' from his father's wallet, and playing truant on frequent occasions to travel to the public library to sit and write scores. It is little wonder that, attracting the hostility of authorities so readily, he was removed from the school in 1949, yet he succeeded in taking with him a huge repertoire of over a hundred works, reflecting his prolific nature.

The following year, 1950, Ridout entered the Guildhall School of Music, where he received piano lessons from George Rogers and learnt how to conduct. His only disappointment there was in his compositional tuition, having been placed under the guidance of the very elderly Orlando Morgan, who had been a student at the Guildhall himself in 1881. Morgan knew little of twentieth century music, so Ridout took it upon himself to send some of his own manuscripts to Benjamin Britten, who wrote back encouragingly. This prompted him to apply for the Royal College of Music, and having gained a place, he began in 1951, tutored by Thornton Lofthouse, Sir George Dyson, Gordon Jacob and Herbert Howells. Here, Ridout remained for four years, and during this time, also offered several works to the SPNM, all but one of which were accepted for performance, and conducted in a series of workshop concerts by Peter Racine Fricker, with whom he also received external compositional tuition.

Upon leaving the Royal College, Ridout expected to be called up for military service, but he was rejected on medical grounds. Thus, he subsequently took a



teaching post at Holmewood House, a boys' preparatory school near Tunbridge Wells, where he gave between eighty and ninety lessons a week in a variety of instruments and became acquainted with Michael Tippett. Yet being a teacher by day and composer by night soon exhausted him, and at the onset of nervous breakdown he was forced to resign at the age of just twenty-three. Thereafter, he resolved to dedicate his life entirely to composition.

Following his father's death in 1958, Ridout received a Netherlands Government Scholarship to study with their leading composer, Henk Badings, in Holland, who introduced him to famous conductors and players and arranged his first commissions. Upon returning to England, Ridout then occupied himself with a study of Western music origins at Cambridge, with Thurston Dart. During this time, he was also gave a BBC radio broadcast on Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony for BBC radio, followed by a series of forty discussion programmes produced by Arthur Langford, covering a whole range of music. This is what largely enabled Ridout's musical reputation to spread, and having established himself, he was then able to pursue a living responding solely to commissions.

Later, Ridout went on to become a lecturer at Cambridge (1963-1975) and a Professor at the Royal College of Music (1961-1984). His works include eight symphonies, several operas and a Christmas Oratorio, as well as a wealth of chamber items, both sacred and secular. One might think it curious that, having never personally been a part of the cathedral sphere and being an atheist/agnostic until 1995, Ridout is bracketed so readily as a 'specialist' cathedral writer. Yet since the 1960s, he has produced an enormous amount of sacred material for Canterbury Cathedral and other churches in Kent, and has thus played a significant role in new classical sacred music for an entire generation.

Having attracted the attention of twenty-five different publishers during his career, his music has been extensively published, and the sacred works republished by Kevin Mayhew during the eighties and nineties, enabling the music to be taken up for performance nation-wide. A vast number of original manuscripts are also used at Canterbury to this day, and in regard of this, it is probable that Ridout's sacred works will long outlive his extensive (but less well-recognised) orchestral repertoire. To the detriment of the arguments of all those in favour of musical autonomy and absolutism, it appears to be the *purpose* of Ridout's sacred music that actually sustains it.

The majority of Ridout's Canterbury works, discussed here, were commissioned by Allan Wicks (Canterbury Cathedral Organist and Master of the Choristers, 1961 to 1988). In his own words, Wicks was 'always discontent with the status-quo',<sup>4</sup> a central reason behind many of the new litanies, processions, hymns, sacred dramas and music for more occasional events that were commissioned during his time at Canterbury.<sup>5</sup> Ridout, who lived in the Canterbury area for most of his life, responded well to Wicks, his outstanding ability to produce works in a very short space of time as an immensely prolific composer also meaning that there was never any shortage of new ideas. This accounts in part for the music's variety, yet the quality of Ridout's work depended very much on the time that he was allotted to be able to work on the music, and the words that he was required to set. He writes, 'I have loathed myself for having allowed myself to be forced to set some... "religious" [liturgical] texts: the quality of some has been... simply appalling'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Allan Wicks speaking to the author in a recorded interview at Canterbury (04/04/98).

<sup>5</sup> He is also famed for the commissioning of a musical 'ballet' based on the Prodigal Son, to be performed at the Lambeth Conference of Bishops at Canterbury in 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Ridout 1995, 113.

Each of Ridout's pieces is justified according to its own means, with a clear sense of beginning, middle and end. Placing strong importance on harmony, it is always impeccably designed with good attention to detail, and is well within the capacities of the choir. Rather than competing for primary attention, the music underlines and surrounds the words, providing a perfect scenario for music and liturgy to work as one, releasing one another's potential. Yet what particularly distinguishes his style is its boldness; Ridout is never afraid to be harmonically and thematically 'straightforward'.

An extreme example of this occurs in the SATB anthem, *I Turn the Corner of Prayer and Burn* (1971), a setting of a passage by Dylan Thomas (1914-53). The piece is fairly short, so it is surprising to be confronted for such a long stretch of time by the choir's line being audaciously composed as a unison passage. However, this has the effect of drawing the listener into the detail of the words, which otherwise might be obscured by a more active setting, and allows the harmony, which begins at the phrase, 'I am found', to underline the poignancy of the words sensitively, without seeming musically intrusive. Such sparing use of musical detail<sup>7</sup> seems to suit the words very well, which is something that Wicks quickly realised: 'Ridout had the technique to be simple, which is very difficult for a lot of people because of an obsession with notes. By poring away to get to the core of the music, [he] freed himself from too heavy a style whilst keeping to the tradition'.<sup>8</sup>

Such sensitivity renders Ridout's music very effective in a cathedral medium, for every element is fundamental to textual illustration and emotional expression,

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<sup>7</sup> Reminiscent of Tippett's later approach as exemplified in his *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (1961)

<sup>8</sup> Allan Wicks speaking to the author in a recorded interview at Canterbury (04/04/98).

and there is apparently no unnecessary grandeur. Many of his sacred works hold testament to this, nowhere more so than in his version of the Latin prayer, *Corde Natus* (1985), attributed to Prudentius (348–c.410) and also known as R.F. Davis' processional hymn, *Of the Father's Heart Begotten*, set here for three unaccompanied SATB choirs. The prayer tells the joyous story of how Christ became man, conquered death and now rules over all that is on earth, from the beginning to the end of time, petitioning for every living creature to praise God's name for ever. The narration is almost entirely in the third person until the last line, when the tone changes and God is addressed instead (hence, the passage is actually a prayer rather than simply a reflection): 'Omnibus te concelebrent saeculorum saeculis': Let [all] join together to laud you for ever and ever.

