RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS’ SEA SYMPHONY: FORMAL STRUCTURES AND ANALYSES INFORMED BY POETRY

BY

DEAN A. LUETHI

DISSEMINATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Music with a concentration in Choral Music in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Emeritus Associate Professor Chester Alwes, Chair
Visiting Assistant Professor Phillip Blume
Associate Professor Barrington Coleman
Emeritus Professor Tom Ward
Abstract

Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* has become standard choral/orchestral repertoire. Written between 1903-1910, the premier of this work occurred during the Leeds Festival on October 12, 1910. This was largest work Vaughan Williams had composed at that time. For the text of this large work, Vaughan Williams used poetry from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Although he uses Whitman’s poetry, the selection of specific poems and omissions were decided upon by Vaughan Williams and the subject was the sea.

This missive is written by a choral conductor, for the choral conductor. The aim of this paper is to provide the choral conductor with the necessary information to better prepare their chorus. Chapter one details the life of Vaughan Williams through 1910 (the year of the premier). Chapter two discusses *Leaves of Grass* and how it may have influenced Vaughan Williams enough to seek out text from this prolific poet. Chapters three through six discuss the four movements of the symphony in turn. Rather than analytical or historical conclusions, I discuss the form of the movements and conclude each chapter with rehearsal strategies to better able the conductor to prepare their chorus. Chapter seven includes my conclusions and appendix A lists useful warm-ups designed to extend the range of the chorus to meet the needs of Vaughan Williams’ work.
Table of Contents

Introduction .........................................................................................................................................1
Chapter 1: Biographical Overview of Ralph Vaughan Williams ..............................................5
Chapter 2: Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass .................................................................22
Chapter 3: *Sea Symphony*, Movement I .................................................................31
Chapter 4: *Sea Symphony*, Movement II .................................................................53
Chapter 5: *Sea Symphony*, Movement III .................................................................62
Chapter 6: *Sea Symphony*, Movement IV .................................................................75
Chapter 7: Conclusions .........................................................................................................101
Appendix A ..............................................................................................................................106
Bibliography ..............................................................................................................................108
Introduction

In the fall of 2005 I had the pleasure of performing Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* as a chorister and conducting apprentice for the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay. This artistic experience was enhanced by the dedicated effort of former artistic director Richard Zielinski to convey the power of the text to the chorale which would then inform and enhance their performance. Zielinski would carry with him an edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in which he indicated the various pages of texts in which Vaughan Williams used. As I perused Zielinski's copy I began to question how Vaughan Williams was able to piece together these separate texts into a symphonic format. Thus my quest for answers began.

Since working with the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay I performed (as a chorister) the work one additional time with the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign Chamber Choir. Having begun my doctoral work I inevitably decided that this would become my culminating research project.

While the subject of Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* is the sea, the work explores larger questions of our existence. I became further connected to the work as it became a poignant tool for closure in my own father's passing, having performed the work soon after and finding peace in Vaughan Williams' use of the Whitman text "O farther, farther sail" to close the entire work (the choral pronunciation of dropping the 'r' resulted in the mantra "O father, father sail.")

The purpose of this dissertation is to inform the conductor in the preparatory phase of his/her study of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony*. While I use information gathered and conclusions based upon music theory and musicology, this document is not meant to satisfy the requirements necessary to regard it as a full analysis of the score nor to inform the reader fully into the complete historical context of the work. Rather, this is document for the choral
conductor and meant to be used as a field guide and an essential tool in one’s preparation for the
rehearsal and performance of the work. My aim is to better prepare the choral conductor to
inform choices regarding rehearsal procedures which will lead to a better performance of the Sea
Symphony. As such, this document will prove invaluable in the choral conductor’s initial
research into the work and preparation thereof.

