

Commentary on three pieces submitted  
for consideration on the conferral of  
MMus in Vocal Music  
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 List of works

*Rhapsody on an American Hymn – ‘My Song in the Night’*, for large string ensemble (2015)

*O Vos Omnes*, for SSAATTBB choir (2016)

*Mariner Songs*, song cycle for mixed choir and soli (2015-2016)

### 1.2 Style and Technique

This paper’s objective is to analyse three recent pieces of mine all composed during my course of study as a MMus student at the University of Aberdeen. These pieces accurately display my particular method and voice of composition, and the tools and techniques I use to achieve such music. I have selected these particular works, namely *Rhapsody on an American Hymn*, *O Vos Omnes*, and *Mariner Songs*, for their diversity from each other as to overall texture and theme while still maintaining between the three of them the same general principles I use when writing music. As will be shown, these pieces imitate and borrow from a wide variety of schools of thought in composition ranging from the Renaissance to today’s contemporary music. The combination of these styles has resulted in a unique voice while retaining a strong sense of familiarity for both the lay listener and the serious musician.

There are three main characteristics I have used in virtually all of my music, namely:

- The use of easily accessible melodies and harmonies
- The use of borrowed chords to invoke senses of modality
- The dominant use of triads, employing cluster and extended tonalities quasi-frequently

Possibly the most important tools I use in composing, especially in choral music, is the heavy reliance on basic, standard voice leading rules. This is not to suggest that I follow them strictly and exclusively, but rather that I make it a point in my writing that if I am going to break these rules, it is a deliberate choice and for a specific purpose. For example, in *O Vos Omnes*, the basses and baritones have a repeated figure of parallel fifths (*ex. 1.2.1*). Though the chord structures could have been completed with spelling that followed the basic part-writing rules

(*ex 1.2.2*), I chose to use the parallel motion to echo plainchant, as well as invoke a sense of heaviness complementary to the text. Another example of using parallel fifths for imagery is in the *Mariner Songs* cycle to depict the swelling, ebbing, and crashing of ocean waves.<sup>1</sup>

*Ex 1.2.1 – O Vos Omnes b. 7-10. Parallel fifths in bass section imitating plainchant.*

*Ex 1.2.2 – ibid. Bass notes respelled to avoid parallels.*

One of my favourite tools in composition is looking at specific influences. Nearly every piece I write can trace its ‘roots’ to a handful of different composers, borrowing harmonic structure, orchestration, or melodic content. While generally I paraphrase material so as to be reminiscent of the original idea, at times I will also quote directly from pieces that, to use a phrase originally intended for spoken language, ‘said it better than I could have myself.’ These moments will be discussed in greater detail as I analyse the pieces individually.

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<sup>1</sup> See 3.2, *Mariner Songs*

## 2. Individual Works

### 2.1 Rhapsody on an American Hymn – My Song in the Night

The origins in my first piece for string orchestra take root in my experience with the BYU-Idaho Collegiate Singers. In the spring of 2011 we toured the northern and Midwestern states of the United States of America in our biannual performance tour. The programme for that tour was comprised of a mixture of contemporary choral pieces, show tunes, and traditional American folk hymns. Among the choir's favourites was an old hymn, *My Song in the Night*. It is a hymn of pleading and hope, crying to Jesus for His love and comfort, realising that though life is full of hardships and tragedies, we don't have to face them alone. I decided to use this hymn as the basis for my commission for a string piece in a similar manner that Ralph Vaughan Williams used the third tune from the Archbishop Parker's Psalter for his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.

The structure of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia* is essentially a theme and variation on his chosen tune. Though I added in several other ideas not based in 'My Song in the Night' in my piece, I still followed the structure he laid out relatively closely. Perhaps most noticeably, the element of the Vaughan Williams piece I imitated closest was how he divided the orchestra into three separate sections: a solo quartet; a large orchestra (Orch 1); and a smaller orchestra, generally one desk per part (Orch 2).

This commission was to be roughly fifteen minutes long, the longest single movement work I had written to date. To help me fill that time, I decided to use more than one melodic idea to put to variations. In the end, three major melodies were used: *My Song in the Night*, an excerpt from Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia* and Lane Johnson's (b. 1958) *Mine Arm is Lengthened Out*. I chose to include the Vaughan Williams melody as an extra 'tip of the hat' for his influence in writing this piece, while my use of the theme from *My Arm is Lengthened Out* was born out the dedication of the *Rhapsody* to my dear friend Karen Ballard. She was also on that 2011 performance tour, and both *My Song in the Night* and *Mine Arm is Lengthened Out* were of particular importance to her.

In the second measure of the piece, I introduce the most important theme that is not a full tune. It was originally intended to be a mere transitional motif, but I ended up developing it just as much as the four main themes stated above. It is modelled after an early motive used by Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia* (ex. 2.2.1). In it, he employed a type of fauxbourdon of parallel harmonies, or planing, between each chord. As for mine, I kept the roots of each chord within an interval of a third, as Vaughan Williams, did, but voiced it so as to create a larger melodic arc. We only hear the first half of this theme in b. 2 and 3. The second half comes at b. 15 and 16 in the solo quartet. The theme is not stated outright in a single section until b. 63 (ex 2.2.2).



ex. 2.2.1 – excerpt from b. 6-8 of Vaughan Williams *Fantasia* on a Theme by Thomas Tallis.



ex 2.2.2 – Rhapsody on an American Hymn, *Orchestra 2*, b. 63-66.

It isn't until the double bar at b. 21 that the actual hymn 'My Song in the Night' is introduced, either in full or part. True, the transitional motif described earlier is based from it, but the similarity is so small as to render it almost unrelated. The voicing and harmonizing for the hymn tune is my own, though it is largely based on Paul Christiansen's (1914-1997) arrangement<sup>2</sup>, the same one I sang in Collegiate Singers, and therefore the most familiar. The next thirty-four bars are dedicated to this exposition.