Fig. 14: *Corde Natus*, page 12

Handwritten musical score for SATB choirs, page 12 of *Corde Natus*. The score consists of ten systems of staves, each with four parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are: '.lu. tem fe. ta sanc. to Spi. ri. tu, Et pu. er re. demp. tor'. The music is written in a single key signature with a common time signature. A dynamic marking 'f' is present at the top right of the first system. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and accents.

The music's style is clear and direct, the voices adopting a 'Britten-esque', homophonic chordal structure for the majority of the work. Despite the twelve parts being divided into three separate choirs-groups, the choirs are united within themselves at all times, achieving an antiphonal effect as the task of narration is passed back and forth from choir to choir. A through-composed style is maintained throughout, partly in response to the fact that the prayer is long, but also to aid a feeling of progression and narration without break. The passage's praise is also communicated since the parts proceed as one from as early as page five, giving the impression of might and strength<sup>9</sup> in a homophonic manner with bold, diatonic chords: a glorious vocal fanfare. This is so effective that it goes a long way to communicate emotions that the Latin text could not begin to express unaided to a layman congregation. Music, it would seem, is truly capable of surpassing the barriers of language.

One of Ridout's favourite compositional traits can be seen when we regard the anthem's melody. This melody, running throughout the anthem, is interspersed with chordal passages, weaving in and out of the texture. However, it does not function in the way an ordinary melody might, for it is never recapitulated or even partially repeated, and not being in a particular key, it does not help to create a feeling of integration or familiarity in the piece. Instead, adopting a mainly stepwise, quasi-plainchant character, it wanders its own harmonic scale, and is simply designed to instigate harmonic development 'incidentally' through suggesting potential harmonic affiliations.

For example, in the opening pages of the work, the melody (sung by the first choir) suggests many harmonic associations and is courted with a variety of

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<sup>9</sup> This could be Ridout's way of compensating, perhaps, for the piece being unaccompanied; the music is obviously designed for a large occasion, and it suggests that voices were the only forces to hand when the work was originally performed.

chords by the second and third choirs. Swiftly working through triadic possibilities, we are therefore acquainted with B flat major and G major followed by A minor, D major and F major and then G minor, E flat major and C major by the time we reach page four. However, it is not until the choirs unite, here, that a sense of G minor is established as the tonal centre. The variety in the way in which the harmony moves means that the melody has no effect over the harmony at all. Rather, the melody is surface cover of an inner, self-driven harmonic language, arising from vertical (rather than horizontal) design.

Vertical design, it may be thought, would make the anthem seem somewhat static, yet this is prevented by the united texture and lack of word-repetition, working together to increase a sense of forward-motion. With twelve parts at Ridout's disposal, however, it is interesting that he does not choose to use dissonance, as many of his contemporaries might. Instead, his harmonic language is surprisingly restrictive, being diatonic throughout and composed of just thirteen triadic chords.<sup>10</sup> This small palette of chords, it will be understood, is not designed merely for its own sake, but is used to prompt a colourful discussion between major and minor, equipping the anthem with excitement through harmonic unpredictability – a suitably appropriate accompaniment to the text's exhilaration. Where the choirs are locked in homophony, the harmonic design is such that only the semitonal alteration of one or two voice-parts (exploiting the augmentation and diminution of fifths and thirds) can change the whole tonality.

It may be thought that the purpose of the G minor tonality established on page four, with its reiteration on subsequent pages, is to present a sense of continuity whilst tonal modulation continues. However, true to Ridout's assertion of

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<sup>10</sup> The reason for the rapid introduction of so many of these chords within the opening pages (before G minor is established) is simply in playing the role of the melody, establishing the harmonic language (instead of the melodic) swiftly and effectively, and achieving a sense of the whole.

harmonic and textual agreement, the chords challenge the concept of a firm central tonality, and eternally modulating, the harmony gradually rises, illustrating the increasingly joyous words ('Psallat altitudo caeli, psallite omnes angeli'...: Sing praises, heights of Heaven, sing praises, all the angels...), arriving at a triumphant A major fanfare at 'Ecce, ecce' (See, see) on page 16 (Figure 15).

Fig. 15: *Corde Natus*, page 16

16.

con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce, ...con-ci-ne-bant sae-cu-lis,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce, quem va-tis ve-tus-tis con-ci-ne-bant sae-cu-lis,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce, quem va-tis ve-tus-tis con-ci-ne-bant sae-cu-lis,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce, quem va-tis ve-tus-tis con-ci-ne-bant sae-cu-lis,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, (ah)  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, (ah)  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, (ah)  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, (ah)  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce,  
 con-son-et. Ec-ce, ec-ce,

Confirming a change in the central tonal point, the narrator's vision of Christ ('Ecce, / Emicat promissus olim': See, / The promised one is sent) is then made to seem more vivid and vibrant than ever. The tonality has moved from doubt to certainty, from harmonic darkness into light. It is as if the experience is real, the

music echoing the powerful idea that God is here. Thus, the listener is both musically and spiritually enlightened and inspired.

By the time the choir's gentler utterances of 'Fluminum' arrive on page nineteen, we realise that the narrator has stepped back from the 'visionary' scene to reflect from afar, beginning the petition for others to join in singing God's praises. This is mirrored, musically, by a quieter, calmer section in contrast to the *fortissimo* that has been, and a slow return to the central tonality of G, emphasised by the final *tierce de Picardie* in G major. Thus, the harmonic and spiritual journeys draw to their close.

Importance of harmonic design over melody occurs in a great deal of Ridout's work, as does the tendency to illustrate the text in an abstract manner, rather than with obvious, madrigalian word-painting techniques. This has the benefit of allowing the listener to focus on the words without distraction, and for the music to 'surround' the piece with atmosphere far more profoundly. The fact that the piece's effect is based upon tonal mood also means that the music never manages to prevent drawing undue attention to itself through detail, and it is therefore ideal for facilitating prayer. Many would say that Ridout's techniques, therefore, provide the ideal balance for cathedral music: the work is unobtrusive, atmospheric, of only moderate difficulty and, being well-suited to through-composition, is ideal for the setting of longer liturgical passages.

