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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART SONG IN THE UNITED STATES: 1890-1920

A LECTURE RECITAL, TOGETHER WITH THREE RECITALS OF SELECTED

WORKS OF J. S. BACH, W. A. MOZART, J. BRAHMS,

M. MOUSSORGSKY, J. IBERT, R. STRAUSS,

C. FLOYD, AND OTHERS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the

North Texas State University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By

Eugene Allison Windsor III, B. A., M. A.

Denton, Texas

December, 1976

Windsor, Eugene Allison III, The Development of the Art Song in the United States: 1890-1920, A Lecture Recital, Together with Three Recitals of Selected Works of J. S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, J. Brahms, M. Moussorgsky, R. Strauss, J. Ibert, C. Floyd, and others. Doctor of Musical Arts (Voice Performance), December, 1976, 26 pp., bibliography, 47 titles.

The lecture recital was given on August 5, 1976. Subsequent to a presentation of some pertinent background material, diverse influences on the compositional styles of five representative composers of the period were discussed. Nine songs by Edward MacDowell, Charles Loeffler, Sidney Homer, John Alden Carpenter, and Charles Griffes were interspersed as musical illustrations.

In addition to the lecture recital, three other public recitals were performed.

The first solo recital was presented on July 26, 1973, and included works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Richard Strauss, and Wolfgang Fortner.

The second solo recital, given on December 3, 1973, was comprised of works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Jacques Ibert, Arrigo Boito, and Modeste Moussorgsky.

The third solo recital (with Miss Jo Ann Pickens assisting), was presented on June 26, 1974, and included works by Thomas Arne, Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Benjamin Godard, Giuseppe Verdi, and Carlisle Floyd.

Tape recordings of all performances submitted as dissertation requirements are on deposit in the North Texas State University Library.

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
School of Music
PRESENTS

Eugene Windsor, Bass
In Recital

with

Michael Rickman, Organ, Piano

Marilyn Reitz, Violoncello

David Widder, Oboe

Thursday, July 26, 1973

8:15

Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Cantata No. 82 ("Ich habe genug") J. S. Bach

INTERMISSION

Heimliche Aufforderung Op. 27, No. 3 Richard Strauss
Das Thal Op. 51, No. 1
Ach weh mir unglückhaftem Mann Op. 21, No. 4
Ich trage meine Minne Op. 32, No. 1
Zueignung Op. 10, No. 1

Songs on Texts by William Shakespeare

Motto (*What You Will*) Wolfgang Fortner
Fear no more (*Cymbeline*)
O mistress mine (*What You Will*)
Blow, thou winterwind (*As You Like It*)

*Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Musical Arts*

North Texas State University
School of Music

presents

EUGENE WINDSOR, bass

MICHAEL RICKMAN, pianist

in

Graduate Voice Recital

Monday, December 3, 1973

8:15p.m. Recital Hall

Program

Mentre ti lascio, o figlia (k. 513) Mozart

Quatre Chansons de Don Quichotte Ibert
Chanson du duc
Chanson du départ
Chanson à Dulcinée
Chanson de la mort

Prologue and Aria from Mefistofele Boito
Ave Signor
Ecco il mondo

Intermission

Songs and Dances of Death Moussorgsky
Trepak
Lullaby
Serenade
Commander-in-Chief

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Music

presents

EUGENE WINDSOR, BASS-BARITONE

in

Graduate Recital

with

Michael Rickman, Pianist

Jo Ann Pickens, Soprano

Wednesday, June 26, 1974 8:15 Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Now Phoebus sinketh in the west Thomas Arne
Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Rule, Britannia!