Again, I imitated Vaughan Williams' approach to how he introduced the full hymn tune of 'Why Fum'th in Fight' in his *Fantasia*, particularly for the second iteration. The first time we hear the hymn tune is in b. 21, where it is written in simple, four-part harmony. The first variation immediately follows, beginning in b. 39.

In the initial draft of this section (b. 39-55), I had doubts as to whether writing something that looked so similar to Vaughan Williams' piece, particularly in the second violins, was wise, especially as the *Fantasia* is such a well-known work. I ultimately decided to leave it largely unchanged. Even though the two pieces look similar, the harmonic and melodic effects are still unique from each other. Thought, to be safe and per the advice of Prof Meador, this was

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<sup>2</sup> Published by Alfred Music. The Concordia Choir is particularly well known for singing this arrangement under the direction of René Clausen.

the section that prompted the addition of the subtitle ‘After the Manner of Ralph Vaughan Williams.’<sup>3</sup>

Bar 57 is the first obvious use on an extended chord in this piece, with the seventh of the G Major sonority in the violas of orchestras one and two. While much of my choral work up to this point had largely favoured the use of seconds and ninths over sevenths, *Rhapsody on an American Hymn* highlights a new approach in my harmonic writing which would carry over into one of my commonly-used tools, as will be explored in *O vos omnes*. I have a particular fondness for major seven chords, as is evident further on in the *Rhapsody*.

After another reiteration of the main transitional motif, the solo quartet is featured for the next several bars as they explore variations on the hymn tune. I varied the tonality between G Major and e Aeolian frequently, as the hymn itself is a mix of the two. The rapid changing of the modality of these variations also kept Vaughan Williams’ influence heavy during this section, lasting from b. 75-88, when Orchestra 2 re-enters in their first major role.

While Orchestra 2 provides the basic harmonic backbone to the cello solo’s melody, the three remaining solo strings overlap each other in basic triads (ex 2.2.3). This creates both a sense of movement in the accompaniment while retaining its simplicity, as well as interest for the performers. It also provides a slight variance of timbre as the viola constantly changes between the high, middle, and low voice in the parts. In that way, a sort of wave in the harmony is developed, rather than a stagnant, slow measured tremolo (ex 2.2.4).

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<sup>3</sup> Prof Meador also suggested that I go even further in drawing from the *Fantasia* and use more direct quotes at certain places in my *Rhapsody*. Although I chose not to do this, it supported my personal views on the correct and tasteful use of quotations and paraphrasing in original compositions.



ex. 2.2.3 – *ibid.* b.109-112. The violins and viola overlap each other in triads to supply a moving accompaniment for the solo cello.

ex. 2.2.4 – *ibid.* Alternative accompaniment in the violins and violas.

Bar 115 introduces the theme taken straight from *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in the cello solo, with the first violins in Orchestra 2 accompanying it two octaves higher. Because of the dynamic difference between the two sections (cello at *forte* and violins at *mezzo-forte*), the effect is similar to adding a 2' rank on an organ to the 8', the main line piercing through the rest of the orchestra for a clear sound. Beginning in b. 144, the accompanying harmonies for this theme are extended chords, as previously alluded to in b. 57-58. The result is a quasi-ethereal timbre as they stray from the strict triadic sonorities that have been the norm for most of the piece, but without introducing dissonances too harsh or different from what the audience is used to.

For the next several bars, this Vaughan Williams theme is developed alongside reiterations of the transitional motif, as the overlapping style of harmonic accompaniment seen in the solo quartet in b. 110-112 returns in Orchestra 2. They come and go intermittently beginning in b. 150, providing the moving backdrop for the solo quartet to introduce the motive taken from Johnson's *Mine Arm is Lengthened Out* (b. 150-154). That theme, like *My Song in the Night*, is fully introduced in simple four-part hymn format, this time in the quartet. As it progresses, other motifs are introduced that will come and go from the musical texture for the remainder of the piece. These include excerpts from Robert Cundick's (1926-2015) *God's Everlasting Love* and Johannes Brahms' (1833-1897) *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, both pieces being of personal significance to both the dedicatee Karen Ballard and myself.

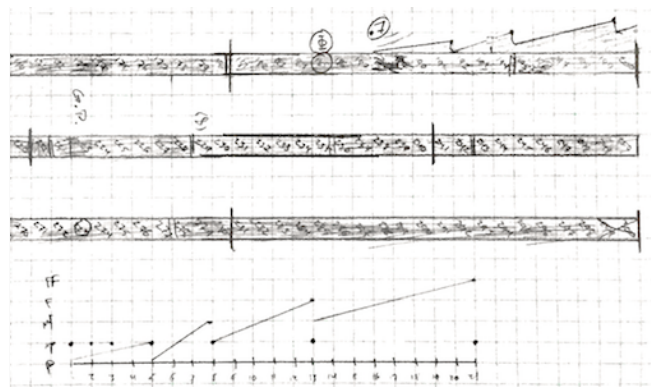
Of particular interest in the construction of this piece is the planning involved in its form. As I knew the average tempo and the length required of the piece, I was able to calculate the approximate number of total bars. Since I was using Vaughan Williams *Fantasia* and my main influence for this piece, I analysed its structure for comparison. When I had determined where in his piece both the golden mean and the climactic section were, I made the necessary adjustments and applied them to the *Rhapsody*, giving myself a clear chart of where I wanted to go and how long I had for each section. Interestingly, the melody at the golden mean bar in the *Fantasia* was the theme I used in my piece. While adjusting for tempo changes, the golden mean in the *Rhapsody* would fall somewhere between b. 175 and 185, where the theme from Brahms' *Requiem* is located. This is the only time that I wrote this theme, and it is obscured enough by diminution to be nearly indiscernible to the lay listener. My reasoning for placing it here is due, once again, the Karen Ballard<sup>4</sup>, as that theme is the opening melody from the fifth movement of the *Requiem*, 'Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit.'