Regarding the theoretical analysis of the work, one can spend an entire dissertation
comparing and contrasting the various conclusions made by authors such as Clark¹, Herbert²,
Ottaway³, and Schwartz⁴. While informative, these analyses vary greatly in their parsing of the
work and their formal conclusions. So much so, that making conclusions of the larger formal
design of the separate movements will undoubtedly be in contradiction to at least one of the afore
mentioned authors as their nomenclature of the larger formal structures varies greatly. This is
largely due to the reconciling of the work in symphonic format, i.e. how does Vaughan Williams
construct Walt Whitman’s poetry to inform larger formal structures perceived by the designation
of this work as a symphony. This confusion can lead one to nomenclature which informs the
potential conductor, but does not offer solid conclusions. Therefore, my analysis will be
informed by the authors above, but will be presented in a format that is meant to be useful to the
conductor, short of the findings of an author whose sole purpose is the complete analysis of the
Sea Symphony (a missive upon which our profession would greatly benefit).

⁴ Schwartz, Elliott S. The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press,
1964.
This work is massive, the orchestration thick and therefore the chorus must be large in order to be heard. In addition, the choral forces sing throughout the entire work and the orchestra’s role is largely accompanimental. One large issue in studying a score of this size is the sectioning of the constituent parts which make up the whole. Therefore, I have included charts (and my evidence for these conclusions) which specify both the large and small formal sections of the work. These charts will provide a framework from which the conductor will use for study.

The key centers/tonalities throughout the work vary greatly and within local areas. Since this is not a theoretical study of the work, but rather a text meant to prepare the conductor, I identify both the large key areas of the work and also harmonic tendencies of Vaughan Williams which, when used within the context of warm-ups, can better prepare the chorus in singing these particular modes or sets of pitches accurately.

Unity is achieved both within the movement and across the work by the use of motives. The importance of the clarity of these motives cannot be overstated. As such, I identify cells, motives and melodies which are important regarding this unification. The chorus would be well served if these too were included in the warm-up regimen.

It is our goal as choral conductors to prepare the chorus to project the text in a meaningful way which may elicit an aesthetic response. Therefore I have included the texts from the Sea Symphony within the body of this missive and discuss thematic elements which will further provide the conductor with the means by which to convey the importance of these texts (and their meaning) to their choristers.

Choral directors are constantly running against the clock, trying to teach the chorister the essential elements in order to have a worthy aesthetic product. To aid the conductor, I’ve created
rehearsal strategies which accompany the analysis of each chapter. The strategies take form of either warm-ups or exercises (etudes).

As detailed by the preceding table of contents, I will first discuss Ralph Vaughan Williams’ historical and biological background followed by details of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, from which Vaughan Williams drew his text for the *Sea Symphony*. Each of the movements will be discussed in turn (with their own chapter) and will included analyses and rehearsal strategies. My final chapter of this missive will detail my conclusions of this study.
Chapter 1: Biographical Overview of Ralph Vaughan Williams

Early Years

Since knowledge of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ life and output is essential to an understanding of the cultural influences that affected his compositional style, we begin with a brief biographical and historical synopsis of the composer’s life prior to the first performance of the *Sea Symphony*.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on October 12, 1872 in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, England. Both sides of Vaughan Williams’ family included examples of conspicuous success. His father was a Vicar in the Anglican Church and several other male relatives were lawyers. The maternal side of his family included a grandmother who was the sister of Charles Darwin. The death of his father in 1875\(^5\) prompted the family to move to his mother’s family home, Leith Hill Place. At Leith Hill Place, he began to study piano at a young age, taught by his aunt Sophy Wedgewood; he also received rudimentary lessons in music theory. His formal education in music began during his years at the Field House School in Rottingdean. In her biography of her husband, Ursula Vaughan Williams recollects Ralph’s memories on this education:

I learned pianoforte from Mr. A.C. West who, after giving me one or two ordinary pieces, realized I was more musical than most of his boys, and introduced me to a delightful little volume called The Bach Album, edited by Berthold Tours, which contained some of the easier preludes and movements from the Suites, among others, the “Cross-hands Gigue.”\(^6\)

Ralph’s enthusiasm for his musical studies got him into trouble at the school. As Emma Darwin wrote to Ralph’s mother concerning his time in Rottingdean, “He got in a scrape the other day