Flieder monolog Richard Wagner
from *Die Meistersinger von Nuerenberg*

Vier ernste Gesaenge Johannes Brahms

INTERMISSION

Au revoir Benjamin Godard
Pourquoi êtes-vous jolie?
L'amour
Contemplation

Or siam' soli Giuseppe Verdi
Duet from *La Forza del Destino*

Blitch's Monologue Carlisle Floyd

*Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Musical Arts*

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

presents

EUGENE WINDSOR,
Bass-Baritone

with

Michael Rickman,
Pianist

in

Lecture Recital

**"The Development of the Art Song
in the United States from 1890 to 1920"**

Thursday, August 5, 1976 4:00 p.m. Recital Hall

Musical Illustrations

Edward MacDowell
(1861-1908)

Midsummer Lullaby, Op. 47
(1893)
The Sea, Op. 47 (1893)

Charles Martin
Loeffler
(1861-1935)

To Helen, Op. 15 (1906)

Sidney Homer
(1864-1953)

Sing to me, Sing, Op. 28 (1913)
The Sick Rose, Op. 26 (1913)

John Alden
Carpenter
(1876-1951)

The Green River (1909)
To One Unknown (1912)

Charles Griffes
(1884-1920)

By a Lonely Forest Pathway
(1909)
The Lament of Ian the Proud,
Op. 11 (1918)

*Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART SONG IN THE
UNITED STATES: 1890-1920

With the passing of Stephen Foster in 1864, America lost its first famous composer, one whose songs have retained a good measure of their original popularity and appeal. Foster's songs, with their wistful suggestions of better days gone by, had the power to evoke in the middle classes feelings of genteel sentimentality and nostalgia. As Dennis Stevens has pointed out, "It is significant that his melodies are not only close to Anglo-Celtic folk-song, but to the idiom of American hymns as well. This alone has ensured a modicum of respectability."¹ His settings of minstrel songs and plantation ballads may owe more than a small portion of their early popularity in the young nation to a growing awareness of and need for something exclusively American--a native American culture.

In the field of popular song America had been able to make her own original contribution, because she had nurtured the society that was mirrored in Stephen Foster's music. In the area of what is today called serious music, it was altogether another matter. There was, of course, no traditional or established American school, musically speaking.

¹Dennis Stevens, editor, A History of Song (New York, 1960), p. 418.

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, an aspiring group of American composers began, consciously or otherwise, to address themselves to the task of creating an American music and in so doing they laid the foundation upon which the art song in the United States was developed.

John Knowles Paine (1839-1906), the first American to hold a professorship in music in a university, taught at Harvard from 1875 until his death and was one of the first Americans to study music abroad. The few art songs he wrote reflect the influence of Brahms and Wagner. Among Paine's students were George Chadwick (1854-1931) and Arthur Foote (1853-1937), both of whom contributed to the development of American song along artistic lines. Their art songs demonstrate melodic invention, and a beginning of a more independent style, both in the vocal and in the accompaniment. Wiley Hitchcock states:

American music of the cultivated tradition from the end of the Civil War to the end of World War I was largely dominated by the attitudes, the ideals, and the modes of expression of nineteenth-century Europe, particularly Austria and Germany. Our leading composers almost to a man were initiated into music by first-generation Americans emigrated from Europe, and when they came back their music was played by ensembles, choruses, and orchestras led either by Europeans or European-trained conductors. Some of their music was even published first in Europe.²

Besides Foote and Chadwick, this group of composers, known variously as the Boston Classicists and the Boston Academics,

²Arthur C. Edwards and W. Thomas Marrocco, Music in the United States (Dubuque, Iowa, 1968), p. 47.

included Dudley Buck (1839-1909) and Horatio Parker (1863-1919). It soon becomes clear just how directly and completely the efforts of virtually all our composers active at the turn of the century were dependent upon the precepts and examples of their European masters. Their style combined the spirit of the German romantic tradition with elements of form associated with the classical period. Edwards and Marrocco, writing in Music in the United States, describe it thus:

This tradition is exemplified by objectivity, use of restraint (no exaggeration), clarity of form (developed through short, regular phrases) and balance and proportion of all elements. Specifically, this ideal is realized in simple, folklike melodies, regular, obvious rhythmic patterns, many triadic harmonies, and modulations to the nearest related keys. . . . Of course, none of this Boston group set up these principles as their sole aspiration; rather, their goal was, as in the music of Brahms, some compatible fusion of certain Classic and Romantic elements. Unfortunately, this synthesis . . . lacked conviction because the combined styles had little sympathetic relationship to the immediate environment of the composers--no real roots in the cultural traditions of our land.³

In many ways it is Edward MacDowell who exemplifies the culmination of the effects of a burdensome Germanic influence in America at the time. Due in no small part to his early successes in Europe as a composer, performer, and teacher, MacDowell, over a period of sustained residence abroad, built a solid reputation, and was recognized in his own country as "the greatest of American composers"⁴ at the turn of the

³Ibid.