Once this golden section was completed, there were still a few bars before the climax, as modelled by Vaughan Williams. The golden mean falls approximately at 61.8% of the whole piece, according to total the number of bars, whereas the *Fantasia's* climax begins at

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Ballard, with whom I sang the *Requiem* in 2010, lost her second child, Carver Lee, shortly after birth due to health complications. Though the pain of this loss was something that I doubt I will ever understand, she displayed an immeasurable example of clinging to hope and faith. The choral pieces I included as part of this work, *My Song in the Night*; *Mine Arm is Lengthened Out*; *God's Everlasting Love*; and *Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit*, the translated opening text being 'You now have sorrow; but I shall see you again and your heart shall rejoice and your joy no one shall take from you,' each share that common theme that Karen exemplifies, hence the dedication to her.

approximate 70%. To build to the climax of the *Rhapsody*, I relied on the Fibonacci sequence (a common model for the golden ratio) to swell and reduce the dynamic and density of the music leading up to it (see ex. 2.2.5).



ex. 2.2.5 – Detail from formal structure sketch. With each step in the Fibonacci sequence, the dynamic grows in step as well.

After the grand pause in b. 218, the piece begins its slow and steady decrescendo until the end. All previous themes return, varying whether they're performed by the quartet, Orchestra 1 or Orchestra 2. The main hymn is presented again in its four-part format for the first time since its exposition at the beginning, only now the violins of Orchestra 2 perform it. If the directors choose to follow the format for how to build the various sections, the result for b. 260-266 will be that four solo violins perform the theme, creating a light, bright timbre in contrast to the thick and heavy sonority presented in b. 252-257. The final measures of the piece are echoes of the various solo themes, as well as the main transitional motif, which has acted as a unifying theme throughout the piece.

*Rhapsody on an American Hymn* was the longest single-movement composition I had ever done to that point, and presented unique challenges. Through the use of formal planning, the task of filling in so much time (the commission being for fifteen minutes of music), and studying how one of the most famed composers for string orchestra worked, I was able to produce a piece that should be satisfying for both the performers and audience. It is scheduled to be premiered in May or June of 2016.

## 2.2 O Vos Omnes

The commission from Prof Paul Mealor to write *O vos omnes* came as an assignment early in my MMus studies at University of Aberdeen. I had a few unique advantages to writing this piece as opposed to other commissions, the first that I would have several months to sing in the choir that would premiere it. The second advantage came as the commission deadline was approaching. Because of certain circumstances, I didn't have a very long time to write the piece, but I did know where it would fall in the programme. At the same time that I received this commission, my fellow student and composer Benjamin Cramer (b. 1991) received a commission to set *Crux fidelis* for the same event, which was to follow my *O vos omnes* in the performance. Because he finished first, I was able to listen to it glean ideas for myself. As the two texts for our pieces contrasted each other in a complementary fashion, I wanted to provide music that would do the same.

Cramer's setting of *Crux fidelis* is set firmly in E-flat Major and closely follows Mealor's style, particularly in his *She Walks in Beauty* and *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal* cycle. It accurately reflects the triumph of Jesus Christ over death through His sacrifice and the joy it brings to mankind. It focussed on the beauty of that supreme sacrifice. The text for *O vos omnes*, in contrast, focussed on the pain involved in it, thus providing a wonderful juxtaposition for the upcoming concert on Maundy Thursday.

As Cramer's piece was full of light and glory, I made my setting dark and lonely, as reflected in the text. I drew further inspiration for how I wanted this piece to feel from other scriptures, all focussing on the immensity of the pain Jesus felt and the utter loneliness He must have felt during that ordeal. As the hymn 'There is a Green Hill Far Away' states, 'We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains he had to bear....'

Along with complete loneliness, the other emotion I wanted to portray was that of utmost pain. As this piece was commissioned for performance on Maundy Thursday, the day when Christ entered the Garden Gethsemane, I felt it appropriate to try to illustrate what Christ might have felt as described in the scriptures:

*And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;*

*And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.*

*(Mark 14:33-34 KJV)*

*And He went a little farther, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."*

*(Matthew 26:39 KJV)*

*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.*

*(Luke 22:44 KJV)*

The piece begins with a descending semitone in the women, which develops into an E-sharp augmented triad, providing an ethereal dissonance without much pull to any tonality in particular. As it resolves to an f-sharp minor in b. 8, the tenors and basses enter, all fairly low in their range, and repeating the text, 'o vos omnes,' in a dirge-like progression. As in 'A Gethsemane Prayer,' I changed the modes frequently, only in this piece, the changes were based on the minor relations from chord to chord. Using this common tone modulation to produce harmonic sequences became one of the foundations for *O vos omnes*, and is most prevalent in the opening lines sung by the men (see ex. 2.3.1). Another example of this occurs in the sopranos and altos in b. 19 and 20 (2.3.2).

The musical score for Tenors (T) and Basses (B) shows a dirge-like progression. The Tenors' part (top staff) and Basses' part (bottom staff) both feature a descending semitone in the first measure, which then resolves to an E-sharp augmented triad. The lyrics 'O vos omnes' are repeated across the measures, with the Tenors' part having a final measure that includes a fermata. The score is marked with a piano (p) dynamic and includes a crescendo hairpin in the first measure of each part.

ex. 2.3.1 – O vos omnes, b. 7-12

19

S

ten - di - te et vi - de - te si est do

A

ten - di - te et vi - de - te si est

ex 2.3.2 – *ibid*, b. 19-20

The emotion I wanted to portray most prevalently in *O vos omnes* was that of loneliness. The word used to describe the sonic world of this piece to its premier conductor, John Frederick Hudson, was ‘distant.’ Two specific elements were used to accomplish this: dynamics and dyads. As written, the piece does not reach anything above a *mezzo-piano* dynamic until b. 42, nearly halfway through the piece. Even then, it only stays as strong for that bar alone, immediately returning to *piano*. Only at the climactic section in b. 56 and the bar immediately preceding do we reach a full *forte*. This only lasts for eleven bars before the diminuendo to *piano* and softer arrives.