In consideration of the fact that Ridout received years of tuition from Herbert Howells at the Royal College of Music, it is curious that his own melodic design should be so contrastingly clear-cut – there is no hint of Howells' intrinsically sorrowful harmonic language. Certainly, Ridout does not claim to have been influenced very greatly by Howells' work, and comments of his own experience



of the composer, 'sadness can become addictive... though he could laugh, this was always briefly, against a background of unshed tears'.<sup>11</sup> It seems probable, then, that the harmonic differences between them are not so much due to ability as the contrast of their personalities. Ridout was forever the energetic, dramatic artist; while Howells has become famed for his *Requiem* and *Hymnus Paradisi*, Ridout (like Mathias) is sure to be remembered for his jubilant, magisterial settings that have so far been the cause of his success.

#### **4.2 John Rutter (b. 1945)**

Rutter was born in London in August 1945, and was brought up in the city for most of his early years. Though there was not a great deal of musical activity in his household as a child, the piano that had been left behind by the previous owners of the family's flat kept him entertained for hours at a time as he experimented with sounds in his own musical world. It was clear to him from the age of four, in fact, that writing music was what he wanted to do.

Rutter received a good musical education at Highgate School for Boys in North London, and was a member of both the school choir and chapel choir during his time there. Though never a cathedral chorister, it was here that he became familiar with much Palestrina and Bach, singing at regular school services, which first introduced to him the power of music in the sacred context. During his teenage years, Rutter composed several pieces of music for the school including *Carol of the Nativity* (1961), which was well received; Edward Chapman, the music master at Highgate, told Rutter on viewing the work that he was sure he would end up in America. As it happens, this prediction was actually very near to the truth – though Rutter has not moved to America, it was, in fact, his music's success within the United States that first prompted his career to flourish in England.

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<sup>11</sup> Ridout 1995, 56.

However, when the time approached to leave the school, composition was simply a hobby for Rutter and he was far more concerned to be around good music than write it himself. Therefore, having been inspired by some recordings by the choir of King's College, Cambridge conducted by David Willcocks, Rutter decided to apply to Cambridge for university. He was offered a place at Clare College, and subsequently studied music as an undergraduate there for several years, thereafter pursuing a doctorate.

In his second year at Cambridge, Rutter became the conductor of Clare College Choir. He decided to put on a concert for Christmas, but in view of the lack of carol settings readily available for choir and orchestra, combining all their forces, he wrote several of his own for inclusion in the concert. The pieces, including *The Shepherd's Pipe Carol*, were a tremendous success, and soon, he was summoned by David Willcocks, who requested to see the pieces for himself. So impressed was he that publication of the carols was immediately arranged with Oxford University Press (OUP), now his main publishing agent both in England and America.

From this day on, Rutter continued to write, submitting carols and other sacred anthems for publication that mainly found performance in America. Of this, he comments that it is 'perhaps because the culture in America is more slanted towards new things [that] they're more welcoming towards [new voices] in composition'.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the case, he has become so significant a composer there that he has even been hailed as a main successor to great British composers such as Vaughan Williams and Holst.<sup>13</sup> It is debatable whether English critics might agree, but nevertheless, he is undoubtedly the best-known composer and arranger of Christmas carols in England this century.

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<sup>12</sup> John Rutter, speaking in an interview with Brian Kay (BBC Radio 4, December 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

With the rise in the success of his compositions whilst still at Cambridge, Rutter finally decided to abandon his PhD and was elected Clare College's Director of Music in 1975, where he remained for four years. After leaving Clare to allow more time for composition, he set up a group known as the Cambridge Singers, a choir formed specifically for making recordings, which has enjoyed great success. Over the years, they have recorded many works, both sacred and secular, including a great deal by Rutter himself.<sup>14</sup> Over the last two decades, he has dedicated his time primarily to composing and conducting, travelling with his work as far afield as Europe, America and Australasia. In 1996, the Archbishop of Canterbury conferred a Lambeth Doctorate of Music upon him in recognition of his contribution to church music.

Rutter began his compositional career by writing carols, and while he has arranged many folksongs and composed many secular ballads since then, sacred music still holds something very special for him. He says, 'the beauty, faith and vision that are enshrined in so many religious texts are among the most important things that I know'.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting, however, that although he has written over a hundred works using sacred texts for the Church, only a handful have become accepted into cathedral repertoire over the last twenty years: the carols.

Carols have always been important to the Church; before the Reformation, they were the only form of prayer permitted to be sung in English. Having being required for use for centuries, they are a well-established part of the cathedral tradition, and consequently, a considerable search remains for new settings that

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<sup>14</sup> He has also published a variety of anthem settings, as well as larger choral works: *Gloria* (1974), *Requiem* (1985), *Magnificat* (1990) and *Psalmfest* (1993). He is also renowned for co-editing with David Willcocks four volumes of the *Carols for Choirs* book-series, and his editing of a great deal of older classical music for OUP.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

can help to make the festival of Christmas a part of the Church of the day. There seems to be far more readiness within the Church to the introduction of new carol-settings into new cathedral repertoire than other pieces written simply for Ordinary time; this is strengthened by the measure of Rutter's success. So as we approach Rutter's music, it is worth remembering the importance of festival music such as this, which as it can be seen from the *CSCM*, makes up a significant proportion of the cathedral repertoire.

Many have written carols this century, yet Rutter is the only composer that can claim to have become chiefly regarded by the Cathedral as a 'carol composer'. Since carols are small works, writers often escape the notice of music critics, and this goes some way to explain why there are actually very few articles and studies on Rutter's music, despite his phenomenal success with parish and amateur choirs as well as the Cathedral. What is particularly special about his music is its commercial value. The vast majority of his pieces have been designed in such a way that they can be re-scored to suit almost any musical ensemble. In OUP's catalogue, pieces are frequently listed more than once to accommodate the variety of orchestrational scoring available. It is little wonder, in this respect, that Rutter's music has been able to grasp simultaneous success with cathedral and parish: such is its genius for adaptability.

In religious circles, there appears to be some contempt of Rutter's music, a response, perhaps, to the music's inherent accessibility, 'singability' and to a certain extent, predictability. However, this last item is a strange thing to declare, for the music is not *derivative* in any way; when one is familiar with Rutter's style, it clearly cannot be mistaken for anything else: the music does not imitate or impersonate, it is simply 'itself'. Some would say that the reason why it appears

predictable is because the harmonies are diatonic, the melodies ‘singable’ and the scoring ‘sensible’.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the music is never adventurous enough to be termed eccentric and its familiarity, with memorable tunes, is easily recognisable as ‘Rutter’. Yet the music’s success seems to suggest that it voices something that many have entertained but have never had the courage to pursue.