⁴Rupert Hughes, Contemporary American Composers (Boston, 1900), p. 34.

century, according to Rupert Hughes. Hitchcock sees the composer as progressively restricting and circumscribing the confines of his artistic outreach. He continues,

Having begun boldly as a composer of piano concertos of truly Lisztian sweep and breadth, MacDowell then tended to produce even fewer, smaller, and more rarefied works. He ended as a composer of concise, evocative genre pieces, each very precisely fashioned, and clearly proportioned. This was true not only of his piano pieces but of his songs as well, most of which were vignettes, not frescoes, and tended to become more and more spare, especially in their piano accompaniments, as time went on.⁵

To his credit, MacDowell evinced a sincere and conscientious concern in the matter of the textual setting of his songs, whereas with many of his predecessors as well as contemporaries, "the text in the average song remained mere caption, and very little thought was given to the inflection of the words and to prosody . . ."⁶ Evidence of MacDowell's intense concern over the problems of combining words with music is manifested in many of his songs in certain restrictive effects, e.g. the absence of variety in his nearly exclusively syllabic settings of texts, as well as the almost total lack of independence of the vocal line from the accompaniment. Both of these stylistic traits are to be

⁵H. Wiley Hitchcock, editor, in Earlier American Music, Vol. VII, Edward MacDowell: Songs, Introduction.

⁶Stevens, op. cit., p. 423.

noted in the two MacDowell selections which are to be used as musical illustrations. Hitchcock relates a rather humorous instance which is indicative of the composer's frustration over the matter:

MacDowell was something of a poet as well as a composer, and was very finicky about the kind of poetry suitable for setting to music. He once said that "some exceptionally beautiful poems possess . . . words that prove insurmountable obstacles . . . [there is] one . . . in which the word 'nostrils' occurs in the very first verse, and one cannot do anything with it."⁷

Thus, not surprisingly, MacDowell became his own lyricist: the last ten songs (Opp. 56, 58, and 60) are all set to texts by the composer. In Opus 47, which consists of eight songs published in 1893, except for three poems by William Dean Howells, all the titles are either original verses or adaptations from Goethe. Although he was never satisfied with music's ability to match the syllables and inflections of a poem, MacDowell's songs at their best demonstrate a decided ability to interpret the spirit and mood of the verses he chose to set to music.

One of the more attractive and interesting songs from Opus 47 is "Midsummer's Lullaby," in Hall's words, "a dream-like fancy with romantic ancestry in Schumann's 'Mondnacht.'"⁸ William Trent Upton, in Art Song in America, calls attention to "the uninterrupted, persistent [eighth note] movement of

⁷Hitchcock, Edward MacDowell: Songs, Introduction.

⁸James H. Hall, The Art Song (Norman, Oklahoma, 1953), p. 260.

his shimmering harmonies as producing just the right dreamy effect."⁹ MacDowell's skillful handling of the simple song form is to be seen in the codetta of the final ten measures. The flattened sixth degree in the closing phrase serves as a kind of harmonic rallentando while the gently rocking 6/8 movement settles into a cadence on the dominant.

[Here is performed the first musical illustration: "Midsummer's Lullaby" by MacDowell.]

A second song from Mac Dowell's Opus 47 is "The Sea." In this piece the composer assays a more dramatic style, though still within quite limited formal and harmonic confines. The full sonorities which proceed from the predominance of block chords and stepwise octave movement in the bass support the setting well. In spite of what must have been, even during his time, a somewhat dated if not hackneyed text, MacDowell has created some musical and dramatic interest, particularly through the unfolding of the sinuous chromatic progressions in the accompaniment, although the diatonic bias of the harmony is never long obscured. The declamatory style is not enhanced by the prosaic nature of the vocal line, although the repeated octave leaps in the melody effectively suggest the ominous mood of the text.

