

THE IMPACT OF RUSSIAN MUSIC IN
ENGLAND 1893-1929

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the reception of Russian music in England for the period 1893-1929 and the influence it had on English composers.

Part I deals with the critical reception of Russian music in England in the cultural and political context of the period from the year of Tchaikovsky's last successful visit to London in 1893 to the last season of Diaghilev's *Ballet russes* in 1929. The broad theme examines how Russian music presented a challenge to the accepted aesthetic norms of the day and how this, combined with the contextual perceptions of Russia and Russian people, problematized the reception of Russian music, the result of which still informs some of our attitudes towards Russian composers today.

Part II examines the influence that Russian music had on British composers of the period, specifically Stanford, Bantock, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Frank Bridge, Bax, Bliss and Walton. A combination of comparative examples and critical discussion of the music is used to illustrate how Russian music influenced these composers and, as a result, demonstrate the key role Russian music played in helping them to find their compositional voice.

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INTRODUCTION

RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE – A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language,
or diverse in interest.*

T. S. Eliot¹

In England, and specifically London, the fifty years or so from 1880 onwards saw a growing interest in establishing a distinctive professional musical culture. The English musical renaissance, as it became termed, has since become a heavily researched topic not just for musicologists but also for cultural and social historians. The bulk of this writing has naturally focussed on the English composers and their music of the period. More recently other writers have attempted to place the English musical renaissance into its broader socio-political context, which has significantly enriched our appreciation of the phenomenon. Most of the writing of the former group, however, examines English music purely in local terms: English composers and their music in relation to other English composers and musicians; little has been written that investigates at length the English musical renaissance against the vast range of continental European music that was being performed in England at this time and the role it played in directing the renaissance. Studies have been made of individual composers and their reception in England, for example Chopin and Debussy², but to research extensively the reception of a number of composers from one country and trace their influence in another country is an approach that has very little precedent. This thesis is about the presentation of and response to Russian music in England during the period from Tchaikovsky's visit to Cambridge and London in 1893 to the death of Diaghilev in 1929, and the reaction to and assimilation of this music by English composers.

The Anglo-American empirical tradition of music historiography has largely been a causal and positivistic history of composers' lives and their works. Only recently has

¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (2nd edn., London: Methuen, 1928), 125.

² D. Carew, 'Victorian Attitudes to Chopin', in J. Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992). Roger Nichols, 'Debussy in London', *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

significant effort been made to connect it with the aesthetics of composition and performance. The broad concept of ‘reception’ in music is, in itself, nothing new; generalisations about attitudes toward and responses to a composer or repertoire have been made for the last few centuries. Reception theory proper was originally an aspect of literary theory; as a tool for music history its application only really began in earnest in the late 1980s. In presenting his theory of *Rezeptionsästhetik* (aesthetic of reception or reader-response theory) in 1967, Hans Robert Jauss had essentially evolved a branch of hermeneutics in literary theory to investigate the nature of the reader’s activity in the process of understanding literary texts.³ Other authors, such as Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, have also contributed to the field, with differing emphases, but all essentially agree on the importance of the audience’s reflexive relationship with a work in interpreting it and finding meaning in it specific to their own position in history.

For the purposes of what one might call ‘listener-response theory’ the essence of the theory remains the same. To reconstruct the set of conventions, expectations and beliefs that existed at the time of a work’s creation or performance is an unrealistic goal. These things cannot exist as either stated or recorded propositions; a generation cannot consciously know of the conditions of their existence directly, thus, neither can those generations who come after them; they may only perceive them indirectly, albeit objectively. On hearing a work the audience – whether it be public or domestic, layman or critic – reacts, and one needs to analyse the response within an objectifiable system of expectations, a system termed the ‘horizon of expectation’. The reaction, or work-audience dialogue, relates the question or problem posed by the work to the answer or solution (i.e. interpretation) of an audience supported by their ‘horizon of expectation’, which may be constructed from a number of factors, musical or otherwise.

At the initial reception of a work a general aesthetic comparison is made with those works already known. The reception study in this thesis begins when little was known about Russian music in England, thus audiences would have expanded their horizon to include what

³ Hans Robert Jauss (tr. Timothy Bahti), *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: Harvester Press, 1982).

they knew, if anything, about Russia in general. For this reason English political, social and cultural perspectives of Russia are included and contextualised in this thesis. The work-audience dialogue at the first performance of some Russian music (e.g. Musorgsky) posed unintelligible questions with regard to the prevailing conventions; other composers were less problematic, but inevitably audiences provided answers to both supported by a 'horizon' initially largely constructed of non-musical landmarks (about which much was presumed), as of strictly musical ones. Subsequent work-audience dialogues enabled initial answers to be sustained and enriched or, in the light of a revised 'horizon' (e.g. after hearing new works, reading articles), precipitate a reappraisal and new answers, or merely further questions that only a later generation could answer.

The first part of this thesis is a reception study of Russian music in England beginning in 1893. This was towards the end of the first phase of the English musical renaissance, which began with George Grove establishing the Royal College of Music in 1883. By the turn of the century some composers, under the pressure from various quarters, began to attempt to distance themselves from the panromanogermanic 'mainstream' stylistic hegemony that England appeared to have been labouring under and which the RCM seemed to perpetuate.⁴ It was at this time that Russian music began to be performed regularly in London, its propagation largely due to Henry Wood and Rosa Newmarch, amongst others. The attraction of Russian music was based on a crude and relativistic perception that it stood beyond (both geographically and aesthetically) the 'mainstream' style and thus appeared to eschew all that the panromanogermanic aesthetic stood for, if such a thing could be said to exist. The vividness of its orchestrations, its emotional range (alternating extreme dynamism with erotic languor or dark pessimism) and rather distinct approach to musical rhetoric and form invoked strong reactions from press and audiences alike. Second, it appeared to some that with Russian music lay a solution to what was regarded as the English problem at this

⁴ Panromanogermanic is Richard Taruskin's more politically correct term for the European 'mainstream' style from which the 'nationalist' (or any 'other') style deviates. In late nineteenth century England the panromanogermanic repertoire was that body of 'classic' works popular with audiences but, moreover, regarded by professors of composition in colleges of music as the epitomization of 'good Art'. It included figures such as Bach, Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Beethoven, Spohr, Weber, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Verdi and the pre-*Tristan* works of Wagner.

time: a lack of a distinctive style (but not necessarily a national style). The Russians themselves had been in a similar position forty years or so earlier in wanting to distance themselves from the 'Italianate' style that had troubled their stylistic self-expression since the early eighteenth century and it appeared to many that they had been successful. Russia seemed an ideal role model, musically speaking. However, other aspects of Russian culture and society (e.g. the Bolshevik Revolution) would, by association, make the reception of some of its music problematic and so, for the reasons stated above, these contextual circumstances have also been explored in the thesis.

At the turn of the century England was largely ignorant of Russian society and culture, and so English audiences were somewhat impressionable in their responses to Russian music. This led to myriad myths or basic factual inaccuracies, some of which have only been recently clarified in English-language texts on the subject. Yet these incorrect 'facts' are important since they reveal how English audiences and composers of the time understood their Russian counterparts. English interest in Russian culture broadly parallels the political and diplomatic relationship that Britain had with Russia from 1893 to 1929. This thesis charts the steady rise of Russophilia (though not without incident) from the end of the nineteenth century to its peak during 1914-17 when Britain was allied with Russia in the First World War and cultural exchange was high. The Bolshevik Revolution created a more directly political situation and the anxiety of the ensuing Red Scare introduced the split issue of White émigrés and Red Soviets. This reception history is thus designed to provide the platform from which to discuss and analyse the compositions of those English composers who were influenced by and benefited most fruitfully from the example of Russian music.

The study of the mechanism of influence in the realm of music is one that has not received any particularly widespread or consistent attention. It has only been in recent years that scholars have begun to explore extensively the influences that contribute to the forging of a composer's style. A somewhat idealized image of the creative process has no doubt distracted studies away from this area and perhaps some feel to explore this in any depth undermines the standing of a composer as an 'original' artist. Each composer's value and validity – due to the pressures of a narrowly and positivistically defined canon, especially

from Beethoven onwards – was seemingly linked to how able they were to demonstrate their originality. Musicologists have spent far more time demonstrating those never-done-before aspects of a piece; as with the street artist, the tag ‘all my own work’ is paramount. Composers themselves are naturally cagey when it comes to the question of whom or what has influenced them. The literary theorist Harold Bloom, in his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, posits the idea that influence cannot be evaded; in all literature there is a complex act of strong misreading of previous writing, what Bloom calls ‘poetic misprision’. ‘What writers may experience as anxiety, and what their works are compelled to manifest, are the *consequences* of poetic misprision, rather than the *cause* of it.’⁵ The nature of the complex relationship between the influence and the influenced is necessarily defensive, thus the anxiety. However, stylistic influence is not only unavoidable, but also quite necessary for an artist or musical culture to reach maturity. Bloom stresses that it is the element of *misreading* that is important and that the ‘reading is likely to be idiosyncratic and is almost certain to be ambivalent, though the ambivalence may be veiled.’⁶ He goes on to point out the inherent paradox, namely that mere imitation only ever produces a pale reflection of the influence, it is through a creative interpretation, or ‘agonistic misprision’, that an artist achieves a seemingly original piece of work. Individuality, whether national or personal, does not rely upon one being able to shut oneself away, but quite the opposite, relying instead upon the degree, the freedom and the uniqueness of reciprocal influence.

The fine line between ‘pale reflection’ and ‘creative interpretation’ is clearly an issue for any creative artist, but one that perhaps English composers of the nineteenth century were not always successful in discerning; England was not so much a ‘land without music’ as a ‘land without its own music’. Later generations were acutely aware of this, thus the English musical renaissance was a rather self-conscious phenomenon and the notion of originality a sensitive issue. Though outwardly confident the renaissance was tainted by insecurities and self-doubt, detectable in the critical writings on English music where well-intentioned but somewhat over-ambitious claims for its stylistic originality are made. Yet it was exactly a

⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (2nd edn., New York: OUP, 1997), xxiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

kind of musical misprision that English composers needed to carry out in order for them to discover their own distinctive style. Many influences, of course, contributed to English composers finding their own style, but because the issue was further complicated by the politics of whether they should cultivate an individual or a national style, some influences (e.g. Tudor composers, folk music) were more acceptable than others. As a consequence the role Continental music (whether panromanogermanic or not) played in shaping various composers' styles was marginalized, which in turn has only helped to confer upon them mere parochial status. This thesis will demonstrate specifically the role Russian music played in enriching the style of many English composers and enabling them to find their own voice. As Russian music helped some English composers to create their first mature works, it also on a broader scale helped English music in general to mature as the musical renaissance continued.

The second half of this thesis focuses on English composers' responses to Russian music, both verbally and musically. Strict Bloomian analysis is not conducted in this thesis simply because of the restrictions of space and moreover because of the impracticality of applying a single framework to such large and highly heterogeneous body of Russian sources. Rather it was felt it would be more fruitful to present the English music in the light of Bloom's general concept of poetic misprision in conjunction with comparative analysis with the Russian music that has influenced it. The pieces chosen are in no way designed to be an exhaustive collection of the pieces in which Russian influences played a part – that could only be undertaken in a larger study than this permits – but rather the ones felt to demonstrate how wide and significant the impact was. Of the composers that the thesis explores, namely Stanford, Bantock, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Frank Bridge, Bax, Bliss and Walton, a select number of works will be analysed with detailed references to the Russian scores that played a role in the composition of each. Thus the broader aim of this thesis is to dismantle the perception of Englishness in music, which has created a misleading image of English composers as being artistically and creatively narrow-minded and thus led to a general underrating of their achievements.

PART I

HISTORY, CONTEXT AND RECEPTION

CHAPTER ONE

OLD IDEALS VERSUS NEW TRENDS: BEGINNINGS TO 1899

'Ware the Muscovite!
Henry Krehbiel.¹

Thoughtful minds see clearly enough that the Slavs are the 'coming people'.
Musical Times, 1 August 1887.

English Perceptions of Russian Culture

When France and Russia signed their Dual Alliance in January 1894 the impact on popular culture was tangible: 'Paris erupted in jubilation verging on hysteria. Matchboxes with portraits of the tsar, Kronstadt pipes and Neva billfolds became all the rage. Portraits of the tsar and tsarina were hung in children's rooms. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky became favourite reading.'² The example is given as a basic (and crude) instance of how directly political gestures can impact upon art and culture. But such examples are only truly illuminating when placed in a wider context, not least because of the subtle interactions of culture and politics. Thus it is necessary first to briefly discuss the political and diplomatic relationship that Britain had with Russia before going on to describe the cultural and artistic aspects.

At the outbreak of the First World War Britain and Russia were allied with France. The forty years or so hitherto saw a gradual move in Anglo-Russian relations toward a state of mutual appreciation and understanding. However, the diplomatic process which led Britain and Russia to the position they enjoyed in 1914 was by no means a straightforward journey. Throughout the greater portion of the nineteenth century, diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Russia were in a constant state of strain, indeed for the period 1894-1914 'Russia was considered to be at least as great a threat to Britain and to British interests as was Germany.'³ This was due to the Eastern Question⁴ where Russia's

¹ Quoted in James Huneker, *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (London: William Reeves, 1928), 82. Henry Edward Krehbiel (1854-1923), American critic, author and editor.

² Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Papermac, 2000), 49.

³ Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), xii.

⁴ This was essentially a dispute over the Balkans, Persia and Afghanistan, countries that were vital for major trade routes or provided a neutral barrier between the two Empires' colonies. Until 1907, when

expansionist policy into Central Asia (and later the Far East) from the 1850s onwards threatened British imperial interests. It was partly the Eastern Question that caused the Crimean War (1854-56)⁵, the Balkan Crisis⁶ of 1875 and the Penjdeh Incident of 1885.⁷ The period specifically from 1894 to 1905 saw Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations deteriorate with hardly a year passing without quarrel. Britain's feelings towards Russia were not necessarily of fear but rather of anxiety; Russia was not a direct threat to Britain, but was a direct threat to British interests.

It is difficult to know exactly what Victorian and Edwardian people in Britain thought about Russia but it is clear that they had definite views, largely shaped from political considerations, which in the main resulted in a negative perception. Broadly it is clear that there was misrepresentation or just plain ignorance of Russia in Britain. The first serious English-language study of Russia appeared in 1877 and primarily with the Eastern question in mind its author principally hoped his didactic tome would aid a broader understanding between the two countries: 'Our duty is clear. We ought to know Russia better, and thereby avoid unnecessary collisions.'⁸ But general knowledge of Russia meant little by itself; facts needed to be interpreted and by the end of the nineteenth century two broad interpretive frameworks had evolved. A 'traditional' view (typical of the later Victorians) portrayed Russia as alien, extra-European, politically despotic and uncivilised, whereas the 'cultural' view (typical of the younger Edwardians) depicted Russia as an emerging European country,

the Anglo-Russian *entente* was reached, relations ranged from that of general irritation to, on two occasions, Britain and Russia being on the brink of declaring war upon each other.

⁵ In the Crimean War (1854-56) Britain, France, Turkey and Piedmont were allied against Russia. Its resolution favoured Britain and France.

⁶ The Balkan Crisis precipitated the Russo-Turkish War, the Russians claiming their war was a moral one, i.e., against the Islamic persecution of Christians in the Balkan region. However, the British were suspicious that if Russia claimed Turkey and the surrounding Balkan countries, it could then advance upon the Dardanelles and other British interests in the Near East. Britain was also anxious that Russia had designs on Afghanistan; if Russia succeeded Britain would then have no hesitation in making a bid for India.

⁷ Penjdeh was an Afghan village. Afghanistan, belonging to neither Empire, acted as a good geographical buffer between Russia and India. The British warned Russia that they would not tolerate such aggression and called up its reserves. The incident was resolved, but not before it had brought the two Empires close to war.

⁸ D. Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1877), ii. 460. Wallace was essentially a journalist but his book was successful enough to merit second and third editions, which appeared in 1905 and 1911.

full of opportunities and possessed of a powerful and unique culture.⁹ Either way the fact that the British perception of Russia was often different to the reality was inevitable for two distant countries. The accuracy of British perceptions is of course open to challenge, but the significance of them is not. Only by attempting to understand these misperceptions can a fuller appreciation of the reception of Russian music in Britain be obtained.

Since tourism between Britain and Russia was not common in the nineteenth century (Russia was not part of the Grand Tour) the majority of people who travelled between the two countries did so only for business or diplomatic purposes. As Anglo-Russian trade improved from the 1880s business trips became more frequent. British tutors and governesses were in demand in wealthy Russian families who greatly admired the Victorian intellectual and liberal traditions. These qualities were reflected in the English novel, which became popular from the 1840s onwards – Dickens and Conan Doyle were two favourite authors of the Russians. By 1890 novels by Russian authors had also become popular in England, reciprocating the interest the Russians had shown earlier in the century. The British popular view of Russian life was largely shaped by the literature that emerged from that country, which tended to focus on the darker and more unpleasant aspects of Russian life. Russian writers such as Pushkin and Gogol sought to capture the spirit of Russian life and not without ironic observation. The novel was an important genre in Russian literature and because of heavy censorship in Russia it was the only vehicle of outright political propaganda. The Russian realist novel of the 1860s and 1870s dealt with contemporary Russian life; often strongly allegorical it was seen as a way of encouraging radical social reform. The realist novels of Turgenev¹⁰, Dostoevsky¹¹ and Tolstoy followed in this tradition but with an added political

⁹ Neilson, op. cit., 108.

¹⁰ Ivan Turgenev (1818-83) effectively created the nihilist character in his novels. Although other examples of nihilism existed in Europe at that time there was a precedent for it in Russian culture in the *raskol 'nichestvo* - a strong dissenter who challenged the authority of Church and State. The nihilist is ruthlessly iconoclastic and is committed to science and materialism. Rather like the Jacobins in the late 18th century they believed that only after total annihilation could a new and more just world emerge. A corrupt society could be 'cured' by political solutions. In Turgenev's masterpiece *Fathers and Sons* (1862; the title alludes to the old and new men of the day) its hero, Bazarov, is a nihilist 'son'. *Father and Sons* was conceived during a visit to the Isle of Wight in the summer of 1860 and Bazarov's character was inspired by the personality of a young provincial doctor he met. Turgenev had the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Laws conferred upon him by Oxford University in 1879. Most of Turgenev's major works had been translated into English by 1890.

dimension. The ideas expressed in the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky would have been perceived in Britain as suspect to say the least – the hero of *Fathers and Sons* has been described as the first Bolshevik.¹²

That the real events of Russian politics and the fictive ones of the Russian novel affected the British psyche is witnessed by the English spy and adventure fiction of the time. William Le Queux's *The Great War in England in 1897* (published 1894), Louis Tracy's *The Final War* (1896) and George Griffith's *The Outlaws of the Air* (1897) all played upon the anxiety of Russia as a global threat to British interests and all highlighted the supposed barbarity of the Russian character – words such as 'fiendish' and 'brutality' are regularly used. Britain was the prime destination for Russian political refugees often with nihilist or anarchist links and the large number of Russian Jewish immigrants in London's East End only reinforced the view that 'Russia seemed to be at the bottom of much of what threatened Victorian stability.'¹³ Yet many Victorians felt the Russian anarchists' deeds (bombings, assassinations, etc.) were justified as a response to the repressive regimes under which they lived, just so long as they did not affect British interests. By the 1890s British people had learnt to distinguish their distaste and suspicion of the autocratic Tsarist regime from their sympathy for the long-suffering Russian people. In December 1889 the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom was formed in London, which from 1890 to 1915 published a journal *Free Russia* to counter pro-Tsarist propaganda in Britain.

The Rise of Tchaikovsky

The British interest in Russia through the medium of its literature, whether positively or negatively portrayed, naturally spread to another of its exportable arts – music. Russian

¹¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81) writer of polemical, anti-nihilist novels, which engaged and challenged the dominant ideologies of the age. *Crime and Punishment* (1867) sought to demonstrate the inadequacy of utilitarian morality, and that the empirical approaches of rationalism and materialism were no good. He believed that salvation could only come from man's inner spiritual resources. Russia and its people were evoked, but in a darker and more volatile environment. Most of Dostoevsky's novels appeared in English during the 1880s though it was through Constance Garnett's authoritative translations, which appeared between 1912-20, that his works gained real appreciation.

¹² By 1882 Karl Marx began to regard Russia, rather than Germany, as the country ripe for a proletarian revolution.

¹³ Neilson, op. cit., 88. For more on this topic see A. G. Cross (ed.), *The Russian Theme in English Literature* (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1985).

music was not widely known in London, let alone the rest of Britain, until the end of the nineteenth century. Although Rubinstein visited London in 1857 to perform his Third Piano Concerto at a Philharmonic Society concert and Glinka's overture from his opera *A Life for the Tsar* was heard at a Crystal Palace concert in 1860 it would not be until the 1890s that a significant and, more importantly, regular influx of Russian music was perceptible in London.

The first Russian composer to enter the broader English public's consciousness was Tchaikovsky but the appreciation of his music was initially hampered by the somewhat sporadic presentation of each new work. The first major work to be heard in England was the First Piano Concerto (1874-75) in 1876, to be followed by the fantasy overture *Romeo & Juliet* (1869-70) and the Violin Concerto (1878) presented to London on 4 November 1876 and 8 May 1882 respectively, but neither appears to have attracted much attention. The publication of a number of piano pieces in 1883 (including *Chant sans paroles* Op.2 No.3, the first in England) and in July 1886 the *12 Morceaux* Op.40 and his most famous song, *None but the lonely heart* (Op.6 No.6), no doubt marked Tchaikovsky's entrance into the wider conscience of the English musical public and by the end of the decade a nascent interest in his music is apparent, to which the Philharmonic Society responded by inviting Tchaikovsky to London.

On 22 March 1888 Tchaikovsky made his first professional visit to London to conduct a concert at the Philharmonic Society. Despite his questionable celebrity his music was an immediate success with audience and musicians alike. The new works presented were the *Serenade for Strings* (1880) and the Theme and Variations Finale from the Third Suite (1884). Tchaikovsky's rise was regarded alongside the more general interest that had developed in Slavonic music, as Joseph Bennett observed:

Nothing in the musical world is more interesting than the achievements and promise of the Slavonic [sic] peoples, who only within a recent period have attracted notice to themselves in any special degree. That they are now closely watched by amateurs of thoughtful and far-seeing minds is due to the appearance among them of unusual talent, and to the steady manner in which Slavonic compositions are making progress.¹⁴

¹⁴ Joseph Bennett, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 1888, 3. Tchaikovsky had first visited England in August 1861 as an interpreter for a friend of his father, who was on a business trip.

Bennett (1831-1911) was one of the more senior critics of his generation and though he would have naturally tended toward the ‘traditional’ view of Russia, he was typical of most critics in his curiosity, albeit with a tone of mild condescension. Other critics were disappointed, but not in the composer; *The Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Times* and *Daily News*, to name but three, all lamented the absence of a ‘serious’ work (i.e. a symphony) and hoped for something more worthy on his next visit. So when it was announced that his Fifth Symphony (1888) would be performed ‘under the direction of the composer’ during the Philharmonic Society’s following season, hopes were raised. However, when Tchaikovsky duly appeared in London for his concert on 11 April 1889 in place of the expected Fifth Symphony was the First Suite for orchestra (1878-79). The *Musical Times* understandably grumbled:

For some inexplicable reason the Russian composer, when he appears among us, refuses to be heard in any of his numerous works of importance which have not yet been introduced to the notice of English musicians. Among them are four symphonies, and the Fifth in E minor was announced in the Philharmonic prospectus. But in place thereof his [First] Suite in D Op.43 was substituted.¹⁵

For English audiences the symphony was the acid test of a composer, and so one by Tchaikovsky was clearly awaited with eager anticipation. However, the next large-scale work to be heard in London was not a symphony but an opera, *Eugene Onegin* (1877-78), sung in English and conducted by an, as yet, unknown 23-year old Henry Wood on 17 October 1892.¹⁶ At this time Tchaikovsky was a name in the concert hall but not in the opera house, and so while the critics turned up to hear the opera, the audiences did not. The work was given wide press coverage and received generally favourable reviews.

Originality of ideas and the methods of their developments are not the common properties of every musician, but with Tchaikovsky all seems to come naturally.

¹⁵ *Musical Times*, May 1889, 278. The Suite was also performed incomplete, the scherzo being omitted.

¹⁶ Performed by Lago’s ‘Royal Opera’ company at the Olympic Theatre with a notable cast: the American baritone Eugene Oudin (Eugene Onegin) and the English singers Fanny Moody (Tatiana), Lily Moody (Olga) and Charles Manners (Prince Gremin). It is perhaps remarkable that the Moodys should be sisters in life playing sisters in the opera. Also, Manners was the husband of Fanny Moody, and the Prince marries Tatiana in the opera. The Nurse was sung by Alexandra Svyatlovskaya, who sang the role of Solokha in *Cherevichki* under Tchaikovsky’s direction in Moscow in 1887.

Complicated rhythms and contrapuntal devices are handled with the same grace and ingenuity that characterize all the best known works of this master.¹⁷

The opera was a critical success but a popular failure, yet such reviews could only whet the appetite of those still awaiting a Tchaikovsky symphony.

When England eventually heard its first Tchaikovsky symphony (no.5) on 2 February 1893, it took place not in London but in Manchester. The Yorkshire correspondent of the *Musical Times*, perhaps unaware of the gathering significance of Tchaikovsky in London, covered the work only in a couple of lines. The *Manchester Guardian* was similarly dismissive, observing: ‘a certain thinness of general construction which forces itself upon us as the Symphony progresses,’ but also that the second movement was ‘an exquisite movement’ which ‘made a great impression upon the audience.’¹⁸

Later that same year London at last heard a Tchaikovsky symphony. On 1 June 1893 at a Philharmonic Society concert at St James’ Hall, Tchaikovsky conducted the British premiere of his Fourth Symphony (1877-78). The work was an immense success. The *Musical Times* in a biographical summary described how Tchaikovsky’s ‘compositions happily reflect the Slavonic temperament with all its fiery exaltation resting on a basis of languid melancholy.’¹⁹ This observation based on a national, cultural stereotype rather than specific biographical information reveals the level of unfamiliarity the press still had about both the composer and his country. The same critic, in just over thirty lines, concluded: ‘The Symphony met with a very cordial reception – more so than any other work from the same pen, and at the close the composer stood higher than before in English estimation.’ The *Sunday Times* described Tchaikovsky as a ‘less familiar figure.’ After reminding readers of the composer’s visit in 1888 (but not in 1889) the critic summarised, obviously in the light of hearing the symphony: ‘The works then heard were scarcely representative of his genius at his best,’ but confidently concluded ‘the Symphony in F minor...may without hesitation be set down as a masterpiece.’²⁰

¹⁷ Unsigned [possibly by Alexander Mackenzie or Ernest Newman], ‘Eugene Onegin: A lyrical opera by P. Tschaikowsky’, *New Quarterly Musical Review*, November 1893, 124-37.

¹⁸ ‘Sir Charles Hallé’s Grand Concerts’, *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1893, 5.

¹⁹ *Musical Times*, July 1893, 407-08.

²⁰ *Sunday Times*, 4 June 1893, 6.

The eager anticipation of a symphony and the presence of the composer no doubt contributed in part to the work's success and it gave a sudden and significant boost to Tchaikovsky's standing in English eyes (and ears). It was by sheer chance that Cambridge University had decided to confer an honorary degree upon Tchaikovsky that same month; a year earlier he was still a figure of questionable celebrity, as revealed in the fact that he was originally ninth in the list of composers the University drew up for five prospective recipients. The original plan was to invite Verdi and Brahms, but they both declined. Gerald Norris suggests that Gounod may have been considered but would not have been able to attend due to a legal case.²¹ The *Cambridge Review* suggested Rubinstein and Grieg as two other possible recipients. Rubinstein was not chosen, no doubt because of his rather disparaging attitude toward the English, whom he thought were, 'the least musical of people – not more than two per cent can be discovered who have any knowledge of music. Even the Americans have a higher appreciation of music than the English.'²² Grieg accepted but in the event did not attend due to ill health. Saint-Saëns and Bruch were then invited to balance the Franco-German equation and Boito to represent Italy. Thus when the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University wrote to Tchaikovsky on 12 December 1892 to invite him to receive the degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, it was more by accident than design.

As part of the surrounding festivities – 1893 was also the year of the Cambridge University Musical Society Jubilee – each composer was invited to conduct a piece of their own choice. On 12 June 1893 Tchaikovsky conducted the orchestra of the Cambridge University Music Society in his symphonic fantasy *Francesca da Rimini* (1876), the work's English premiere. The piece was extremely well received by the Cambridge audience and press, but for some reason the event only attracted one major London critic, Herman Klein, of the *Sunday Times*, who reported, 'Dr Tchaikovsky was rapturously applauded and recalled.'²³ With recognition from Cambridge and a hugely successful symphonic premiere in London,

²¹ Gerald Norris, *Stanford, the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1980). See Chapter 4 on Gounod.

²² Anton Rubinstein (trans. Aline Delano), *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein 1828-1889* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890), 118. Rubinstein completed his autobiography in October 1889.

²³ *Sunday Times*, 18 June 1893, 6.

Tchaikovsky became the popular success of the moment. What now could possibly heighten public interest in him?

Five months later, on 6 November 1893, Tchaikovsky died from cholera. The *Musical Times* afforded an obituary that ran to over two columns. The *Sunday Times* cautiously described him as, ‘in his own orbit, a star of the first magnitude,’ pointing out that, ‘Ten years ago we might not have noted the loss.’ For English audiences Tchaikovsky was a new celebrity who had been cut down in his prime and despite the recent performances the same critic was correct to point out that ‘we know comparatively little of Tchaikovsky’s music, and even that, it is said, does not comprise his finest efforts.’²⁴ Thus in England it was the timing of Tchaikovsky’s death that probably did more than anything to promote an interest in him and his music.

Two and half weeks later on 25 November 1893 the newly built Queen’s Hall opened to the public and a week later hosted its first public concert.²⁵ For the opening of its 82nd season the Philharmonic Society decided it would move to the new hall where it duly gave the British premiere of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony (1893) on 28 February 1894 conducted by Sir Alexander Mackenzie. The new work, in a new hall for the new season attracted a large, expectant audience. ‘We were prepared for a fine work, but not for such a masterpiece of originality and boldness without *bizzarrarie* [sic], of glitter without tawdriness, and of complexity without over-elaboration,’ wrote the critic of the *Sunday Times*.²⁶ The symphony was such a success it was repeated two weeks later. By the end of the year London alone had heard the Symphony at least a further five times and by the end of 1897 it was being performed somewhere in Britain, on average, once every four weeks. On the figures for the Sixth Symphony alone, 1897 was Tchaikovsky’s most popular season yet. The periodical *Hazell’s Annual* reported:

Excepting perhaps the C minor of Beethoven, no symphony was so frequently performed in the Metropolis during [1897] as the ‘Pathétique’, the ‘Swan Song’ of Tchaikovsky. It was conspicuous in the Richter *répertoire*, and it was many times

²⁴ *Sunday Times*, 12 November 1893, 6.

²⁵ A performance of Mendelssohn’s Second Symphony ‘Lobgesang’, conducted by Frederic Cowen.

²⁶ *Sunday Times*, 4 March 1894, 6.

played under the direction of Mr Henry J. Wood at the Promenade and other concerts at Queen's Hall.²⁷

By the end of 1898, however, critical opinion was beginning to turn tide, in the *Musical Times* most noticeably:

On 29 October...Mr Newman's hobby-horse 'Symphonie Pathétique' was once more ridden to the admiration of a crowded house. Moral for all orchestral conductors everywhere: Play the 'Pathetic' for the remainder of your days and you will please the dear public evermore. We do not know how the work fared on this occasion, for we purposely absented ourselves *pro tem*. We cannot endure this nerve-shattering music anymore, and shall give it a well-deserved rest until further notice.²⁸

Amongst the light-hearted sarcasm is the truism: though critics may tire of Tchaikovsky audiences will never do so. Despite the reaction of the *Musical Times* Tchaikovsky's music became played even more: London received its first all-Tchaikovsky concert in 1897, Birmingham in 1900.²⁹ But Tchaikovsky's music suffered an increasing critical reaction against it, partly due to its overexposure, but also as the circumstances of his death came to light, certain quarters of the press turned against him for other reasons.

At a paper given by Sir Charles Maclean at the Musical Association on 10 January 1898 entitled 'Modern Sensationalism' it was commented that: 'Tchaikovsky had no thought of sensationalism when composing, but merely strove to express the Slav temperament.'³⁰ Two years later other issues were being discussed beyond the composer's racial background as the cause for his music's character. The first was that the composer had not died of cholera. This myth, Richard Taruskin claims, is of Russian origin.³¹ Cholera in Russia, at that time, was a disease associated with the poor and thus vulgarly demeaning, not at all compatible with Tchaikovsky's exalted public image. Rumours, however, were rife in St Petersburg on the day of Tchaikovsky's funeral. The conclusion followed that it was suicide

²⁷ Quoted in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Music in England 1885-1920: As Recounted in Hazell's Annual* (London: Thames, 1994), 57.

²⁸ *Musical Times*, December 1898, 803. For the next twelve months the *Musical Times* merely notes the performances but gives no critical reviews.

²⁹ A typical all-Tchaikovsky programme would consist of *Hamlet*, the Sixth Symphony, First Piano Concerto, *Nutcracker* Suite and the *Overture '1812'*. Programme used by Wood at Queen's Hall on 20 June 1900.

³⁰ *Musical Times*, February 1898, 102.

³¹ Richard Taruskin, 'Pathetic Symphonist', *New Republic*, 6 February 1995, 26-40.

as a result of what today would be called clinical depression.³² This conception of the Sixth Symphony had obviously travelled to Britain by the end of the nineteenth century:

At the Tsar's – beg pardon, the Queen's Hall...the sentimental and unhappy hero of the 'Pathétique' Symphony has once more been killed with stroke of tam-tam and decently buried...But even you, gentle reader, cannot deny that the *toujour perdrix* of tam-tam suicides (for it *is* a suicide, of that we are convinced) and weeping double-bass funeral mutes does become monotonous.³³

Some, such as Edgar F. Jacques in his biographical note for Tchaikovsky in the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts programme notes (appearing at every Tchaikovsky performance from 1895 to c.1902), would unambiguously state: '[Tchaikovsky] succumbed to an attack of cholera, caused by a glass of impure water which had been given him at a restaurant in St Petersburg.' However, many were obviously swayed by the more 'interesting' version of the composer's demise. In 1899 the American critic James Huneker related how 'grave rumors [sic] circulated in St Petersburg the day of his funeral; rumors that have never been quite proved false, and his sixth and last symphony is called by some the Suicide Symphony.'³⁴ In its first issue of the new century the *Musical Times* also has Emile Sauret, the French violinist and sometime acquaintance of Tchaikovsky, on record as saying: 'Ah! Poor Tchaikovsky's death was a mystery – a mystery I fear will never be cleared up. No, he certainly did not die of cholera.'³⁵ However, Rosa Newmarch, writing in the first English language biography of

³² The Sixth Symphony was premiered in St Petersburg on 16 October 1893 (OS) without its subtitle 'Pathétique' and was granted a cool reception. The day after the premiere the composer's brother, Modest, tells us that he suggested the symphony's subtitle to the composer. However, a letter to Tchaikovsky from his publisher Jurgenson dated 20 September 1893, suggests that Tchaikovsky had already decided on the Russian subtitle 'Pateticheskaya simfoniya'. However, the Russian 'Pateticheskaya simfoniya' is better translated as 'impassioned' and closer to its Greek root of *pathos*, and therefore quite different in meaning to the French 'Pathétique' under which the symphony appeared at its second performance on 6 November and is now known. The presence of that title, the quote from the Orthodox Requiem liturgy (first movement, trombones, bb.201-5) and the volatile minds of a mourning audience only nine days after the composer's death led them to interpret the symphony as a musical suicide note. For more on the events surrounding the work's genesis and Russian premiere see Timothy L. Jackson, *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No.6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge Music Handbooks; Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

³³ *Musical Times*, December 1899, 819.

³⁴ James Huneker, *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (London: William Reeves, 1899/1928), 86. The point is similarly raised again on p.134.

³⁵ *Musical Times*, January 1900, 13.

the composer, coolly dismisses the whole idea whilst accounting for the Sixth Symphony's popularity:

There is no doubt that one of the reasons of the extraordinary popularity of this work lies in the fact that it had been invested with an autobiographical interest for which there is no real warranty. It is said that in some vague and mysterious way it foreshadowed the composer's approaching end. Perhaps it is also with the idea of supporting this theory that sensationalists have discovered that Tchaikovsky shortly afterwards committed suicide. The idea is picturesque, but neither in Russia nor abroad have I discovered any substantial ground for the report.³⁶

Despite such levelheaded appraisal, by 1900 statements in journals and books were drawing people into speculative biography and particularly into what had precipitated the composer to take his own life, rather than discussing the music. However, for concert audiences at the beginning of the twentieth century it was apparent that nothing would shake the public thirst for Tchaikovsky's music; a weekly Tchaikovsky Night at the Proms started in 1902 during which season all six numbered symphonies were also played.³⁷ Such an enterprise would not have been risked without some certainty that there would be an audience.

The 'New Russian School'³⁸

As a corollary to the success of Tchaikovsky's music in London in the mid-1890s was the broadening of interest in the music of his contemporaries. Not everybody was happy with this, however. 'The [Russian music] craze... is of Mr Newman's and Mr Wood's creating. Tchaikovsky's one great symphony proving a phenomenal success, they let loose a flood of Russian music.'³⁹ The first casualty of this was felt to be the central repertoire, especially the favourite composers of the day, Wagner and Brahms:

³⁶ Rosa Newmarch, *Tchaikovsky: His Life and Work* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), 106-7.

³⁷ Schubert, Brahms, Gounod, Grieg and Sullivan Nights were all tried but were not popular with the public whereas Tchaikovsky, Beethoven and Wagner Nights became regular features of the season.

³⁸ The New Russian School was the title by which the Five were known in the press at this time.

³⁹ *Musical Times*, February 1899, 91. Robert Newman was the manager of the Queen's Hall concerts and with his conductor, Henry Wood (whose first wife was Russian – they had married in July 1898), they were responsible for much of the programming of Russian music.

Exit Russian music *pro tem.*, and re-enter more Wagner selections. *Toujours perdrix!*⁴⁰

A Brahms Symphony under Hans Richter! O great and all too rare delight, that makes us forgive those of our friends who love not the great Johannes, and even them that will persistently inflict upon our long suffering good nature the barbarous noises and the unspeakable dullness of much unripe bill-poster art *à la Tartare*.⁴¹

The other casualty was closer to home. In March 1898 the *Musical Times* lamented how ‘the finest efforts of Parry, Stanford, Cowen, German, Cliffe...Barclay Jones, Walford Davies, Coleridge-Taylor etc – rest securely in their composers’ portfolios.’⁴² The same year had witnessed a competition between Hans Richter and Frederic Cowen for the conductorship of the Hallé Orchestra – Britain’s only fully professional orchestra – that caused controversy over one of the fundamental issues of English cultural politics at this time, *viz.* that musical talent (i.e. composers, performers and conductors) must be foreign. The nurture of native musical talent was still a delicate seedling in late-Victorian Britain and, as in the realm of Anglo-Russian political diplomacy, added further to the anxiety that English journalists and musicians felt toward Russian music. Within the year the *Musical Times* took another swipe at what it saw as the epicentre of the problem: ‘Lost! British Music at the Queen’s Hall’ where it criticised the programming of ‘novelties at all costs – defective in terms of themes, structure, etc.’⁴³ It was this last point, however, that was really at the root of all the animosity that critics felt towards Russian music. Nowadays, rather than being thought of as flawed, it is recognised that the music of the Russian nationalists is simply different from that of the panromanogermanic ‘mainstream’ composers of the period in its means and methods. However, in the last decade of the nineteenth century musical values (and the canon) were relatively narrowly defined by this ‘mainstream’, and critics, especially those of the *Musical Times*, were quick to defend them if they felt they were being undermined.

⁴⁰ *Musical Times*, April 1898, 246. ‘Toujours perdrix’ was an expression used to indicate boredom at something always being the same. It is attributed to the story of one of the kings of France who, on being reprimanded once too often for his philandering by his confessor, instructed that the confessor be fed only partridge (perdrix).

⁴¹ *Musical Times*, December 1899, 819.

⁴² *Musical Times*, March 1898, 171.

⁴³ *Musical Times*, January 1899, 15.

During 1896 the introduction of five new orchestral pieces from the New Russian School and a book on Borodin marked the first significant influx of music from this group of composers.⁴⁴ Interest naturally gathered around the English premiere of another Russian symphony, Borodin's Second (1869-76). As with Tchaikovsky, initial response to the music of the New Russian School was good-natured but ultimately dismissive, basing its judgment on the 'traditional' view of Russia:

The themes and rhythms are distinctly Slavonic [sic] – some of them no less distinctly Oriental – and to the same source may be traced conspicuous points in their treatment, such as persistent repetition of short phrases, alternations of languor and wild exuberance, and harmonic progressions which certainly stand not upon the order of their going...the *Andante*...contains much that Western ears can recognise as beautiful...the *Finale* carries us to Asia in the frankest and most open manner. It is an example of rampant Orientalism, and the audience listened in some wonder, and considerable doubt what to make of it all. But we are glad to have heard the Symphony. It indicated that which, according to present appearances, will be, in some more or less modified form, the 'music of the future'. Not the Philistines, but the Slavs are upon us.⁴⁵

Though favourably received, applying the title 'Symphony' to such a work obviously raised eyebrows, as *The Times* subtly alludes: 'The composer is what is sometimes called a "colourist" in music rather than a draughtsman – that is to say, the actual treatment of his themes is generally less interesting than the manner and effect of their presentment.'⁴⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol* (1887) found a similar response after its first performance on 24 September 1896. Though the critic of *The Times* found it 'impossible to refuse admiration to the brilliant manner in which the composer has handled his orchestra'⁴⁷ he found little else to compliment. *Scheherazade* (1888), heard on 5 December 1896, was found to be 'faulty in form and eccentric in character'⁴⁸ a comment *The Times* echoes and

⁴⁴ Alfred Habets (trans. Rosa Newmarch), *Borodin & Liszt* (London: Digby, Long & Co., 1895). Rosa Newmarch essentially provided a translation of Alfred Habets' *Alexandre Borodin d'après la biographie et la correspondance publiées par M. Vladimir Stasov* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1893) which, as the title implies, was based on the original Russian book by Stasov which was published in 1889. Newmarch's edition included an introduction largely drawn from Cui's *La Musique en Russie* (see note 61).

⁴⁵ *Musical Times*, April 1896, 238-39. Conducted by Mackenzie, Philharmonic Society, 27 February 1896.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 28 February 1896, 7.

⁴⁷ *Times*, 26 September 1896, 7. Conducted by Wood, QH.

⁴⁸ *Musical Times*, January 1897, 19. Conducted by Wood, QH.

goes on to note that it is also a work ‘abounding in abnormal technical difficulty.’⁴⁹ The same criticisms return time and again for any piece by a composer of the New Russian School: peculiar monotony of rhythm, unorthodox or awkward harmony, defects in form and structure and abnormal technical difficulty. There was a cautious curiosity about this music, as the latter review from *The Times* went on to observe: ‘The Suite was well worth producing in spite of its faults, and will be heard again with interest, even pleasure.’ Thus thirteen months later and after over a dozen further Russian premieres it was felt, ‘The mannerisms of the New Russian School have become so familiar to English audiences that even its curious and characteristic monotony and the other peculiarities...are now accepted as almost common-place.’⁵⁰ However, it was clear that some critics hoped this music would be performed once and then forgotten.

From 1894 onwards there had been a year on year increase in the number of Russian premieres in London. The music of the New Russian School specifically began to be programmed in earnest in 1898, the same year the *Musical Times* boycotted Tchaikovsky concerts. To the *Musical Times* it must have seemed like the thin end of the wedge; when Borodin’s Second Symphony received a second airing, this time by Wood at the Queen’s Hall on 29 January 1898, the *Musical Times* took its gloves off:

Borodin’s Symphony in B minor was the *pièce de résistance*, an audience...seemed terribly bored by one of the most Russian of Russian compositions. Colour, glaring and massive, strong rhythms, much energy, and last, but not least, those precious Oriental scales beloved of Mr E. F. Jacques, it gives us, and therefore it may appeal to a few students of nationalism in music. To an average audience it is, and is likely to remain, caviare [sic]. We have no desire to hear Borodin’s masterpiece again. Twice we have suffered it, and failed to see a trace of greatness in [the] music.⁵¹

Musorgsky’s *Night on the Bare Mountain* (1867, rev.1874) the first orchestral piece of his to reach Britain, came next on 18 February 1898, and drew a similarly acid response:

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 7 December 1896, 14.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 31 January 1898, 6.

⁵¹ *Musical Times*, March 1898, 171. Edgar F. Jacques wrote the ‘analytical notes’ for the Newman Promenade concerts from 1895 until c.1904 when Percy Pitt and Alfred Kalisch acquired the post jointly. Rosa Newmarch took over in 1908, whose notes were still be used well into the 1920s, with notes on the more contemporary pieces being written by Eric Blom from 1921.

It is...as hideous a thing as we have ever heard. The 'story' is of that gruesome, childish description so fascinating to Slavonic composers. These are sounds of mysterious voices underground, spirits of darkness, the black god Tchernobog, evil crews, revels, and, as an artistic climax, a church bell! The music cannot be described. It is very clever certainly...but excepting the coda...an orgie [sic] of ugliness and an abomination. May we never hear it again.⁵²

The Times found the piece 'remarkably ugly [and] very noisy.'⁵³ Critics attributed the mannerisms of Musorgsky's music to his nationality rather than any other aspect, probably more out of ignorance than any other reason, as the *Sunday Times* states: 'His compositions are completely unknown in this country, but the present example reveals the imaginative feeling and wealth of barbaric colour peculiar to the contemporary musicians of his race.'⁵⁴ Musorgsky's Turkish March in A flat followed next on 5 March 1898 and as with Borodin's Second Symphony the *Musical Times* is keen to point out the audience's lack of interest:

The melody of the *Trio*, 'Alla Turca', is the sort of thing Scarlatti's cat might have 'extemporised' on its master's harpsichord...This is scored in the stereo-typed and insipid 'Oriental' style (piccolo, tambourine, etc.)...Verily as poor a composition as we have heard at a high-class concert. The audience declined it without thanks, and we endorse their verdict.⁵⁵

When one of the most admired conductors of the day, Hans Richter, also tried his hand at the music of the New Russian School, this was obviously too much for the *Musical Times*. Its review of his performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* (its second hearing in London) is conspicuous by its length – a veritable tirade of criticism:

Nothing could have excelled the playing of the orchestra in the extremely difficult, 'tricky' *Scheherazade*...and proved another addition to the lengthy list of Russian works that seem all masterly technique, bewildering arabesques, put together, or rather side by side, in the most whimsical fashion; strange wayward rhythms, and brilliant, glaring colour, produced by the most daring orchestral devices, frequently new and beautiful, ever anon bizarre and childish, but always calculated with quite uncanny certainty...There are some pretty tunes...and we greatly admire one

⁵² *Musical Times*, March 1898, 172. Conducted by Wood, QH. The version heard in this country at this time was the one revised and orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov who also was responsible for the whole of the harp/bell coda that the *Musical Times* found so odd.

⁵³ *The Times*, 21 February 1898, 7.

⁵⁴ *Sunday Times*, 20 February 1898, 6.

⁵⁵ *Musical Times*, April 1898, 245. Conducted by Wood, QH. The melody in the Trio is scored for piccolo and viola playing two octaves apart which, with the percussion, must have sounded bizarre for a late nineteenth-century audience.

splendid passage of real grandeur near the end...but the rest is notes, notes *et praeterea nihil!* Even the wonders of the brilliant orchestration soon pall, even as to look into the sun becomes unendurable after a short while, and we rebel against the utter lack of emotional qualities in a very lengthy work. Do Slavonic music-lovers admire this kind of music, we wonder, and must we Anglo-Saxons, Celts, and Teutons first become Slavs before we can appreciate these strange effusions at their full and proper value? We suppose our Russian friends do derive some satisfaction from them, something more, we mean than a mere tickling of the senses. To us, we confess it with sorrow and all due humanity, they seem like ‘linked boredom long drawn out’ to vary a famous quotation.⁵⁶

The consistent criticism is one of lack of substance. The music is technically ‘clever’ – a trait more likely to arouse suspicion than admiration in England – and the interest is in the novelty of the music’s style rather than its content. Yet, as the *Sunday Times* recorded, ‘Each movement was received with tumultuous applause.’⁵⁷ Popular demand was obviously tangible enough to encourage Richter to repeat the work later on 17 October after which other critics seemingly begin to agree with the *Musical Times*:

The Suite which...last May Dr Richter invested with a glamour of picturesque charm and a ravishing beauty of colour that amounted to a positive revelation, now fell upon the ear with an effect of artificiality and meaninglessness that was almost painful...as a whole the work was plainly unable to bear the test of repetition.⁵⁸

Music of this class is quaint, bizarre, and intentionally outlandish, but it has no such intricacy of structure as would make its second performance easier to follow than its first.⁵⁹

When Henry Wood introduced Rimsky-Korsakov’s Suite from *Mlada* to his Proms audience on 12 November 1898, the *Musical Times*, which had been politely enthusiastic when Manns had originally introduced the piece two years ago, treated it again with derision. The year had truly been an *annus horribilis* for Russian music.

Whereas the response to Tchaikovsky’s music had primarily been against its overexposure, the case with the New Russian School was different. Tchaikovsky had received conservatoire training and, to a sufficient degree, his music ascribed to the

⁵⁶ *Musical Times*, June 1898, 389. Richter admired *Scheherazade* immensely; he conducted around 20 performances across the country in the period up to January 1899. However, *Scheherazade* did not truly become popular in England until its production by the *Ballets russes* in London in 1911.

⁵⁷ *Sunday Times*, 29 May 1898, 6.

⁵⁸ *Sunday Times*, 23 October 1898, 6.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 18 October 1898, 6.

‘mainstream’ musical values that certain quarters in England wished to preserve. His eccentricities could be explained away as being part of his Russian character – interesting but not threatening. However, the New Russian School had not received any academic training in music (though they all made close studies of the ‘classical’ masters) and this, combined with their radical departure from a narrowly defined musical aesthetic, was viewed with distinct suspicion. So when their music was met with enthusiasm by sections of the public, the self-appointed arbiters of taste and decency, the critics of the *Musical Times* – many of whom were graduates of the decidedly conservative Royal College of Music – were clearly alarmed. Thus when a senior figure in London’s academic world of music expressed a similar opinion, it can be no coincidence that his views were recorded and printed in full by the *Musical Times*.⁶⁰

Sir Alexander Mackenzie was Principal of the Royal Academy of Music and as conductor of the English premieres of Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* and Borodin’s Second Symphony, perhaps felt responsible for taking his finger out of the musical dyke which precipitated the flood of Russian music. His lecture, ostensibly about Tchaikovsky, was given at the Royal Academy of Music in February 1899. ‘Within the last few years we have learned to know [Russian music] so well here in London – perhaps even to the exclusion of equally interesting music – that, so far from requiring an introduction, it can well afford to stand closer examination.’ He broadened his discussion to address Tchaikovsky’s contemporaries whose ‘distinctive qualities and elements...[were]...new to the Western mind and taste.’ The presumption at this time was to ascribe these qualities to the composers’ nationality. Following in an emerging trend for culinary analogy he continued: ‘Our digestive powers were not strong enough to assimilate with entire satisfaction the highly-seasoned sauces with which these piquant dishes are served up’ and goes on to enlighten his audience by the benefit of his stronger constitution:

After a good many years of intimacy with modern Russian music I am somewhat reluctantly driven to the conclusion that not a little of its so-called ‘novelty’ owes its existence to more than a mere ‘thread’ of amateurism which runs through its mazes.

⁶⁰ *Musical Times*, March 1899, 174.

The outright statement Mackenzie makes here, which has been implied before by other critics, is that this music's distinction is due not to original thought and material but rather to the lack of training of the composer. Ironically, it was probably a Russian who is to be blamed for this perception having arisen in the first place.

The first significant document on Russian music published outside Russia was *La Musique en Russie* by César Cui.⁶¹ First issued during 1878, it became the main source of information on Russian composers and their music in western Europe for at least the next twenty years. Cui's strongly prejudiced views were, for some time, taken as read and, unfortunately, still colour some of the major ideas we have about Russian music today. The document describes the aims of the five composers and also gives his opinion on some of his fellow *kuchkists*. Balakirev, the leader of the group is described as being in 'the front rank of composers'. A prime example of Cui's severe judgement is that on Musorgsky, which lays emphasis on his technical shortcomings:

This highly gifted composer appears at times, however odd it may seem to say so, not to be altogether musical...symphonic form is altogether alien to Musorgsky, who is not at all at home in working out or developing a musical situation. His modulations are too free, and sometimes one might say that they only proceed on the lines of pure chance. When he harmonizes a melody, he cannot give the requisite continuity to the laying out of the parts, and these parts, as he writes them, often look quite impossible and unnatural, and produce harmonies which only fall to pieces, and chords which are intolerably harsh. The critical instinct and the sense of beauty were not always revealed to his understanding, and his gifts assume a character of astounding wildness, which brooks no kind of restraint.⁶²

What once fascinated audiences – and later outraged critics – had initially been attributed to each composer's Russianness, but in one sentence Mackenzie (via Cui) re-aligned the whole perspective of cause and effect to 'bad' composition. Mackenzie's colleague and Principal of the Royal College of Music, Sir Hubert Parry, best expressed the worrying implications this would have for England:

⁶¹ *La Musique en Russie* was first issued during 1878 in the journal *Revue et Gazette musicale*, and then later published separately as a pamphlet in 1881. Incidentally, Cui's paternal family was French.

⁶² Quoted in A. Pougin (trans. L. Haward), *A Short History of Russian Music* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), 242.

It is obvious that when the most cultured audiences prefer the music of the less developed races to their own, a lowering of the standard of their artistic perception and taste is implied, and a lessening of their sympathy with the products of the best of their own composers is sure to follow.⁶³

In his lecture Mackenzie stressed his remarks were aimed at the ‘earliest leaders’ and not to the ‘coming men of the present generation’ by whom he appears to be referring to, amongst others, Glazunov.

Glazunov

The first major work by Glazunov to be heard in Britain was the *Scènes de ballet* (1895) presented by Wood on 24 September 1896.⁶⁴ From the first it seems Glazunov was Tchaikovsky’s heir apparent and his lack of nationalist mannerism a positive trait:

Glazunov... though still a young man is beginning to occupy the place among Russian composers left vacant by the decease of Tchaikovsky. His music is characterized more by a spirit of eclecticism than by any strong individuality and possibly for this reason it seems likely to prove more acceptable to a foreign audience than the productions of the extreme national school, of which Rimsky-Korsakov is the chief representative.⁶⁵

Four months later Henry Wood presented Glazunov’s Fifth Symphony at the Queen’s Hall on 30 January:

Though it would seem that Glazunov cannot as yet be credited with the possession of an individual style, his music shows talents and acquirements of a high order of merit. Everything is direct, clearly defined, and logically coherent; the movements are not too lengthily spun out, and there is abundance of life and charm. The last movement – a thoroughly Russian piece, full of barbaric effects and abounding in percussive noises – seemed on a first hearing to have little to do with those that preceded it, which are far more restrained.⁶⁶

⁶³ C. Hubert H. Parry, *Style in Musical Art* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 128.

⁶⁴ The second and third numbers (*Marionettes* and *Mazurka*) were omitted at this performance. The first recorded performance in Britain of anything by Glazunov appears to have been of two movements from his Suite for Strings op.35, performed by the amateur Rev. E. H. Moberley’s Ladies String Orchestra.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 26 September 1896, 7.

⁶⁶ *Musical Times*, March 1897, 109.

Glazunov's sober restraint and logic of form in the first three movements clearly appealed to the critics of the day, and the converse in the finale to which the *Musical Times* would later take exception. Almost invariably Glazunov was regarded as a 'safe' composer and one that the Philharmonic Society felt able to invite to London later that same year where he conducted his Fourth Symphony (1893) on 1 July 1897. The symphony obviously disappointed the critic of the *Sunday Times*: 'The debut here of Glazunov was a more notable event than the production here of his Symphony in E flat, no. 4, which is by no means an inspired work...the Slavonic origin of the themes is unmistakable.'⁶⁷ The critic goes on to imply that even though Glazunov is technically accomplished it is the Slavonic aspect that lets him down. The symphony attracted the attention of *The Times* 'on account of its spontaneous and characteristically pathetic charm that it has in common with the works of so many of the newer Russian writers. The first movement is quite unmistakably national in style.'⁶⁸ The *Musical Times* felt differently:

[The Fourth Symphony] is not so characteristically Russian as his No. 5...and we almost like it better for that reason, for we confess that we do not care one jot for the much vaunted 'nationalism' in music unless that nationalism produces beautiful as well as 'characteristic' music; and a great deal of the Russian music lately introduced to Londoners, though very characteristic, appears to be devoid of beauty. We refuse to believe that Englishmen will ever become greatly attached to the effusions of the Russian schools unless the latter assimilates Western ideas – i.e., comes more strongly under the influence of the great classic masters of music.⁶⁹

It appears Glazunov clearly was able to reconcile the beautiful with the 'characteristic'. The final comment reveals the contemporary perception of the 'nationalist' (i.e. the Five) Russian composers as self-taught and ignorant of the western European canon. Yet, as scholars have revealed, nearly all the Russian composers, whether conservatory trained or not, closely studied academic musical forms (fugue, sonata, etc) in addition to the works of the western European canon, the Five focussing on the more progressive scores of Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt and Chopin. The same review continued:

⁶⁷ *Sunday Times*, 4 July 1897, 8.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 5 July 1897, 5.

⁶⁹ *Musical Times*, August 1897, 533-34.

In this connection we may point out that what in England is considered the greatest achievement of the Russian school so far – viz., the stupendous first movement of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathetic' Symphony, is also the least essentially Russian of that master's pieces... At present we are too frequently reminded of Bismarck's 'Scratch a Russian and find a Tartar' when listening to the wild effusions which some Russian composers inflict upon us.

It was the same issue the *Musical Times* was to become so concerned with the following year, that of 'mainstream' aesthetic values – a common concept of beauty in music based upon those represented by the 'great classic masters of music'. Glazunov had obviously shown an acquaintance and willingness – in the eyes of English critics – to assimilate these values. However, when Sir Charles Stanford performed the same symphony with the student orchestra of Royal College of Music on 23 July 1897, the *Musical Times* clearly thought things had gone too far.

We have heard [it] twice and do not hesitate to protest against a work with such an ugly movement as the *Finale* being taught at one of our chief music schools... The champions of 'nationalism' will tell us that this is the best movement in the work, because it is the most Russian and 'so characteristic'; they may even assure us that we do not require beauty in music. We shall continue to hold exactly opposite views. If *they* find beauty there, it must be of the kind which some people see in the abnormally developed biceps of the professional strong man.⁷⁰

The final comment suggests that this critic found something excessive about Glazunov's music – exactly what is not clear. What is clear is that this is not the sort of music this critic wants the future musicians of England to be studying, no doubt for similar reasons to those expressed by Parry earlier. The issue here is not of amateurism, but more simply that music should be more dignified; without such reticence Glazunov was obviously not a good role model. However, this comment was only directed at the finale of the Fifth Symphony; for the rest it seems critics found much to admire in Glazunov's music. Conservative critics, such as those of the *Musical Times*, did not mind Russian music so long as when one 'scratched' its composer an Austro-German was revealed beneath, and in his next major work to be heard in London, Glazunov seemed to reveal the preferred outlook.

⁷⁰ *Musical Times*, August 1897, 536.

The first day of 1899 brought the premiere of Glazunov's Sixth Symphony (1896), conducted by Wood, the symphony that many interpreted as the indication that the Russian had reached maturity. Though Rimsky-Korsakov had been slightly perturbed by the interest Glazunov had recently been displaying in the music of Brahms, on hearing the symphony Rimsky-Korsakov found much to praise in it, as did the English press, even the *Musical Times*:

The work is by far the best example of the young Russian's powers that has yet been heard in this country. It shows a sobriety of method, a maturity of thought, and a symmetry of construction that I had found lacking in his earlier compositions of the same class.⁷¹

Of all the Russian composers, Mr Glazunov is the most Western in his style and methods, and for this reason his music possesses additional artistic value...[the Sixth Symphony] possesses more than ordinary attractiveness and...its second performance will be anticipated with interest.⁷²

These critics were clearly pleased to note, albeit in somewhat patronising terms, that Glazunov had become less 'Russian' in his compositional style and was adopting in its place the more commonly held (and preferred) aesthetic. Nationalism was perhaps regarded as a *péché de jeunesse* – something a good composer grew out of. The *Musical Times* was optimistic for the future of Russian music: 'We admire the brilliant band of young Russians, with Glazunov at their head, and believe that before long they will produce music of lasting value.'⁷³ Unfortunately his Sixth Symphony did not survive the acid test of a second performance, this time conducted by Richter on 29 May 1899, whereon the *Musical Times* performed a *volte-face* of opinion:

Time was when we built great hopes on Glazunov. We believe in him less and less as he goes on producing symphony after symphony with the facility and rapidity of a Mozart or Schubert. To be sure, he is a great architect, and can raise a splendid monument of learning and ingenuity with anybody. But, alas! the life-giving breath of melodic inspiration is sadly wanting...His mastery over all branches of the technique of his art is astounding...but [the symphony's] length and elaboration

⁷¹ *Sunday Times*, 8 January 1899, 6.

⁷² *Musical Times*, February 1899, 98.

⁷³ *Musical Times*, February 1899, 91.

suggest that the composer became ‘intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity’ while he wrote it.⁷⁴

The *Musical Times* was perhaps being unfair in expecting a composer to ascribe to an out-dated set of aesthetic values and also produce an interesting work. The Suite from *Raymonda* (1896-97) was given by Wood six months later but fared no better. For those who hoped the composer was becoming a Russian Brahms, that his latest work found him writing in that ‘low’ and least Brahmsian of genres – ballet music – must have disappointed.

Upon Alexander Glazunov used to rest the fond hopes of those who rightly or wrongly expect Slavonic composers to shape the course and make the history of music in the near future. To us the gifted young Russian has proved a disappointment, for every fresh work from his pen seems to take him farther away from the path that leads towards greatness.⁷⁵

However, over the next few years with the appearance of the music of Richard Strauss and Debussy it was apparent that a commonly held aesthetic of music was fast becoming redundant. Tchaikovsky would never truly lose his place in the concert hall whereas the music of Borodin, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov would not become truly popular until 1911 when Diaghilev produced their operas in London, by which time their *âme slave* gaucheries became highly fashionable. In the new century as other trends and a new pluralism further undermined the panromanogermanic hegemony it became apparent that conservative quarters, such as the *Musical Times* were fighting a last, desperate and losing battle for its cherished ‘mainstream’ aesthetic values.

⁷⁴ *Musical Times*, July 1899, 464.

⁷⁵ *Musical Times*, January 1900, 34. Wood, QH, 25 November 1899.

CHAPTER TWO

FASHION AND EXPECTATION: 1900 TO 1914

*Russian music has during the last generation played a part in the world of music generally that is comparable with that played by German music in the nineteenth century, English music in the fifteenth, or Italian music in the sixteenth.*¹

The coronation of Edward VII in August 1902 precipitated a significant shift in British life. The period from 1902 until the outbreak of the First World War was one of great excitement and a sense of freedom, as H. G. Wells recalled: ‘Queen Victoria sat on England like a great paperweight...after her death things blew all over the place.’² Edward VII was a monarch whose interest in fashion, art and culture further encouraged the move, begun in the last decade of the previous century, away from an accepted norm of aesthetic appreciation towards an evolving, fashion-conscious one. His own tastes precipitated a shift in ideals away from Teutonic Victorianism toward Gallic Edwardianism. The King’s Franco-Russian interests spread to politics and diplomacy; it was no accident that the French and Russian *ententes* with Britain were achieved during his reign. Although Edward VII could often be exasperated by Tsar Nicholas II’s incompetence as a ruler he was keen for an improvement in relations between the two countries in a way that his mother, Queen Victoria, had not been.

Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations at the beginning of the century were still problematic and reached crisis point with the Dogger Bank Incident which took place on the night of 21 October 1904.³ The incident brought Britain and Russia even closer to war than they had been at Penjdeh in 1885. On 22 January 1905, ‘Bloody Sunday’ sparked off the first revolution of the century.⁴ The event was keenly felt in the world of music. An open letter signed by 29 Moscow musicians, including Rachmaninov and Chaliapin, was published on 15 February in the Russian newspaper *Nashi Dni*: ‘Like all Russian citizens [we] are victims of

¹ Herbert Antcliffe, ‘The Significance of Scriabin’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 10/3, July 1924, 333-45.

² Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 316.

³ During the Russo-Japanese War (February 1904 to September 1905) the Russians mistakenly sank a fleet of British trawlers. There was outrage at home, but Britain very restrainedly opted for arbitration by France. France and Russia had signed their Dual Alliance in 1894, and Britain and France had recently agreed their *Entente cordiale* in 1904.

⁴ In the twentieth century until 1917 Russia was thirteen days behind the Western world because of the country’s adherence to the old style Julian calendar. The event took place on 9 January 1905 in Russia. All dates given will be in the Western New Style Gregorian Calendar.

today's abnormal social conditions. In our opinion, there is only one solution: Russia must at last embark on a road of basic reforms.'⁵ In declaring his protest in a letter published in a Moscow newspaper on 1 April 1905, Rimsky-Korsakov was suspended from his professorship at the St Petersburg Conservatoire and placed under police surveillance, which in turn provoked student protests, news covered by the *Musical Times*. The Revolution, with its reports of bloodshed, harsh repression and general disorder, immediately incensed British opinion and further polarized attitudes against the tyrannous autocracy and in favour of the long-suffering Russian people. On 1 May 1905, one of many protest meetings against 'Bloody Sunday' met, appropriately enough, at Queen's Hall, and by the end of May the Russian Strikers Relief Fund had raised nearly £1000.

Russia suffered a humiliating defeat in its war against Japan and this, combined with the turmoil of domestic political events, led many in Britain to feel the Tsar had had his wings severely clipped. Britain no longer felt the major threat to its empire was from Russia – that was now perceived to be from Germany. The advent of a new Liberal government in Britain in December 1905 (after ten years of Conservative rule) with their tradition for a more proactive foreign policy set plans in motion in September 1906 for a closer understanding between Russia and Britain. The result was the Anglo-Russian Convention signed on 31 August 1907. Its main purpose was to solve part of the Eastern Question – Persia.⁶ The 1907 agreement was not popular at the time but it ushered in a new period of sympathy towards the Russian people. By June 1914 Maurice Baring, in reference to the West's fascination with Russia, noted:

The Russian soul is filled with a human Christian charity which is warmer in kind and intenser in degree, and expressed with greater simplicity and sincerity, than I have met with in any other people anywhere else; and it is this quality behind everything else which gives charm to Russian life, however squalid the circumstances of it may be, which gives poignancy to its music, sincerity and simplicity to its religion,

⁵ Quoted in Richard Burbank, *Twentieth Century Music* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984) xx.