Where the Cathedral is concerned, adaptability, accessibility contained within a well-crafted framework can be of nothing but practical benefit. This seems to have been recognised for quite some time: there are now very few cathedral libraries in Britain that do not contain at least one of his pieces. Though there is some truth in Allan Wicks’ opinion that ‘if you think that by singing Rutter three times a year you’re doing modern music, you’re strange’,<sup>17</sup> this is not to undermine the importance of his music in helping to assert contemporary repertoire in the cathedral sphere. The music, as we will see, is very effective, and at its best, carries great appeal.

*What Sweeter Music* (1987) is quite possibly the most famous of all Rutter’s carols. It was commissioned by Stephen Cleobury for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols service at King’s College, Cambridge in 1987, and has subsequently found a home in many cathedrals and churches both in Britain and America as well as being recorded by several well-respected choirs.<sup>18</sup> Scored for SSATB and organ / orchestra, the piece is based on a poem by the English writer, Robert Herrick (1591-1674) with nature at its heart. The day is described as ‘a field beset with corn’, ‘a meadow newly shorn’, Jesus also coming ‘with his sunshine and his showers [to turn] the patient ground to flowers’. Rutter’s setting

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<sup>16</sup> This may be contested, however, by the fact that in Rutter’s larger works, there is little *actual* modulation – pieces ‘shift’ (usually upwards by a tone/semitone) with little or no cadential linkage.

<sup>17</sup> Allan Wicks speaking to the author in a recorded interview at Canterbury (04/04/98).

<sup>18</sup> Including Canterbury Cathedral Choir (YORK CD 136), the Cambridge Singers (COLCD 111).

is at one with this tranquillity, yet the voices punctuate the ambience with techniques such as the syncopated ‘trumpet’ calls of ‘Awake the voice! Awake the string!’ that occur on the opening page.

Rutter has manipulated the poem so that it takes the form of five basic verses. All the verses are characterised by the same tune that alters little, except occasionally where the rhythm of the words demands it or the music is concerned with modulation (note the variations in chordal developments near the end of verses, particularly bars 18-19, 34-35, 49-50, discussed in the following paragraph). Indeed, it is the constant recurrence of this singable tune that makes the piece so memorable, a technique that Rutter uses a great deal; unlike Ridout’s music, the tune always leads the harmony, and not the other way around.

Fig. 16: *What Sweeter Music*, page 1 (© Oxford University Press 1988)

The musical score for 'What Sweeter Music' is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 1-4) features a Soprano line with the lyrics 'What sweeter' and an Organ accompaniment. The tempo is 'Andante tranquillo' (♩ = 66) and the organ part is marked 'Sw. p legato sempre' with a 'Man.' (manual) instruction. The second system (bars 5-8) continues the Soprano line with lyrics 'mu - sic can we bring Than a ca - rol, for to sing The birth of' and includes a 'Ped.' (pedal) instruction. The third system (bars 9-12) features Tenors and Basses with lyrics 'this our heav'nly King? A - wake the voice! A - wake the string! Dark and dull' and includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf*. A footnote at the bottom left states '\*slightly abridged and altered'.

The organ accompaniment that begins the carol is designed for the swell organ, its smoothness paints a perfect background for the gentleness of the words. The sopranos begin in unison, establishing the melody line in G flat major<sup>19</sup> with a simple organ accompaniment, ending on a dominant chord by the end of page one (Figure 16). Despite the extensive harmonic development that occurs during the piece, this is curiously one feature that remains the same with each occurrence until its last appearance on the final page. It is as if this dominant chord is a springboard for Rutter's more adventurous harmony to begin in the 'development' section that follows, taking a different and increasingly complex direction each time. Thus, in the first verse, the tonality 'rises' to a temporary resolution of the major 2nd, A flat, illustrating 'December turned to May' (bar 18), quickly resolved to a dominant chord of D flat by bar 20. In the second, the harmony reaches the minor 7th, F flat (bar 34) again resolving to the dominant by bar 36. In the third verse, the corresponding chord of F flat becomes clouded by the occurrence of an E flat in the counter-melody (bar 49), resolving to an implied chord of F-flat with an added 2nd by bar 50, heralding the way for further modulation to the mediant, B-flat major, at the top of page six. Unlike the tune, the harmony, it seems, is anything but straightforward. Rutter's crafting is impeccable, and even more so when we consider that recognition of this talent arises only with close examination of the score: the level of harmonic detail is skilfully obscured by the music's exterior melody.

The piece is also characterised by 4-3 resolutions, added seconds, fourths, sixths and sevenths and occasionally piled thirds, e.g. the first chord of bar 16. Yet despite the level of harmonic variation and complexity adopted as the piece

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, G flat major (a very 'gentle' key) is a favourite key of Rutter's. He uses it to great effect in many other works too, eg. the 2nd movement of the *Gloria* and *Requiem*, to subtly underline a feeling of peace.

proceeds, the carol is made complete by a recapitulation of the message of the first verse, ‘What sweeter music can we bring / Than a carol for to sing / The birth of this our heavenly King’, bringing home the piece’s message. The simplicity and beauty of the occasion is further emphasised by the voices, adopting a unison approach on the penultimate page leading to a homophonic declaration of ‘the birth of this our heavenly King’ and a return of simpler harmony by the final page. Finally, the return of the sopranos, with a unified choir humming beneath, echoes the carol’s beginning.

It is interesting how Rutter uses the higher voices to express sweetness, purity and light while lower voices are often used to communicate darkness, strength and honour. This is not only seen in *What Sweeter Music*, but can be identified in much of his work. Another successful carol, *There is a Flower* (1985) uses a similar technique, opening with a soprano solo which blossoms into an upper-part rendition of the verse, concerned with flowers and Mary. The lower parts, contrastingly, lead the second and third verses, concerned with the powerful characters, God and Gabriel, and it is not until the fourth verse, in fact, that the choir sings in a more united manner describing the blossoming of the flower (Jesus’ birth).

*There is a Flower* (Figure 17) bears a number of similarities to *What Sweeter Music*. Composed only two years apart, both were written in response to commissions by choirs in Cambridge. *There is a Flower* was written for George Guest and the choir of St. John’s College for Christmas 1985,<sup>20</sup> and being a setting of another five-verse, rhyming poem by another English poet, John

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<sup>20</sup> This raises a very important point: while it is continually termed *cathedral* music, it is important to remember that Oxford and Cambridge’s college choirs have contributed a great deal to the tradition, and continue to do so to this day. Of all the composers studied here, only one person (namely Arvo Pärt) has not experienced the Oxbridge system first-hand (see Chapter Five).