---

\(^5\) (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 10)
\(^6\) Ibid., 22
for playing his violin after he had gone to bed which set the boys dancing in their shirts and the masters came in. However nothing very severe was awarded to him”.⁷

In 1887, he joined his brother at Charterhouse, a boarding school in Godalming, Surrey, where he sang in the choir and played both violin and viola in the school’s orchestra. He also composed and was able to have his works performed:

It was my task to approach Dr. Haig Brown, the Headmaster, for leave to use the school hall… we gave the concert, and it was attended by several of the masters and their wives and even some of the boys. I was complimented after the concert by Mr. Noon, the mathematical master, who said in his well-known sepulchral voice, ‘You must go on.’ That is one of the few words of encouragement I have ever received.⁸

The successful performance of his first compositions led Vaughan Williams to contemplate a life in music, perhaps as an orchestra player, but “…the whole weight of family opinion was against him. If he had to be a musician he must be an organist, which was a safe and respectable career.”⁹ Therefore, he studied the organ at home, also receiving permission to practice on the organ in a nearby church.¹⁰ As we shall see, Vaughan Williams never enjoyed the vocation of being a church organist, an attitude that may perhaps be traced to these family attitudes or his agnosticism.

Student Days (1890-1897)

Vaughan Williams entered the Royal College of Music in September of 1890. C Hubert H. Parry (1848 – 1918) taught composition at the prestigious school and Vaughan Williams was determined to study with him:¹¹

…I remember, even as a boy, saying to my mother that there was something, to my mind, peculiarly English in his music. So I was quite prepared to join with the other young

---

⁷ Ibid., 23
⁸ Ibid., 27
⁹ Ibid., 30
¹⁰ Ibid. 30
¹¹ Ibid., 31
students of the R.C.M. in worshiping that shrine, and I think I can truly say I have never been disloyal to it…

Indeed, the idea of composing “national” music may have stemmed from lessons with Parry:

Parry once said to me: ‘Write choral music as befits an Englishman and a democrat.’ We pupils of Parry have, if we have been wise, inherited from him the great English choral tradition, Which Tallis passed on to Byrd, Byrd to Gibbons, Gibbons to Purcell, Purcell to Battishill and Greene, and they in their turn, through the Wesleys, [sic] to Parry. He has passed on the torch to us and it is our duty to keep it alight."

This nationalistic attitude certainly prompted his activity in collecting the folksong of his native land, an activity that had profound implications on the development of his musical style. The specific role that folksong played in the genesis of his *Sea Symphony* will be discussed in chapter 2.

In 1892, he entered Trinity College, Cambridge at the age of twenty to study History; because these lectures at Cambridge did not conflict with Parry’s teaching days at the R.C.M. Vaughan Williams continued to travel from Cambridge to London for private lessons with Parry. Concurrently, he studied with Charles Wood at Cambridge, who helped him prepare to take his Bachelor of Music degree. He also belonged to the University Musical Club, under the direction of Hugh Allen (who would later be the champion of the *Sea Symphony*), and conducted a small choral society dedicated to the performance of Schubert’s Masses.

After completing his degree at Trinity, he matriculated at the R.C.M. in 1895, delighted to be among fellow pupils as bright and musical as he: “What one really learns from an Academy or College is not so much from one’s official teachers as from one’s fellow students”. During his tenure at the R.C.M., he began what would become a life-long friendship with Gustav Holst.
(1874 – 1934). Vaughan Williams would later credit Holst as being the greatest influence on his music.\textsuperscript{15}

Holst and Vaughan Williams would engage in conversations regarding the specifics of each other’s compositional style and technique. Gustav Holst was Vaughan Williams’ closest friend and confidant in all things related to his craft. Although we do not have accounts (letters) of a particular instance where the Sea Symphony was discussed in detail, Vaughan Williams discusses the collegial atmosphere that began at the R.C.M. and continued throughout their friendship in his A Musical Biography.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, their willingness to help each other through their personal difficulties is well documented in Heirs and Rebels: Letters written to each other and occasional writings on music.\textsuperscript{17} These letters describe a collegial, healthy, and supportive relationship.