⁶ As a result Persia was divided into three zones: a Russian, a British and a neutral zone. The British zone, to the south, bordered Afghanistan and India. Russia's weakened state after the previous three years left her in no position to bargain and so Britain gained the upper hand.

manners, intercourse, music, singing, verse, art, acting – in a word, to its art, its life, and its faith.⁷

Thus the long incubating ‘unofficial’ cultural interest in Russia now found itself in ideal conditions to grow ‘officially’ over the coming years. The period from 1907 to 1914 saw a steady move toward an active interest and general appreciation of Russian culture. However, this trend still relied to a large extent on the generalised and stereotyped perceptions that the English had of the Russians.

Racial Perceptions and Behaviourism

A letter Musorgsky wrote to Rimsky-Korsakov in 1868 amply demonstrates how they, as Russians, thought of themselves in relation to the Germans.

And further, regarding *symphonic development* – you seem appalled that you are writing in a Korsakov manner rather than in a Schumann manner. And I tell you...that cold *borsch* is a calamity to a German, but we eat it with pleasure... The German *Milchsuppe* or *Kirschensuppe* is a calamity for us, but it sends the Germans into ecstasy. ... *symphonic development, technically understood*, is developed by the German... The German, when he thinks, first *theorizes* at length, and then *proves*, our Russian brother proves first, and then amuses himself with theory.⁸

Beyond the stereotyping it also demonstrates that a difference in nationality was at this time also regarded as a difference in race and behavioural characteristics. More importantly it shows how these composers were keen to distance themselves from the ‘other’ (in this case the Austro-German) by reinforcing their own self-perceived racial characteristics in their creative lives. The situation in Britain was little different. By 1900, despite the volume of new Russian music that had been presented to London over the previous five years, there was still a marked tendency to discuss Russian music from a somewhat narrow viewpoint, mainly because the average English person had no direct experience of Russia. It was almost

⁷ Maurice Baring, *The Mainsprings of Russia* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1914), 318. Maurice Baring (1874-1945), writer, critic and journalist. Credited with having discovered Chekhov’s work in Moscow he helped to introduce it to the West. Wrote many books and articles on Russian literature.

⁸ Letter from Musorgsky to Rimsky-Korsakov, 15 August 1868, quoted in: Jay Leyda & Sergei Bertensson (ed. & trans.), *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters & Documents* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970). This letter was also quoted, in a slightly different translation, in the *Musical Times*, March 1914, 158-59.

invariably covered by the term Slavonic, a catch-all word which consequently encouraged a simplistic and generalised perception of much of eastern Europe.⁹ The word itself had no standardized spelling in English until early in the following century (e.g. one frequently finds the variant spelling of ‘Sclavonic’ used).

Russia was as a country perceived to be extra-European. ‘On entering Russia,’ a British diplomat noted, ‘one has the sensation of leaving Europe and being in quite another world.’¹⁰ Its otherness was thus defined from a negative perspective, that is to say it emphasised what was different about it rather than what it had in common with Europe, e.g. skin colour, height, beauty/ugliness, cleanliness, clothing, treatment of women and religious beliefs. Descriptions of what was regarded as a monolithic culture were similarly defined by stressing the extremes of their temperament, rather than the common denominator, generating depictions such as: ‘the unmistakable impress of a Slavonic temperament acted upon by the extremes of heated passion and depression’¹¹ or ‘a temperament having fiery vigour and languid melancholy as its extremes.’¹² Further distinctions were not made on the grounds that people were either ignorant of what these distinctions might be or that in view of the contemporary ideas about race, the Slavs were all one people and exhibited the same characteristics. The idea that each nation had a distinct style of art first arose in the field of literature. In literature it was the Romantics’ belief that ‘each nation has a special, separate history for itself, and therefore also possesses a literature which is independent from the others.’¹³ By the end of the nineteenth century this idea was reinforced by anthropological studies.

In the eighteenth century non-European peoples were generally assumed to share essentially the same psychic nature as Europeans. The idea of this essential unity was eroded

⁹ This was a view which was to some extent fostered in these countries by the pan-slavists, who regarded Russians, Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs all to be united by their common Slav culture, a sort of east European equivalent to the Latin countries.

¹⁰ Sir H. Beaumont, quoted in Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 51.

¹¹ *Monthly Musical Record*, April 1876, 62. Taken from a review of the English premiere of Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto.

¹² Edward Dannreuther’s programme note for English premiere of Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto in March 1876.

¹³ Hans Robert Jauss (trans. Timothy Bahti), *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: Harvester Press, 1982), 111.

in the first half of the nineteenth century by the developing idea of hereditarian racialism. When Charles Darwin published his classical evolutionist text *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 various cultures began to be studied in context of evolutionary associationism. The result enmeshed the idea of environmental influences with the hereditary theory of human psychic differences into a crude framework of biological evolutionism and the concept of 'race'. For Victorian anthropologists distinctions between cultural and biological were still ambiguous. For example, that the Victorian anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) spoke of the Italians as a race rather than a nation implies more than just a looser use of the term over 100 years ago.¹⁴ The assumption was that habitual behaviour, dictated by environment, became instinctive and thus this cultural inheritance became part of biological heredity. Even so-called 'social Darwinists', who doubted the direct influence of environment on the formation of major races, tended to blur the distinction between race and nation, and between the processes that formed them. Thus the assumption was that once a cultural habit became hereditary it manifested itself as racial instinct.¹⁵ That this was clearly thought to be the case by the Russians themselves is revealed in a passage in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In this scene Natasha hears a popular melody and, *instinctively* aware of the peasant rhythm and steps, begins to dance to it. Tolstoy's point is that however grand and well-educated they might be, Russians are Russians, united by 'the same blood, the same bones, the same flesh.'¹⁶

In drawing the parallel point for music, each race or nation would then be expected to exhibit different characteristics according to the environment-moulded culture, which had become part of their biological heredity; 'good' composers, therefore, were those who followed their racial instincts – to go against such instincts would be against nature. For Parry, Russian music could be clearly defined by race. In 1905 he noted its 'primitive emotional expression...orgiastic frenzy...unrestrained abandonment to physical excitement

¹⁴ In the USA, Italians were still regarded as 'non-white' in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁵ George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987) 234-36.

¹⁶ Prince Antioch Dmitriyevich Kantemir, 'Letter on Nature and Humanity', quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3. For more on Russian cultural perspectives see Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2002).

which is natural to underdeveloped races.¹⁷ He reiterated the same point six years later when he spoke of Slavonic composers ‘who have by habit or descent a great deal of the “untutored Indian” in their natures.’¹⁸ For Victorians such as Parry, music criticism was largely about a commonly held set of aesthetic values and how far a piece of music subscribed to, or strayed from, those values. The 1890s saw the beginnings of the erosion of that view to be replaced by a pluralistic Edwardian view, which in turn precipitated a new set of issues.

Because Russia was perceived to be extra-European, assigning cultural value to Russian music was largely governed by its otherness in relation to the panromanogermanic ‘mainstream’ style. To guarantee a western European audience’s interest in their music Russian composers had to compose ‘Russian’ music, i.e. music that was first, appreciably different to the ‘mainstream’ style and second, music which conformed to an expectation of what Russian music ‘should’ be like, an expectation based on the received (stereotyped) image of Russia and Russian people as a race. As a consequence this created what has been termed the double bind situation: Russian music which did not display an obvious otherness was rejected for failing to be ‘Russian’ and thus culturally worthless; Russian music which was ‘Russian’ gained interest but, because it was a product of an extra-European culture, it could only hope, at best, to attain secondary canonical status.¹⁹

The double bind situation existed in England for Russian composers but, as displayed in Chapter One, there was an upper as well as a lower threshold for the otherness of their music if they wanted it to receive both interest and acceptance: they had to be ‘Russian’ enough but not too ‘Russian’, especially for the conservative *Musical Times*. To compound the issue this ‘window of expectation’ was a moving target in England, especially so during the emergent aesthetic pluralism of the Edwardian period. The cultural conditions precipitated by the accession of Edward VII also meant that fashion became an important issue, one that governed reception as much as, if not more than, aesthetic principles. Toward the end of the Edwardian period the music of Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky

¹⁷ C. Hubert H. Parry, *Summary of the History and Development of Medieval and Modern Music* (London: Novello, 1905), 118-19.

¹⁸ C. Hubert H. Parry, *Style in Musical Art* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 128.

¹⁹ Richard Taruskin, ‘P. I. Chaikovsky and the Ghetto’, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48-60.

increasingly hit the target of expectation and fashion, whereas Glazunov and Rachmaninov only had brief periods of success. Tchaikovsky was fortunate and unusual in being a composer who survived the Victorian-Edwardian shift, whose music always found its target, being broad enough in its appeal to find the window of expectation, wherever it shifted. However, from the Edwardian period onwards Tchaikovsky was increasingly subjected to critical condemnation due to the emergent facts of his sexuality, which had an important bearing on how his music was perceived.

Tchaikovsky and the 'Hysterical'

By the end of 1901 over 20 works by Tchaikovsky had been introduced to London audiences yet, as Ernest Newman succinctly summed up public perception of the composer:

It cannot be said that our ordinary musical audiences know Tchaikovsky very well...for the great majority of people Tchaikovsky may be said to be represented by the Sixth Symphony, the '1812' Overture, and the *Casse-Noisette* Suite – the first earning him the reputation of a hopeless pessimist, the second that of a semi-barbarian, the third that of an adept in graceful trifling.²⁰

Ernest Newman (1868-1959) was one of a new generation of Edwardian critics; his writing is often closely argued, lively yet intellectual, and as a rationalist he aimed for scientific precision in evaluation. His point here is clear: that there is a misunderstanding of both the man and his music. First, Newman objects to Tchaikovsky being pigeon-holed by fact of his nationality and attempts to deconstruct the English stereotype of the Russians as: 'alternately simple barbarians and morbid, lachrymose decadents.'²¹ Second, Newman encourages his readers to view Tchaikovsky as an individual: 'The current misunderstanding of Tchaikovsky...is due in part to lack of knowledge of the whole of his work, but in part also to a misconception of his aims and techniques.'²² Third, in a very far-sighted manner Newman urges us to consider Tchaikovsky's music for what it is rather than what it is not, i.e. that Tchaikovsky's developmental technique was that which was best suited to his material and to

²⁰ Ernest Newman, 'The Essential Tchaikovsky', *Contemporary Review*, June 1901, 887-98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 888.

²² *Ibid.*, 892.

criticise him for not composing more like Beethoven is pointless. Newman allows for the fact that over-familiarisation with a handful of works has bred an undeserved contempt of Tchaikovsky's music, but considering just a selection of songs:

Nothing but a defect of temperament can blind a man to the greatness of such things as these. No puling sentimentalist could write such music as this. It has too much solidity, too much directness, too much veracity, too much restraint, to be the product of mere hysteria.²³

For Newman *Romeo & Juliet*, the *Manfred* symphony and the operas were 'all examples of assured and easy strength, perfectly under intellectual control, perfectly free from the sound and fury that signify nothing.'²⁴ Yet for some Tchaikovsky's music quite plainly did signify something. Its emotional nature, formerly attributed quite simply to the racial characteristic of Russians, was now aligned with Tchaikovsky's 'pathological' condition, i.e. his sexuality.

Rumours of Tchaikovsky's sexuality had become widespread in St Petersburg and Moscow since the 1870s and though it would never have been mentioned explicitly in print in Britain there is no reason to suggest that this news had not spread to Britain by the time of his first visit there in 1888. In mid nineteenth-century Britain homosexual men were not stigmatised to the extent or manner they would become in the twentieth century. The scandalous Oscar Wilde trials of May 1895 have been described by Alan Sinfield as the catalyst that essentialised the 'queer' character-type for the twentieth century which was synonymous with Wilde himself – effeminate, camp, effete, leisured, insouciant, charming, spiteful and dandified.²⁵ This character-type was regarded as broadly degenerate and though it was similar to that of the Victorian (heterosexual) philanderer, Wilde's trial made it clear that his 'type' was implicitly a sodomite. As a consequence Britain developed a pathological aversion to homosexual men. Presumptions about Russian cultural attitudes towards sexuality (i.e. that they were the same as in England) allowed the myth – that Tchaikovsky

²³ Ibid., 891.

²⁴ Ibid., 892.

²⁵ Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994).

was forced to take his own life to avert a homosexual scandal involving him and a minor member of the Russian royal family – to take root in England.

In 1900 Rosa Newmarch, the pioneering English expert on Russian music, published her ‘Life and Works’ biography of Tchaikovsky.²⁶ A contemporary review stated: ‘this book furnishes an interesting and valuable *resumé* of the somewhat mysterious, and, so far as we can at present know, rather uneventful life of a remarkable musician.’²⁷ Whether Tchaikovsky’s life was uneventful or not, the fact of his sexuality would precipitate a marked change in the way he was perceived and written about, in some cases explicitly so. The American critic and essayist James Huneker (1857-1921) who was greatly impressed when he heard Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto in Paris in 1878, later in 1899 admitted in print, ‘I once wrote of Tchaikovsky that he said things in a great manner. Now I sometimes feel that the manner often exceed the matter.’ But it becomes clear that Huneker’s change of opinion was not prompted by a simple change in his musical taste:

His existence was clouded by an unfortunate and undoubted psychopathic temperament...some secret sorrow, the origin of which we can dimly surmise, but need not investigate...[Tchaikovsky] was morbid in his dislike of women...He felt deeply and suffered greatly...his music is fibred with sorrow, and sometimes morbid and full of hectic passion. He is often feverishly unhealthy, and is never as sane as Brahms or Saint-Saëns...The tragedy of a life is penned behind the bars of his music. Tchaikovsky was out of joint with his surroundings...There is no need of further delving into the pathology of this case, which bears all the hall marks familiar to specialists in nervous diseases, but it is well to keep the fact in view, because of its important bearing on his music, some of which is truly pathological.²⁸

²⁶ Rosa Newmarch (1857-1940) played a pioneering and crucial role in her writings in shaping Edwardian and later audiences’ ideas and perceptions of Russian music. In 1897 she visited Russia to study at the Imperial Public Library under Stasov and met many Russian composers including Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov. On her return to England she devoted herself to raising the profile and understanding of Russian music. In 1897 she contributed a series of articles on Russian music in *The Musician* and from 1900 to 1905 she gave five lectures to the Musical Association on Russian opera that later became the basis for her book *The Russian Opera* (1914). In 1908 she contributed two articles to the *Monthly Musical Record* and from 1908 to 1919 she wrote all the programme notes for the Promenade Concerts, a job that she continued in a lesser capacity until 1927, even after which some of her material continued to be used. Newmarch was concerned not to encumber her writings with superfluous technical discussion, aiming her style at the average concertgoer and not the specialist. Newmarch’s interests also spread beyond music to art, q.v. Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Arts* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1906).

²⁷ *Musical Times*, July 1900, 474.

²⁸ James Huneker, *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (London: William Reeves, 1928), 86-98.

And in a final parting shot Huneker displays the paranoid suspicions that some still had about Russia. ‘The [last] movement [of the *Pathétique*] is the last word in the profoundly pessimistic philosophy which comes from the East to poison and embitter the religious hopes of the West.’²⁹

It was this kind of rhetoric that became the norm for Tchaikovsky criticism for at least the next sixty years, and it appears that Huneker was one of the first to inaugurate it. In 1901 the style had become evident in the *Musical Times* where a review for the Third String Quartet described: ‘the moody, melancholy, and occasional suggestion of hysteria in the opening movement.’³⁰ It is important to note the use of the word hysteria. From around the turn of the century the word ‘hysterical’ is increasingly found in descriptions of Tchaikovsky’s music, both in the press and in more learned writings. In the light of studies made by Sigmund Freud, hysteria became a coded word often used to describe a person with deviant sexual tendencies.³¹ It also enabled the ‘over emotional’ quality of Tchaikovsky’s music to be accounted for by his sexuality, something which the Oscar Wilde ‘queer’ character-type did not encompass.

Tchaikovsky’s sexuality was now regarded as deviant, even if few were prepared to say explicitly in what way, and it frequently predisposed those who wrote about Tchaikovsky’s music to colour it in a Huneker-like manner. Ernest Newman, however, would not be swayed in his opinion confidently asserting in 1902 that the Third and Fourth Symphonies were:

in the main free from tragic suggestions of any kind. They are for the most part extremely impersonal, confining themselves to an expression of such generalized emotions as come more properly within the scope of the symphony pure and simple... The Fourth is a big and masterly work throughout, the first and last movements being particularly vigorous; while the third, although it is so full of

²⁹ Ibid., 138.

³⁰ *Musical Times*, April 1901, 246.

³¹ Since the ancient Greeks hysteria was almost invariably associated with women, but in 1896 Sigmund Freud identified a male hysteric type also existed. Freud posited that the basis of the condition lay in the person’s sexuality, either in a trauma of a sexual nature early in life, or in the conflict of a sexual urge not permitted by society, i.e. an hysteric was a sexual deviant. It later became incorporated into his theory of the Oedipus Complex.

sportiveness and winsome beauty, gives constant glimpses of the strong man's hand.³²

Such clear-headed journalism, unfortunately, was not widespread. The translation of Modest Tchaikovsky's biography of his brother appeared in 1906. Complete with extracts from letters and diaries, it was edited in a painfully obvious way to conceal various facts about the composer's drinking and gambling in addition to his sexuality (Modest was also homosexual). People who had heard rumours would not need to read far to find them 'confirmed'. The 'rather uneventful life' had become rather more interesting, as the review from the *Musical Times* concluded: '[Tchaikovsky] entered the world handicapped with a neurotic, indolent temperament, which developed into a morbid disposition and culminated in spiritual and mental disturbance.'³³ Far from giving a rounded account, the edited letters and diary quotes in Modest's book merely exacerbated the emergent distorted image of Tchaikovsky's character.

The same year also saw the publication of a life and works of Tchaikovsky that would be the standard text in Britain for the next forty years. Edwin Evans' biography of the composer compares him with Brahms: 'On the one side, music calm, intellectual, raisonné, of careful and calculated symmetry; on the other, passion, the coursing of warm blood, violent reactions of an emotional temperament, fringing hysteria, both in its exuberance and in its depression.'³⁴ The gender-coded vocabulary here has completely shifted since Shaw's comments on the Fourth Symphony in 1893: 'The noblest merit of the Symphony is its freedom from the frightful effeminacy of most modern works of the romantic school.'³⁵ In 1907, Donald Tovey published his Analytical Essay on Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, where it received high praise: 'Nowhere else has [Tchaikovsky] concentrated so great a variety of music within so effective a scheme. [The finale] with its complete simplicity of despair...[is] a stroke of genius which solves all the artistic problems that have proved most

³² Ernest Newman, 'Tschaikowsky and the Symphony', *Monthly Musical Record*, August 1902, 146-47.

³³ *Musical Times*, December 1905, 792. Review of Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky: edited from the Russian with an Introduction by Rosa Newmarch* (London: John Lane, 1906).

³⁴ Edwin Evans, *Tchaikovsky* (London: Dent, 1906), 39.

³⁵ G. B. Shaw, *Music in London 1890-94* (London: Constable, 1932), iii. 13.

baffling to symphonic writers since Beethoven.³⁶ However, Tovey was not so complimentary of the Fifth Symphony, dismissing it as ‘impotent’. Unfortunately, groundless speculation as to the explanation of Tchaikovsky’s music was all too frequently made, such as Parry’s description of the finale of the *Pathétique* as being: ‘like the cry of a man realizing his helplessness in the face of a predisposition towards some special overmastering temptation.’³⁷

Huneker may have been one of the first to blacklist Tchaikovsky from receiving serious musicological attention, but if Huneker had not done it then no doubt someone else would have. However, in the concert hall gossip about the composer’s life reinforced the interest in his music and created expectations that would, by their nature, be self-fulfilling. The disclosure of Tchaikovsky’s biographical particulars, spurious or otherwise, crystallised an image of the composer as a hysterically over-emotional homosexual, and his fate was sealed. Those, like Huneker, who once admired the Russian, now roundly condemned him. For Russophile writers and journalists, such as Newmarch, there was obviously now the worry that other Russian composers would become tainted by association, i.e. that all Russian composers might be degenerate in some way. Consequently, there was a shift in the vocabulary used to discuss these composers to one that emphasised their happy and sane personalities, and this did not just apply to Russian composers. In 1905 in a public lecture Alexander Mackenzie pronounced that ‘in the greater works of Smetana and Dvořák there is no morbidity, nor is there any of that superficial emotion or manufactured enthusiasm.’ Mackenzie, in reference to Smetana and Dvořák’s use of folk material, described their compositions as ‘eminently truthful – sometimes even roughly so – and quite without affectation’ and concluded his lecture by proclaiming that:

it might be better, and certainly more wholesome, if we fixed our attention upon this material rather than continue to imitate the eccentric and insincere poses of a decadent foreign art... These deathbed moanings and similar incoherent and morose babblings, which we are carefully informed are the expression of the ‘zeitgeist’, ring false in comparison with the clear, healthy tones and forceful vigour of [this] music.³⁸

³⁶ Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (London: OUP, 1935), ii. 84.

³⁷ Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, op. cit., 241. For more on attitudes towards homosexuality in Edwardian England see Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994).

³⁸ A. Mackenzie, ‘The Bohemian School of Music’, *Musical Times*, April 1905, 257.

A ‘decadent foreign art’ could be a reference to contemporary German music – Richard Strauss perhaps – but the ‘deathbed moanings’ are a clear allusion to Tchaikovsky. Mackenzie makes it clear where he would prefer his audience to direct their attentions, which of the living generation included Glazunov. For Glazunov, the composer whose output most closely paralleled Tchaikovsky in terms of genre, his more ‘mainstream’ style seems to have been the fact that precluded any press speculation into his personal life, but ultimately it also meant that his music would only ever be of limited interest.

Glazunov and the ‘Characteristic’

Glazunov was the Russian composer whose music suffered most from the issue of the double bind in terms of its reception. By the mid-1890s the nationalist-conservative rivalry in Russia had passed into the realms of history; the melodious and effective but somewhat unadventurous style of Glazunov’s symphonies and concertos became the dominant musical force in Russia’s concert halls. For the reception of his music in England it was initially considered too Russian, but only just so, for the conservative Victorians. For the Edwardians his music was briefly popular, but the failure of Glazunov’s style to develop in line with the expectations of fashion (i.e. to sound as ‘Russian’ as the other music that was appearing contemporaneously) led to interest in his music falling away as quickly as it had arisen.

Glazunov Seventh Symphony *Pastoral* (1902) was given its English premiere at a semi-private performance by the RCM students under Stanford on 17 February 1903.³⁹ The *Musical Times* thought it to be: ‘One of the most memorable musical events of the past month,’⁴⁰ with no trace of the alarm they had expressed only six years earlier at Glazunov’s music being taught and performed at the RCM. *The Times* was less enthusiastic:

Outside Russia Glazunov is regarded as the successor in a sense of Tchaikovsky – that is to say, as the master *par excellence* of the new Russian school of to-day... The opening movement of his symphony has some melodious charm, but neither here nor

³⁹ Stanford had already conducted Glazunov’s Fifth and Sixth Symphonies with the RCM’s student orchestra in 1900 and would later conduct his Violin Concerto. For more on Stanford’s opinion of and his relationship with Glazunov, see Chapter Five.

⁴⁰ *Musical Times*, March 1903, 186.

in any of the other movements is the melodic form in any sense Russian. Though too much may be claimed for nationalism in music, still individualism counts for much, and of individuality here we find few traces.⁴¹

It is quite obvious that these two critics were impressed and disappointed by exactly the same musical element of this symphony, reflecting their Victorian or Edwardian outlooks and expectations. Opinion was little changed later that year when the Seventh Symphony received its first proper public London performance, this time conducted by its composer, at Philharmonic Society concert at the Queen's Hall on 11 June. 'After an acknowledged masterpiece like [Glazunov's] Sixth Symphony,' wrote *The Times*, 'it was only natural that...it should disappoint the most ardent admirers of its predecessors.'⁴² The *Musical Times* was more lukewarm this time, but clearly wanted to highlight what it felt was important in a symphony: 'It is not a great work, but one which excites esteem by its clever craftsmanship.'⁴³

In 1905 Glazunov was appointed Director of the St Petersburg Conservatoire and though he had clearly come to occupy the position in English minds as the leading Russian composer of the day, he was also regarded as something of a *kapellmeister* figure.⁴⁴ Consequently on 12 and 18 June 1907 Glazunov received honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford respectively, prior to which there had been an all-Glazunov programme performed by the RCM students on 6 June.⁴⁵ The programme included the Seventh Symphony conducted by Stanford.⁴⁶ 'The fine Seventh Symphony...differs in a welcome degree from the usual run of modern Russian compositions,' observed *The Times*, 'for it is

⁴¹ *The Times*, 18 February 1903, 5.

⁴² *The Times*, 13 June 1903, 16.

⁴³ *Musical Times*, July 1903, 479.

⁴⁴ Glazunov had been appointed professor of composition in 1899. He retained the directorship until the 1920s.

⁴⁵ The same year Diaghilev presented five concerts of Russian music in Paris given on 16, 19, 23, 26 and 30 May. These concerts included works by Rachmaninov and Glazunov, which the composers conducted on the last two dates respectively. The previous year Diaghilev had organised an exhibition of Russian paintings; the following year he produced the first performance outside Russia of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

⁴⁶ The other pieces were: *Raymonda* (1896-97), *Deux mélodies* (1888-90, after Pushkin) for alto and orchestra (sung by Dilys Jones) and the *Chant du ménestrel* for cello and orchestra (Beatrice Harrison, cello). These pieces were conducted by Glazunov. He also spent much time at both the RCM and RAM studying their curricula, ideas from which he took back to St Petersburg where, as Director of the Conservatoire, he established an opera studio and students' philharmonic orchestra.

sane in construction, healthy and happy in mood, and ingenious in the treatment of its exceedingly characteristic themes.⁴⁷ Though Glazunov's music clearly cheered the old-guard critics, it seemingly did not excite audiences: Henry Wood, that ever reliable barometer of musical fashion, programmed only one Glazunov symphony in the Promenade Concerts for the period from 1902 to 1914 – the Sixth in 1907.

Glazunov's Eighth Symphony (1906) was greeted in a similar fashion after its premiere later the same year on 11 October at the Leeds Festival, chosen for the programme by Stanford, Professor of Composition at the RCM, who clearly admired Glazunov for the same reasons the *Musical Times* did. As *The Times* noted:

Glazunov is the one eminent Russian composer to whom the lovers of musical form look to keep up the noble traditions of the past. He is not merely a clever colourist, but his "drawing" is so sure and masterly in originality and in treatment that his symphonies have very few rivals among the music of the present day.⁴⁸

Glazunov by now has definitely passed into the category of establishment composer and defender of the one area Russian music was generally criticised for at this time: its unorthodox or just plain clumsy handling of musical form. For conservative minds, such as the journalists of the *Musical Times* or prominent academic figures such as Stanford, Glazunov represented the civilised and acceptable side of Russian music. At the end of the 1912 Proms season, his contribution was summed up: 'Glazunov upheld the reputation of the modern Russian School in its academic respect.'⁴⁹

When his First Piano Concerto (1910) was performed the following year on 28 August it revealed a facet that some would lament as much as some would cheer: 'The work is full of ingenious artifice, though it is in no sense *Kapellmeister* music...Both [the first subject] theme and that of the Variations are formed after Brahms's manner, or, at any rate, the manner that Brahms made famous.'⁵⁰ Thus, when Glazunov ultimately revealed that his

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 7 June 1907, 4.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 14 October 1907, 8. Conducted by Stanford. The performance took place the day after the premiere of Vaughan Williams's *Toward the Unknown Region*.

⁴⁹ End of season summary of the 1912 Proms season printed in the programme note for the Last Night on 26 October 1912. The reference was to Glazunov's *Introduction and Dance of Salomé* (1908), which had received its English premiere at the Proms on 10 September 1912.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 29 August 1913, 7.

music seemingly had little to offer beyond imitation Brahms, albeit well written, the reason for any interest in his music beyond its craftsmanship was lost. For the same period Rachmaninov's music also had problems in retaining a position in the concert hall, but the issues for him did not preclude his music becoming popular at a later date, as they had become for Glazunov.

Rachmaninov – the new Tchaikovsky?

On 15 April 1899 Rachmaninov arrived in Britain due to make his musical debut as composer, pianist and conductor at the Queen's Hall on 19 April at the invitation of the Philharmonic Society. The day before his Queen's Hall concert, in what appears to be a shrewd piece of coordinated programming, his Second Piano Trio (1893) was performed at St James's Hall. This would be the second performance in London of the Trio, which had received its English premiere the previous year on 22 February. At this time little was known in England about the 25-year old composer. It appears that there was much interest in the first performance, undoubtedly because Rachmaninov was a new Russian composer.

'Modern Russian music is attracting so much attention in England just now that no little interest was attached to the [Trio's] first performance.'⁵¹ It was pointed out that the Trio was dedicated to the memory of Tchaikovsky; the Tchaikovsky connection was to become a somewhat double-edged sword for the younger Russian. Since Tchaikovsky's death and the first performance of the *Pathétique* it became apparent that journalists, and no doubt the public, were keen to find another candidate for Tchaikovsky's mantle and when it became obvious that Glazunov was not going to be his heir, expectation shifted to Rachmaninov. The critic of the *Sunday Times* was not present but still managed to report the audience response: 'opinions were unanimous as to the remarkable merit of the...work. It made a profound impression by virtue of qualities calculated to specifically appeal to lovers of emotional music...[there was] rapturous applause after each movement. Rachmaninov...is evidently a genius.'⁵² A second performance of this piece was obviously not to be missed.

⁵¹ *Musical Times*, April 1898, 248.

⁵² *Sunday Times*, 27 February 1898, 6. Herbert Parsons, Gerald and Herbert Walenn, QH (small).

At the second performance of the Trio the *Sunday Times* critic, who was present this time, was positive: ‘The Trio is indeed a work of singular originality and imaginative power...Above all the music has that emotional quality which appeals direct to the senses and which seems to be one of the strongest characteristics of Rachmaninov’s style.’⁵³ The language used by the critic shows a direct attempt to align the work with the *Pathétique*, which at this time was frequently described as ‘heart-music’ where the emotions ‘go straight to the heart and move us to tears in spite of ourselves.’⁵⁴ However, the critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, the conservative-minded 68-year-old Joseph Bennett, obviously did not feel so moved: ‘Speaking for ourselves, we would burn the scores of half-a-dozen such oddities as the Rachmaninoff Trio, to preserve intact the exquisite song-cycle [*In a Persian Garden* by Liza Lehmann] which adorned the second part of last evening’s programme.’⁵⁵ Either way, when Rachmaninov appeared in public the following night at the Queen’s Hall (it is not known whether he attended the performance of the Trio) he was in the fortunate position that his name was already on people’s lips.

It was originally intended that Rachmaninov would premiere his Second Piano Concerto at his Queen’s Hall debut, but due to the depression triggered by the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony (in March 1897) he had failed to complete the work in time. In the end the main work Rachmaninov brought with him to London was his *Fantasy* for orchestra (1893 – known today as *The Rock*). The Tchaikovsky association was obviously in many minds during its performance. The *Sunday Times* was again very positive, stressing the parallel with Tchaikovsky to the point of over-exaggeration:

[Rachmaninov is] a worthy pupil of Arensky, but an even more faithful disciple, if indirectly, of the giant Tchaikovsky. I know, in fact, no exponent of the modern Russian school who so closely reproduces the method, the mannerisms – nay the very intensity of pessimistic spirit peculiar to the genius that gave us the ‘Pathetic’ Symphony...the instrumentation is masterly; the abounding climaxes are led up to with a patience and a skill that only Tchaikovsky himself could have surpassed.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Sunday Times*, 23 April 1899, 4. Walenn Trio, St James’s Hall.

⁵⁴ *Musical Times*, August 1897, 533.

⁵⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1899, 10.

⁵⁶ *Sunday Times*, 23 April 1899, 4. Rachmaninov also played the ‘well-known’ C# minor prelude (twice) and the *Élégie* op.3 no.1.

But this was 1899, the year when the London press was seemingly suffering from a surfeit of Tchaikovsky, especially the *Pathétique*. Whether one was a Russophile or not it was obvious that the comparison was over ambitious and inevitably the piece ‘disappointed expectation’ as the *Monthly Musical Record* surmised: ‘Probably the enthusiasm evoked by Tchaikovsky’s music may have been a disadvantage to the new comer...it would be unreasonable to suppose that all Russian composers would produce masterpieces like the ‘Pathetic Symphony’.’⁵⁷ The poetic basis for the work – Lermontov’s poem ‘Utyos’ printed in a German translation with an English paraphrase in the programme note – appeared to hinder rather than help understanding of Rachmaninov’s score.⁵⁸ *The Rock* is an early work and it was regretted in the *Monthly Musical Record* that Rachmaninov had not chosen a piece of ‘more solid value,’ which shows that it must have been clear that the young Russian was capable of better things.

Unfortunately the next work London heard did nothing to support this hope. For his Queen’s Hall debut the Philharmonic Society suggested Rachmaninov play his First Piano Concerto (1890-91) in place of the Second, but he refused to play the earlier work in public, dismissing it as a ‘student work’.⁵⁹ Had he known that it had been performed at the Queen’s Hall on 4 October 1900 one imagines he would not have been pleased. In any case, the performance clashed with the Birmingham Festival where most newspapers’ chief critics were to hear the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* (which had taken place the previous night); that day was also polling day for the 1900 general election.⁶⁰ Surprisingly, the Second Piano Concerto (1900-01) did little to improve opinions of Rachmaninov when it was given in London two years later on 29 May. Press opinion was lukewarm but far from uniform, with critics divided on which movement of the Concerto was the best. However, the response of some still indicated they felt something better was to come from this composer. When

⁵⁷ *Monthly Musical Record*, May 1899, 106.

⁵⁸ *Utyos* is variously translated as rock, crag or cliff. The score is headed with the first two lines of Lermontov’s poem: ‘A little golden cloud slept the night / on the breast of a giant crag.’ The audience, however, were not aware that the inspiration for the piece was actually Chekhov’s short story *Na puti* (‘On the Road’) which is headed by the same Lermontov quote that heads the score of *The Rock*. In Chekhov’s story a young girl and an old man strike up a conversation at a road-side inn; the man tells the girl about the tragedies of his life, whereon they part again as abruptly as they had come together.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Norris, ‘Rachmaninoff in London’, *Musical Times*, April 1993, 186-88. Rachmaninov revised the First Piano Concerto in 1917.

⁶⁰ The concerto was performed by Evelyn Stuart, conducted by Wood, QH, 4 October 1900.

Rachmaninov returned to London in 1908 to perform his Second Piano Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky on 26 May, *The Times* felt Rachmaninov's performance style, rather than the Concerto, was the most notable feature:

The direct expression of the work, the extraordinary precision and exactitude of his playing and even the strict economy of movement of arms and hands which Rachmaninov exercises, all contributed to the impression of completeness of performance...the freedom from extravagance of any kind was the most remarkable feature.⁶¹

This 'freedom from extravagance' would have counted in Rachmaninov's favour in the period when pro-Russian critics were attempting to reconstruct the Russian character type by distancing it from the Tchaikovskian hysterical archetype. As an encore the composer played his famous, or rather infamous, C# minor prelude. The critic of *The Times* was struck by the 'crisp, almost rigid' treatment of the prelude, wishing that other pianists, who delight in producing 'sensational effects' with the prelude, would follow his example. So perhaps it was not always the emotional quality of the music that people were objecting to, but rather the extreme way it tended to be realised. Despite the repeated parallels drawn with Tchaikovsky, questions about the younger composer's sexuality never arose. It was not stated in the press that he was married, but rather one might think, in the light of the Wildean caricature, that it was Rachmaninov's 'freedom from extravagance' which killed any presumption or speculation about his personal life.

Two years later Artur Nikisch introduced Rachmaninov's Second Symphony (1906-08) to London audiences on 19 May 1910 at a Philharmonic Society concert. Again, the timing was hardly auspicious, the concert taking place the day before the funeral of Edward VII. Also two further major distractions, in the form of Karsavina and Pavlova, were performing in London that evening. Nikisch's concert was reported in the newspapers and though many reported various positive features, overall 'many hearers felt that a whole hour

⁶¹*The Times*, 28 May 1908, 12. Koussevitzky had visited London to give a double bass recital in 1907 after which he was immediately invited to return the following year and guest conduct the LSO. Subsequently he introduced much new Russian music to London, especially Rachmaninov, Medtner, Scriabin, Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

of precious time had been wasted on the symphony.’⁶² Later that same year the Second Symphony was performed at the Leeds Festival on 13 October at the suggestion of Stanford.⁶³ Although the provincial critics were kinder to Rachmaninov than their London counterparts, public interest in Rachmaninov’s symphony was distracted by an English premiere, Vaughan Williams’s *A Sea Symphony*, which had received its world premiere the previous day.

In the press comparisons with Tchaikovsky were absent, which is a telling point; Rachmaninov’s music entered London concert halls on the coat tails of Tchaikovsky’s popularity, being hailed as Tchaikovsky’s successor just as critical appreciation for the elder composer was waning due to overexposure. In 1899 the press reviews make it clear that the critics regarded Rachmaninov primarily as a composer; by 1910 however, the ambivalence of his status as composer-pianist (or pianist-composer) no doubt muddied judgement, as a critic noted after the London premiere of the Third Piano Concerto (1909): ‘It is more than usually difficult to judge of the actual value of this remarkable work from a first hearing, because it is almost impossible to dissociate the music from the extraordinary glamour cast upon it by the magical piano playing of the composer.’⁶⁴ Besides the ubiquitous C# minor prelude Rachmaninov’s output was not large or consistent enough in its appearance to register deeply with English audiences at this time. The Second Piano Concerto appears, curiously, to have had little resonance with its Edwardian audience; the programme note for its first appearance at the Proms, which surprisingly did not take place until 19 September 1907, makes scant reference to the work’s qualities which attracted later audiences: its expressive melodies and passionate lyricism.

Rachmaninov’s choral masterpiece *The Bells* (1913) was due to be performed at the Sheffield Festival on 13 November 1914, but the Festival was cancelled due to the War. In the event the work was not performed in Britain until 1921, by which time it must have

⁶² *The Times*, 21 May 1910, 15.

⁶³ Rachmaninov himself conducted at Leeds at which he also performed his Second Piano Concerto, with Stanford conducting, on 12 October 1910. Stanford had conducted a semi-private performance of Rachmaninov’s *Isle of the Dead* with the RCM orchestra on 23 February 1910. Rachmaninov also visited the RCM during May 1910.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 8 November 1911, 11. The Third Concerto received its English premiere in Liverpool given by the Liverpool Philharmonic Society conducted by Speelman on 24 October 1911. The London premiere was given by the (London) Philharmonic Society under Mengelberg on 7 November 1911. The composer was pianist at both performances.

appeared anachronistic. If the work had been performed before the War it might have helped to consolidate Rachmaninov's reputation as a composer. The Second Piano Concerto appears to have come into its own from 1915, being performed almost annually for the next ten years. However, by the time Rachmaninov appeared at Henry Wood's Proms Jubilee concert in October 1938 his popularity was at its height, but not as a composer. Rachmaninov appeared in England for the last time in March 1939; since his first appearance in April 1899 he had visited the country over 15 times. All but three of these trips were made in the 1920s and 1930s where he occasionally conducted but primarily gave concerto performances and solo recitals, in which the programme would consist mainly of works by other composers. For the same period he produced only three new major compositions; ultimately he was perceived first and foremost as a concert pianist who happened to compose (similar to Mahler's situation, who during his lifetime, was regarded primarily as a conductor not a composer). In 1924 the *Musical Times* noted after Rachmaninov had performed his Third Concerto that, '[he] remains...one of the most appreciated of *musicians*,' – not of composers.⁶⁵ Similarly, when Rachmaninov was presented with the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal in 1932, it was said, 'To win it he need not have been a composer.'⁶⁶ Though it was clear he was a composer, Rachmaninov was valued more as a pianist during his lifetime. It would not be until many years after Rachmaninov's death in 1943, after memories of him as a performer had faded, that his compositions would shift to the foreground and audiences reform a perception of him as a composer.

Rosa Newmarch and The Five

Central to the English public's wider appreciation of Russian music was the musicologist Rosa Newmarch, the only writer of her generation to have had firsthand knowledge of Russia and Russian composers. In 1897 Newmarch visited Russia to study at the Imperial Public Library under Stasov and met many Russian composers including Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov.

⁶⁵ *Musical Times*, November 1924, 1031. From a review of a performance conducted by Wood at QH on 11 October 1924.

⁶⁶ *Musical Times*, April 1932, 359. The presentation took place on 10 March 1932 where Rachmaninov played his Third Concerto.

Although her meetings in Russia with Stasov and Cui ensured she was the eminent authority on Russian music in Britain, she was obviously a shrewd enough judge of character not to take everything at face value, as her opinion of Cui amply demonstrates: ‘As regards Russian music, his views cannot be accepted as comprehensive.’⁶⁷ Similarly she regarded his pamphlet *La Musique en Russie* as: ‘an interesting, but in many ways misleading, statement of the phenomenon [of Russian music].’⁶⁸ At a paper she presented to the Musical Association on 10 January 1900 Newmarch stated: ‘with the exception of Tchaikovsky, none of the representative composers of Russia had received any academic training.’⁶⁹ Newmarch makes no attempt to say what it is that makes composers ‘representative’ of their country or why Tchaikovsky is an exception; it is merely taken as a given point. The statement seemingly implies that a lack of academic training is a major prerequisite of being a representative Russian composer, which resonated greatly with the general perception of Russia as a semi-civilised country, and so is accepted as a truism. Over the next twelve years Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and finally Musorgsky, are addressed in such a way as to distinguish each, not only from Tchaikovsky for reasons already discussed, but from each other to allow their individuality to emerge.

Volume VI of *The Oxford History of Music ‘The Romantic Period’* by Edward Dannreuther was published in 1905. His opinions of the Five, who he described as ‘the Five Neo-Russian innovators’, are interesting not least because he was not an especial Russophile but also because he addressed individual attributes to each of its members. Balakirev and Cui are dismissed as being too derivative. Rimsky-Korsakov is discussed in mildly condescending tones as a composer who produces ‘surprising effects of rhythm and colour’ derived from his interest in Russian folk tunes, and is also a ‘master of orchestration’. Musorgsky is described as the ‘most Russian of the Russians’ specifically because his music ‘appears wilfully eccentric...[and] his style impresses the ear as barbarously ugly.’ Borodin, however, is given a distinctly positive appraisal:

⁶⁷ J. A. Fuller Maitland (ed.), *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn., London: Macmillan, 1904).

⁶⁸ Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Opera* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1914) preface.

⁶⁹ *Musical Times*, February 1900, 116-17.

Borodin...does not consciously strive to produce characteristic Eastern music; with him it is true, spontaneous, and irresistible. Throughout his work Russian local colour is supreme...the composer's command of musical form and diction, of the treatment of solo and choral voices and the orchestra, is that of a bold, highly accomplished master – one who never rouses the suspicion that he may have intended one thing and by lucky chance achieved another.

The language used here distances Borodin from that used to describe Tchaikovsky at this time and chimes with contemporary thinking on race already discussed. By using such terms as 'true' and 'spontaneous' it is obvious Borodin is just 'doing what comes naturally', making no attempts to go against nature; he is the noble savage. Parry, who spoke of 'the semi-oriental condition of Russian music', stated that: 'Races with a touch of the oriental in their habits show great aptitude for instrumental expression and colour,' implying they have little talent for anything else.⁷⁰ Rimsky-Korsakov's sophisticated approach to harmony and orchestration would no doubt have been regarded as evidence of him trying to be something he was not, apt to arouse suspicion of at least a self-conscious art or at worst 'cheap cleverness to astonish the superficially intelligent.'⁷¹ Musorgsky, in fulfilling the semi-barbarian Russian stereotype, was obviously being too Russian for his own good. Dannreuther, however, is positive about the future of Russian music: 'Kept within proper artistic bounds, the Russian movement now in full course may ultimately lead to illustrative instrumental music of the highest beauty and value.'⁷² Though he was an equal advocate of both conservative and *Zukunftsmusik* aesthetics, Dannreuther's use of the qualifier 'illustrative' suggests that though he is sympathetic toward Russian composers he perceives of them as being second-rate and bio-genetically incapable of evolving to the highest pantheon.

E. A. Baughan, writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, similarly shared Dannreuther's preference for Borodin:

⁷⁰ Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, op. cit., 240. Russia's link with Orientalism was largely due to the eastern expansionist policies fostered by the liberal Tsar Alexander II (1855-81), though links clearly existed before this point.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷² E. Dannreuther, *The Romantic Period* (The Oxford History of Music, 6; London: OUP, 1905/1931), 320-28.

There can be no doubt that in Borodin Russia has produced a genius of the first order. His symphony in E flat and *Prince Igor* are masterpieces which the world can never afford to forget; every page is spontaneous, every thought is noble, every incident is alive with the spirit of youth and adventure.⁷³

Baughan, like Dannreuther, emphasises the spontaneous, i.e. natural, quality of Borodin's music, distinct from the 'morbid' and 'unhealthy tones' of Tchaikovsky. Newmarch, in her article on Borodin for the second edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1904-08), notes that *Prince Igor* provides the exception to the rule that a spirit of pessimism pervades all Russian literature and music.

The death of Rimsky-Korsakov in June 1908 drew a personal reminiscence from Newmarch.

He was one of the delightful exceptions to those cosmopolitan, expansive, emotional, and sometimes frothy, Russians who give such false impression of the national character... Each time I saw [him] I was more and more struck by his simplicity and dignified reserve... Of late years English critics have expended a good deal of censure upon the morbid and melancholy tendencies of modern [Russian] composers. Death and sorrow, unhappy passion – all kinds of impolite and indiscreet tragedy – have incurred their displeasure and caused much shaking of heads over the decadence and pessimism of the younger generation. The influence of Tchaikovsky has not altogether unjustly been held accountable for some of this wilful melancholy. That being the case, it is strange how few good words have been said in this country on behalf of a composer who combines in his music poetic interest with a vigorous and manly optimism. Rimsky-Korsakov was the embodiment of all those qualities which stage literature and a misinformed Press have taught us *not* to look for in the Russian character: sincerity, unpretentiousness, refinement, gaiety, and a sweet and healthy outlook upon life.⁷⁴

Newmarch is obviously at pains to distance Rimsky-Korsakov from Tchaikovsky in the same way Dannreuther and Baughan had been with Borodin. She attempts to re-construct the more authentic Russian (not dissimilar to Mackenzie's description of the Bohemian composers in 1905): one who is healthy, happy, dignified, the personification of which is Rimsky-Korsakov, whose music by default must be all the more Russian too. He is a civilised creature who has suffered much at the hands of ignorant journalists, distracted by the over-exposure of Tchaikovsky, whose character is not altogether representative of the 'true'

⁷³ E. A. Baughan, 'Some Tendencies in Modern Music', *Edinburgh Review*, October 1906, 394-96.

⁷⁴ R. Newmarch, 'Rimsky-Korsakov: Personal Reminiscences', *Monthly Musical Record*, August 1908, 172-73.

Russian which means one must conclude that his music is not either. Rimsky-Korsakov, the seeming one-time renegade, had undergone a Pauline conversion to academia and by the time of his death had become a highly influential figure at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. This meant a certain amount of biographical realignment was necessary in order to preserve his reputation. Whilst English journalists were concerned that Russian music should be ‘kept within proper artistic bounds’, for some an academic connection would be a positive association.

In fact over the next five years it becomes apparent that English critics and academics are now quite comfortable with all Russian music – music which in the late 1890s some perceived as a threat to English musical life. On 3 February 1912 Mackenzie delivered a lecture on the subject of Russian music at the Royal Institution. Whereas in 1899 he referred to the ‘piquant dishes’ which ‘can well afford to stand closer examination’ for this lecture he revised his opinions, in some cases by no small measure. Far from saying he has heard enough of this music, as he did in 1899, Mackenzie is now warmly enthusiastic. Musorgsky is now thought of as a ‘natural genius’ and Rimsky-Korsakov is notable for his ‘natural gifts and exceptional perseverance.’ The word that is constantly applied to good Russian music is ‘natural’ or its associated qualities, indicating that Russian music was still being perceived as a racial product governed by a natural instinct. When Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein are said to have ‘pursued their purpose by *grafting* upon German art the characteristics of Russian folk-music,’ Mackenzie implies an artificial product. Indeed, when the Five are described as ‘innocent of any real training,’ the use of the word ‘innocent’ rather than e.g. ‘lacking’, suggests something positive. Academic musical training for the Five is couched in terms such as being ‘scientific’ and ‘theoretic’ whereas for German composers it is referred to as ‘art’. The ‘amateurism’ of this music, or its lack of restraint, is now no longer problematic; rather it is its strength. The best of contemporary Russian music is ‘spontaneous’ with an ‘exceptionally strong, *inborn* sense of rhythm.’ The issue of Russian melancholy, which it was felt all too easily slid into Tchaikovskian morbidity, is tidily contextualised: ‘in spite of that shade of melancholy which overcasts so much of their folk-tunes, we have a considerable amount of sturdy, robustious [sic] humour.’

In concluding his lecture Mackenzie discussed the contemporary situation: ‘in contrast to the feverish, bubblesome, mawkish art which is so much in evidence just now, the foremost Russian composers of to-day remain natural, manly and sound.’ In the latter point Mackenzie seemingly advocates Russian music as the salvation against the ‘feverish’ contemporary music (no doubt a reference to Richard Strauss whose *Salomé* and *Elektra* had been performed in London just two years earlier). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Mackenzie, Principal of the RAM, advocates the two composers who formally or currently held academic posts in St Petersburg: Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, the latter praised for his ‘unimpeachable part-writing...his brilliant instrumentation, his fluency and his facility.’ For these composers to have been given such a warm appraisal by an academic the calibre of Mackenzie was a signal that the most unconventional of them, Musorgsky, could now hope to receive a more sympathetic reception than that granted to him in London in 1898.

By 1914 Musorgsky had come to be regarded as the epitome of Russianness, a view which one can trace back twenty years to Paris. On 15 May 1894 an article on Musorgsky by the French musicologist and journalist, Théodore de Wyzewa (1862-1917), appeared in the French journal *Revue des deux mondes*. Musorgsky is described as ‘unquestionably, the most original, the most gifted and absolutely the most Russian of the Russian composers,’ but it is lamented how little of his music is known in Russia and is totally unknown in France.⁷⁵ To remedy this in 1896 Pierre d’Alheim published a book on Musorgsky, and with his wife, the singer Marie Olénine d’Alheim, gave seven comprehensive concert-lectures on the composer in Paris. The series took the city by storm. Musorgsky’s music attracted praise from composers, philosophers, novelists, poets and critics alike. No such reception had been granted to Musorgsky’s music in London in the late 1890s. Around a decade later, however, when Wood re-introduced Musorgsky’s music to the Proms in 1909, Rosa Newmarch plainly

⁷⁵ Théodore de Wyzewa, ‘La vie et les ouvrages du compositeur Mousorgsky’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 123, 15 May 1894, 467-68. The article was later quoted in translation in M. -D. Calvocoressi, ‘Early Criticism of Moussorgsky in Western Europe’, *Musical Opinion*, April 1929, 642.

felt confident enough to proclaim bluntly in her programme note that Musorgsky was ‘one of the most original of Russian geniuses.’⁷⁶

No doubt aware that London had become more receptive to Musorgsky’s music the d’Alheims finally brought their lecture-recital series to the British capital in 1912, when they appeared at the Bechstein Hall in May and June where they gave four concerts comprised of forty Russian songs, mostly by Musorgsky. These lectures were not analytical; they merely introduced the music and provided a brief background to each piece’s genesis. The works heard included the song-cycles *Songs and Dances of Death* (1875-77), *Sunless* (1874) and *The Nursery Suite* (1868-72). The *Musical Times*, once so hostile to Musorgsky’s music, published a glowing four-page article by H. C. Colles. His article notes how the sceptics may attribute Musorgsky’s popularity to posthumous honour, but that he has now become ‘an intensely interesting historical figure’ in the light of the fact that we can detect his influence on Debussy and Wolf. The realism of Musorgsky’s idiom and the idea of musical truth is the prized quality:

Like the primitive Russian who records his impressions in snatches of melody with little care for their rhythmic or melodic balance, Musorgsky seems to have taken such musical ideas as the rhythms, accent, and feeling of the verse suggested, and their beauty and artistic success depends primarily upon their truthfulness of expression.⁷⁷

Comparing their ‘infinite variety’ Colles draws a parallel between Musorgsky’s style and Russian folk-melodies. Musorgsky’s consistency is now in his diversity of means, hitherto criticised as haphazard. In discussing the song-cycle *Sunless* the rugged, unfinished quality of Musorgsky’s music is judged as a realistic reflection of the language: ‘The absence of all articles, definite and indefinite, gives the Russian language a natural terseness of expression...Musorgsky has simply put down notes according to the accentuation of the verse.’ In all the pro-Musorgsky writings there is this discourse of authenticity; his music reflects reality, a truth about life stripped of inessentials. It is a discourse that can be traced

⁷⁶ Promenade Concert, 25 August 1909. Analytical programme note by Rosa Newmarch for a performance of the ‘Song of the Flea’ with an orchestral arrangement of the piano accompaniment by Henry Wood. The singer was Herbert Brown.

⁷⁷ H. C. Colles, ‘Mussorgsky’, *Musical Times*, August 1912, 503-06. Recitals given on 31 May, 4, 10 and 12 June 1912.

back to Musorgsky himself, and it allowed him and others to proclaim him as *the* Russian composer. His music is seen as authentically Russian because it is an accurate and realistic reflection of the language and therefore the nation it sprang from.⁷⁸

Musorgsky's Russianness is re-aligned and individualised much in the same way Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov had been in recent years: his choice of sad subjects is now the outcome of his personal temperament and circumstances and not some broad Russian character-type. Yet the sympathy for Musorgsky's realism was surely part of a broader public sympathy for the Russian people. As mentioned earlier there was a growing sympathy for Russians and their fate under a brutal autocracy. Musorgsky's music was grim for a reason: he chose to bear the truth about Russia to the world through his music. However, if by this juncture English audiences finally felt they were familiar enough with Russian composers to appreciate and separate out their different qualities and knew what to expect from their music, even to the point that they were beginning to tire of it, Diaghilev's productions of Russian ballet and opera, which came to London in 1911, showed a whole new world of Russian music of which audiences in England were mostly quite unaware.

⁷⁸ For more on this topic see Richard Taruskin, 'Who Am I? (And Who Are You?)', *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61-80.

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE BRINK OF THE FUTURE: 1911 TO 1917

TOUJOURS À LA RUSSE!

*Coronation guests may come and go, but the new Russian Ballet is here to stay.*¹

Diaghilev's 'Russian Ballet'²

The main platforms for ballet in London during the latter half of the nineteenth century were the Alhambra from 1864 and the Empire from 1887. The distinguished Danish dancer, Adeline Genée, was a regular feature at the Empire from 1897. Genée was the dance celebrity of her day and when she left for the USA in January 1908 the Russian dancer, Lydia Kyasht, replaced her. Kyasht had studied at the St Petersburg Imperial Ballet School and subsequently danced at both the Maryinsky and Bolshoi Theatres and was essentially the first Russian dance celebrity to appear in London. A troupe of Russian dancers, including the legendary Tamara Karsavina, arrived the following year appearing at the Coliseum on 28 June. This was essentially the first group of Russian dancers to appear in London and marked the beginning of a new era for ballet in England, which from 1908 to 1911 was marked by an increasing Russian presence.

Ten days before the appearance of the Karsavina group, Diaghilev's immensely successful first season of ballet in Paris had just concluded. Though Karsavina's London venture was not a part of Diaghilev's company the news of the immense success of the Russian impresario's first *Saison russe*, which was reported in newspapers and theatre magazines such as *The Stage*, no doubt whetted the London audience's appetite. The following year saw Anna Pavlova's first public appearance in London at the Palace Theatre on 16 May 1910. The same night a shortened version of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, ostensibly the work's English premiere, was produced at the London Hippodrome with Olga Preobrajenska (*prima ballerina* at St Petersburg's Maryinsky Theatre) and three days later the

¹ Owen Seaman, *Punch*, 5 July 1911, 16.

² Diaghilev's dance company appeared under various names in London from 1911-29, initially as the *Imperial Russian Ballet*. Since it was invariably referred to in the press as the 'Russian Ballet' (even in the post-1918 era) that is how Diaghilev's company shall be referred to throughout this thesis.

Karsavina group returned to London, appearing at the Coliseum.³ This cornucopia of ballet talent was doubtless overshadowed by the death of Edward VII on 6 May.⁴ However, these two years of ballet in London opened many eyes to the level of talent that existed in ballet, but nothing prepared them for the singularly high standards of Diaghilev's productions, or some of the new Russian music he brought with him.

Prior to Diaghilev's productions, ballet was not held in high regard as a genre in its own right. Subservient to opera, it was the *divertissement* between acts or other 'serious' dramatic works, entertainment in which only tired businessmen and 'snobs' were interested. When it was presented independently it was little more than a formulaic, large-scale spectacle. Believing that audiences would not be interested in whole evenings of ballet, the productions of Diaghilev's 1909 Paris *Saison russe* consisted of mixed programmes of ballet and opera. The works that appealed to the crowds were those with an explicitly exotic theme: *Ruslan & Lyudmila*, *Prince Igor* and *Ivan the Terrible (The Maid of Pskov)*, rather than the more classical-European *Les Sylphides*, *Le Pavillon d'Armide* and *Cléopâtre*. However, the 1909 season nearly bankrupted Diaghilev so for the following year he decided to limit his presentations to the less costly genre of ballet.

At this time the ballet repertoire was exclusively of the traditional variety, grounded in the French classical tradition of choreography. Diaghilev knew that the French would not be interested in seeing their own ballet repertoire presented by a foreign company; he realised the spectacle-loving Parisians would be far more interested in exotically-themed ballets *à la russe*, but such a repertoire at that time did not exist. This was created by means of what Benois referred to as Diaghilev's 'export campaign'. So for the 1910 season the *Ballets russes* mounted newly choreographed versions of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, Balakirev's *Tamara* and specially commissioned *Firebird*. In creating these 'export' pieces

³ Pavlova had been engaged to dance at a private party in London at which the Countess of Londesborough (the Sitwells' aunt) entertained King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, at St Dunstan's, the Countess's home in Regent's Park. Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States 1911-1929* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1975), 18. The 2-act version of *Swan Lake* was performed at the London Hippodrome.

⁴ The funeral took place two weeks later, which was filmed by a handful of operators. One colour version (Kinemacolor) was shown on the Bioscope at the Palace Theatre. Many who saw it probably also remained to see Pavlova.

Diaghilev established a very lucrative aesthetic with which he would continue until the First World War. Diaghilev's productions, however, were of note for more than spectacle. The exoticism of many of them, the rejection of realism, and the appeal of art as entertainment in a deliberately mannered style caught the imagination of the era. As in Paris, the London audiences were similarly most captivated by the ballets with exotic or Oriental settings. The Oriental-themed ballets impressed the rich to such a degree that they started a craze for Oriental fancy-dress parties in the years immediately prior to the First World War. Osbert Sitwell noted the effect on interior design: 'Every chair cover, every lamp-shade, every cushion reflected the Russian Ballet, the Grecian or Oriental visions of Bakst and Benois.'⁵ Interest in representations of the Orient, however, went beyond ideas for interior design.

Edward Said has described how the West regards the East as the 'other' and has been aroused by its sense of the exotic and forbidden, and in Imperial terms the masculine West sought domination of the passive, feminine East.⁶ Diaghilev consequently sharpened the underlying consciousness with ballet themes, costumes and choreography of an explicitly sexual nature. That the company primarily consisted of Russian artists, also perceived as 'other', no doubt reinforced the whole effect. For audiences watching these sex-drenched fantasies from a passive position of 'look but do not touch', the impact was explosive. For Russian music the result crystallised perception. With Diaghilev Russian musical Orientalism *was* Russian music; to the West, Russia was the East. This merely compounded the latent nationalist myth that Russian music was only 'authentic' by merit of its otherness (i.e. if it had an exotic or Oriental theme), a myth that had strong currency in the burgeoning anti-German attitude of pre-war England. The crystallisation also reinforced the converse, namely that non-exotic Russian repertoire was inauthentic and therefore culturally worthless. It created a problem for Diaghilev since it prevented him from lucratively presenting the musical artefacts of sophisticated Imperial Russia with which he personally identified, e.g. Tchaikovsky. Diaghilev's initial target audiences were in Paris, but because of the Imperialist

⁵ Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning: Being the third volume of Left Hand, Right Hand!* (London: The Reprint Society, 1949), 234.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

parallels that Britain had with Russia, Diaghilev was also keen to conquer London, a city with whose cultural significance he felt more in sympathy.

Russian Ballet and Covent Garden Audience

By making their first appearance in England during the Grand Season of 1911 the timing of the Russian Ballet was perfect. The Grand Season ran for three months from the end of April and this year coincided with the coronation of George V for whom there was to be a special Coronation Gala.⁷ The Coronation, which took place mid-season on 22 June 1911, meant many more people would be in London that famous summer, the hottest on record since 1868. Coronations, with all their associations of a new beginning and new life, no doubt opened London's imagination to new experiences and new ideas.

The initial 1911 season of the Russian Ballet in England was originally to have been at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane under the invitation of Sir Joseph Beecham and his son, Thomas, who was to provide the services of his orchestra. The Grand Opera Syndicate at Covent Garden got wind of this and, with the reported successes of the Russian Ballet in Paris and Beecham's own recent triumphs with *Elektra* and *Salome*, obviously realised that their own season, hitherto unchallenged, would lose out to the competition. They proposed that they should unite their forces: the Grand Season at Covent Garden would consist of mixed programmes of opera, provided by the Syndicate, and ballets, provided by Diaghilev. The season ran from 21 June until 31 July. Diaghilev would not produce opera in London himself for another two years.

Covent Garden was a very different venue to the Alhambra and the Empire Theatres, the venues hitherto traditionally associated with ballet. Covent Garden was the preserve of King, Court and (Tory) Council whose traditional audience consisted of royalty, dignitaries, the ruling classes and high government officials (the latter to the extent that Covent Garden was described as a Government Club). The whole represented an epoch of glamour, elegance

⁷ The Coronation Gala performance by the Russian Ballet took place on 26 June for which Covent Garden had been decorated with 100,000 pale cream and deep pink artificial roses.

and aristocracy. This Establishment audience consisted of two types: the socialites – who had little artistic interest; going to the opera was largely a social event and an occasion to mingle with the celebrities of the day, the attendance of whom would be dutifully listed in the papers the following day – and the musical *connoisseurs*, who had the time and the money to indulge their passion. The Imperial aristocracy was Diaghilev's ideal audience, the audience with which he identified himself, and whom he actively courted. The 'gallery audience' was one that Diaghilev never actively courted; the masses were alien to him. Diaghilev seemingly ignored the latter, but not out of any class arrogance. As Sir Thomas Beecham points out in his autobiography, the common perception of the middle class music enthusiasts in the cheaper, gallery seats being the arbiters of taste rarely proves true.⁸ It was those in the more expensive seats (who could afford to be more adventurous) who led in the matters of new music at this time and with whom Diaghilev could take artistic risks. It would not be until 1914 that reporters began to note the conspicuous appearance of middle class serious music-lovers, drawn by the shift in repertoire to include opera, and the change of venue to Drury Lane, which had less association with the Establishment than Covent Garden.

The initial 1911 audience probably had little or no interest in or knowledge of ballet. They were primarily operagoers who came to the ballet simply because it was on during the same season or out of curiosity. The opera repertoire at that time was largely Franco-Italian: Puccini was by far the most popular composer, making up a quarter of the Grand Season of 1912. Also popular were Verdi, Rossini and Wolf-Ferrari and individual works: *Louise*, *Les Huguenots*, *Manon* (Massenet's version) and Zandonai's *Conchita* (which received its English premiere in the 1912 season).⁹ Wagner was staged occasionally but he appealed to a different section of the opera-going public: intellectuals, artists and literati, most prominent of which at the time was the Bloomsbury Group. It was through Wagner that this more artistically discerning public – Diaghilev's *connoisseurs*, in addition to the serious music-lover – came to the ballet when the Russians returned on 16 October 1911, where they shared

⁸ Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime* (London: Hutchinson, 1944).

⁹ Riccardo Zandonai (1883-1944). Italian composer, studied with Mascagni. His operas are mostly in the Puccinian *verismo* tradition. Composed in 1911, *Conchita* was his first major, international success.

the autumn season with performances of *The Ring* conducted by none other than Hans Richter. The attraction of the Russian Ballet to the Wagnerites perhaps seems incongruous until one examines Diaghilev's aesthetic philosophy.

Between 1898 and 1905 Diaghilev put on a series of exhibitions supported by the magazine *Mir iskusstva* (1899-1904) or 'World of Art', which represented his aesthetic (the nearest English equivalent would be the *Yellow Book*). This aesthetic would ultimately be realised in his productions of ballet. Diaghilev believed the artist's job was not to reflect or interpret reality but rather to create it; a reality of the imagination, a World of Art of its own in itself where the subject should be inseparable from its medium and method of execution.¹⁰ When he came to apply these ideas to his dramatic productions he demanded a synthesis of collaboration. All areas of production, the staging, scenery, costumes, scenario, choreography and music should be of the same high standard and all co-ordinated towards the same goal. It was exactly this unparalleled quality in all aspects of Diaghilev's ballet and opera productions, in addition to their extravagance, novelty and titillating themes, that were at the root of his successes: 'the most harmonious and scrupulously artistic stage décors and dresses ever seen in a London theatre,' noted Richard Capell.¹¹ That Diaghilev demanded serious music of the highest quality for a genre where, traditionally, music had not been a prime concern was also vitally significant.

The success of the first season of Russian Ballet in Paris in 1909 had been widely reported, and so their arrival in London was eagerly anticipated. The attraction was due obviously to more than just the music. A preview in the *Sunday Times* for Borodin's 'Polovtsian Dances' anticipated 'a furore' – tickets had sold 'like hot cakes' even though the

¹⁰ *Mir iskusstva* was the closest Russia ever got to having a 'art pour l'art' movement. The *miriskusstniki* were also interested in folk art but in a way different to that of the older nationalist tradition, a style that became known as neo-nationalist. The *miriskusstniki* had no interest in social value or responsibility; folk art was of no interest to them as an expression of "the people's spirit" or as evidence of "the people's condition". Rather folk art was to be used for its inherent aesthetic and stylistic value, as stimulus for the fantasy to be applied in abstraction for its own intrinsic beauty, especially in the decorative arts. In this way it has much in common with the earlier Arts & Crafts movements in England.