Andante con moto tranquillo (♩ = c. 63) *poco cresc.*

*mp* SOPRANO SOLO

There is a flow'r spring of a tree. The root there - of is call-ed Jes - se. A flow'r of

5 *mf* FULL SOPRANOS *poco cresc.*

price:— There is none such in pa - ra - dise. 1. This flow'r is fair and fresh of hue, It fad-eth

A. *ALTOS mp poco cresc.*

It fad-eth

10 *mf* *dim.* branch this flow'r on grew

ne - ver... but ev - er is new:— The bless-ed branch this flow'r on grew Was Ma - ry mild that bare Je -

ne - ver... but ev - er is new: The bless-ed branch this flow'r on grew— Was Ma - ry mild that bare Je -

15 *mp* A flow'r of

- su:— A flow'r of grace:— A - gainst all sor - row it is so - lace.

- su: A flow'r of grace:— A - gainst all sor - row it is so - lace.

\* TENORS *mp*

A flow'r of grace:—

\*These three bars may alternatively be sung by 2nd altos

2

TENORS (and BARITONES) *mp* (2nd time. SOPRANOS) *poco cresc.*

CHOIR 1

2. The seed here - of was God-des \*sand, That God him-self sowed with his hand, In Na - za -

(3.) - el this maid did meet, With 'A - ve Ma - ri - a' he did her greet; Be - tween them

S. *p poco cresc.*

CHOIR 2

1. Hum

2. Hum

3. Aw

T. *p*

*poco cresc.*

24 (35) *mf* *dim.* *mp* 3

- reth that ho - ly land, A - midst her ar - bour a maid - en found; This bless - ed flow'r sprang

this flow'r was set And safe was kept, — no man should wit, Till on — a day In

(2. Hum)

(3. Aw)

*mp* *dim.* *p*

29 (40) SOPRANOS *mp*

ne - ver but in Ma - ry's bower. 3. When Ga - bri - spray.

Beth - lem it could spread and

CHOIRS 1 and 2 *p molto legato*

(2. Hum)

(3. Aw)

4. When that fair flow'r — be - gan to

*p molto legato*

When that flow - er

They mar - velled

43 *mf* 3

spread And his sweet blos - som be - gan — to † bed. — Then rich and poor — of ev - ry land — Mar - velled

spread blos - som *mp* *mf*

\* sand = gift  
† bed = bud

There is a flower

Fig. 17: There is a Flower, verses 1-3

Audelay (15th Century), it is not surprising to find that Rutter adopts similar techniques. In fact, the piece proceeds in very much the same way as the previous carol, with a compressed introduction of the first verse sung by the soprano part to begin the piece and a reiteration of this on the final page. Again, it is the melody that unites the work, surrounded by detailed harmony suggesting Mixolydian tendencies with recurring references to the flattened seventh (F natural). Other tendencies are added seconds, fourths, sixths and sevenths, while cadence points are constructed with such care that they seem to ‘blossom’ rather like the flower that the poem describes (see bars 29-30, 40-41 and the harmonic intricacies rising out of the vocal lines that follow). Obvious word-painting is occasional, yet the falling ‘Alleluias’ in verse five (pages three to four) could be interpreted as reminiscent of bells.

Fig. 18: *What Sweeter Music*, bar 70 to the end (© Oxford University Press 1986)

70

*dim.* *rit.* *a tempo*  
*pp*  
 this our hea - ven - ly King.

*dim.* *pp*

*dim.* *pp*

*dim.* *pp*

*rit.* *a tempo* *rit.*

*pp*

(Ped.)

A striking feature of both the carols is the avoidance of straightforward perfect cadences at the end.<sup>21</sup> In *What Sweeter Music* at bar 71, the voice parts arrive at a G flat major chord by way of the flattened mediant (B double-flat major with an added 9th) leading to the clash of an F flat, E flat and C flat on the last beat before resolution to the tonic chord (Figure 18). This is ambiguous, for if the F flat dominates, the chord could be interpreted as F flat major, implied (effectively, a flattened VII resolving to I with a IV-I bass). Alternatively, if the E flat dominates, the chord becomes C flat major, implied (a very tentative IV to I). Yet since both the E flat and the F flat are passing-notes, our ears are drawn to the bass-line instead (C flat-G flat). Thus, it appears to be plagal.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, in *There is a Rose*, the cadence is also effectively IV-I, the piece resolving to G by way of a C minor triad with an added seventh, the B flat particularly strengthening the case for modality. Yet whatever cadence Rutter adopts, the reason it still sounds so ‘Rutter-esque’ is because the parts, being so often harmonically compressed in the first chord of the cadence, resolve *outwards*, the inner parts rarely needing to move more than a tone to reach their final note.

So, as we have seen, Rutter’s harmonic language is not as simple as his accessible reputation would suggest. If anything, it is harmony which is the most challenging aspect of his music for choirs to master. Yet the way in which he uses harmony to vary decoration and texture shows an outstanding awareness of the importance of thematic (and melodic) development. Each piece has a beginning, middle and end and is self-contained, yet while being identifiable as ‘Rutter’ in

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<sup>21</sup> It would seem at first glance that though Rutter is often painted as a predictable composer, this cannot arise through lack of attention to the music’s conclusion. However, if the treatment discussed here is as consistent as is suspected, then the predictability label may actually arise through Rutter’s attempts to be ‘unpredictable’. The phrases ‘Rutter ending’ and ‘Rutter cadence’ are not uncommon in choirs; indeed, they are often referred to as standard inventions!

<sup>22</sup> It is to the piece’s credit that the organ part returns here, for it is necessary to confirm the cadence with its own V-I pattern.

terms of melodic design, it is certain that the music is capable of affecting the listener in manifold different ways.

### **4.3 The Place of Specialist Cathedral Writers in the Existing Tradition**

Rutter and Ridout represent very different facets of the 'sacred specialist' genre, yet the reason that they are drawn together is due to the fact that their sacred work is essentially built around one theme: the religion that it serves. This, undoubtedly, is a principal reason why the music has succeeded in the Cathedral to the extent that it has. Furthermore, it offers an explanation as to why the music of these composers makes up the core of new music used in the Cathedral today, and why the group is by far the largest of the three discussed.