At this time, Parry was director of the R.C.M. and unable to teach privately, so Vaughan Williams studied composition with Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 – 1924). Although he never displayed great enthusiasm for Vaughan Williams’ work as a student, Stanford’s actions were kinder than his words.\textsuperscript{18}

I once showed him a movement of a quartet which had caused me hours of agony, and I really thought it was going to move mountains this time. ‘All rot, my boy,’ was his only comment…later on he introduced my work to the Leeds Festival, thus giving me my first opportunity of a performance under those imposing conditions.\textsuperscript{19}

Stanford’s advocacy of Vaughan Williams led to more than one commission from the Leeds Festival.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 43
\textsuperscript{17} Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, Heirs and Rebels: Letter written to each other and occasional writings on music, ed. Ursula Vaughan Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).
\textsuperscript{18} (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 45)
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 45
In the pivotal year of 1895, Vaughan Williams also assumed the duties of choir master and organist at St. Barnabas Church in Lambeth, London. While Vaughan Williams’ acceptance of this position might have pleased his family, he did not enjoy this work. The Vaughan Williamses were well off and Ralph did not need to work as the allowance from his family was enough to support him. Working at St. Barnabas gave him wonderful experiences and also allowed him to live in London.

“… I could never play the organ, but this post gave me good insight into good and bad church music, which stood me in good stead later on. I had also to train the choir, and give organ recitals, and accompany the services, which gave me some knowledge of music from the performer’s point of view. I also founded a choral society and an orchestral society, both of them pretty bad, but we managed once to do a Bach Cantata, and I obtained some of the practical knowledge of music which is so essential to a composer’s make-up. Composers who think they will achieve their aim by ranging apart and living the life beautiful make the great mistake of their lives.”

Exploring New Paths

On October 8, 1897, Ralph Vaughan Williams married Adeline Fischer and the new couple moved to Berlin so that Vaughan Williams could study with Max Bruch (1838-1920), Professor of Composition at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. In Berlin Ralph studied with Bruch and both Ralph and his wife Adeline studied German. Not coincidentally, the move also enabled the newly-married couple to begin their life together in a new place, far removed from family. Upon their return to England in 1898, Vaughan Williams resumed his position at St. Barnabas, a job that he soon came to detest, “He had given up taking communion, even as ‘part of the show’, so when a new vicar was appointed who made this a condition of his continuing as

---

20 Ibid., 45
21 Ibid., 45
22 Ibid., 52
23 Ibid., 52
an organist, he resigned his post with great thankfulness”.\textsuperscript{24} Later, we shall see how his agnosticism drew him inevitably to the poetry of Walt Whitman (1819-1892).

The end of his tenure at St. Barnabas forced Vaughan Williams to find a new way of making money; his first effort was to craft a series of articles for \textit{The Vocalist}. This periodical, which only printed 45 issues, was produced by The Vocalist Company weekly from 1902-1905. Vaughan Williams wrote ten articles for the periodical: \textit{A School of English Music}\textsuperscript{25}, \textit{Soporific Finale}\textsuperscript{26}, \textit{Palestrina and Beethoven}\textsuperscript{27}, \textit{Good Taste}\textsuperscript{28}, \textit{Bach and Schumann}\textsuperscript{29}, \textit{The Words of Wagner’s music-dramas}\textsuperscript{30}, \textit{The Words of Wagner’s music-dramas continued}\textsuperscript{31}, \textit{Brahms and Tschaikowsky}\textsuperscript{32}, \textit{A Sermon to Vocalists}\textsuperscript{33}, and \textit{Ein Heldenleben}\textsuperscript{34}. In 1902, he began lecturing on a variety of subjects at local universities. In 1903, he began collecting folksongs, as an outgrowth of his academic activity. He also began planning a projected “choral symphony”, which, at that time, he referred to as \textit{The Ocean}, perhaps in emulation of Stanford’s \textit{Songs of the Sea} published in 1904.\textsuperscript{35}