¹¹ Richard Capell, 'Russian Dancers', *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1911, 3. The idea of the compatibility of all art forms was one that, in Russia, actually pre-dated Wagner. For an English audience, however, it would have been with the German composer that they drew a parallel. Yet the following day Fred Terry wrote to the *Daily Mail* (16 June 1911, 5) citing Henry Irving's productions at the Lyceum Theatre as being comparable in quality to Diaghilev's.

performance was the night before the Coronation of George V.¹² Due to the apparent elision of the Russian and Oriental character-type by Diaghilev's export campaign, critics perceived the characters on stage as reflections of the real-life Russians off stage, and the old stereotypes surfaced. A typical review spoke of 'the Russians' racial instinct for ballet as a means of emotional expression...an expression of [the] fiercest primitive emotion which left one breathless.'¹³ The authenticity issue also featured, the *Musical Times* rapturously describing the 'unadulterated, organically pure Russian music.'¹⁴

Not all of the Russian music heard in that season was new to London, notably *Scheherazade* and the *Polovtsian Dances*. Critical reception of these pieces at their concert hall premieres in the 1890s had been less favourably disposed to their exotic excesses, either in theme or style, but transferred to the stage, these decadent works found reappraisal. *Scheherazade* was produced on 20 July to a very different response than had greeted the piece in London concert halls fifteen years earlier: 'in point of design and colour the most stimulating thing they have shown us. [The] music is very simple and direct [with] terse rhythms and decorated and highly coloured orchestration.'¹⁵ One critic noted the ballet was so popular there would be 'tiara nights to the end of the season' and continued, 'The music is not new to London but gains in effect in its proper association.'¹⁶ Many critics were mistaken in thinking *Scheherazade* was originally conceived as a ballet. The ballet scenario by Bakst, Benois and Fokine was also very different to that with which Rimsky-Korsakov had originally composed his symphonic suite. The ballet adapts the first tale of *The Thousand and One Nights* in which the Golden Slave engages in a nocturnal orgy in the Sultan's harem and meets his death in the morning, a tale that no doubt shocked and excited audiences. Musically, the critics were content. In its 'proper association' the music, once dismissed as tricky, superficial and tiresome, now suddenly found favour with the critics.

¹² *Sunday Times*, 18 June 1911, 6. The performance took place on 21 June.

¹³ *Sunday Times*, 25 June 1911, 6.

¹⁴ *Musical Times*, August 1911, 533.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 21 July 1911, 11.

¹⁶ *Sunday Times*, 23 July 1911, 6. 'Tiara nights' was the phenomenon whereby a production was so popular it would attract the attention of the wealthier classes and were more common during the winter season.

The Russian Ballet's success was such that four extra matinees were included in the summer season of 1911 and the company was immediately re-engaged for the autumn season (the traditional Wagner season, that year conducted by Hans Richter). At the end of 1911 the *Musical Times* summed up: '[The Russian Ballet] with its acrobatic feats on the part of the majority and its glaring costumes, crudely coloured scenery and beautiful music has retained its hold.'¹⁷ The 1912 season was no different. The *Sunday Times* noted the Russian Ballet's immense attraction: 'The first matinee of the season on Thursday afternoon [drew] a crowded house – albeit it was Gold Cup Day at Ascot – showing how eagerly the public seizes every opportunity of seeing these famous dancers.'¹⁸ That Covent Garden's Society audience was at the ballet and not the races is a telling fact, since, as the racing correspondent of the *Sunday Times* remarked, 'from a Society point of view [Gold Cup Day] is a great day at Ascot.'¹⁹ The 'crowded house' saw Balakirev's *Thamar* (completed 1882), which had received its English premiere only the week before, on 12 June. The ballet, with its Oriental setting and story of sex-before-death, here tinged with an element of sadism, suffered from comparison with *Scheherazade*, which was felt to be the more moving and effective piece. Musical comparison was also made, to the ironic detriment of Balakirev, whose score was found to be 'stamped with a style that is anything but purely Russian. *Thamar* contains a good deal of Wagner, Berlioz and Liszt, and except for the pressing insistence of the Oriental rhythms is not very effective.'²⁰ Diaghilev's 'export campaign' obviously cut both ways.

At the close of the 1912 season the Russian Ballet's audience had remained largely the same as it had been in 1911, largely Establishment-based with a small but growing group of music-lovers, intellectuals, artists and literati, notably the Bloomsbury Group. The latter were drawn to the eclecticism of Diaghilev's productions, specifically Bakst's costumes and décor, but also their frank eroticism, since a large part of the Bloomsbury aesthetic espoused an enlightened attitude towards sex and sexuality. That Diaghilev could risk the overtly

¹⁷ *Musical Times*, December 1911, 804.

¹⁸ *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1912, 6.

¹⁹ *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1912, 10.

²⁰ *The Times*, 13 June 1912, 6. *Thamar* was the choreographic version of Balakirev's symphonic poem *Tamara*. The orchestral work was first heard in England on 18 April 1896 performed by Lamoureux and his Paris Orchestra at the Queen's Hall. The story centres on Tamara who lures men to her castle for a night of passion and then promptly kills them at dawn.

sexual aspect of some of these ballets was due to the general perception of Russians being semi-civilised, the presumption being they were either of lax sexual morals or just generally over-sexed. Again, the Russians were just doing what came naturally. The audience in 1913 and 1914, however, changed markedly. In 1913 the Russian Ballet moved theatre to Drury Lane opening there during the Grand Season. Famous in the late-Victorian era for its melodramas and Christmas pantomimes, Drury Lane had less of an Establishment audience than Covent Garden and by 1914 there was a noticeable drop in attendance by the various members of European royalty whose presence had been conspicuous hitherto. Conversely there is an increase by those associated more with Liberal politics, fashionable society and the more artistically aware middle classes, i.e. a more discerning audience.²¹ The second reason for the audience shift was because Diaghilev was now producing whole seasons of Russian music – both ballet and opera – no longer sharing them with Italian opera or Wagner.

Russian Opera and the Drury Lane Audience

During the summer seasons of 1913 and 1914 attention focussed on Diaghilev's productions of the Russian opera at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. *Boris Godunov* (1868-73), *Khovanshchina* (1873) and *The Maid of Pskov* (1868-72, given under the title *Ivan the Terrible*) were produced on 24 June (first night of the season), 1 and 8 July 1913 respectively, and the following year *Prince Igor* (1869-87), *The Golden Cockerel* (1906-07) and *May Night* (1878-79) were performed on 8 June, 15 June and 26 June. The fact that five of these operas were all around forty years old and were only being heard in England for the first time seems not to have merited discussion by the critics. The first performance outside Russia of the most significant of these operas, *Boris Godunov*, did not take place until 1908. This production, produced by Diaghilev in Paris, was significant enough to be reported in Britain. Rosa Newmarch in the *Monthly Musical Record* reported the enormous success with press

²¹ Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: OUP, 1992), 300-329. It is significant that intellectual circles such as Bloomsbury should be more in evidence at Drury Lane since although many came from privileged backgrounds they were always at pains to distance themselves from the privileged *milieu* they challenged in their works.

and audience alike of this ‘highly original national masterpiece.’²² This event, in addition to the d’Alheim lecture-recitals of Musorgsky’s songs at the Bechstein Hall in 1912 (see Chapter Two), meant that musical cognoscenti in England would have been eagerly awaiting the performance of his operatic masterpiece.

Musorgsky’s operas were new to London and his whole approach to music drama was quite different from anything audiences had experienced before. Certainly, Musorgsky’s style could not be compared with the Russian operas that London had heard hitherto: Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* in 1887 and Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* in 1892. As with the Russian Ballet the high standard of production and performance was notable, to the extent that some found it difficult to separate the greatness of the work from the greatness of the performers, which here included Chaliapin:

Boris Godunov is seen to be a great work of art...It is difficult to say how far Musorgsky, how far the extraordinarily powerful acting of M. Chaliapin, the fine singing, and natural action of the crowds, or the beauty of the scenery were responsible for the effect...²³

In general it was the ‘national’ quality that was initially used to explain the ‘otherness’ of all these operas, which was discussed at length by many in print. Newmarch, Baughan and Montagu-Nathan, to name a few, all consistently described the Russian operas performed in 1913 and 1914 as ‘national’. This clearly irked Ernest Newman, who took them to task in a lengthy article on nationalism in Russian music.

The whole body of critics in their articles, have assured us, with a persistence and a unanimity that seems almost rude to refuse to be convinced by, that...these Russian operas are ‘national’ both in subject and in musical idiom. There must be something wrong, I am afraid, with my mental make-up, for I have never been able to see very much that is ‘national’ in either. ...I ask myself whether my friends are not confusing ‘national’ with ‘historical’? *Boris Godounov*, *Khovashchina* and *Ivan the Terrible* are founded upon episodes in the history of Russia; but...that does not make them any more national than an opera founded upon some event in English history would be.²⁴

²² R. Newmarch, ‘Russian Opera in Paris: Musorgsky’s ‘Boris Godunov’’, *Monthly Musical Record*, July 1908, 147-49. The performance took place on 19 May 1908 at the Paris Opéra.

²³ *The Times*, 25 June 1913, 9.

²⁴ E. Newman, ‘Russian Opera and Russian ‘Nationalism’’, *Musical Times*, August 1914, 505-08.

The main issue of Newman's article was to attack the spurious notion of 'national' music, as a product of a common national consciousness, and the idea of an hereditary racial instinct; his words still have a resonance nearly one hundred years later: 'We are particularly prone...to the error of looking at nations too much in the lump...we have a dim vision of a number of people a long way off, all as like as each other as one sheep is like another sheep...I venture to suggest that what [is taken] to be a homogenous racial body is in reality a body highly heterogeneous.' Newman then goes on to deconstruct the concept of race in favour of environmental conditioning: 'It is environment, more than race that counts...The Georgian Borodin, domiciled in St Petersburg, writes Russian music...Had Borodin been removed to Germany in his cradle, and never set foot in Russia or heard a note of Russian music, he would almost certainly have written German music.' This is followed by an attack on the artificial distinction between those composers who are considered to be 'national' and those who are not, and the spurious issue contained therein, namely that some of these composers were somehow more Russian than their colleagues.

Newman's opinions, however, were going against the grain of popular thought and hearing these operas performed in close succession naturally led to comparisons with each other. It soon became clear that Musorgsky was a composer who stood apart from the rest and that he came to be regarded as the most, rather than the least, Russian of composers was – after the writings of de Wyzewa and others (see Chapter Two), and because of Musorgsky's seemingly unique style – an inevitable conclusion. *Khovanshchina*, by the very nature of its subject, reinforced any feelings that *Boris* had planted, and as with the Russian ballets, critics interpreted these operas, as Diaghilev would have wished, as genuine reflections of Russia: 'Musorgsky has made masterful use of the chorus to express the mind of the Russian people...the quick outbreak of their dominant religious instinct as the news of their imminent fate reaches them, throws a flood of light on the national temperament.'²⁵

The result was a somewhat double-edged sword for the success of Russian opera. Musorgsky's two powerful operas precipitated a shift in expectation and perception, and the 'export' image, which was primarily visual, was now strongly aligned with a musical

²⁵ *Sunday Times*, 6 July 1913, 5.

expectation which put a premium on those things which so vexed critics in the 1890s. Two of the operas performed in 1913-14 concurred with this shift and were thus immensely successful. In *Prince Igor* (also its first performance in western Europe), the ‘export’ image was especially strong, since it presented ‘quite a different aspect of Russian opera and an intensely interesting one...scenes...in rich parti-coloured clothing, brings us at once into a strange and fascinating epoch – Russia in the 12th century.’²⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Golden Cockerel*, was similarly popular by it being ‘sheer extravaganza...with a zest for romp and grotesquery...an abundance of sparkling melody and bright colour.’²⁷ Unfortunately after these operas Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Ivan the Terrible* and *May Night* suffered from comparison. *The Times* who had so enjoyed the colourful *Prince Igor* and *Golden Cockerel* found: ‘the musical numbers...in [*May Night*] reminds one of the Italian style.’²⁸ In *Ivan the Terrible* Rimsky-Korsakov was more directly compared with Musorgsky and criticised by *The Times* for using folksong in such a way that gave the feeling of ‘conscious construction. Musorgsky worked more intuitively. [In] Rimsky-Korsakov’s treatment of crowds there is nothing as vital as in Musorgsky. [There is a] weakness in conventionality.’²⁹ Russianness was now measured from a base point, epitomised by the unconventionality of Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*.

Initial reviews of *Boris Godunov* used similar vocabulary to convey their impressions. *The Sunday Times* describes how Musorgsky set himself to ‘evolve an idiom which should faithfully reflect the national character and sentiment.’³⁰ *The Times* noted ‘The simple crudity of the music is the thing which impresses one most...[Musorgsky] might have made it much more beautiful, but he preferred to make it true.’³¹ To coincide with the Drury Lane production the subject of the July ‘Illustrated Portrait’ in the *Musical Times* was Musorgsky. The article, by Newmarch, concentrates on the operas and highlights Musorgsky’s aesthetic and covers many of the points she had made in her 1908 article. She

²⁶ *The Times*, 9 June 1914, 10

²⁷ *Sunday Times*, 21 June 1914, 8.

²⁸ *The Times*, 27 June 1914, 11.

²⁹ *The Times*, 9 July 1913, 8.

³⁰ *Sunday Times*, 29 June 1913, 8.

³¹ *The Times*, 25 June 1913, 9.

quotes a letter in which Musorgsky sets out his artistic credo: ‘To seek assiduously the most delicate and subtle features of the human [Russian] crowd, to follow them into unknown regions, to make them our own; this seems to me to be the true vocation of the artist.’³² As expected the discourse of authenticity is a central theme, doubtless inspired by the viewpoint expressed in the d’Alheim’s lecture-recitals. This and the use of the words ‘faithful’ and ‘true’ in the reviews show how Musorgsky’s individual style was regarded as a result of his aesthetic belief in realism and artistic truth. Montagu Montagu-Nathan (1877-1954), one of a new generation of pro-Russian critics who delivered a paper on Musorgsky at the Musical Association on 2 December 1913, reinforced the point when he underlined the composer’s ‘respect for the essential truths of life’ and his ‘protest against Art as glorification of the beautiful.’³³

At a time when England was struggling to define itself musically this was a potent ideal which obviously arose in discussion in some quarters, ‘[In *Boris Godunov*] lies the way to that birth of a genuinely English School of opera.’³⁴ This obviously troubled E. A. Baughan who responded a couple of months later:

[If] Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov have proved that folk-music can be employed in national opera with beautiful and impressive effect, they have only proved it as far as their own country is concerned. I have laboured this point because more harm than good will be done if our own composers imagine they can make the same use of the folk-music of these islands...the effect of *Boris* and *Khovanshchina* is not entirely due to the folk character of Musorgsky’s music, but rather to the individual genius which could reconstruct a period with such insight and dramatic truth that the music-drama have [sic] no self-conscious archaism.³⁵

However, by this time other critics were beginning to suspect that Musorgsky’s individuality was due not to his aesthetic beliefs but for another, simpler reason: his lack of formal musical training, another reason to discourage English composers from following his example in the quest for English opera. Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877-1944), having worked for

³² Letter from Musorgsky to Stasov quoted in R. Newmarch, ‘Musorgsky’s Operas’, *Musical Times*, July 1913, 433-39.

³³ *Musical Times*, February 1914, 116.

³⁴ *Sunday Times*, 29 June 1913, 8.

³⁵ E. A. Baughan, ‘Moussorgsky’s Operas’, *Fortnightly Review*, 94/561, 1 September 1913, 539-45.

Diaghilev as his General Secretary 1907-10, was an early champion of Musorgsky, and in an article addresses a number of issues, first that of Musorgsky's supposed amateurisms. Tchaikovsky's famously disparaging comments about Musorgsky's crude style are mentioned (yet the two composers' general animosity toward each other and diametrically opposed aesthetics are not) but Calvocoressi does not lay the blame for Musorgsky's poor reputation solely with him. Second, he points out that Musorgsky's choice of subjects was also problematic: 'When not absolutely contemptuous, the Russians inclined to underrate him...people who did not altogether ignore him were heartily ashamed of his fondness for 'vulgar' [Russian] topics, for the dealings with mere peasants' which to an audience with a common perception of semi-civilised Russia, was no doubt part of his operas' attraction.³⁶ The article then sets out to deconstruct the image of Musorgsky the amateur, hinted at by Newmarch (no doubt due to her acquaintance with Rimsky-Korsakov, who revised much of his friend's music)³⁷ and Baughan. The view of the composer whose 'finest inspirations were mere flukes,' who would have been infinitely better had he observed 'a few cardinal rules,' is rejected by reference to Musorgsky's letters and manuscripts. From these we are told 'that what Musorgsky has done he did not through ignorance but deliberately; that he devoted more time to acquiring technical proficiency, and far more thought to the way of using what he knew, than his first critics have led us to suppose.' Calvocoressi claims there is still a lot of work to be done before 'we shall come into possession of his true history now in the making' and concludes: 'Never has an artist of high genius been judged on evidence so incomplete and so inaccurate in all respects...and so long unquestioned.' On the reappraisal, however, many were sharply divided.

Ernest Newman, writing a few months later, clearly disagreed with Calvocoressi: '[Musorgsky] appears a much smaller figure than he is in the eyes of even thoroughly competent and instructed admirers of him like M. Calvocoressi...[and] never more than half a musician in the sense in which we apply that word to composers like Wagner and Strauss, or

³⁶ M.-D. Calvocoressi, 'The New Moussorgsky', *Musical Times*, March 1914, 157-59.

³⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov was harshly criticised for his tinkering with Musorgsky's music, though he himself said he never intended his revised versions to replace the originals, but simply to be used until an age had come which would be comfortable with Musorgsky's more challenging style.

even Gluck and Weber.’ In his conclusion, Newman is obviously prepared to acknowledge some talent in the composer, but one still detects an underlying scepticism to all the grand claims being made by Calvocoressi *et al*:

Moussorgsky...was an amateur with moments of genius. When he was not out of his depth...he could be extraordinarily poignant...He had the amateur’s unconstrained way of saying just what came into his head...his untrained genius hit upon a number of what were, for his time, harmonic innovations, and found new accents and a new naturalness for certain dramatic emotions...whether they are sufficient to atone for his general shapelessness and thinness of tissue we may have our doubts.³⁸

The issue sharply divided critics and writers. In many ways the situation was similar to the reaction that had met Russian music in London’s concert halls in the 1890s: initially general popularity, then after closer acquaintance, certain critics became suspicious of these composers’ methods and also to some extent of the sudden, popularity it had with audiences. Essentially, the issue again was that of ‘mainstream’ values and, by Parry’s extension, the consequences this might have for public standards, taste and decency. In an age of growing historical consciousness, the ideal of the enduring work of art (i.e. one impervious to fashions in music, which is itself about a ‘mainstream’ canon and the values enshrined within) was another issue that coloured criticism:

No one wishes to deny the extraordinary vivacity of the Russian music, and the skill with which it is scored; but the impartial listener cannot escape from the fear that the very violence of the first impressions it makes will result, as in the case of the very piquant dishes, in more speedy satiety. All the Russian music depends on constant reiteration, rather than on development, and history proves that it is the music which relies for its effect in great moments of climax on thematic treatment (whether it be music for the stage or not) which has the longest life. It is because it answers to this definition better than the other operas, and because it has more unity, that ‘Prince Igor’ may possibly prove of more lasting value than the other works.³⁹

The same author similarly held Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Golden Cockerel* in high regard because the composer seemed ‘to have realised at the end of his career that possibly he and his school had been underrating the value of logical thematic treatment.’⁴⁰ Even in 1914 the

³⁸ Ernest Newman, ‘A Note on ‘Boris Godunov’’, *The Nation*, 13 June 1914, 415-16.

³⁹ *Musical Times*, July 1914, 469-70.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 469.

Musical Times was still holding on to its aesthetic beliefs and preferred those Russians whose music still preserved some vestiges of these values. Essentially, it was about the issue of the shock of the new, in some senses modernism: what was valid as musical experiment, what was not, and whether it was the product of a logical extension of ideas or merely the serendipity of the amateur. Musorgsky's unique, progressive style was ultimately ascribed to the latter. The 'shock of the new', in the case of Stravinsky's 'ultra-modern music' as it was described, critics initially took in their stride, but it all too soon baffled and then outraged them, as so much Russian music had done in the recent past.

Stravinsky

Stravinsky's ballet *Firebird* (1909-10), first heard in Britain at Covent Garden on 18 June 1912, gave no reason for anyone to question his technique or talent and was greeted with almost undisputed admiration. Written in the style of Rimsky-Korsakov's late operas, Stravinsky followed the traditions of Russian magic opera (which can trace its roots back to Glinka's *Ruslan & Lyudmila* (1837-42)) wherein characters are given corresponding harmonic idioms: diatonic/folk for the humans and whole tone/octatonic for the magical characters.⁴¹ However, English critics were not familiar with this repertoire as yet so their reaction was to relate the music to what they knew. Hence the pro-Richard Strauss critic, Alfred Kalisch, found Stravinsky's music 'ultra-Straussian' whereas the *Sunday Times* critic heard it as 'very much in the modern movement of [Paris],'⁴² not realising that Stravinsky and the 'modern' composers working in Paris were actually inspired by the same common source: the music of the Russian Silver Age. If this ballet was regarded more as a product of France than Russia, Stravinsky's next ballet countered that perception.

Petrushka (1910-11) appeared at Covent Garden on 4 February 1913 (the last season at that venue until 1920) and was granted a very favourable reception. *Petrushka* is usually

⁴¹ The music for the ballet was originally to have been written by Lyadov but ended up being written by Stravinsky when it transpired that the former composer would not have the music ready in time. Stravinsky was brought in when the concept for the whole ballet had already been established; he later described the music as 'Rimsky-Korsakov with black pepper.'

⁴² *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1912, 6.

cited as the work in which Stravinsky finds his individual voice and yet ironically, as Taruskin points out, it is also the piece that uses the most borrowed material, either folk or popular. It was another 'export' piece and most critics picked up on what was perceived to be its national character. Again, the fulfilment of audience expectation was a key factor to its success: 'the whole thing is refreshingly new and refreshingly *Russian*, more Russian, in fact, than any ballet we have had,' said *The Times*.⁴³ For a country which now enjoyed a cordial diplomatic and cultural relationship with Russia, the lively, urban setting caught people's imaginations. Here, it was felt, was a depiction of everyday Russian life, a real Russian fair, which interested audiences just as much as the exotic tales of Russian folklore.

As with *Boris Godunov*, it was the realism of *Petrushka*, and more especially the scenario, that appealed to the English intellectuals and literati of the time: the individual's (Petrushka's) lonely and bitter struggle against the Philistine masses (the crowd who think he is just a puppet). Lady Ottoline Morrell had made a comparison between Petrushka's character and that of the main protagonist of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky's anti-heroes usually being of a psychologically unbalanced type.⁴⁴ The political upheavals Russia had recently endured led many in England to perceive the average Russian as an anarchist or nihilist (see Chapter One). Osbert Sitwell, albeit in retrospect, read a different import: 'it presented the European contemporary generation with a prophetic and dramatised version of the fate reserved for it, in the same way that the legend of the Minotaur had once summed up, though after the event and not before it, the fate of several generations of Greek youths and

⁴³ *The Times*, 5 February 1913, 8.

⁴⁴ Lady Morrell (1873-1938) wife of Philip Morrell, Liberal MP from 1902. From 1908 she entertained a wide circle of political and literary celebrities (including Bloomsbury) at her Thursday evening gatherings at 44 Bedford Square. Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* concerns a saintly innocent who becomes the centre of a struggle for his affection between a rich, kept woman and a virtuous girl. It is an exploration of the possibility of a truly saintly man's survival in a world concerned with power and money. A major wave of interest in Russian literature coincided with the arrival of the Russian Ballet. Maurice Baring's *Landmarks in Russian Literature* was published in 1910 and he was also responsible for introducing Chekhov to the West. The first Chekhov play to be staged in England, *The Cherry Orchard*, was produced in 1911 and Constance Garnett began her authoritative translations of all of Dostoevsky's novels in 1912. Lytton Strachey had read Dostoevsky in 1909 when few in the West knew his work. The Bloomsbury publishing house, Hogarth, was responsible for the publishing of many of the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky and Bunin.

maidens.⁴⁵ Stravinsky's next ballet was to be even more prophetic of the 'fate' which awaited that generation.

The production of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* (1911-13) on 11 July 1913 took place at Drury Lane where, for reasons already discussed, the audience was doubtless more sympathetic toward it than if it had been performed at Covent Garden. Additionally, a new section of audience turned out for the ballet – the English *avant-garde*. The Imagists and Vorticists had largely ignored ballet previously partly because of its hitherto low artistic significance but mainly because of the associations it had with the Establishment, i.e. the Covent Garden link.⁴⁶ *Petrushka* had attracted their attention by way of its subject, but it was the three performances of *Le Sacre* which were to command the attention of the English *avant-garde*. Their interest, however, lay more in Nijinsky's primitivist vision, than Stravinsky's extraordinary score.

Prior to the curtain going up at the first performance the Slavophile music critic Edwin Evans was to give a brief lecture on the ballet. This aroused the suspicion of some, who believed good Art should need no explanation. After speaking for about ten minutes he was obliged to stop by the impatient audience who, after all, had come to see the ballet and not hear a lecture. Some parts of the audience were apparently alarmed when Evans told them that the ballet was a representation of primitive man and that they should prepare their eyes more than their ears. Despite some vaguely hostile hissing and laughter during the performance the majority received the ballet quite favourably. 'M. Nijinsky's anti-curvilinear movements,' reported *The Standard*, 'were received with a good deal of laughter during the performance and plenty of hissing and clapping at the close – the ayes having it for the most part.'⁴⁷ It is possible that the generally favourable response was more for the performers, especially Maria Piltz who danced the role of the Sacrificial Virgin, than for Stravinsky's music, there always being that section of an audience that thinks that something must be good

⁴⁵ Sitwell, op. cit., 240.

⁴⁶ Ezra Pound chose not to see *Le Sacre*, even though he was in Paris in 1913. The *avant-garde* had avoided the Russian Ballet because of a clash of social aesthetics, i.e. many of them were poor or foreign and split from the Society that the ballet represented.

⁴⁷ 'Amazing Ballet at Drury Lane: The Apotheosis of Ugliness', *The Standard*, 12 July 1913, 8. Recent reconstructions of the Nijinsky choreography reveal that some sections are seemingly comic, which may account for the laughter reported in this review.

because they do not understand it. As in Paris, it seems to have been Nijinsky's choreography, more than Stravinsky's music, which startled and distracted and certainly many reviews reported more about the dancing than the music. But contrary to the Paris premiere the first night audience in London actually heard the music.⁴⁸

In spite of Evans' pre-curtain talk many were still baffled by what the ballet was actually meant to be about beyond a representation of an early Russian culture's sacrificial rites. The primitivism of the whole piece was the main stumbling block: Alfred Kalisch in *The World* questioned the apparent retreat from intellectualism or, looked at another way, the severance from tradition, which seemed nonsensical to his positivist age. How was *Le Sacre* of service to Art? H. C. Colles in *The Times* appreciated that the aim of the music was to appear primitive and not to please the ear and so suggested the music should have been performed solely on primitive instruments, i.e. drums.⁴⁹ Some read a darker import into the primitivism, namely anarchy, whereas others merely found the music overly extravagant or aesthetically suspect. Apart from the modern idiom, the radical departure that *Le Sacre* makes is in terms of the concept of musical structure, i.e. the way in which anti-narrative blocks of seemingly unrelated material follow upon each other. Many saw this as the last word in the emancipation of form. However, by the third and final performance of *Le Sacre* on 25 July 1913 the London audience received the ballet with scarcely any sign of opposition with most of the applause for the exhausted Maria Piltz.⁵⁰

In Stravinsky's opera *Le Rossignol* (1908-09, 1913-14) the production, which included elements of ballet, was very much more a traditional Russian Ballet affair: an Oriental setting, sumptuous, colourful and vivid, the music and the action all closely matched,

⁴⁸ Much is always made of the brawling Paris premiere but the significance of the music as the cause of this overemphasized. It was actually the choreography more than the music that offended the Parisians; it is unlikely that anyone actually heard the music after the disturbances began (the dancers on stage certainly could not).

⁴⁹ An interesting point when one considers that Stravinsky's next ballet *Les Noces* is for just that combination, if one regards the piano as a percussion instrument.

⁵⁰ It was sometime in 1913 that the stage designer Gordon Craig suggested to Vaughan Williams the idea of a ballet piece for Diaghilev's company. Vaughan Williams and Gordon Craig met Diaghilev and Nijinsky in the Savoy to discuss a project on the theme of Cupid & Psyche, suggested by Craig, with Nijinsky to dance both parts. Vaughan Williams objected strongly to the idea (what exactly, it is not clear). The project, however, came to nothing since Craig would not start work on a scenario until Vaughan Williams had written the music and the composer would not write any music until he had a scenario.

‘a spectacle to be wondered at even after all the experiences which the Russians have been giving us lately.’⁵¹ The critics found little to admire in the music, however. ‘He might have achieved his object without so much unpleasant noise,’ wrote the *Musical Times*, ‘and one regrets that he was not satisfied with the paths which had led him to *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*.’⁵² Another critic was similarly unimpressed but noted the very positive reaction of the audience, ‘anything more determinately ugly than [Stravinsky’s] accompaniment of the Court scenes it is difficult to conceive...Familiarity with dissonance and cacophony...seems to have killed the former aversion of the public, for there was no hint of the hostility that was shown on the production of *Le Sacre*...Stravinsky...was given quite an ovation.’⁵³ Despite the stylistic incongruencies of the music, the cause of which was known about, the public received the work very favourably.⁵⁴ Surprisingly even Parry, who heard the work on 29 June 1914, liked the piece ‘immensely’. But to reinforce the point, what people found most shocking about *Le Sacre* was not primarily the music but rather the choreography. London’s reaction to *Le Sacre* was tamer than that of Paris because the Parisians were more sensitive to Nijinsky’s ‘crime against grace’. Musically speaking, English ears were also probably more open to new, radical music: by this time London had already heard Strauss’ *Elektra* in 1910, Schoenberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke* the previous September and Scriabin’s *Prometheus* in February. In the concert hall, Stravinsky had yet to make any significant impact; in the Queen’s Hall it was Scriabin who was regarded as representing the *dernier mot* of Russian music.

Scriabin

A resentful Scriabin once asked: ‘Is it possible that I am not a Russian composer merely because I don’t write overtures and capriccios on Russian themes?’⁵⁵ Scriabin occupies a

⁵¹ *The Times*, 19 June 1914, 10.

⁵² *Musical Times*, July 1914, 470.

⁵³ *Sunday Times*, 21 June 1914, 8.

⁵⁴ The critic of the *Sunday Times* mentions the work’s history. Act one was composed 1908-09 (before *The Firebird*) whereas the remainder was written 1913-14 after the completion of *Le Sacre*.

⁵⁵ Hugh Macdonald, *Skryabin* (London: OUP, 1978), 11.

problematic and, in some senses, marginal position in music history. Constant Lambert said Scriabin was one of the few important Russian composers not to be directly indebted to that Father of Russian music, Glinka, and Stravinsky dismissed him as being ‘without a passport.’⁵⁶ Though the expected Russian exoticism (either folk or Oriental) was absent from Scriabin’s music it still had a vital quality of otherness to secure audience interest: his association with theosophy and the fringe occult, what Richard Taruskin has described as his ‘extra-musical baggage’. Writers later in the twentieth century have tried to distance or at least play down this ‘baggage’ as of no consequence: ‘It would be a pity if appreciation of the music required us to follow Scriabin into this world of cosmic hocus-pocus.’⁵⁷ Yet it was exactly this ‘hocus-pocus’ that created a curious interest in the composer as his music began to appear in England before the First World War, after which it became distinctly popular with audiences, partly due to the parallel rise of a popular interest in theosophy.

Interest in theosophy, or more broadly speaking spiritualism, began during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Victorians were a somewhat naïve and trusting generation, thus the rise of scientific materialism and the writings of Darwin, Nietzsche and later Freud, undermined the period’s sedate Christianity and led to a Victorian crisis of faith. This in turn prompted the rise of spiritualism and its related groups. Theosophy was the most significant of these groups under the guidance of H. P. Blavatsky, and later Annie Besant.⁵⁸ Blavatsky’s progressive ideas on equality of race and gender and of a universal brotherhood, central to theosophy, appealed to those of the post-Morris and Ruskin generation. Edward Carpenter, writing in 1918, regarded:

Hyndman’s Democratic Federation, Edmund Gurney’s Society for Psychical Research, Mme. Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, the Vegetarian Society, the Anti-vivisection movement, and many other associations of the same kind marked the

⁵⁶ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1948), 110. Stravinsky quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 312.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., Macdonald, 10.

⁵⁸ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-91) founder of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875, the Esoteric School in 1888, and author of *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *Secret Doctrine* (1888). She visited London in 1851, 1853 and 1884. In 1887 she moved to London where she launched the magazine *Lucifer* (first issue September 1887) and established the European headquarters of the Theosophical Society. Annie Besant (1847-1933) took over from Blavatsky after her death. She was also a prominent campaigner for women’s rights, especially birth control.

coming of a great reaction from the smug commercialism and materialism of the mid-Victorian epoch, and a preparation for the new universe of the twentieth century.⁵⁹

That Blavatsky was Russian aided her cause immeasurably. Victorian society commonly believed the East embodied a spiritual knowledge the West lacked, and Besant believed that Blavatsky, as a Russian, possessed this superior Eastern knowledge. Blavatsky's belief, as outlined in her book *Secret Doctrine*, was in a reality that transcended the material world, and attempted to provide the spiritualist movement with a philosophical foundation taken from a popular Orientalism, which cemented another Russian link. In this sense theosophy was proffered as the key to all knowledge, both seen and unseen.

Although theosophy essentially eschewed the supernatural it involved the investigation of 'the unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers latent in man.' However, theosophy's link with spiritualism naturally linked it with the paranormal world of séances, necromancy and other occult phenomena. Yet despite this, and claims of fraud in 1885, many respected, intellectual public figures had known interests in spiritualism, not only artists and writers as eminent as Ruskin and Tennyson, but also, perhaps surprisingly, scientists and politicians, such as Faraday, Gladstone and Einstein.⁶⁰ The popularity with ordinary folk was such that it appears in the literature of the time in E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1912-24).⁶¹ Theosophy and modernism both regarded art as a means to change the world, and many avant-garde artists, writers and musicians from across Europe were drawn to it. Kandinsky spoke of a transcendental art, which would lift humanity onto a higher spiritual plane, and of the 'artist Messiah'. Scriabin vividly saw himself in this Messianic role. He had read Blavatsky in 1905 and had links with a Brussels theosophist group, and though he evolved a very personal interpretation, which probably had little to do with orthodox theosophy, the Theosophical

⁵⁹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918), 240.

⁶⁰ In December 1885 the Hodgson Report, published by the Society for Psychical Research, accused Blavatsky of being an impostor and of making fraudulent claims for theosophy. These were later retracted by the SPR in 1986.

⁶¹ Margaret Schlegel is reading a book on theosophy in *Howards End*. In *The Magic Mountain* Hans Castorp takes part in a séance.

Society claimed him as a convert.⁶² In the years leading up to the First World War Scriabin's nationality and his links with one of the rising popular movements of the day ensured a fashionable interest. Yet it also problematized his reception in that critics and audiences were unsure to what extent it was necessary or possible to understand the inspiration behind the music to appreciate it.

Scriabin's musical debut in England began appropriately enough with his First Symphony (1899-1900), performed on 11 May 1909.⁶³ The piece, however, was performed incomplete, the choral sixth movement being omitted. The absence of this not insignificant 13-minute movement (a setting for soloists and chorus of verses by the composer in praise of art) can only have upset the perception of the work as a whole. *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* both noted how attitudes towards Russian music had seemingly subsided over the last ten years or so. 'Even Mr Wood,' noted the *Sunday Times*, 'whose devotion to the Slavonics [sic] had a sort of apostolic fervour, [has] grown lukewarm towards them.'⁶⁴ The *Musical Times* was glad to hear this new Russian composer since it felt 'English people are apt to summarize Russian music as "Tchaikovsky et praeterea nihil."⁶⁵ But while most critics were interested in hearing this new Russian, audiences were not, *The Times* noting the 'far from crowded state of the hall.'⁶⁶ Of the music most critics agreed that Scriabin 'has some good ideas,' as *The Times* put it, 'but, as in so many modern works professing to be symphonies, there is little power of development.' The flaw was felt to be Scriabin's 'frequent and abrupt changes of mood,' as the *Sunday Times* noted, which it felt was the only characteristic instance where it was obvious Scriabin was Russian. The lack of Russian characteristics, however, does not seem to have disappointed critics. When the First Symphony was repeated

⁶² Scriabin's music was played at the World Congress of the Theosophical Society in August 1929 as an example of how theosophy could enrich music.

⁶³ Given by Serge Koussevitzky and the London Symphony Orchestra at the Queen's Hall.

⁶⁴ *Sunday Times*, 16 May 1909, 4.

⁶⁵ *Musical Times*, June 1909, 389.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 12 May 1909, 8. Koussevitzky was making his London conducting debut. A long, unknown Russian symphony conducted by a double-bass player (whose reputation in Russia was as an upstart conductor) may have put audiences off the concert.

four years later, again without choral finale, the more representative works heard during the intervening period made the Symphony appear sentimental.⁶⁷

London audiences got their first taste of the mature Scriabin when the *Poem of Ecstasy* (1905-08) was first performed on 4 April 1910.⁶⁸ The programme note referred to the music as representing ‘the joy of untrammelled activity’, a description reproduced in most of the periodical reviews. Journalists on the whole did not spend many column inches discussing this aspect. The *Musical Times* hazily interpreted the work as representing the ‘quest and ultimate finding of “the joy of untrammelled activity” in some tangible higher sense.’⁶⁹ Whether the absence of any further discussion of the subject was due to a lack of information and an ignorant press, or that these were such things not to be mentioned in print, any description of the erotic nature of the work is conspicuous by its absence until the reviews of the early 1920s. The *Sunday Times* was suspicious: ‘But for the assurance of its serious intent, one might suspect of it a subtle satire on latter-day tendencies, for it illustrates some of their salient perversities.’⁷⁰ The journalist does not elucidate his thoughts any further; again, the vagueness of the criticism makes one wonder whether ignorance or propriety forbade him. *The Times* criticised the piece for its reliance on orchestral colouring, noting the work required a large orchestra. As was the case with so many other Russian composers, it required Rosa Newmarch to provide the much-needed further illumination of the composer and his music.

Rosa Newmarch gave a paper on Scriabin’s *Prometheus – Poem of Fire* (1908-10) at the Halcyon Club on 21 January 1913. Newmarch informed her audience that the work was an attempt of the composer to realise in music his theosophical views but then admitted that theosophists might find her description ‘somewhat shorn of its fullest esoteric significance.’ Many since Newmarch have similarly glossed over the issue and the importance of understanding theosophy in appreciating Scriabin’s music remains a moot point. Newmarch

⁶⁷ Vasily Safonov, Philharmonic Society concert, 13 March 1913. The absence of the choral finale is even more curious in this case since Beethoven’s Choral Symphony was in the same programme, so soloists and choir would have been on hand.

⁶⁸ LSO, Koussevitzky, QH. Scriabin also wrote a literary poem of the same name before he commenced work on the musical *Poem*, which was published privately in Geneva, 1906.

⁶⁹ *Musical Times*, May 1910, 308.

⁷⁰ *Sunday Times*, 10 April 1910, 4.

described the legend upon which the work is based, not Æschylus or Shelley, but rather that of the Greek myth of the ‘Sons of the Flame of Wisdom’, who were responsible for the ‘dawn of human consciousness’, which led to the ‘blossom of human intelligence and self-consciousness.’ Thus the music represents a psychological programme of this awakening. Scriabin’s self-obsession precipitated the association of himself with the image of the Promethean figure who imparts a creative spark to Karma-less mankind. An analysis followed, based mainly on articles by Leonid Sabaneyev with additions by Newmarch.⁷¹ The analysis included Sabaneyev’s somewhat obscure acoustic explanation of the evolution of Scriabin’s harmonic language, which we are told expressed his psychical experiences.

After hearing Newmarch’s ‘luminous’ paper on the piece William G. McNaught suggested, in a letter to *The Times*, that the work should be played twice at its first performance; Scriabin himself had claimed *Prometheus* needed to be heard five times to be understood. McNaught pointed out that the work only lasts 22 minutes and two performances would still last only half the time it took to perform the Mahler symphony Wood had premiered the previous Saturday.⁷² Wood premiered *Prometheus* on 1 February 1913 with the pianist Arthur Cooke and the Queen’s Hall Orchestra, where it was performed twice (sandwiching Beethoven’s Violin Concerto in between!), the conductor claiming that the double-premiere scheme was something of an innovation.⁷³ Newmarch’s programme notes, doubtless based on her Halcyon Club paper, also included what was probably the longest English-language biography of the composer to date. The whole (including a technical analysis later approved by the composer when it was reused for his London debut in 1914)

⁷¹ Leonid Sabaneyev (1881-1968) Russian musicologist, composer and champion of Scriabin. Sabaneyev’s analytical note on *Prometheus* first appeared in the Russian journal *Muzika* in 1910 and then two years later in Kandinsky’s almanac *Der blaue Reiter* in a German translation by Kandinsky and Schoenberg. A critique of Sabaneyev’s analysis and further discussion can be found in: Richard Taruskin, ‘Scriabin and the Superhuman’, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 308-59.

⁷² Wood had conducted the British premiere of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony (1904-05) on 18 January 1913 at QH.

⁷³ Kreisler supposedly introduced Wood to Scriabin’s music. The work was to have received its English premiere at the Birmingham Festival on 4 October 1912 (the year the Festival also premiered Elgar’s *The Music Makers* and Sibelius’ Fourth Symphony) but it was withdrawn due to a lack of rehearsal time. Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après midi d’un faune* received a double premiere in Manchester in 1907 and something similar happened in Vienna at Schoenberg’s *Verein für musikalische Privataufführung* (Society for Private Musical Performance).

was issued the day before the concert, no doubt in the realisation that such a mass of information could not be absorbed in tandem with the actual performance.⁷⁴ Included in the programme was also a reproduction of the design from the cover of the score (published by Koussevitzky's Edition Russe de Musique) by Jean Delville, described as the 'leader of the theosophist cult in Belgium.'

At this juncture most critics commented that although they found much to appreciate in the new work they could not be sure that these instances were those intended by the composer, and moreover were unsure whether their ignorance of theosophy mattered in relation to their appraisal of the music. Many obviously understood the story of the Greek legend, but beyond that Scriabin's aesthetic was so esoteric as to leave no common ground between him and his audience, as *The Times* remarked: 'We had...no starting point in common. Scriabin speaks with tongues, and all we can do is note the phenomenon and refrain from attributing it to unworthy causes.'⁷⁵ The first performance drew hisses as well as applause and, although Wood claimed very few people left the hall after the first performance, Ernest Newman reported that 'probably not more than half of the people who heard the first performance of *Prometheus* remained for the second.'⁷⁶ The work seems to have been met with lukewarm approval on the whole because of its esotericism in addition to its advanced chromatic language. Newman, however, found it all quite straightforward: 'to a listener with an imagination it mostly talks in a perfectly lucid language of things that have never been expressed in music before.' He praised the work for the absence of any affectation, and for the surety of its style and saw it as the only work he had ever heard that was approaching the 'new territory that music will some day make its own,' having only one prophetic caveat: the worry that the theosophist in him might, one day, 'overpower the artist in him.'

Newman's fresh, open-minded opinion was conspicuous by its uniqueness. Those who did not get bogged down by the spiritual side of the piece were distracted by the

⁷⁴ Newmarch's analytical programme note was reproduced in the *Musical Times*, April 1914, 227-31, to coincide with Scriabin's visit to London in March 1914.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 3 February 1913, 8.

⁷⁶ Ernest Newman, 'Scriabine's *Prometheus*', *The Nation*, 18 February 1913, 781-82.

technical and harmonic idiom of *Prometheus*. The work begins with a 6-note chord, a chord that forms the tonal basis for the work, which has become known as the Mystic Chord. The origin of this English name is seemingly Newmarch's 1913 programme note, which referred to the opening 'characteristic "mystical" chord.'⁷⁷ Scriabin himself never actually used the name, referring to it in a conversation with Rachmaninov as the Chord of the Pleroma. Pleroma is a Christian Gnostic term, derived from the Greek for plenitude, which Scriabin almost certainly came across in the writings of Blavatsky, and represents in this instance the revelation of those things that are beyond the mind of man to conceptualise: a world of hidden otherness. Scriabin, Sabaneyev tells us, was always searching for harmonies or 'mystical sounds' that could embody his ideas and considered the Mystic Chord as a perfect consonance. After this discovery Scriabin dispensed with functional harmony. Sabaneyev's linking of the Mystic Chord with the harmonic series seems to have been an attempt to situate Scriabin's harmonies within the natural order of the universe. It left some unconvinced: 'Is it the natural progressive evolution of art,' questioned the *Musical Times*, 'or is it a freakish and sterile variation?'⁷⁸ Sabaneyev's, and therefore Newmarch's, quartal analysis of the Chord unfortunately made it look as though Scriabin had synthetically constructed his harmonic system rather than merely extended the traditional palette of his predecessors in a logical fashion. Consequently Scriabin became known as an ultra-modernist and was often grouped with Richard Strauss, despite the fact Scriabin did not consider himself a modernist composer and distinctly disliked most of the music of his progressive contemporaries.

The following month, on 8 March 1913, *The Times* printed a sympathetic article on Scriabin's piano music. It charts his musical development and helps put it into perspective, noting that it is from the Fourth Sonata Op.30 (1903) onwards that the 'real Scriabin appears.' It is in this article that the first reference is made to the fact that Scriabin did not follow theosophy in its typical form, but that he had developed a more personal philosophy of his own. Emphasis is put on the mystical and transcendental aspects of his music, and as a result

⁷⁷ The likely origin of the nickname Mystic Chord, although Taruskin states it first appeared in English three years later in: Arthur Eaglefield Hull, *Scriabin: A Great Russian Tone Poet* (London, Kegan Paul, 1916).

⁷⁸ *Musical Times*, March 1913, 174-75.

a more direct association with the psychical, occult side is made when it is suggested that many of Scriabin's later works seem to have been produced 'like automatic drawing, by an outer influence operating through a human mind and hand, so bizarre are their shapes and so alien their feeling to anything we have hitherto known.'⁷⁹ It is seemingly in this article that the inevitable association of Scriabin with the occult fringe of theosophy is first suggested. But rather than dismissing the music the anonymous author urges the reader to accept the music as 'highly spiritualized emotions', and not to analyse it by the 'cold light of reason' nor by the 'accepted standards of beauty.' In the latest works to date, the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, Opp.62 and 64 (both 1911), Scriabin's attempts to illuminate his beliefs are such that the author predicted they would only become popular in esoteric circles (shades of Newman's reservation proving true). However, he believed that Scriabin's contribution to contemporary music was real and significant, that 'it is our duty to see that our sympathies become proportionately broadened in response to it.'

Scriabin's Third Symphony, *The Divine Poem* (1902-04), was heard later that year on 18 October 1913 conducted by Wood at the Queen's Hall.⁸⁰ Only ten years separate the composition of the First Symphony and *Prometheus* yet they display two extremes of style; the *Divine Poem* interested many because it stood about halfway between these works and thus would hopefully clarify the composer's development and throw light on *Prometheus*. The work was described in the programme note as a 'poem of self-assertion', in both musical and philosophical senses. On the latter point most critics incorrectly spoke of the work in relation to theosophy (the Symphony had actually been composed while the composer was absorbed by the writings of Nietzsche) but many noted that the development of Scriabin's dual interests at this point were not evenly matched. 'It is easy to see that musically the symphony lags some distance behind the philosophy,' observed *The Times*.⁸¹ *The Musical*

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 8 March 1913, 9. In some circles experiments had been made whereby a subject would be placed in a trance and would report sensations of colour at the suggestion of certain ideas, or would actually create drawings or write text. Such experiments were witnessed by Kandinsky, who took an interest in theosophy (as did Klee and Mondrian), which influenced his ideas for colour in abstract art.

⁸⁰ This was the first of Wood's concerts to employ female violinists. The issue of women's suffrage was a major issue during 1913; Emily Pankhurst was sentenced to three years in prison on 3 April for her militant activities.

⁸¹ *The Times*, 20 October 1913, 12.

Times bemusedly wrote: ‘Those of the audience who anticipated a discordant assault on their ears were disappointed, as the work is mostly quite attractive.’⁸² It was with this Symphony that Scriabin’s own double bind was secured: Scriabin’s ‘extra-musical baggage’ was necessary to secure audience interest and it needed to be clearly apparent in the music. Without it he was of no interest, as the *Sunday Times* noted: ‘The Symphony compared to [*Prometheus*], is as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine.’⁸³ The same critic found the middle movement, subtitled *Voluptés*, ‘the most attractive’, but ultimately disappointing: ‘The passion is but lukewarm, and the emotion quite virginal.’ With hindsight, it appears this critic may have been hoping for something more erotic in this music, as in the case of the *Poem of Ecstasy*, but in general that association was not made until after 1918.

Scriabin made his personal debut in London on 14 March 1914 as soloist in his own Piano Concerto (1896) and *Prometheus* with Henry Wood conducting. His appearance ‘looking the incarnation of Madame Blavatsky’s theosophical theories’⁸⁴ was an event of marked interest and attracted ‘a very large audience on the tiptoe of curiosity to Queen’s Hall.’ The Concerto, with its echoes of Liszt and Chopin, was easily accepted offering ‘no bait to mouths agape for a new sensation.’⁸⁵ Indeed the last couple of years had brought a rush of modern music to London by Mahler, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. But the obvious interest was to hear the composer perform his own *Prometheus*. Many critics agreed that *Prometheus* sounded a different work to the one performed a year previously, attributing this to the orchestra and conductor’s greater familiarity with the music and the presence of the composer himself. *Prometheus* appeared ‘wonderfully clarified,’ claimed *The Times*, and while agreeing, the *Monthly Musical Record* admitted, ‘It cannot honestly be said that the theosophical complexities of *Prometheus* appeared more intelligible than they did a year ago.’⁸⁶ Many of the reviews were conspicuous by their brevity; either still daunted by the subject or rather they had come to the conclusion it did not need to be addressed since the

⁸² *Musical Times*, November 1913, 747.

⁸³ *Sunday Times*, 19 October 1913, 8.

⁸⁴ Eugene Goossens, *Overture and Beginners* (London: Methuen, 1951), 102. Goossens is not explicit as to what he is referring to here. Scriabin was always immaculately dressed, to the point of narcissism even, and had a Napoleon II-style beard and moustache.

⁸⁵ This and the previous quote from *The Times*, 16 March 1914, 12.

⁸⁶ CDG, ‘In the Concert Room’, *Monthly Musical Record*, April 1914, 96.

music now appeared to make more sense. Many now found some sections of the work ‘strikingly beautiful,’ as the *Sunday Times* put it.⁸⁷ The very crowded audience reportedly ‘cheered [Scriabin] so loudly,’ said *The Times*, ‘that some of the few dissentients were forced to assert their opinion a little rudely.’

That critics appear to have decided on the unessential nature of Scriabin’s ‘extra-musical baggage’ to the understanding of his music was strengthened in an anonymous article on Scriabin’s ‘Three New Sonatas’ which appeared in *The Times* on the same day as that concert. Irrespective of one’s own opinion of Scriabin’s ‘theosophic creed’,

Scriabin is dealing with things which are very real to him...In reality his creed...has done the only thing a creed can do for an artist; it has given him conviction, and having done that it is of no further importance to the world. We need not study the mysteries of Karma in order to understand Scriabin’s music. It is his business to express his conviction through music, not ours to retranslate the music into [the] terms of his philosophy.⁸⁸

The article then goes on to point out that although London had heard a significant amount of Scriabin’s orchestral music it had not kept up with his primary medium of expression – the solo piano.⁸⁹ The *Divine Poem* having failed to make a great impression, it was hoped that his piano music would provide the key to his artistic evolution. Each of Scriabin’s pieces shows an advance on the last and ‘we cannot afford to waste time wondering over his curious harmonic combinations’ but rather to take them on board as ‘second nature’, as they obviously are to the composer. Significantly, nobody had been truly alarmed or outraged by Scriabin’s music at this point. People were clearly not suspicious (*pace one Sunday Times* review) of his means and methods and felt both the music and what Hugh Macdonald described in 1978 as ‘hocus-pocus’, were legitimate. That these people took his music seriously, even when they did not quite understand it, shows they had faith in its composer, whose music chimed with the *zeitgeist*.

⁸⁷ *Sunday Times*, 15 March 1914, 7.

⁸⁸ ‘Scriabin and the piano’, *The Times*, 14 March 1914, 11.

⁸⁹ However, over the following 12 months the Fifth Sonata Op.53 (1907), which has been regarded as a companion piece to the *Poem of Ecstasy*, was heard more often than any of his orchestral works.

The following week Scriabin gave two piano recitals, on 20 and 26 March, at the Bechstein Hall. Even though the weather was miserable the hall was full to overflowing. The first recital consisted of a number of Scriabin's early works.⁹⁰ Of the 21 pieces heard only 6 were post-Fourth Sonata Op.30 (1903) 'hardly anything that would vex the soul of an Oxford Mus. Doc.'⁹¹ In the second recital 9 of the 23 pieces heard were mature works.⁹² Since the early works exhibit the strong influence of Chopin the interest was, naturally, in the later, more experimental pieces, which despite their challenging nature, the *Sunday Times* regarded as: 'in Verlaine's phrase, *musique qui pénètre*.'⁹³ *The Times* was disappointed with the Ninth Sonata (today considered one of his masterpieces), which it thought meagre in its use of tone and colour and thematically weak. The reviewer was obviously not the same person who had penned the enthusiastic article on the late piano sonatas but two weeks earlier. It is with this critic that the first signs of cynical suspicion begin to creep in: '[The] *Poème* Op.69, with its wild arabesques persistently hitting on what used to be called "wrong notes", entertained the audience immeasurably, and they asked for more and got its repetition.'⁹⁴ However, the *Sunday Times* held faith: 'it is music that, in spite of its strangeness and crypticism, does hold the hearer. One feels that the composer is not groping in the dark, nor out for sensation, but is experimenting with sincerity and surety.' Whilst this and other critics were content to approach Scriabin's music as just that, more enquiring minds began to enquire into the pseudo-scientific side of Scriabin's world.

In an article for the *Musical Quarterly* John F. Runciman attempted to discuss this aspect of Scriabin and his theories about combinations of sounds, odours and colours.⁹⁵ Synaesthesia is dismissed as having no valid scientific argument. Even though Scriabin had

⁹⁰ *Poème* Op.32 no.1, *Poème satanique* Op.36 (both 1903), *Poème ailé* Op.51 (1906), *Désir* Op.57 (1907), *Feuillet d'album* Op.59 (1910) and *Étrangeté* Op.63 (1911). The other works were selections from the Preludes from Op.11 (1888-96) and Op.13 (1895), Mazurkas Op.3 (1889), Études Op.8 (1894) and Piano Sonata no.3, Op.23 (1897-98)

⁹¹ *Sunday Times*, 22 March 1914, 6.

⁹² 2 *Poèmes* Op.32 (1903), 2 Preludes Op.35 (1903), *Masque* Op.63 (1911), Prelude Op.67 (1913), Ninth Sonata Op.68 (1913) and 2 *Poèmes* Op.69 (1913). The other works were selections from Études Op.8 (1894), Preludes Op.11 (1888-96), Op.16 (1894-95) and Op.17 (1895-96), Second Sonata Op.19 (1892-97) and Mazurkas Op.25 (1899).

⁹³ *Sunday Times*, 26 March 1914, 6.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 27 March 1914, 13.

⁹⁵ John F. Runciman, 'Noises, smells and colours', *Musical Quarterly*, 1/2, April 1915, 149-61.

admitted his theories about colour and sounds were intuitive, Runciman regards the idea as ridiculous unless it could be scientifically proven. Scriabin's use of colour as part of his expressive medium in *Prometheus* (plus perfumes/smells in the projected *Mysterium*, which he did not live to realise) and his theosophical claims are written off as 'moonshine' and 'pompous rubbish' which make do for true inspiration in his music. He does not deny that some people are deeply moved by 'their strange creed' of theosophy but finds 'small sign of [Scriabin's] faith in his "programmes" and smaller signs still in his music.' It becomes quite obvious that Runciman regarded Scriabin as a charlatan. He suggests, with admitted flippancy, that rather than using lights and perfumes with the music to raise an audience to 'the required state of "ecstatic contemplation"' it would be better to 'insist on each seat-holder [to take] a dose of opium on entering the hall.'⁹⁶

Not happy in ridiculing and dismissing Scriabin's beliefs wholesale, Runciman then attacks the composer's music. Musically Runciman groups Scriabin quite erroneously with what he terms the 'futurist school' namely Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Marinetti and Pratella.⁹⁷ Runciman is content to observe that in most respects he cannot distinguish Scriabin's music from that of the 'futurists' with their 'same desperate struggle after originality and the same impotence of the creative faculty.' For him Scriabin's novelty lay in his harmonic resources, his themes and forms being 'loaned' from Beethoven and Chopin, created from adopting new scales, which 'our European ears do not take kindly to,' clearly regarding Russia in the old-fashioned, extra-European manner. Ironically, Runciman claims it is Scriabin's lack of 'inner motive [and] spiritual force' that leaves him unable to create something that 'forever remains new' as Bach, Beethoven and Wagner did. For most contemporary observers Scriabin's drive and conviction were exactly the things most noticeable about his music. Runciman also claims that Scriabin attempts to express himself in pure emotion, devoid of form (here he draws a rather muddled parallel with Kandinsky's abstract art) whereas today his handling of

⁹⁶ A copy of the full score of *Prometheus* was given to Bantock by Charles Sanford Terry dated 3 October 1912 (obviously with the aborted Birmingham premiere in mind) with the inscription: 'But only after being drugged.'

⁹⁷ Scriabin resented such associations. He regarded himself as quite distinct from other composers; he was truly a romantic musician, a musical prophet, and as already mentioned, had little interest in the music of his contemporaries.

form, especially in the later works, has been demonstrated to be quite adept. Though Runciman could not hope to precipitate a reaction single-handedly, it is unlikely his opinion was unique. After the War the peak in the interest in spiritualism would assure Scriabin's popularity for a short time, but eventually, unfounded opinions like Runciman's would contribute to Scriabin's fall from grace with the public.

CHAPTER FOUR

ULTRA-MODERN MUSIC: 1918 TO 1929

I suppose that the two most powerful outside influences of the last half-century upon European art have been the discovery of Japanese and Chinese paintings, and the sudden revelation of the great Russian composers.

Sacheverell Sitwell¹

Scriabin

Scriabin died on 27 April 1915 at the age of 43. Many obituaries agreed that Scriabin had died on the brink of reaching his prime as a composer but, like *The Times*, were unsure as to the ultimate value of his music: ‘Scriabin had just arrived at the stage at which it would be possible to discover whether he was a genius able to open up an entirely new vista of creative art or only one of the virtuosi of musical thought who specialize in details of technique.’² The *Sunday Times* spoke of ‘a solitary and exceptional figure who, in seeking to expand cosmic evolution and Theosophic doctrine in terms of tone has attempted a transcendental task...whose medium of expression...is too intricate and subtle for the understanding of the average man, even with the adventitious aid of written commentary.’³ Clearly little had changed from the immediate pre-war years: the issue for many critics was still to what extent an understanding of theosophy was necessary for a full appreciation of Scriabin’s music in order to ultimately ascertain his standing as a composer. However, because in the immediate post-war era Scriabin’s popularity with audiences was due to his association with spiritualism, rather than a direct interest in his music, as the interest in spiritualism waned performances of his music attracted increasingly smaller audiences. Unfortunately, it meant that when musicologists did come to discuss his music technically it was invariably coloured by the prejudices of critics reacting to the passing ‘fad’ of spiritualism.

At his death the world had been at war for almost nine months. Scriabin’s last words are reported to have been: ‘I must be self-possessed, like Englishmen are,’⁴ which were

¹ *Radio Times*, 8 July 1927, 55.

² *The Times*, 28 April 1915, 7.

³ *Sunday Times*, 2 May 1915, 5.

⁴ Quoted in Rosa Newmarch, ‘Alexander Scriabin’, *Musical Times*, June 1915, 329.

subsequently used by some newspapers in an attempt to fire people's flagging enthusiasm for the war, reporting it as a mutual expression of sympathy between allies. Scriabin, like many people, had welcomed the conflict in 1914, but not for any political reasons; for him it was to be the event that would sweep away the old order to allow a new era of rebirth and renewal for humanity to begin: 'The masses need to be shaken,' Scriabin claimed. 'In this way they can be rendered perceptive of finer vibrations than usual. How deeply mistaken it is to view war merely as discord between nations.'⁵ Politically and socially many were aware a decade or so before the war broke out that some violent disruption was bound to occur soon. Similarly, for the same period many artists took an interest in the rhetoric of the Apocalypse and in apocalyptic themes, partly as a reaction to the materialism of the late nineteenth century. This was especially the case in Russia. Kandinsky, in the almanac *Der blaue Reiter* (1912), wrote of the coming collapse which would destroy all and the re-birth that would follow. Diaghilev, in 1905, spoke of a coming judgement and struggle which would sweep all away leading to a new resurrection. All these ideas revived many 'older romantic, religious and spiritualist motifs. Many were drawn from unconventional sources, and in particular from theosophy.'⁶

Ironically, spiritualism was fashionable both before and after the First World War. For the pre-1914 period people were enthusiastically spiritualist, eagerly anticipating the new world order, thus the connection that Scriabin's metaphorically transcendental music had with theosophy meant it broadly shared in the surge of interest these themes enjoyed prior to 1914. After the conflict theosophy and its related aspects were popular again but for a different reason. The post-1918 interest in theosophy was in part a reaction against the Church, who had advocated participation in the war, and the crisis of faith many experienced after the horrors of the trenches. As people attempted to cope with their losses a desire to transcend their pain and suffering led them to explore alternative spiritual paths, such as theosophy. The psychical aspect of theosophy received a particular interest as people hoped to be able to contact the dead via mediums and séances. Visions of angels who led lost troops to safety on

⁵ Hugh Macdonald, *Skryabin* (London: OUP, 1978), 10.

⁶ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 146.

the battlefield, or ghosts of servicemen at the Cenotaph, acted to reinforce an interest specifically in the supernatural and the occult fringe.⁷ Artists and musicians linked with theosophy, such as Kandinsky, had spoken of the power of Art to lift humanity to a new reality that transcended the material world, and Scriabin, in his last three orchestral works, represented a broad progression to a higher and better mode of existence. Many of the apocalyptic works, which had been regarded as somehow anticipatory of the First World War, were afterwards deemed allegorical. The catastrophe of the war did not create these ideas and beliefs, but rather it strengthened them and therein people sought consolation. Whether Scriabin's music was ever deemed to be consolatory or not it is difficult to tell, but his music benefited from the second wave of interest in theosophy that swept the country after the war.

Because of the very large orchestras required to execute Scriabin's late symphonic works, they received no performances during the war until Wood revived the *Divine Poem* on Tuesday 20 August 1918 at the Queen's Hall (Tuesday was Russian Night). The *Musical Times* found the music 'difficult to follow,' suggesting, 'perhaps we are not on the right plane for the acceptance of the work,' acknowledging that because of the 'mysticism that governed Scriabin...it would appear that his hearers too must be in a mystical mood.'⁸ It was a novel point for a critic to make, that if the music did not make sense it was the fault of the listener, rather than the composer. It demonstrates that critics accepted as valid the belief system and the music it inspired and therefore it was the responsibility of the listener to 'tune in'. When the same piece was repeated the following year on 20 November it appeared the audience had adapted themselves to the right mood; the performance was a great success. *The Times* was cynical in interpreting this: 'it is either smoking flax which ought not to be quenched, or a bubble that ought to be pricked; and we incline to the bubble theory.'⁹ The *Musical Times* was more certain. 'Scriabin's *Divine Poem*,' the critic wrote, 'caused a sensation. It looks as if we are on the eve of a period of Scriabin worship.'¹⁰

⁷ For more on this aspect see Jay Winter, op. cit.

⁸ *Musical Times*, October 1918, 469.

⁹ *The Times*, 21 November 1919, 10.

¹⁰ *Musical Times*, December 1919, 694.

During the intervening 15 months London had heard *Prometheus* once and the *Poem of Ecstasy* twice.¹¹ It is reported that a very large, interested audience attended the performance of *Prometheus*, conducted by Wood on 15 October 1918, who gave the work a ‘hearty reception’. Despite finding the work ‘difficult, almost repellent,’ the *Musical Times* felt that ‘only more familiarity is needed to give the work the place it deserves amongst the finest of modern orchestral compositions.’¹² Again there is this singular faith in the music, which for the critics was that this was, in itself, great music. The explanation for the large audiences that attended these performances was a different matter, and became plain after the performance on 27 October 1919 of the *Poem*, the second that year. ‘While the composer is reaching out toward his unknown region of transcendental expression,’ reported *The Times*, ‘he has not lost touch with what is common to the musical thought of ordinary humans.’¹³ Albert Coates tells of a Russian audience’s reaction to a performance of the *Poem*:

The public, which consisted almost entirely of the ‘People’, shouted themselves hoarse with enthusiasm. This so astonished me (I had never dreamed that they would understand it) that I turned to a sailor who was yelling fit to burst his lungs and asked him what it was he liked so much about the work. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘I’m of course not wise enough to understand it, but it makes me feel like a young horse. I should love to kick out, and then run around a field for an hour.’ After this performance I was continually receiving requests – work-people used to stop me in the streets – to get up another concert and conduct *Poème d’Extase*, they wanted so much to hear it.¹⁴

Ironically, despite it being regarded as music in a very advanced technical idiom, Scriabin’s compositions appealed most to those who had the least understanding of these issues. Critics always worried over whether they understood Scriabin’s music for the ‘right’ reasons, the presumption being that one could not appreciate music ‘correctly’ without some technical understanding (music appreciation was a topic widely discussed in the press at this time). Audiences, be they spiritualists or not, liked this music because it appealed to the ‘heart’ rather than the ‘head’. Critics, however, could not write about the music from such a

¹¹ *The Poem of Ecstasy* was performed on both occasions by the LSO, conducted by Albert Coates, on 16 May and 27 October 1919.

¹² *Musical Times*, November 1918, 517. The pianist was Myra Hess.

¹³ *The Times*, 28 October 1919, 10.

¹⁴ Albert Coates interviewed in *Musical America*, May 1919, quoted in Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1973), 7.

subjective point of view. Whilst Scriabin's music was bound up with a largely accepted belief system, which music critics knew too little about to criticise, it would remain beyond criticism; the seemingly arbitrary experiments of other modern composers were fairly open to criticism. The decline of spiritualism dealt Scriabin a double blow: not only did his music fall out of fashion with audiences, but as the various manifestations of spiritualism became discredited it left his music without an explanation for itself and thus open to critical assault.