Part of the reason why the music of Rutter and Ridout differs so greatly in style is due to the age difference between the two. Born in 1934 and 1945, either side of the Second World War, they have been subjected to very different political climates and social conditions during their lives, and despite being brought up in the same city, it is clear that though only eleven years apart in age (which may not seem a great deal), time has had a profound influence on the way their styles have progressed. Variation in the ages of composers, we realise, has always been a factor in the reason for diversity at any particular time. The differences between Mozart and Beethoven, for example, are very substantial, though the age gap was similar to that of the two writers mentioned here.<sup>23</sup> This has some bearing, then, on the diversity of our own contemporary music. Within every artistic era, there are composers that represent the old school of thought, those that express the ideas of today and some who are reaching out toward the future, often best described on a scale of old and young.

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<sup>23</sup> Born in 1756 and 1770 respectively.

Ridout, having been thoroughly familiar with the Victorian school of cathedral music writers, the 'new music renaissance' and taught first-hand by Herbert Howells, is undoubtedly a composer representative of the 'old-school', joined in musical style by many other composers, notably William Mathias (1934-1992), Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988), Harrison Oxley (b. 1935) and Arthur Wills (b. 1926). His use of diatonic harmony is a clear rejection of the *avant-garde* and displays clear indication of the influence of the 'Stanford school'. Thus, his music goes some way to fulfil the stereotype of 'traditional' cathedral music. The success that it continues to enjoy with publishing houses and cathedrals across Britain today underlines the fact that the 'Stanford school' approach, as it has come to be known, cannot easily be slighted (though we realise that he is actually a generation below the era of Stanford and Howells, it still retains enough modernity to be considered 'contemporary' even today). It is difficult to say whether Ridout himself has played a part in influencing younger cathedral writers, thus far. Yet with composers of his generation continuing to write music for today, one thing, at least, is certain: this stable, 'traditional' compositional approach is sure to be influencing contemporary repertoire for a very long time to come.

Rutter, meanwhile, is representative of those composers since the Stanford school that have been successful in the Cathedral over the last thirty years, but the majority of whom are still expanding the borders of 'regular' contemporary cathedral music. Such composers include the vast majority of composing cathedral organists, as well as Jonathan Willcocks (b. 1953), Philip Wilby (b. 1949) and the American composers Morton Lauridsen (b. 1943) and Tony Piccolo (b. 1946), who are (like several other American writers for the Anglican Church abroad) becoming increasingly well-known in England through the influence of

publishing. The music of all these composers is simple and elegant, interestingly based around the horizontal and the concept of melody much in the same way as Rutter's own approach. One is also led to wonder, regarding the similarities between Rutter's own energetic contributions and the music of Jonathan Willcocks (a composer who has also found a market in composing and arranging especially for choir and orchestra) whether he has had some influence on the younger composer. Certainly, when one regards the extent of the influence that publishing has had on both their careers, they appear to parallel each other in many more ways than simply musical approach.

There is, admittedly, a difference in standards of mastery and design between music by many of the specialist, 'home-grown' writers and the more accomplished, 'radical' composers discussed in the previous two chapters. Yet, 'good music, defined as such by its truthfulness, does not have to be abstruse or highly intellectual'<sup>24</sup> in order to work, and in a fully functional cathedral, there is room for all. The music of the sacred specialists, while not being renowned for its extremism or breaking of musical boundaries, is nevertheless ideal for everyday services, being attractive, approachable, quick to learn, relatively easy to sing and effective in facilitating prayer. In fact, when measured against the music discussed in the previous two chapters (for all its originality and intelligent musical design), this music is by far the most appropriate for a choir's staple diet.

Some might object that the music is adequate rather than revolutionary, and that it does not, therefore, have a hope in moving contemporary music forwards. Yet on the contrary, while sacred specialist composers continue to be write alongside the radical few, ideas are sure to disperse, grow and mature with a

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson-Dickson, Andrew: *A Brief History of Christian Music: From Biblical Times, to the Present* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1992), 429-430.

cumulative effect. Contemporary cathedral music may not appear to be progressing at any tremendous rate – composers are still working their way through influences of the past and present – yet examination shows that it is certainly far from static, especially amongst the specialist cathedral writers. Thus, for as long as new compositional voices continue to be born, each generation giving way to the talent of that beneath it, the cathedral tradition is sure to keep advancing.

Thirty-five years ago, Routley expressed a belief that talent is cyclical, and that cathedral music would continue to renew itself with the passing of generations, expanding and progressing for as long as that talent continued to be recognised and was permitted to remain.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this opinion is as valid today as it ever was (as the generation element of this group of composers reaffirms). For: ‘those who contribute most fruitfully to church music will tend to be those who listen most openly to the music of the past and of their neighbours: who, like Herbert Howells, are soaked in the music of their time and of other times and yet evolve a style of their own.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Sources: Routley 1964b.

<sup>26</sup> Routley 1964b, 213.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A Postscript

Thus far, Chapter One has been dedicated to covering the historical, theological and sociological influences on contemporary cathedral music, while Chapters Two Three and Four have examined the music in detail, highlighting its individualism and diversity. Yet while there is a limit as to how much may be concluded about the pathway of cathedral music from this point onwards, three things still remain to be said with regard to its current situation. Firstly, while the focus of this investigation is on the music of English cathedrals, this is not to ignore the influence of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges on the development of the tradition. Secondly, while it has been acknowledged that the *SCMC* may be valuable in providing the reader with a thorough knowledge of the repertoire here discussed, it is also possible to establish from its findings the nature of contemporary cathedral music and its future in association with publishers. Thirdly, one further factor holds the potential to have more bearing on the music of the immediate future than any other: the new millennium. Therefore, as a postscript to the thesis, Chapter Five will reflect upon these issues.

#### **5.1 The Contribution of the Oxbridge Colleges**

Several Oxford and Cambridge colleges (notably King's College, Cambridge, St. John's College, Cambridge, Christ Church, Oxford and Magdalen College, Oxford) boast world-famous men-and-boys choirs that perform services in their chapel on a regular basis. These services can be compared directly with those of the cathedral, since apart from performing the same repertoire, many of the larger foundations open their doors to the public, and are therefore little different from



collegiate Cathedrals. The majority of colleges also offer choral scholarships (to maintain a constant standard of musical excellence) the places for which are highly competitive.