[Here is performed the second musical illustration: "The Sea" by MacDowell.]

⁹William T. Upton, Art Song in America (New York, 1930), p. 122.

MacDowell's style, as viewed throughout forty-two songs, has been described by the iconoclastic critic, Paul Rosenfeld, as "a sensitive, personal assimilation of European elements suffused with the cast of originality which no genuine assimilation ever lacks."¹⁰ Again, Hall remarks, "If he is not in this form [i.e. the art song] quite at his happiest, he is among the foremost of those who have kept alive in the modern tradition the conception of the song as a medium of lyric utterance . . ."¹¹ Finally, John Tasker Howard, concluding an essay on MacDowell, writes--and one is not sure whether facetiously or not--that he was "a man who knew what a good song should be, without any compromise with what singers like to sing."¹²

Charles Martin Loeffler (1861-1935), born in Alsace, immigrated to the United States in 1881 after spending his formative years in Europe absorbing diverse German, French, and Russian musical influences. Having studied violin with Joachim and Massart, he arrived in America where he was soon playing in orchestras under Walter Damrosch and Theodore Thomas. He became a naturalized citizen in 1887. Upon deciding to devote himself exclusively to composition a few

¹⁰Paul Rosenfeld, An Hour with American Music (Philadelphia, 1929), pp. 50-51.

¹¹Hall, op. cit., p. 170.

¹²John T. Howard, "Edward MacDowell," The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 9th ed., edited by Robert Sabin (New York, 1964), p. 1250.

years after settling in his adopted country, Loeffler, who already possessed a well-honed compositional style, never attempted actively to further his contact with contemporary music as it developed in America in the ensuing years: he spent his last twenty-five years in virtual isolation at his rural home in Medford, Massachusetts, never to be influenced musically by the country of his adoption. Most of his small output of only sixteen songs was written between the years of 1903 and 1908. And, of these, half were set to French texts. While Loeffler is most often identified as having cosmopolitan tastes and eclectic tendencies, his musical style has been described by Warren Storey Smith as follows:

The strong feeling for line as well as for colour in his music renders somewhat inaccurate the grouping of him with the French Impressionists. A bold and individual harmonist, he treated dissonances as the outcome of a free polyphony rather than arbitrarily as discord for its own sake. Loeffler cultivated the macabre, the mystical, and the idyllic. Modal influences derived both from the music of the Russian liturgy and plainsong play an important part in his style.¹³

While Loeffler's music creates an aura of at least superficial magnificence and brilliance, Rosenfeld feels that, like MacDowell's music, it lacks intensity.¹⁴ Lawrence Gilman, on the other hand, regards Loeffler as a mystic, a dreamer,

¹³Warren S. Smith, "Charles Loeffler," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th ed., edited by Eric Blom, Vol. V (London, 1954).

¹⁴Rosenfeld, op. cit., p. 56.

and a visionary who is drawn to the poetry of Baudelaire, Poe, Yeats, Nietzsche, and Eichendorf. Gilman continues,

He is far from being a mere recrudescient Romanticist. He has a love for the macabre and the fantastically sinister . . . but he indulges it in a manner wholly free from the excesses and the attitudinizing that are an unmistakable index of the survival of the Romanticistic [sic] impulse. His sincerity and his instinct for the porportion are unailing.¹⁵

Upton supports this view of the composer and emphasizes his individuality and integrity. He states,

Loeffler writes with a full, rich texture . . . while he apparently avoids the deeply tragic and deals preferably with themes of less passionate utterance, yet with no less sincerity of expression. In his songs, at any rate, Loeffler shows more the influence of Debussy; but, he is far from being a mere imitator; his own artistic personality is too vigorous for that. . . . Perhaps, however, he never wrote a song of more tender beauty, of more expressive simplicity . . . than his earlier song "To Helen" (with a text by Edgar Allen Poe), written in 1906.¹⁶

Loeffler uses his palette of romantic colors to their best advantage here. The texture of the accompaniment ranges from thin and transparent to full-bodied and lush. The composer is particularly successful, through the use of whole-tone movement and chromatic alteration, in dissipating the feeling of being in a key throughout most of the piece. The extended postlude provides a lovely reiteration of the counter melody.