In 1920 London heard *Prometheus*, the Piano Concerto (both twice) and the *Divine Poem*, all conducted by Coates except for the Concerto, which Wood directed. For audiences it was the sensation of Scriabin's music that provided part of its appeal; by now it was only really the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus* which provided the looked for 'hit'. As performances of these works became more regular and took place under different conductors, critics became familiar enough with the pieces for the issue of interpretation to arise. *The Times* tells us that Coates was known to have discussed *Prometheus* with its composer in connection with his Petrograd performances and the piece, it was agreed, gained clarity under the direction. Koussevitzky's *Poem*, on 2 February 1921, was thought to be far superior to anything London had yet heard and was deemed to have an authenticity that placed it well beyond previous readings.¹⁵ With Koussevitzky the work apparently gained in clarity of detail whereas Coates, it was felt, tended to encourage a more vague sense of outline and colour, no doubt an attempt to create a mystical atmosphere. Koussevitzky's second performance of the *Poem* that year, on 3 June 1921, was thought to be even better than the previous one: 'There can be no question that for the real Scriabin we must go to Koussevitzky.'¹⁶

Koussevitzky's performance of *Prometheus* on 10 June 1921 was awaited with great expectation, not just because of these performances, but also because Coates' somewhat prosaic interpretation of *Prometheus* earlier that year had disappointed.¹⁷ The *Sunday Times* and *Musical Times* both thought the performance 'marvellous' and 'remarkable' but the latter felt 'the truth is dawning on us that greater familiarity does not increase our admiration for the

¹⁵ Koussevitzky had met Scriabin in 1908 and regularly conducted his works in Russia.

¹⁶ *Sunday Times*, 5 June 1921, 6.

¹⁷ Performance at a Philharmonic Society concert on 10 March 1921, QH.

work itself.’¹⁸ Opinion clearly shifted after this concert. Hitherto people clearly felt that if a piece failed to make a full impact, the fault lay with the listener. The idea of the contrary was now entertained; it dawned on some that *Prometheus* was simply not Scriabin’s best work, which a crudely positivist interpretation of his music had led many to believe (i.e. a piece more advanced in idiom and style must be a better piece). However, on this concert hinged a larger issue of Scriabin reception. The world premiere of Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, which took place in the same concert, showed by stark contrast how *passé* Scriabin’s music was fast becoming. As *The Times* observed, ‘There is already a fairly vigorous reaction from Scriabin, led not by such old-fashioned folk as ourselves...but by leaders of a new movement...For them Stravinsky is the man.’¹⁹ That year in London saw the tide of fashion turn against Scriabin as quickly as it had arisen, and in parallel the coming years saw the rise of criticism against his music become more intense, based on a sense that this music was, as *The Times* put it, ‘a particularly unhealthy mixture of pedantry and hysteria,’ as the moral correctness of spiritualism came under fire.

When it was announced that the *Poem of Ecstasy* was to be performed at the 1922 Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester Cathedral, a letter of objection appeared in the *Musical Times*. The author, who signed with the name ‘Cambrensis’, felt the work was:

Unsuitable for performance in a place of Christian worship...The fact that this work of Scriabin’s is associated with a so-called theosophical “programme” may have given rise to an impression that it is a work of religious character. This, however is very far from being the case. It is thoroughly morbid, erotic, and sensational in the worst sense...and its performance at Gloucester would create a most undesirable precedent.²⁰

The work was seen as a threat to the ideals of ‘dignity and sanity’ thought to be emerging in English music. Similar objections were made at the performance but not about the music *per se* but rather at it being performed in church. Here is what appears to be the first instance in print of the attachment of the word ‘erotic’ to the *Poem*. Three years earlier *The Times* regarded the piece as ‘an intensified *Tristan*...due to...a common subject matter in ecstatic

¹⁸ *Musical Times*, July 1921, 495.

¹⁹ ‘Scriabin and Stravinsky: Permanence in music’, *The Times*, 11 June 1921, 8.

²⁰ *Musical Times*, February 1922, 124.

emotion,' but felt Scriabin's aspirations were 'purer' than Wagner's.²¹ People, perhaps naively, felt that because Scriabin's music was spiritual it could not be sexual.²² The performance of the *Poem* in a provincial church, where one imagines people were less open-minded than their London counterparts, forced people to confront what they had hitherto either been too naïve to realise, or too prudish to voice. Scriabin's music now became a moral concern; money was the other issue. Herbert Brewer, responsible for the Festival that year, was unlikely to have had any sympathy with Scriabin's music, but was shrewd enough to recognise a fashionable piece that would sell out, just what was needed to balance the books for what was an ailing Festival in the immediate post-war years. When the work was eventually heard, in what appears to have been another rather lack-lustre performance by Coates, Herbert Thompson objectively remarked: 'If listened to on its merits, and without any prejudice, the music sounded well and not inappropriate for such an environment.'²³

The performance of the *Poem* and *Prometheus* at the Leeds Festival in 1922 caused no outrage, but the Gloucester incident had precipitated another shift in Scriabin reception, as reflected in Ernest Newman's review of Koussevitzky's performance of the *Poem* the following year on 5 March. Newman felt the success of the performance was all the more great because it was in the face of what he described as 'a secret disapproval of the work.'

No composer to-day...rouses...such antipathy as Scriabin. To some he is pure idealist. This may account for the women's fondness for him; to them his music seems all aspiration. To others his music is nothing but eroticism masquerading as transcendentalism; one eminent conductor even described the "Poem of Ecstasy" to me the other day as "obscene."²⁴

²¹ *The Times*, 17 May 1919, 14. A review of Koussevitzky's performance with the LSO on 16 May 1919.

²² In 1904 Scriabin had written what he described as a 'short exposition of my doctrine' under the title *Poème Orgiaque*. Two years later the title changed to *Poema Ekstaza* (*The Poem of Ecstasy*), which then became the basis for his musical composition of the same name, Op.54. The literary *Poem* is about Scriabin himself as Man-God the Creator, experiencing a series of feelings from torment to ravishment as he grants the world liberation and ecstasy. At its apotheosis the poem is frankly sexual, ending with an orgasmically self-assertive: I AM! [*Ya Yesm!*]. Scriabin claimed the explanation of the musical work could be found in the text but preferred people to approach the piece first as pure music. The text of the poem was not published in an English translation until 1972 (see *Musical Times*, January 1972, 26-27).

²³ *Musical Times*, October 1922, 70.

²⁴ *Sunday Times*, 11 March 1923, 7.

The problem was the fine line between religious ecstasy and erotic emotion; to what extent was religion a sublimation of sex or *vice versa*. Newman claimed it all depended on the listener's point of view, but, in his typically rational style, dismissed the issue: 'the most sensible people...enjoy it as a magnificent illustration of an artist doing to perfection what he set out to do. Scriabin's aim is to keep us perpetually aspiring towards something...that eludes us until the very end...Whether that something...is spirit or sex, it is indisputable that as a technician he holds us all the time in the hollow of his hand.' As with Tchaikovsky, Newman supported Scriabin with his balanced and objective criticism at a time when critical opinion began to turn against him.

A lengthy article about Scriabin penned by Herbert Antcliffe in 1924 had noted: 'The music of Scriabin offends the listener whose small or great technical knowledge makes him analyse rather than feel the music. It delights the crowd which knows not how to analyse but which does feel its deep impelling emotion.'²⁵ The importance of Scriabin's 'extra-musical baggage' is logically dismissed: 'One does not need to believe the same as the composer in order to appreciate his music. Otherwise the music of Palestrina, Mozart, Gounod and Franck would be taboo to the Protestant and the Jew, and that of Handel, Brahms and Mendelssohn to the Catholic and the Moslem.' Therefore all that remained to be scrutinised in support of Scriabin was his compositional method. Antcliffe claims Scriabin evolved his technique gradually and purposefully and was far from being of the true *avant-garde*. The significance of Scriabin lay in his ability to manipulate 'ancient and modern principles' to create a new musical style independent of 'mere technique' and which used 'little new machinery.' For those who might question the latter, Antcliffe quotes Vincent d'Indy: 'all processes are good, on condition that they never become the principal end, and are regarded only as means to make music.'

Thus Scriabin's 'new machinery' came under close examination by a number of articles in the 1920s. George Dyson, writing in 1923, had also recognised the same general point as Antcliffe, describing Scriabin's harmonies as 'chord[s] of classical derivation made more complex by added appoggiaturas...Theoretically he only touched the fringe of the

²⁵ Herbert Antcliffe, 'The Significance of Scriabin', *Musical Quarterly*, 10/3, 1924, 333-45.

subject.²⁶ The drawback, as Dyson rightly claims, is that when Scriabin uses the chord as the basis for the whole piece, as in *Prometheus*, it becomes harmonically monotonous once the novelty of it has worn off. Dyson also touched upon another issue that for many lay at the real root of their distaste for his music. ‘There is obvious danger in Scriabin’s method, which amounts to the ruthless pursuit of a fixed idea, a pursuit which in his peculiar psychology is sometimes hardly to be distinguished from consistent hysteria.’²⁷

Hysteria was a word that, hitherto, had only made select appearance. *The Times* had, in 1921, noted there was a quarter that regarded Scriabin (in reference to *Prometheus*) as: ‘a particularly unhealthy mixture of pedantry and hysteria.’²⁸ The same newspaper in 1910 thought that the *Poem* created many of its effects ‘upon those waves of hysterical emotion for the existence of which in modern Russian music Tchaikovsky is mainly responsible.’²⁹ There is a distinct parallel between the receptions of these two composers. Both were hugely successful, but the popular rather than musical nature of their successes – its great appeal to the ‘People’ – aroused suspicion, contempt or even alarm in critics. Both composers were ‘unhealthy’: Tchaikovsky was a sexual deviant and Scriabin had been obsessed by what was increasingly regarded as a fraudulent or occult religion. To undermine Scriabin’s position attack followed lines similar to that against Tchaikovsky: sensationalist invective against the composer and analysis to ‘demonstrate’ the fundamentally flawed nature of his music.

An article by Alexander Brent-Smith written in 1926 was such a case. It was a sustained tirade against Scriabin’s music which occupies a place not dissimilar to Huneker’s polemic on Tchaikovsky in 1901.³⁰ Brent-Smith bases his attack on the ‘conclusion’ that towards the end of his life Scriabin became ‘unhinged’ which led to a ‘clouded reasoning’ and an ‘illogical application of half-truths [such] that Scriabin’s muddled reasoning ran to its own

²⁶ George Dyson, *The New Music* (London: OUP, 1923), 63 and 106. In interpreting the origin of the Mystic Chord Dyson disregarded the Sabaneyev/Newmarch theory of the rearrangement of higher partials, preferring to understand it as a derivative of the whole-tone scale. For further explanation and a modern interpretation see Richard Taruskin, ‘Scriabin and the Superhuman’, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 308-59.

²⁷ Dyson, op. cit., 143.

²⁸ ‘Scriabin and Stravinsky: Permanence in music’, *The Times*, 11 June 1921, 8.

²⁹ *The Times*, 5 April 1910, 14.

³⁰ Alexander Brent-Smith, ‘Some Reflections on the Work of Scriabin’, *Musical Times*, July and August 1926, 593-95 and 692-94.

destruction.’ This is all perhaps reasonable enough as biographical observation, but Brent-Smith carries his conclusion over: ‘it is because Scriabin offered muddle-headed reasoning seriously that the value of his later work is being suspected.’ Brent-Smith’s main criticism is in direct opposition to that of Dyson and Antcliffe, i.e. he accuses Scriabin of not being intuitive or natural, but artificial, especially in the realm of harmony. Brent-Smith creates, ironically, an artificial distinction between musical developments which have occurred naturally and those which have been ‘deliberately’ manufactured.

When a language is enriched it is because men have new thoughts to express...Deliberately to invent new words is not the same as enriching the language...in every instance from Bach to Strauss, composers who have indulged their fancy for increasing the language of music have added their new inventions to the already existing vocabulary.

Scriabin is criticised for consciously constructing his harmonic system, for it not being spontaneous, ignoring the fact that most developments in music have occurred from conscious experimentation rather than unconscious serendipity. Brent-Smith chides Scriabin for ‘discarding all previous harmony’ and common chords (ignoring the fact that *Prometheus* and the *Poem* both end with a very ‘natural’ major triad). On the basis that ‘a common chord has a natural, not a human origin,’ and by ‘deliberately’ omitting common chords Scriabin, it is claimed, ‘destroyed his natural mode of expression.’ Brent-Smith claims Scriabin was not a great composer because his utterances lacked simplicity or universality of sympathy (his huge popularity with concert audiences at this time seemed to be of no moment). The article drew responses in the form of a letter to the Editor from Ernest Fennell and a short article from Robert H. Hull. The simplicity of their retorts indicates that the flaws in Brent-Smith’s were probably obvious enough, but by this time Scriabin’s fate, both in print and in the concert hall, had been sealed.

The year of Antcliffe’s article, 1924, was the first year since 1918 that Scriabin was absent from London’s concert halls, and by the tenth anniversary of the composer’s death in 1925 it was obvious that Scriabin was attracting smaller audiences. Coates took the *Divine Poem* and *Prometheus* to the Leeds Festival in 1925. The former, it appears, was performed

with cuts and neither work seems to have been greeted with any particular enthusiasm. By the following year a performance of the *Divine Poem* by Wood in London on 6 March 1926 drew a smaller audience than was usual, a fact which the box office had obviously anticipated by not selling tickets for seats in the ‘orchestra’ (i.e. the choir seats). *The Times* observed that the programme (*Till Eulenspiegel*, Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no.1, *Pacific 231*, *Capriccio Espagnol*) would ‘a few years ago...have filled every seat.’³¹ In 1926 the *Musical Times* noted: ‘how cruel are the veerings of fashion. Is it five or six years ago since Scriabin’s vogue was at its height?’³² ‘Fashion’ and ‘vogue’ were exactly the right words. Though fashion had dictated to some extent the popularity of Russian composers in the 1890s, its importance became even more acute in the 1920s. The fashion for Scriabin is unique in this study in that its underlying or initial impetus was non-musical, i.e. spiritualism. Henry Wood and Robert Newman did much to shape the fashion for Russian music in the 1890s, but they were largely responding to supply and demand (as well as their own sympathies). In the 1920s musical fashion in London was directly shaped and manipulated to a great extent by Diaghilev.

Post-war Audiences

When Diaghilev and his company returned to London on 5 September 1918 the Russian Ballet’s aesthetic was much changed from that of its pre-war years. Gone were the glittering Russian neo-nationalist mythical tales with their sumptuous settings by Bakst or Benois. The success of the pre-war ballets very much relied upon the ‘export campaign’ image of Russia, and the extent to which this was fashionable. After the Revolution, when the appalling condition of Russia, widely covered in newspapers, became common knowledge, the ‘export campaign’ became unworkable. In place of Russian nostalgia Diaghilev chose more cosmopolitan subjects, either with a directly contemporary or historical setting.

The post-war Paris where Diaghilev and his company suddenly found themselves as émigrés was that of Satie, Cocteau and ‘Les Six’. Cocteau called for music to be more

³¹ *The Times*, 8 March 1926, 21.

³² *Musical Times*, April 1926, 345.

frivolous, stylistically anti-Teutonic and anti-intellectual.³³ This outlook, which was just as much about fashion as aesthetics, found a ready agent in Diaghilev, whose post-war ballets were scrapbook pastiches that popularised the idea, as Constant Lambert put it, of chic chaos. The serious music-lover, a small but distinct section of Diaghilev's London audience, found the apparent frivolity of the post-war Russian Ballet not at all to their liking: 'the sham serious really decadent and frivolous attitude of the RB toward everything,' Vaughan Williams wrote to a friend.³⁴ Diaghilev was mocking that which should be taken seriously. In essence he created a vogue for vogue. Diaghilev became a purveyor of novelty, rarely supporting the same artists consistently as he had done before the war. But many still followed Diaghilev closely – primarily artists and the pre-war literati – but also fashionable society. Even the 'plain man meekly followed.'³⁵ Diaghilev's post-war period attracted his broadest audience; it was a golden age for ballet.

An increased journalistic interest in the productions of the Russian Ballet also became apparent. Newspapers which had covered Diaghilev before the war increased their coverage, and intellectual journals and weeklies, such as *The Spectator* and *Nation and Athenaeum*, who hitherto had not taken an interest in ballet, now gave regular reviews. The audiences that came to these ballets also altered, partly due to the change in aesthetic and partly due to a change in venue. Intellectual circles made regular visits, displaying a direct and tangible interest, especially the Bloomsbury group, attracted by the visual modernism of Diaghilev's productions, which were now using the artists that Bloomsbury had championed before the war in their Post-impressionist exhibitions, e.g. Matisse and Picasso. During the period 1918-22 the venues for the Russian Ballet were no longer the glamorous Covent Garden Opera House but the music halls of the Coliseum, Alhambra, Empire and Prince's Theatre. Provincial tours were also embarked upon, to music halls in Manchester (1919), Bournemouth, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Nottingham, Birmingham and Sheffield (all 1920).³⁶ Prices were now a ninth of what they had been before the war but these tickets were

³³ Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (Paris: Stock, 1979)

³⁴ Letter from Vaughan Williams to Gwen Raverat, quoted in Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States 1911-1929* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1975), 353.

³⁵ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1948), 36.

³⁶ There was one season at Covent Garden from 10 June to 30 July 1920.

no longer for all-ballet programmes; ballet would now be the centre-piece amidst a variety bill, usually given twice daily, which could include ventriloquists, performing elephants, comedians, female jugglers and gymnasts. At these venues Diaghilev could no longer expect the grand audiences of his pre-1914 seasons, and whilst some accused him of trivializing his art, the net result was still positive. By promoting modernism through the music halls Diaghilev brought ballet to a wider audience and social spectrum than ever before. The rise of the music hall revue post-1918, backed by impresarios such as Sir Oswald Stoll and C. B. Cochran, who also backed Diaghilev, no doubt also contributed to the general broadening of his demographic. In becoming such a regular feature in post-1918 London the Russian Ballet may have lost some of its exotic appeal, but the company also became more talked about and more popular than ever before. In creating a fashion for certain composers, Diaghilev did a great service to the composers who wrote for him, since the fashionable audiences attracted to the Russian Ballet also then tended to follow these composers across to the concert hall.

Stravinsky

During the First World War Stravinsky composed a number of experimental works for small forces in which he turned away from his earlier Russian Ballet idiom and consciously attempted to write in a purified style. *Pribaoutki* (1914, for voice and eight instruments) was heard on 22 February 1918 (its world premiere) which the critic of the *Musical Times* felt ‘severely tested...our capacity for dazed amazement at the daring of a modern composer...but perhaps the most vexing feeling was that after we had heard all these reprehensible effects we wanted to hear them all over again!’³⁷ Despite the laughter reported at the performance of the *Three pieces* for string quartet (1914) on 13 February 1919 critics took the work seriously. ‘It is daring and brilliantly clever,’ wrote the *Sunday Times*, ‘but the effects do not always come off. Yet there can be few among the audience who would not gladly hear it again.’³⁸ While critics may not have understood Stravinsky’s music entirely, they clearly took it seriously.

After hearing *Ragtime* (1917-18, for 11 instruments) on 27 April 1920 (another world

³⁷ *Musical Times*, April 1918, 171. Performed at the Aeolian Hall by Olga Haley (v), the London String Quartet, unknown wind players, conducted by Eugene Goossens.

³⁸ *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1919, 4. Performed by the Philharmonic Quartet at the Wigmore Hall.

premiere), however, some obviously felt they were being hoodwinked. The work was invariably described as a ‘good joke’ or a ‘little joke’. ‘It was amusing for a few minutes,’ thought *The Times*, ‘till one began to suspect the composer of trying to be funny.’³⁹

Later that year London heard Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* (1919-20) and *The Song of the Nightingale* (1917) on 10 June and 16 July respectively. The latter, a reworking of parts of the earlier opera into a ballet, failed to make much of an impact. The choreography was found to be satisfactory but the absence of any real big dancing opportunities meant its main appeal worked through a nostalgia for the pre-war Russian Ballet’s exotic style. *Pulcinella* was a different story. Along with the Scarlatti-Tommasini *Les Femmes de bonne humeur* and the Rossini-Respighi *La Boutique fantasque*, the Pergolesi-Stravinsky *Pulcinella* was generally greeted favourably but with accusations that Stravinsky the archmodernist had sold out to the current vogue for pastiche. But whereas the Tommasini and Respighi ballets do little more than arrange the original pieces for the modern orchestra, perhaps enriching the implied harmonies, Stravinsky’s efforts with Pergolesi (or pieces thought to be by Pergolesi) were quite different. Stravinsky retains the melodies and basses almost intact but then goes on to add other harmonies or inner parts or to distort the phrasing and metre by the manner in which the new material has been applied. The orchestral conception is quite different: timbres are juxtaposed in what Stravinsky described as a ‘disequilibrium of instruments’ – the additions Stravinsky makes in terms of chords are purely for the sake of colour. Parallels have been drawn with Picasso’s designs for the scenery where simple, linear classicism is distorted in certain ways. The audience reception was warm, according to the *Musical Times*, but not overwhelming, yet the press were more definite in their praise. ‘The result is undoubtedly satisfying. It is the best way in which to serve up gems of the past.’⁴⁰ Even Ernest Newman, who found it difficult to appreciate Stravinsky’s music, managed a compliment, albeit a somewhat backhanded one: ‘Purists will tell us that Stravinsky has no right to re-make Pergolesi in his own image...it all seems pure *gaminerie* on Stravinsky’s part; but as *gaminerie* it is mostly first-rate.’⁴¹

³⁹ *The Times*, 28 April 1920, 14. Performed at the Aeolian Hall, conducted by Arthur Bliss.

⁴⁰ *Musical Times*, July 1920, 465.

⁴¹ *Sunday Times*, 13 June 1920, 6.

‘The audience,’ remarked Alfred Kalisch at the world premiere of the Suite from *The Soldier’s Tale* (1918) on 20 July 1920, ‘was in some ways as interesting as the concert itself.’ He noted three groups: ‘earnest musicians, . . . painters devoted to modern music, with their families, and . . . society, or rather that section of it that is always anxious for the latest thing in any art.’ The latter two groups were not common constituents of the concert-hall audience; they were the theatre audience, no doubt Diaghilev devotees who had seen, ten days earlier, Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* with Picasso’s designs, and had followed the composer across to the concert hall. With their tradition for a more vocal method of appreciation, or hissing if they disapproved, this theatre audience coloured the concert-hall audience increasingly throughout the 1920s. ‘All three sections vied with each other in expressions of enthusiasm, and the hall was packed.’⁴² The press response, however, was largely dismissive. ‘The Suite . . . contained some music which was really funny and some which was merely trying,’ wrote Kalisch, ‘but even the music which is least attractive is always that of an extraordinarily clever man, and always contains excellent material for students of orchestration.’ One might detect a pejorative use of the word ‘clever’, especially in the light of other criticism. *The Times* found ‘the especially amusing passages for cornet and trombone reminded one a little of Sousa,’ whereas the subjects used in the *Berceuse du chat* (1915), performed in the same concert, were no more than ‘pegs upon which to hang the tricks of the modern trade of which Stravinsky is such a master.’⁴³

Ernest Newman reviewed the concert at length, which clearly had irritated him. He thought Stravinsky’s distinction of subjective and objective music, discussed in a pre-concert talk by the conductor, Ernest Ansermet, an irrelevance; Stravinsky’s choice of subject matter was banal and trivial, and the music as ‘not particularly well done [and] it often became tiresome through its sheer obviousness. . . in the *Three Pieces for Clarinet* he is the merest poseur and dullard.’⁴⁴ But he claimed he would not be dismissive: ‘we are not intolerant; still less are we arrogant. . . [Stravinsky] has apparently lost the genius that gave us “L’Oiseau de

⁴² Alfred Kalisch, ‘London Concerts’, *Musical Times*, September 1920, 621.

⁴³ *The Times*, 21 July 1920, 12.

⁴⁴ Ernest Newman, ‘Music of the Week: Stravinsky’, *Sunday Times*, 25 July 1920, 6.

Feu” and “Petrouchka”...He has, for the time being at any rate, written himself out.’ What irritated Newman most, however, was not the music.

The concert...drew a large and fashionable audience; Stravinsky is evidently the musical sensation of the moment...There is a certain type of mind that likes to feel it is in the very front of things, that it is awake to the art of the future at a time when the rest of us are dozing comfortably on the fat bosom of the past. It is a harmless delusion; but as it makes them happy we shall not try to dissipate it.

For this reason Newman had a great dislike for Diaghilev. His articles for the *Sunday Times* are written with an almost missionary zeal to stand against sensationalism and fashion for their own sake and the theatre audience who clamoured for such experiences, whose responses he felt were solely guided by fashion. For Newman, Stravinsky was not necessarily a bad composer (before the war he had thought very highly of him), just an overrated one, and consequently he saw it as his duty to point this out.

After hearing a very ragged performance of *Le Sacre* under Ernest Ansermet during the winter of 1920-21 the young conductor Eugene Goossens decided to assemble an orchestra with private finance and conduct the work himself. The concert took place on 7 June 1921.⁴⁵ Goossens’s purpose was purely musical but it was an important moment that would initiate a whole new performance tradition for the piece and provide a focus for the composer’s recent consolidation of his new aesthetic stance, namely that modern music was now primarily about form, sonority and rhythm. This necessarily required a revision of the ideas he had had about his extant compositions. Thus *Le Sacre* was re-born as an abstract piece to be appreciated as such. Stravinsky’s reason for revising his position was partly based upon that fact that, like Diaghilev, his Russianness no longer held the same cultural value it had before the war. Post-1918 modernism necessarily required music to be detached from both the present and the past; by proclaiming his idea of pure music Stravinsky could seemingly detach his music from any sense of national identity and adopt a new, aggressive, anti-folkloric stance. Stravinsky asserted in an interview printed the following month in *The Observer* that he had always held the same aesthetic in that he had only ever been concerned

⁴⁵ There was precedent for this ‘concert’ performance. Pierre Monteux had conducted the work in Paris at the Salle Pleyel in 1914 to a very enthusiastic audience.

with a purely musical construction: musical form should be dictated or implied by the content or material used. In explaining his idea of pure music he claimed that even though a piece of music may have a subject, it is but a pretext and nothing more; the piece must exist as music first and last, in spite of its subject.⁴⁶ He claimed that in his stage music he had never tried to make the music illustrate the action or the action the music, but rather find an ‘architectural basis of connection.’ One wonders whether Stravinsky read H. C. Colles’ review of *Le Sacre* back in 1913: ‘It sounds...as though it had been written as absolute music conceived in varieties of a single mood rather than as programme music’ suggesting the choreography was roughly fitted together to match the music, which ‘happened to illustrate ideas conceived in a similar mood.’⁴⁷

The audience gave the Goossens performance a rapturous reception. The critic of *The Times* was more cautious, preferring to wait until after the new Diaghilev production of the ballet in three weeks’ time before making a full judgement. ‘It is only in association with the stage that the music becomes intelligible,’ the critic continued, ‘the stage scenes and movements supply something of what is left out of the music.’⁴⁸ The issue that both Ernest Newman and Alfred Kalisch were concerned with was the eventual significance of Stravinsky and *Le Sacre*. They were also concerned with the attitude of the adulatory audience and how some regarded this as proof of Stravinsky’s genius. ‘The advocates of the extreme forms of the new music tell us that the matter has passed beyond the realms of controversy – that the victory is won.’ Those who stated the contrary were immediately to be written-off as ‘old fogeys.’⁴⁹ Newman acknowledges Stravinsky’s talent but objects at those who ‘are so taken up with sonorities that they are deaf and blind to [the] defects...that are painfully obvious to the rest of us,’ citing the weaknesses in ‘the patchiness of the tissue and in the slavery of the

⁴⁶ ‘Interview with Stravinsky’, [unsigned], *The Observer*, 3 July 1921, reprinted in F. Lesure (ed.), *Igor Stravinsky ‘Le Sacre du printemps’: Dossier de presse* (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, 1980), 76-77.

Stravinsky first expressed this revised history to a French interviewer in December 1920. Stravinsky asserted for the rest of his life that *Le Sacre* was a purely musical work. Richard Taruskin has since demonstrated that the music contains at least six folk-melodies, fragmented throughout the textures, apposite to the subject of the ballet it was designed to go with. See Richard Taruskin, ‘Stravinsky and the Subhuman: A Myth of the Twentieth Century’, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 360-88.

⁴⁷ H. C. Colles, ‘Le Sacre du printemps at Drury Lane’, *The Times*, 12 July 1913, 8.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 8 June 1921, 10.

⁴⁹ Alfred Kalisch, *Musical Times*, July 1921, 488-89.

composer to certain simple Russian rhythmic patterns that have long exhausted whatever novelty they once had for us.’⁵⁰ Newman stated the value and role of composers such as Stravinsky: ‘the pioneers themselves never enter the Promised Land. Their work is to open up paths for their successors.’ The issue continued when Diaghilev revived *Le Sacre* as a ballet twenty days later.

The new production of *Le Sacre du printemps* with choreography by Massine was given on 27 June 1921.⁵¹ After Goossens’s concert performance the London public seized upon the chance to see the work in its proper context, especially since the concert version had puzzled some. The new production was given an ecstatic reception by its London audience, who ‘roared itself hoarse... Thus the London public proved its connoisseurship in contemporary art.’⁵² But many critics found Massine’s new choreography, more abstract than Nijinsky’s, rather dull, especially since the production still used Roerich’s colourful, neo-nationalist costumes and designs. ‘If Pagan Russia’s artistic ideas had advanced to the point suggested by Nicolas Roerich’s beautiful dresses, they would never have tolerated the dances which M. Massine has attributed to the period... Their fault is that they commit the unforgivable offence of being dull,’ lamented the *Daily Telegraph*.⁵³ Newman remained unmoved: ‘The intention was to put a halo round Stravinsky’s work,’ he wrote, ‘the effect was to lay a wreath on its coffin. So far as London is concerned the work is dead. A concert-giver in search of sensation may still exhume the corpse now and then; but it will be only an inquest, not a resurrection. It is the end of a chapter.’⁵⁴ Even today, after it has long since been accepted as music, *Le Sacre* remains problematic as a ballet, appearing more frequently in the concert hall than the theatre.

In the mean time the Symphonies of Wind Instruments (1920) was performed on 10 June 1921 by the LSO under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky. The rest of the programme

⁵⁰ Ernest Newman, ‘The Extreme and the Mean’, *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1921, 4.

⁵¹ It was at this production that various translations of the French were consolidated into the familiar, if still rather unsatisfactory, translation of *The Rite of Spring* (the Consecration of Spring is more or less the closest one can get in English).

⁵² *The Times*, 28 June 1921, 8.

⁵³ *Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 1921, 12.

⁵⁴ Ernest Newman, ‘The End of a Chapter’, *Sunday Times*, 3 July 1921, 6. Goossens repeated his concert *Le Sacre* on 23 June, four days before the new ballet production, and again later in the year on 12 December 1921.

– Rachmaninov’s *Isle of the Dead*, Glazunov’s Violin Concerto and Scriabin’s *Prometheus* – must have drawn a mixed audience which undoubtedly explains their mixed reception of the *Symphonies*: cheers, applause, laughter and loud hissing. The critic of *The Times* noted that the hissing subsided when Stravinsky stood up to bow, which either demonstrates the politeness of audiences then or that they were hissing the performance rather than the piece itself. The quality of the performance was discussed by many critics, most of whom knew that the work had received limited rehearsal time. ‘Koussevitsky [sic] seemed pleased with the performance of his players, so we must suppose that it really did sound more or less as intended,’⁵⁵ wrote *The Times* somewhat naively. The pro-modernist Percy Scholes felt more confident to state outright that the work ‘was not perfectly performed.’⁵⁶ Stravinsky aired his grievances in print: ‘The audience did not hiss enough,’ the composer complained, bluntly blaming the conductor: ‘The radical misunderstanding was that an attempt was made to impose an external pathos on the music.’⁵⁷

The problem was not necessarily wrong notes (British orchestral players being famed for their sight-reading skills) but rather an attempt to interpret or sentimentalise the score, perhaps in the light of its dedication to the memory of Debussy, who had died three years earlier. This baffled Koussevitzky who responded with a letter to the *Sunday Times* twelve days later: ‘for the whole programme [I] only [had] two rehearsals [for which Stravinsky was present at both]...in such conditions we could only play what was written in the partition quite automatically.’⁵⁸ The concert billed the work as a Symphony – not *Symphonies* – of Wind Instruments, another point which irritated the composer, who specifically sought to make reference to an earlier meaning of the word.⁵⁹ The dedication bemused Ernest Newman: ‘I had no idea Stravinsky disliked Debussy so much as this. If my own memories

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 11 June 1921, 8.

⁵⁶ Percy Scholes, *The Observer*, 12 June 1921, 10.

⁵⁷ ‘Misunderstood! Stravinsky says audience did not hiss enough’, *Weekly Dispatch*, 12 June 1921, reprinted in Stephen Walsh, *Igor Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 331.

⁵⁸ *Sunday Times*, 24 July 1921, 6. Koussevitzky had received the score at short notice and during the performance he did not re-seat his orchestral players who remained in their scattered orchestral positions.

⁵⁹ Stravinsky meant the word in the pre-eighteenth-century sense of the word – literally a sounding together of instruments. The idea behind the piece is to create a montage by juxtaposing three heterogeneous segments or symphonies.

of a friend were as painful as Stravinsky's of Debussy seem to be, I would try to forget him.'⁶⁰ One critic disagreed, 'the emptiness of orchestration and hollow incessant clash of melodies...as an expression of grief [the] Symphony is psychologically true.'⁶¹ Over the last year or so the elitist problem of modern music had crystallised: 'One need not consider the idiots who found it dreary; they probably expected Stravinsky to jazz at the memory that Debussy was dead...the work is so free from the conventional sentimentalism; there's the rub; its emotion is intense.'⁶²

The seemingly avant-garde style of the piece evoked other interpretations. 'I make bold to assert that the later works of Stravinsky stand for Bolshevism, with all its attendant horrors of rape, murder, injustice and terror,' railed Henry Hecht in a letter to the *Musical News & Herald*.⁶³ On 12 December 1921 the *Symphonies* was repeated, this time conducted by Goossens, but a second hearing and presumably a better performance endeared no critics to the piece. Ernest Newman, objecting to Stravinsky's insistence on the plural title *Symphonies*, took him to task: 'Stravinsky can go as Bolshevik as he likes in musical grammar, but even he must pay a little respect to the grammar of the spoken language.'⁶⁴ The *Musical Times* claimed the *Symphonies* 'gave us one more reason for regretting [Debussy's] death. It was received with rapture by the left-wing audience.'⁶⁵

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 would not have surprised anyone with the most basic knowledge of conditions in Russia in the early twentieth century; in fact even Marx had regarded Russia as the country ripest for a proletarian revolution. Since the October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent decision of the Bolsheviks two months later to pull out of the war entirely (sealed by the signing the infamous Treaty of Brest Litovsk with the Germans in March 1918) Britain had grown distinctly distrustful and suspicious of its once close ally. Despite the many counter-revolutionary activities, which persisted over

⁶⁰ Ernest Newman, 'The week's music: Mr Kussevitsky', *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1921, 4.

⁶¹ C. H., 'Stravinsky at the Queen's Hall', *The Spectator*, 18 June 1921, reprinted in *Dossier de presse*, op. cit., 69-70.

⁶² T. Warner Wharton, 'London Notes: Music', *Fanfare*, 1/7, January 1922, 124.

⁶³ Henry Hecht (letter to Editor), 'Bolshevism in Music', *Musical News and Herald*, 18 June 1921, 785-86.

⁶⁴ *Sunday Times*, 18 December 1921, 5.

⁶⁵ *Musical Times*, January 1922, 40.

the next two years, and the signing of many counter-revolutionary statements (Stravinsky signed one) all Russians, including their *émigré ballet*, became tarred with the same 'Red' brush. The Red Scare, as it became known, coloured the early post-war years and reached its height in mid-1920 after the failure of the counter-revolutionary forces in July.⁶⁶ Even after the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 1921, propaganda still persisted. Whereas immediately before 1914 Russia had been perceived as curiously exotic, even barbaric, this image was somewhat glamorised; Russia posed no direct threat. By 1921, however, the threat had become both uncomfortably real and uncomfortably close, with regular left-wing demonstrations occurring in Britain, a threat that was crudely interpreted in anything Russian.

That Stravinsky's music was commonly perceived somehow as being politically left wing is witnessed in Beverley Nichols novel *Patchwork*, written in 1921. The hero of the novel, Ray Sheldon, returns from the war intent on recreating the tranquil pre-war atmosphere of the Oxford aesthete.

I want people to be charming again and not go about in standard suits and look horribly earnest and put cubist paintings on their walls and talk about the war... If you wear futurist jumpers and join the Labour party and say that Chopin is out of date, and that nobody's any good but Stravinsky, and if you read *Wheels*, and adore Robert Smillie, and talk about skyscrapers, it shows one thing quite clearly, and that is that the war has deprived you of your mental balance.⁶⁷

The war was responsible for many things, not least the political polarisation that occurred in Europe after 1918. The major shift in politics to the Left was part of the desire for radical change in the light of what Modris Eksteins describes as the 'bankruptcy of the old order.'⁶⁸ Anything that was radical and discarded (or flagrantly ignored) the conventions of the 'old order' was associated with the revolutionary activities of the Bolsheviks. The modernist techniques of the Russian composers Diaghilev chose to commission were regarded as synonymous with the progressive politics of the Bolsheviks, perceived as a very present threat

⁶⁶ Britain was divided as to what extent it should involve itself with supporting the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia, the Tories wanting to support them, the Labour and Liberal MPs wanting to leave them to their own devices.

⁶⁷ Beverly Nichols, *Patchwork* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), 145. The novel's title refers to the discontinuity of post-1918 society.

⁶⁸ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Papermac, 2000), 255.

to the stability of British life, not dissimilar to the threat which some had perceived in the music of the Five in the late 1890s.⁶⁹ Modernism, in its many manifestations, necessarily involved breaking from the past and a desire for the new, either in a constant present or in a new interpretation of the past. The impact of the political shift to the Left was to reinforce a parallel shift to the Right, not merely as a reaction to the Left, but a need many felt to rejuvenate conservatism, not to conserve but to rebuild. Neo-classicism, as an attitude towards the past rather than a vision of the future, reflected both Stravinsky's political and musical concerns. That Stravinsky was an émigré White Russian, who was later to profess admiration for Mussolini, was clearly of no consequence to those who thought he was a Bolshevik propagandist. Similarly, Diaghilev, who had many Establishment connections in Russia, was horrified at what had happened in his country since 1917. Others, such as Prokofiev, had little interest in politics. People in England simply equated modern, and seemingly anarchical, music with the anarchy of revolution and Bolshevism. Though both Stravinsky and Prokofiev were regarded as Bolshevik propagandists, it was Prokofiev who was more consistently harangued in this respect. Partly the reason was timing: the first large-scale piece by Prokofiev was heard in England in August 1920 at the height of the first phase of the Red Scare, whereas Stravinsky's music, first heard in 1912, entered the public consciousness without any direct political association.

Prokofiev

‘What an odd way the Russians have of coming to us! The more important a composer's work the less significant the example by which he is first represented to us.’ The curiously named Montagu Montagu-Nathan, author of *A History of Russian Music*, makes a salient observation in the first English-language article on the music of Prokofiev, which appeared in 1916.⁷⁰ Henry Wood had introduced the *Scherzo humoresque* (1912)⁷¹ for four bassoons at a Promenade Concert the previous month on 2 September. Rosa Newmarch's programme note

⁶⁹ That fact that Lenin, Gorky and Stalin all had rather conservative tastes regarding art, literature and music is a paradox that is often overlooked.

⁷⁰ M. Montagu-Nathan, ‘Sergei Prokofiev’, *Musical Times*, October 1916, 465-66.

⁷¹ An arrangement by the composer of his op.12 no.9 *Scherzo humoresque* for piano.

merely described the work as ‘a clever little piece and very modern in treatment, as might be expected from a pupil of Tcherepnin.’ What impact such a short piece can have made it is difficult to say. The example was unfortunately prescient of the performance of Prokofiev’s music in England throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which was not as regular or as representative as that enjoyed by some of his fellow countrymen (especially those all-important second and third performances). Excepting Diaghilev, Prokofiev lacked a consistent advocate, either a Wood or Koussevitzky on the rostrum, or a Newmarch or Evans in print. This may have been due, partly, to the composer’s personality – haughty and intransigent – but also to the fact that for him the only city that mattered was Paris.

No doubt wanting to make up for Prokofiev’s distinctly inauspicious English musical debut, Montagu-Nathan proceeded to ‘sell’ this new composer, describing how he has:

tweaked the ear of the pedagogue and warmed the cockles of the progressive musician’s heart...the Rubinstein prize-winner, the triumphant virtuoso...Diaghilef’s [sic] latest find, whose ‘Scythian Suite’ drove Glazunov from the hall in which it was being performed, this ‘raging futurist,’ ‘barbarian,’ ‘*enfant terrible*’...one of the most remarkable figures in contemporary Russian music.⁷²

However, when later the same year Ernest Newman heard a performance of Prokofiev’s piano suite *Sarcasms* (1912-14) in Birmingham, he was clearly unimpressed:

In the *Sarcasms*, I am afraid, [Prokofiev] has not done any ear-tweaking or cockle-warming; he has simply made a bit of a donkey of himself...My complaint against such a work as *Sarcasms* is that the gibing at tradition is not at all cleverly done; in the end, indeed, it seems rather more stupid than tradition itself...There is plenty of room for paradox in musical melody and harmony, but it needs to be done by a real genius like Stravinsky, in comparison with whom the Prokofiev of the *Sarcasms* is merely a clumsy clown.⁷³

Clearly in response to this, in his next article Montagu-Nathan now back-pedals frantically: ‘Prokofiev is no longer regarded in Russia as an experimental ear-tweaker... that was an ill-chosen expression, for genius is rarely guilty of deliberately annoying the pedagogue...He is now acknowledged to be a master.’ Realising, however, that the First Concerto was due to be

⁷² M. Montagu-Nathan, ‘Sergei Prokofiev’, *Musical Times*, October 1916, 465-66.

⁷³ Ernest Newman, ‘A Schoolboy Escapade’, *New Witness*, 2 November 1916, 18-19.

performed later that year, he goes on to explain why this work ‘does not reveal to us that strangeness which has made Prokofiev a much-discussed composer,’ and meekly describes that while certain moments arouse ‘no suggestion of their having emanated from a desire to shock the musical middle-classes, [they] are undeniably original.’⁷⁴ But the dye had been cast. Subsequent reviews are coloured by the insinuation that Prokofiev’s modernism is not always sincere, that he deliberately set out to shock in his music. Whereas the *enfant terrible* tag (one which is still used today) would appeal to the fashionable audiences of London’s theatres, English critics were largely unimpressed.

When Prokofiev’s First Piano Concerto eventually received its English premiere on 24 August 1920, under Henry Wood with Ellen M. Jensen as soloist, it came as somewhat of a disappointment, though there was warm commendation from some quarters. So when the *Scythian Suite* (1914-15) was premiered just over two months later it was hoped to be the sensation the novelty-hungry audiences craved.⁷⁵ Many rumours circulated about the piece before the performance, how it had driven an enraged Glazunov from the hall at one performance: the audience was told they were going to be startled by its savagery and sheer volume of noise. Unfortunately pre-publicity such as this created an expectation that exceeded the reality. *The Times* described how the ‘full house’ had come to hear the piece, ‘about which all sorts of rumours had been current.’

It seemed to use an interesting and at times an amusing specimen of the present day school of queer sounds...some [of which] are new; many of them are merely the clichés of modernism redressed...It is not abstruse or difficult music to listen to... You see what the composer is driving at all the time...nowhere is there anything that calls for half the mental exercise which even Rachmaninov’s 1st movement [of the Third Piano Concerto] demands. Intellectually and emotionally Prokofiev is evidently a very simple soul.⁷⁶

Yet many critics seemed to feel, as the *Musical Times* did, that ‘with all deductions made’ the composer was ‘a man to be reckoned with.’⁷⁷

⁷⁴ M. Montagu-Nathan, ‘Prokofiev’s First Piano Concerto’, *Musical Times*, January 1917, 12-13. The scheduled performance of Prokofiev’s First Piano Concerto in 1917 never took place, due, no doubt, to the political situation in Russia.

⁷⁵ Premiered by Albert Coates and the LSO on 1 November 1920.

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 2 November 1920, 9

⁷⁷ *Musical Times*, December 1920, 820.

Prokofiev's first ballet to be staged by Diaghilev was *Chout* (1915, rev.1920) given its English premiere at the Prince's Theatre on 9 June 1921, conducted by the composer. *Chout* suffered from a somewhat uncoordinated production, which was unusual for Diaghilev. Prior to its production Diaghilev dismissed his current star choreographer and *danseur*, Léonide Massine after he had developed a relationship with one of the company's female dancers.⁷⁸ Consequently the choreography of *Chout* was left to the inexperienced Taddeus Slavinsky under the supervision of the designer Mikhail Larionov. The result was an uneven production, perhaps obvious to *The Times* critic, who described the work as having 'the effect of a loosely-improvised charade.'⁷⁹ Despite this the ballet was a huge success with both its Parisian and London audiences but not with the critics, as the composer noted in his autobiography: 'The public received the ballet very well but press comment [in London] was most unfavourable, quite abusive in fact.'⁸⁰ As usual, most critics balked at exactly that which audiences approved. 'The whole thing is just a sound-and-colour "rag",' sniffed Francis E. Barrett in the *Musical Times*. 'The whole thing is best looked upon as a joke...personally, I should have preferred to have seen...a new ballet composed by an Englishman.'⁸¹ (Such comments as the latter had been absent since 1898 when the same journal lamented the absence of English music in Wood's programmes.) Ernest Newman's review of the ballet was particularly vitriolic:

The recipe is simplicity itself. You just put down anything that comes into your head, and trust to it all fitting. If it does, well and good; if it doesn't, you say that that's the effect you were aiming at... Anyone could turn out music of this sort by the ream... Someone was once indiscreet enough to call Prokofiev the *enfant terrible* of music; and ever since he seems to have been trying to live up to the description. But he is much more *enfant* than *terrible*.⁸²

This enraged Diaghilev who wrote a letter of complaint to the *Sunday Telegraph* (which is odd since Newman worked for the *Sunday Times*) and the critic was barred from subsequent

⁷⁸ Diaghilev had a romantic attachment to Massine. A similar event had led to Nijinsky's dismissal eight years earlier.

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 10 June 1921, 12.

⁸⁰ Sergei Prokofiev (ed. & trans. Oleg Prokofiev), *Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings* (London: Faber, 1991), 270.

⁸¹ Francis E. Barrett, 'The Russian Ballet', *Musical Times*, July 1921, 497-99.

⁸² Ernest Newman, 'Chout', *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1921, 4.

productions. The impresario at the Prince's Theatre, Charles B. Cochran, recalled: 'Many strange things were said about *Chout*, but perhaps the strangest by an English painter who declared that it was "Bolshevist propaganda".'⁸³ (The following night the same response greeted Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* – see above). The *Classical Symphony* (1916-17), performed as an interlude piece at the Russian Ballet two days later, no doubt delighted its Diaghilev audience, the Haydn pastiche being a complete contrast to the Petrushka-like *Chout*. Even Newman was unusually positive: 'I had my suspicion...that Prokofiev was a better composer than you would think from his music and my suspicions were confirmed when I heard his little "Classical Symphony."' Prokofiev can write quite nice music when he does not try too soar too high.'⁸⁴

The following year Prokofiev returned to perform his own Third Piano Concerto (1917-21) in London on 24 April 1922 with the LSO under Albert Coates. His personal appearance, as with Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Scriabin, did much to help boost his standing. *The Times* felt enlightened by the performance: 'We must honestly confess we never understood Mr Prokofiev's music until he played it himself...his concerto is of absorbing interest all through...it was all put before us with complete clarity and proportion.'⁸⁵ The *Musical Times* found the gymnastics at the keyboard visually very engaging. Ernest Newman continued the line of thought he began in 1916 describing Prokofiev as 'a professional nose-tweaker...a confirmed poseur...aided and abetted in his youthful poses by one or two people in this country who were old enough to know better.' (A reference to Montagu-Nathan (1877-1958) and Edwin Evans (1874-1945) who had promoted his music in England.) But Newman was clearly ready to be convinced otherwise.

He has only to drop his pose for us to see the real Prokofiev – a minor talent, it is true, but quite a likeable one...for the most part [the concerto] is quite an enjoyable little work with one thoroughly good tune in it, and a constant flow of high spirits that of itself engages our sympathies.⁸⁶

⁸³ Quoted in Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, op. cit., 263. The following night was the premiere of Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, which, as already discussed, was greeted by a similar response.

⁸⁴ Ernest Newman, *Sunday Times*, 30 April 1922, 4. From a review of the Third Piano Concerto.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 25 April 1922, 10.

⁸⁶ Ernest Newman, *Sunday Times*, 30 April 1922, 4.

When the work was repeated the following year on 24 November, again with the composer as soloist but this time with Wood at the Queen's Hall, it was accorded a more mixed reaction. *The Times* found it 'barbaric, splendidly barbaric...saved by its fierce energy' which sounds more like a review of the pre-war Russian Ballet.⁸⁷ *The Musical Times* was contrastingly cutting, finding the work 'infantile – you think of a singularly ugly baby solemnly shaking a rattle. But, no, it is not so human as that. It is curiously in-human, and, at the same time, clever.'⁸⁸ A point had been reached at which both audience and critics found something to appreciate in Prokofiev's music. The March and Scherzo from the opera *The Love for Three Oranges* (1919) were encored at their English debut on 1 June 1922, under Koussevitzky, 'and if it had been decent to ask it, would have been demanded again,' reported *The Times*. Edwin Evans found the pieces 'exhilarating...but not in the least of the stature of the composer whose Third Concerto aroused so much interest.'⁸⁹

Similarly the First Violin Concerto (1915-17) given by Szigeti and Ansermet at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert on 26 February 1925 found an even more sympathetic press toward its more mature style. '[The concerto is] free from the irritating school-boyish tricks that spoil its two predecessors for the pianoforte and there were moments of real charm of a delicate kind' wrote the *Musical Times*.⁹⁰ Ernest Newman found the work humorous and clever rather than significant, but in comparison to his criticism of Prokofiev's other music this was quite positive. This more sympathetic attitude toward Prokofiev dates from 1922, the year after many had felt Stravinsky had exceeded the boundaries of intelligibility with his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, but by no means had Stravinsky relinquished his prime position in the minds of audiences for whom he was 'the Man'. Critics, however, seemed to be coming to a swift conclusion.

Stravinsky's Octet (1922-23) received its English premiere at a private performance given at Seaford House on 15 October 1924.⁹¹ The work would not be heard in public until 9

⁸⁷ *The Times*, 26 November 1923, 19.

⁸⁸ *Musical Times*, January 1924, 70.

⁸⁹ *Musical Times*, July 1922, 497.

⁹⁰ *Musical Times*, April 1925, 352.

⁹¹ Seaford House was Lord Howard de Walden's London residence. Walden was the man who, at the last minute, had financed Goossens' concert *Rite*. He took a wide interest in music and musicians and wrote the libretto for Josef Holbrooke's operatic trilogy *The Cauldron of Anwen*.

February 1926, under the same conductor, Anthony Bernard. In an article published in 1924 Stravinsky explained his idea for the Octet.

[It] is not an 'emotive' work but a musical composition on objective elements which are sufficient in themselves...[the] play of movements [i.e. tempi] and volumes, that puts into action the musical text, constitutes the impelling force of the composition and determines its form...the emotive basis resides not in the nuance but in the very form of the composition...form will be the only guiding point for the executant.⁹²

Had critics had access to this article, which was published in Brooklyn, New York – amounting to what Stephen Walsh has described as a miniature artistic manifesto – they might have been more sympathetic. As it was, the press appeared to enjoy writing him off altogether. 'The last movement...causes an acute nervous pain to the ear.' wrote *The Times*. 'Here...is the delusion that what is stark is *ipso facto* more real than what it pleasing; the reaction from make-belief [sic] and romantic has swung too far.'⁹³ The *Musical Times* wondered if the work was meant to be funny and saw it as being symptomatic of the composer's later style: 'this composition...can have filled no purpose in life...it saddened us, for the years are passing, and all that Stravinsky – the wondrous, coruscating young hopeful of 1911-14 – produces is this sort of idle buffoonery...The plain fact of the case seems to be that Stravinsky has done nothing worth mentioning for years.'⁹⁴ Ernest Newman, who it seems had read the Brooklyn article (he had been working for the *New York Post* in the mid-1920s), concurred with the *Musical Times*, adding that Stravinsky's theories are all well and good but that his music still gives little or no pleasure, and accuses him of living off 'the reputation he made between 1910 and 1913. If anyone doubts this, I would ask him...what he would have said about the Octet last Tuesday had he been told that the composer was one Smith of Brixton.'⁹⁵ The point was clear: the success of the Octet was not due to its musical content but rather the fashionable label of the composer's name. For these critics at least, the double disappointment of the Symphonies of Wind Instruments and the Octet left them

⁹² Igor Stravinsky, 'Some ideas about my Octuor', *The Arts*, January 1924, 4-6, reprinted in Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (London: Faber, 1966), 528-31.

⁹³ *The Times*, 12 February 1926, 10.

⁹⁴ *Musical Times*, March 1926, 253.

⁹⁵ Ernest Newman, 'The Stravinsky Octet', *Sunday Times*, 14 February 1926, 7.

feeling justified in writing-off Stravinsky as a successful composer, and certainly English composers at this time absorbed little, if anything, from these works (see Chapter Eight). Fashionable audiences, however, were still following Stravinsky as close as ever, especially his pieces for Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet.

The Late-1920s Audience

The 1926 season of the Russian Ballet ushered in Diaghilev's significant last phase. It was the second time in the post-1918 era that he returned to giving whole evenings of ballet, the first being in 1921 with Tchaikovsky's full-length ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*.⁹⁶ Given at His Majesty's Theatre under the patronage of the Duke of Connaught it was a distinguished season containing a rich programme, including three new ballets, and drew a very fashionable and glamorous audience that over the last few years had not been so much in evidence. From around this time Diaghilev returned to courting the stalls and the boxes, the trend-setting élite and the highbrow, feeling that the future of his company now lay more in England than in France where he now had stiff competition from Ida Rubinstein. Post-war England saw a consumerist vanguard; influence was assigned now not by blood but by spending and media power. Fashionable magazines, such as *Vogue*, paid much attention to the Russian Ballet for 1925-29. The Russian Ballet's audience in large part was now made up of the sophisticates, the Bright Young Things. They took their cues from Paris and the Sitwells with their mixture of aestheticism, frivolity and financial/social privilege. This *milieu* was not to everyone's taste, as Vaughan Williams's comment above makes clear. It was precisely this that gradually lost Diaghilev the intellectuals and average dance-lovers from his audience and obviously irritated the press.

From the mid-1920s a new element was to be found at Diaghilev's productions in which, 'not only the female portion of it...was shrilly enthusiastic. The 'Oxford bags' and the flop of long hair over the forehead were there in sibilant strength, and all that happened on the

⁹⁶ The ballet was produced as *The Sleeping Princess* so audiences would not confuse it with the pantomime. The failure of the 1921 revival of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, due to a very old-fashioned Imperial-style production, left Diaghilev severely in debt. The Russian Ballet did not perform in Britain between February 1922 and November 1924.

stage was voted – rightly, of course – as “perfectly too wonderful.”⁹⁷ This new male audience was what would now be described as the gay audience. Homosexual men attended the Russian Ballet in a significant number that they did not for other ballet companies or productions. As Philip Page noted in the *Evening Standard* in 1927: ‘One does not see at [Pavlova’s ballet productions] the ecstatic youth with flowing hair who expresses his appreciation of Serge Lifar with a mass of sibilants.’⁹⁸ The post-1918 era saw a cult of Oscar Wilde. ‘The trial of Oscar Wilde [in 1895] was responsible for a flight from aestheticism,’ as Cyril Connolly observed in 1938.⁹⁹ Thus in 1911 Diaghilev’s distinctly aesthetic productions must have appeared as an oasis – it would not be until after the war that the rejection of Victorian seriousness would allow such an aestheticism to flourish and a trend for Wildean dandyism to appear: ‘It was *chic* to be queer, rather as it was *chic* to know something about the twelve-tone scale and about Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*.’¹⁰⁰ Heterosexual men, too, affected the mannerisms of Wilde, usually simply by being dandy-aesthetes, as a symbol of their nonconformity or rebellion against the values of the pre-1914 generation.¹⁰¹ Diaghilev was a Russian Oscar Wilde, aesthetic, decadent and dandified, as Merle Armitage recalled in 1947, ‘When I first saw him, it occurred to me that here was a Russian version of a more muscular and dominant Oscar Wilde.’¹⁰² No doubt Diaghilev’s own homosexuality was known about and his affairs with his leading *danseurs* (Nijinsky, Massine, Lifar) would no doubt have been one of the prime topics of conversation in the auditorium. Diaghilev’s dancers were also renowned for their Bohemian lifestyle:

Although the members of the company...were a disciplined group, they had no inhibitions in manners and morals...They were paganly unmoral in the simple, animal sense of the word...On board a Pullman train, they slept or dressed, conversed

⁹⁷ *Daily Sketch*, 3 August 1925, 5.

⁹⁸ Philip Page, review of Pavlova’s 1927 season at Covent Garden, *Evening Standard*, [August/September] 1927, quoted in Olga Kerensky, *Anna Pavlova* (New York: Dutton, 1973), 99.

⁹⁹ Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 59.

¹⁰⁰ Alan Pryce-Jones quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation* (London: Faber, 1990) 80-81.

¹⁰¹ Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of ‘Decadence’ in England After 1918* (London: Constable, 1977), 203-04. For more on this see also: Chapter 6 ‘Class Relations’ in Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994), 130-160.

¹⁰² Merle Armitage (ed. Edwin Corle), *Dance Memoranda* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946) 24-25. Merle Armitage (1893-1975) US writer, designer and impresario. He was in charge of the American publicity for Diaghilev’s tour of the USA 1915-16.

or made love in various degrees of dishabille, and to one who appreciated the perfection of their bodies it was, to say the least, a Sybaritic feast...they were something out of an Oriental seraglio, and their ordinary conduct a voluptuous orgy.¹⁰³

That the *danseurs*, rather than the *danseuses*, almost invariably took the leading role in his productions was a radical departure from classical ballet. The choreography and costumes of Diaghilev's productions were often specially designed to show off an essentially masculine beauty. As with his pre-war productions, Diaghilev used sex to sell ballet. The startlingly attractive dancers, such as Léonide Massine and Serge Lifar, were added attractions, no doubt to both sexes, at the Russian Ballet. However, there was seemingly no anxiety attached to the sexual heterodoxy of Diaghilev's productions or the plural sexualities of the audiences they attracted. When the Labour MP J. H. Thomas attended a dinner with the Coliseum Orchestra (where the Russian Ballet had just concluded their 1925 season) he was dismayed to find the press there as well. However, the worry was not about how an association with the Russian Ballet might imply a sexual preference, than a political one: 'Heaven alone knows what I'm doing here with the Russian Ballet...if it gets known outside, all the morning posters will be shouting "J. H. Thomas with the Bolsheviks again!"'¹⁰⁴

Stravinsky's *Svadebka* (1914-17, orch.1923) produced under its French title *Les Noces*, was part of the distinguished 1926 season, receiving its London premiere on 14 June. The work was premiered in Paris in 1923 and usually an English premiere would have followed soon after, but Diaghilev did not think the work would suit the audience at the Coliseum (the Russian Ballet's London venue for 1923). It obviously suited the 1926 audience at His Majesty's Theatre since every seat had been booked weeks before the premiere. 'There was in the interval in the hall a gathering of Chelsea and Mayfair such as one only sees at the Russian Ballet, and there was no room to move,' noted Alfred Kalisch.¹⁰⁵ Usually Diaghilev gave pre-premiere interviews to aid the press and the audience in their

¹⁰³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Sketch*, quoted in Eugene Goossens, *Overture and Beginners* (London: Methuen, 1951), 231. J. H. Thomas was also General Secretary of the National Union of Railwayman who had been against Britain assisting the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia after the war.

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Kalisch, 'Stravinsky's Decline', *Daily News*, 15 June 1926, 5.

comprehension of a new work. This did not happen for *Les Noces*. If shock tactics to attain maximum publicity was his plan, he was not to be disappointed.

As ever the audience and the press were divided: Goossens, who conducted the work, recalled that the work ‘created a sensation with the public, but not such a great one with the press.’¹⁰⁶ The inevitable comparisons with *Le Sacre* were made and critics were either positive yet slightly bewildered or hostile outright. Others complained of the score’s ugly and aimless noise. ‘It is supposed to represent the preliminaries of a wedding,’ wrote Alfred Kalisch, a one-time supporter of Diaghilev; ‘it is enough to convert intending brides and bridegrooms to celibacy. The élite applauded.’¹⁰⁷ H. G. Wells felt the press were so caustic in their reviews that he penned a letter in defence of *Les Noces* to: ‘protest against this conspiracy of wilful stupidity that may succeed in driving it out of the programme.’ Goossens claimed the letter was sent to *The Times*, but it appears it was never printed. Instead Diaghilev distributed copies of it in the theatre after, rather than before, subsequent performances of *Les Noces*:

I do not know of any other ballet so interesting, so amusing, so fresh or nearly so exciting as *Les Noces*. I want to see it again and again, and because I want to do so I protest against this conspiracy of wilful stupidity that may succeed in driving it out of the programme...It was an amazing experience to come out from this delightful display, with the warp and woof of music and vision still running and interweaving in one’s mind, and find a little group of critics flushed with resentment and ransacking the stores of their minds for cheap, trite depreciation of the precious and strongest thing they had had a chance to praise for a long time.¹⁰⁸

The consistently anti-Diaghilev *Daily Express* critic, Hannen Swaffer, coupling Noel Coward (who had been at the first night) with his comments, made sarcastic reference to an illustration by the newspaper’s cartoonist of a pyramid of figures including Diaghilev, his dancers, H. G. Wells and Lord Balfour. This provoked a reaction from Osbert Sitwell: ‘Probably M. Stravinsky is the greatest musician that we have seen for a century...Some of M. Diaghilev’s creations have already survived for fifteen years, which is more than can be

¹⁰⁶ Goossens, op. cit., 234.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Kalisch, ‘Stravinsky’s Decline’, *Daily News*, 15 June 1926, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Goossens, op. cit., 235. H. G. Wells was known for his broad tastes – a few days later he was seen in the audience for Gershwin’s *Lady be Good* at the Empire Theatre.

said for the works of genius turned out at such short intervals by Mr. Noel Coward.¹⁰⁹ One paper, however, did give a positive response: ‘One may like it, one may hate it, but it is so immensely vital, so throbbing with life and energy, that one cannot but be moved. It is impossible to pass any kind of judgement on such a work after one shattering performance.’¹¹⁰

Ernest Newman had already written about the work the previous year in the *New York Post* where he dismissed it as ‘too purely Russian to capture the musical world as a whole.’¹¹¹

A year later he was not so passive in his comments:

Musical Europe is already more than a little tired of the moujik and his half-baked brain. Everyone now sees him for just what he is and always was – a Little Master who flamed up to genius for a brief year or two of his life, then declined into a talent, then into a mediocrity, and is now a nonentity.¹¹²

This was too much for Diaghilev who subsequently sent one of the *Les Noces* pianists to go to Newman’s seat at the next performance and pull his nose. Fortunately for Newman, he was not at the next performance, so Diaghilev simply barred him from subsequent performances (as had happened with Prokofiev’s *Chout*). Diaghilev then also penned a letter to *The Observer*: ‘The public, which has the right not to understand anything, has nevertheless understood everything; and the Press, which is under the obligation to understand everything, has, as usual, not understood anything!’¹¹³ Many issues arose in the various discussions about *Les Noces*, but they all seem to centre on the one issue that was crystallising in the mid-1920s, that of the ‘problem’ of modernism – was this music valid as art if it was only appreciated by an ‘élite’, as Kalisch described it? The usual paranoid journalese about Bolshevism was also present. *The Times* obviously thought the ballet was an actual representation of a peasant wedding, rather than a highly stylised one, alluding to the

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Osbert Sitwell to Editor of *Daily Express*, 19 June 1926, 8. Osbert Sitwell may have had his own axe to grind, since Noel Coward had satirised him and his siblings in *London Calling* as the Swiss Family Whittlebot.

¹¹⁰ *Daily Sketch*, 15 June 1926. Quoted in Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, op. cit., 326.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Ernest Newman (ed. Herbert Van Thal), *Testament of Music: Essays and Papers by Ernest Newman* (London: Putnam, 1962), 219-23.

¹¹² Ernest Newman, ‘Les Noces’, *Sunday Times*, 20 June 1926, 7.

¹¹³ ‘Les Noces: M. Diaghileff Replies to the Critics’, *The Observer*, 20 June 1926, 11.

Bolshevik Revolution: 'If that is the way Russian peasants got married we feel it is no wonder things have happened as they have.'¹¹⁴ Comments like this were to be even more widespread about the next Russian ballet Diaghilev staged in London.

Prokofiev's *Le Pas d'acier* (1925-26), opened in London on 4 July 1927, at the Prince's Theatre. Eugene Goossens conducted the first night, who recalled, 'Rumours had circulated that, as the ballet was Bolshevik propaganda and London was extremely anti-Bolshevik, the audience would certainly put up a hostile demonstration on the first night.'¹¹⁵ Diaghilev brought a revolver to the first night and sat in the orchestra next to the first flautist with the intention to fire it into the air at the first sign of any disruption, though as Goossens points out, his intention was probably more to enliven the scandal than quell it.

In 1927 the Red Scare was at a new height. Over the past few years, after a short period of relative harmony in 1923, relations between Britain and the Soviet Union had become increasingly strained. Despite the fact that the Soviet government had belatedly received official recognition from the British government in 1924 (during Britain's first Labour administration) the scandal of the Zinoviev Letter in October of the same year led to the breaking-off of diplomatic relations between the two countries.¹¹⁶ During and after the General Strike of May 1926 rumours circulated that it had been caused by Bolshevik infiltration as an attempt to topple capitalist Britain. Further intrigue persisted leading to the breaking-off of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement in May 1927.

¹¹⁴ 'The Russian Ballet: Les Noces', *The Times*, 15 June 1926, 14.

¹¹⁵ Goossens, op. cit., 246-47. A similar rumour had circulated at the Paris premiere the previous month. White Russians felt insulted by the apparent glorification of the Revolution whereas the Left, including Cocteau, were offended at the seemingly frivolous attitude to such a great event as the Revolution.

¹¹⁶ A copy of a letter, purporting to be signed by G. E. Zinoviev, President of the Presidium of the Communist International in Moscow, and MacManus, a British member of the Presidium, was sent by the Third International to the Central Committee of the still very small Communist Party of Britain. It was leaked to the *Daily Mail* and printed on 25 October 1924. It was an exhortation to insurrection and incited the masses of British unemployed proletariat to revolt. An immediate protest from the Foreign Office to the Soviet Government appeared to prove its authenticity, which the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* in his reply promptly denied. However, the truth about the 'Red Letter' remains uncertain. Internal evidence and the fact the letter appeared four days before a General Election, arouse suspicion that it was a forgery. Before the letter had appeared Conservative propaganda had worked hard to equate the Labour Party with Communism, and whipped up a Red-spy mania. The timing of the Zinoviev Letter, in itself, seems enough to indicate that the letter was not entirely genuine. Nor was the original of it ever produced. David Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century* (The Pelican History of England, 9; Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1974), 96-97.