Unique to *O vos omnes* compared to my other compositions is the use of dyads, the second element is creating a feeling of distance and solitude. As stated earlier, my primary *modus operandi* is to write almost exclusively in triads. This piece, however, gave me an opportunity to explore the music of Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) and John Tavener (1944-2013), particularly Pärt’s *Magnificat*. Both composers are known for their masterful use of minimalism, both melodically and harmonically. The first overt use of dyadic minimalism begins in the tenors and basses as they echo the opening descending augmented triad beginning in b. 23. This use of dyads continues in the divisi sopranos at b. 28. Their melody reflects the oboe solo in the third movement of Dmitri Shostakovich’s (1906-1975) fifth symphony, and is an extension of the alto melody in b. 13 and 14. Nearly every example of dyadic melodies follows the same pattern of beginning in unison, followed by splitting with one part ascending by a semitone, and eventually coming back to unison. In b. 44-47 we see the same thing doubled at the octave as the altos follow sopranos’ melody (ex. 2.3.3).

et vi - de - te do - lo - rum me - um

et vi - de - te do - lo - rum me - um

vi - de - te do - lo - rum

vi - de - te do - lo - rum

ex. 2.3.3 – *ibid*, sopranos 1 and 2, altos 1 and 2, b. 45-48.

As the piece begins to approach its climax, the men's and women's parts double each other at the octave, following the progression laid out in the tenors and basses at the beginning, but keeping to the dyad theme. Parallel progressions, both at the octaves and at the perfect fifths, was the natural effect, and kept perfectly in line with the harmonic sonority I had established from the pieces beginning. All parts join together in unison at b. 53, expanding the melody that began in b. 42. As all parts climb up a double harmonic minor scale, growing in dynamic until they finally reach *forte*, a *molto rallantando* is marked to create even greater tension before b. 56 (which lands almost exactly on the golden mean when tempo changes and alterations are taken into account), when the parts explode into a full b minor chord spread throughout the entire vocal range.

Having established the new 'home key' as b minor, I added in the sevenths of each chord as I had done in *Rhapsody on an American Hymn*, as well as added seconds, creating dissonances that are all but standard in modern choral music. As the main climactic theme completes for the first time, a dominant chord at b. 61 that I've used previously on several occasions sets up its repetition. There are two ways to label this specific chord: either a fully diminished  $\text{vii}^\circ$  with an added f-sharp, the dominant of b minor; or a standard  $\text{V}^7$  of the key with an added flat second (ex 2.3.4). The melody recapitulates at b. 62, with an added B6 in the first sopranos for extra power.





## 2.3 Mariner Songs

### 2.3.1 Overview

During the winter and summer before my wife's and my moving to Aberdeen, I worked as a professional transcriptionist for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Services at BYU-Idaho. The nature of the job involved frequent breaks to prevent mental and physical fatigue. During these breaks, I would often go online to search poetry in the public domain that I could later set to music.

It seems that poets have long been fascinated with writing about the ocean, and finding multiple texts on this subject was relatively simple. I selected four and, along with a poem written by my friend Skyler Wixom<sup>5</sup>, laid out the texts which would become my first official song cycle, 'Mariner Songs.' The cycle is dedicated in memoriam to my late paternal grandfather, who served in the US Navy during World War II<sup>6</sup>.

Harmonically, several elements link the five songs in the cycle together, which will be discussed later. Melodically, however, all five songs are quite unique, excepting one motif, which we will refer to as the 'storm' motif.



ex. 2.3.1.1 – 'Storm' motif from Mariner Songs

This motif originated in the overture of my opera 'Jonah, the Prophet'<sup>7</sup> (still in progress). Its place in the overture was to portray the storm that Jonah encountered with his shipmates as he was attempting to flee to Tarshish, according to his book in the Old Testament.

<sup>5</sup> Skyler was also the poet who wrote 'Winter Lullaby,' which I set for choir and piano in 2014. See Appendix B.

<sup>6</sup> Grandpa Merrill, along with the rest of my family, was an enthusiastic supporter of the Seattle Mariners baseball club since the team's inception in 1977. So though the songs have nothing to do with the baseball team, other than being named after sailors as Seattle has a rich maritime tradition, the title has an unintended double meaning in its dedication.

<sup>7</sup> Libretto by Ray Alston. The overture and first scene were premiered on 3 Nov, 2013 in the Barrus Concert Hall at BYU-Idaho.

72

Pno.

76

Pno.

80

Moderato (♩ = c. 108)

mp

ex. 2.3.1.2 – excerpt from the overture of *Jonah, the Prophet* (condensed vocal score), b 72-84. The origin of the ‘storm’ motif in *Mariner Songs* is found in b 75-80.

This same element of parallel chords, or ‘planing’ is used generously in the entire *Mariner Songs* cycle, as a kind of harmonic ‘wave’ motif.

Adagio ♩ = 60

mf

Soprano Solo

Soprano

Alto

For rehearsal only

Be still now my love, the night is de -

Mmm

Mmm

ex 2.3.1.3 – b 1-5 of *Prayer to the Sea*, in which the open notes move in parallel intervals

From the texts chosen for this cycle, the listener is taken along with a young sailor and his journey out to sea, beginning with his mother offering a prayer for his safety as she entrusts him to the awesome power of the ocean. We follow the sailor as he revels in the adventure of being at sea, his fear as a storm approaches, and the deep thoughts of his own existence as he becomes shipwrecked. The cycle ends from the dual perspective of our sailor and his mother as they both come to acceptance of whatever their final outcome may be.

Each of the first four songs in the cycle highlights a soloist from each section in turn, while in the fifth and final song they combine to make a solo quartet after singing brief reprises of their respective themes. The choice for this ensemble setup is purely aesthetic, with no intended symbolism aside from the assigned sex of each ‘character’ (soprano for the mother, baritone and tenor for the sailor).

There is, however, a practical use for using as many soloists. Aside from *Hateful is the Dark-Blue Sky*, these songs will have only three rehearsals before their scheduled premiere as part of the MMus student concert by the University of Aberdeen Chamber Choir in autumn 2-16. By highlighting soloists and making the rest of the choir’s parts relatively simple, the chances for the choir to learn the songs quickly at a high performance level are increased.