The connection between the Cathedral and the Oxbridge colleges is highlighted by the fact that of all those featured in this thesis, only Arvo Pärt has not been a member of such an institution. All the English writers have had some involvement with either Oxford or Cambridge: John Tavener, Judith Weir, Jonathan Harvey, Giles Swayne, John Rutter, we recall, were students, Alan Ridout and Erik Routley have been lecturers, and John Rutter, the musical director of Clare College. This suggests that cathedral music today is strongly influenced by the musical produce of Oxford and Cambridge, a staggering realisation when we consider that the music of these composers, who according to post-modernist, eclectic and pluralist trends are said to embrace the sounds of many different cultures and times, should have been nurtured by such a stereotypically ‘English’ foundation. With such close links to these writers (and presumably many more), Oxbridge does not always require funding to obtain new high-quality works (for example, Rutter’s involvement as an undergraduate, writing carols for Clare College without expectation of payment), and therefore has a considerable advantage over cathedrals.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious Oxbridge influence on the cathedral tradition, however, is the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from Kings College, Cambridge, broadcast by the BBC on radio (and now also television) across the world, every Christmas Eve, for over seventy years. Each year, the service has featured one newly-composed carol, and while the choice of composer may only

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<sup>1</sup> The constant flow of new compositional voices at Oxford and Cambridge brings into question whether the colleges are actually musical receivers of ideas *from* the Cathedral or chief promoters of ideas *to* the Cathedral (*vice versa*).

ever have been representative of the contemporary music scene of the time (rather than anticipatory of the ‘star writers’ of the future), there is little doubt that the continued success of the composers in question has been effectively ensured by the promotion and publicity that the service has offered.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, too, it has aided the recognition of a well-known composer of secular classical music previously unknown to the Church of England, as has been the case most recently with Arvo Pärt (1990) and Thomas Ades (1997).<sup>3</sup> Yet as Routley notes, the most valuable contribution of the broadcast festival has been in helping to bring the English carol back into the worship of the Church after more than a century of decline.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it would seem that for as long as the musical union between cathedrals and colleges can continue, the musical tradition is certain to continue to achieve a great deal.

## 5.2 Findings from the *Sacred Choral Music Catalogue*

While it has been noted that there has been relatively little discussion of contemporary cathedral music since the work of Erik Routley thirty-five years ago and that repertoire-documentation is scarce, this is not to say that there is no documentation whatsoever. Indeed, the *Friends of Cathedral Music* were

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the promotion of new composers and performances of their work through radio, recordings, the media and cathedral festivals in recent years have had an unprecedented effect of the progress of the cathedral tradition. The majority of successful contemporary writers in the Cathedral today have achieved recognition directly through their music being publicised at sacred festivals, and therefore, such commissioning has provided a good indicator of success.

<sup>3</sup> The list of composers commissioned to write carols for Kings College, Cambridge’s Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in the last fifteen years is as follows: Peter Maxwell Davies (1984); Judith Weir (1985); Richard Rodney Bennett (1986); John Rutter (1987); Peter Sculthorpe (1988); Alexander Goehr (1989); Arvo Pärt (1990); John Casken (1991); Nicholas Maw (1992); Diana Burrell (1993); Jonathan Harvey (1994); James MacMillan (1995); Stephen Paulus (1996); Thomas Adès (1997); Giles Swayne (1998); Richard Rodney Bennett (1999). Also, other works by John Tavener and Judith Bingham.

<sup>4</sup> Routley, *The English Carol* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1958), 228.

responsible for initiating a nation-wide survey into cathedral repertoire in 1986, John Patton's *Eighty-Eight Years of Cathedral Music: 1898-1986*, and the recent update, *A Hundred Years of Cathedral Music, 1898-1998: A Comparison With Previous Music Surveys of 1898, 1938, 1958 and 1986*. Both of the latter surveys list service material (i.e. anthems, masses and canticles) performed throughout the British Isles over the course of one year in statistical comparison with their appearance in previous surveys, measuring gradual changes in cathedral music repertoire since the time of previous surveys. As some of the only records of recent British cathedral repertoire in existence, they are invaluable sources for accurate assessment of the progress of cathedral music this century.

However, music by the 'modern' composers discussed in the thesis does not receive anywhere near equal prominence in Patton's surveys to works by Stanford and Howells, based on the fact that new music is not performed anything like as often as the 'old favourites'. Many cathedrals do not offer a great deal of repertoire space for new works even today, and therefore, the surveys are therefore not overly helpful in highlighting this new material; they act only as mirrors to the present situation. In other words, whilst providing a rare insight into the repertoire of cathedral music, they do not provoke change.

At the start of this research, the lack of documentation of the newer music and composers beginning to find favour in cathedrals presented some difficulty, for a thesis cannot be justified without some evidence of the repertoire discussed. Therefore, over the course of 1999, it has been necessary to compile a catalogue as an appendix to the thesis, detailing much of the music written for cathedral and high-church use (mostly available through English publishers) from 1965 to the present day.

Constructed in collaboration with publishers and cathedrals in England, Scotland and Wales, the information contained therein is based upon information gathered from publisher-catalogues, cathedral libraries and the British Library Music Catalogues (pre and post 1980). *The International Who's Who in Music and Musicians 1999* has helped to establish the dates and places of birth of many composers, while dates of composition (c.) / publication (p.) are included where known<sup>5</sup> alongside a description of the publisher. Information is listed in date-order under alphabetical composer-headings, and for accessibility, it is divided into two sections: *Anthems, Motets and Music for Occasional Use*, and *Service Settings and Responses*. Similarly, for ease of use, the alphabetical index of first-line titles is divided into four sections, as indicated on the Contents page of Volume Two.

When we examine the *SCMC*, what is immediately apparent is the enormous number of pieces that have been written for high-church use in the last thirty-five years,<sup>6</sup> and while the Catalogue cannot allow the reader to actually 'hear' the music, it is possible to detect the diversity of the composers' styles through the variety in the title subjects and even options for scoring. Indeed, while many composers seem to have been content to write for choir and optional organ alone,

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<sup>5</sup> Hardly any publisher-catalogues list the dates of composition or initial publication, and since many of the pieces included in this catalogue are (for some reason) not listed on the British Library's database, it has been necessary to conduct private research directly with publishing firms to obtain the dates now listed in this document.

Some of these firms have well-organised date-archives stretching back years, yet the task of date-searching proved more difficult with companies with whom publishing dates were only located on the scores themselves: dates were only obtainable through direct purchase. One firm wrote, "if you join the Superlist Club, I can offer you a 40% discount", yet despite the appealing offer, the volume of music that would need to be purchased (approaching 800 pieces) was still rather impractical.