Le Pas d'acier was a representation of the industrialisation of Soviet Russia, an apparent glorification of everything most detested by Tory London, and the fact the first night was on 4 July cannot have enthused many Bulldog hearts. At the end of the ballet Richard Buckle recalled 'the audience looked anxiously at the Duke of Connaught's box, the Tzaritsa's first cousin once removed led the applause, which turned into a stupendous ovation.'¹¹⁷ The audience was of Diaghilev's preferred demographic: 'The theatre was full of lords and ladies and a dazzling display of diamonds' wrote Prokofiev, amused by one newspaper's response: 'Prokofiev deserves to be famous. As an apostle of Bolshevism he has no peer.'¹¹⁸ Quite the opposite. Diaghilev had chosen the subject since it was topical and Prokofiev had leapt at the idea, having recently returned from his first visit to his homeland in nine years. The two émigrés would have had no political interest in advertising the Soviet government; Diaghilev was being deliberately provocative to generate publicity.

Many were perplexed by the absence of any real plot in the ballet, but agreed that it was an exciting production. The two scenes – one representing the country, the other the factory with all manner of pistons, wheels and machinery on stage – describe a farm labourer's conversion into a factory worker. This, in addition to its Bolshevik representation, was also cause for anxiety, as Edward Evans in the *Musical Times* interpreted: '[the second scene] shows the enforced automatism of a modern factory whose inmates appear as the slaves of a force which, man-made, has passed beyond man's control...if they stopped some terrible catastrophe would happen.'¹¹⁹ The mid-1920s saw an influx of books, films and plays, the futuristic plots of which focussed on the fear of enforced automatism; just four years earlier Karel Čapek's plays *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play* had both been performed in London to great success.¹²⁰ Evans drew comparison between the ballet and the film *Metropolis*, and claimed the ballet was the strongest Diaghilev had produced since *Les Noces*.

¹¹⁷ Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 492. The Duke of Connaught was a grandson of Queen Victoria, noted for his striking resemblance to Tsar Nicholas II.

¹¹⁸ Sergei Prokofiev, *Soviet Diary 1927*, op. cit., 284.

¹¹⁹ *Musical Times*, August 1927, 744.

¹²⁰ Karel Čapek (1890-1938) Czech novelist and dramatist. *The Life of Insects* (1921) was a joint work with his brother, Josef, a satire on human society and totalitarianism. *R.U.R.* (1920) is set on a remote island in the 1950s, and depicts robots (a word derived from the Czech 'robota' meaning drudgery) who have acquired emotions and rebel against and destroy their human masters. The title stands for Rossum's Universal Robots.

Of the music many were intrigued how, in the last scene, Prokofiev sought to imitate the sounds and rhythms of a factory with his orchestra rather than provide a more conventional music, foreshadowing some of the techniques of film music.

New technology was also making its impact in music at this time. On the 19 June 1927 Stravinsky made his radio debut for the BBC as soloist in the first English performance of his Concerto for Piano and Winds (1923-24) with the Wireless Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edward Clark.¹²¹ It was part of an all-Stravinsky programme, which included the overture from his opera *Mavra* (1921-22), the Suite no.1 (1925) and the suite from *Firebird*. Later that year from 10 to 12 July Clark conducted three fully staged performances in English of the *Soldier's Tale* (1918) the last of which was broadcast by the BBC.¹²² Sacheverell Sitwell wrote a pre-broadcast article for the *Radio Times* in which he describes how Stravinsky in his later works 'has been making a desperate effort to cast off his early fame and to renew it by fresh methods.'¹²³ Though Sitwell does not think any of these works will ever be as popular as the three pre-war Diaghilev ballets, he claims there is now enough works of his 'reformed and mature style by which to appreciate this fresh series of contrasts to his early successes.' Sitwell's aim is clear: to argue the case for Stravinsky's post-1914 works including the *Soldier's Tale*. He describes how the work is 'based upon certain imperishable human emotions' and that it makes more of a 'direct emotional appeal' than the Concerto for Piano and Winds, which had been heard recently.

Unfortunately Sitwell's explanatory note did not convince, and the BBC received a number of letters of complaint; their audience was not largely made up of fashionable Londoners. Percy Scholes, writing in response in the *Radio Times* two weeks later, admitted how he did not enjoy the work when he first heard it, but encourages his readers to 'hear the *Soldier's Tale* once or twice again before we pass final judgement upon it.'¹²⁴ He compares

¹²¹ Edward Clark (1888-1962). English conductor and administrator. A sometime pupil of Schoenberg and conductor for Diaghilev, was responsible for the performance and broadcast of much modern music at the BBC.

¹²² The Concertino for string quartet (1920), Piano Sonata (1924), *Piano Rag Music* (1919) and *Oedipus Rex* (1926-27 – performed twice on consecutive nights) were similarly premiered in England by BBC radio broadcasts over the next year.

¹²³ Sacheverell Sitwell, 'Stravinsky's 'L'Histoire du soldat'', *Radio Times*, 8 July 1927, 55.

¹²⁴ Percy A. Scholes, 'The Danger of Infallibility', *Radio Times*, 22 July 1927, 125.

comments made at the premiere of a piece of Wagner, ‘nowadays the Broadcasting world’s most popular composer,’ with those made after Stravinsky’s performance of his own Concerto. Both are comparable in their harsh criticism. Scholes’ point is clear: the ‘problem’ of modern music is just a matter of getting used to it (he wrote similar articles about Schoenberg and Bartók). This music was to be appreciated and not merely listened to because it was the fashion of the moment.

The following year Stravinsky’s latest work, *Apollon musagète* (1927-28), was given at His Majesty’s Theatre conducted by the composer on 25 June 1928. ‘A new work by Stravinsky is inevitably an event of some importance,’ wrote the Paris correspondent of *The Times* in a pre-premiere article, ‘the developments of his style are perhaps awaited and discussed with greater interest in Paris than in any other capital.’¹²⁵ Contrasted with the following, written by the journalist’s London colleague, it aptly revealed the difference between the Parisians and the Londoners. ‘It used to be said that the Russian Ballet would not be much without Stravinsky; his latest production makes us fear that soon it will not be much with him.’¹²⁶ Compared with *Les Noces* Stravinsky’s latest ballet was distinctly different to anything the Russian Ballet had done so far. With its solemn, classical choreography and rarefied music *Apollon* revealed a different side of neo-classicism – an attitude towards the past rather than a vision of the future. If Stravinsky’s recent works, such as the *Octet* seemed dry or harsh, *Apollon* represented an attempt to endow his music with a spiritual dimension. The idealisation of a timeless art and a (spiritual) neo-orthodoxy were both major trends that grew out of post-war agnosticism and the intellectual and spiritual renewal that occurred not only in 1920s France but in the life of the composer, too. But the presentation of this austere yet rather serene ballet in the milieu of the frivolous and sensationalist Russian Ballet was perhaps ill judged, as Francis Toye observed, ‘The choreography is extremely ingenious and beautiful at times...but the whole is too tenuous to hold the attention so long.’¹²⁷

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 22 June 1928, 14.

¹²⁶ *The Times*, 26 June 1928, 14.

¹²⁷ Francis Toye, ‘Diaghileff Season at His Majesty’s Theatre’, *Morning Post*, 26 June 1928, 12.

Despite the advocacy of people such as Sitwell and Scholes, when Stravinsky gave the first public performance in England of his Concerto with Goossens on 13 June 1929 it met with almost invariably negative criticism, many describing the work as feeble. ‘This music is Bach in Alice’s Wonderland: a nightmarish concerto,’ wrote the critic of the *Evening News*. ‘But this concerto is typical of an age when music is enormously discussed – when theories have got the better of instinct – when the intellectual in music has outraged feeling. To the initiates (or propagandists) it is no doubt a miracle of beauty, better than the *St Matthew Passion*. The plain man would call it a hoax.’¹²⁸ Ernest Newman followed his usual plan of attack: ‘The pleasure of seeing the composer of *Petroushka* [sic] again was equalled only by the pain of hearing the composer of the piano concerto. It was sad to think that the one-time man of genius had degenerated into the manufacturer of this ugly and feeble commonplace.’¹²⁹ The audience still kept the faith and ‘applauded loud and long,’ noted the *Musical Times*. ‘It was clear that he still stands for much with the bright young folk, but they are not likely to hear this concerto often – or ever again.’¹³⁰

The burlesque *Renard* (1915-16) was given the following year on 15 July at Covent Garden, over seven years since its world premiere in Paris. Most critics were baffled by this work, where a double cast of dancers and acrobats in the same costumes enact a popular Russian tale, which *The Times* felt was merely ‘a high-class circus.’¹³¹ Being a much earlier work, many spoke of Stravinsky’s shift in style. The magazine *The Queen* pointedly observed, ‘*Renard* is a soulless farmyard burlesque belonging to Stravinsky’s half-way period between the vigorous iconoclast revealed in *Les Noces*, and the feeble neo-classicist he has lately become in *Apollon Musagète*.’¹³² The 1929 season included *Petroushka*, *Le Sacre* and *Apollon*, which gave more opportunity to compare, and for some to lament, Stravinsky’s shift in style. The critical reception of Stravinsky in England throughout the 1920s seemed to follow a downward trend and by the close of the decade, even previously positive supporters

¹²⁸ Marcato, ‘Some Nightmarish Music’, *Evening News*, 14 June 1929, 6.

¹²⁹ Ernest Newman, *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1929, 7.

¹³⁰ *Musical Times*, July 1929, 643-44.

¹³¹ *The Times*, 15 July 1929, 16.

¹³² Hilda Andrews, ‘The Russian Ballet: A New Stravinsky’, *The Queen*, 24 July 1929, 4.

of his, such as Constant Lambert, felt that the Russian's talent was no longer burning as bright.

It was perhaps appropriate that Diaghilev's last season before his death in 1929 ended where his English enterprises had begun back in 1911, at Covent Garden. His last new production, Prokofiev's *The Prodigal Son* (1928-29), was given there on 1 July 1929, and was as much a contrast to *Le Pas d'acier* as *Apollon* had been to *Les Noces*. At its Paris premiere two months earlier it was met with unanimous approval. The biblical theme and the sombre set designs of Georges Rouault were a distinct departure for Diaghilev.¹³³ Many regard *The Prodigal Son* as one of Prokofiev's first mature scores. William Walton described the end as 'better than anything he has ever done.'¹³⁴ London critics on the whole did seem to notice this new seriousness in both the production and the music, and perhaps it wrong-footed audiences:

The fashionable audience at the first [London] performance did not much care for it. But if they persevere with it, I think they may find that this is one of the strongest pieces of the new repertoire. M. Diaghilev calls it the 'Parsifal' of the Russian Ballet. It is too soon to say that. But it is a serious and important piece of work with feeling in it – which one could not say of many of the *delightful trifles* which he has given us in the last two or three years.¹³⁵

Unfortunately, nobody had the chance to persevere with this music; seven weeks later on 19 August 1929 Diaghilev was dead and subsequently the Russian Ballet was disbanded. Truly it marked the end of an era. He launched the career of numerous composers, artists, dancers and choreographers and raised the public perception of ballet for which he created several audiences. His impact would echo for decades in the various ballet companies in England and beyond that emerged in the wake of his own Russian Ballet. By the end of the 1920s the

¹³³ The biblical idea probably had their origins in Vaughan Williams' *Job*, which had originally been offered to the Russian impresario in 1927. A set of full-size reproductions of Blake's engravings had been sent with an eight-part scenario to Diaghilev who rejected the idea outright: 'C'est tout ce que je déteste'. But the idea surely sowed seeds in Diaghilev's imagination and the influence of Blake's etchings, never returned, are perceptible in some of Rouault's stage designs. Indeed, *The Times* commented on the 'Blake-like intensity' of Lifar's dancing in the first and last scenes.

¹³⁴ Letter to Siegfried Sassoon, 3 July 1929, quoted in Stephen Lloyd, *William Walton: Muse of Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 92.

¹³⁵ Lydia Lopokova, 'The Russian Ballet at Covent Garden', *The Nation & Athenaeum*, 6 July 1929, 476.

reputations of Scriabin and Prokofiev had crystallised, as far as English minds were concerned. Only Stravinsky, that stylistic chameleon, would manage to continuously adapt himself to prevent a restrictive image forming of his music.

Reputations Post-1930: The End of the Affair

In 1928 Gerald Abraham penned an article about Scriabin that dismantled the last aspect of him that remained from those which attracted the English to him in the first place – his Russianness.¹³⁶ Scriabin, like Tchaikovsky, the reader is told, was a lonely and isolated figure who lay outside of the main current of Russian art, and consciously aligned himself with the Western tradition. They both dealt with the erotic, the emotional and the psychological, qualities, which Abraham tells us, the best Russian music owes little to; Russian music is physical rather than spiritual. In claiming the erotic, emotional and psychological topics for the West he was obviously working from a stereotyped image of the Russian naïf. Abraham credits Scriabin's handling of form and his logical development of germinal ideas very highly, but this also counts against him since this is 'entirely foreign to the spirit of Russian music.' Scriabin was by now completely caught in the double bind. For the concert audiences of today, perhaps little has changed in their perceptions of Scriabin since the mid-1920s. In attempting to rehabilitate him the solution has been to sanitize his music by ignoring everything that lies beyond the printed page and by 'proving' Scriabin's worth by complex pitch-class theory analysis to demonstrate his compositional discipline and rationale, i.e. to lose his 'extra-musical baggage', and thus rescue his academic prestige. But this singularly misses the point of the directness of Scriabin's music and, paradoxically, has only led to Scriabin becoming trivialised.

Scriabin's music had the advantage of regular repeat performances. Prokofiev had no such luxury; most of his music was lucky to receive anything beyond a second performance in London. Moreover, new works appeared neither regularly nor in large volume. After Diaghilev's death Prokofiev's main conduit into London was severed. Beyond the impresario, Prokofiev had few consistent champions of his music either as conductors or

¹³⁶ Gerald Abraham, 'The Elements of Russian Music', *Music & Letters*, 9/1, January 1928, 51-58.

journalists as Scriabin and Stravinsky did – his difficult personality probably hindered this. Of the music that London did hear it was plainly difficult for audiences and critics to work out exactly what kind of a composer Prokofiev was. His works from the 1920s increasingly exhibited both *enfant terrible* and mature characteristics and even after 1945, when his Soviet ballets and symphonies began to be performed in London, this aspect was hardly clarified.

It has often been claimed that Prokofiev had no soul and, like *Petrushka*, inside he was only sawdust. Leonid Sabaneev plainly regarded this as unfair when he countered in 1928 that despite the appearance of Prokofiev as ‘the composer of a continuous scherzo...there *is* – and sometimes it is very strongly expressed – both depth and sincerity of feeling, and a special tenderness which, perhaps on account of the rarity and timidity of its appearance, seems particularly dear and precious.’¹³⁷ But due to the erratic flow of his music into London and the hard-nosed attitude of 1920s modernism this was seldom noticed or valued. Add to this Ernest Newman’s pertinent observation ten years later:

There is something ironic in the reflection that the composer who was hailed by his enthusiastic bodyguard, some twenty years ago, as one of those who were going to regenerate music by “tweaking the noses of the academics”, is now mainly dependant for his existence in the concert room upon a piece of charming artificial academicism.¹³⁸

Prokofiev’s music was frequently criticised for being artificial or synthetic (charming or otherwise), a charge that was invariably levelled at all modern music, but whereas Stravinsky could make a virtue out of his artificiality, in Prokofiev’s music it is frequently combined with that fleeting streak of ‘special tenderness’, which ultimately confused or aroused suspicion of insincerity.

Stravinsky and Prokofiev would ever be indebted to Diaghilev for effectively launching their careers in the West, careers that Stravinsky was, in the end, the better man in handling. Stravinsky, ever the more shrewd man in such matters, in addition to his own talent for re-invention, would ultimately survive the ‘cruel veerings of fashion’ that tend to affect all

¹³⁷ Leonid Sabaneev, “‘The Angel of Fire’: Prokofiev’s new opera’, *Musical Times*, October 1928, 891-93.

¹³⁸ Ernest Newman, *Sunday Times*, 30 January 1938, 8. After a BBC broadcast of the *Classical Symphony*.

composers. Although the reception of Stravinsky's music was problematic in the 1920s few if any of these issues problematize his reception today; his pre-eminence as one of the towering figures of twentieth-century music silences criticism to a large extent. Unlike most of the composers studied here Stravinsky was alive for the period under consideration and also most able to react to, or precipitate, changes in musical fashion, aesthetics and technique.

Beyond Stravinsky and Prokofiev it was now clear that new Russian music meant Soviet music, the reception of which was even more closely linked to the diplomatic situation. The effects of the Red Scare problematized the reception of Russian and Soviet music from 1921 to 1934, when even the staunch Russophiles, Henry Wood and Rosa Newmarch, shifted their advocacy further west to promote the 'safer' music of Janáček and Kodály. A period of Anglo-Soviet cordiality followed in 1934 when the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations, only to be curtailed when Hitler and Stalin signed the von Ribbentrop non-aggression pact in 1938. Then when Hitler broke the pact in the summer of 1941 and the Soviets joined the Allied forces, a renewed musical interest between Britain and the Soviet Union sprang up, only to be beaten down again as the Iron Curtain descended in 1946. Thus, seven of the nine English premieres of Shostakovich's music from this period took place between 1934-38 or 1941-46.¹³⁹ But much of this music, alongside that of Miaskovsky, Khachaturian and Mosolov, received few repeat performances and so its net effect, against the more popular new music of Janáček, Kodály and Hindemith, was negligible for this period.

In broadcasting a shift away from Russian music also occurred. At the BBC the figures responsible for the sympathetic advocacy of Stravinsky and Prokofiev in the late 1920s – both in broadcasting schedules and in print in the *Radio Times* (*viz.* Percy Pitt and Percy Scholes) – had by 1930 either retired or left the corporation to be succeeded by more conservative figures such as Hugh Allen, W. H. Hadow and Adrian Boult who were at best ambivalent in their attitude towards modern music in comparison to their 1920s counterparts. Adrian Boult, appointed conductor in chief to the newly formed BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1930 (to the great dismay of Frank Bridge), was no great advocate of Russian music or

¹³⁹ Henry Wood's wartime English premiere of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony on 22 June 1942 was facilitated by flying-in a microfilm of the score from behind enemy lines.

‘modern’ music in general.¹⁴⁰ The remaining modernist from the Pitt-Scholes era, Edward Clark, fought his corner valiantly but left the corporation in 1936.¹⁴¹

England’s relationship with Russian music had been a passionate affair that aroused the gamut of feelings, seldom expressed in temperate language, but, as in all relationships of this nature, it inevitably came to an end. The experience, however, was widely beneficial and one from which both English composers and English musical culture emerged enriched. Russia’s musicians revealed the possibilities for England’s ‘adolescent’ musical culture in demonstrating the breadth of styles and personalities, some seemingly contradictory, that could still identify themselves as ‘Russian’ without undermining or diluting what it meant to be a Russian composer, as some feared it would. Ultimately it was the diversity of Russian music that strengthened its culture, as a similar process was to do so for English music. How this took place is the topic for the second half of this thesis.

¹⁴⁰ Though it is true Boult conducted music from the Second Viennese School it is more likely this was because of pressure from Edward Clark, a BBC music department employee and former Schoenberg pupil, than from any personal sympathy for the music, which is clear from Britten’s description to Auden of Boult’s interpretation of Berg’s *Lyric Suite*: ‘a Kensington drawing room apology’ for what Berg really meant. Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1993), 69. After a performance probably mid-1935.

¹⁴¹ For more on this subject see Jenny Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music 1922-1936: Shaping a Nation’s Taste* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) and Meirion Hughes & Robert Stradling, ‘Radio to make us musical’, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (2nd edn., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 101-11.

PART II

INFLUENCE AND STYLISTIC ASSIMILATION

CHAPTER FIVE

ASPECTS OF STYLISTIC INFLUENCE

Real cribbing takes place when one composer thinks with the mind of another, even when there is no mechanical similarity of phrase. When, as often happens, this vicarious thinking does lead to similarity of phrase the offence is, I think, more venial. In that case one is so impressed by a certain passage in another composer that it becomes part of oneself.

Ralph Vaughan Williams¹

Introduction – Receptivity and Influence

This second part of the thesis will explore the consequences of the influx of Russian music into English concert halls, specifically those in London, for the period 1893-1929. At times the exposure of Russian music was, as has been described, quite concentrated with correspondingly intense reactions from press and public. All this, however, would be of little significance for English composers had they not also been interested and receptive to the ideas and styles of the new music from the Continent, a factor which only occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century.

During the nineteenth century England's industrial capacity was far in advance of that of countries in continental Europe. England's developed capitalist economic system and factors such as the singularly long reign of Queen Victoria (r.1837-1901) all contributed to the inherently conservative nature of English society and culture in the latter part of the century. These aspects were largely responsible for the fact that music in England developed on a far more commercial basis than was typical in the rest of Europe. As a consequence this did not encourage any great individualism of style and England did not witness a Romantic era until much later than its Continental counterparts. In its place remained an aesthetic, which was 'classical' in all but manner, in which composers approximately conformed to a common practice of style, form and genre. With the establishment of the Royal College of Music in 1883 English musicians were able to receive a systematic musical education; the College's aim was the production of a body of 'home grown' professional musicians. The staff of the RCM however, many of whom had studied and trained abroad, fostered the

¹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'What Have We Learnt From Elgar?', *Music & Letters*, 16/1, January 1935, 13-19.

common-practice idea of composition centring on the models of the mainstream canon of composers and their styles. Various issues, including morality, sustained this aesthetic. However, rather than perpetuating this vicious musical circle, it had the opposite effect; the College's student composers felt driven out of sheer necessity to look beyond the prescribed examples for inspiration that would allow a more personal style to emerge. Some took the example set by many Slavonic and Bohemian composers during the nineteenth century of establishing a national style.

The concept of the national style was in essence a German notion and was necessarily a self-conscious and inward-looking aesthetic. For all composers, irrespective of nationality, its application was ultimately limiting, especially so in England whose island culture necessitated an outward looking attitude to the philosophy of civilisation. The English always used other countries as a foil to help them define themselves; thus, as Constant Lambert observed, 'The particular type of self-conscious Englishry practised by the folk-song composers is in itself curiously un-English.'² But this was a necessary phase of maturation for English composers, who next looked for ways in which they could balance and reconcile these nationalist elements with contemporary trends. English culture has rarely been a creative one, in the strict sense of the word, as Peter Ackroyd has discerned, 'The power of Anglo Saxon culture springs in part from absorption and assimilation.'³ English culture necessarily learnt to seek inspiration from without and thus English artists became more susceptible to alien influences than their Continental counterparts and more willing 'to tolerate and even adapt to [their] own purposes any acceptable new elements.'⁴ In some cases this resulted in travel abroad to study with composers who otherwise would not have been approved of by the College – e.g. Vaughan Williams with Ravel and Britten's unfulfilled plan to study with Berg. Clearly there were musical influences at this time other than just the Russian composers. Puccini, Richard Strauss, and the French composers from Delibes to Ravel all provided musical stimulus for English composers' imaginations during

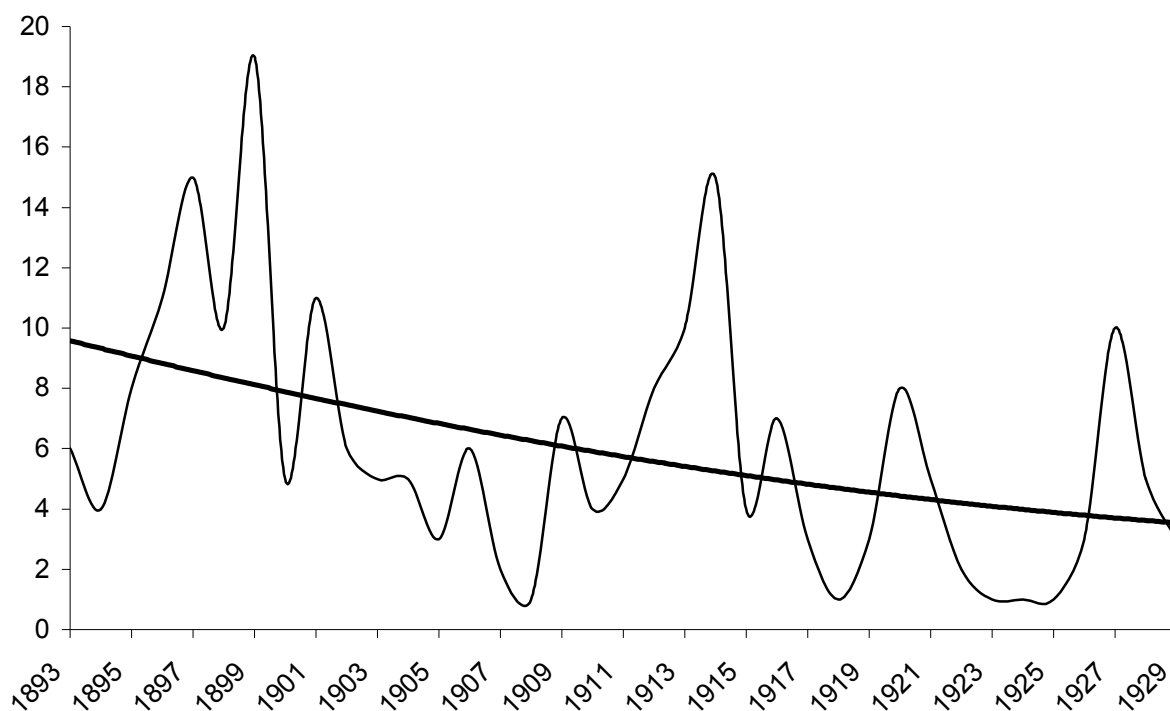
² Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1948), 124.

³ Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), xxi.

⁴ M. Wood, *In Search of England: Journeys into the English Past* (London: Viking, 1999), 100.

the period under consideration, but it is the assertion of this thesis that it was the Russians, in many ways and for many reasons, who exerted the stronger and more consistent influence. Before the discussion of how the Russian influence was absorbed and assimilated it will be fruitful to observe first the rate of the influx of Russian music into England for the period under consideration.

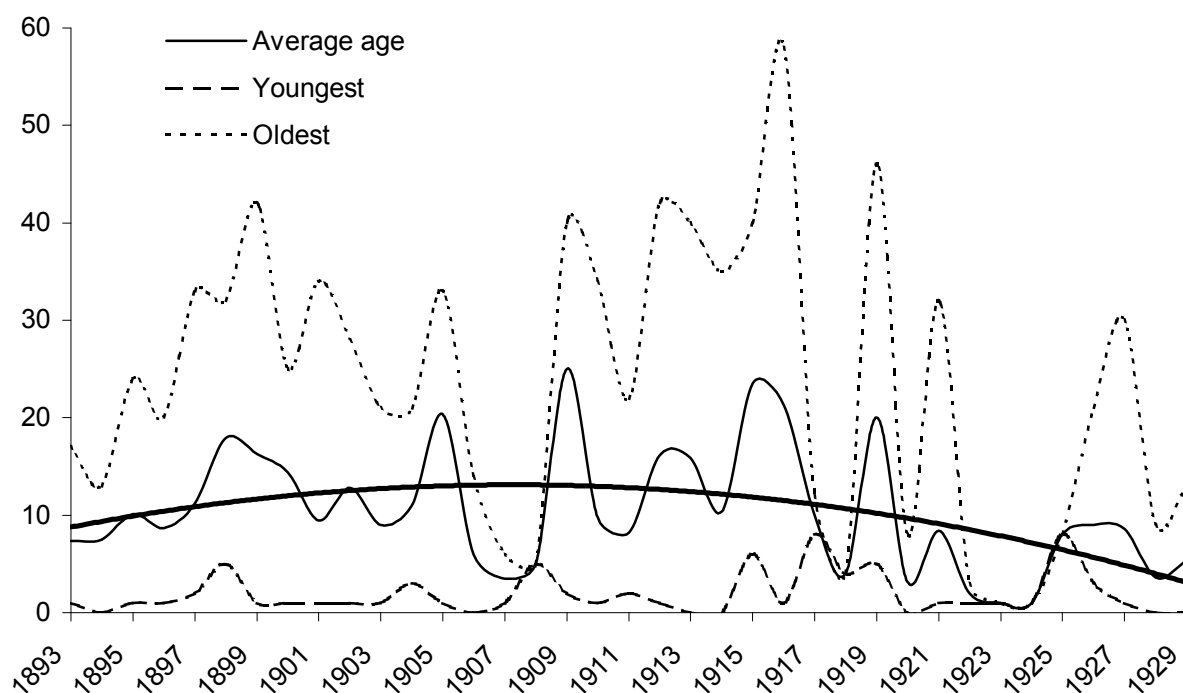
The following two charts display firstly, the volume of new Russian music being premiered in England represented as annual totals and, secondly, the age of this music (defined here as the time elapsed between the world and English premiere) represented by the youngest, oldest and average age for each year.



Annual totals of premieres of Russian music in England with trend line

This first chart displays four clear peaks in 1899, 1914, 1921 and 1927, each of which correspond with Wood's advocacy (to which there was such a markedly negative reaction by the *Musical Times*), the Russian Ballet's pre-1914 popularity, Scriabin and the return of the Russian Ballet, and the fashionable Stravinsky/Prokofiev boom in the late 1920s. If one disregards the smallest of the peaks – 1921 – the comparable gaps between the remaining

peaks – about 15 years – reveals a trend which repeated itself again in 1942-43 when Shostakovich became the fashionable composer of the moment in wartime England. These three peaks correspond with an almost immediate positive reaction from English composers as displayed especially in the music of Bantock, Bax, Holst and Walton, as shall be demonstrated in the later chapters of the thesis. The other English composers under consideration here – Stanford, Vaughan Williams and Bliss – also appear to have reacted correspondingly to some of the other peaks, but those of a less pronounced margin. The first group were clearly reacting very much in terms of fashion, whereas the second group, though also susceptible to the trends of the time, were responding in a more select manner.



Youngest, oldest and average age (in years) of works premiered for each year with trend line

This second chart shows that even though in each year there was something representative of new Russian music there was, more often than not, also a work receiving a somewhat belated English premiere. The combination of a large number of works and a breadth of styles meant that it was in this period that Russian music reached out to its broadest possible audience. The fact that composers as old as Stanford and as young as Herbert

Howells were absorbing Russian elements into their music at the same time, the period immediately prior to 1914, shows that this was no 'niche' trend which only appealed to a specific demographic. This period saw not only a large number of English premieres but also the widest disparity in 'ages', e.g. 1913 saw the premieres of *Le Sacre du printemps* and *Boris Godunov*, the ballet less than a year old, the opera just short of its fortieth anniversary. Also the general situation as regards what could be termed the Anglo-Russian cultural diplomacy meant that the audiences of the pre-1914 period were at their most receptive, or least prejudiced, in their attitude toward Russia and the music of its composers.

The music at the forefront of the three influx peaks of 1899, 1914 and 1927 also coincides with three specific archetypes of Russian music. The first was primarily about Russian music as represented by Tchaikovsky, Glazunov and Rachmaninov; the direct expressiveness of their music was plainly popular with the late Victorians, a generation known for their sentimentality. Also these composers worked in the symphonic concert-hall genres that were still expected of any serious composer. The second peak saw a shift toward the music of the nationalist and neo-nationalist Russian composers. The theatre-based genres as represented by Diaghilev's productions of opera and ballet – colourful and exotic, extreme and exciting, with a sense there were new experiences to be had – were clearly popular with the pleasure-seeking Edwardians. Scriabin's popularity with the post-1918 audience has already been discussed, as has the fashion for the post-war Russian Ballet, the successes of which were achieved in the teeth of a reaction to the recent memory of the First World War, in the need to escape the recent past either through spiritualism or hedonism. As a result the 1920s was largely a cynical and hard-nosed decade and clearly the music of Stravinsky and Prokofiev appealed to many because its objective or sardonic quality. In all cases the common thread here is about Russian music representing a refreshing alternative to current trends.

The remaining part of this chapter examines a handful of compositions by Stanford and Vaughan Williams who responded only to individual aspects of Russian music for a specific purpose or effect in a limited number of compositions; overall their personal style remained largely unchanged. Chapter Six examines Bantock and Bax, two composers who

learnt and absorbed aspects of Russian music at a moderate level, if in a somewhat ‘magpie’ fashion, adapting but not necessarily absorbing a wider number of aspects of orchestration and rhetorical style. Chapters Seven and Eight look at two pairs of composers whose styles were radically influenced by Russian music at a deeper, structural and a detailed level – Holst and Bridge, and Bliss and Walton. In a sense all these composers were reacting to Russian music as fashion, albeit to varying degrees. More interesting and more important, however, is what specifically they reacted to and how they applied it to their own compositions.

Stanford

The image of Stanford as a composer too enamoured of Brahms to admit any influences that lay beyond that composer is as inaccurate as it is unfair. True, Stanford did share a Hanslick-like preference for substance over superficial attractiveness or empty showmanship but he was probably more aware than anyone of his generation of the danger of adopting a too ‘Teutonic’, either Brahmsian or Wagnerian, style of composition. Many of his students, including Vaughan Williams and John Ireland, recalled how Stanford urged them to avoid a neo-Brahmsian manner, for which the older composer’s panacea was the study of modal counterpoint. In addition, to guard against any heaviness of style, Stanford suggested the study of Italian composers, especially Verdi, and in Vaughan Williams’ case he actually suggested the composer study in Italy for a period (as it turned out he went to Berlin to study with Max Bruch in the belief that the German city was the new musical capital of his age). That Stanford often encouraged his students to seek models outside the Austro-German canon shows, in one sense, how enlightened he was as a teacher. One of his favoured methods of teaching composition was to get his students to compose by imitation and then copy out the original as well. The pieces the students imitated were essentially the ‘classics’ but other works would doubtless have been permitted as long as they did not transgress Stanford’s concept of beauty – ugly music was bad music. Stanford obviously believed that beauty could be defined as an absolute. That his view was a narrow one cannot be denied. However, it did not restrict him from admiring certain Russian composers and regularly performing their orchestral compositions with the RCM student orchestra. Two Russians he obviously

admired highly were Glazunov and Rachmaninov; Glazunov's music was second only to Beethoven's as that most regularly conducted by Stanford at the RCM.

It has been commented on already by others that Stanford and Glazunov contemporaneously occupied similar positions in English and Russian music. Eugene Goossens, in his autobiography, relates how Stanford regularly referred to Glazunov's compositions in his composition classes.⁵ Its appeal to Stanford was, no doubt, its discipline and colour. In the wake of the decadence and excess of Debussy and Strauss, Glazunov was a kindred spirit whose music was a symbol of musical sanity in a world steadily losing touch with the aesthetic values Stanford held dear. Another purveyor, to some extent, of the moderate style that Stanford approved of was Rachmaninov. One of Stanford's first practical experiences with Rachmaninov's music appears to have been when he conducted a performance of the Second Concerto at the RCM with Joan Powell and the student orchestra in December 1908. Impressed by the work, Stanford then gave the first English performance of Rachmaninov's tone poem *The Isle of the Dead* in February 1910, again with the RCM student orchestra, and was then instrumental in inviting Rachmaninov to attend the 1910 Leeds Festival as soloist in the same concerto and conductor of his new Second Symphony. The influence of the two works performed at Leeds can be traced in the two major compositions Stanford composed after the Festival, his Seventh Symphony and Second Piano Concerto.

In Stanford's Seventh Symphony (1911) a number of styles are to be found, especially in the second movement. It begins with a genial Brahmsian theme that throughout the movement is subject to variations of style and substance, twice evolving into a waltz-like idiom characteristic of Tchaikovsky and Glazunov.

The image shows a musical score for the second movement of Stanford's Seventh Symphony. It is in 6/8 time and features three staves: strings (Strs.), clarinet in B-flat (Cl. fl. (8va)), and bassoon (Bsn. pizz. db.). The music is characterized by a waltz-like idiom with a mix of Brahmsian and Tchaikovsky/Glazunov influences. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 1a – Stanford Seventh Symphony, 2nd mvt., 7 bars after fig.6

⁵ Eugene Goossens, *Overture and Beginners* (London: Methuen, 1951), 80.

The image shows a musical score for strings (Strs.) from the Stanford Seventh Symphony, 2nd movement, 3 bars after figure 9. The score is written for a string ensemble in 3/8 time, featuring complex rhythmic patterns and cross-movement thematic relationships. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings, illustrating the intricate cross-movement thematic relationships mentioned in the text.

Ex. 1b – Stanford Seventh Symphony, 2nd mvt., 3 bars after fig.9

The influence of Rachmaninov is also apparent in this symphony though not so much in style as in format; Stanford has quite plainly studied the intricate cross-movement thematic relationships that help to bind Rachmaninov's Second Symphony together. It appears though, like many critics at the time, the overindulgent length of the Russian composer's symphony did not impress Stanford – one wonders if he heard Sibelius conduct his compact Third Symphony at a Philharmonic Society concert in London on 27 February 1908. In the finale Stanford subtly reprises material from the previous movements and though he does not use a cyclic motto theme as Rachmaninov does in his symphony, Stanford perhaps avoiding this plan lest he was accused of imitating Elgar's First Symphony. This musical retrospective gives the impression that he had studied Rachmaninov's score closely.

Stanford's Second Piano Concerto (1911) shows Rachmaninov's influence more clearly, no doubt inspired by the experience at the 1910 Leeds Festival. In his previous concertos Stanford's favoured model was Mendelssohn, though one can detect a little of Tchaikovsky in the Irish composer's Concert Variations for piano and orchestra 'Down Among the Dead Men' Op.71 (1898). Although overall the main stylistic influence in Stanford's Second Concerto is that of Brahms' Second Concerto, with the occasional trace of the same composer's First Concerto and Saint-Saëns Fifth Concerto (1895), two further aspects reveal that Rachmaninov's work had made an impression on Stanford. The first comes across plainly in the concerto's opening pages where Stanford's tonality, piano figuration, broad epic style of melody, its tessitura and distinctive dark orchestral timbres closely match those of Rachmaninov.

Cl., vln., vln.
Vcl., db., pizz.

etc.

Ex.2a – Rachmaninov, Second Piano Concerto, fig.1

Hns.
Vcl., db., pizz.

Ex.2b – Stanford, Second Piano Concerto, bar 5

(Note also how the second phrase of Stanford's subject also bears a striking resemblance to the parallel passage in Sibelius' Violin Concerto, which was given its English premiere in London in 1907). Stanford's second subject, with its arioso melody and modestly simple accompaniment surely owes much to similar instances in Rachmaninov's Op.23 Preludes as well as the Concerto.



Ex.3 – Stanford, Second Piano Concerto, 2 bars after fig.3 (piano only)

The influence of Rachmaninov is also detectable in the way the soloist and orchestra interact. But another more thoroughgoing influence is taken from Rachmaninov's Second Symphony. In his symphony Rachmaninov makes use of a motto theme, which also doubles as the 'head' of the first subject. This motto then appears at various places throughout the symphony's first movement, either at structural junctures or sometimes precipitating them, and also makes appearances in the remaining movements. Stanford does likewise in his concerto. The stentorian first four notes of his first subject are detached and used as his motto theme either at the beginning of sections or at mid-way points. The motto also appears mid-way through the slow movement and at significant points of structural articulation in the finale.

Had Stanford not performed the concerto with its composer he might not have been quite so struck by it; Rachmaninov's reputation as a composer was by no means widespread at this point. Stanford plainly knew the work from conducting it in 1908, so it appears it was Rachmaninov's performance of the piece himself that inspired him rather than perhaps the concerto alone. As described above Stanford was always keen to find works from outside the

Austro-German lineage that met his strict criteria of beauty to inspire fresh creative instincts and Rachmaninov, as both pianist and composer, clearly provided that stimulus.

In his other orchestral works of the Edwardian period Stanford's penchant for the prominent use of cor anglais and harp, for example in his Sixth Symphony, may have been inspired by Franck, d'Indy or Tchaikovsky. These instruments were not the preserve of his favoured Brahms and Schubert, and were seldom used in a symphonic context by Dvořák. Though admittedly they are to be found in Liszt, it is more likely Stanford's experience of the combination was from Russian symphonic poems, for example in *Romeo & Juliet* and *Francesca da Rimini*, the latter which Stanford heard conducted by the composer at the Cambridge Jubilee in 1893.

Vaughan Williams

Like many composers of his generation Vaughan Williams found it difficult to escape the strong influence of Wagner. Of course the great catalyst that enabled Vaughan Williams's individuation of style was his 'discovery' of folk music in 1902. But beyond folk-song rhapsodies and the like, the issue for him was how to utilise this rich store of material in a way that would expand, rather than restrict, his musical outlook. With the exception of cases such as his Second and Fourth Symphonies Tchaikovsky was certainly a Russian composer who had managed to use folk material in a convincing and unobtrusive fashion in his compositions. Folk material needed to be a point of departure rather than an end in itself, which was the limitation of the folksong rhapsody or suite. The first work in which Vaughan Williams shows a debt to Russian models is his *A Sea Symphony*.

Completed in 1909 Vaughan Williams's first large-scale work reveals an interesting mix of influences, most obviously Parry, Elgar and Wagner. Other more contemporary, if rather eclectic, influences appear in isolated passages of the score where Vaughan Williams was obviously 'cribbing' from other composers for a specific effect. Shades of Richard Strauss linger over the score, not least in the inclusion of that most un-Vaughan Williamsian of instruments, the piccolo clarinet of *Till Eulenspiegel* (also used in the contemporaneous *First Norfolk Rhapsody*), the writing for the lower brass and the string writing at the opening

of the Scherzo (*Don Juan* – though no heroic use of the horns). A flurry of whole-tone scales in the Scherzo (after fig.U) reveals that Vaughan Williams was familiar with the idiom from Ravel, or more specifically from Debussy's musical seascape *La Mer*. In the finale (11 bars after fig.B) Vaughan Williams sets the words 'Down from the gardens of Asia descending, Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,' to music clearly reminiscent of the music Borodin composed to evoke the procession of two desert caravans in his musical picture *In Central Asia*. However, since the symphony was begun in 1903, it is perhaps no surprise to find Tchaikovsky's music exerting an influence of the work. Like the *Pathétique*, Vaughan Williams' symphony concludes with a slow finale, still a novel concept in the early twentieth century, which ends quietly although the emotional import of each movement is quite different. However, another Tchaikovsky symphony, the Fourth, played a more significant role as a structural model for *A Sea Symphony*.

Despite the use of text throughout this work it is clear that Vaughan Williams wanted it to be a symphonic piece and not merely an extended cantata. The musical form is given primacy over the textual form in governing the symphony's structure; this is clear in the uneven manner in which Vaughan Williams distributes Whitman's text in the first movement. The symphonic model was Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony which clearly also gave him other ideas for the work. Both works use folksong (Vaughan Williams in the first and third movements, Tchaikovsky in his Finale) and have a sonata-form first movement with three main subject groups/tonal areas. Each symphony begins with an important fanfare motif, which exploits a dramatic harmonic sidestep. Both composers regarded their respective fanfares as a key element to their symphony. In both cases the fanfare is used to articulate/punctuate the first movement's structure and is recalled in the last movement. Tchaikovsky told his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, that the fanfare in his Fourth Symphony represented Fate, and in Vaughan Williams' case it is possible to decode a similar symbolic association for his opening fanfare. One wonders whether Vaughan Williams knew of Tchaikovsky's programme for his symphony's first movement, where the idea of Fate and the metaphor of the sea as life are mentioned: 'Thus all life is an unbroken alternation of hard

reality with swiftly passing dreams and visions of happiness...No haven exists...Drift upon that sea until it engulfs and submerges you in its depths.’⁶

In his Finale Vaughan Williams, like Tchaikovsky, makes a reference back to the two main ideas of the first movement, the fanfare idea and the melody sung by the choir in bars 8-9, but in a way which is not as explicit or dramatic as with Tchaikovsky. The two elements of the fanfare, its harmonic progression and the gesture played by the brass, are separated for their finale reprise. The progression appears first in the passage beginning at 6 bars before fig.E where the chords of F minor and A major are juxtaposed. Fanfares are then heard in the brass 4 bars after fig.H (though hints are made twenty bars earlier). Though there is a separation of around 50 bars both instances occur with text that has a common denominator with the theme, not of Tchaikovskian fate, but of human destiny: ‘Wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?’ (for the progression) – ‘Finally shall come the poet worthy that name, the true son of God shall come’ (for the fanfare gesture). In Tchaikovsky’s symphony the fanfare theme returns to dramatically interrupt the proceedings after which follows the coda. In Vaughan Williams’s case the passage leads to the climax at the end of the first part of the Finale (up to the ninth bar of fig.K), which is then followed by an orchestral passage of some 28 bars based upon the other theme to be recalled from the first movement. This orchestral passage ‘interrupts’ in a textural sense (the chorus and soloists are absent) and also marks a change in the nature of the poetical text set. The dramatic potential of a cyclic device, further inspired by the example of the Russians, was also to serve Vaughan Williams in his next large-scale orchestral work, his *A London Symphony*.

During the composition of *A Sea Symphony* Vaughan Williams described how he was dissatisfied with his grasp of orchestral technique and form. Edwin Evans suggested for further guidance he consult Vincent d’Indy. However, on the suggestion of another friend, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, in January 1908 Vaughan Williams went to Ravel for three months under whose tutelage he chiefly studied orchestration. Ravel taught mainly by example drawing from Russian scores: Vaughan Williams mentions specifically Rimsky-

⁶ Letter from Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck quote in David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1992), ii. 165. The first edition of Tchaikovsky’s correspondence had appeared in 1902.

Korsakov's *Antar* and Borodin's *Prince Igor*.⁷ Though the majority of *A Sea Symphony* had been composed by this time and some of these orchestral aspects may have passed into *A Sea Symphony*, one can more fruitfully observe them in a number of other works composed at this time. 'Bredon Hill', the fifth song from the song-cycle *On Wenlock Edge* (1908-09) – one of the first works to be composed after his studies with Ravel – clearly shows Vaughan Williams was familiar with the Coronation Scene from *Boris Godunov*, an influence which becomes even more apparent in the 1923 version with orchestral accompaniment.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Bredon Hill' from the song-cycle *On Wenlock Edge* by Vaughan Williams. The score is in 4/4 time and features a vocal line with lyrics 'Oh, noi - sy bells, be dumb; I hear you' and an orchestral accompaniment. The orchestration includes woodwinds (WW, glock.), strings (Tpts, hrs., Tms., lower str. + gong), and percussion. The score is divided into four measures, with the vocal line and orchestral accompaniment clearly visible.

Ex.4 – Vaughan Williams, *On Wenlock Edge*, 'Bredon Hill'

Boris Godunov had received its first performance in the West in Paris on 19 May 1908.⁸ Debussy, Ravel and many other French composers had for many years been fascinated by the operas of Glinka and The Five, and it is clear that while he was with Ravel, Vaughan Williams must have studied a number of these works. The overture for the incidental music he wrote for a production of Aristophanes' play *The Wasps* (1909) reveals Vaughan Williams was familiar with the overture to *Ruslan & Ludmila* by Glinka. Both have a broad, song-like second theme scored for strings which initially appears in the tenor register and both make use of the whole-tone scale for colouristic rather than harmonic purposes which, *pace* Ravel, Debussy *et al*, is a quintessential feature of the magical/fairytale Russian opera, of which *Ruslan* is the progenitor.

⁷ Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (2nd edn., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 90.

⁸ Produced by Diaghilev. The success of *Boris* in 1908 encouraged him to bring ballet to Paris the following year, which, in all but name, was the beginning of the *Ballets russes*.

The influence of another Russian opera – Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera *Sadko* (1894-96, vocal score published in 1908) – is detectable in Vaughan Williams’ first opera, *Hugh the Drover* (1910-14). In his correspondence with his librettist, Harold Child, Vaughan Williams mentioned Richard Strauss’ opera *Feuersnot* (1900-01).⁹ In the fact that Strauss uses Bavarian folksong and the central character, Kunrad, rejects his vocation in favour of nature, there are slight parallels.¹⁰ Similarly *Sadko* quotes folksong, but its opening market scene clearly inspired the scene at the fair with which *Hugh* opens. Besides the individual market traders Vaughan Williams makes extensive use of the chorus, having four separate groups in addition to the soloists at one point. Large crowd scenes are a hallmark of nineteenth-century Russian national operas. *Boris Godunov*, *Khovanshchina* and *Prince Igor* all have their extended and immensely effective choral crowd scenes. *Sadko* is no exception wherein various groups representing the different traders are present. The market activity is interrupted by the arrival of Nezhata, a *guslar*, from whom the crowd request an old ballad.¹¹ Similarly, in *Hugh the Drover*, the bustle of the crowd stops with the arrival of Mike the ballad seller, who is called upon to sing ‘one of the old songs’. In both cases the dramatic function of the song unites the hitherto heterogeneous groups of traders on stage, each with their own musical material, into a single mass of people united by a common music.

In composing *Hugh the Drover* Vaughan Williams put into practice that which he expressed in his 1912 article ‘Who Wants the English Composer?’ in which he criticised his colleagues for not attempting to forge their own (national) style, those who were all too happy to imitate Brahms, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, etc.

What the artist should be concerned with is the raw material. Have not we all about us forms of musical expression which we can take and purify and raise to the level of great art?...the lilt of the chorus at a music-hall joining in a popular song, the children dancing to a barrel organ, the rousing fervour of a Salvation Army hymn, St. Paul’s and a great choir singing in one of its festivals, the Welshmen striking up one of their

⁹ See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 413. Thomas Beecham conducted the English premiere of *Feuersnot* in London on 9 July 1910.

¹⁰ In *Hugh the Drover*, the character Mary rejects a domestic, village life for one of roving on the open road with Hugh.

¹¹ The *guslar* was the Russian folk musician who played the *gusli*, an old Russian instrument of the zither family.

own hymns whenever they win a goal at the international football match, the cries of the street pedlars, the factory girls singing their sentimental songs?¹²

Composed alongside the opera, *A London Symphony* fulfils this aesthetic perhaps more than any of his other compositions and possibly for that reason was his own favourite piece; it is certainly among his best works.

A London Symphony was originally conceived in 1911 as a tone-poem about London. However, George Butterworth urged Vaughan Williams to compose a symphony and so the work was re-cast in that genre, thus it retains some of the narrative elements that were part of the composer's original plan. It is not difficult to read the piece as a 'symphony of hours', with time (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and location (the Thames, Bloomsbury, The Strand, Hampstead, etc) depicted throughout the symphony, as hinted at by the composer. Vaughan Williams's desire to assimilate the urban soundtrack into music, raise the commonplace to the status of art, brings to mind the music of Mahler and Ives, but in his symphony Vaughan Williams created something that also has striking parallels with Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. Though Stravinsky's second ballet for Diaghilev was not published until 1912 and would not be heard in London until February 1913, it is possible Vaughan Williams may have seen a rehearsal copy of the score obtained by any one of his friends who had direct links with Diaghilev: Edwin Evans, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi or Maurice Ravel. Even if Vaughan Williams did not see the music, which we know he did not like when he eventually heard it (he regretted Stravinsky abandoning his *Firebird* style), this same group of friends could alternatively have conveyed the work's essence to him after its 1911 premiere. The barrel organ, street pedlars, factory girls and popular/urban music genres appear in both *Petrushka* and *A London Symphony*, and both works have a dark and tragic import.

Whereas Vaughan Williams may have absorbed some of the more superficial aspects of Stravinsky's orchestration, the greatest significance of the ballet score – the opening scene's polymetrics, the irregular and independent counterpointing of pithy melodic cells and general montage approach to form – plainly did not appeal to Vaughan Williams. However,

¹² Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Who Wants the English Composer?', *The R.C.M. Magazine*, 9/1, January 1912, 11-15.

Stravinsky's orchestral technique does appear to have left its mark most noticeably in Vaughan Williams' scherzo movement. The opening creates a similar impressionistic haze, representing the aural backdrop of London's nightlife, as *Petrushka's* opening represents the fairground murmur.

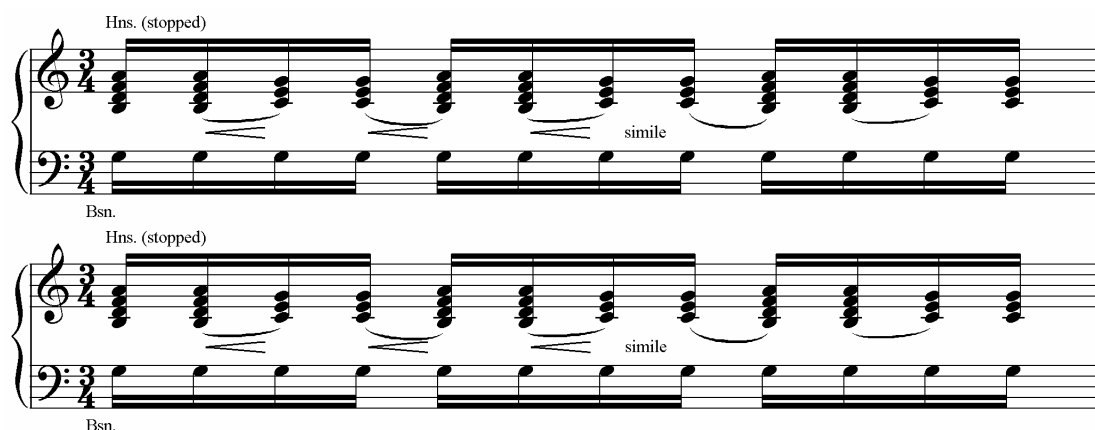


Ex.5a – Stravinsky *Petrushka*, opening

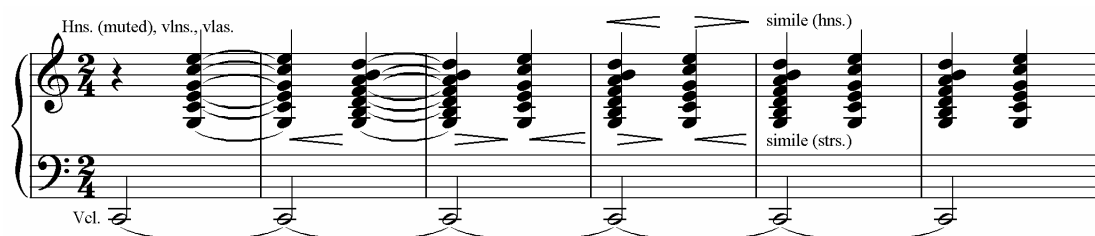


Ex.5b Vaughan Williams, *A London Symphony* Scherzo, opening

Later in the same movement's Trio section Vaughan Williams evokes the sound of the concertina or harmonica by means similar to that which Stravinsky had used in his ballet to depict the sound of the Russian *bayan*.



Ex.6a – Stravinsky *Petrushka* (1911), bar after fig.61



Ex.6b – Vaughan Williams, *A London Symphony*, 6 bars before fig.N

The last movement of the symphony concludes with an Epilogue, where the symphony's opening motif is brought back. The process of recalling material from the first movement differs from that used in *A Sea Symphony* in that here the section, the Epilogue, stands outside of the main structure of the last movement. The Epilogue's structural function in one sense simply unifies the symphony, but dramatically and rhetorically the Epilogue is much more than just the fulfilment of the cyclic process. Whereas in the coda to Elgar's First Symphony, for example, the reprise of the symphony's opening theme comes almost as a matter of inevitability (which is perhaps what makes it so thrilling), Vaughan Williams creates something psychologically darker and more complex. The section from fig.Q to the end recalls the three opening gestures of the symphony (the four-note motif, the Westminster chimes and the Allegro theme) but stated in reverse; the Epilogue is essentially a discourse on the first of these. The Introduction and Epilogue to the symphony create a frame to the main body of the work, emphasised by their symmetrical construction.

The idea to use a framing device was no doubt an idea left over from the original plan to write a symphonic poem. Such processes are common in programme music; a good basic example can be observed in Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826) where the framing 'magic' chords are the musical equivalent to 'Once upon a time...' effectively applying musical quotation marks around the story as told in the main body of the work. Berlioz and Liszt created similar frames for some of their programmatic works but the concept of the *idée fixe* or technique of thematic metamorphosis necessarily required the frame and its constituent themes to be part of the symphonic (i.e. sonata) argument. Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov (both of whom admired the music of Berlioz and Liszt) wrote pieces that used non-symphonic frames, i.e. narrative themes which stand outside of the dialectic procedure. The fanfare of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony frames the whole work (only the coda of the finale stands outside of it) and although it appears throughout the first movement at points of structural articulation the symphonic process does not rely on its presence; its role has a more rhetorical function. Similarly, the solo violin in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, representing the storyteller, introduces each movement and frames the whole piece but is not part of the formal procedure. Russian composers exploited this

instrument-specific narrative or framing technique but, as might be expected, put more emphasis on the instrumentation or orchestration, and frequently made the role of the instrument/s that of a dispassionate observer rather than an active player.

In *A London Symphony* the closing frame is larger and more sophisticated than most Russian examples and relies primarily on the composer's imagination for orchestration, harmonic colour and mood; the Epilogue is primarily textural – *sotto voce* string and woodwind figures over three-note motivic fragments. This reliance primarily on colour rather than on any formal process broadly points to the Russian models mentioned, and in the light of his tuition with Ravel and his own experience in composing *Hugh the Drover*, it perhaps comes as no surprise to find further examples of such colouristic frames in Rimsky-Korsakov's operas, all of which had appeared in print by 1908. Simple examples can be observed in *The Legend of Tsar Sultan* (1899-1900), where a simple trumpet fanfare, subject to various transformations, indicates the fairytale frame for each act, and in *The Golden Cockerel* (1906-7) where a similar function is fulfilled by the Astrologer's theme. Whereas these examples match or complement the mood of the rest of the pieces they frame Vaughan Williams's Epilogue creates a very different atmosphere from that of the rest of the symphony (excepting perhaps the end of the Scherzo) despite its use of pre-existent material; it is the psychological mirror of the opening frame. Vaughan Williams hinted at what its narrative function was in a reference to H. G. Wells' novel *Tono-Bungay*.¹³ Musically, the Epilogue achieves its effect almost wholly by orchestration: new sonorities and textures create a very evocative conclusion to the symphony. Vaughan Williams's example clearly became immensely influential; Holst and Bax over the coming year would similarly compose immensely effective epilogues for their symphonic works, which owe a dual debt to Vaughan Williams and the Russians.

¹³ Written in 1909 *Tono-Bungay* was described by Wells as 'a social panorama in the vein of Balzac,' and is essentially a picture of Britain in dissolution, 'the broad slow decay of the great social organism of England.' The passage that Vaughan Williams referred to is taken from the chapter 'Night and the Open Sea' – 'Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass – pass. The river passes – London passes, England passes...'

CHAPTER SIX

DEDICATED FOLLOWERS OF FASHION

We do not create anything. Everything already exists. We only discover.
Nikolai Medtner¹

Bantock and Bax were both students at the Royal Academy of Music where they studied composition with Frederick Corder. The atmosphere at the Royal Academy was markedly different from that of the Royal College of Music. As Arnold Bax recalled he believed the Royal College to be a ‘more aristocratic and pompous place than our old Academy.’² Part of this was due to the Academy’s staff, specifically Frederick Corder, a committed Wagnerite, and Alexander Mackenzie who was interested in Liszt and later, Tchaikovsky. As Bax recalled, ‘in their own day both Mackenzie and Corder were enthusiastic progressives...But neither were able to appreciate much music written later than say the death of Tchaikovsky.’³ Tchaikovsky’s music appears to have had a special dispensation in the minds of Mackenzie and Corder; according to Bax, he was the only non-German composer (Liszt was obviously German in Bax’s mind) who was mentioned at the Academy and thus with whom they had any familiarity.

With more emphasis on Wagner, Liszt and Tchaikovsky than would have been the case at the Royal College of Music the result was that these two Royal Academy pupils tended to compose music of more sensuality and colour than their Royal College counterparts. As many writers have pointed out, however, Corder’s lack of emphasis on form in his teaching sometimes led his students to compose structurally weak or overlong pieces – one of Stanford’s great qualities as a teacher at the RCM was to encourage conciseness of expression. Whereas Parry’s views on music at the Royal College encouraged the concept of an English ‘school’ of composition – he once advised Vaughan Williams to compose music ‘that befits an Englishman and a Democrat,’ – Corder’s outlook at the Academy did not

¹ Nikolai Medtner quoted in Edna Iles, ‘Medtner, friend and master’, *Recorded Sound: Journal of the British Institute of Recorded Sound*, April-July, 1978.

² Arnold Bax (ed. Lewis Foreman), *Farewell, My Youth, and other writings* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 19.

³ Bax, *op. cit.*, 15.

actively promote a nationally self-conscious approach. This less ‘hands-on’ approach no doubt suited the mildly hedonist, romantic personalities of Bantock and Bax, who led lives rich in experience and sensitive to the trends of the day. Bantock and Bax readily sought out new music and, in view of the aesthetic of their musical education and their own personalities, they were consequentially less inhibited about what music their styles would benefit from studying and more receptive to the musical fashions of the time whilst their individual compositional styles were forming. Both composers eschewed the abstract in music and revelled in the representational and programmatic possibilities that music offered as a medium. As Bax stated defiantly: ‘My music is the expression of emotional states. I have no interest whatever in sound for its own sake.’⁴ For two composers such as Bantock and Bax the advent of Russian music in England – more colourful and more extreme in its emotional range than anything previously heard – surely came as a great fresh breeze of inspiration as it showed them how they could develop their own musical personalities and, in Bax’s case, develop a highly original style.

Bantock and the Russian Influence

Bantock began his studies at the Royal Academy on 28 September 1889. It appears that Bantock attended both of Tchaikovsky’s visits to the London Philharmonic Society in 1888 and 1889. After one of the concerts Bantock was so struck by the music that he spent the rest of the evening trawling through the hotels of London looking for the composer.⁵

Tchaikovsky, we are told, received him very cordially and told him that if he wished to be a composer he would have to be prepared to work ‘very hard’.

On 1 September 1894 Bantock undertook a 431-day tour of the USA and Australia with George Edwardes ‘Gaiety Company’ conducting musical theatre pieces such as *A Gaiety Girl*, *In Town*, *The Shop Girl* and *Gentleman Joe*. When he returned to England on 5 December 1895 Bantock then almost immediately engaged to conduct Stanford’s *Shamus O’Brien* on a one year provincial tour of England. Yet despite a two-year absence from

⁴ Quoted in C. Scott Sutherland, *Arnold Bax* (London: Dent, 1973), 12.

⁵ Myrrha Bantock, *Granville Bantock: A Personal Portrait* (London: Dent, 1972), 30-31. Tchaikovsky stayed at the Dieudonné on both trips, situated just off St James’s Street on Ryder Street.

London it appears Bantock's passion for Tchaikovsky's music was still with him when he took up his next appointment. From 1897 to 1900 Granville Bantock was musical director of the Tower Gardens Orchestra, New Brighton – a popular holiday destination just across the Mersey from Liverpool. Liverpool was one of the most active musical cities in England after London at this time. At Tower Gardens Bantock took what was in essence a light dance entertainment band and transformed its repertoire, thus making New Brighton a centre for new music, both English and Continental. Season by season he gradually introduced more 'serious' works to the repertoire, which allowed him to indulge his taste for Tchaikovsky. The *Pathétique* was given its New Brighton premiere by Bantock on 17 June 1898. Like Henry Wood in London, Bantock gave several all-Tchaikovsky programmes, the first of which appears to have taken place on 11 September 1898. The Fourth Symphony was given in May 1899, *Francesca da Rimini* (with the *Pathétique*) on 6 August 1899, and many further concerts until the last on 26 August 1900 where he conducted the fantasy overture *Hamlet*, the festival overture *1812* and the First Piano Concerto, with Josef Holbrooke as soloist. Another Russian favourite of his was Rubinstein's seven-movement Second Symphony, 'Ocean'.

In the light of this first-hand knowledge of Tchaikovsky's music it can be no surprise to find the very tangible influence of it in Bantock's own compositions. This is apparent in the six tone poems Bantock composed from 1899 to 1902, especially the first three: *Thalaba the Destroyer*, *Dante & Beatrice* and *Fifine at the Fair*. The subjects Bantock chose to set as tone poems have little precedent, *pace* Liszt, excepting the example of the Russians, specifically Tchaikovsky. Neither Bantock nor Tchaikovsky took up the harmonic challenge set down in *Tristan*, preferring to enrich their musical palette in other ways. Bantock clearly assimilated much from Tchaikovsky in terms of his melodic style and sense of rhetoric and gesture. Bantock rarely seems to have followed Tchaikovsky's large-scale structural processes, but rather learnt from how his music often creates its effect from the manipulation of medium-range events, for example, how the contrast between two paragraphs or sections of music throws an aspect into relief. Bantock frequently borrows a certain type of textural or

sequential device to create what is in essence a Tchaikovskian gesture, even though the actual material itself may be quite un-Tchaikovskian.

Thalaba the Destroyer, after the poem by Robert Southey, was composed in the first half of 1899, the full score completed on 17 July.⁶ Originally described as a ‘Fantasie for orchestra’ it bears resemblance in places to Tchaikovsky’s fantasy overture, *Romeo & Juliet*. Later Bantock changed the sub-title to the more straightforward ‘orchestral poem’, perhaps because he felt it too closely identified the piece with Tchaikovsky’s overture. Indeed, the broad formal archetype of the story has much in common with those used by Tchaikovsky in his symphonic poems.

The opening chords are underscored by a descending motif on pizzicato strings which outline an augmented 2nd – the interval which would become the somewhat clichéd signifier for all things oriental in music and used by many Russian composers.

Ex. 7a – Tchaikovsky, *Marche Slave*, opening

Ex. 7b – Bantock, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, opening

The main theme of the opening section has a definite Tchaikovskian cast to it and the rather uninvolved counterpoint on horn, and later oboe, seems to strengthen this.

⁶ Robert Southey (1774-1843) a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge was one of the so-called ‘Lake poets’. His narrative Oriental verse romance *Thalaba* was published in 1801.

Ex. 8 – Bantock, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, bar 25

The opening brass chords are treated as a recurring motif that appear at significant points of structural articulation, which, as a rhetorical device of programmatic significance in Bantock's piece, is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's use of the fanfare motif to articulate the main points of the structure in the first movement of his Fourth Symphony.

The next section (bars 57 to 184) seems even more to be vintage Tchaikovsky in its rhetoric. The build-up using running semiquavers on strings which pass into the main part of this section, and the generally agitated use of rhythm, both syncopated and off-beat, and juxtaposition of diminished seventh chords can link this piece to a number of compositions by Tchaikovsky – *Romeo & Juliet* and his First and Sixth Symphonies.

Ex.9a – Tchaikovsky, First Symphony, last movement, fig.B

Ex.9b – Tchaikovsky, Sixth Symphony, first movement, fig.H

Ex.9c – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 91

Note the syncopated bass Bantock has in common with Tchaikovsky’s First Symphony, and the running semiquavers and general contour of the Sixth Symphony. Bantock, like Tchaikovsky in the *Pathétique*, uses this energetic passage, placed after a sombre introduction in both cases, to generate a significant amount of energy to propel the music through this first main section. The more restrained section that follows (bar 185 to c.210) is worked into a climax where one is reminded of a passage in the middle of the development of the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony.

Ex.10a – Tchaikovsky, 4th Sym, 1st mvt., fig.P

Ex.10b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 238

Following this first climax the mood calms and Bantock leads into a passage that bears some resemblance to a passage in *Romeo & Juliet*, which likewise has followed a climactic passage of great energy (the Sword Fight).

Ex.11a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 196

Ex.11b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 276

Both passages achieve a sense of calm by similar method, in the use of gently oscillating chords and the shift to a primarily string-based texture.