[Here is performed the third musical illustration: "To Helen" by Loeffler.]

¹⁵Lawrence Gilman, The Songs of Charles Martin Loeffler (New York, 1942), p. 198.

¹⁶Upton, op. cit., p. 142.

Sidney Homer produced well over 100 songs, most of them between 1899 and 1915. He rarely sought the limelight, however, and was often overshadowed by his wife, Louise Beatty Homer, the contralto, who sang at the Metropolitan Opera House with Caruso. The songs of Sidney Homer are infrequently heard today, if, indeed, they are known at all. There is, however, some justification for this state of affairs. Taken as a whole, the songs reflect a rather broad unevenness of style and conception, ranging from music hall ballads of the most general appeal to art songs of unquestionable inspiration.

One of the problems encountered in assessing the quality of Homer's songs is the exceedingly wide range of texts he chose to set. If a composer is known by the poems he sets, one's initial reaction to the songs of Homer may well be astonishment and confusion. Here side by side lie "The Eternal Goodness" and "Casey at the Bat;" "Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead" and "Old Watt and the Rabbits." Some of the verses from Christina Rossetti's Seventeen Lyrics from Sing-Song which the composer saw fit to set to music as his Opus 19 elicit a smile in passing: for example, "Kookoorookoo, Kookoorookoo," "The Dog Lies in His Kennel;" and "Mix a Pancake, Stir a Pancake." How can one reconcile the taste which chooses to set such a powerful poem as "The Sick Rose" (from Songs of Experience by William Blake) with that which elects such doggerel as "Christmas Chimes"?

H. C. Thorpe, in attempting to explain this side of Homer as a song writer, suggests that the composer is simply affirming various aspects of his individual personality, and thus asserting with Whitman, "I resist anything better than my own diversity."¹⁷ Thorpe continues his defense,

Had the art of Sidney Homer been less than uncorruptibly honest, he would never have written "A Banjo Song" . . . for, of course, among contemporary musicians of elevated brow the one evil is the possession of a heart, especially a heart that understands and sometimes beats in unison with those of lowly and uncultured folk. . . . Because he has written several songs of rather general appeal, however, one should not too hastily conclude that the music of Mr. Homer finds its most congenial habitat on Main Street.¹⁸

Samuel Barber, who is Homer's nephew, was instrumental in bringing out the collection, Seventeen Songs by Sidney Homer in 1943. Writing in the preface, besides recommending the study and use of these songs to young singers, Barber declared that Homer has avoided the extremes of both provincialism and eclectism.¹⁹ He may have been suggesting, however euphemistically, that Homer's overall style is something less than distinctive. But, it may also be inferred that Homer has succeeded to some extent in coming to terms with the myriad influences, potential and real, which confront

¹⁷Harry C. Thorpe, "The Songs of Sidney Homer," Musical Quarterly XXIV (January, 1930), 48-49.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Sidney Homer, Seventeen Songs, compiled by Samuel Barber (New York, 1943), Preface.

virtually all artists, and in doing so has emerged with something of an individual, personal idiom. Again, Thorpe adds,

Mr. Homer . . . does not follow in the rush to join the newest modern-movement--whatever that might be. He is perfectly content to occupy his own skin, artistically speaking, accepting his own emotion for better or for worse as the sole source of his inspiration.²⁰

The two songs, "Sing to Me, Sing," and "The Sick Rose" are exemplary of the divergent styles of Sidney Homer. The former, in a decidedly more popular vein, is a "straight-forward celebration of life, broad, ecstatic, and sweeping with noble passion to a powerful climax."²¹ The diatonic harmonies of the first song provide a marked contrast with the sinister chromaticism of the second piece, set off as it is by the wide-ranging leaps in the cantilena. Rarely has a song composer of his time captured and delineated musically and dramatically with such consummate artistry the starkness and foreboding of a poetic text.