### 2.3.2 Prayer to the Sea

The text for this first song in the cycle is by Skyler Wixom, with whom I’ve collaborated before on another choral piece, *Winter Lullaby* (2013)<sup>8</sup>. Both poems were written about the same time, and their structure and form share many similarities. Consequently, the general form of my setting for *Prayer to the Sea* also shares many qualities with my setting *Winter Lullaby*, especially in terms of form.

The soprano soloist enters in the second bar and presents the main melody of this song. It is reflective of a Celtic folk song, complete with small ornaments particular to that style written in. This melody is written in what closely resembles the standard ‘song’ form (AABA). Likewise, the song itself shares that form, with b 1-17 and b 18-37 closely mimicking each

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<sup>8</sup> Compare with ‘Winter Lullaby, Appendix B: Supplemental works

others' melodic and harmonic content (the main difference being texture and timbre); b 40-88 acting as the B section; and b 81 to the end as the recapitulation of the original A section.

This song begins with the women humming in open fourths, gently rising and falling just as waves lap up against the shore (see ex 2.3.1.3). As stated previously, this parallel motion is a harmonic motif representing the waves of the sea. Beginning the cycle with this motif prepares the listener for what he or she might expect throughout all five songs. In this first 'A' section (b. 1-17), the melody is laid out clear and unobstructed by a soprano soloist as the accompanying voices are limited to humming and softly singing on an 'ooh' vowel, with the exception of two beats where they open to a stronger 'oh.' But the soloist doesn't compete with that until after they have begun their *diminuendo* back to a softer dynamic and vowel sound, giving her an open window through which to sing.

The majority of the chords in this opening section are written in second inversion, thereby providing a sense of instability in the harmonic progressions. The basses don't go below C3 until the second 'A' section at b 20. Postponing a strong, low note in the basses provides an sense of tension-and-release without the audience being aware of there ever being any need for that resolution, at least not in the way that a dominant chord sets up its resolution. I was first made aware of this technique in one of my courses during my first term as an MMus student. We – my classmates and I – were analysing a particular piece by Morten Lauridsen in which he didn't give the basses a true 'bass note' until after several bars had passed and the main themes of the piece had been well-established. In the words of fellow-student Benj Cramer in regards to this particular technique, 'He earned those bass notes.'

As the soloist resolves her melody in b 18, the altos and tenors begin an ostinato that again illustrates the waves of the sea, only more agitated and rapid, while the entire soprano sections takes up the melody. They add in a greater sense of tension and anxiety as they constantly overlap each other, settling into homophony only rarely until the theme begins to resolve in b 36-39.

16 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

S. Solo rocks you to sleep by my side.

S (Mmm)

A (Mmm) *mp* By my side. By my side. By my side. By my side. By my

T (Mmm) *mp* By my side. By my side. By my side. By my side.

B (Mmm) *mp* My side

ex. 2.3.2.1 – Prayer to the Sea b. 16-20. Altos and tenors continuously overlap each other as the basses sing their first note lower than C3

What adds more to the unrest of this section is the use of actual lyrics as opposed to neutral vowels in the accompaniment. The words in each section are misaligned from each other for nearly all of b 18-29.

26

S cause it must take you for - ev - er from me. Ah

A take you take you for - e - ver from me So long as you

T Take you. Take you, for - e - ver from me. So long as you

B Take you for - e - ver. Ah

Ex. 2.3.2.2 – *ibid*, b 26-30. Example of misaligned text through each section.

At b 30 the sopranos pass off the melody to the altos and tenors, who sing it in a sort of duet and the basses and sopranos revert to the neutral vowel ‘ah.’ The sopranos then retake the melody at b 33. At its conclusion, the altos, tenors, and basses gradually decrescendo until they all arrive on a D, the dominant of the key. This D acts as the pivot for a common tone modulation as the song transposes into d minor for the ‘B’ section.

It is here that the wave harmonic motif comes in full force, as the sopranos and first altos oscillate between d minor and C Major, the second altos providing a pedal tone A underneath. This A also provides an a minor 7 sonority for each time the others are singing the C triad. However, as it functions as a pedal tone, the note soon becomes more ‘felt’ than heard, and resulting 7 chord is not overtly apparent to the listener.

41

S (Ooh)

A (Ooh)

ex 2.3.2.3 – *ibid*. Detail from b 41-45. Sopranos and first altos share ‘wave’ harmonic motif whilst second altos provide pedal tone.

This section is also where we hear the ‘storm’ melodic motif for the first time, shared between the tenors and basses. They do so without any rhythmic variance, simply laying out the notes in a regular pattern of crotchets. This same melody/motif is repeated, various sections passing it back and forth from each other, as the song nears its climax between b 60-72.

T  
Shim - mer - ing waves, — my soul lives with thee. — I

B  
Shim - mer - ing waves, — my soul lives with thee. — I

ex 2.3.2.4 – *ibid.* Detail from b 41-45. Tenors and basses presenting the ‘storm’ motif outright.

All sections decrescendo and slow down (through use of rhythmic augmentation as opposed to tempo change) in the five bars leading up the climax of the song, which begins in bar 78. Having the choir back off before a powerful re-entry adds to the impact of the climax in the same way a dramatic pause intensifies an important moment in film or conversation<sup>9</sup>. The melody for the climactic section is taken from the ‘B’ section of the main melody. The altos carry it whilst the other sections provide a polyphonic harmonic background until it goes through a brief development section between the various sections from b 83-87.

The soprano soloist reprises at b 90. The rest of the choir accompanies her as they echo the text she is singing in a homophonic variant of the original ‘wave’ accompaniment from the beginning of the song. We are given one last flourish as the choir swells, taking the melody from the soloist at b 99, before she takes it back in b 102. She and the choir gradually fade until the song’s soft conclusion on a g minor chord.