The mood of calm, however, does not prevail for long before a recapitulation of the agitated material (bar 290ff). This agitated music subsides into a somewhat disquieting passage where tam-tam and flutes are deployed in a manner similar to a passage in *Francesca da Rimini*, which likewise occurs after a stretch of loud and dramatic music.

Ex.12a – Tchaikovsky, *Francesca da Rimini*, p.63 (Eulenburg score)

Ex.12b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 405

Following this, Bantock then rebuilds the tension in a manner that is reminiscent of many Tchaikovskian passages, especially that of the Act I finale of *Sleeping Beauty* where a slow, chromatically rising bass and shifting diminished 7th harmonies underpin a repeated melodic cell.

Ex. 13a – Tchaikovsky, *Sleeping Beauty*, Act I finale, bar 79

Ex. 13b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 448

In both cases the harmonic tension is not released in the conventional manner the listener expects (i.e. by a perfect cadence), but rather in a way that short circuits the build up of energy into a rather subdued closing section. Bantock's closing section, slow string counterpoint over a timpani pedal, has parallels with the beginning of the coda of *Romeo & Juliet*.

Ex. 14a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 485.

Ex. 14b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 516

After a brief reprise the section representing Thalaba's reassertion to power is obviously indebted to the Scherzo of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony in its melody and rapidly alternating instrumentation.

Ex. 15a – Tchaikovsky, Fourth Symphony, 3rd movement, 2 bars after fig.H

Ex. 15b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 585

This is followed by an indulgently lyrical section where the melodic style and use of pedal and diminished sevenths is again very Tchaikovskian, here reminiscent of the waltz in Act III of *Swan Lake*.

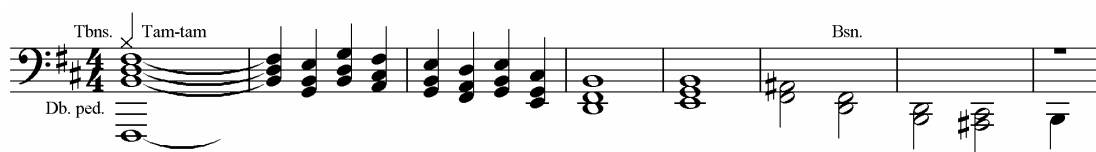
Ex. 16a – Tchaikovsky, *Swan Lake*, Act 3 no.17

Ex. 16b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 685

The lyrical section does not last long before, after a rapidly prepared climax, Thalaba's death is announced with Tchaikovskian drama, with the stroke of the tam-tam. The short, dirge-like passage that follows on trombones is surely homage to the same rhetorical device that Tchaikovsky uses to lead to the second subject recapitulation in the finale of the *Pathétique*, which likewise includes a stroke on the tam-tam after its climax.



Ex. 17a – Tchaikovsky, Sixth Symphony, last movement, fig.L



Ex. 17b – Bantock, *Thalaba*, bar 721

The Oriental drama of *Thalaba* is a subject that is readily illustrated by a Tchaikovskian sense of orchestral drama. Equally, Bantock's next tone poem, *Dante & Beatrice*, would draw inspiration from Tchaikovsky's own Dante-inspired orchestral work, *Francesca da Rimini*.

Bantock's second orchestral poem was originally conceived in the summer of 1901 under the title *Dante*. After performances at New Brighton and in Birmingham (at one of the Halford Concerts) Bantock revised the score, altering the title to *Dante and Beatrice*. The revision was completed on 31 July 1910 and premiered the following summer (alongside Elgar's Second Symphony) with the subtitle 'A Psychological Study' although this appears neither in the manuscript nor the printed score. The original version does not appear to have survived though from contemporary reports it seems that the revision did little more than to link the six previously separate sections (Dante, Strife of Guelphs and Ghibellines, Beatrice, Dante's Vision of Hell, Purgatory & Heaven, Dante's Exile, Death) into a continuous whole.

Again Bantock seems to have been greatly influenced by Tchaikovsky's orchestral fantasy *Romeo & Juliet*. After a brief statement of the main theme, Bantock gives a chorale-like theme over pizzicato strings, a texture comparable with that near the beginning of *Romeo & Juliet*.

WW col 8va
Pizz.strs. col 8v

Ex. 18a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 41

Pizz. vlins. 3
Tbns. tb
Vla., vcl.

Ex. 18b – Bantock, *Dante & Beatrice*, bar 12

Bantock then, like Tchaikovsky, quickens the tempo to lead into the next section with a stabbing idea in the brass depicting the ‘Strife of Guelphs and Ghibellines’⁷ which is similar to the music Tchaikovsky provides to illustrate the sword fight between Montagues and Capulets.

Tutti
Hns. col 8v
Bsns., strs. col 8v

Ex. 19a – Tchaikovsky, *R & J*, bar 111

Ex. 19b – Bantock, *Dante & Beatrice*, bar 51

⁷ The Guelphs and Ghibellines were the two rival political factions in Rome from 11th to 14th century.

Similarly, later in this section (at bar 75 and again at bar 88) a passage of running string semiquavers punctuated by off-beat wind chords has a comparable passage in Tchaikovsky's piece.

Ex.20a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 144

Ex.20b – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 75

Bantock's brief use of canon (bar 79 and again at bar 92) also resembles Tchaikovsky's use of the device, both in 4-bar phrases.

Ex.21a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 125

Ex.21b – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 79

Bantock then closes this dramatic section, as Tchaikovsky does, with a tutti passage of offbeat chords.

Ex.22 – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 119 (c.f. ex.20b)

After this follows a calmer section where Bantock depicts Beatrice⁸ in what is in effect a love theme and its manner of presentation (syncopated accompaniment with later use of the cor anglais) and similarities of melodic contour bear some resemblance to that of Tchaikovsky's and both are set in D flat major.



Ex.23a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 212



Ex.23b – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 137

Both composers essentially present their material twice; the second time at bar 163 Bantock follows Tchaikovsky by adding an extra line for horn, before returning to the agitated music that preceded this section.

For the remainder, Bantock seems to follow less the direction of Tchaikovsky's piece, probably because of the disparity of the narrative of the extra-musical programme, yet there are a handful of passages that bear similarity. Tchaikovsky launches back into the material representing the sword fight, weaving in Friar Lawrence's theme which then leads to the full-blooded and final statement of the love theme, to be thwarted by a return to the sword fight material. Bantock similarly interchanges his Strife and Beatrice themes leading to an apparent climax with the latter at bar 279, which as in *Romeo & Juliet*, is given twice – the second time (bar 310) Bantock is a little half-hearted – to be interrupted by the agitated music. Bantock's coda is much more extended than Tchaikovsky's, beginning with a dirge-like fugato on a minor-key version of Beatrice's theme, which seemingly parallels Tchaikovsky's minor-key version of the love theme.



Ex.24 – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 323 (c.f. ex.14a)

⁸ Beatrice is Dante's guide in Paradiso (and Virgil's in Inferno and Purgatorio) and is supposedly modelled on a girl he fell in love with after he had married.

Bantock next moves back to D flat major and presents a slightly bittersweet, though lushly orchestrated, major-key version of Dante's theme, a gesture comparable to that towards the end of Tchaikovsky's coda.



Ex.25a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, bar 509 (n.b. use of flattened 6th degree)



Ex.25b – Bantock, *Dante*, bar 343 (with harmonic reduction)

With this Bantock mingles Beatrice's theme in a coda that is slightly overlong, closing in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo & Juliet* love-theme key of D flat major.

Fifine at the Fair (A Defence of Inconstancy) is described by Bantock as an 'orchestral drama with a prologue after Browning'.⁹ One cannot be sure exactly as to when it was composed, but as it was the third of the series of six tone poems it has been presumed it was begun some time during 1901; the date on the manuscript full score, however, is August-November 1911. The work was premiered at the Birmingham Festival on 2 October 1912.

Fifine shows Bantock at his most eclectic in the variety of styles his composition has absorbed. The section representing the Fair appears a fruitful mixture of Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* and the festive style of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter Festival Overture*. Stravinsky's *Petrushka* also seems to have filtered into the music, which must be one of the quickest examples of one composer assimilating another's music. *Petrushka* was not

⁹ Robert Browning (1812-89) published his long and somewhat esoteric poem in 1872. Don Juan, the narrator of the poem, is strolling with his wife Elvire when they pass a fair whereon Don Juan is entranced by the gypsy dancer, Fifine. The poem is essentially a meditation on the contrast between the intense ephemerality of desire with the dull permanence of love, and its interconnected topics of knowledge, identity and truth in life and art. In part the poem is also a discourse on the problematic issue of a man's intimate relationships with women other than his wife. Bantock was a gregarious and engaging man and his choice of *Fifine* may have been suggested by an incident in his own life, especially since the sub-title 'A Defence of Inconstancy' is that of the composer, not the poet.

published until 1912 and it does not appear that Bantock was in Paris the previous year when the ballet was premiered in Paris on 13 June 1911. However, on 16 June 1911 a friend of Bantock's, Otto Kling – the London representative for Breitkopf & Härtel – introduced him to Nikolai Tcherepnin.¹⁰ Tcherepnin was one of Diaghilev's conductors for the Russian Ballet during their pre-war seasons and was involved in the programme-planning meetings of the 1911 season. It seems inevitable that with the imminent arrival of the Russian Ballet in London later that month Bantock would have asked specifically about the forthcoming ballets. It is highly possible Tcherepnin described Stravinsky's latest ballet to Bantock (it would not be brought to London until February 1913) and may even have played excerpts to him from memory. Whatever the case one cannot escape the fact that certain parts of Bantock's score bear a striking similarity to *Petrushka*.¹¹

Fifine opens with a Prologue for strings only, which divide into 22 parts for one section in a somewhat Straussian manner. Bantock then plunges the listener at once into the festival atmosphere of the fairground with a trill-like gesture played by most of the orchestra. This texture is reminiscent of the fairground murmur Stravinsky evokes in *Petrushka*.

Ex.26a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, opening

Ex.26b – Bantock, *Fifine*, opening

Bantock does not adopt the cinematic montage effect of Stravinsky's opening scene. However, certain aspects of the Englishman's score – the absence of any extended melody or theme, the predominance of open intervals of fourths and fifths, the incorporation of popular tunes (Bantock with 'The Carnival of Venice' and Stravinsky with 'Elle avait une jambe en bois') and the use of the bass drum – suggest that Bantock at least had been given a verbal description of Stravinsky's ballet. Both composers use percussion in a strikingly similar

¹⁰ Kling also introduced Bantock to Scriabin and Prokofiev in 1914.

¹¹ However, a diary entry for 21 May 1911 notes: 'revised first 20 bars of *Fifine*' so the dates at the end of the autograph MFS (August – November) may only refer to the period of the work's orchestration. This appears to have marked a resurgence of interest in Russian music for Bantock for he subsequently programmed an all-Russian concert of music at the Birmingham Institute in December 1911.

fashion to link two paragraphs of music and in the manuscript Bantock has altered an earlier passage to include the instrument.

Ex.27a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), fig.33

Ex.27b – Bantock, *Fifine*,

Later on in the manuscript of *Fifine* Bantock made an extensive cut of almost 200 bars prior to the score's publication. In the second part of this cut occurs a passage that bears a striking resemblance to the 'Russian Dance' in *Petrushka*.

Ex.28a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), fig.33

Ex.28b – Bantock, *Fifine*, from cut section (originally at bar 444)

Bantock repeats and varies his passage with accumulative orchestrations – the changing-background technique so common in the works of Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov – to create a passage that runs to around 100 bars. The cut was possibly made for

structural reasons in what is still perhaps an over-long piece, but also because Bantock realised the passage was too obviously cribbed. However, the whole passage itself is interesting in that it shows how effectively Bantock had assimilated the Russian technique.

For the section that depicts Fifine's dance and beguilement of Don Juan (from bar 210), Bantock imports the stylised oriental vein to represent her allure and otherness (as a gypsy), for which he returns to the Tchaikovskian vein. This passage, with its repetitive melodic contour and harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment from tambourine, is similar to that found in the central section of Tchaikovsky's *Overture 1812*.

The score for Ex. 29a is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats. The flute part (Fl., C. ang.) features a repetitive eighth-note melody. The tambourine (Tamb.) provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a pattern of eighth notes and rests. The lower strings (Lower str.) play a simple harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes.

Ex.29a – Tchaikovsky, *Overture '1812'*, p.44 Eulenburg score

The score for Ex. 29b is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps. The violin part (Vlins 8vsi) features a repetitive eighth-note melody. The tambourine (Tamb.) provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a pattern of eighth notes and rests. The lower strings play a harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes.

Ex.29b – Bantock, *Fifine*, bar 235

Bantock then works his music up to an impassioned climax, marked *con abbandono*, for which he adopts Tchaikovsky's mantle in a passage that echoes the music the Russian used in the overture for his opera, *The Queen of Spades*.

The score for Ex. 30a is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps. The piano accompaniment features a repetitive eighth-note melody in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand with sustained notes.

Ex.30a – Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, overture, bar 34

Ex.30b – Bantock, *Fifine*, bar 308

Note the extended pedal, alternating diminished harmonies, regular use of appoggiaturas, chromatically rising inner part, and the melodic line, which turns around the same figure sequentially.

For the theme that represents Elvire, Bantock again makes use of Tchaikovsky’s more mellifluous melodic style in a passage that must be one of Bantock’s finest. Set in the middle of the orchestral texture, the horn/cello melody is used to romantic effect, and is seemingly a happy mixture of the calm, central section of Liszt’s *Les Préludes* and the slow movement of Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony.

Ex.31 – Bantock, *Fifine*, bar 351

This music is followed by a contrasting section, which leads to a passionate climax. The manner in which Bantock leads to this climax has a parallel with that used by Tchaikovsky in the same section in the slow section of the Fifth Symphony. A repeated figure, a mixture of rising and falling contours, builds up to a passage where the whole orchestra then plunges headlong down the scale leading to a repeat of Elvire’s theme by the whole orchestra.

Ex.32a – Tchaikovsky, Fifth Symphony, 2nd mvt., 5 bars after fig.F

Ex. 32b – Bantock, *Fifine*, bar 462

Elvire's theme makes one last appearance towards the end of *Fifine*. The slight solemnity of this passage, with its descending pizzicato, recalls the close of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*.

Ex. 33a – Tchaikovsky, Sixth Symphony, 1st movement coda

Ex. 33b – Bantock, *Fifine*, bar 693

In these three works Bantock was somewhat of a musical barometer, registering the music that was popular in the concert halls of the day. In his orchestral work *The Pierrot of the Minute* (1908) he even began to reflect a little of the music of Debussy, whose compositions had begun to be performed in England from the middle of that decade. Unfortunately, Bantock's open-minded attitude to new music meant that he was perhaps too receptive to it and so he never really evolved a very individual style of his own. The case for Bax, however, was quite different.

Arnold Bax

In the early years of the twentieth century Bax made two significant personal discoveries. The first, and perhaps most significant, was Ireland. In 1902 he read *The Wanderings of*

Oisín by W. B. Yeats and made his first trip to Ireland, which revealed to Bax the Irishman within himself.¹² In 1887 Yeats and his fellow student George Russell (later a close friend of Bax) became interested in mystic religion, the supernatural and, inevitably, the theosophical doctrines of Madame Blavatsky. The result for Yeats enabled him to create an Irish equivalent to the Transcendentalists of the USA, in one sense a higher form of nationalism, and it enabled Bax, as Yeats had done, to strengthen his artistic purpose and moderate the influences he felt were distracting his individual artistic development, which like Holst (see Chapter 7), was primarily the music of Wagner.¹³ In view of the nationality of Madame Blavatsky and her link with two of Bax's idols it is fittingly poetic that it was Russian music which helped Bax to free himself from the 'binding tyranny' of the Wagnerian spell (to borrow Imogen Holst's phrase). As Lewis Foreman has described, it was Russian music that, 'allowed him to write music personally, to himself.'¹⁴

From 1900 to 1905, Bax studied at the Royal Academy of Music and, like Bantock, he encountered the music of Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein; the latter's *Ocean Symphony* and *The Demon* were favourite works. Music by the Five, Lyapunov, Glazunov and Rachmaninov, were either heard in performances conducted by Henry Wood at the Queen's Hall (Bax attended his first Henry Wood Prom in 1896, aged 12), or played through at the piano, quite often from the full score, with his friend Arthur Alexander. In April 1910 Bax went to Russia for three months – on the whim of pursuing a young woman, Natalia Skarginsky, with whom he had fallen in love – where in St Petersburg he saw the last performance of the season of *Prince Igor*, with Chaliapin, and the Imperial Ballet, though he does not specify in his autobiography which ballets he saw. From this trip it is clear Bax gained a wider knowledge of Russian music than was common for his generation, a point illustrated in a letter written in 1914 to Montagu Montagu-Nathan: 'I have just been reading

¹² Arnold Bax (ed. Lewis Foreman), *Farewell My Youth & Other Writings* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 36.

¹³ Bax's brother, Clifford, also became interested in theosophy and edited *Orpheus* (transactions of the Theosophical Art-Circle – a publication of the Art Movement branch of the Theosophical Society) which appeared from 1907 to 1914. Charlotte Bax, Clifford and Arnold's mother, also developed a passing interest c.1907 in theosophy and the New Theology of Dr Reginald John Campbell (1867-1956).

¹⁴ Lewis Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and His Times* (London: Scolar Press, 1985), 71.

your very delightful [History of Russian Music] and am charmed to see that someone has at last put Tchaikovsky in his right place in comparison with Rimsky-Korsakov.’¹⁵

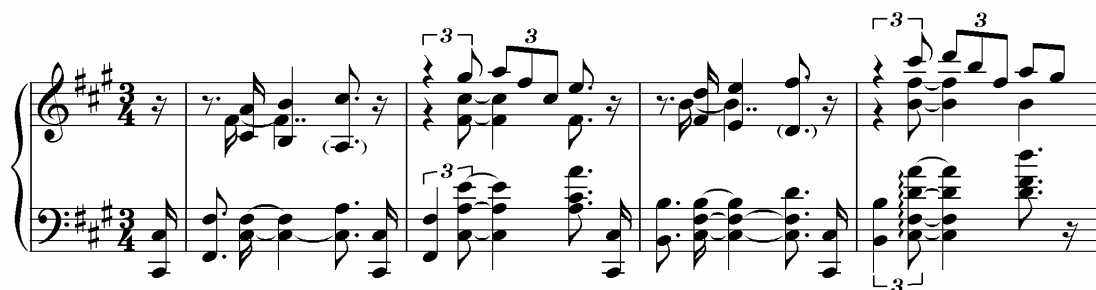
In the light of the discovery of his Celtic ‘other’ Bax needed a model of how to reconcile the different aspects of his musical personality, which Russian music clearly provided. The appeal of Russian music to Bax was no doubt its directness and spontaneity, but also how Russian music dealt specifically with human experience. That this was part of Bax’s broader view of life is reinforced in his references to Dostoevsky in his autobiography. From this point of view Bax did not regard Rimsky-Korsakov as important because he felt he only dealt with the objective fantasy of fairy stories; Bax’s own interest in ‘faery’ legend was in how it related to human experience. In this sense Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy were evidently important, and Bax, like them, is most successful when being episodic and dramatic, rather than pursuing a logical argument. Where Bax felt Rimsky-Korsakov merited appraisal alongside Tchaikovsky was in his great natural flair for imaginative and colourful orchestration. Bax was a musical sponge who soaked up the contemporary styles and currents of the era up to 1914, and while his music may not always sound Russian this is because of the very unique way he assimilated the influence. Like Bantock, Bax’s primary gain from the Russians was their sense of colour and musical rhetoric and gesture.

Whilst in Russia in 1910 Bax sketched what was initially entitled as a *Symphonic Phantasy* for piano, although it appears *Romantic Tone-Poem* may also have been considered as a title. The work was revised between 1917 and 1920 and again in 1921, and finally published as Bax’s First Sonata in F# minor in 1922. This single-movement work is not a Lisztian attempt to combine elements of slow and scherzo movements within a sonata framework, but rather an extended essay in a broad sonata form. The original title suggests that Bax may have been influenced by W. W. Cobbett’s revival of the fantasia form, but Bax’s sonata does not really follow that structure. Models for such a large, continuous sonata structure for piano alone were rare at this time. The only one-movement sonata of Scriabin that Bax could have known was the Fifth (1907) but the spirit of that sonata is quite different. The nearest possible model that fits both in terms of scale and spirit is the first movement of

¹⁵ M. Montagu-Nathan, ‘Reminiscence of Arnold Bax’, *Musical Times*, November 1953, 507.

Rachmaninov's First Sonata (1907). This sonata was composed in Dresden where Rachmaninov lived from 1906 to 1909, and where Bax was also resident from 1906 to 1907. If the two composers met the event was not recorded, but their First Sonatas share some interesting parallels. The works share an implied (by Bax's discarded title) or revealed programmatic basis; in 1910 Rachmaninov revealed that his Sonata had been inspired by Goethe's *Faust*, each of the movements representing Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles (as in Liszt's *Faust Symphony*). Rachmaninov toyed with the idea of orchestrating the work as a symphony (as Bax was to do with another sonata he composed in 1921, which became his First Symphony) but the feel of so much of Bax's piano music is that the conception is ultimately more idiomatically suited to an orchestral medium (as with some of Ravel's piano music). Both composers create colouristic effects especially from the lower end of the keyboard.

The key and some of the opening gestures of Bax's Sonata are reminiscent of the music of one Rachmaninov's contemporaries, Scriabin and specifically his Third Sonata (1897).



Ex.34a – Scriabin, Third Sonata, opening



Ex.34b – Bax, First Sonata, opening

The repetitive nature and flat contour of Bax's theme is a characteristic it shares with many of Rachmaninov's melodies, such as that which opens his Third Piano Concerto, published in the same year that Bax composed his Sonata.



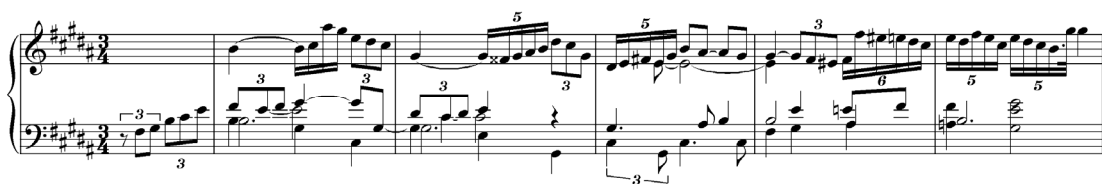
Ex.35a – Rachmaninov, Third Piano Concerto, opening theme



Ex.35b – Bax, First Sonata, opening theme

However, Bax's rhetorical style in his treatment of his theme is different from Rachmaninov but still reveals a debt to Russian models. Rather than composing a group of first subject themes Bax presents his subject (ex.35b) four times exploiting the changing background technique. There is little precedent for this in a piano work since the technique relies primarily on the composer being able to vary the instrumentation of an orchestra. However, Tchaikovsky uses the technique in his Piano Sonata in G, Op.37 (1878) with the second subject in the first and last movements. Bax's piano textures owe little to Rachmaninov; like Tchaikovsky, the English composer's piano writing in many places is more idiomatically orchestral.

Bax's second subject (bar 59) shows a French inflection with more than a whiff of Debussy's *Clair de lune* permeating the score, though when the theme is restated in the middle of the piano texture the effect is similar to that of Scriabin in his Second Sonata.

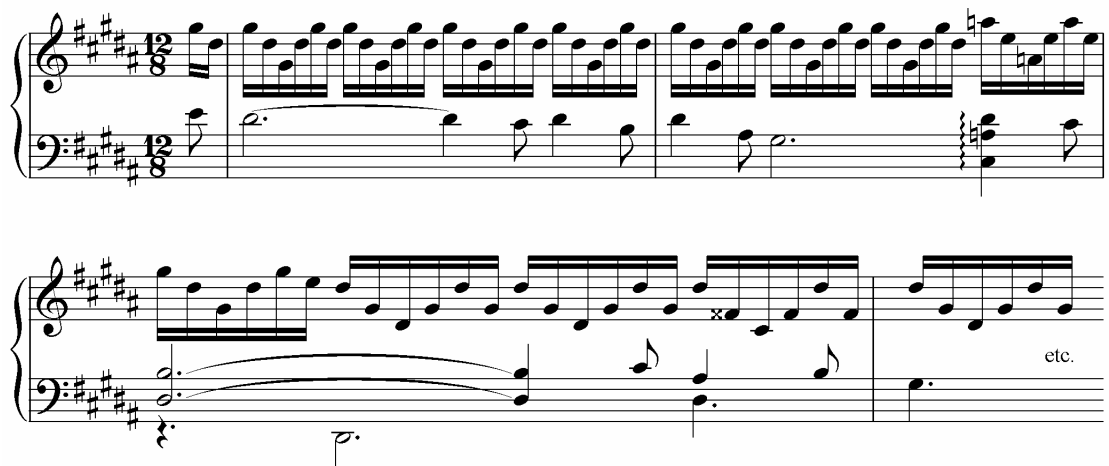


Ex.36a – Scriabin, Second Sonata, first movement, bar 31

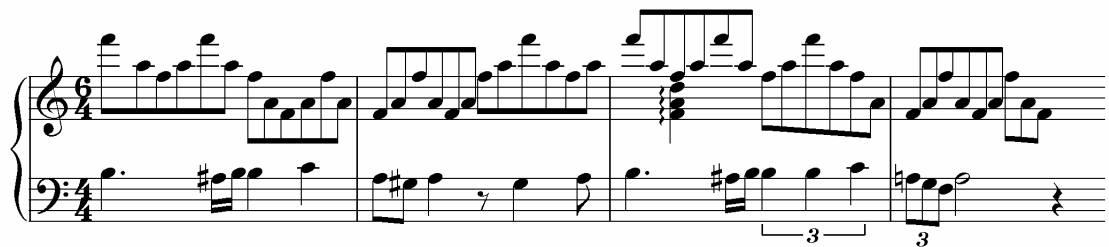


Ex.36b – Bax, First Sonata, bar 76

In the development section Bax again uses the changing background technique. Both composers focus almost exclusively on the first subject material for the purposes of the development. At the section from bar 166 Bax creates a variant of the first subject which he told Harriet Cohen was meant to represent the wide, open Russian plain which, with its incomplete broken arpeggios in the right hand and left hand tenor melody, is reminiscent of Rachmaninov's Prelude in G sharp minor (1910).



Ex.37a – Rachmaninov, Prelude Op.32 no.12



Ex.37b – Bax, First Sonata, bar 168

From the mid-point of this section Bax, like Rachmaninov in his First Sonata, essentially works back to the recapitulation by means of a long passage (both about 70 bars), which is in essence a rising sequence with an ostinato based upon a rhythmic figure from the first subject.

Ex.38a – Rachmaninov, First Sonata, first movement, bar 172

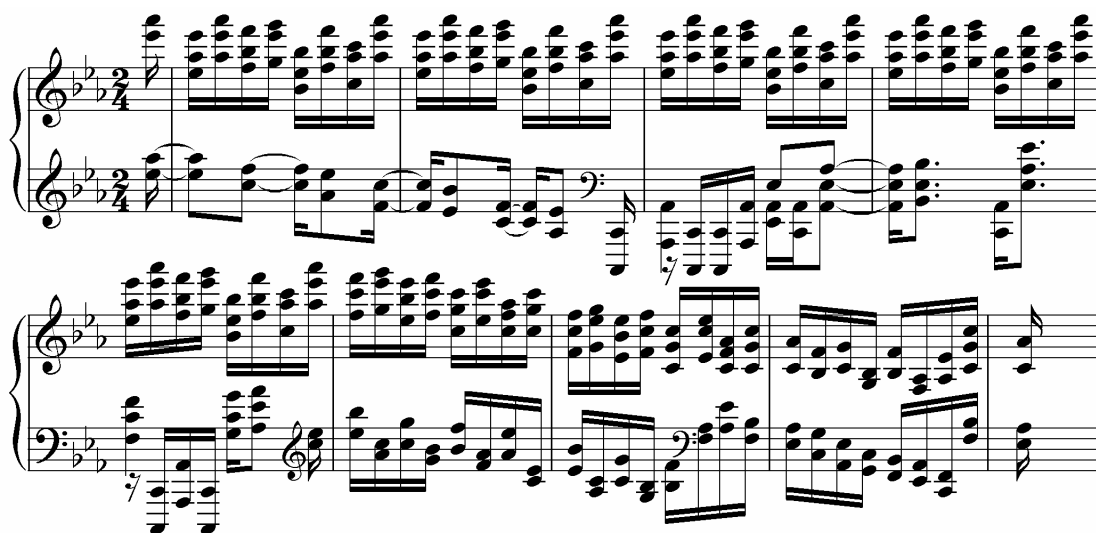
Ex.38b – Bax, First Sonata, bar 224

Bax does not, however, follow Rachmaninov in the placing of his dynamic climax.

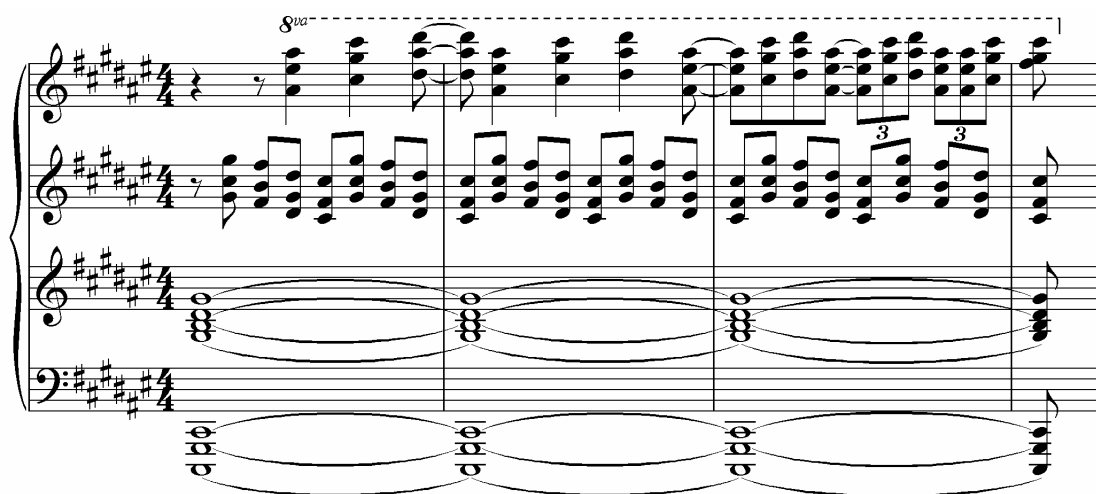
Rachmaninov, typically for him, places his climax just before the end of the development so the recapitulation can begin calmly. Bax places his climax to match the point of recapitulation, which is what Tchaikovsky does in his Sonata.

Harriet Cohen tells us Bax added the extended bell-like coda of the Sonata in the revision of 1920. Bax told Frank Merrick that his coda was inspired by the bells of the Russian cathedrals (Bax arrived in St Petersburg on Easter Day in 1910 and would doubtless have heard the bells of St Isaac's Cathedral). Yet if the programmatic basis of the work was related to his trip to Russia it seems odd that this coda was not present in the original version in some way. Alternatively, Bax did have the idea in 1910 but was lacking a model, both formally and texturally, with which to carry out his ideas. By 1920 Bax had found the models that would enable him to create the coda he had envisaged. The bell coda functions very

similarly to that of the Russian-inspired coda-epilogues of Vaughan Williams and Holst (see Chapter 7) where, after the standard recapitulation has taken place, the main theme is reprised again in a transformed state, in Bax's case in the tonic major. The bell-like texture of Lyapunov's 'Carillon' (1901) – the third of his *Études d'exécution transcendante* Op.11 – may have been the model for this coda, or it may have been influenced more directly by the similar texture Rachmaninov uses in his *Études Tableaux* Op.39 No.7 (published in 1920), which also appears as a coda. It interesting to speculate on Bax's programme for his Sonata when one thinks of the role the sound of the Easter bells played for Faust in saving him from his despair for Gretchen, where Bax himself in 1910 must have realised the futility of his journey to Russia.



Ex.39a – Rachmaninov, Etudes Tableaux, op.39 no.7, bar 90



Ex.39b – Bax, First Sonata, bar 348

Bax employs the open 4th/5th figuration and syncopation which Rachmaninov had similarly made use of in his Second Piano Sonata (1913) where at the climax of the development section as it leads to the reprise Rachmaninov works up a frenzied passage in imitation of pealing bells.

For his Second Sonata, composed in 1920 and then revised in 1921, Bax still retains some of the Tchaikovskian and Rachmaninovian aspects that influenced the First Sonata. However, in the intervening years he had also obviously absorbed something of the music of Scriabin, which was enjoying popular success in England at this time. The result is a darkening of Bax's musical style. The two main aspects of the dark introduction are clearly influenced by the opening of Scriabin's Seventh Sonata, with the marked use of leaping figures and arpeggios.

Ex. 40a is a piano introduction in 4/4 time, featuring a dark, syncopated melody. The right hand consists of a series of arpeggiated chords, many of which are grouped as triplets. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a similar syncopated feel, also featuring some triplet patterns. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic.

This section of Ex. 40a shows a leaping figure in the right hand, characterized by a wide interval between notes. Below it, a sextuplet (marked '6') is shown, consisting of six notes beamed together. The left hand continues with its syncopated accompaniment.

Ex.40a – Scriabin, Seventh Sonata, opening

Ex. 40b compares the fundamental chords of Bax and Scriabin. The Bax chord is shown in the key of B-flat major (F, A-flat, C, E-flat). The Scriabin chord is shown in the key of B major (F, A, C, E), which is a transposition of the Bax chord.

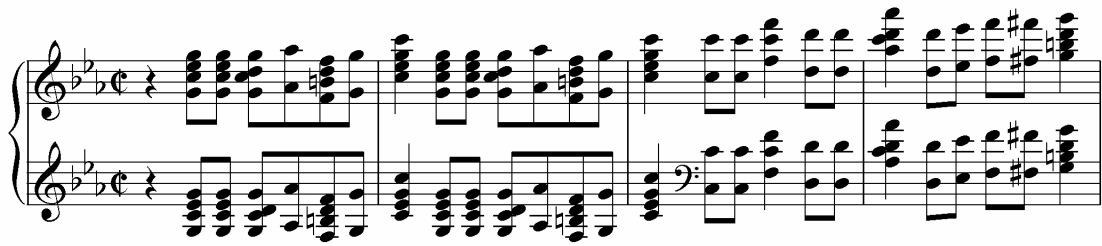
Ex.40b – Fundamental chords

The image displays three systems of musical notation. The first system shows a piano introduction in 4/4 time, with the left hand playing a sixteenth-note pattern marked with '6' and an octave sign '8^{vb}'. The right hand features a four-note chord with a long note value. The second system continues the piano part with similar patterns, including a seventh-note figure marked '7'. The third system shows a violin part starting with a four-note chord, followed by a piano accompaniment with triplets marked '3'.

Ex.40c – Bax, Second Sonata, opening from bar 3 and bar 10

Both composers use a four-note chord to characterise the harmonic region of their introductions, which share a comparable sonority (see ex.40b). Bax said that his Sonata represented a battle between good and evil – the introduction clearly represents the malevolent forces, and since many people associated Scriabin with the more sinister side of theosophy and spiritualism, the influence seems particularly apt here. But the influence of Tchaikovsky is also noticeable. The theme first given out in bar 10 is used as a motto theme, which recurs at all the major points of structural articulation throughout the Sonata, comparable to the manner in which Tchaikovsky treats his opening Fate motto in his Fourth Symphony. Bax, like Tchaikovsky, also states his motto twice during the course of the development leading up to the Sonata’s climax, the second appearance simply being an upward transposition in both cases.

When the first subject proper emerges, marked *eroico*, Bax’s theme strongly recalls that used by Rachmaninov at the recapitulation in the first movement of his Second Piano Concerto in its rhythm, melodic contour and texture.



Ex.41a – Rachmaninov, Second Piano Concerto, recapitulation (piano only), 9 bars after fig.10



Ex.41b – Bax, Second Sonata, first subject, bar 52

Bax's second subject also has a Rachmaninovian cast to it with its parallel 6ths, being particularly reminiscent of an extension of the second subject in the first movement of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Trio (1893), accompanied by a left-hand ostinato similar to that which performs the same function with the second subject of Tchaikovsky's Piano Sonata.



Ex.42a – Rachmaninov *Trio élégiaque* no.2
bar 318 (piano only)



Ex.42b – Tchaikovsky, Piano Sonata,
second subject, bar 69



Ex.42c – Bax, Second Sonata, second subject, bar 118

This theme, like the first subject of his First Sonata, is stated four times in succession and treated to the changing background technique.

Ex.43 – Bax, Second Sonata, 2nd, 3rd and 4th variants of second subject, bars 136, 152, 173

At the recapitulation of the second subject it is stated in two further variants of texture and harmony. This and the coda – similar to the darkness-to-light transformation of Liszt's B minor Sonata – show that while Bax was highly resourceful as a composer for the keyboard, his imagination was ultimately restricted and was best served by the medium of the orchestra.

In the realm of orchestral music Bax's early tone poems are more indebted to the scores of Russia's Silver Age composers Rimsky-Korsakov, Lyadov and Glazunov. Bax's early trio of tone poems *Into the Twilight* (1908), *In the Faery Hills* (1909) and *Roscatha* (1910), known collectively as *Eire*, still shows Bax under the influence of Wagner and Richard Strauss. *Roscatha* appears to have been sketched as early as 1908 as an entr'acte for an unrealised opera project¹⁶ but Bax reworked the piece in November 1910 after returning to England from his trip to Russia, and it is in this piece that a tangible Slavic influence is felt. It begins with a martial section which has a sturdy folk-like quality to it that is reminiscent of Holst's 'Marching Song' (the second of the *Two Songs Without Words*, Op.22 for orchestra). This gives way to a Trio section where a long-breathed horn melody is given out over an ostinato bass.

¹⁶ Bax sketched an opera *Déirdre*. On the autograph manuscript for *Roscatha* is written in Bax's hand 'The Gathering of the Chiefs' which suggests it may originally have been intended as the entr'acte to Act 3.

Ex.44 – Bax, *Roscatha*, trio section

Perhaps the nobility of the tune and its scoring makes the passage seem Elgarian with its blended orchestral colours, but further on this section is repeated with the music's constituent parts separated out in contrasting sonorities. The melody is given one colour, scored in triple octaves for strings, over and above which the middle and upper woodwind play an accompanying figuration with a glockenspiel ostinato; the whole is underpinned by a deep tonic pedal. As a result the passage is utterly transformed.

In the three pieces that comprise *Eire* Bax discovered the great potential of his orchestral idiom. Bax's own instrument was the piano yet in spite of this and the fact that he had no experience as an orchestral instrumentalist or conductor he had an incredible instinct for orchestration and somehow evolved his own very distinct sound world; Bax's vivid and imaginative orchestrations can sometimes be so vital as to be a distraction from the other processes in his music. Bax's sense of harmony and counterpoint was, as he himself freely admitted, derived from Wagner, but the manner in which he clothed these ideas orchestrally owed little to the German composer. Whereas Wagner's large instrumentation enabled him to blend ever-subtler shades of orchestral colour (e.g. using 3 or 4 instruments from different families on the same unison melodic line, as in the prelude to *Parsifal*) Bax used his orchestra, often of a size comparable to that used by Richard Strauss in many of his tone poems, to paint in contrasting yet very definite orchestral sonorities. This manner is derived from Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and, to some extent, Stravinsky who orchestrated their

music in points of colour with a great tendency toward what Rimsky-Korsakov specifically described as the ‘principle of highlighting primary hues’, i.e. individual timbres, and the greater transparency of texture that results from this approach.¹⁷ In Bax’s tone poems and symphonies, one can frequently find passages where an idea and its accompanying harmony are scored as a single primary colour, e.g. three flutes or three muted trombones often playing in triads, often accompanied by a contrasting texture or solo colour. This approach, and that used in the *Roscatha* example above, can be found in the scores of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. An obvious example would be Tchaikovsky’s use of three flutes in the ‘Danse des mirlitons’ of the *Nutcracker*. Moreover the very vivid use of orchestral colouring was a necessity of the Russian changing background technique, where distinct changes of orchestral sonority are vital – the blended Wagnerian approach to shading orchestral colour would render very feeble the effectiveness of the technique.

Bax’s languorous *Nympholept* (1912), a ‘nature-poem for orchestra’, shows the composer developing a more sophisticated and opulent musical palate. Originally conceived as ‘Poem for piano’ Bax later orchestrated the piece early in 1915 making some minor changes to the general text. For the opening, depicting ‘a perilous pagan enchantment haunting the sunlit midsummer forest’ as the composer heads the manuscript score, Bax has obviously absorbed something of Lyadov’s *The Enchanted Lake* (1909) and Rachmaninov’s *The Isle of the Dead* (1909) with their muted use of orchestral colour and arabesque-like woodwind interjections.

¹⁷ Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Principles of Orchestration* (New York: Dover, 1974).

$\text{♩} = 58$
 Vln. etc. +Hp. trill trill Vel.
 Vla.

Ex.45a – Lyadov, *The Enchanted Lake*, bar 5

Hn.
 Hp. vla.
 Vcl. db.

Ex.45b – Rachmaninov, *The Isle of the Dead*, 13 bars after fig.1

$\text{♩} = 52$
 Fl. 6
 Cl. 6
 Hn. 6
 Fl. 6
 Hp. vla. 3 3 3 3
 Cor.ang. 3 3 3 3
 Cl. 3 3 3 3
 Hn. 3 3 3 3
 Ob. 3 3 3 3
 Fl. 3 3 3 3
 B.cl. 6
 Vln. 3 3 3 3
 Ob. 3 3 3 3
 B.cl. 6
 5

Ex.45c – Bax, *Nympholept*, bar 5

Also the languorous atmosphere from the opening of Scriabin's First Symphony colours much of the mood of Bax's magical nature piece.¹⁸ As with Bantock, Bax adopts a Russian

¹⁸ Compare also the opening of *The Enchanted Lake* with Bax's *Tintagel* (1917-19).

mantle to suit the need of a particular passage, and will shed it just as quickly when it is no longer suited to his musical needs. After this opening section which continues for 32 bars, Bax's style shifts away from the Russian towards a more rapturously Delius-inspired mood, which becomes increasingly extravagant in its chromaticism.

Another facet of Bax's approach to orchestration that illustrates his appreciation of Russian music was his use of the piano as an orchestral instrument. Bax was one of the very few English composers of his generation to use the orchestral piano, which was rarely, if ever, used by any of the non-Russian composers that influenced Bax (Debussy, Ravel, Wagner, Strauss, Sibelius, etc.). 'The use of the piano in the orchestra... belongs almost entirely to the Russian school,' Rimsky-Korsakov states.¹⁹ Although Stravinsky's *Petrushka* would make the piano the vital addition to the twentieth century orchestral palette – as much a percussion as a keyboard instrument – its authentic orchestral use (as opposed to it being used merely to accompany recitative) can be traced back to Glinka's *Ruslan & Lyudmila*. Tchaikovsky, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov also all made striking use of the instrument. Whereas in Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty* the piano is treated in a rather plainly pianistic fashion, Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky in their operas use the instrument for illustrative purposes. Rimsky-Korsakov makes most prominent use of it in his opera *Sadko* (1894-96) to imitate, in conjunction with the harp, the sound of the *gusli*.²⁰ Musorgsky's use of the instrument in the Coronation Scene of *Boris Godunov*, although primarily to imitate the timbre of bells, reveals a more 'modern', almost Stravinskian use. Here the piano is shorn of its character as a keyboard instrument *per se* and exploited for what it can offer purely in terms of its colour and percussive nature. In the Coronation Scene its lower register is used to reinforce the bass of the deep tolling bells whereas the upper register adds a percussive glitter to the orchestra's upper tessitura. Bax's use of the instrument, most notably in *Spring Fire* and his Second Symphony, follows this same approach in using the piano to highlight specific points of colour in the rest of the orchestra.

¹⁹ Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Principles of Orchestration* (New York: Dover, 1974).

²⁰ The *gusli* is a Russian folk psaltery and member of the zither family. Not to be confused with the *gusle*, a single-string fiddle from Yugoslavia.

Bax's Second Symphony was composed in 1924 and orchestrated over the following 18 months. It marks a watershed in both the composer's creative and personal life. The work is dedicated to Serge Koussevitzky and so it is perhaps fitting that it exhibits some prominent Russian features. The first movement inhabits a very similar world to that of the Second Piano Sonata. The symphony's introduction (bars 1-60) occupies the same style as the corresponding passage in the Second Sonata, which Bax described as representing evil or malevolent forces. The influence of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony appears in the introduction where a repeated horn fanfare is given out over shifting chords in the strings.



Ex.46a – Tchaikovsky, Fourth Symphony, first movement, bar 16



Ex.46b – Bax, Second Symphony, first movement, bar 35

The same symphony is also used as a formal model. As in his Second Sonata Bax borrows the rhetorical device used by Tchaikovsky in his Fourth Symphony, namely that this introductory material is then used to mark the movement's main points of structural articulation; the correlations are all the stronger in Bax's symphony than in his sonata. He uses the introductory material, as Tchaikovsky does, to mark the link between exposition and development (bars 200-217); elements from it then appear toward the end of the development and reappear to herald the coda. In addition to this the introductory material also recurs as a link between the first and second subject groups. Fragments and motifs derived from this introductory material also reappear in the symphony's other two movements; before the coda in the last movement an explicit reference back to the symphony's introduction draws a further parallel with Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, where the opening fanfares return, and

similarly the result is immensely dramatic. With this, and Bax's references to the malevolent forces represented in the symphony, it is perhaps not fanciful to regard his Second Symphony as his 'Fate' Symphony.

The introduction to the Second Symphony is harmonically characterised by the use of octatonic pitch collections. Bax's music clearly moves through each of the three possible transpositions of the scale, sometimes superimposing them. Note also the similarity of the opening theme to that used by Borodin in his Second Symphony (1869-76).



Ex.47a – Borodin, Second Symphony, opening

Ex.47b – Bax, Second Symphony, 1st mvt., bar 8

At the beginning of ex.12a the cor anglais theme is referable to Collection II (D, E flat, F, G flat, etc) and this is superimposed above the piano/string accompaniment, which is drawn from Collection I (C#, D, E, F, etc). At the sixth bar of the extract the music moves to settle purely on Collection III (D#, E, F#, G, etc.), which is used throughout the texture. A similar process occurs later at bar 39 where Collections II and III are present simultaneously where after the latter asserts primacy until the last few bars of the section where the system disintegrates and diatonic tonality in the form of E minor is established as the tonal focus for the main body of the movement. Note in the last 5 bars of this extract the use of three flutes

and three muted trumpets, the 'primary hue' style of orchestration that one can find in Stravinsky.

The image shows a musical score for three flutes (3 fls.) and harp (Hns.). The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three measures. The first measure has a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The second measure has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The third measure has a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The harp part is indicated by a bracket under the bass clef staff. The flute parts are indicated by a bracket above the treble clef staff. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

Ex.47c – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, fig.79

Bax's great ability to read orchestral scores at the piano no doubt gave him a distinct advantage over his contemporaries in appreciating a piece without having to hear a performance. This, combined with his very imaginative approach to orchestration, meant he was perhaps the most able of all the English composers considered here to absorb and assimilate the myriad influences that contributed to his own style, and yet retain his own very strong musical personality.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE LONELY IDEALISTS

England, after two centuries of imitative negligibility, has suddenly flung into the field a cohort of composers whose methods have made a technical revolution in musical composition.

George Bernard Shaw¹

Holst and Bridge were, in one sense, the most ‘English’ of English composers of their generation in their open-minded and willing acceptance of new ideas. It should be pointed out at this point that Holst and Bridge were probably the first to appreciate and absorb the implications of Russian music at more than one level, so that not only can one detect superficial influences but also the deeper structural ones that would permit them to learn from Russian composers whilst still being able to develop their own personal style.

Holst

One of Gustav Holst’s early major influences was the music of Wagner. This influence, however, gripped Holst to the point where it prevented him from evolving his own personal style. English folksong was obviously the main catalyst that enabled him to escape what was for him the overbearing influence of Wagner’s music. But in assimilating the elements of English folk music he needed to evolve his own style of musical rhetoric, for which Russian music played a vital role. Holst himself may have had personal reasons for taking an interest in Russian music. His great grandmother was Russian and her husband was a musician and composer to the Russian court. We know he joined the Hammersmith Socialist Society in 1896 and read all of Turgenev’s novels in 1899 (borrowed from Vaughan Williams) indicating his predisposition toward radical socialism. This outlook naturally precipitated a great admiration for William Morris, who strongly believed that ‘art...[should] be shared by learned and unlearned, as a language that all can understand.’² Compare this with

¹ G. B. Shaw in 1922, quoted in G. B. Shaw (D. H. Laurence ed.), *Shaw’s Music: The Complete Musical Criticism of Bernard Shaw*, 3 vols. (2nd edn., London: Bodley Head, 1989),iii. 415.

² Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 6.

Musorgsky: ‘Art is a medium of communication between human beings – not an end in itself’³ and it becomes apparent that these artists shared similar concerns.

Holst had much in common with the so-called Russian nationalist composers: their interest in their native folk music and Oriental or Asian culture, cultures shared by both the British and Russian empires. Aesthetically Holst and the Five had much in common, essentially their unconventionality and anti-academic ideas. During his student years Holst led a debate on ‘The Future of English Music’ proposing academic training should be abolished. Later in life Holst expressed his broader view: ‘The fact is, I don’t like any music if it is highly polished and sounds fluent. I like to have a sense of struggle which an artist has had with his material.’⁴ The rugged quality of the Five, all self-taught, and the sense of personal struggle in moulding his material that pervades much of Tchaikovsky’s music cannot have escaped him. Holst believed a composer should say what he needs to say clearly and succinctly and then stop, as is demonstrated by the brevity of so many of his mature works. The symphonic structures and processes of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms were clearly not going to be of use as models to help Holst shape the sort of music he wanted to compose. Rather, it would be the various non-dialectic, rhetorical techniques used by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky, not to mention their approach to orchestration, which would help Holst to create his own very personal idiom.

In 1906, after a suggestion made by Cecil Sharp, Holst composed his first folk-music-based pieces, the *Two Selections of Folksongs*, later revised and retitled separately as *Songs of the West* and the *Somerset Rhapsody*. The orchestral folk-song concert piece was by no means a new genre, Glinka penning probably some of the earliest examples in the late 1840s. As Russian composers, such as Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov, collected folksong in the 1860s and produced various Overtures and Fantasias on Russian themes, a parallel phenomenon took place in England forty years later. The problem was how to arrange the borrowed material in a way that avoided the work becoming a mere pot-pourri of themes. When Balakirev in 1889 reorchestrated his *Second Overture on Russian Themes* (originally

³ Quoted in R. Newmarch, ‘Russian Opera in Paris: Moussorgsky’s “Boris Godunov”’, *Monthly Musical Record*, July 1908, 147-49.

⁴ Quoted in Michael Short, *Gustav Holst: The Man and His Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 2.

composed in 1864), renamed it *Russia* and attached a loose programme, he created what was in effect a symphonic poem based upon folk themes. Holst, in his *Somerset Rhapsody*, utilised his selection of folk songs in such a way as to invest the work with a narrative, as he described to his friend Edwin Evans, ‘There is no definite programme but the form grew out of a suggestion of pastoral country becoming filled with human activities but surviving them all.’⁵ On another occasion, however, it seems that Holst himself elaborated upon this to produce a Housman-like programme of a quiet pastoral scene where soldiers arrive, persuade a young man to leave the girl he is courting and go away to war, after which the quietude of the opening returns. To what extent this rather more specific programme was in Holst’s mind as he composed the work is difficult to tell, but that there is a narrative can be inferred by the subjects of the folk songs and some of the techniques used in the work.

The idea of some sort of procession that approaches and recedes is indicated by the overarching dynamic contour of the work, framed by the quiet opening and conclusion. (The idea of a procession would become a favourite device of Holst’s.) The significant concept in this work is that of the musical frame, no doubt representing the countryside existing before and after human intrusion. The musical frame is a rhetorical technique used in music to give a sense of distance between narrator and subject, and is frequently found in programme music; there are many effective examples of its use in the music of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov (as discussed in Chapter 5). Holst, in the *Somerset Rhapsody*, achieves a framing effect by startlingly simple means. The opening and conclusion share a common theme and texture which is very distinct from the rest of the piece: solo oboe d’amore, which has no solo role elsewhere in the piece, plays the ‘Sheep Sheering Song’ under a high dominant pedal in octaves played by the 2nd violins, the empty texture no doubt representing the pastoral scene before the intrusion of man. One wonders to what extent Holst’s broader programme was influenced by Borodin’s *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (1880). Set in the empty steppe, also represented by a dominant pedal high in the violins, two processions approach, mingle and pass, whence the empty texture returns.

⁵ Undated letter from Holst to Evans, quoted in Michael Short, *Gustav Holst: The Man and His Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 64.

Ex.48a – Borodin, *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, opening

Ex.48b – Holst, *Somerset Rhapsody*, opening

In the course of the work Borodin counterpoints his contrasting themes, which Holst also does but to greater effect because his melodies are moving at different tempi. For the concluding frame Holst achieves a further sense of narrative distance by tonal manipulation. The work begins and concludes in Dorian-inflected E minor, but for the penultimate section Holst has moved to Dorian-inflected B flat minor, thus when the home key of E minor is reached for the concluding frame the effect is to make the home key seem distant and detached. This simple yet startlingly effective idea of a sort of transcended reprise is one he would use again and as a concept may have been the basis for the effective coda-epilogues he, Vaughan Williams and Bax would later write.

In the summer of 1909 Holst was asked to write a work to be used as a ballet piece. The result was the *Oriental Dance*, dedicated to Edwin Evans. The dance project fell through, however, and the following year Holst added two further ‘dances’ to create his oriental orchestral suite, *Beni Mora*. The main musical inspiration for the work came from Holst’s holiday in Algeria in April 1908, where the composer was particularly fascinated by the Arab quarter of Algiers. In the First Dance the opening gesture bears a striking similarity to that used by Tchaikovsky in the ‘Danse Arabe’ of his *Nutcracker* ballet.

Ex.49a – Tchaikovsky, ‘Danse Arabe’, bar 69

Ex.49b – Holst, ‘First Dance’, opening

But in its rhetorical structure the piece obviously owes much to the Oriental-style pieces of Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin. The movement is comprised of three main groups of material in three distinct tempi: Andante, Vivace and Moderato. The Andante section stands at the opening, middle and close of the movement, separated by two sections comprised of the Vivace and Moderato material. Worked transitions are studiously avoided in favour of blank juxtaposition: thus the music proceeds sequentially A-VMVM-A-MV-A. Rimsky-Korsakov used such a montage technique to great effect in the last movement of *Scheherazade*. Holst’s material for each section consists almost wholly of short phrases constantly reiterated, again very much in the manner of *Scheherazade*. As each section returns any sense of development is eschewed in favour of simply redressing it in alternative orchestral garb, like an ornament viewed from a different perspective. This technique, attributed to Glinka and used by many Russian composers after him, is one that Holst exploits to great effect throughout the suite. The Second Dance is also indebted to the ‘Danse Arabe’ from Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* ballet, here for the contour of the melodic material, especially the ends of phrases, and the underlying ostinato used throughout. The orchestral palette is also very similar in the use of soft woodwind colours, all the instruments playing in the tenor/alto register.

Ex.50a – Tchaikovsky, *Nutcracker Suite*, ‘Danse Arabe’, opening

Ex.50b – Holst, *Beni Mora*, Second Dance, opening

At the work's premiere on 1 May 1912 and subsequent pre-war performances, the Finale 'In the Street of the Ouled Nails' drew hostile reactions from parts of the audience.⁶ No doubt what caused this was not the musical material Holst was using but rather the rhetoric he was using to deliver it – unlike the first two movements here was something strikingly original, not pastiche. There is a loose programme to this movement, which, like the *Somerset Rhapsody*, has the idea of a procession at its core.⁷ Although the concept was obviously inspired by his experiences in Algeria one feels that Holst could not have produced this movement without the example of the Russians.

At a very rudimentary level is the layering technique from Borodin's *Steppes of Central Asia*, which Holst had already used in the *Somerset Rhapsody*. However, the immensely thrilling effect of this finale is achieved by extension of a technique Holst borrowed from Rimsky-Korsakov. The finale of *Scheherazade*, the Festival in Baghdad, uses a basic theme plus four further subsidiary themes related by an underlying ostinato rhythm, plus three other themes drawn from the second and third movements. Rimsky-Korsakov's ostinato runs, in implied and modified forms, for well over 500 bars. Holst's finale follows a comparable plan wherein there are likewise five themes, the most important of which is a four-bar ostinato, plus two more drawn from the first two movements. Holst's repeats his 4-bar ostinato unchanged 41 times, which the composer states was inspired by a similar short melody he had heard an Algerian musician play for two-and-a-half hours. This is the basis for the movement, which then adopts Russian processes to structure the whole. Holst, like Rimsky-Korsakov, uses open-ended ideas, each with its own identifiable pithy motif so that he can easily truncate, lengthen or loop it. In Rimsky-Korsakov's case this allows him to cut and paste his ideas freely; he does not attempt to layer his different themes as Holst does, but the composer's shifts of metre create a comparative impression of montage. Holst, in a manner one feels Ives would have admired, layers his ideas over each other, which are

⁶ Holst is referring to a street in Biskra in Algeria renowned for its prostitutes and Bedouin dancing girls, or *ouled nails*.

⁷ The programme describes how a traveller on approaching a village at night sees a procession threading its way through the village. On entering the village the traveller joins the procession, which passes through the Street of the Ouled Nails, wherein the music of the dancers mingles with that of the procession. Eventually the traveller passes through the village and out into the desert.

constantly shifting in their register and orchestration. Both processes throw the burden of responsibility in maintaining the listener's interest on to the orchestration and it was Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral technique that clearly indicated the way in which Holst needed to be thinking to recreate his experiences in Algeria. The end result is one of Holst's most original compositions and probably one of the most thrilling pieces of the pre-1914 English repertoire.

Holst's Fantasia on the 'Dargason', the last movement of his Second Military Band Suite in F, Op.28 No.2 (1911), although not quite as thrilling as the Finale of *Beni Mora* is no less impressive for its use of a folksong as an ostinato to which *Greensleeves* is later added as a counterpoint. In this movement the model is quite clearly Glinka's *Kamarinskaya* (1848) where the dance song 'Kamarinskaya' is used as the ostinato with the addition of the wedding song 'Iz-za gor, gor visokikh, gor' (From Beyond the Mountains High). From these two works it becomes apparent that Holst was experimenting on a moderate scale with the sort of techniques and devices he would later use to great effect in the much larger canvas of his 'Seven Pieces for Large Orchestra' Op.32, otherwise known as *The Planets*.⁸ In this work he assimilated perhaps the greatest number of influences to produce his first mature masterpiece.

Both English and Russian composers, when they did not wish to use authentic folk material, frequently composed folk-style melodies, the examples of which share a feature known as a double tonic. The first phrase of the 'Jupiter' tune is easily referable to both its tonic and relative minor as, for example, is the Musorgsky's melody in the Prelude to *Khovanschina*.



Ex.51a – Musorgsky, *Khovanschina*, Prelude, bar 25



Ex.51b – Holst, 'Jupiter', bar 210

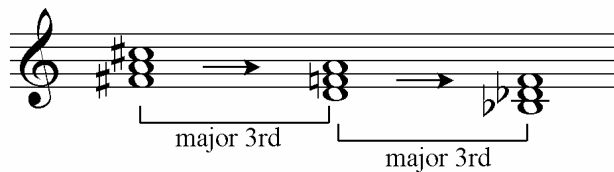
⁸ 'Seven Large Pieces for Orchestra' is the only title to be found on the manuscript FS, neither are the individual names of the planets used, each movement only has its present subtitle, 'Bringer of War', etc. The title 'The Planets – Suite for large orchestra' was applied at the first (private) performance of the Suite in September 1918. See Imogen Holst & Colin Matthews (ed.), 'The Planets, Op.32, Suite for Large Orchestra', *Collected Facsimile Edition of the Manuscripts of the Published Works* (London: Faber, 1979), iii.

It can be no surprise then to learn that some of the initial critics of *The Planets* thought that Holst's melody was Russian in origin. But such melodies, beautiful as they are, create problems for the composer. As a composed or synthetic folk tune the only thing Holst could do was to 'repeat it louder', as Constant Lambert would have said. Themes such as that from the middle of 'Jupiter' need to be treated in a non-symphonic fashion because they are already highly developed as melodies and, therefore, it would be inappropriate to attempt to develop it along standard (i.e. Beethovenian) lines. Holst was always concerned that the musical material should inspire the form and structure of a piece, and not vice-versa, doubtless being aware that his own themes were not best suited to undergo traditional sonata dialectic process. Inspired by various Russian models Holst, in *The Planets*, successfully applied a number of non-symphonic processes to bind his music into a coherent whole.

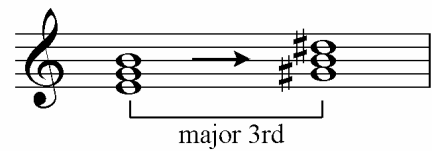
The orchestration of much of *The Planets* clearly owes much to Stravinsky's example. According to Howells 'Holst...often cited *Petrushka* as an outstanding example of modern orchestration in his composition classes at the RCM and University College, Reading.'⁹ But, Holst clearly learnt more than just how to orchestrate with great transparency. Much has been made of what has been regarded as Holst's assimilation of Schoenberg's *Klangfarbenmelodie* technique in 'Neptune'. However, Holst adopts the concept in a way quite different from that of the Viennese composer. Whereas Schoenberg blends his sonorities in a post-Wagnerian manner so that the shift in instrumental colour is quite subtle, Holst varies his approach so that sometimes the shift is subtle but on other occasions the switch is quite direct. To achieve the latter effect he adopts Stravinsky's primary colour approach to orchestration, such as in the opening passage of 'Neptune', scored for three flutes.

In the realm of tonal thinking Holst learnt much from Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky. Holst was fond of the juxtaposition of minor triads where the root of each is a major third a part. This is a characteristic that one can trace in the works of Rimsky-Korsakov. Compare the opening of his *Antar* with that of 'Neptune'.

⁹ Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Celebration* (London: Thames, 1996), 182.

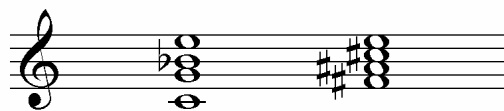


Ex.52a – Rimsky-Korsakov, *Antar*, opening

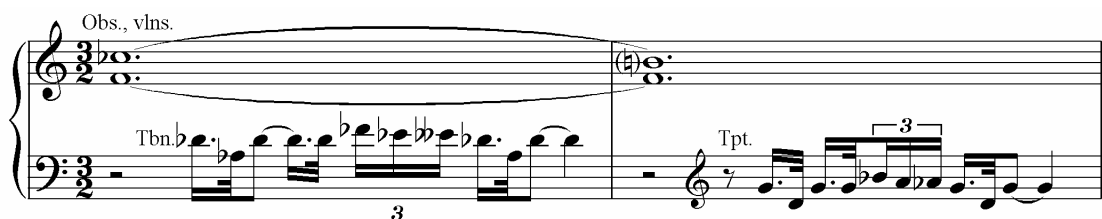


Ex.52b – Holst, ‘Neptune’

Note each pair of triads shares a pivot note. The use of pivots, especially enharmonic ones, is another Russian feature in Holst’s music. Examples of the use of pivot notes to modulate can be found in the music of Schubert and Haydn, but these are diatonic pivots and largely exploit a false relation (i.e. with voice leading). In the introduction to his Fourth Symphony Tchaikovsky enharmonically re-harmonises the same note five times to dramatic effect. Musorgsky, and later Rimsky-Korsakov, exploited the use of enharmonic pivots and favoured the gesture especially if it precipitated movement to unrelated chords. A device used by both these composers was a double enharmonic pivot that facilitated a chord progression by a tritone. Musorgsky uses it in the Coronation Scene of *Boris Godunov* and Rimsky-Korsakov in the second movement of *Scheherazade*.



Ex.53a – Musorgsky, *Boris Godunov*, Coronation scene, harmonic progression

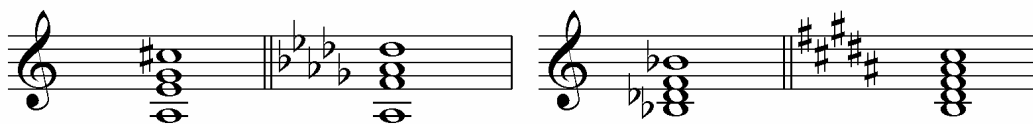


Ex.53b – Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade*, 2nd mvt, 5 bars after fig.D

Holst’s use of the enharmonic change became a hallmark of much of his music, such that in turn Benjamin Britten admitted to the composer’s daughter, Imogen: ‘That’s one of the things that I learnt from your father; the enharmonic change and the extraordinary effect it has on the note that is changed.’¹⁰ Bars 29-30 in ‘Venus’ are an example of such an ‘extraordinary

¹⁰ Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1993), 16.

effect', which completely wrong-foots the listener, similar to that achieved by Tchaikovsky in *Romeo & Juliet*. Again the (implied) movement by tritone skip is the common feature.



Ex.54a – Tchaikovsky, *Romeo & Juliet*, fig.xx

Ex.54b – Holst, 'Neptune', bar 29-30

This, like many composers, led Holst to experiment with bitonality. 'Mercury' is such an example but the way he exploits the interval of the tritone is indebted to late Rimsky-Korsakov and early Stravinsky, as in the *Firebird*. At the opening of the ballet Stravinsky fills in the tritone gap with major and minor thirds alternately, a process which Holst similarly executes at the opening of 'Mercury'.



Ex.55a – Stravinsky, *Firebird*, opening

Ex.55b – Holst, 'Mercury', opening

Holst also exploited the idea of the pivot in linking contrasting sections of music together. The harmonic pivot links two usually unrelated chords together by a shared pitch, and by the same token one can link unrelated sections of music together by some shared attribute, rather than by supplying a transition passage. As already demonstrated the process of transition was anathema to Holst. One feels sure he would have agreed with Musorgsky: 'O transitions! How many fine things were spoilt by you.'¹¹ Thus, an aspect of one section can be used as the pivotal linking thread into the next, such as a single note, a chord, a rhythm or even a texture. Holst had used already the Rimsky-like idea of an underlying ostinato that threads through a whole movement to great effect in the finale of *Beni Mora*, but in this instance the composer was not linking sections together, rather the ostinato is the canvas for

¹¹ Letter from Musorgsky to Rimsky-Korsakov c.1868 quoted in *Musical Times*, March 1914, 158.

the musical collage Holst assembles upon it. In the third movement of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* a perpetuum mobile figure is the basis for the first subject, the shape and rhythmic pattern of which becomes the linking thread for more than 200 bars of the movement. It begins in the foreground and later becomes the background to the second subject.