During this time, and indeed till Holst’s passing, Vaughan Williams and Gustav von Holst wrote each other often concerning their personal state of affairs as well as issues dealing with their personal struggles and joys in composing. Letters between these composers show the influence of this relationship in two ways. First, compositions, in which they were presently engaged in, were discussed in detail as they often sent their works to each other. The detail of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 58
\item (R. V. Williams, A School of English Music 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Soporific Finale 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Palestrina and Beethoven 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Good Taste 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Bach and Schumann 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, The Words of Wagner’s music-dramas 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, The Words of Wagner’s music-dramas continued 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Brahms and Tschaikowsky 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, A Sermon to Vocalists 1902)
\item (R. V. Williams, Ein Heldenleben 1903)
\item (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 68)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
comments shows this influence. Concerning Holst’s libretto for the opera *The Youth’s Choice* Vaughan Williams writes, “You’ll think me a very ‘destructive’ critic – as I have scratched out most of your lines. I think the whole scheme of the verses is bad.”36

Secondly, they often wrote of the process of composing and how their personal habits should change or be modified in order to write better. Holst writes,

Would it be good, do you think, for you to rewrite as a matter of course *everything* you write about six months after it is finished? (*Really* finished, not merely sketched). Whenever I have re-copied or re-scored anything, I have improved it very much. Anyhow I would never score at once – wait until your mud pie is hardened and until you can compare it in cold blood to others.37

This relationship grew throughout the years and created a continual safe-zone to which each of these composers could return to come to an understanding as to what a friend and admired colleague truly thought about the other’s work.

His growing reputation as both scholar and composer led to offers from the Purcell Society to edit the *Welcome Songs*;38 he was also asked to compile an updated version of the *English Hymnal*.39 He also wrote articles on “Fugue” and “Conducting” for the second edition of Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1904-1910). Based upon the articles on conducting, his practical experience at St. Barnabas, and his reputation as a lecturer, Vaughan Williams was invited to conduct his composition *Heroic Elegy* with the Leeds Municipal Orchestra in January of 1905; his success in this endeavor was later recognized essentially as the beginning of the Leith Hill Festival, a choral festival that Vaughan Williams conducted until 1953.

---

38 Volumes 15 and 18 of *The Complete Works of Henry Purcell* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1905)
39 Published in 1906
To further his skills as a composer and gain a continental perspective, Vaughan Williams wrote to Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) asking for private composition lessons. When, in 1907, Ravel agreed to his request, Vaughan Williams went to Paris to study orchestration,\(^{40}\) returning to England three months later. After Vaughan Williams’ departure, Ravel became an advocate for Vaughan Williams’ compositions; in fact, when Ravel visited London in 1909, he stayed with Ralph and Adeline.\(^{41}\)

For the remainder of the first decade of the new century, Vaughan Williams took day trips through the surrounding counties to collect folk songs. His *Sea Symphony* was premiered at the Leeds Festival on October 12, 1910. Despite mixed critical reception additional performances in that year were lined up for Oxford, Bristol and Cambridge. The first London performance took place on February 3, 1913 conducted by Hugh Allen.

The Genesis of the Sea Symphony

The Leeds Festival

The Leeds Festival had begun with a concert given in 1858 as part of the ceremonies involving Queen Victoria’s dedication of the new Leeds Town Hall under the direction of Sterndale Bennett (1816-1875). Two years later, a ‘Grand Easter Musical Festival’ took place in this same venue. There were, however, no more music festivals there until 1872, when the Leeds Festival was reorganized as a triennial event, which it remained until the First World War interrupted this schedule.\(^{42}\) The Leeds Festival was an event that highlighted both English performers/composers and their works as well as those of foreign musicians. Leeds was one of the largest choral festivals at the time alongside the Three Choirs Festival.