### 2.3.3 Young Sea

In direct contrast to the slow, solemn, and lyrical *Prayer to the Sea*, *Young Sea* is energetic, quick, and youthful; its initial tempo marking is written as ‘Like an upbeat shanty.’ As did *Prayer to the Sea*, this song begins with the ‘wave’ harmonic motif, only in full triads throughout the entire choir. As the first chord change is from the tonic of D Major to the flat 7<sup>th</sup> of C major,

<sup>9</sup> I learned of this technique of using silence, or at least softness, before the climax of a piece from Thomas LaVoy’s PhD proposal for the University of Aberdeen.

a strong sense of mixolydian mode becomes apparent. From my studies into old maritime folksongs and sea shanties, this tends to be the popular choice of key.

A baritone provides the solo voice for this song, beginning at pick up to bar 3. Again, the choir accompanies on the neutral ‘ooh’ vowel, allowing the soloist to ring out without obstacle.

It wasn’t until my wife pointed it out to me when I first played this for her that I realised striking similarities between the soloist’s melody and one of the main themes in my *Jonah, the Prophet*. Though it wasn’t intended, I can’t say that I was particularly surprised by it, in that I drew inspiration for both melodies from the sea shanty/English folk song tradition.



ex 2.3.3.1 – Young Sea, detail of b 2-4.



ex 2.3.3.2 – Jonah, the Prophet, overture (condensed vocal score) b 34-37.

Despite the obvious similarities, I make no apology for this for two main reasons:

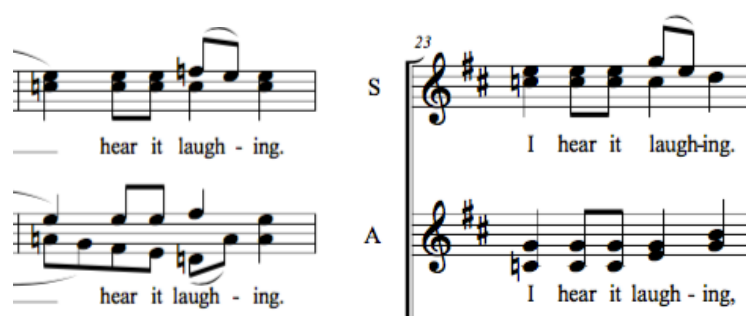
- a) The probability of *Jonah* coming to full fruition aren’t terribly high, at least not in the foreseeable future, and



- b) Ralph Vaughan Williams borrowed extensively from his opera *Pilgrim's Progress* and used it in his fifth symphony.<sup>10</sup>

Just as in *Prayer to the Sea*, *Young Sea* is written in a loose song form, though this song's structure is less strict than the former. Harmonically and melodically, both beginning 'A' sections (b 1-9 and 10-17) are nearly identical, as is the final 'A' section (46-53). The main differences between the first two are adjustments made to the rhythm so as to match the generally irregular metre of the poem.

Bar 18 begins a small variant of the main 'A' theme before presenting the 'storm' motif for this song in b 22-23. This instance of the motif is the hardest one to identify, as it is so short-lived, and it is hidden without a major sonority.



ex 2.3.3.3 – Young Sea, detail from b 22(TB)-23(SA).

Aside from the very last note in the soprano line, the intervals and number of repetitions for each note are identical to the original motif as displayed in ex 2.3.1.1.

The use of this motif in this way at these words, 'I hear it laughing,' acts as foreshadowing of the shipwreck that will happen in *Hateful is the Dark-Blue Sky*. The sea recklessly laughs, knowing that it has complete power over the sailors. The major sonority represents both the sailor's naiveté shown through his own joy at the adventure, and the sea's glee at its own awesome strength. The regular parallel triads in quavers that usually end each section at bar 26 are offset from each other by one beat as text painting at the word 'reckless.'

<sup>10</sup> Or maybe it was the other way around. I'm not quite sure on that. He started *Pilgrim's Progress* first, but finished it after the symphony was completed. Regardless, there's a lot of shared material between the two.

A more obvious sense of foreboding and foreshadowing in b 28-45. The main harmonic structure in this section is primarily an oscillation between the I and minor v chord, a sonority which I have been particularly fond of recently<sup>11</sup>. The women carry the melody in a duet whilst the men provide the accompaniment on simple ‘oh’ and ‘ah’ vowels. The effect they give as they open to the ‘ah’ in b 35 is one of perceived strength only, as that vowel is more open and projects better, though the dynamic doesn’t change.

This passage produces a bittersweet feeling as the choir sings:

*They love the sea,  
Men who ride on it  
And know they will die  
Under the salt of it*

The melody is repeated in four-part harmony from b 38-43, adding strength and warmth to the music. Beginning at b 44 the choir uses parallel triads rising and falling as a growing wave does to transition back to the ‘A’ theme at b 46.

The baritone soloist reprises his theme from b 46-49 before the choir sopranos takes over the melody in b 50. The same storm/laughing theme is re-stated at b 53 until the same broken parallel theme as seen in b 26 is repeated in b 57. This time, however, not only are the rhythms offset, but each adjective or adverb which ends the first three stanzas of the poem are each stated twice at disjunctive times between the men and women.

The song closes with several repetition of the opening triadic parallel theme, gathering speed as the choir repeats ‘is never still’ for three consecutive bars while also softening in dynamic down to a *pianissimo*, before one final flourish like a shout of triumph, the choir comes back on flat VII to I cadence with an ‘ah’ vowel.

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<sup>11</sup> See ‘Midnight Waltz,’ Appendix B – Supplemental works.

### 2.3.4 Before the Squall

*Before the Squall* acts as the uneasy calm before the storm of *Hateful is the Dark-Blue Sky*. It is the shortest song in the cycle, lasting circa 1'15". There is no time signature, but bar lines provide a sense of structure.

Harmonically, this song is anchored in an octatonic scale beginning on C, and the sopranos outline it exactly in the first measure.