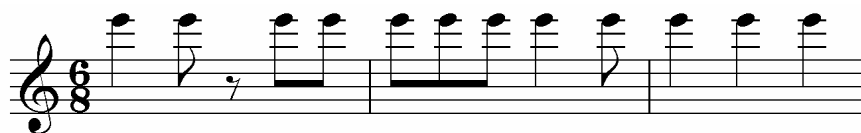


Ex. 56a – Tchaikovsky, Sixth Symphony, 3rd movement, opening



Ex. 56b – Tchaikovsky, Sixth Symphony, 3rd movement, second subject

In the middle section of 'Mercury' Holst links 112 bars using a 6-bar figure that combines this process with that of the changing background technique. Holst's figure begins in the background in the violins then glockenspiel. After seven statements, the rhythm then becomes the basis for a melodic figure, which is repeated twelve times.



Ex. 57a – Holst, 'Mercury', rhythmic figure, bar 44



Ex. 57b – Holst, 'Mercury', melodic figure, fig.III

Holst made a 4-hand transcription of *The Planets* wherein this passage looks decidedly unexciting, the only variation being in register and the accompanying harmony. In its symphonic version each and every statement adopts a different orchestral guise; it is constantly being developed texturally. This is wholly idiomatic orchestral music and the most 'Russian' movement in the suite.

In conjunction with a repeated pitch or melodic fragment the use of a repeated rhythmic figure over long spans can sometimes act in the manner of a pedal point by which tension can be built up, especially if it functions as a background to other moving figures. Towards the end of ‘Mercury’ a pedal B is presented amongst some related and some quite unrelated chords, such as C major and B flat major. It is of course nothing more than a dominant pedal, which is then followed by a tonic pedal, but its presentation as a constant rhythmic ostinato amongst rapidly changing rhythmic and harmonic textures creates an ambiguity which, when the movement eventually resolves, intensifies the sense of release when it occurs. Here the effect is obtained at the close of a movement, but it can also be applied at the end of a section to propel the music into the section that follows. This release of tension is precipitated by the removal or alteration of a static or constant figure amidst other changing variables. It is a kind of catapult device which Holst adapted from Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. In the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred Symphony* the composer repeats a three-note figure on the violas, which gradually gets faster by diminution of note values but with no change in pitch. As other more mobile figures are introduced over the static one Tchaikovsky creates an enormous build-up of tension, released at the cadence point.

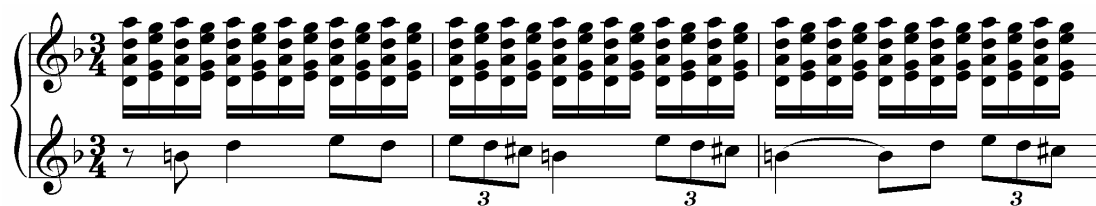
The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system features a Viola part with a repeating triplet figure (three eighth notes) that gradually increases in speed, and a Bass part with a static three-note figure. The second system continues the Viola part and introduces a more complex, moving figure in the Bass part. Labels 'leading to' are placed between the systems.

Ex.58 – Tchaikovsky, *Manfred Symphony*, 1st movement, bar 60-61, 69, 72, 76, 79

Holst uses a similar catapult idea but, at the cadential point of release, introduces an element of instability, which imparts an extra propulsive element. In ‘Mars’ Holst adopts a rhythmic ostinato as the common link between two contrasting sections, which recurs later when he fragments and interchanges these with an additional third theme. The rhythmic

Again the release is thwarted and the unstable element, the 6-3 chord, propels the music forward again. When the ostinato gives way at this point it throws the new material into relief. The propulsive strength of gestures like these is such that the music requires no dialectic process to drive itself.

Sometimes, as in the First Dance of *Beni Mora*, Holst appears to have deliberately avoided linking his blocks of material together and simply juxtaposes them side-by-side. It gives the effect of a montage in which the composer cuts to and from various ideas with seeming irregularity, a technique that Stravinsky was essentially the first composer to make effective use of. The effect Holst creates in *Jupiter* is very similar to that of the opening tableau of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and also in his use of diatonic dissonance where all notes of the same scale are kept in play yet the clashes are never harsh.



Ex. 62a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, fig. 1



Ex. 62b – Holst, 'Jupiter', bar 6

Stravinsky here follows the Russian tradition of setting folk tunes against a background wherein colour and movement are more important than harmony in the usual sense. In the ballet the various groups at the Shrovetide fair are given a series of musical sketches, like a series of divertissements, all set over the seemingly functionless fairground texture. Holst presents three characteristic themes, each of which paraded pass, and when the first and third are counterpointed against each other over the opening texture, the effect is not dissimilar to

that in *Petrushka* when the Wet Nurses dance with the Coachmen and Grooms (fig.114, 1911 version), their respective themes presented over the fairground texture.



Ex.63 – Holst, ‘Jupiter’, bar 140

In ‘Jupiter’ next follows the contrasting ‘trio’ section followed by the reprise of the first half. In this format a reprise of the ‘trio’ melody would not be expected, but Holst provides one and in a very interesting way. The movement is essentially in C major, but when the ‘trio’ theme is reprised (fig.XVII) the music switches abruptly to B major. The theme is stated deep in the bass below a highly ornate texture of rapid pentatonic arpeggio figures in the woodwind, harp and strings. This section is only seven bars long, but when the music then moves back to C major the effect is similar to that achieved in *A Somerset Rhapsody* in making the home key seem detached, here achieving the effect that the music has literally taken off. This coda, although part of the tonal structure, seemingly stands outside the main part of the movement, showing a totally different aspect of something already heard. Holst, in ‘Venus’, ‘Saturn’ and ‘Neptune’ also makes use of a coda-epilogue but to greater effect than in ‘Jupiter’.

The idea seems to have developed from Holst’s own experiments with musical frames and the epilogue to Vaughan Williams’ *A London Symphony*. As with his friend’s symphony, Holst’s epilogues follow after the standard reprise of material and so do not have a structural purpose. Moreover they fulfil some narrative purpose but, more than Vaughan Williams, Holst reserves some special orchestral texture or, more typically, a new instrument for the moment wherein some previously heard material is stated in a transfigured form. The transfiguration is primarily of harmonisation and orchestration, i.e. of background, and like the changing background technique, this prioritisation of orchestration over symphonic process, is a Russian characteristic. For example in the coda of the last movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred Symphony* (bar 448) the transfiguration of texture represented by the

introduction of the harmonium (or organ as in most performances, c.f. Liszt's *Eine Faust-Symphonie*) represents a literal transfiguration. Similarly, for the coda (bar 381) of Musorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* (in the version completed by Rimsky-Korsakov) harp and bell are introduced and the timbre of the flute playing low in its tessitura is exploited. In these examples the new textures, demanded by the narrative, are given new material.

Holst, in 'Venus', 'Jupiter' and 'Saturn', modifies already extant material for its subsequent presentation in new orchestral surroundings. Holst's technique seems to follow the plan that he contrasts the material in its new state by placing it immediately after the same material in its original form at the reprise. In 'Venus' after the reprise, there follows a coda where the movement is seemingly drawing to a close, but five bars after fig.VI he presents the material which has already been reprised only 35 bars previously, but now in a state of further transformation. Here, despite the tonic pedal, the music is harmonically restless (oscillating 9ths and half-diminished chords) and texturally murky, the orchestra playing in the lower half of its tessitura. But this soon passes and leads to a clarified texture; the music is removed to the top half of the orchestral tessitura, with prominent new sonorities (celesta and harp harmonics) and a new pentatonic harmonic idiom.

A very similar effect is achieved in 'Saturn'. The opening motif of the movement becomes the object of transfiguration. It appears in various guises, initially outlining a tritone, then a 4th and later a minor 3rd. The movement proceeds and at the climax a crisis is precipitated; the motif appears again in its original tritone form, thus allowing the greatest contrast with its transfigured form, which then follows. The epilogue here, as in 'Venus', has a two-fold nature. The initial phase displays a slight restless quality and it takes a while for the fully transfigured state to emerge. Statements are made in E major and then D major before finally coming to rest, both metaphorically and harmonically, in C major. Again the epilogue introduces a whole new sound world: harp, organ pedal and bells (previously played with metal striker, now soft felt), and imparts a feeling of transfiguration by exploiting a pentatonic harmonic style. The new instrument introduced in the epilogue to 'Neptune' is the human voice where Holst likewise uses the pentatonic idiom, here in the harp arpeggios from

bar 97. In its *Klangfarbenmelodie* textures one could regard ‘Neptune’ as the epilogue to the whole suite. As with the epilogues of ‘Venus’ and ‘Saturn’, ‘Neptune’ is largely static and has little if any real thematic material. It is pure atmosphere – an experiment in timbre and sonority. Holst’s epilogues impart the sensation of some kind of musical or spiritual transfiguration, but this is not some Faustian transfiguration towards ultimate knowledge, rather a release from humanity back to a state of nescience, a characteristic one can find throughout his output, from the early *A Somerset Rhapsody* (the return to the empty country scene) to the late *Egdon Heath*.¹²

A critic reviewing *The Planets* once dubbed Holst as ‘the English Stravinsky’. That critic was referring to the rhythmic vitality of Holst’s music. If Holst and Stravinsky do share some similarities as composers it is in their great ability for stylistic assimilation. The originality of the best of Holst’s works is demonstrated, as, paradoxically, are so many composers’ works, in his convincing assimilation of other music but in such a way that would never constrict his own creative imagination.

Frank Bridge

The parallels between Bridge and Holst are rarely commented upon. Bridge, like Holst, was concerned that composition should not indulge in musical hyperbole – a piece should say what it needed to say and then stop. Similarly they saw it necessary to constantly evolve their musical style and not rest on the successes of earlier works. It is interesting that neither composer regarded his ‘hit’ work – Holst’s *The Planets* and Bridge’s *The Sea* – as his best composition, and bemoaned how it was overplayed at the expense of his later output. The two composers shared a personality trait in their firm belief that, as artists, they must remain true to themselves, even if this meant alienation of a popular audience; composition was a quest for an artistic truth. They held a desire not to repeat themselves musically, thus consequently both composers evolved at a speed that left their audiences behind. The uncompromising style of their late works meant they would increasingly find themselves

¹² In the light of Holst’s immense admiration for Thomas Hardy one is tempted to speculate that the manner of Holst’s epilogues was inspired by this common theme of his novels.

marginalized from the mainstream musical establishment. Both also, despite the difference in age, came to a realisation of the need for a more radical style at around the same time – 1912.

Unlike Holst, Bridge was critical of the folk-music movement: ‘So long as we have no consciously national music, I think all should be well with the future.’¹³ Somewhat akin to Elgar and Delius in their contempt for a national style, Bridge’s attitude permitted him a less self-conscious outlook on the music of other composers. The style he evolved, however, would never allow him to be admitted to the pantheon of Englishness that, rightly or wrongly, gives shelter to Elgar and Delius. Bridge’s crime, in the eyes of Herbert Hughes, was in his later works to have subscribed to the ‘international vogue of atonalism...he can no longer be regarded as a “young British composer”.’¹⁴ His early pieces show him writing in a post-Brahmsian language lightened by a Fauré-esque French accent, but with works such as the *Dance Poem* (1913), *Summer* (1914) and *Lament* (1915) Bridge revealed a growing self-awareness, no doubt in the light of much of the new music that was performed in London in the decade before the First World War. However, when his Piano Sonata emerged in 1924 it appeared that there had been a suitably modernist rupture in the evolution of Bridge’s style, with Scriabin casting a heavy shadow over that work. As Herbert Hughes observed of the Second Piano Trio in 1929: ‘One wondered whether Mr Bridge had not somewhat forced upon himself this style of writing...having suddenly adopted a manner (as he did in his recent Piano Sonata) that bears no recognisable relationship to his own natural development.’¹⁵ But in each of the three pre-war works respectively there is a sultry chromatic languor and an intensity, which in retrospect, allow Bridge’s later more direct use of Scriabin’s aesthetic to appear more logical than hitherto has been acknowledged.

That Bridge must have been aware of Scriabin’s music before the war is witnessed in his *Three Poems* (1913-14) for piano. Bridge’s use of the quintessentially Scriabinesque generic title ‘poem’ and their individual titles – Solitude, Ecstasy and Sunset – coupled with a sultry chromaticism meant that as mere miniatures for domestic consumption they were

¹³ Frank Bridge, quoted in *Radio Times*, 23-29 July 1988, 72. It is not clear when or to whom he made this remark.

¹⁴ Herbert Hughes, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 November 1929, 8. From a review of the Piano Trio No.2.

¹⁵ Herbert Hughes, op. cit.

stretching the genre. The post-war popularity of Scriabin in England peaked in 1921, the year in which Bridge began to compose the Piano Sonata (1921-24). Since the Piano Sonata is dedicated to the memory of Ernest Bristow Farrar, one may presume it was meant as a memorial to Bridge's friend who died in 1918 on active service in the First World War. As described in Part One, the post-war years in England saw a rising parallel interest in theosophy and Scriabin. Whether Bridge ever took any interest in theosophy is not known. The impact of the War on Bridge, a pacifist of great conviction, obviously led Bridge to reassess his hitherto largely untroubled musical aesthetic in favour of a more radical style. In composing a piano sonata *in memoriam* it seems quite logical that he drew his main inspiration from the only major composer of the period who was writing piano sonatas in a challenging and advanced style; that Scriabin was also the least nationalist of his generation may also have been regarded positively by Bridge. The Piano Sonata and *Enter Spring* (1927) are clearly indebted to Scriabin's later piano and orchestral works. The Third String Quartet (1926) and Second Piano Trio (1929) although sharing some of the same harmonic resources of the Piano Sonata and *Enter Spring*, retain the residue of Bridge's interest in Scriabin, but show him beginning to absorb aspects of Schoenberg, Berg and Bartók.

The main point that strikes one about Scriabin's music is his use of harmony and the effect this then has on aspects of structure and form. As his harmonic language expanded, rather than abandon tonality altogether, which in turn would create a new set of problems, Scriabin instead evolved what Jim Samson has described as an 'expanded tonality.'¹⁶ Common practice sonata form is essentially a tonal contest between two contrasted keys, e.g. tonic and dominant. In his Fifth Sonata (1907) Scriabin uses two distinct harmonic regions rather than two keys or tonal regions, to create the 'tonal' contest. The first subject's harmonic region is a major chord with added 6th and 7th degrees, the whole chord being accepted as a consonance and is used to colour the whole of the first subject section.

¹⁶ Jim Samson, 'Scriabin: The Evolution of a Method', *Soundings*, 4, 1974, 64-75.

Ex.64 – Scriabin, Fifth Sonata, bar 47

The second subject's harmonic region is that of an unresolved dominant seventh which proceeds with a characteristic tritone skip in the bass. The chord is left unresolved, *Tristan-* fashion, so as to imply the key rather than state it explicitly. This chord permeates the second subject section, which is actually stated before the first subject section proper begins.

Ex.65 – Scriabin, Fifth Sonata, bar 13

These two sharply contrasted chords characterise well the 'active' and 'passive' aspects of the two subject groups and thus it allows Scriabin to employ the classical procedures of sonata form with little alteration. The transition moves towards and juxtaposes the new harmonic region before it is established with the second subject. The development reworks the themes but, as one would expect of the development, avoids any clear commitment to either of the harmonic regions. The recapitulation presents the groups still with their own harmonic regions but in transposed states. In the Fifth Sonata Scriabin created this 'expanded tonality' where a sense of key is still necessary for the sense of tonal dynamic that drives the work, but the key is never revealed. Rather one observes the shadow that it casts, created by unresolved cadences and long pedal points.

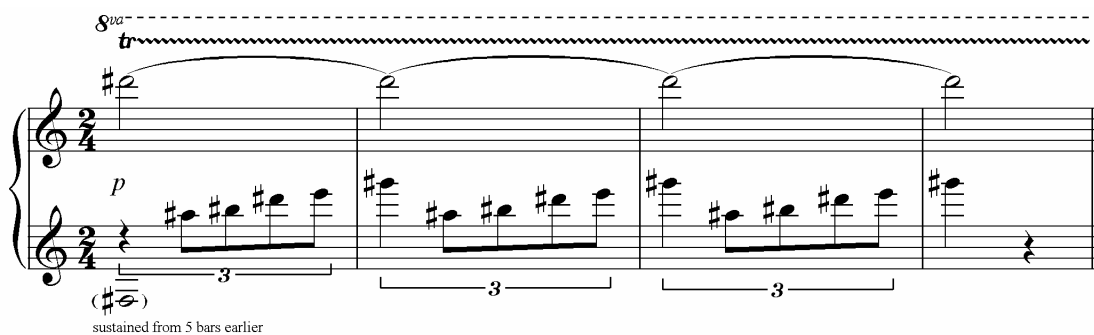
In the *Poem of Ecstasy* Scriabin uses the same technique but emphasises the harmonic region of Ex.65 with a second possible 'resolution' to the one illustrated. The effect weakens

the sense of tonality to be replaced by a strong sense of harmonic unity. This technique was then systematised in *Prometheus* and the piano works composed after it. Here a six-note chord provides the basis for all the melodic and harmonic material (and thus harmonic region) in each work. The chord that governs *Prometheus* has become known as the Mystic Chord, and is the progenitor of all the similar chords that Scriabin used in his music from 1910 onwards. In the Sixth Sonata the chord employed is revealed in stages throughout the course of the exposition only fully appearing at the closing stages of the exposition, thereafter throughout the work and most significantly again as the final chord.



Ex.66 – Scriabin, Sixth Sonata, final chord

The Seventh Sonata displays its chord in the opening bars, but as a texture rather than an explicit chord. The chord is present at the recapitulation but, unlike the Sixth Sonata, this is not the exact chord used to crown the work. Rather it is further altered or ‘modulated’ before being implied at the end with a series of trills and rushing quavers in the upper regions of the keyboard.



Ex.67a – Scriabin, Seventh Sonata, conclusion



Ex.67b – Mystic Chord as in Sixth Sonata

Ex.67c – Final chord from Seventh Sonata (transposed)

In the Seventh Sonata Scriabin attaches an opening motif, which since the tonal pull of the traditional tonic has been lost, is later used to mark out the major points of structural articulation. The ordering of material after that point can then be constantly varied; the result can sound remarkably spontaneous and yet it is still bound by an inner logic. Effectively, this approach allowed Scriabin to create a structure that can still exploit the traditional dialectic idea of sonata – including the more formal developmental methods to which his somewhat aphoristic themes lend themselves quite well – but the contest is now one of mood and intensity rather than of explicit tonal centres.

Lisa Hardy in her book *The British Piano Sonata 1870-1945* draws attention to certain similarities between Scriabin's Sixth Sonata and Bridge's Piano Sonata (1921-24).¹⁷ True, both works open with very similar textures and sonorities, but it is with Scriabin's Fifth Sonata, however, that a more fundamental model for Bridge's Sonata can be observed. Scriabin's Fifth Sonata begins with an introduction, comprised of two main ideas, which is used as a link from the exposition to the development, and recurs towards the end of the recapitulation, dramatically altered. Bridge uses this scheme also using his introduction material as a link from development to recapitulation as well. Both composers begin their first subject transitions with a similar motif and keyboard figuration.

The image shows a musical score for Scriabin's Fifth Sonata, bar 96. It is written for piano in 6/8 time and F# major. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff is marked 'imperioso' and the bass staff is marked 'f'. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and dynamic markings. The treble staff has a melodic line with accents and a fermata. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment with a prominent bass line. There are several dynamic markings, including accents and a fermata.

Ex.68a – Scriabin, Fifth Sonata, bar 96

¹⁷ Premiered by Myra Hess at the Wigmore Hall on 15 October 1925, who also gave the U.S. premiere in New York the following year in March.

Ex.68b – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 66

In the link from exposition to development which uses introductory material, Scriabin brings back both themes whereas Bridge only brings back one and substitutes a new theme in place of the second.

Ex.69 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 115

At the climax of the recapitulation both composers bring back one of the themes from the introduction, scored on three staves to exploit the whole range of the piano.

Ex.70a – Scriabin, Fifth Sonata, bar 423

Ex. 70b – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 291

The ensuing coda is based on elements of the main first subject. The other chief parallel between these two sonatas is Bridge’s use of Scriabin’s technique of ‘expanded tonality’; again the chief model appears to be the latter’s Fifth Sonata.

Richard Taruskin has suggested that Scriabin conceived of his 6-note Mystic Chord as an inversion of the Extase Chord, which appears in the *Poem of Ecstasy*, the origin of which, like the Scriabin Sixth in the *Divine Poem*, can be traced back to the French Sixth, the chord so beloved of Scriabin’s idol, Chopin.¹⁸ Central to these chords is the interval of a second, which also became a key characteristic of much of Bridge’s harmonic thinking. From here it is easy to ponder whether Bridge, who during the war years began experimenting with bitonality in a somewhat Holstian fashion, examined Scriabin’s Mystic Chord and perceived it from a bitonal angle.

Ex. 71 – Scriabin’s ‘Extase’–‘Mystic’ transformation and Bridge’s interpretation of the Mystic Chord

¹⁸ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 338-40.

Bridge appears to have adopted Scriabin's technique, as manifest in the Fifth Sonata, in using two 6-note chords, referred to here as type I and type II, as the tonal, or rather harmonic, regions within which to locate his first and second subject groups.

Type I Type II

D min [F#] C# maj C min [F#] D maj

n.b. common 3rd

Ex.72 – Bridge's harmony

Both are clearly derived from bitonal aggregates – note the similar sonority of the Type II chord to the Mystic Chord. Scriabin and Bridge clearly used similar harmonies but perceived them from a different perspective: Bridge, in his Sonata, is plainly thinking triadically whereas Scriabin, in his later Sonatas, is not. However, it was also in the long-range structural application of these chords that Scriabin's music influenced Bridge in the composition of the Piano Sonata.

As with Scriabin's example in the Sixth Sonata, Bridge in each section slowly unveils the 'key' chord as the music progresses, explicit reference only being made at each paragraph's climax. Lisa Hardy says that there are three chords as the basis to this sonata, but rather one can see that the chord around which the introduction is based (bars 1-41) is an incomplete version of the type I chord that characterises the first subject section and revealed fully at bar 62.

Type I > Type I

Ex.73 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 62

The transitional section that follows at bars 69-73 shows the chord in a state of ‘modulation’ where a whole tone passage acts as a trigger to facilitate the type I chord’s ‘modulation’ to type II. (It should be noted that the Mystic Chord is easily referable to whole tone pitch collections by resolving only one note, having an almost neutralising effect). The second subject section follows but since the opening phrase is based upon the first subject, logically Bridge does not begin in his type II area but rather weakens the prevailing type I until a recognisably new theme appears at bar 79. Only at this point does Bridge introduce his new harmonic region, which as before, is revealed in full at this section’s climax at bar 107.

The musical score for Ex. 74 is in 6/8 time and marked *ff*. It shows a transition from a Type I chord to a Type II chord. The Type II section includes a triplet in the bass line.

Ex.74 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 107

In the development section of Scriabin’s Fifth Sonata the process can be broadly split into two sections. From bar 248 there are references to the two ideas from the introduction acting as a ‘modulatory’ passage from the type II region, in which the development section began, toward the type I region which then follows.

The musical score for Ex. 75 is in 2/4 time and marked *pp*. It shows a transition from a Type II region to a Type I region. The Type I section includes triplets in both the treble and bass lines.

Ex.75 – Scriabin, Fifth Sonata, bar 248

Bridge does something similar. In the bass from bar 183 appears an idea related to that of the introduction and its Type I region, after which follows a section which leads to the affirmation of the type II region at bar 214.

Ex. 76a – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 183

Ex. 76b – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 213

Scriabin’s Sonata remains in the type II region right up to the beginning of the recapitulation where it suddenly switches back to its type I region. Bridge inserts the introductory material as link back to his recapitulation, but here too it is couched in the type II region (hitherto it has been type I-based) leading straight into the veiled type I region as the recapitulation begins at bar 240. The recapitulation restates the main material not in reverse order, as Hardy claims, but as one would expect. The placing of the tolling bell theme at the climax is the only idea to be placed out of sequence. The veiled type I chord fails to assert itself properly and gives way to type II (transposed on to F# major and G# minor) as the second subject is reprised (bar 274 although the chord appears bar 279).

Ex.77 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 274

But at the climax of the movement with the tolling bell theme the type I chord emphatically crashes in.

Ex.78 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, bar 304

However, with a brief appearance at bar 328 of the type II chord, it is clear that this ‘tonal’ contest is not yet over; as with Scriabin in his late sonatas an element is often left ambiguously (and not a little tantalisingly) unresolved.

Other points of style and individual events relate Bridge’s Sonata to Scriabin’s output. Earlier, in the slow introductory part of the exposition, a small cadenza-like passage at bar 27-28 creates a chord identical to that which Scriabin’s Eighth Sonata is based upon.

Ex.79 – Harmonic derivations

Later in the link section between exposition and development a lingering, tenuto, arpeggiated chord, possibly in place of the earlier mini cadenza, is now directly referable to the chord used in Scriabin's Sixth Sonata and the one that opens the Seventh Sonata.

Ex.80 – Harmonic derivations

In the light of the already acknowledged similarities of Scriabin's two chords, it appears that Bridge is following the same idea of developing his chords, only in a different direction.

The second movement is seemingly less indebted to Scriabin stylistically, and formally its structural practice is less interesting. The movement is constructed of two contrasting thematic groups. The second of the two is curiously reminiscent of Debussy's *Clair de lune*, but this makes an excellent foil to the dark, first theme, its repetitive chordal texture similar to the opening of Scriabin's Sixth Sonata.

Ex.81a – Scriabin, Sixth Sonata, opening



Ex. 81b – Bridge, Piano Sonata, 2nd movement opening

Ostinato textures and slow-moving melodies given out above arpeggiated textures are the other characteristics Bridge's movement shares with Scriabin's sonata.

If the middle movement of Bridge's Sonata is perhaps representative of some brief armistice, the final movement returns to the battle. In this movement, in addition to the recurrence of the type I and type II chords, one further chord of significance is introduced in bar 4. This type III chord is nothing special in itself, being a stock-in-trade device of many composers from Schubert onwards, but with the lower half in second inversion one ponders its possible relation to Bridge's type I chord whose notes are usually arranged so the lower half form a six-four chord.



Ex. 82 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, bar 3

The type III chord appears to represent the first subject group. Type I reappears at bar 21 as the basis for the second subject group, but type II is also briefly present in this section from bar 26 and then type III appears from bar 33 to reassert control. The dominance of type III continues for almost another 30 bars where, after two bitonal flourishes with arpeggios of B and F and then F# and C at bars 59 and 60, the exposition closes with type III very firmly in control. However, with the commencement of the development, type I reappears (and curiously the 'Tristan' chord, bar 73) with also a thematic reference back to the first

movement. The type III chord seems to still have control for the rest of the development and most of the recapitulation, despite a version that appears referable to the Mystic Chord at the beginning of that section at bar 98.

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 83. It consists of a piano part with two staves (bass and treble) and a separate treble staff on the right. The piano part is in 4/4 time and features a complex melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The treble staff on the right shows a resultant chord in bar 98, which is a complex chord with a sharp sign and a circled symbol. The text 'Resultant chord in bar 98 c.f. ex.79' is written below the treble staff.

Ex.83 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, bar 98

Everything seems more or less straightforward until bar 127 when Bridge suddenly cuts to the music from the middle of the first movement's first subject group (bb.44-51). At bar 141 this section then appears to have become a coda-epilogue with a dramatic reprise of the bell-like chords from the opening of the first movement. The transfiguration that has taken place is that in the first movement these chords are linked to the type I chord, but now in the third movement from bar 141 they are altered to be explicitly referable to type II, which until this point had not been used significantly in this movement.

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 84. It consists of a piano part with two staves (bass and treble) and a separate treble staff on the left. The piano part is in 3/4 time and features a complex melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The treble staff on the left shows a Type II chord, which is a complex chord with a sharp sign and a circled symbol. The text 'Type II' is written above the treble staff. The piano part is marked with a dynamic of 'mf'.

Ex.84 – Bridge, Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, bar 141 (c.f. ex.70b)

Bars 151-55 present a curious anomaly where the music moves back to type I, but at bar 156, with a reprise of the theme from bar 11 of the first movement, type II reasserts its dominance

and is present in every bar to the end of the sonata. Chord type II has seemingly won the battle for supremacy; but Bridge seems to say this is a distinctly hollow victory.

In the orchestral rhapsody *Enter Spring* (1926-27)¹⁹ Bridge makes further use of Scriabin's harmonic and formal processes by associating thematic material or subject groups with a chord or harmonic idiom. The opening to *Enter Spring* takes the Mystic Chord and orchestrates it in a manner that is striking in its resemblance to the opening of the *Poem of Ecstasy*, which Bridge must have heard in one of the seven performances it received in London between 1918 and 1923. Bridge's choice of instruments – melody in flute accompanied by oboe, clarinets, horns, tremolando violins and violas, harp, celesta, and later, solo violin – is the same selection that Scriabin uses to score the opening pages of the *Poem*. The chord is the Mystic Chord and although the chord is arranged in a more open position it is identical to that used at the opening of *Prometheus*.

The image shows a musical staff with three chordal examples. The first chord is labeled 'Chord at opening of Enter Spring'. The second chord is labeled 'Bitonal aggregates c.f. ex.8a' and is annotated with 'B maj' and 'A7'. The third chord is labeled 'Chord at opening of Prometheus' and has an '8' below it. All chords are in G major (one sharp).

Ex.85 – Harmonic comparison

This instance provides proof, as mentioned earlier, that Bridge conceived of the chord in triadic, bitonal terms. Also, where Scriabin could subtly alter his chord to make it referable to either the whole tone or octatonic scales, Bridge likewise shifts his chord to make it referable to pentatonic or quartal pitch collections.

In the opening pages of the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Enter Spring* both composers foreshadow their work's closing harmonic resolution: Scriabin resolves his 'Extase' chord to C major, whereas Bridge simultaneously states a chord of similar sonority to the 'Extase'

¹⁹ Bridge's only orchestral commission was first performed at the Norwich Festival on 27 October 1927, conducted by the composer. Commissioned by the Festival after the success of *The Sea*, which had been performed at Norwich in 1924, its original title had been *On Friston Down* (the location of Bridge's Sussex country cottage). The press reaction was largely hostile and reports say the audience, some of whom giggled (it seems not to have been a particularly good performance), did not pay much attention.

chord over violin passagework which is a broken version of his final C major chord plus ninth.

Ex.86 – Bridge, *Enter Spring*, 2 bars before fig.1

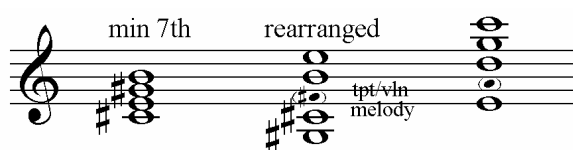
Enter Spring can easily be regarded as being in four sections, the first section also comprising a brief introduction and the final section acting as a reprise. As in the Piano Sonata, Bridge characterises the whole of this first section (introduction and first section proper from fig.4) with one chord, in this case the Mystic Chord, while also hinting at the chord that becomes the basis of the second section, a pentatonic chord. This is first heard at fig.6 in the brass and, in the way it is voiced, one can see how it has almost grown out of the first section's Mystic chord.

Ex.87 – Bridge, *Enter Spring*, fig.6, c.f. Mystic Chord

But then at fig.7 Bridge introduces another chord that is also to be of significance later, a quartal chord, and one can then see how both these chords are, in a way, two sides of the same harmonic coin – a process Scriabin was also fond of exploiting.

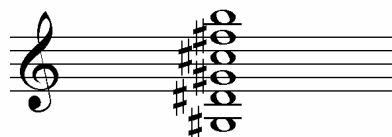
Ex.88 – Bridge, *Enter Spring*, fig.7

From fig.9 Bridge begins to disintegrate or weaken his chord by treating parts of it melodically (rather than wholly as a chord) and so at the first section's climax (fig.11) the chord is not presented explicitly, as in the Piano Sonata, but in a smeared or melted form. However, in what appears to be a codetta to the first section the chord does make one last appearance (Harp II, three bars before fig.15) before the second section commences (fig.15) characterised by the chord of the minor 7th, referable to that heard at fig.6.



Ex.89 – Bridge, *Enter Spring*, 4 bars after fig.15

At fig.17 the Mystic Chord, in weakened form, attempts to reassert itself and from fig.18-20 it presides more strongly, but at fig.20 and then especially at fig.22, the pentatonic chord FACDG is used explicitly (in a climax reminiscent of Delius' *Song of the High Hills*) which as a nature portrait is particularly apt. This quickly subsides into the Holstian pastoral haze of the third section (fig.26-31), which makes extensive use of the same chord but in its quartal version.



Ex.90 – Bridge, *Enter Spring*, fig.26

The fourth section (fig.31) acts as a reprise, but as Scriabin does in the *Poem* amongst other pieces, the material is truncated and not reprised in the same order that it was presented in the first section. The Mystic Chord reappears indirectly at first then bluntly at the sixth bar of this section and then follows the first half of the first section and the last part of the second section. At the point of the expected climax of the second section, Bridge aborts and presents a reminiscence of the opening introduction with celesta, harp and violin harmonics. This is the last we hear of the Mystic Chord for what follows in the coda is based on the whole of the

Holstian, third section, making use of the coda-epilogue technique. Fig.40 represents the reprise of the material as it appeared at fig.30, now transposed. Directly following this at fig.41 follows a rescored version, introducing the new sonority of the tubular bells. This coda, like the introduction, also bears close comparison with the parallel passage in Scriabin's *Poem*. The theme is presented by unison brass (Scriabin uses horns and trumpets, Bridge uses trumpets and trombones), with pealing bells, harp arpeggios, trilling strings over a tonic pedal. The passage that this reprises and extends from the third section (fig.30) in both pieces occurs just before the recapitulation and shares the same characteristics. Both passages are, in effect, two linked climaxes, and share the slight differences in orchestration that distinguish this passage from its recurrence in the coda. They also share the same flaw. As Anthony Payne observes, in this section of *Enter Spring* the climax is too long, and so rather pre-empts the crowning reappearance of the same material in the coda. Scriabin's piece shares this problem but it is seemingly less obvious since there is a longer span of music between the two climaxes.

As mentioned earlier, after *Enter Spring* Bridge's style shifted perceptibly away from the more overt references to Scriabin that one can trace in the two works discussed here. Subsequently he moved toward absorbing the ideas of the Second Viennese School, most readily identifiable in his late chamber music, although one can still hear occasional references to Scriabin (compare the closing of his Second Piano Trio with the close of Scriabin's Seventh Sonata). It is clear, however, that Russian music helped him to expand his horizons and embolden him (and other English composers) in his quest for a mature and personal style.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NEW GENERATION

I once ruled a score for the same instruments and with the same number of bars as Mozart's G minor symphony, and in that framework I wrote a symphony, following as far as possible the same outlines for his themes and the same modulations. I did this on my own initiative as I was groping in the dark after light, but looking back after 30 years I don't know any discipline from which I learnt so much.

Edward Elgar¹

Bliss and Walton were of a new generation of English composers who were far more at ease with musical modernism than the previous generation. They were seemingly less self-conscious about what they assimilated and to what level, since their sense of identity was no longer quite so preoccupied with the notion of national music. Bliss and Walton both found much to stimulate their creative minds in the music of the newer French and Russian composers such as Ravel, Poulenc, Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

Arthur Bliss

Bliss's interest in Stravinsky began, like that of so many English composers of his generation, with the three great pre-war ballets in their London performances by the Russian Ballet between 1912 and 1914. After returning to England after the First World War, Bliss followed up his fascination for Stravinsky by conducting the world premiere of the Russian composer's *Ragtime* at the Aeolian Hall on 27 April 1920. The following year he wrote three articles which aimed to enlighten readers of Stravinsky's music and his approach to composition.² These articles were the product of Bliss's own personal involvement with Stravinsky's music and also from the experience of applying some of the Russian's techniques in his own compositions. During the period 1918 to 1921 Bliss composed a handful of small-scale pieces for mixed chamber ensembles. Bliss's pieces, like those Stravinsky had composed

¹ Rupert de Cordova, 'Interview with Dr Edward Elgar', *Strand Magazine*, May 1904, 538-9, quoted in Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (2nd edn., Oxford: OUP, 1982), 26.

² 'Recent Works of Igor Stravinsky', *Musical News & Herald*, 14 May 1921, 625; 'What Modern Composition is Aiming At', *Musical News & Herald*, 23 July 1921, 90, 6 August 1921, 138-39, 20 August 1921, 189-90; 'A Short Note on Stravinsky's Orchestration', *Musical Standard*, 30 July 1921, 43.

during the war, enabled the composer to experiment and consolidate a number of ideas and techniques, which could then be applied in their refined form in larger works. These pieces, with their modernist flirtations, acquired for Bliss a reputation as an accessible innovator, a composer who could successfully assimilate a number of influences. Though his music pushed on the boundaries of modernity it never really fully engaged with it – Bliss always kept his music within the boundaries of propriety, a fact witnessed in the reviews of these early pieces by the finicky Ernest Newman, who regarded the composer as ‘an extraordinary talent...he does most that the newer French and Russians are trying to do, but does it very much better.’³ As the same critic noted of *Conversations*, ‘however *outré* [his harmonies] are, each note in them has a logical relation to all the others. His work was harmonically the most audacious of the afternoon, and much the most intelligent.’⁴

Bliss began work on *Rout* sometime in the autumn of 1920 and completed the work in November of that year. It was originally written for a musical party held on 15 December 1920 at the Piccadilly home of the Baroness d’Erlanger.⁵ One wonders to what extent the *soiree* influenced the piece – a gathering very similar to those held in Paris by the Princesse de Polignac – the Baroness’s guests included Karsavina, Ezra Pound and Paul Nash. Bliss had visited Paris late in 1919 which was then in the throes of Cocteau’s 1918 artistic manifesto *Le Coq et l’Arlequin*. *Rout* in many ways concurs with Cocteau in its anti-serious, frivolous style. Along with Bliss’s own *Madam Noy* (1918) a number of compositions by Stravinsky, Ravel and *Les Six* dating from this time are for voice and a small mixed ensemble, some setting a text of a non-serious nature.⁶ The obvious progenitor to all these pieces as

³ Review of *Rout* in the *Sunday Times*, 8 May 1921, 6.

⁴ *Sunday Times*, 24 April 1921, 6. The other pieces in the concert were Tailleferre’s *Image*, Poulenc’s *Cocardes*, Milhaud’s *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, Mozart’s *Haffner Serenade* and Alessandro Scarlatti’s *Christmas Cantata*.

⁵ Stratton House, on the corner of Stratton Street and 139 Piccadilly, W1. The Baroness (Marie Rose Antoinette Catherine de Robert d’Aqueria de Rochegude) was the wife of the poet and banker Baron Emile Beaumont d’Erlanger (1866-1939), elder brother to the composer and banker Baron Frederic A. d’Erlanger (1868-1943). The first public performance was given at the Steinway Hall on 4 May 1921, directed by Bliss.

⁶ A ‘Witchery Song’ for soprano, flute, clarinet, bassoon, harp, viola and double bass. Stravinsky’s *Three Japanese Lyrics* (1912-13, for voice, 2 flutes, 2 clarinets, piano and string quartet), Ravel’s *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913, for voice, piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, piano and string quartet), Poulenc’s *Rapsodie nègre* (1917, for voice, flute, clarinet, string quartet and piano), Durey’s *Images à Crusoe* (1918, for voice, flute, clarinet, string quartet and celesta or harp).

regards medium is *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) but stylistically Schoenberg's piece is a world away, and neither can his rather balanced ensemble account for these composers' more heterodox ensembles. Stravinsky's *Pribaoutki* (1914) is a more fruitful comparison in its medium, slightly eccentric texts and quirky, experimental style.⁷

Bliss described *Rout* and its companion pieces as 'experiments'. He was obviously following the example set by Stravinsky, whose wartime chamber pieces he had immense admiration for, being, as Bliss himself observed: 'akin to the pencil and charcoal sketches which serve artists as essays and tests for their larger canvasses, and it is as unfair to judge Stravinsky on these works as it would be to condemn a painter on the stray drawings in his portfolio.'⁸ One could conclude then that neither are we meant to take Bliss's own 'sketches' too seriously. There is definitely something of *l'esprit des Six* in *Rout*, but above all another Stravinsky piece is echoed. The inscription at the top of the score reads as follows: 'The title *Rout* is used in the old sense meaning revelry, and the voice part is given a string [of] syllables corresponding to the scraps of song that would reach a listener watching a carnival from an open window.' The opening immediately invites comparison with the Shrovetide carnival scene in *Petrushka*. In terms of its form *Rout* follows the same broad outline as the first part of the first tableau of *Petrushka* (up to fig.30 in the 1911 score). This portion of the Stravinsky ballet can be broken down into three sections, the third a modified restatement of the first. The first section has three groups of themes stated and then repeated in the same order with modifications, the last group extended. These similarities are not particularly striking in themselves, but on closer investigation one finds a deeper set of correspondences that *Rout* shares with *Petrushka*. The opening of *Rout* in both its instrumental and harmonic texture is *Petrushka* in microcosm.

⁷ For voice, flute, oboe/cor anglais, clarinet, bassoon, string trio and db, given its world premiere in London by Goossens on 22 February 1918.

⁸ Arthur Bliss, 'Unexplained Superstitions: The Cult of the Dead', *Musical News & Herald*, 23 April 1921, 523.

Fl. (8va)
Hns., cls. (8va)
tetrachord A
tetrachord B

Ex.91a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), opening

Vlms., hp., cel.
Bsns., vcl., db.
B A etc.
Mixolydian theme

Ex.91b – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), 2 bars after fig.3

Hp. A (tone higher) B
Fl. 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
Cl. A
Vln.+vla. mixolydian theme etc.
B 3 3 tr etc.

Ex.91c – Bliss, *Rout*, opening

Sop.v. A

Ex.91d – Bliss, *Rout*, 4 bars after fig.A

Like Stravinsky, Bliss creates a texture based on two tetrachords. This harmonic texture can be directly traced to the melodic ideas, both with a mixolydian inflection, which occur alongside it. Bliss's melodic ideas are not as short and pithy as those of Stravinsky but his stratifying of the texture into three layers; their comparable tessituras and the fact that Bliss's themes share elements with Stravinsky's make the parallel all the stronger.

In *Conversations* Bliss continued to explore the experimental path he had embarked upon in *Rout*. Composed in the winter of 1920 it was another piece to be premiered at a musical society party, this time at the house of Muriel Lee-Matthews on 19 January 1921.⁹ Bliss was plainly influenced by certain aspects of Stravinsky's *Three Pieces* for string quartet (1914), which he knew well since he referred to them in an article he wrote for the *Musical News & Herald*.¹⁰ In the *Three Pieces* Stravinsky gives each of the instruments their own contrasting material, which is deliberately set not to coincide; it is a constructivist piece in the sense that it is literally constructed from blocks of material put together in a seemingly arbitrary manner. The 1st violin has a long ostinato figure, the cello a shorter one, with a viola pedal note and 4-note interjections from the 2nd violin whose seeming randomness belies the strict organisation of the movement.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin 1 (Vln.1), Violin 2 (Vln.2), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vcl. pizz.). The score is in 3/4 time and consists of four staves. The Vln.1 staff has a long, repeating ostinato figure. The Vln.2 staff has a shorter, more complex figure. The Vla. staff has a long, sustained pedal note with occasional interjections. The Vcl. pizz. staff has a shorter, repeating figure. The score is labeled 'Ex. 92a – Stravinsky, Three Pieces'.

Ex.92a – Stravinsky, *Three Pieces*

The first movement of *Conversations* 'The Committee Meeting' is similarly a constructivist piece. Bliss gives each of his five instruments a specific theme, but none is played

⁹ The public premiere of *Conversations* took place on 20 April 1921 at the Aeolian Hall at the second of a series of four concerts organised by Edward Clark.

¹⁰ Stravinsky's *Three Pieces* were first heard in England at a performance at the Wigmore Hall, London on 13 February 1919 and again on 20 July 1920. The article Bliss refers to them in is 'Unexplained Superstitions: The Cult of the Dead', *Musical News & Herald*, 23 April 1921, 523.

continuously, the nearest being the violin which has a break of a beat and a half between repetitions.

Ex.92b – Bliss, *Conversations*

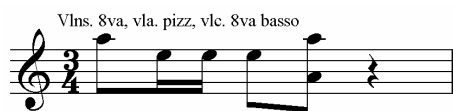
Bliss's themes are generally longer and more lyrical and his tonal organisation is not as neat as Stravinsky's. The Russian links his cells by means of interlocking tetrachords, whereas it is only the common pitch A that links Bliss's polytonal fragments.

Ex.93 – Stravinsky, tonal structure

The three middle movements owe little directly to any Russian style (they are more indebted to Ravel) so are not discussed here. The final movement 'In the Tube at Oxford Circus' again returns to the first of Stravinsky's *Three Pieces* for its initial inspiration. Bliss's cello ostinato can be easily traced to that of Stravinsky.

Ex.94 – Bliss, *Conversations*, 'In the Tube at Oxford Circus' (c.f. ex.92a)

Some smaller details can be traced to the second of the *Three Pieces*, such as an oboe motif that appears later in the movement.



Ex.95a – Stravinsky, *Three Pieces*,
2nd mvt., bar 5



Ex.95b – Bliss, 'In the Tube', Fig.E

Bliss perhaps blunted the impact of *Conversations* by giving each movement a referential title; the second of Stravinsky *Three Pieces* somehow loses its radical sheen when Stravinsky tells us it was inspired by a circus performer called 'Little Tich' and a female bareback rider. One wonders how *Conversations* would have been received by audiences and the press had Bliss given it the abstract title *Five Pieces* or similar.

In 1921 Bliss composed a Concerto for piano, tenor voice, strings and percussion. The composer was obviously dissatisfied with the piece since he subsequently rewrote it in 1924 as a Concerto for two pianos, wind, brass and percussion. This work was then given its first performance in Boston, Massachusetts on 19 December 1924, conducted by Koussevitzky. It appears that Koussevitzky may have been influential in suggesting the instrumentation for the new version of Bliss's Concerto, which is remarkably similar to that used by Stravinsky in his Concerto for Piano and Winds. Koussevitzky knew about Stravinsky's Concerto when he started sketching it in July 1923 (though Stravinsky's concept for the work may date back as early as June 1922) and hoped to premiere the work with its composer as soloist during his first season as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra during the winter of 1924-25. This plan, however, did not materialise (Stravinsky's Concerto was premiered in Paris on 22 May 1924). Instead the work Koussevitzky premiered in December 1924 was the new version of Bliss's Concerto. Bliss moved to the USA in April 1923 settling in Santa Barbara in August. In October the same year Bliss travelled to Boston to hear the orchestra and it is conceivable that he met Koussevitzky whereupon Stravinsky's Concerto came up in conversation, which inspired the instrumentation of Bliss's new double concerto and provided Koussevitzky with a new piece for his first season in Boston. Even if

Bliss fell upon the instrumentation for his 1924 concerto in ignorance of Stravinsky's concerto, the example of the Russian surely pointed him in that direction. In the programme note for the Boston performance Bliss describes how the concerto 'is intended as music in the abstract without any extra musical association,' and how he has 'eschewed string tone in this work, from the rooted conviction that strings and pianos are unpleasant to the ear.'¹¹ Stravinsky also eschewed stringed instruments in many of the compositions he wrote during the 1920s from the point of view that he felt their tone was too expressive, favouring the more objective tone of woodwind and brass.

Bliss subsequently revised his Concerto intermittently between 1925 and 1929; unfortunately the composer destroyed the manuscript for the 1924 version. Curiously, in the revision Bliss re-incorporated strings into his instrumentation. The 'prominent xylophone part' of the 1924 concerto (as described by the composer and seemingly also an aspect of the original 1921 version) shows that Bliss was still under the spell of *Petrushka* (there is no percussion in Stravinsky's Piano Concerto). The opening section of Bliss's concerto displays the influence of the 'Russian Dance' (fig.33) from the ballet, where the scoring spotlights piano and xylophone.

The image shows a musical score for Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for Piano (Pf.) and Xylophone (+ xyl.), and the bottom staff is for Clarinet (Cl.). The music is in 2/4 time. The top staff features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a section marked '(this bar without xyl.)' and a '5' below it. The bottom staff features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a '6' below it.

Ex.96a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), 13 bars after fig.42

The image shows a musical score for Bliss's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for Piano (Pis.) and Xylophone (+ xyl.), and the bottom staff is for Orchestra (Orch.). The music is in 2/4 time. The top staff features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a '6' below it. The bottom staff features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a '7' below it.

Ex.96b – Bliss, *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, opening

¹¹ Arthur Bliss, 'Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra: Programme note, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Hall, Boston, 19 December 1924, reprinted in Arthur Bliss (ed. Gregory Roscow), *Bliss on Music: Selected Writings of Arthur Bliss 1920-70* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 48.

It must be remembered that Bliss would have been familiar with the original version of *Petrushka* where much of the xylophone writing is more conspicuous than the 1947 revised version (the version most often played today) where Stravinsky rewrote most of it down an octave and made small cuts to its general contribution. Bliss, like Stravinsky, creates the same type of harmonic background, that based on added sixth chords (or minor triads plus seventh) – Stravinsky’s DFAB and GBDE, and Bliss’s FACD.

In a linking passage Bliss seems to have wandered accidentally in the world of Scriabin, of whose music he was not fond.

Ex. 97a is a musical score for three parts: Solo piano, Flute (Fl.), and Clarinet (Cls.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Solo piano part features a series of chords with a trill (tr) and an ornament (tr) above it. The Flute part has a trill (tr) and a triplet (3) of notes. The Clarinet part has a trill (tr) and a quintuplet (5) of notes. The Solo piano part also has a quintuplet (5) of notes. The Solo piano part is marked 'Solo piano' and the Flute and Clarinet parts are marked 'Fl.' and 'Cls.' respectively.

Ex.97a – Scriabin, *Prometheus*, 4 bars after fig.7

Ex. 97b is a musical score for two parts: Pianos and Orchestra (Orch.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Pianos part features a series of chords with trills (tr) and ornaments (tr) above them. The Orchestra part has a trill (tr) and an ornament (tr) above it. The Pianos part is marked 'Pianos' and the Orchestra part is marked 'Orch.'.

Ex.97b – Bliss, *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, fig.12

But it is not long before Bliss returns to the rhythms and sonorities of *Petrushka*.

Ex. 98a is a musical score for Solo piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The Solo piano part features a rhythmic pattern of chords with a trill (tr) and an ornament (tr) above it. The Solo piano part is marked 'Solo piano'.

Ex.98a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), fig.34 (orchestra omitted)

Ex.98b – Bliss, Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra, 5 bars after fig.29

After the 1925-29 revision, Bliss subjected his Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra, to two further revisions in 1950 and 1968 (a version for two pianos, three hands), making it his most revised piece. Like Stravinsky in the many pieces he revised, the revisions were largely ones of orchestration and texture, illustrating both composers' preoccupation with matters of sonority. It is clear their ideas came to them 'readily imbedded [sic] in a definite atmosphere of sonority,'¹² and in his next major work Bliss continued to absorb valuable lessons from Stravinsky's music.

Composed between 1921 and 1922, *A Colour Symphony* originally began life simply entitled 'Symphony in B'. Faced with a commission for the 1922 Three Choirs Festival but no ideas Bliss came across a book on heraldry which described the symbolic significance attached to various colours and 'saw the possibility of so characterising the four movements of a symphony that each would express a colour as I personally perceived it.'¹³ The title of the symphony and each of its movements – purple, red, blue and green – provoked great discussion in the press and inspired *Punch* to compose a rather clever poem, including the verse:

*Cultivate a green or blue sense, in the style of Bliss and Goossens,
And demolish as a nuisance those who perpetually pule
When a piece virile and vital with scarifying title
Is performed at some recital by the Neo-English School* (see Appendix 1)

¹² Arthur Bliss, 'A Short Note on Stravinsky's Orchestration', *Musical Standard*, 30 July 1921, 43. Bliss is paraphrasing the French musicologist and founder of the *Revue musicale*, Henry Prunières (1886-1942).

¹³ Arthur Bliss, *As I Remember* (London: Faber, 1970), 71.

Despite the fact that Bliss stressed the inspiration was the symbolic association of each colour, many seemed to misinterpret the music as being either an abstract, semi-scientific response to the colours or in some way an actual representation of the colours in music.¹⁴ Bearing in mind this was in post-war England when clairvoyance and automatic drawing¹⁵ and the music of Scriabin were at the height of their popularity, one can perhaps understand their confusion.

Bliss revised the symphony in 1932. Some of the revisions were undertaken purely from the point of view of practicality, for example re-notating rhythms to make them easier to read. The prime effect tightened the symphony's structure: themes and sections were reworked or cut altogether. Other revisions generally softened the sound world of the symphony. Points of orchestration are changed, yet these appear not to be revisions in the light of experience, but rather a different approach to sonority and timbre, rather similar to the reasons behind Stravinsky's decision to revise several of his works in the 1940s. As with Stravinsky, one feels Bliss's revisions were undertaken to suit the aesthetic of the composer he had become by 1932 with emphasis now less on innovation and experiment and more on music for as broad an audience as possible.¹⁶ However, Bliss was clearly not worried about the incongruence of style apparent in some passages since the most marked Russian influences detectable in the symphony are almost wholly in the sections that received little or no attention in the revision.

The influences in the symphony come from a wide range of sources from Elgar to Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du printemps* in particular. The music for that ballet was first published in 1921 and given its first controversial performance as a concert work in the same year. It

¹⁴ For Bliss, Purple suggested amethysts, pageantry, royalty and death, producing music of a regal and processional nature. Red suggested rubies, wine, revelry, furnaces, courage and magic, and inspired an explosive scherzo. Blue suggested sapphires, deep water, skies, loyalty and melancholy, and so a pensive, slow movement. Green suggested emeralds, hope, youth, joy, spring and victory, and thus a strong, exultant finale.

¹⁵ Séances in which attempts were made to communicate with the dead, sometimes received replies in the forms of coloured drawings, dictated through a medium.

¹⁶ Perhaps one of the most striking changes was the removal of much of the percussion. The original score was for side drum, bass drum, triangle, gong, bell, cymbals and 6 timpani (two players); in revising the work he cut all of these instruments except the timpani and cymbals, the latter now used only once, on the final chord. Cuts are most noticeable in the scherzo, which originally included a peculiar cadenza for oboe.

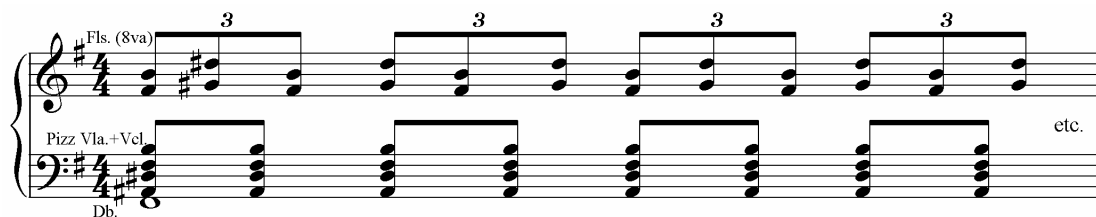
can be no coincidence, therefore, that we find the residue of the impact that that score made on Bliss in the symphony he was just about to begin. The influences in the first movement are perhaps the least obvious of the four (the opening has a definite echo of the processional-like opening of Elgar's First Symphony with its timpani roll and the instrumentation and tessitura of the melody at fig.1). Bliss's trumpet flourish two bars after fig.5 bears some resemblance to a passage in *Le Sacre*, though the context is quite different.



Ex.99a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, 2 bars after fig. 41

Ex.99b – Bliss, 'Purple', 2 bars after fig.5

The general texture at fig.8 in the symphony is a throwback to the opening of *Rout* with its Petrushkian associations.



Ex.110 – Bliss, 'Purple', fig. 8

Bliss's quintuplet figure at fig.9 on horn and then cor anglais echoes a similar figure from Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* at fig.151.



Ex.111a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*

Ex.111b – Bliss, 'Purple', fig. 9

The opening of the second movement is identical to that of the opening of the third tableau of *Petrushka*, in matters of scoring and tessitura, even down to the actual notes and tempo.

Ex.112a – Bliss, ‘Red’, opening

Ex.112b – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), sc.3

The trio section at fig.22 echoes Elgar (Second Symphony, scherzo and trio section) and Stravinsky together. The grace notes of the flute theme are a feature of Stravinsky’s melodic style (such as the opening of *Le Sacre*) but here they seem to be closer to that of the post-Borodin style of the oboe and clarinet melodies in the ‘Ronde de princesses’ movement in *Firebird* or the flute in *Le Chant du rossignol* (first heard in London in 1920 and first published in 1921).

Ex.113a – Stravinsky, *Firebird* (1910), 6 bars after fig. 76

Ex.113b – Stravinsky, *Chant du rossignol*, 1 bar after fig. 39

Ex.113c – Bliss, ‘Red’, Trio fig. 22

The bar-by-bar changes of metre in the section at fig.29-34 (4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 2/8) are obviously also indebted to Stravinsky, one the most obvious example being in *Le Sacre* at fig.104 (5/8, 9/8, 5/8, 7/8, 3/8, 4/8) though Bliss’s use is regular in its irregularity, being bound by the phrasing, whereas Stravinsky’s is more asymmetrical.

The third movement also reveals an indebtedness to *Le Sacre*. The rhythm and harmony of the opening, which accompany much of the movement, can be seen to relate to fig.87 (or possibly even fig.149). Like Stravinsky’s, Bliss’s slow music uses chords with

added ninths, the rhythmic part of which are given to divisi strings, overlaid with arpeggio-like arabesques.

Ex. 114a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, fig. 87

Ex. 114b – Bliss, ‘Blue’, opening

Ex. 114c – Bliss harmonic reduction

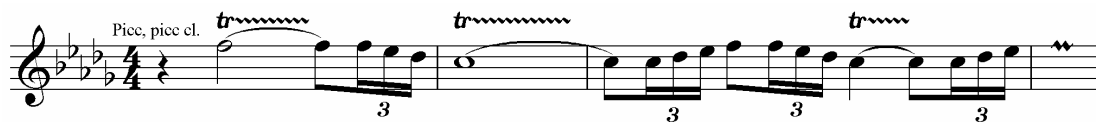
Ex. 114d – Stravinsky harmonic reduction

For Bliss’s flute arabesques (ex. 114b) one can find precedents in the passage leading up to fig. 12 of *Le Sacre* but more convincingly in *Le Chant du rossignol*.¹⁷

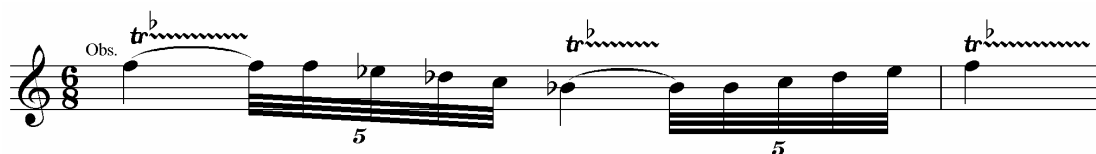
Ex. 115 – Stravinsky, *Le Chant du rossignol*, fig. 13

¹⁷ This trend of elaborate flute-writing perhaps suggests *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, but I like to think Stravinsky is more likely to be indebted to Tchaikovsky, who himself was a flautist, and wrote some especially idiomatic music for the instrument. The flute arabesques in the slow movement of Tchaikovsky’s First Symphony come to mind in particular.

The oboe phrase six bars after fig.56 one can relate to fig.51 of *Le Sacre*; both passages are in B flat minor.



Ex.116a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, fig. 51



Ex.116b – Bliss, 'Blue', 6 bars after fig. 56

Bliss's cor anglais melody at fig.60 is curiously redolent of the passage 'Tending in ceaseless flow' from the scherzo of Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony*.¹⁸ The rhythm, texture and tempo further on in the slow movement of Bliss's symphony are traceable to fig.68 of *Rossignol*.



Ex.117a – Stravinsky, *Le Chant du rossignol*, fig. 68



Ex.117b – Bliss, 'Blue', 5 bars after fig. 62

¹⁸ The *poco animando* section just before letter D. Vaughan Williams revised the work on and off up to 1923 during which period he shared his house on the Chelsea embankment with R. O. Morris and Bliss. The latter in his autobiography states how he would occasionally hear sounds of the piano from Vaughan Williams' floor of the house. Since this is the 'Blue' movement with its symbolic associations with water, one is tempted to speculate on the theme's origins as being a crib in homage to the elder composer.

Shortly after Bliss follows this with another passage, which again shows the influence of the Stravinsky passage from *Le Sacre* cited in ex.114a.

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 118. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is for Flutes and Clarinets in B-flat (Fls., cls. (8vb)) and features a series of chords with a trill-like ornament (tr~) above them. The lower staff is for Violins (Vlns.) and Violas in the 8th octave (Vlas 8va) and features a series of chords with a '6' below them, indicating a sixth interval. The time signature is 3/8.

Ex.118 – Bliss, ‘Blue’, 5 bars after fig. 63, c.f. ex.12a

The end of this movement can be compared with the texture of the ‘Ritual of the Ancestors’ section of Part 2 of *Le Sacre*.

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 119a. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is for Horns (Hns.) and features a series of chords. The lower staff is for strings and features a series of chords with annotations for pizzicato strings (pizz. str.), tambourine (tamb.), and timpani (timp.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 52. The time signature is 4/4.

Ex.119a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*,
3 bars after 129

The image shows a harmonic reduction for Ex. 119a. It consists of a single staff with a series of chords. The chords are labeled as a minor triad + 9th.

Harmonic reduction

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 119b. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is for Horns and timpani (Hns., timps.) and features a series of chords with annotations for pizzicato violas (pizz. vlas.). The lower staff is for strings and features a series of chords with annotations for pizzicato strings (pizz. str.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 56. The time signature is 3/4.

Ex.119b – Bliss, ‘Blue’, 3 bars after fig. 71

The image shows a harmonic reduction for Ex. 119b. It consists of a single staff with a series of chords. The chords are labeled as a minor triad + 9th.

Harmonic reduction

The fugal section in 7/8 of the final movement (five bars after fig. 82) seems not to have had any Russian model. When this section gives way at fig.88 Bliss is once again under the spell of *Petrushka*.

Vlns., ww
Tpts., hns. vcl.

Ex. 120a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911), fig.88

Fls. (8va), picc.
Bel., bsn., vlas., vlc.
Hns., vcl.

Ex. 120b – Bliss, 'Green', fig.88

Bliss's ostinato for the six timpani has its obvious precedent at various points in *Le Sacre*, most notably at fig.174.

Timp I
Timp II

Ex. 121a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, fig.174

Timp I
Timp II

Ex. 121b – Bliss, 'Green', 3 bars after fig.92

At the very end Bliss crowns his work with a passage of grinding 7th chords, which also can be traced to *Le Sacre*.

Vlns., fls., cls., hns.
Tpts., hns. (b)
+ tbn
melody
parallel 1st inv + major 7th below root reduction

Ex. 122a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, 7 bars after fig.53

Obs., cls., tpts., vlms.
Hns.
+ tbn
+ cym
parallel 1st inv chords + major 7th below root
reduction

Ex. 122b – Bliss, 'Green', 2 bars after fig.96

One wonders whether Stravinsky knew of Bliss's symphony since the end of his Symphony in Three Movements (1945) the final chord echoes very strongly that of the Englishman who obviously learnt so much from his Russian colleague.

Bliss once said of himself, 'There is little of the spider about me, spinning from his inner being.' In the light of this and on the evidence of the works discussed, Bliss can be regarded as being a quintessentially English composer by the definition that regards Englishness as being able to absorb and assimilate a number of foreign influences. Certainly, Bliss, perhaps more than any other English composer of his generation, learnt much from Stravinsky yet, as with Vaughan Williams's experience with Ravel, he later grew out of his immediate influence and evolved a more personal style.

Walton

Although Walton studied music for two years as an undergraduate student at Christ Church, Oxford, unlike the other English composers under consideration here, he did not attend a London music college and was largely self-taught. As a result the most fruitful musical education he gained was whilst he was living with the Sitwells in London from 1919 to 1934, where, from their home in Chelsea, he was able to immerse himself in all that was current in the Arts in London.

Façade occupies a position in Walton's output comparable to that of *Rout* and *Conversations* in Bliss's. In its original concept, as conceived by the Sitwell siblings Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell, the idea of a group of performers accompanying a narrator – all of which were situated behind a drop curtain through which the narrator would declaim the poetry through a megaphone (or a Sengerphone in the Sitwells' case) – has been thought by

some to have been taken from Satie's *Parade*.¹⁹ When Walton was asked to provide the music to accompany the poems he was, at first, unsure what kind of music was required. It has been suggested that Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) was one of the models that Walton used. We know Walton owned a copy of the score for *Pierrot Lunaire* but he did not hear a performance of it until 1942 (in a double-bill with *Façade* performed by Hedli Anderson). Also Walton's instrumentation and cool, objective musical style have little parallel with Schoenberg's piano-based ensemble and highly subjective, expressionist, *sprechgesang* idiom. Stravinsky, however, is the far more plausible influence. Walton's first experience of Stravinsky was probably when Hugh Allen played the score of *Petrushka* to him, probably in 1916.²⁰ Stravinsky was a figure in which the Sitwells took an interest and no doubt when Walton moved to Chelsea to live with Osbert and Sacheverell in June 1919, doubtless his experience of the Russian's music increased.

In *Façade* Walton began to assimilate vernacular styles and apply these with unorthodox textures and irregular metres in a manner that owes something to Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* and *Ragtime* (1917-18). With Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* there is the similarity of ensemble (4 woodwind, percussion and strings – Stravinsky has violin and bass where Walton has cello), the rhythmically notated narration and use of stylised popular idioms – Stravinsky a march, tango, waltz, ragtime and chorale, Walton a hornpipe, tango, march, tarantella, polka, ragtime, waltz, scotch reel, foxtrot and other jazz-related styles. Walton's other numbers draw from the styles of Stravinsky's ballets. Walton probably heard Ansermet give the world premiere of the Suite from Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (1918) at the Wigmore Hall in July 1920 (published the same year, the full score in 1924). In the same concert Ansermet gave a talk on Stravinsky's aesthetic in which he no doubt described how *The Soldier's Tale* should work when performed in full.

The history of the 47 numbers Walton composed for the various *Façade* performances throughout the 1920s is complicated. Only 34 now survive and it is clear from

¹⁹ Walton and the Sitwells saw *Parade* in London at the Empire Theatre during November 1919. Diaghilev's production of *Parade* began with a special drop curtain (designed by Picasso), which was the first of his ballets to do so. The character of the American Manager carries a megaphone.

²⁰ Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Walton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 8.

several accounts that Walton’s approach for the original set of 18 numbers used at the 1922 premiere was rather different from that he subsequently adopted for the revisions and further numbers he composed between 1923 and 1928.²¹ We can glimpse Walton’s original style in ‘Small Talk’, which was discarded from the set after its performance in 1922. The accompaniment is more sparse and discreet, allowing the narration to predominate, and could not stand alone as music, as many of the later settings can, hence the two orchestral suites Walton made in 1926 and 1938.