The Genesis of the Music

\(^{40}\) (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 80)
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 84-86
\(^{42}\) Scholes 1844-1944, 160
Based on Vaughan Williams’ initial experience conducting the Leeds Municipal Orchestra (see below) and his ascendancy among the elite of the English musical establishment, the Leeds Festival (in 1906) tendered him a commission to write a work for chorus and orchestra. Vaughan Williams began work on this new Leeds commission *Toward the Unknown Region* in 1904. In 1906, Holst and Vaughan Williams decided to compose on the same Whitman text. Vaughan Williams describes the wager “Gustav and I were both stuck – so I suggested we should. Both set the same words in competition – suggesting ‘Darest thou’ The prize was awarded by us [Ralph and Gustav] to me [Ralph].” Here, we see two composers simultaneously working to come to an understanding of the same text and setting it with very different results. While the differences in their settings of the same words was quite telling, the thoughtful conversations about the text regarding its meaning, form (or lack thereof) and sound was very interesting. This was to be the test bed from which Vaughan Williams would learn what would or would not work. *Toward the Unknown Region* was premiered at the Leeds Festival in 1907.

That work, *Toward the Unknown Region*, became a virtual study piece for the later Sea Symphony, especially given that Vaughan Williams drew his text from the poetry of Walt Whitman. By the time of its premier at the 1907 festival, Vaughan Williams had already completed the initial draft of his choral symphony. Given the successful performance and favorable response that accompanied *Toward the Unknown Region*, the Program Committee of the Leeds Festival commissioned an even larger choral, orchestral work for the next Festival to be held in 1910.

He continued composing what he was now calling the *Sea Symphony*; without doubt, this compositional work benefited from the practical conducting experience he had gained,

---

43 (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 78)
particularly the contacts made through his participation in the Leeds Festival and the Leith Hill Festival.

… his experience in conducting the Leith Hill Festival choirs was useful, for it helped him to discover what choirs could do and could not do, what, as he said, would “come off”, and what blurred the words or lay beyond the capacity of choral singers.\textsuperscript{44}

Without the practical knowledge about how to write idiomatically for chorus and large orchestra it seems clear that the \textit{Sea Symphony}, a tour-de-force for the choristers, who must sing almost continuously throughout the seventy–minute symphony, would arguably not have been the success that it was and has remained.

The initial plans for the premiere of the \textit{Sea Symphony} included it on the closing concert of the festival, October 12, 1910. According to information contained in the Archives of the Leeds Festival, the initial program was laid out as follows, including a rough estimate of each work’s duration:\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. A Sea Symphony Ralph Vaughan Williams 50
  \item 2. Pianoforte Concerto C minor Rachmaninoff 35
  \item 3. \textit{Fest- und Gedenksprüche}, Op. 109 Brahms 20
  \item 4. Orchestral Fantasia: Don Juan Strauss 16
  \item 5. Songs with orchestra lasting 12 minutes ?
\end{itemize}

The program was once again altered in January of 1910:

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. Symphonic Poem \textit{Villon} William Wallace
  \item 2. \textit{A Sea Symphony} Ralph Vaughan Williams
  \item 3. Concerto in C Minor (composer at piano) Rachmaninoff
  \item 4. Orchestral Fantasia \textit{Don Juan} Strauss
\end{itemize}

When the actual length of Vaughan Williams’ new work (70 minutes) became evident, the Wallace composition was reassigned to a different concert.

The work we know today as the “Sea Symphony” began its life as ‘Notes for choral work \textit{Songs of the Sea}.\textsuperscript{46} Over the course of its gestation (1903-1909) the title of the work changed to

\textsuperscript{44} Ib., 77
\textsuperscript{45} Sketch program included in Leeds Program committee Minute Book, 10/18/1909 located in the archives of the Leeds Festival Chorus Offices.
reflect the decision to make the work a symphony. The various layers of compositional sketches illuminate the work’s evolution but do not always provide an accurate (or any) sense of chronology. To make matters worse, the sketches are incomplete due to Vaughan Williams’ habit of destroying preliminary sketches that didn’t prove to be useful.