Freely, with anxiety  $\text{♩} = 60$

*sempre p* *poco rit.* *simile*

Soprano  
The wind is ris - ing on the sea, The wind - y white foam danc - ers leap;

Alto  
The wind is ris - ing on the sea, The wind - y white foam danc - ers leap;

Tenor  
The wind is ris - ing on the sea, The wind - y white foam danc - ers leap;

Bass  
The wind is ris - ing on the sea, The wind - y white foam danc - ers leap;

ex. 2.3.4.1 – Before the Squall b 1-2

As shown in ex 2.3.4.1, all four parts generally travel in unison or thirds for the majority of the song, with occasional splits, usually at the end of each bar. The song is purposefully written without any real sense of structure, motion, or depth. It is meant to sound in a sort of ‘nowhere’ for the listener, painting – for lack of better words – a grey sonority.

At b 6 the basses and baritones provide a pedal tone in octaves to support the alto soloist. The soloist has much more freedom for interpretation than any of the others do, as her solo is written with only the most basic rhythmic indications in stemless note heads, and the instruction to sing in a recitative fashion. It’s in her first bar that we hear the ‘storm’ motif for this song.



the song. As the women continue their soft, slow, dirge-like tune, the men repeat their rhythmic ‘Let us alone,’ melody, independent of the current tempo, as if they were thunder regressing into the distance<sup>13</sup>.

The song ends on an open fifth of B and F#, and leads *attacca* into the fifth and final song.

### 2.3.6 Beyond the Sea

The introduction of the fifth and final song of the *Mariner Songs* cycle emerges from *Hateful is the Dark Blue Sky*’s final open fifth. The idea for saving the piano accompaniment until the end of the cycle, and of having it enter in *attacca* from the previous song, was directly inspired by Morten Lauridsen’s *Les Chansons des Roses*, which is a capella for the first four songs until the classic *Dirait-on*. In *Beyond the Sea*, steady quavers in an upper octave in the right hand provide a soft pulse as the left hand oscillates first single notes, then diads, outlining the main harmonic idea of the movement: Major I to minor v and back again. As this ostinato carries on, each of the four soloists return to make a brief reprise of their solo material in the order they first performed them (soprano, baritone, alto, tenor).

At b 13 we enter into the song proper, its form being strophic, reflecting the strict metre of the poem it uses for its lyrics. This song is unique amongst the others for three main reasons: first, because of its piano accompaniment, as mentioned; second, it is the only song to not have either the ‘storm’ motif nor the ‘wave’ harmonics; and third, the melody is nearly void of any non-chord tones.

The piano figure at this point carries on the I-v harmonic theme, and its melodic material will be used in different variants throughout the song.

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that this ‘echo’ effect was written into the score after the premiere recording, which is provided on the accompanying sound files.



ex. 2.3.6.1 – Beyond the Sea, b 13-14, piano accompaniment

After an introduction from the piano and, beginning at b 15, the choir, the soloists present us with the song's melody. As stated previously, this melody, with only two exceptions, is exclusively formed from the chord tones of each accompanying triad. The two exceptions are found, as an example, in b 20 and 26.

20

gone. And e - ver on its track will flee —

Far, far from me. And on its track will flee —

The image shows a musical score for a solo quartet. It features a treble and bass staff in B-flat major. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are: 'gone. And e - ver on its track will flee —' and 'Far, far from me. And on its track will flee —'. The score is marked with a '20' at the beginning of the first line.

ex. 2.3.6.2 – *ibid.*, b 20-23, solo quartet. The fourth beat of bar 20 is the first non-chord tone of the melody, found in the tenor and baritone lines.

25

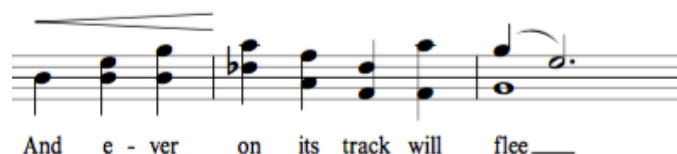
dreams, ————— be - yond the sea.

dreams, ————— be - yond the sea.

The image shows a musical score for a solo quartet. It features a treble and bass staff in B-flat major. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are: 'dreams, ————— be - yond the sea.' and 'dreams, ————— be - yond the sea.' The score is marked with a '25' at the beginning of the first line.

ex 2.3.6.3 – *ibid.*, b 25-27. Here, the non-chord tone is shared between the women and men soloists (beat four, bar 26), and is identical to the previous example.

This melody bears a slight resemblance to the melody used in *A Prayer to the Sea*, in that it contains a swell up to two consecutive descending lines at the beginning of its second half. Sharing this basic structure on the outer most songs in the cycle provides a sense of continuity and resolution, as well as brings us back to the mother of our sailor. The duality between the women and the men soloists fulfils both of their roles, as if this song could be referring to either or both.



ex 2.3.6.4 – *ibid.*, b 21-23, soprano. Beginning in b 22 we see the two consecutive descending lines which comprise of the beginning of the second half of the melody.

Musical notation for the solo soprano (S. Solo) and tutti soprano (S) parts of the song. The solo soprano part is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tutti soprano part is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'mf' and 'f'.

ex 2.3.6.5 – *A Prayer to the Sea*, b 98-102, solo soprano and tutti soprano. Notice the similarity in structure beginning in b 98-100.

This being said, one of the main purposes of this song in its relation to the others is to provide contrast. As both its harmonic and melodic structures are so straightforward, with minimal cluster chords, parallel harmonies, and dissonances in general, it accomplishes this purpose exceedingly well.

As the harmony constantly alternates between major and minor chords so closely related to each other (though it could be argued that they are not related, seeing as how the v chord, missing its leading tone, does not function at all as a dominant), we get neither a major nor minor feel for the key of the song. It invokes a sense of bitter-sweet, leaving the audience guessing whether the sailor survived the storm or will see his mother again. Though the text suggests that they are separated, whether or not they have the possibility of reuniting with each other is up to the listener to decide.

The second verse, beginning at b 29, is simply a denser version of the first verse. The piano plays triplets against quavers, providing greater motion in the accompaniment. As the accompaniment provides more, faster notes, the choir increases the density by singing more clusters and suspensions than the majority of the piece.

29

S Be - yond the sea, The swal - low wan - ders.