While every effort has been made to find missing dates, the dates of many pieces that are published by some firms reliant on scores for publication-date confirmation could not be obtained. These include the dates of music published by the companies Oecumuse, Basil Ramsey, Boosey and Hawkes, Ricordi, G. Schirmer (Music Sales), Warner Bros (Maecenas) Samuel King, as well as CPP/Belwin archive music and pieces of the Oxford Choral Archive held at Banks Choral Archive Centre, Sand Hutton, York.

<sup>6</sup> This is, we remember, only a selection of the total repertoire.

John Tavener's music, for example, frequently requires unusual orchestral forces including gongs and recorded tapes, while John Rutter's often presents several different arrangements per piece with alternative forces to suit any number of occasions. The first option might well signify the 'standard' cathedral writer, while Tavener's requirements seem more typical of the art-musician. The scoring options for Rutter's music, meanwhile, indicate the influence of the publisher, tailoring the music to suit demand in order to sell as many copies as possible.

In Routley's day, most of the music produced for cathedrals was commissioned by the Church. However, though the *SCMC* indicates that some music has been commissioned by cathedrals since 1965, there is little chance that the Church could have afforded more than a tiny percentage of this music, regarding the shortage of funding for new music which has occurred over the last generation. Clearly, it is either the case that most contemporary composers have decided to contribute to the tradition of their own volition, or there was another factor at work.

The answer to this lies in the publishing details listed alongside almost every piece in the Catalogue. Indeed, in the last thirty-five years, while certain publishing firms such as Stainer and Bell Ltd. and International Music Publications Ltd. have witnessed a decline in the demand for their choral music repertoire (having sold almost exclusively to cathedrals), larger firms such as Oxford University Press (OUP), conglomerations such as Associated Music Publishers Inc. (AMP) and even specialist sacred choral music publishers such as Kevin Mayhew Ltd. have found a substantial market for new sacred choral works.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, they are always willing to purchase new scores for inclusion in compilations and series, a process that has revolutionised sacred

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<sup>7</sup> Again, we must remind ourselves that the Church is not equipped with excessive musical finance, and so the reason for these publishers' success must be due to sale to independent choirs.

music publishing, for it has become easier and more accessible than ever before. Not only can writers find a market for their work (making the sacred genre more popular with composers than ever), but cathedrals are also beginning to put forward some of the ‘closet’ occasional music that has been sitting unnoticed and unpublished in choir libraries and organ lofts for years for the musical and monetary benefit of all. The Church can also obtain new works from publishers for a remarkably lesser price than if they had commissioned the music directly from the composer; thus, publishers have become essential in promoting new music to cathedrals.

This process reveals three things. Firstly, over the last generation, the lack of funding for new music has contributed to the expansion of the publishers in promoting contemporary sacred music independently of the Church. Secondly, the rise of the publisher poses a threat to the Cathedral’s direct relationship with composers, and thirdly, contemporary cathedral music is becoming far more of a business than merely a religious constituent. Without wishing to speculate unduly, music publishers are certain to increase in size and success with their running trade in the sale of high-church and cathedral music. Already, OUP is the chief promoter of the music of John Rutter, Bob Chilcott and Andrew Carter (much of whose music is featured in the *SCMC*) and has become closely allied to concert management, recording firms, other publishers and the media; its influence extends far and wide.

### **5.3 The New Millennium**

One final factor that is of particular significance to the progress of cathedral music today is the coming of the new millennium. In the lead up to the celebrations that will occur over the coming year, the Church is looking forwards rather than

backwards, presenting an ideal opportunity for the commissioning of new works to celebrate two thousand years of Christianity and the dawning of a new era. Due to media hype surrounding the occasion, therefore, contemporary composers known to the secular world who are commissioned to write for the event are sure to draw public attention to cathedrals and their music tradition, which could, in turn, provoke a rise in record sales, ensuring the success of our contemporary cathedral music for years to come.

Michael Nicholas (the former Organist of Norwich Cathedral) has said that 'we should be prepared, though we ourselves are unlikely to be here to discover it, for future generations to sweep aside almost the whole of what we are pleased to regard as contemporary church music and to find that some of those whose voices are almost totally neglected now will be heard then as the music of our time'.<sup>8</sup> Yet in light of the effect of such millennium-induced publicity, it is conceivable that this might not be the case. The increasing focus on contemporary cathedral music allows it to stand a chance of becoming viewed by the media, and even the Church in time, as a 'culmination' of the sacred musical creativity of the last thousand years. Just as post-modernism looks set to become regarded as 'the culture that began the new millennium', so contemporary cathedral music might be viewed as a new foundation upon which the next thousand years of sacred music is able to develop.

Since this thesis is concerned with contemporary cathedral music and cannot predict what the future will bring, there is naturally a limit to what can be concluded about the development of the cathedral tradition from hereon. We have examined the styles of seven contemporary choral composers whose music is

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas, Michael, 'Broadside: Rethink or Rehash', *Choir and Organ*, 6 (February 1998), back page.

currently gaining favour within England's cathedrals. Yet as the investigation has shown, compositional approaches differ to such an extent that it is impossible to determine the 'worthiest writer' or even the 'best group of writers'; evaluation of quality is prevented by diversity.

However, following post-modernism's celebration of variety and colour and the eclectic nature of the age, diversity allows us to consider each approach as equally valuable, contributing to the tradition in the same way as parts to a whole. Each has its own function. The 'sacred spiritualists' highlight the importance of the numinous element of religion and are valuable in encouraging spirituality both inside and outside the Church; the 'radical' composers allow the tradition to incorporate many voices, bringing outer influences into the Church and allowing the Cathedral 'to converse with "the world"';<sup>9</sup> the 'specialist' writers, meanwhile, act as the tradition's inner core, confirming the pathway of cathedral music's development through their music's gradual change.

'History and one's neighbours matter; and it is the creative counterpoint between different musical cultures, and different classes of men, and between the sacred and secular, which will in the end determine the course that church music takes.'<sup>10</sup> Indeed, there may be little that can be speculated about the future, here, but it is certain that 'what we are witnessing is the first few sentences of a [musical] conversation whose end will surely be more creative than the former state of things was'.<sup>11</sup> In highlighting choral cathedral music at the end of the twentieth century, it should not be doubted that musical development is at a pause. As a snapshot of the cathedral tradition, this work is simply an indicator of the ongoing

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<sup>9</sup> Routley 1964b, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Routley 1964b, 213.

<sup>11</sup> Routley 1964b, 210-211.



musical activity that currently provides the musical tradition with a degree of hope for the future. Yet the abundance of contemporary music listed in the *SCMC* by so many imaginative and diverse writers would seem to suggest, at the very least, that there is a great deal more to come.

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