[Here are performed the fourth and fifth musical illustrations: "Sing to Me, Sing" and "The Sick Rose" by Homer.]

John Alden Carpenter is one composer, of the several being considered, whose songs are heard today with some regularity. Like his contemporary, Charles Ives, Carpenter pursued an active career in the business world for many years, and, until his retirement in 1935, composed mainly on weekends

²⁰Thorpe, "The Songs of Sidney Homer," 48-49.

²¹Ibid.

and holidays.²² By heritage Carpenter might easily have been a conservative, if not a reactionary. He was not, however, a reactionary, a conservative, or for that matter a revolutionary, but simply an honest artist who accepted the modern era and interpreted it according to his own feelings. His songs have been described by W. J. Henderson as having "a whimsical fancy, a delicate, even poetic, humour and tender sentiment [as well as] refinement and artistic elegance [while] his melodic invention is facile and his themes have fluency and grace."²³

Ever since the first of his approximately eighty songs was published in 1912, much has been made of Carpenter's alleged indebtedness to the so-called French Impressionist style. Felix Borowski explains that in light of such prejudicial opinion,

Carpenter was scarcely likely to escape the painstaking investigators who found Debussy in every composition that might contain augmented triads or successive chords of the ninth, or whole-tone scales. But although there is a modicum of truth in the assertion that the composer . . . has absorbed something of the Gallic spirit of the twentieth

²²while undeniably the music of Ives has been and remains a very significant force in American music, none of his songs was known or available to the musical public until--as a result of a belated housecleaning--the composer published in 1922 his collected 114 Songs. For this reason Ives' work has not been included within the scope of the present discussion.

²³W. J. Henderson, "John Alden Carpenter," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th ed., edited by Eric Blom, Vol. II (London, 1954).

century, it is none the less true that he has evolved a style of his own.²⁴

Indeed, Carpenter was once called by Walter Damrosch "the most American of composers"²⁵ (probably, though, with reference to native elements such as ragtime and jazz which he has incorporated in some of his larger instrumental works, for example, the ballet suites Skyscraper and Krazy Kat). Carpenter did, however, utilize the jazz idiom along with speech dialect in his Four Negro Songs, published in 1926.

"The Green River" (to a text by Lord Alfred Douglas), one of Carpenter's first songs, remains today one of his best known. The sensitive evocation of mood achieved through chromatic movement in the vocal line is supported by a rarefied and translucent piano accompaniment reminiscent of style brisé. The transition from the *più animato* section in the key of C major to the closing phrase which restates the opening *adagio*, is skillfully accomplished by means of an enharmonic modulation, a four-note whole-step progression which returns to the tonic of B major.

In a later song, "To One Unknown" (to a text by Helen Dudley), Carpenter effectively utilizes syncopation, chromatic alteration, and octave leaps, as well as a haunting countermelody which wanders between the left and right hands

²⁴Felix Borowski, "John Alden Carpenter," Music Quarterly, XVI (October, 1930), 454.

²⁵John T. Howard, A Short History of American Music (New York, 1957), p. 229.

in the accompaniment. The final twelve measures unfold over a pedal point on the dominant at the conclusion of which the vocal line ends on a deceptive cadence, thus heightening the mood of wistful unfulfillment.

[Here are performed the sixth and seventh musical illustrations: "The Green River" and "To One Unknown" by Carpenter.]

Considering what he produced during the brief time he was active as a composer, Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920) raises much speculation concerning what he might have created had he lived longer. Upton reflects that "When we come to make a serious study of his songs, we can [sic] but be amazed at their range and variety; and yet we cannot escape the conviction that . . . we are after all merely making explorations in the workshop of his mind."²⁶

Charles Griffes has been characterized by Gilbert Chase as a composer whose predominant tendency is that of exotic eclecticism. Cataloguing the numerous direct influences on his ever developing style, Chase states,