A Be - yond the sea, The swal - low wan - ders.

T Ah Be - yond the sea, fast and

B Ah Be - yond the sea, fast and

Pno. (8<sup>va</sup>) --, 8<sup>va</sup> --, 15<sup>va</sup> --,

ex 2.3.6.6 – Beyond the Sea, b 29-32

After a short bridge from b 40-43, in which the choir sings on an open ‘Ah’ whilst the piano provides a variant of the bridge of the melody itself (see ex 2.3.6.4) – again, reflective of the opening song of the cycle – the soloists re-enter for the third verse, a very thin accompaniment being provided in the piano and choir.

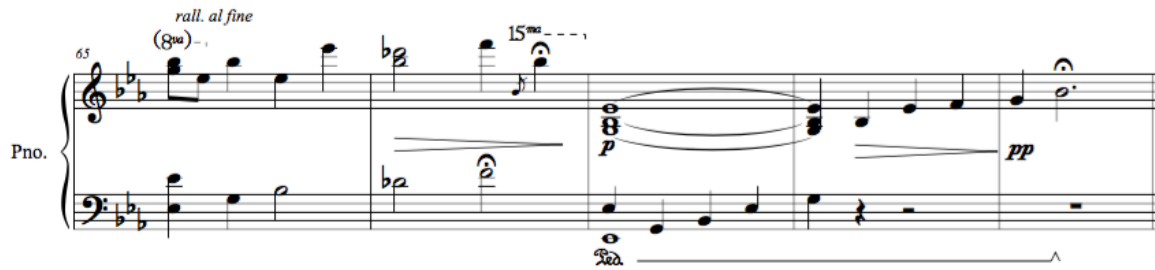




ex 2.3.6.7 – *ibid.*, b 45-46

My experience in writing for choir and piano is limited, having only written one other piece besides this one (*Winter Lullaby*, 2013). Finding a pleasant balance between the choir and accompaniment has been a challenge for me, especially in this particular piece. However, I believe I have found a tool that not only works, but that I also enjoy: less is more. In both *Winter Lullaby* and *Beyond the Sea*, by scaling back and thinning out chords to only what is essential has proven to make the piece easier to listen to and brings more focus on the choir.

After one last swell in b 50-51, the choir finishes the third and final verse and begins a gradual decrescendo until the piano is left as a solo instrument in 63, playing only the bare minimum of its primary figure first laid out in b 13-14. As it gets softer and softer, it concludes the song and the cycle with a gently rising arpeggio. But, in an effort to prevent too much resolution, it ends on a single B-flat. The sustain pedal is lifted when this note is played, leaving it completely exposed. It provides a sense of ambiguity, acting as both the root of the dominant chord, and as an at-rest note for the tonic. The overall emotion that the audience should have at this, the conclusion of this cycle is that of contentment and acceptance, no matter whether the outcome was for good or ill.



ex 2.3.6.8 – *ibid.*, b 65-69

### 3. Conclusion and Future Projects

Western music has its roots firmly planted in tonality and its predecessor, modality. Mixing these two sets of theory is my favourite tool in composition, as is evident in the pieces included in this commentary. Among the compositions I am planning to write in the near future, perhaps the one that will be most indicative of my philosophies and techniques will be the full oratorio, *The Martyrdom of the Saints*, for orchestra, organ, large and small choirs, and soloists. The idea for this work stemmed from the stained-glass window on the west wall of St Machar's Cathedral in Aberdeen, Scotland, which depicts Christ and the original twelve apostles (replacing Judas Iscariot with Matthias and including Paul) alongside emblems of their martyrdom: Jesus and Peter with a cross, Andrew next to a saltire cross, Paul with a sword, and so on. Being a Christian myself, and belonging to a faith that has an intimate connection with martyrs itself<sup>14</sup>, this piece will have an especial deep significance to me personally. Text will be drawn from traditional Christian sources such as the Bible<sup>15</sup>, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Requiem Mass, alongside other sources that speak on the topic, including books of scripture unique to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. By focusing only on shared doctrines and avoiding any denomination-specific beliefs, this

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Smith Jr, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, alongside his brother Hyrum, the Patriarch to the church, were both murdered while prisoners at Carthage Jail in Carthage, Illinois, USA on 27 June, 1846. Numerous other members of the church were killed in various mobbings and massacres, especially in the state of Missouri, where then Gov Lilburn W Boggs issued an extermination order, in which he declared 'The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary....' (Missouri Executive Order 44). Many others died of exposure and starvation in the mass exodus across the American plains to modern-day Utah.

<sup>15</sup> My preferred version of the Bible is the King James Version for both its poetic nature and its being the version I grew up reading.

libretto will be arranged in such a way that will be universally acceptable to all Christian faiths.

Musically, this oratorio will draw on elements dating from the renaissance to the music of today. Using antiphonal choirs, a connection between Heaven and Earth as bridged by the martyrs will be illustrated, the large choir representing mankind, and the antiphonal chamber choir representing the Heavenly hosts guiding the way to their eternal reward. I am considering mixing the libretto with both the English and Latin versions of the various motets, with the chamber choir singing primarily in the Latin, thus giving them an extra emphasis on the holiness that they represent. Once completed, it will not only be the largest work I will have written to date, but will also be a prime example of each individual element of my compositional style, as well as my philosophies on plurality and my central desire to promote fellowship, fraternity, and goodwill among all of us as humankind.

## **4.     Appendices**

### **4.1    Appendix A – Featured works**

- *Rhapsody on an American Hymn*, for mixed string orchestra (2015)
- *Vos Omnes*, for SSAATTBB choir (2016)
- *Mariner Songs*, for mixed choir, soli, and piano (2015-2016)

#### 4.2 Appendix B – Supplemental works (Located on accompanying CD)

- *Jonah, the Prophet*, opera for orchestra, soloists, and chorus (2013)
  - *Overture*
  - *Scene 1, aria, ‘O Lord God’*
- *Winter Lullaby*, for mixed choir and piano (2013)

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