Concerning the composer’s process, Roy Douglas, who was Vaughan Williams’ copyist for years, has written:

The composer would have revised them again and again, as he always did in his large-scale works. There would have been a second, and perhaps a third, draft and then a fair copy of the piano version; after this he would have made a rough draft of the full score, probably a second draft of some sections, and at last a fair copy of the complete full score. Each time he wrote out one of these versions he would have made changes: in the note values, the rhythmic patterns, the harmonies, the passage work, and of course the scoring. Even some of the tunes might have been altered, for he occasionally reshaped subsidiary themes as a work progressed.

The sketches are of limited use in understanding the compositional process of Vaughan Williams concerning the *Sea Symphony*. Since the chronology of the sketches is unclear, the particulars of which movement was penned before another or which themes were written after others is a question one cannot answer.

We must remember that during the seven-year span of the *Sea Symphony*’s composition Vaughan Williams composed many songs including his cycle, *Songs of Travel*, edited the *English Hymnal* (1906) and Welcome Songs of Henry Purcell for the new complete works series published by the Purcell Society, and composed both chamber music for both chamber music (*Quintet in C Minor, Ballade and Scherzo*) and symphonic works (*Symphony Rhapsody* [unpublished], *In the Fen Country, Norfolk Rhapsodies* 1, 2 [unpublished], 3 [unpublished]). He

---

46 (Kennedy 1996, 50)
47 (Herbert 1994, 59) Other working titles included *Whitman Sea Songs* and *Ocean Symphony*.
48 Ibid., 16-17.
49 (Frogley n.d., 5)
50 (Douglas 1988, 101)
51 Supra, note 18.
was also involved in a mutual exchange of compositions with Gustav Holst, each composer offering his impressions of the other’s work.

Text

Discussion of the Sea Symphony must begin with the text, the importance of which was critically important to the composer. “Whenever Ralph was rehearsing a choral work he would read the words to the choir, before they attempted the music, to make his singers understand the mood and the quality of the poem.”52 What was true of his choral rehearsals was more important as the necessary prelude to composition. While the texts of the Sea Symphony were written by Walt Whitman, the text Vaughan Williams used is not a verbatim copy of selections of poems from Whitman’s magnum opus Leaves of Grass which was first published in 1855, but revised for the remainder of the poet’s life.

Vaughan Williams discovered the poems of Walt Whitman while a student at Cambridge. “There seemed to him unencumbered with some of the burdens of the Classics, an attitude unfamiliar in much English literature of the-then-recent past, and as unlike as could be to the scented melancholy of many of Rossetti’s art-nouveau-erotic sonnets and pictures.”53 Vaughan Williams was not alone among British composers in his admiration for Whitman’s poetry.54 In 1906, Holst and Vaughan Williams both decided to set the same Whitman text. Ursula Vaughan Williams describes the wager “…he [Ralph] worked on a setting of Whitman’s poem, Toward the Unknown Region, which he had made in early 1904 or 1905. ‘Gustav and I were both stuck – so – I suggested we shd. both set the same words in competition – suggesting ‘Darest thou.’ The prize was awarded to us by me.’55 Here, we see two composers working together to come to an

52 (Williams, Ralph Vaughan Williams 1972-1973, 88)  
53 Ibid. 82  
54 (A. V. Butcher 1947)  
55 (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 78)
understanding of the text. While they each set the text differently, the benefits of this experience, though immeasurable, must, at least, have sparked their interest in Whitman’s poetry.

One of the earliest settings of Whitman text by an Englishman was Stanford’s choral/orchestral Elegiac Ode (1994). The review of the work’s first performance at the Norwich Festival addresses the reception of Whitman’s poetry:

“There are some who look upon Whitman as a poet of genius, while others regard him as a little better than a lunatic. It is not our duty now to discuss this question, but we must say that it is long since we met with anything more eccentric than the words which Dr. Stanford has selected for treatment in his Ode…This may be poetry, but to ourselves we confess it is more like incoherent maundering. Leaving on one side the question of its poetical merit, we are bound to allow that the words are well suited for musical illustration, and to add that the composer has taken full advantage of the opportunity they offered him.”