In ‘En Famille’ (1922) occurs a passage which owes a broader debt to Russian music. For the passage between fig.4 and 5 Walton uses octatonicism, and that this should be for the passage of text which begins: ‘We should now stand in the street of Hell’ shows him following a Russian tradition that one can trace back to Rimsky-Korsakov, namely the use of octatonicism to represent evil or supernatural elements.²² For this 18-bar section Walton consistently uses octatonic pitch collection C#, D, E, F, etc (Collection I) except for in bar 53 which is almost chromatically saturated – only E is absent. That this should occur with the text ‘With a noise like amber softly sliding’ appears deliberate – the harmony ‘sliding’ from an octatonic to an atonal region.

Ex. 123 – Walton, *Façade*, ‘En famille’, bar 52 (all instruments in C, percussion omitted)

²¹ For further details on the history of *Façade*, see Stewart Craggs’ preface to David Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *William Walton Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), vii. ‘Façade Entertainments’.

²² One of Walton’s earliest operatic experiences was of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Golden Cockerel*, which makes prominent use of the scale. In Russia at the turn of the century the scale was known simply as the *gamma ton-poluton* (tone-semitone scale), which later became dubbed the Rimsky-Korsakov scale because of that composer’s fondness for it, having first used it in his orchestral poem *Sadko* (1867). The English term ‘octatonic’ did not appear until 1963, where Arthur Berger coined it in his article ‘Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky’, *Perspectives of New Music*, 2/1, 1963, 11-42.

This is one of the earliest instances of the use of octatonicism by an English composer. Walton's attention was perhaps drawn to the scale by Ernest Ansermet with whom he had some informal composition lessons mid-1921, the period immediately before he began to compose the first numbers for *Façade*. The opening of 'En Famille' is indebted to the cool, bucolic austerity of the 'Pastorale' from Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*.

Ex. 124a – Stravinsky, *The Soldier's Tale* 'Pastorale', opening

Ex. 124b – Walton, *Façade* 'En Famille', fig.2 (reciter part omitted)

Other passages in Stravinsky's 'Pastorale' can also be found to have influenced Walton, most noticeably in 'By the Lake' (1923), where the use of repetitive melodic and accompanimental figures over a string harmonic are a specific feature.

Ex. 125a – Stravinsky, *The Soldier's Tale*, 'Pastorale', closing bars

Ex. 125b – Walton, *Façade*, ‘By the Lake’, fig.1 (reciter part omitted)

The percussion-only close of *The Soldier’s Tale* is borrowed in a very experimental way to accompany almost the whole of ‘Madame Mouse Trots’ (1922) in its use of three tuned bongos.

Ex. 126a – Stravinsky, *The Soldier’s Tale*, ‘Triumphal March of the Devil’, fig.17

Ex. 126b – Walton, *Façade*, ‘Mme. Mouse Trots’, opening

‘Aubade’ (1922 and subsequently used in *Façade 2*) contains a passage that is very similar to that of ‘The Ritual of the Ancestors’ from *Le Sacre*, perhaps deliberately since it occurs to the text ‘Sounding like an overtone / From some lonely world unknown.’

Ex. 127a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, ‘Ritual of the Ancestors’, 3 bars after fig.129

Ex. 127b – Walton, *Façade 2*, ‘Aubade’, bar 30 (reciter part omitted)

The ‘Round Dance’ from the first part of *Le Sacre* has permeated ‘Gardener Janus Catches a Naiad’ (1923, subsequently used in *Façade 2*). Walton uses his opening figure, scored in double octaves, as an ostinato figure to accompany the opening section of the number.

Ex. 128a – Stravinsky, *Le Sacre*, ‘Round Dance’, fig. 48

Ex. 128b – Walton, *Façade 2*, ‘Gardener Janus’, opening figure

The influence of *Le Sacre* also penetrated ‘Four in the morning’ (1926) in Walton’s use of pithy motifs. For the structure of the whole number, however, Walton appears to have taken a cue from the first of Stravinsky’s *Three Pieces* for string quartet in his constructivist approach of building a piece from contrasted musical material given to each instrument (c.f. ex. 92a).

Ex.129 – Walton, *Façade*, ‘Four in the Morning’, bar 4 (recit. pt. omitted, instrs. sounding pitch)

In the same way that Stravinsky’s *Three Pieces* influenced Bliss in *Conversations*, Walton constructs his piece from four unrelated elements, here looped back-to-back for the first eleven bars of the number. Specifically the cello line of the first of the *Three Pieces* (see ex.92a), also picked up by Bliss, likewise finds a place in the introductory bars of Walton’s ‘Came the Great Popinjay’ (1923, subsequently reused in *Façade 2*).

Ex.130 – Walton, *Façade 2*, ‘Came the Great Popinjay’, opening (percussion omitted)

The flute writing in *Water Party* (1922, subsequently reused in *Façade 2*) takes its cue from the music written to accompany the Magician in the first tableau of *Petrushka* when he brings the puppets to life.

Ex.131a – Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, ‘The Magic Trick’, 1 bar after fig. 31

Ex.131b – Walton, *Façade 2*, ‘Water Party’, bar 11 (cello and reciter omitted)

Of these only 'En famille', 'By the Lake' and 'Four in the Morning' were included in *Façade*, the others were left to be incorporated into *Façade 2* (1977), Walton perhaps recognising that he had not yet digested sufficiently the implications of Stravinsky's influence.

Throughout the various numbers Walton composed under the title *Façade* he managed to experiment with a number of styles and genres. One thing he seems to have learnt from the exercise was that Stravinsky's influence was only going to be a limited one. Though the jazzy syncopations and orchestral athleticism of Walton's *Portsmouth Point* (1924-25) perhaps bring to mind aspects of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, from the mid 1920s Walton began to discover his own very personal brand of lyricism, which one can, in part, trace to the music of Prokofiev. Walton would have known Prokofiev's music initially from his trips to the Russian Ballet. Prokofiev's style, sardonic, quirky, but also capable of a distinct lyricism, no doubt held great appeal for Walton. In the summer of 1925 Walton met Vladimir Dukelsky (Vernon Duke) who subsequently introduced him to Prokofiev in late 1926 (probably in December). Dukelsky was a great admirer of Prokofiev and no doubt encouraged Walton to study his compositions. What each composer thought of the other personally is not known, but Walton obviously held Prokofiev in high regard since, according to Christopher Palmer, he sent some of his music to Prokofiev²³ and in his next two major works – the *Sinfonia Concertante* and the *Viola Concerto* – one can detect the assimilation of his style.

In 1926 Walton and Angus Morrison played to Diaghilev a two-piano version of a piece the young composer had written during the winter of 1925-26, in the hope the impresario would take up the piece as a ballet. Diaghilev, however, rejected the piece, telling Walton he would subsequently write something better. The piece itself, however, did not go to waste and was subsequently rewritten in the autumn of 1927 as the *Sinfonia Concertante for Orchestra with Piano*.

In the opening and closing gestures of the work Walton appears to have been influenced by Stravinsky's *Concerto for Piano and Winds*, which had been published in an

²³ CD liner notes to Walton *Viola and Violin Concertos*, Nigel Kennedy, André Previn, RPO, EMI CDC 749 628 2. It is not clear what music Walton sent to Prokofiev, to what purpose, nor that Prokofiev ever received it, since no Prokofiev scholars have ever commented upon it.

arrangement for 4 hands in 1924. The heavy tread of the work's opening *maestoso* section has something of the highly stylised, neo-baroque feel of Stravinsky's opening.



Ex. 132a – Stravinsky, Concerto for Piano and Winds, opening



Ex. 132b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, opening

Both composers reprise this material toward the end of the final movement in its original (first movement) tempo, before being swept away by a brief, dismissive coda. After his mock pompous opening Walton, like Stravinsky, immediately changes to a lighter, more ebullient mood, but rather than following the somewhat dry style of Stravinsky's Concerto, Walton switches to the style of *Petrushka*, another work 'for Orchestra with Piano' in which the piano has a concertante role.²⁴ Note how the piano chords in Walton's slow introduction are based on the *Petrushkian* tetrachord figures that Holst and Bliss also assimilated. The main *allegro* section of the first movement is, like its introduction, based on this tetrachord figure and here Walton creates a bustling texture, rather than any clear sense of melody and accompaniment, just as Stravinsky does in the opening to *Petrushka*.

²⁴ The title page of Walton's autograph manuscript describes the work as 'for orchestra with pianoforte (continuo)'. Walton further downgraded the piano's role when he revised the piece in 1943, calling it *Sinfonia Concertante for orchestra with piano obbligato*.

Ex. 133 – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, first movement, fig.7

Where this passage returns for the movement's reprise, the addition to the instrumentation of the xylophone to highlight the piano texture makes the link to *Petrushka* that much more direct. Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto (1913, rev.1923, pub.1925) is another work that clearly had a direct influence in this work. A linking passage to the second subject group bears a direct resemblance to that used by Prokofiev in his Concerto in the last movement.

Ex. 134a – Prokofiev, Second Piano Concerto, 3rd mvt., fig.115 (occurring earlier at fig.110)

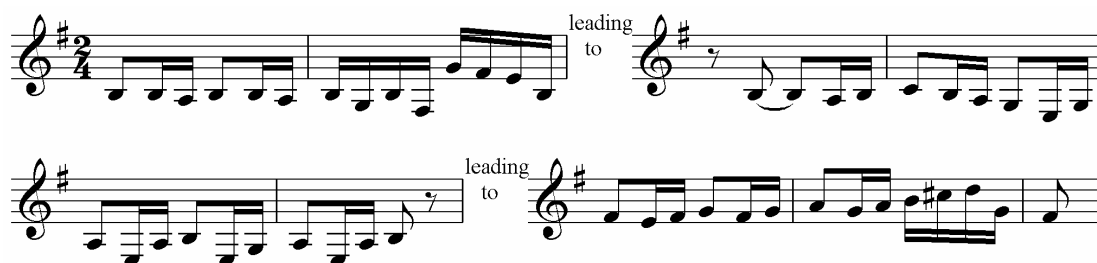
Ex. 134b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 1st mvt., fig.12 (occurring later at fig.17)

In both works these passages appear twice, the second time slightly varied, each time functioning as a linking passage. The influence of Prokofiev's Concerto becomes even more pronounced for Walton's lyrical second subject group. The second subject in the finale of

Prokofiev's Concerto (fig.100) is, in essence, stated 8 times, each with slight melodic variation, but more importantly, with an accumulative orchestral texture. Walton achieves a very similar process with his group of three related themes.

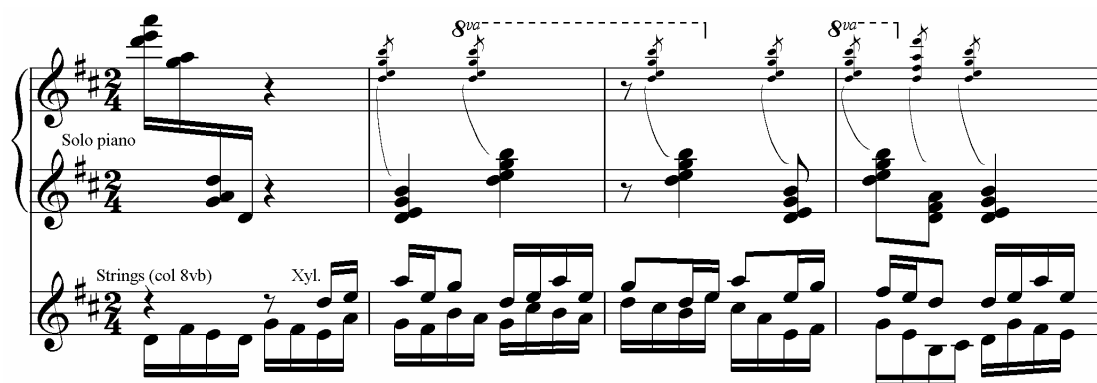


Ex.135a – Prokofiev, Second Piano Concerto, 3rd mvt., fig.100



Ex.135b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 1st mvt., fig.13

In the reprise of the main *allegro* section in the first movement the scoring is especially evocative of *Petrushka* in the use of the xylophone to emphasise the percussive nature of the solo part. Compare the following example with ex.91.



Ex.136 – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 1st mvt., 6 bars after fig.18

A linking passage to the coda has a similar effect as that which Prokofiev creates in leading into the coda in the last movement of his Concerto. Walton, like Prokofiev, uses the link as a lull in between two loud and dynamic sections of music, basing it on the second subject stated by the soloist over a sustained chord of an open fifth. Both composers lull the audience into a false sense of calm before rudely awakening them by the sudden and loud re-entry of the full orchestra, in both cases with first subject material.

Ex. 137a – Prokofiev, Second Piano Concerto, 3rd mvt., 1 bar before fig.127

Ex. 137b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 1st mvt., fig.21

In his slow movement Walton develops the lyrical style of his first movement's second subject group, but in a way that reminds one more of the bittersweet melancholy of Ravel and Poulenc, or even Szymanowski.

In the finale Walton conjures up a mood that successfully mixes elements of both the Prokofiev and Stravinsky concertos, with jazzy touches reminiscent of Gershwin.

Ex. 138a – Prokofiev, Second Piano Concerto, 2nd mvt., fig.28 (piano only)

Ex. 138b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 3rd mvt., fig.4 (SD at repeat of passage at fig.13)

The use of the xylophone in the latter example brings back echoes of *Petrushka* and the syncopated figure parallels a similar instance in Stravinsky's Concerto, which in turn has left its mark on a theme that appears early on in Walton's last movement.

Ex. 139a – Stravinsky, Piano Concerto, 1st mvt., fig.14

Ex. 139b – Walton, *Sinfonia Concertante*, 3rd mvt., fig.1

As one critic noted after a performance: 'This young man will some day do something worth while, but he will have to make up his mind what he wants to say.'²⁵ In the *Sinfonia*

²⁵ Quoted in Stephen Lloyd, *William Walton: Muse of Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 82.

Concertante Walton began to tap into a deep vein of lyricism which Stravinsky's drily objective style could offer no help in developing. For this Walton turned again to Prokofiev.

In the Viola Concerto, begun in December 1928, Walton created his first mature masterpiece. It is clear a number of pieces influenced Walton's Concerto: Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, Elgar's Cello Concerto, Hindemith's *Kammermusik No.5* and Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto. Prokofiev's Concerto, especially, appears to have had a life-long influence on him. It received its first performance in England at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert on 26 February 1925, and though Walton did not hear it on that occasion (he was travelling with the Sitwells at that time) it is more than likely that Ernest Ansermet, who conducted the work's English premiere, drew the younger composer's attention to the work, the score having been published in 1921. In an interview with John Amis in 1972, Walton admitted he had used the Prokofiev concerto as a model for his own concerto 'up to a point.'²⁶ In terms of the larger dimensions the Prokofiev concerto was most definitely the model Walton used. Both have the unusual three-movement plan of a central scherzo flanked by two slower movements in the first of which the emotional climax is placed just before the end of the development section. The recapitulation loses its function of dramatic synthesis and in effect becomes more a framing coda-epilogue. In the last movement, Walton quite obviously borrows Prokofiev's idea of recalling the main theme of the opening movement over an ostinato idea derived from the main opening theme of the third movement. This point is dealt with in greater detail later, but it is surprising in view of these correspondences that little close comparison has been made of the two concertos.

In the middle and small dimensions the correspondences between the two concertos are even more striking. The opening theme of the Walton bears some resemblance to the Prokofiev in its melodic and rhythmic contours.



Ex.140a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, 1st mvt., main theme

²⁶ Interview on 17 March 1972, quoted in Lloyd, op. cit., 94.



Ex. 140b – Walton, Viola Concerto, 1st mvt., main theme

Walton, like Prokofiev, accompanies this with bowed tremolando strings – this is in the revised 1961 version, the original 1929 version had fingered tremolando. Prokofiev presents his theme in full (D major) and then the opening fragment is stated twice, first by violas then oboe, the second statement of the fragment a semitone higher than the first, C major then D flat major. Walton does exactly the same in his concerto, modulating from D minor to E flat minor for each statement of the fragment, except he presents the theme both times on the oboe. The figuration Walton gives to his solo instrument also shares the same octave feature at the end of each phrase.



Ex. 141a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, 5 bars after fig.2



Ex. 141b – Walton, Viola Concerto, fig.1

Walton then restates his opening material again in full in the tonic of A minor, which Prokofiev does not do. The tonal process that Walton achieves from the opening up to fig.2 reveals a specifically Prokofievian technique that the Russian used in a number of works, that which Richard Bass has described as chromatic displacement.²⁷ A striking example of this is found in Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto, the work, which as demonstrated, was a key influence on Walton's *Sinfonia Concertante*. In Prokofiev's concerto the soloist's opening

²⁷ Richard Bass, 'Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement', *Music Analysis*, 7/2, July 1988, 197-214.

passage (bars 5-12) consists essentially of two 4-bar phrases, both of which ostensibly begin in the tonic, G minor, and modulate to the subdominant, C minor. However, Prokofiev performs an ingenious harmonic slight of hand. The first phrase ‘slips’ upward by a semitone and thus actually concludes in C sharp minor. The second phrase begins back in the tonic but immediately slips down a semitone so that when the same process occurs again it concludes in the ‘proper’ subdominant of C minor. Prokofiev achieves this process by proceeding towards the expected key and then substituting, or displacing, one note of the leading chord, and using that note to sidestep the music into an unrelated key, usually a semitone away from the supposed target key. The effect thwarts expectation but not in a way that appears disjointed because it subtly hijacks what would have otherwise been a conventional process.

Piano theme

fundamental bass (Prokofiev)

g: i g# iv g v i #i g iv

fundamental bass (theoretical original)

g: i g iv v i

Ex. 142a – Prokofiev, Second Piano Concerto, 1st mvt., bars 5-12, melody and bass structure

Walton uses a similar device in the middle of his first subject section. The concerto begins in A minor and soon moves to D minor and C minor, after which the music slips into A flat minor and E flat minor, which are surely chromatic displacements of the ‘expected’ keys of G minor and D minor. The displacement, as in Prokofiev’s concerto, is temporary since the music manages to correct the slip and return to the tonic, A minor, for the close of the section.

Orch. melody

fundamental bass (Walton)

c → a flat → c flat → c# → a

fundamental bass (theoretical original)

c → g → d → c → a

Ex. 142b – Walton, Viola Concerto, 1st mvt., bar 13, melody and bass structure

The end of Walton's first subject section is again closely modelled on that of Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto. Walton's passage, like Prokofiev's, is essentially a sequence based on a cycle of fifths, hardly a significant correspondence in itself, but rather it is how the sequence manifests itself that is revealing. Both take the opening fragment of the main theme, giving it to the woodwind, varying the instrumentation for each bar. This takes places over a chromatic descending bass figure that does not always concur with the harmonies above.

Ex. 143a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, fig.4

Ex. 143b – Walton, Viola Concerto, fig.3

Note the striking similarity of the bass lines where they switch back up the octave, not where the phrase ends, but just after it has begun again. This leads to the inevitable dominant pedal where both link into the second subject with a rapid upward scale, solo violin in the Prokofiev and solo flute in the Walton.

Ex. 144a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, lead into fig.6

Ex. 144b – Walton, Viola Concerto, lead to fig.4

At six bars after fig.4 in his revised version Walton added the term *sognando*, a term characteristic of Prokofiev and used at the opening of his concerto. (That Walton was familiar with the term at the time of the original is witnessed by his use of it in the middle movement of the *Sinfonia Concertante*.)

After the second subject the closing section of the exposition in Walton's concerto bears similarity of procedure to Prokofiev's. Both are essentially an extension of the second subject accompanied by a pizzicato bass ostinato and quaver chords in the woodwind. (This is in the revised version – the original version was given to violins.)

Ex. 145a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, fig.9

Ex. 145b – Walton, Viola Concerto (1961), 2 bars after fig.5

This short passage is then repeated in what is in essence a descending sequence in both concertos.

The development section of Walton's concerto begins in a similar fashion to Prokofiev's. Both concertos have now settled into 4/4 time, the soloists spinning the first subject into running semiquavers accompanied by low clarinet and bassoon.

Ex. 146a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, fig.13



Ex. 146b – Walton, Viola Concerto, fig. 7

Walton's development is more emotionally complex than Prokofiev's, as is the whole concerto, but both composers work towards their climaxes using the ostinato material from their respective closing sections, Prokofiev's in partial diminution, Walton effectively doubling the movement by halving the metre from 3/2 to 3/4. As the climax fades, Walton, like Prokofiev, abandons the ostinato figure for a short passage and then brings it back to lead into the short cadenza, both placed before the recapitulation/epilogue and both wholly composed of double-stopped counterpoint. Walton's cadenza is thematically linked to the introductory material of the movement, Prokofiev's is free material, but both share a rising chromatic line in the lower part.



Ex. 147a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, fig. 19



Ex. 147b – Walton, Viola Concerto, fig. 14

The recapitulation/epilogue then begins, Prokofiev's after a short orchestral link, Walton's directly. The performance direction in both concertos is that the tempo is to be the same as the opening but *più lento*. Prokofiev gives the theme to flute, piccolo and then oboe respectively, Walton to oboe, flute and piccolo, the instrumentation changing with the phrasing. The soloist is given an accompanying role high in the instrument's register with semiquaver filigree musings. The whole is cast over tremolando middle register strings, Prokofiev using violas, Walton using 2nd violins and violas, in fact the whole tessitura of the

closing section of both concertos is confined to middle and upper registers, the dynamic rarely rising above *piano*. One distinction, however, is that Walton restates both his main themes here whereas Prokofiev only restates his principal theme.

The second and third movements appear to be significantly less in debt to Prokofiev. Both second movements are, in essence, rondos but in character the Walton is quite different from Prokofiev's rather whimsical *scherzo*. The performance direction at the head of Walton's second movement again uses a phrase that is not in regular usage: *con molto preciso*. One wonders if Walton was influenced by Prokofiev's use of the direction *con precisione* for the third movement of his concerto. One passage in Prokofiev's scherzo does seem to have influenced Walton. This occurs initially at fig.26 and then later at fig.40 as a continuation of the rondo theme where a passage of harmonics for the soloist over a pulsing bass accompanied by a woodwind figure has obviously influenced the passage in the Walton concerto five bars after fig.34.

Ex.148a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, 5 bars after fig.40

Ex.148b – Walton (1961), Viola Concerto, 3 bars after fig.34

Walton places the soloist with the pulsing bass for the first phrase and with the woodwind (given in the first two bars of the example) for the second.

The influence of the Prokofiev in the last movement of Walton's concerto seems wholly reserved for the coda. Prokofiev's quite unique idea is to recall the opening theme from the first movement of the concerto and place this over an ostinato idea derived from the opening material of the third movement.



Ex. 149a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, 3rd mvt., opening and fig. 58



Ex. 149b – Walton, Viola Concerto, 3rd mvt., opening and fig. 61

In essence Walton does exactly this. Prokofiev introduces his ostinato theme six bars before the coda begins, to dovetail the sections together. Walton, however, has no need to do this (or did not think to do it) because he has made more prevalent use throughout the movement of the theme from which he takes his ostinato idea. Perhaps, again, the 1961 revised version of Walton's concerto is closer to Prokofiev's in the sense that the ostinato, previously given to mixed bowed and pizzicato cellos, is now given to harp and bass clarinet. Prokofiev gives his ostinato idea to clarinet (and flute), and the harp is used conspicuously, though not in the ostinato. Prokofiev's coda simply restates the whole of the main theme of the first movement and then evaporates to a close. Walton's epilogue is more complex, thematically and emotionally, with reminiscences to other ideas from the first movement including the second subject and a further reference to the main subject of the third movement.

Walton's Violin Concerto (1938-39) also follows Prokofiev's plan of slow-fast-moderate, the last movement using the thematically cross-referenced coda, but here it is not quite as effective as in the Viola Concerto because in this instance the attempt to then create

an upbeat ending to close the coda negates the mood and makes the movement overlong. The first subject section of the first movement exposition follows a similar plan Walton used in the Viola Concerto borrowed from Prokofiev, namely the feeling that here is a theme in search of a key, slipping into various tonal regions. Twice in this movement Walton uses a solo passage to link sections in the manner shown in ex.144. Walton, in his second movement, also borrows a technical feature that Prokofiev uses in the first movement of his concerto.

Ex.150a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto
1st mvt., 3 bars before fig.17

Ex.150b – Walton, Violin Concerto,
2nd mvt., 2 bars after fig.29

But perhaps the most striking instance of Prokofiev’s influence on Walton is to compare the opening paragraph of the last movement of the Prokofiev concerto with that of Walton’s Cello Concerto, composed in 1955-56.²⁸ The opening ticking accompaniment to Walton’s concerto, in essence a triad with chromatic appoggiaturas, although more elaborate in harmony, has obvious kinship.

Ex.151a – Prokofiev, 3rd mvt., opening

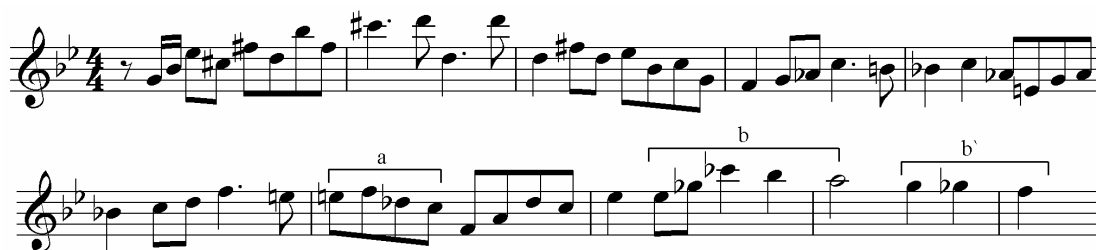
Ex.151b – Walton, Cello Concerto, opening

The way it is scored with the parts crossing and interlocking is another common feature.

Walton’s main theme also bears a number of parallels with Prokofiev’s: the opening bar

²⁸ This passage clearly struck more than just Walton. There is a striking correspondence between the opening of Prokofiev’s third movement and the *Domine Deus* movement in Poulenc’s *Gloria* (1959).

which picks its way through the notes of the underlying harmony with the added chromatic notes and two common motifs *a* and *b*.



Ex. 152a – Prokofiev, First Violin Concerto, 3rd mvt., main theme



Ex. 152b – Walton, Cello Concerto, 1st mvt., main theme (transposed)

The harmonic language of the Walton passage is of the same added-note diatonicism and Walton, like Prokofiev, articulates each change of harmony with a harp chord and pizzicato double bass and then repeats the passage, passing the theme to the oboe.

In taking the Prokofiev concerto as a model and assimilating some of its ideas Walton displayed just as much genius. The Viola Concerto is anything but a slavish imitation. As Britten remarked to Walton of the latter's Viola Concerto in 1963, 'it showed me the way of being relaxed, fresh, and intensely personal.'²⁹ One wonders whether Walton, struggling with the idea of form, knew of Elgar's idea of planning a symphony closely modelled on Mozart's 40th Symphony, since he too was 'groping in the dark after light.'

²⁹ Letter from Britten to Walton, reprinted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1992), 42.

CONCLUSION

Art comes out of art; it begins with imitation, often in the form of parody, and it's in the process of imitating the voices of others that one comes to learn the sound of one's own.
Alan Bennett¹

As observed over the course of Part I one of the chief strengths of Russian music was its diversity and it was exactly this quality that meant Russian music appealed to a wider number of English composers and had a stronger impact than the music of any other country at this time. Overall the Russian imagination for instrumentation and orchestration left no English composer untouched, from Stanford (who used Glazunov's orchestral works as an example of good colour) to Walton and beyond; the impact of Stravinsky's orchestral approach in *Petrushka* on English composers is a topic for a thesis in itself (Holst and Howells regularly pointed to it as an example for their students). The Russian approach to form, both at a local and large scale level, was also significant for English composers both in terms of being direct and avoiding hyperbole and in providing an alternative to the post-Beethovenian dialectic process. The Russians' sense of rhythm is the other significant factor without which, English music, especially that by Holst, Bliss and Walton, would be somewhat lifeless. But more importantly it encouraged English composers to be imaginative and broaden their outlook to allow them, and thus English music, to come to maturity.

The period 1893-1929 was one of huge change and upheaval and so to study the music of not one but two countries for such a period is a huge topic. To balance detail against the broader horizon of events has necessitated focussing on certain genres at the expense of others and omitting some composers altogether. Beyond the scope of this thesis were figures such as Josef Holbrooke, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, John Ireland, Cyril Scott, Rebecca Clarke, Eugene Goossens and Herbert Howells, composers who all absorbed or learnt something from the Russians but for whom the influence was not extensive either in terms of range or depth. For example, one can hear shades of Tchaikovsky in Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto (1912); similarly the piano writing in John Ireland's Piano Concerto (1930)

¹ Alan Bennett, *Writing Home* (London: Faber, 1995), xii.

shows a familiarity with Prokofiev's way of writing for that instrument. Howells is perhaps the most significant in his omission from this thesis; his two piano concertos (1913 and 1925) owe debts to Rachmaninov and Stravinsky, whereas his orchestral pieces *The B's* (1914) and *Procession* (1922) could not have been written without the example of the Russian composers of the pre-war Russian Ballet.

For those composers who have been included in this study, the tendency has been to focus on orchestral genres at the expense of small-scale idioms such as chamber music. This largely reflects the balance of genres of Russian music that was performed in England at the time and also that it was in these genres – symphony, concerto, opera, ballet – that Russian composers had made their greatest impact. Chamber music is probably the most notable omission from the reception study. The string quartets of Tchaikovsky and Borodin were being widely performed by the 1890s, to be followed by those of Glazunov, but they attracted little comment in the press compared with the symphonies of these composers. This partly reflects the prevailing fashion for the period, which was toward the larger genres, but it also reflects the genres English composers appeared to be least confident working in and wished to learn most about. This would certainly explain the almost total lack of interest in Russian choral music in England at the time. Outside the realms of opera and liturgical music Russia does not have a strong choral tradition, but at a time when English-language versions *Boris Godunov*, *Khovanschina* and *Prince Igor* were regularly being staged in London (c.1916-19) problems of language and text cannot account for the almost total neglect of Rachmaninov's masterpiece, his choral symphony *The Bells* (1913). For Russian song, French- or English-language versions of the more famous examples (e.g. Tchaikovsky's *None but the lonely heart*) were available, but English singers seem to have been the least adventurous of their musical colleagues when it came to expanding their repertoire, thus Russian song was largely disseminated in England by visiting foreign singers, such as the d'Alheims.

The cultural and political contexts of the period were clearly important for the reception of Russian music in England. This can be demonstrated by examining the situation in France, where cultural and diplomatic links were forged earlier than was the case with Britain. Russia signed its *entente* with France in 1893 and with Britain in 1907, and one can

observe a similar time-lag of about 15 years between the first signs of the Russian influence in French music (the Debussy-Ravel generation) and the English music discussed here. Though the cultural and political context certainly did much to shape the critical reception of Russian music, composers responded more often in terms of the musical fashion of the age. Stanford, for example, conducted a great deal of Russian music, both in Cambridge and London, for many years before he actually began to assimilate something of this music into his own compositions. The post-war period demonstrates how fashion became such a significant force that it almost overrode the politico-cultural dimension.

Of the English composers covered in this study, Stanford needs separate consideration, not only because he was Irish, but because he adapted to the Russian influence late in his compositional career. It is perhaps ironic that in an age when he felt the values he had tirelessly defended were being undermined all around him Stanford should turn to a music broadly regarded for its undermining of that standard. The Russian music discussed here was influential not just because it was fashionable but because each composer found something they could use to enrich their own style at a deeper level. The balance of these two aspects differed for each composer. Those discussed earlier on, such as Stanford, Bantock, Bax and Bliss were reacting more to the trend of the moment, borrowing an aspect whilst it was fashionable and artistically appropriate to their needs, whereas those such as Holst, Bridge and Walton clearly followed fashion as well but the aspects they borrowed were then integrated into their own musical personalities; these composers most fruitfully used Russian music to help them find their own voices as composers. As the Alan Bennett quote suggests, this process necessarily required them to imitate, even plagiarise, the Russian music they admired and wished to learn from. Yet, as Vaughan Williams believed (as quoted at the top of Chapter Five), ‘When, as often happens, this vicarious thinking does lead to similarity of phrase the offence is, I think, more venial.’ In essence, it was a necessary process all composers had to undergo in one sense or another. Imitation aside, the actual process of successfully assimilating the aspect that had been cribbed would take longer. In this respect it must be noted that though these English composers often borrowed or imitated quite closely they all (excepting Stanford and, to a degree, Bantock) went on to develop a more personal

and individual style later in their careers. This also broadly parallels the experience of the whole English Musical Renaissance.

Clearly Russian music was not the only music to inspire and influence the English composers of this period, nor did it exert its influence in isolation. A wider discussion would have to take in how Russian music was assimilated alongside other music either by distinction of aesthetic or geography. The modernism of Richard Strauss or Schoenberg clearly made their impact alongside Russian music on Englishmen such as Bantock, Holst and Bridge. Studying the influence of non-Russian east European composers, such as Dvořák, Szymanowski and Bartók, could likewise help to illuminate the larger picture of the impact of Russian music in England. Of course the most significant tandem influence as regards Russian music was that of French music, specifically that by Debussy and Ravel. For the period under consideration France and Russia were increasingly regarded as the cultural counterbalance to the Austro-German cultures and because of the more positive, or rather less negative, relationship Britain enjoyed with France and the seemingly less extreme nature of French music, its reception during this period was less problematic than that of Russian music. The Franco-Russian link was also doubly reinforced by the reciprocal musical influence that flowed between the two countries for at least three generations, e.g. the influence of Berlioz in Russia and the musical relationship that Debussy and Ravel had with both earlier and later generations of Russian composers. The corollary is that French music often affected the same English composers who came under the spell of Russian music. Separating the two influences in some cases becomes almost impossible, e.g. with Vaughan Williams who studied Russian music under the guidance of a French teacher, Ravel.

Beyond aspects of orchestration and structure Russian harmony is somewhat erratic in its impact in England. Scriabin's 'Mystic' chord though much discussed in the 1920s was plainly too personal or too limited a harmonic idiom to have been fruitfully absorbed. Octatonicism, either that of Rimsky-Korsakov or Stravinsky, seems to have had only limited impact on composers in England, or even the whole of Europe, during this period. As a recognised harmonic idiom of the Silver Age in Russia it is curious that Rosa Newmarch never wrote about it, especially in view of her personal acquaintance with Rimsky-Korsakov.

Nevertheless, it can be traced to a degree in the work of Frank Bridge, Eugene Goossens and Rebecca Clarke.

Despite the clear influence of a number of works by Stravinsky and Prokofiev on English composers, there is also a conspicuous body of music by these Russians that seemingly made no impact at all, specifically that composed c.1920-28. The works Stravinsky composed between *Pulcinella* (1920) and *Apollon musagète* (1928), and those Prokofiev wrote between the Third Piano Concerto (1917-21) and *The Prodigal Son* (1928), made next to no impact on the inter-war English composers, including Britten, Tippett, *et al*, in comparison with their pre-1920s output. In the 1920s the post-war idealist revolt against sentimentality and complacency led to a dogmatic assertion of abstract aesthetics in music. Schoenberg, Bartók, Hindemith and others in addition to Stravinsky and Prokofiev wrote some of their most uncompromising music in this period.² This music may have been granted a favourable reception by certain audiences due to the fame of the composer but, as is clear from press criticism of Stravinsky's Octet, it failed to produce any significant reaction to it as a piece of music. Thus, as the clock struck midnight on the party that was the 1920s critics such as Ernest Newman began to question where exactly all this was leading: was there a future for music of serious and sincere expression, which that of Stravinsky and others seemed devoid of at this time?

The 1920s left many English composers vainly searching for valid models of a new musical mode of expression. The effect for English composers working in the 1920s such as Bliss and Walton can be seen in the absence from their music of the stylistic features of Stravinsky's and Prokofiev's output from the middle of that same decade. As a consequence they repeatedly turned to the Russian works of the 1910s for inspiration, but also looked further inside themselves; thus works such as Walton's Viola Concerto evince both an indebtedness and a new, more personal style. That the sea-change, represented by such works as *Apollon* and *The Prodigal Son*, was welcomed is clear from Walton's response to the latter. The signal moment that allowed this shift to flourish as a musical fashion was probably the

² It can be no coincidence that Schoenberg and Stravinsky in effect published their thoughts on the matter at around the same time: Schoenberg in his first serial music in 1923 and Stravinsky in his article about his Octet in 1924.

Wall Street Crash, which occurred on 28 October 1929. The Crash ushered in a period of harsh economic austerity, mass unemployment, neo-orthodoxy and an emphasis on planning and organisation, thus the 1930s saw a marked change in compositional trends and attitudes towards contemporary music across Europe and North America. Stravinsky, Prokofiev and other modernists consequently mellowed their style and it was these works from the 1930s onwards that were significant for the next generation of Britten, Tippett, *et al.* For composers such as Bax, Vaughan Williams and Walton, however, it was Sibelius who represented a new way forward – ‘of all living composers the most interesting and stimulating to the post-war generation,’ as Constant Lambert confidently asserted in 1933³ – and whose methods were incorporated alongside those they had borrowed from the Russians.

In many cases the incorporation of Russian elements by English composers resulted in some rather incongruous combinations of influences, some even seemingly incompatible. But surely Holst’s ability to blend his Tudor-style polyphony with his Rimsky-like ear for orchestral colour and sonority, Bliss’s marriage of Elgar and Stravinsky in *A Colour Symphony*, or Walton’s weaving of English melancholy with Prokofievian sardonic humour, make the result not only ‘more venial’ but paradoxically, infinitely more personal. Doubtless aware of the fate of their nineteenth century forbears, these English composers were aware of the need to evolve a personal, if not ‘English’, style and idiom in the process of absorbing the Russian elements. Thus the English assimilation of Russian influences necessarily involved a softening of the idiom or style being carried across. Dissonances are often less harsh, rhythmic and metrical matters are less complex, instrumentation less fanciful, overall a less extreme approach. This process of what could be termed Anglicisation in its tendency to tone down the original also occurs in areas other than music where Britain has absorbed and assimilated many foreign trends in painting, sculpture, literature, poetry and even cuisine. However, this English ‘compromise’ in no sense results in a thinning down of its culture, rather it enriches it, and for English music it helped to produce some of the outstanding works of the twentieth century as witnessed in Vaughan Williams’s *A London Symphony*, Holst’s *The Planets*, Bliss’s *A Colour Symphony* and Walton’s *Viola Concerto*.

³ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1948), 238.

APPENDIX I

Modern Minstrels
By a Misoneist

O ye youthful music-makers who despise the old wiseacres
And are frank and fearless breakers of each antiquated rule,
Pray your best attention render to the counsel that I tender
If you wish to shed new splendour on the Neo-English School.

Fix your fierce injected eyes on some tropical horizon,
Shun the mellow light that lies on English landscapes calm and cool,
If you need an inspiration for some noble exudation
Full of negroid syncopation – for the Neo-English School

Don't be cowed by Mr Harty, that reactionary party;
Write an Anthem to Astarte, or a Vampire, or a Ghoul;
Be chromatic and exotic, and erratic and erotic,
But oh! don't be patriotic in the Neo-English School.

Dealing with the age Victorian, ancient hymns and chants Gregorian,
Be dynamic, dinosaurian, in your scathing ridicule;
Emulate the spatial swerver who controls the great *Observer*
And impart a hectic fervour to the Neo-English School.

Cultivate a green or blue sense, in the style of Bliss and Goossens,
And demolish as a nuisance those who perpetually pule
When a piece virile and vital with scarifying title,
Is performed at some recital by the Neo-English School.

Be yourselves – that is, hubristic, apolaustic, botulistic;
Shun the broodings of the mystic on the penitential stool;
And remember that the tragic element exerts its magic
Only when it's haemorrhagic - in the Neo-English School.

You may hint a Celtic *aura*, or suggest the Burmese flora,
Or an Adriatic *bora*, or a merry Mespot mule;
Limn the Arctic (frozen-mittish), the Equator when it's skittish,
But you never must be British in the Neo-English School.

Be malignant and mephitic, ultra - psycho - analytic,
Lest some fine enlightened critic write you down a simple fool;
Be voluptuous, volcanic, swift in stimulating panic,
And you'll add a charm Satanic to the Neo-English School.

Punch, 1 November 1922, 418

APPENDIX II – CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AND PERFORMANCES

Abbreviations of musicians and venues

Arn	Arensky	Prk	Prokofiev
AH	Aeolian Hall	PH	Prince's Hall
Bal	Balakirev	PT	Prince's Theatre, London
BH	Bechstein Hall	QH	Queen's Hall (Orchestra), London
Bor	Borodin	Rac	Rachmaninov
CG	Covent Garden	RB	Russian Ballet (Diaghilev)
CH	Central Hall, Westminster	RCM	Royal College of Music
CP	Crystal Palace	Reb	Rebikov
DR	Drury Lane	R-K	Rimsky-Korsakov
Glz	Glazunov	Rub	Anton Rubinstein
Gli	Glière	Scr	Scriabin
HMT	His Majesty's Theatre, London	SJH	St James' Hall, London
Ip-Iv	Ippolitov-Ivanov	Stn	Steinberg
LOH	London Opera House	Str	Stravinsky
LSO	London Symphony Orchestra	Tch	Tchaikovsky
Lyd	Lyadov	Tcp	Tcherepnin
Lyp	Lyapounov	WH	Wigmore Hall
Mus	Musorgsky		

All performances are British premieres unless stated otherwise

1861

3 March Emancipation of the Russian serfs
- Rub Second Symphony (Ocean) 4 mvt version

1874

4 July Glinka Ruslan & Ludmila ovt – Manns(?) CP
7 November Tch Op.19 no.6 (Variations on an original theme in F) – von Bülow, SJH

1875

Mid-July Balkan Crisis begins, leading to Russo-Turkish War (1877)

1876

11 March Tch Pf Conc no.1 – Dannreuther, Manns, CP
4 July Tch Qt no.1 – Musical Union, SJH
4 November Tch R & J (orig ver) – Manns, CP (rev version not until 1896+?)

1877

12 April Rub Second Symphony (Ocean) 6-mvt version – Rub, CP
24 April Russo-Turkish War (1877-78)
26 July Tch Qt no.3 – Royal Normal Coll & Acad of Mus for Blind(?) see 1896

1879

10 May Tch Serenade Melancolique – Sarasate, Manns, CP

1880

- Glinka Kamarinskaya – Cowen?, London

- 1881**
3 March Tch Marche Slave – Hallé, Manchester
13 March Assassination of Alexander II
28 March Musorgsky dies in St Petersburg
- 1882**
8 May Tch Vln Conc – Brodsky, Richter, SJH
13 May Rub Second Symphony (Ocean) 7-mvt version – [Manns], CP
- 1883**
- 3 lines of biog on Tch in Handbk of Mus Biog
- Tch Pf pcs pubd (incl. Chant sans paroles op.2 no.3)
- 1884**
29 November Tch Pf Trio – Dannreuther Trio, London, 1st mvt only (see 1888)
- 1885**
30 March Penjdeh Incident begins – settled by independent arbitration in September
11 May Glinka Kamarinskaya – Richter, [SJH]
5 December Tch Capriccio Italien – Manns, CP
- 1886**
- Tch ‘None but the lonely heart’ pubd
July Tch 12 Morceaux Op.40 – 1st pubd set
28 October Tch Pf Conc no.2 (2nd/3rd mvt only – see 1890) – Hallé, Manchester
- 1887**
27 February Borodin dies in St Petersburg – obituary in April MT
12 July Glinka Life for the Tsar (in Italian) – CG
13 December Tch Marche Slave – Henschel, London Symphony Concert, SJH
- 1888**
19-24 March Tch 1st visit to UK (as composer)
22 March Tch Serenade for Strs – Tch, Phil Soc, SJH
22 March Tch Third Suite (Finale only, see 1897) – Tch, Phil Soc, SJH
18 May Tch Pf Trio – Hallé Trio, SJH(?) 1st compl perf
6 August Tch Mazeppa – G. Truffi touring company, Alexander Th., Liverpool
- 1889**
- Tch entry in Grove Dictionary (Dannreuther)
15 January Tch 1812 – Henschel, London Symphony Concert, SJH
9-12 April Tch 2nd visit UK
11 April Tch First Suite – Sapellnikov, Phil Soc, SJH
- 1890**
26 April Tch Pf Conc no.2 – Sapellnikov, Manns, CP 1st compl perf (see 1886)
- 1891**
20 November Bor In the Steppes of Central Asia – Hallé, SJH
- 1892**
17 October Tch Eugene Onegin (Eng) – Lago, Moody, Manners, Wood, Olympic Th

1893

2 February	Tch Fifth Symphony – Hallé, Free Trade Hall, Manchester
12 May	Glz Suite op.35 (mvts 1-2 only) – E. H. Moberley's Ladies Str Orch, SJH
June	Tch 3rd visit UK (London + hon deg from Cambridge)
1 June	Tch Fourth Symphony – Tch, Phil Soc, SJH
12 June	Tch Francesca da Rimini – Tch, Cambridge UMS
6 November	Tch dies
8 November	Tch Elegy for Strs [A Grateful Greeting] – Henschel, [SJH?] 'in memoriam'
25 November	QH opens (first public concert 2 December)
27 November	Rac 5 Pieces Op.3 – Ziloti, SJH

1894

January	Franco-Russian Dual Alliance signed after 2 years of secret negotiations
28 February	Tch Sixth Symphony – Mackenzie, Phil Soc, QH (first Phil Soc conc at QH)
24 May	Tch Concert Fantasy op.56 – Sophie Menter, Mackenzie, Phil Soc, QH
1 November	Death of Alexander III
4 December	Borodin Notturmo (from 2 nd qt) – E. H. Moberley's Ladies Str Orch, PH
4 December	R-K Finale from Imenini (as Jour de fête) – Moberley's Ladies Str Orch, PH

1895

4 March	Ziloti recital of Russian music - PH ¹
29 June	Tch Fifth Symphony – Nikisch, QH, (fp in London)
10 August	First Robert Newman/Henry Wood Promenade Concert at QH
21 August	R-K Ovt May Night – Wood, QH
2 October	Tch Coronation March (as Marche Solennelle) – Wood, QH
11 November	Bor Second Quartet – RAM students
December	Arn Pf Trio in D minor – Ziloti, [SJH]
16 December	Ziloti recital of Russian piano music – QH (small) ²

1896

30 January	Arn Silhouettes – Wood, QH
27 February	Bor Second Symphony, Mackenzie, Phil Soc, QH(?)
18 April	Bal Thamar – Lamoureux, Paris Orch, QH
26 May	Coronation of Nicholas II, Moscow
24 September	Glz Scenes de Ballet (nos. 2+3 omitted) – Wood, QH
24 September	R-K Capriccio Espagnol – Wood, QH
10 October	R-K Mlada Suite (1895 suite, as Characteristic Dances) – Manns, CP
17 October	Tch Nutcracker Suite – Wood, QH
22 November	Arn Pf Trio in D minor – Wood, QH orch soloists, QH
5 December	R-K Scheherazade – Wood, QH
9 December	Tch Qt no.3 – Richard Gompertz Qt, QHsml (see 1877)

1897

30 January	Glz Fifth Sym – Wood, QH
20 February	Tch Ovt to The Storm – Wood, QH
3 April	Bor Polovtsian Dances – Wood, QH
3 April	Tch Qt no.2 – Bohemian Qt, SJH
1 May	Arn First Sym – Wood, QH
8 May	Glz Carnival Overture – Wood, QH
15 May	Tch Ovt to The Voyevoda (opera) – Wood, QH
15 May	Tch Third Suite (compl) – Wood, QH

¹ Ziloti's programme included Glazunov Prelude op.25, Rachmaninov C# minor prelude, Arensky Consolations op.36, Togaèdes, Péons op.28, Tchaikovsky Nocturne op.19 no.4, Balakirev Islamey.

² The programme included pieces by Napravnik, Taneyev, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Arensky.

17 June Tch Rococo Vars (incmpl) – Stern, Mackenzie(?), Phil Soc, QH, Cmem conc
 23 June Tch Pf Conc no.3 – Maud Gay, Stanford, RCM
 July Glz visits UK
 1 July Glz Fourth Sym – Glz, Phil Soc, QH
 23 July Glz Fifth Sym – Stanford, RCM
 3 November Tch Hamlet – Lamoureux, QH

1898

18 January Tch Tempest – Halford, Birmingham Town Hall
 20 January Tch Rococo Vars – Fuchs, Cowen, Manchester (1st cmpl perf?)
 20 January Tch Pezzo Capriccioso – Fuchs, Cowen, Manchester
 19 February Mus Night on Bare Mountain – Wood, QH
 22 February Rac Piano Trio No.2 – Walenn Trio, QHsmI
 2 March Glz Str Qt No.3 (Slav) - RCM
 5 March Mus Turkish March in A flat (orch R-K) – Wood, QH
 15 June Tch Ovt on Danish Nat Anth (as Overture Triomphale) – Wood, QH
 7 September Tch Fourth Suite ‘Mozartiana’ – Wood, QH
 14 September Tch Entr’acte and Air de ballet from Voyevoda – Wood, QH
 28 September Tch Manfred – Wood, QH
 5 October Tch Tempest – Wood, QH, f London p

1899

1 January Glz Sixth Sym – Wood, QH
 15 January R-K Fantasia on Serbian Themes – Wood, QH
 4 March Tch Third Sym – Manns, CP
 23 March Bor First Sym – RCM, Stanford
 April Rac visits UK
 19 April Rac Prelude and Elegie from Op.3 – Rac recital QH
 19 April Rac The Rock – Rac, Phil Soc, QH
 19 June R-K Snegourotchka Suite – Richter, SJH (same concert as ‘Enigma’ fp)
 26 August Lyd Valse Badinage (A Musical Snuffbox) – Wood, QH
 2 September Tch Second Suite ‘Characteristique’ – Wood, QH
 7 September Ip-Iv Caucasian Sketches – Wood, QH
 8 September Glz Fantasia op.53 [From Darkness to Light] – Wood, QH
 22 September Tch Ovt to Cherevichki – Wood, QH
 26 September Bal Overture on 3 Russian Themes – Wood, QH
 28 September Tch Cossack Dance from Mazeppa – Wood, QH
 29 September Cui Premier Scherzo – Wood, QH
 3 October Tch (orch Erdmannsdörfer) Chant sans paroles (op.2 no.3) – Wood, QH
 21 October Glz Polka for Strings (from Les Vendredis) – Wood, QH
 28 October Tch Fatum – Wood, QH
 28 October Tch Duet from Romeo & Juliet – Blauvelt, Ellison van Hoose, Wood, QH
 25 November Glz Raymonda Suite – Wood, QH

1900

- Newmarch biography of Tch published
 26 April Newmarch lecture on Russian Art Song – Steinway Hall
 31 May R-K Fantaisie Russe – Ysaye, Wood, QH
 July-October Russian occupation of Manchuria as result of Boxer Rebellion
 19 September R-K Antar (2nd version) – Wood, QH
 26 September Tch Rococo Variations – W.H. Squire, Wood, QH (fp in London)
 4 October Rac Pf Conc No.1 – Evelyn Stuart, Wood, QH (see also 1921)
 1 November Glz Les Ruses d’amour – Wood, QH

1901

27 January	Bor First Sym – Wood, QH (f prof p)
18 March	Rosa Newmarch public lecture ‘Art Songs of Russia’
14 September	Tch Swan Lake suite – Wood, QH
21 September	Lyp Overture solennelle – Wood, QH
24 September	Glz Chant du menestrel – Jacques Renard, Wood, QH
26 September	Bal First Sym – Wood, QH
7 October	Tch Pf Conc no.3 – Holbrooke, Godfrey, BSO, fp prof
11 October	Glz Memorial Cantata – Leeds Fest, Stanford
16 October	Tch Pauline’s Romance from Pique Dame – Olga Wood, Wood, QH
17 October	Glz The Seasons (scs 1-3) – Wood, QH
19 October	Glz The Seasons (sc 4) – Wood, QH
29 October	Glz Overture solennelle op.73 – Wood, QH
6 November	Tch Pique Dame (Act 2 Schäferspiel) – Wood, QH

1902

29 May	Rac Pf Conc No.2 – Sapellnikov, Cowen, Phil Soc, QH
Aug-Oct	Wood progs all Tch syms, concs, + many orch wks in Prom season ³
27 August	Tch First Sym – Wood, QH (fp in London)
3 September	Tch Second Sym – Wood, QH (fp in London)
6 October	Rac Spring Waters (op.14 no.11) – Olga Wood, Pitt, QH
15 October	Tch Pf Conc No.3 – Evelyn Stuart, Wood, QH (f-professional-p in London)
22 October	Tch March, Entr’acte & Ovt to Hamlet (incidental music) – Wood QH

1903

-	Trans-Siberian Railway completed
17 February	Glz Seventh Sym – Stanford, RCM
June	Glz visits UK
11 Jun	Glz visits RCM
11 June	Glz Seventh Sym – Glz, Phil Soc, QH (fp prof)
11 June	Glz From the Middle Ages – Glz, Phil Soc, QH
22 June	R-K Pf Conc – Polyxena Fletcher, Wood, SJH
30 July	Formation of Bolshevik Party
10 October	R-K Night on Mt Triglav from Mlada (orch. arr. of act 3) – Wood, QH
14 October	Arn Pf Conc – Edward Goll, Wood, QH

1904

18 January	Glz Theme & Vars Op.72 – Sandra Drucker, SJH
18 January	Rac Cello Sonata – Percy Such, Sandra Drucker, SJH
February	Russo-Japanese War begins, concludes September 1905
8 April	Anglo-French ‘Entente cordiale’
16 August	Tch Battle of Poltava from Mazeppa (act 3) – Wood, QH
29 September	Tch ‘One moment, pray’ from Pique Dame – William Higley, Wood, QH
15 October	Tch ‘Who can be compared’ from Iolanta – William Higley, Wood, QH

1905

22 January	‘Bloody Sunday’ and revolutionary protests
26 August	Tch Eugene Onegin, closing scene – Olga Wood, Frederic Austin, Wood, QH
30 August	Tch Eugene Onegin, Lensky’s aria – Lloyd Chandos, Wood, QH
5 September	Tch (orch. Glz) Souvenir d’un lieu cher op.42 – Beatrice Langley, Wood, QH

³ All the symphonies were performed, including *Manfred*, and the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth were performed twice. The First and Second Piano Concertos, Concert Fantasia, Violin Concerto, Rocco Variations, ‘1812’ Overture, Nutcracker Suite, Capriccio Espagnol, Hamlet and Third and Fourth Suites all appeared, some more than once, during the 1902 season in September and October.

21 September	Tch Introduction [overture] & Dance from The Oprichnik – Wood, QH
28 September	Tch Voyevoda, symphonic ballade op.78 – Wood, QH
17 October	Glz Violin Concerto – Elman, Wood, QH
24 October	Rac C# minor prelude arr for organ – H.C. Tonking, QH
30 October	New Russian government (Duma) formed
1906	
25 August	Lyd Eight Russian Folksongs – Wood, QH
26 August	Gli First Sym – Wood, QH
30 August	Lyd Baba Yaga – Wood, QH
6 October	Mus (orch. Lyd) Gopak from Sorochinsky Fair – Wood, QH
16 October	Arn Variations for Strings on a theme of Tchaikovsky, op.35 – Wood, QH
18 October	Bor (orch. R-K) finale from Mlada – Wood, QH (fp in London)
1907	
June	Glz visits UK – visits RCM (6 th) hon DMus from Cantab (12 th), Oxon (18 th)
20 June	Glz Pf Sonata No.1 – Sapellnikov, Steinway Hall
August	Anglo-Russian Entente results in Triple Entente (UK, France and Russia)
11 October	Glz Eighth Sym – Stanford, Leeds Festival
1908	
May	Koussevitzky conducting debut with LSO
21 June	Rimsky-Korsakov dies in St Petersburg
8 October	R-K Christmas Eve Suite – Wood, Sheffield Festival
1909	
11 May	Scr First Sym (without choral finale) – Koussevitzky, LSO, QH
25 May	R-K Sadko (symphonic picture) – Koussevitzky, LSO, QH
28 June	Karsavina's ballet troupe performs at Coliseum
25 August	Rub Fantasie in C for piano and orchestra, op.84 – Arthur Cooke, Wood, QH
25 August	Mus (orch. Wood) Song of the Flea – Herbert Brown, Wood, QH
31 August	Mus (orch. Wood) The Peep Show – Thorpe Bates, Wood, QH
7 September	Lyp Rhapsody on Ukrainian themes op.28 – Evelyn Stuart, Wood, QH
15 September	Mus (orch. Wood) King Saul scena – Webster Millar, Wood, QH
1910	
23 February	Rac Isle of the Dead – Stanford, RCM (see 1915)
4 April	Scr Poem of Ecstasy – Koussevitzky, LSO, QH
6 May	Death of Edward VII (funeral 20 May)
16 May	Tch Swan Lake (2 acts only) – Imp Rus Op, Hippodrome, London
19 May	Pavlova's first public appearance in London
19 May	Karsavina's 2 nd visit to London
19 May	Rac Second Sym – Phil Soc, Nikisch, QH
29 May	Balakirev dies in St Petersburg
1911	
9 February	Lyd Two Russian Folksongs – Chessin, Phil Soc, QH
9 February	Lyd Lac Enchanté – Chessin, Phil Soc, QH
21 June	Bor Polovtsian Dances (ballet) – RB, CG
21 June	Tep Pavillon d' Armide – RB, CG
7 July	Arn Cléopâtre – RB, CG
20 July	R-K Scheherazade (ballet) – RB, CG
24 October	Rac Pf Conc No.3 – Rac, Speelman, Liverpool Phil, Liverpool
3 November	Tch Sleeping Beauty (exes) – RB, CG
7 November	Rac Pf Conc No.3 – Rac, Mengelberg, Phil Soc, QH (fp in London)

30 November Tch Swan Lake (2 acts only) – RB, CG

1912

May/June Musorgsky/Russian song lecture-recitals – Mme d’Alheim, Bechstein Hall
12 June Bal Thamar – RB, Beecham, CG
18 June Str Firebird – RB, Rhené-Baton, CG
9 July Tcp Narcisse – RB, CG
10 September Glz Intro & Dance of Salomé – Wood, QH
?? November Glz Finnish Fantasia – Stanford, RCM
30 November Gli Les Sirènes – Wood, QH

1913

1 February Scr Prometheus – Arthur Cooke, Wood, QH (perf twice)
4 February Str Petrushka – RB, Monteux, CG
21 February Romanov Tercentenary
10 March Glz Spring – Safonov, LSO, QH
16 April Str Symphony in E flat – Beecham, Torquay
24 June Mus Boris Godunov (ed.R-K) – RB, Cooper, DL
1 July Mus Khovanshchina – RB, Cooper, DL
8 July R-K Ivan the Terrible (Maid of Pskov) – Chaliapin, Cooper, RB, DR
11 July Str Rite of Spring – RB, Monteux, DR
28 August Glz Pf Conc No.1 op.92 – Alfred Quaife, Wood, QH
4 September Str Firebird Suite⁴ – Wood, QH
20 September Rac (orch Wood) C# minor prelude – Wood, QH
18 October Scr Third Sym – Wood, QH
25 October Gli String Quartet no.2 op.20 – Wessely Quartet, BH

1914

January Rac visits UK
30 January Rac Pf Sonata No.2 – Rac, Bradford
14 February Str Fireworks – Wood, QH
March Scr visits UK
14 March Scr Pf Conc – Scr, Wood, QH (concert included Prometheus)
20 March Scr pf recital – Bechstein Hall
26 March Scr pf recital – Bechstein
8 June Bor Prince Igor – Chaliapin, RB, Leon Steinberg, DL
15 June R-K Golden Cockerel – RB, Cooper, DL
18 June Stn Midas – RB, DL
18 June Str Le Rossignol – RB, Cooper, DL
26 June R-K May Night – RB, Steinberg, DL
28 June Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo
4 August Britain enters First World War
25 August Lyd Fragment from the Apocalypse – Wood, QH
26 August Str Scherzo Fantastique – Wood, QH
31 August St Petersburg renamed Petrograd

1915

17 April Mus (orch. Wood) Pictures at an Exhibition – Wood, QH
27 April Scriabin dies in Moscow
7 May Sinking of Lusitania
29 May Tch Queen of Spades – Rosing Co, Gurevitch, LOH

⁴ The suite, prepared by Stravinsky, consisted of the Introduction, The Enchanted Garden of Kashchey, The Supplications of the Firebird, The Princess and the Golden Apples, Round Dance of the Princesses, and Infernal Dance.

15 July Rac Aleko – Rosing Co, Gurevich, LOH
 14 August R-K Cradle Song (from Ivan the Terrible) – Edith Evans, Wood, QH
 25 August Rac Isle of the Dead – Wood, QH (fp prof)
 1 November Str Petrushka – Phil Soc, Beecham (fp concert)

1916

5 July Mus Boris Godunov (in English) – Aldwych Th, London
 31 August Mus Scherzo in B flat – Wood, QH (world prem)
 2 September Prk Scherzo for 4 bsns – Wood, QH
 4 September Mus Intermezzo in B minor – Wood, QH
 7 September Mus (orch. Touthmalov)⁵ Pictures at an Exhibition – Wood, QH
 9 September Glz Paraphrase on National Anthems of Allies – Wood, QH
 11 September Glz Song from the Haulers on the Volga – Wood, QH
 18 September Mus Persian Dance (Khovanshchina) – Wood QH
 28 September Reb The Christmas Tree – Wood, QH
 ? October [6 recitals of Russian piano music, Birmingham]
 9 October R-K Pan Voyevoda Suite – Wood, QH
 13 December R-K Legend of Tsar Sultan Suite – Brighton

1917

16 January Bechstein Hall re-opened as Wigmore Hall
 8-15 March ‘February’ Revolution leading to abdication of Tsar and Kerensky govt
 18 September Lyd Kikimora – Wood, QH
 9 October R-K Golden Cockerel suite – Wood, QH
 16 October Tcpl Piano Concerto – Benno Moiseiwitsch, Wood, QH
 20 October Mus Khovanschina (in English) – Pitt, DL
 8 November ‘October’ Revolution – Bolsheviks seize power in Petrograd

1918

29 January Civil war breaks out in Russia (1918-21)
 22 February Str Pribaoutki – Olga Haley, London Str Qt, Goossens, AH (world prem)
 3 March Treaty of Brest Litovsk
 16 July Death of Nicholas II
 19 July R-K Golden Cockerel (in English) – Pitt, DL
 11 November Armistice signed
 23 December Lyd Contes Russes – RB, Coliseum

1919

13 February Str 3 pieces for str qt – Philharmonic Qt, WH
 26 July Bor Prince Igor (in English) – Coates, CG
 19 August Mus (orch. Wood) The Nursery – Anne Thursfield, Wood, QH
 23 September Tcpl Quartet for horns – Wood, QH

1920

27 April Str Ragtime – Bliss, (ensemble), AH (world prem)
 10 June Str Pulcinella – RB, Ansermet(?), CG
 16 July Str Song of the Nightingale – RB, Stravinsky, CG
 20 July Lecture given by Ansermet on Str’s aesthetic at WH (hand picked orch)
 20 July Str Soldier’s Tale Suite – Ansermet, WH (world prem – see also 1927)
 20 July Str Berceuses du chat – Olga Haley, Ansermet, WH
 20 July Str 3 pieces for cl – Haydn Draper, WH
 24 August Prk Pf Conc No.1 – Ellen Jensen, Wood, QH
 1 November Prk Scythian Suite – LSO, Coates, QH

⁵ Touthmalov’s orchestration omits the movements ‘Gnomus’, ‘Tuileries’ and ‘Bydlo’.

- 11 November Prk selection pf pcs – Rubinstein, WH(?)
- 1921**
- March Soviet New Economic Policy – Famine Crisis (1921-22)
- 15 March Rac The Bells – Wood, Liverpool Phil Soc & Ch, Liverpool
- 7 June Str Rite of Spring concert perf – Goossens, handpicked orch, QH
- 9 June Prk Chout – RB, Prk, PT
- 10 June Str Syms of Wind Instrs – Koussevitzky, LSO, QH (world prem)
- 11 June Prk Classical Sym – as interlude music RB, Prk, PT
- 18 October Rac First Piano Concerto (rev. version) – Ilmari Hannikainen, Wood, QH
- 2 November Tch Sleeping Beauty (near cmplt, adpt Str) – RB, Goossens, Alhambra
- 1922**
- 24 April Prk Pf Conc No.3 – Prk, Coates, LSO, QH
- 1 June Prk March & Scherzo from Love 3 Oranges – Koussevitzky, LSO, QH
- 1923**
- 5 February Mus (orch. Ravel) Pictures at an Exhibition – LSO, Koussevitzky, QH
- 1924**
- 24 January Lenin dies – Petrograd renamed Leningrad
- 1 February British government recognizes Soviet Union
- 3 May Rac at QH
- October Zinoviev Letter scandal
- 15 October Str Octet – private perf at Seaford House, London (see 1926)
- 1925**
- 26 February Prk Vln Conc No.1 – Szigeti, Ansermet, Phil Soc, QH
- 12 November Glz The Kremlin – Harty, Hallé, Manchester
- 1926**
- 9 February Str Octet – Anthony Bernard, London Chamber Orch, CH(?), Westminster
- 30 March R-K Invisible City of Kitezh – concert perf, broadcast BBC, Coates, CG
- 3 May General Strike in Britain – 12 May
- 14 June Str Les Noces – RB, Goossens, HMT
- Autumn (?) Str Soldier's Tale – Clark, People's Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- 1927**
- 19 June Str Conc for pf and winds – Str (pf), Clark, Wireless SO (Str radio début)
- 19 June Str Mavra overture – Str, Wireless SO, BBC radio broadcast
- 19 June Str Suite No.1 – Str, Wireless SO, BBC radio broadcast
- 4 July Prk Le Pas d'acier – RB, Goossens, PT
- 10 July Str Soldier's Tale (cmplt in Eng & broadcast) – Arts Th Club, Edward Clark
- 11 October R-K Mozart & Salieri – Chaliapin, Coates, LSO, (C.B. Cochran) RAH
- 7 November Str Concertino for str qt – Pro Arte Qt, BBC radio broadcast
- 5 December Prk Pf Sonata No.3, plus miniatures incl Toccata – Prk, BBC radio broadcast
- 9 December Prk Pf Conc No.2 – Prk, Ansermet, Wireless SO, BBC radio broadcast
- 1928**
- 5 March Prk Quintet – BBC radio broadcast
- 2 April Str Pf Sonata – Marcelle Meyer, BBC radio broadcast
- 2 April Str Piano Rag Music – Marcelle Meyer, BBC radio broadcast
- 12 May Str Oedipus Rex – Str, Wireless SO, BBC radio broadcast (repeated 13 May)
- 25 June Str Apollon Musagete – RB, Str, HMT

1929

- 13 June Str Conc for pf & winds – Str, Goossens, QH (fp public concert, qv 1927)
1 July Prk Prodigal Son – RB, Desormière, CG
15 July Str Renard – RB, Desormière, CG
19 August Diaghilev dies in Venice
28 October Wall Street crash
18 November Rac Pf Conc No.4 – Rac, Coates, LSO

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