Griffes began by assimilating the technique of German song writers, veered to the impressionism of Debussy and the primitivism of Stravinsky, underwent the influence of the arch-eclectic Busoni, made more than a passing bow to the Russian "Five," turned briefly to American Indian themes, and found a congenial source of material in the music of the Far East. Throughout these avatars he maintained a personal style and developed a power of expression that

²⁶William T. Upton, "The Songs of Charles T. Griffes," Musical Quarterly, IX (July, 1923), 314.

entitle him to a distinctive place among the creative musicians of America.²⁷

While he was engaged in evolving and refining his musical language, Griffes was able to maintain a detached and self-critical point of view, frequently revising and meticulously scoring his work. According to Hall, "The elusive and ever changing goal he sought led to experiments. Griffes never allowed them to run rampant, but, on the other hand, he never curbed his imaginings in order to win an audience with familiar music."²⁸

The most frequently performed of his twenty-four songs, "By a Lonely Forest Pathway" ("Auf geheimem Waldespfade" in the original German text by Lenau) seems to have evolved in a well defined line from the late romantic traditions of Brahms and Strauss. But, as the favorite of the five early German songs of Griffes (no opus number) it has maintained its popularity on its own merits. Upton sees "the keenest sort of response to the text. . . . In none of his later and more elaborate songs do we find a more subtle and refined workmanship or a keener appreciation of the mood to be expressed."²⁹ Even the overly sentimental text, so common to the songs of the period and a factor to which the modern critic may point

²⁷Gilbert Chase, America's Music (New York, 1955), p. 519.

²⁸Hall, op. cit., p. 273.

²⁹Upton, Art Song in America, p. 251.

with some disdain, is treated by Griffes with restraint and dignity.

The piece begins with a tremulous, rustling figure, a broken, first inversion chord. The slight dissonance injected by the addition of the sixth to the major triad effectively establishes the mood of reverie from the outset. A feeling of intensification is achieved with the introduction of a triplet figuration at the first instrumental interlude. After a brief excursion through an unrelated key (F-sharp major), the climax is reached, occurring on a chord of the dominant seventh. The vocal line comes to rest after descending an octave and a half, almost entirely by stepwise movement, to the tonic of B-flat major.

Written by William Sharp under the pseudonym of Fiona MacLeod, "The Lament of Ian the Proud" is the first of a group of three poems based on Gaelic legend which Griffes conceived originally for solo voice and orchestra, but first published for voice with piano accompaniment. Upton describes the song as "a sincere and infinitely pathetic presentment of an old man's unassuageable grief. In its simplicity and nobility of expression it is perhaps Griffes' finest song."³⁰ The text is simple, direct, and predominantly monosyllabic; thus, Griffes' syllabic setting of the melody is in places suggestive of an intoned chant, while the leitmotif, reiterated and varied intervallically, assumes a bleak and ominous quality. The

³⁰Ibid., p. 260.

strongly rhythmic accompaniment, alternately somber and subdued, then sweeping and impassioned, is masterfully integrated into the overall texture of the piece, chiefly by means of syncopation and the superimposition of duple and triple rhythmic patterns.

[Here is performed the ninth musical illustration: "The Lament of Ian the Proud" by Griffes.]

Griffes's individual contribution to the art of song writing is to be recognized, according to Upton, in the

unfailing sincerity of his style . . . and in the fact that nothing is being done for extraneous effect . . . everything tending to interpret and elucidate the text . . . also in the beauty and richness of his harmonization, the singleness of his melodies, the vitality and virility of his rhythmic sense.³¹

Of this group of five American art song composers, all of whom were active in the early years of the twentieth century, Charles Griffes was the most forward-looking and the least conservative, although he was outlived by Homer and Carpenter by more than thirty years. It has been said of Griffes by Upton (as it can be said also of Ives, who had been pursuing similar ends, albeit in isolation and obscurity) that he "had the devoted modernist's love of searching after new truths, even at the cost of the most drastic experimentation."³²

³¹Upton, "The Songs of Charles T. Griffes," Musical Quarterly, Vol. IX (July, 1923), p. 324.

³²Upton, Art Song in America, p. 267.

The American composer of seventy years ago, and in particular the composer of art songs, was confronted with a dilemma in the form of a confusion of traditions, or even a lack of tradition altogether. The composer and critic Daniel Gregory Mason held as a credo that native American musical expression "could be achieved only by developing the distilled essence of folk melody in an eclectic style through skillful organization in accepted forms."³³ The nebulous question of what really constituted (or should constitute) American music was widely entertained.³⁴ Mason stated that

No doubt the work of our best composers still leaves something to be desired, for they labor under great impediments, chiefly psychological; but they have given us nevertheless a music. . . . Perhaps it would be better to say they have given us a dozen musics.³⁵

The composers themselves could hardly remain unaware of the controversy which had grown up around the nature of their roles as creative artists. John Alden Carpenter spoke out eloquently on the predicament of the American composer when he wrote

It has become the fashion with many of our musical observers and music critics . . . to wring their hands and demand, for the future at least, if it is impossible for the present, a more unmistakably "American" quality

³³Edwards and Marrocco, op. cit., p. 50.

³⁴See Gilbert Chase, America's Music, p. 387 ff. for a discussion of the controversy which arose from Dvorak's visit to the United States in 1893 over the use of ethnic materials by American composers in their works.

³⁵Daniel Gregory Mason, The Dilemma of American Music (New York, 1928), p. 1.

in American music. Such a demand must inevitably result in the impression that we have a greater concern for affixing the national label than for the contents of the package. And, it must inevitably result--for the composer who allows himself to be influenced by it--in a self-consciousness which is death to the real creative impulse. That impulse, if it is to be real, has nothing to do with volition. You may lead your creative impulse to our very best folkmusic material, but you can't make it drink . . . The American composer must be writing what he feels like writing, and certainly not what some friendly critic or critical friend may urge upon him. The real creative impulse, it is worthwhile to repeat, cannot and will not respond to this kind of suggestion. Whether we like it or not, that impulse will always reach out and choose its own inspiration from whatever source is most natural and, therefore, the most impelling. . . . The American composer is going to be "American" enough to suit our most fastidious patriots, because in the final analysis he can't, thank God, be anything else.³⁶

The development of the art song in the United State in the early years of this century may be seen as contingent upon highly diverse social and cultural influences, and upon the ability of individual composers to shape these diverse factors to their own creative personalities and artistic goals. Thus, it is difficult to attempt to assess the aesthetic or technical progress of the art song as a genre. Rather, it becomes a question of considering the degree to which these American composers have attained artistic distinctiveness, but as individuals, not as representatives of one particular school or another. "Where shall we recapture [or perhaps more accurately capture] our native tongue, or at

³⁶As quoted in Karl Krueger, The Musical Heritage of the United States (New York, 1973), p. 48.

least learn to speak . . . with voices recognizably our own and an authority not borrowed?"³⁷ Responding to his own query, Mason, having cited Van Wyck Brooks definition of originality as "a capacity to survive and surmount experience after meeting and assimilating it," states

If he is right, there must be possible to us as many musical personalities as there are possible combinations and permutations of vital traditions. Therefore, when MacDowell meets and assimilates German romanticism when Loeffler meets and assimilates French impressionism . . . let us not cavil and define, let us rather rejoice and applaud. Were a single one of them to be forcibly "Americanised," music in America would be the poorer. Music in America is the richer for each of them; and music in America is a thing far more worth working for than "American music."³⁸

While some would still be inclined to affirm cynically Mason's concluding pronouncement, few would dispute the contributions of these American composers to music in America and to American music.

Finally, in considering the songs of these composers, some of admittedly lesser quality, one should avoid any initial temptation to relegate them en masse, unseen and unheard, to limbo. To do this would be, of course, altogether too easy, especially since so much of the music itself is no longer either in print or readily accessible. It is well to bear in mind also that much of the critical opinion dealing with these composers and their music, being, as it is, contemporaneous

³⁷Mason, op. cit., p. 13.

³⁸Ibid., p. 26.

with them, may today be as outdated as many of the texts they chose to set. Thus, in declining to judge them by our present standards alone, the way is left open to a fuller appreciation of the art of another era.

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