This review suggests that, although many composers in England used Whitman’s poetry in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the English people weren’t necessarily unanimous concerning the merits of his poetry.

Other English composers at the turn of century who used Whitman’s poetry include Frederick Delius (1862 – 1934), whose Sea Drift (1906) for chorus and orchestra drew its text from Whitman’s anthology of the same title (1903-1904). Portions of the poem, Drum Taps, were set by Vaughan Williams, Arthur Bliss, Charles Wood, Gustav Holst and others.

Ursula Vaughan Williams’ biography details her husband’s fondness for and fascination with Whitman’s poetry. She also describes how he came to know Whitman’s poetry. William Kimmel’s article focuses more on Vaughan Williams’ choices of words within his entire catalogue. William Kimmel suggested that Vaughan Williams set texts from authentic folksongs, lyrics, songs, rondels and sonnets from the ages of Chaucer and Elizabeth, and a third group comprised

---

56 (Anon. 1884, 633)
57 (Butcher 1947, 158)
…entirely of poems which are definitely of a mystical nature, most of them written by modern poets, but a few of them selected from seventeenth century literature. With a few exceptions all the poems selected were written by Englishmen. The most important exception is that of Walt Whitman.58

Whitman, the champion of American individuality and ideals, aided the liberation of England from the influence of European literature. Kimmel compares Vaughan Williams’ place in the history of English music as somewhat similar to Whitman’s within the development of American literature.59

It is not clear which edition of Leaves of Grass Vaughan Williams owned. Seven editions of Leaves of Grass were printed in the United States. In England, one edition of selected poetry of Whitman (edited by William Michael Rosetti) and one edition of Leaves of Grass (Rhys) was published. Since Ursula Vaughan Williams mentioned that Vaughan Williams carried with him an edition of Leaves of Grass with him and worked from that copy, one can assume that the all of the poetry which he used for the Sea Symphony must have been included in that one edition. Neither of the British editions of Whitman’s poetry include all of the poems which were used in Vaughan Williams’ Sea Symphony. The first US edition which included all the poetry in the Sea Symphony is the 1881-1882 edition of Leaves of Grass. The Leaves of Grass of 1891-1892 (sometimes referred to as the “deathbed” edition) “does not qualify as an edition according to generally accepted modern standards, since it contained no significant new material.”60 One can deduce that Vaughan Williams owned the 1881-1882 edition or the “deathbed” copy of Leaves of Grass. I will discuss poetry specific to each movement during the textural analysis in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

58 (Kimmel 1938, 132)
59 (Kimmel 1938, 140)
60 (J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings 1998)
Musical Influences

Asked to name specific musical works that influenced his first symphony, Vaughan Williams wrote, “I spent several hours at the British Museum studying the full scores of the *Enigma Variations* and *Gerontius*. The results are obvious in the opening pages of the finale of my *Sea Symphony*, and I have discovered lately that I owe a good deal in this work to an early work of Holst's, *The Mystic Trumpeter*."\(^{61}\) The reference to the *Enigma Variations* must refer specifically to the ninth variation (“Nimrod”), the opening music of which begins piano and gradually “awakens” just as does the first movement of Vaughan Williams’ symphony.

In 1953 Vaughan Williams published a book entitled, *Some Thoughts on Beethoven’s Choral Symphony, with Writings on Other Musical Subjects*.\(^{62}\) While he never explicitly says so, one can intuit that the finale of this, the first and most famous of all the “choral symphonies” must have been in his thoughts when he was composing the *Sea Symphony*.

Michael Kennedy has suggests that, since Vaughan Williams entitled his initial sketches “Notes for choral work *Songs of the Sea*”, that the work, perhaps began as an emulation of Stanford,\(^{63}\) whose *Songs of the Sea* (using Whitman text) for baritone solo, male chorus and orchestra was first performed at the 1904 Leeds Festival.

First Performance and Criticism

Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* would not have been performed had it not been for the influence of Stanford who was the producer of the Leeds Festival of 1910 (and its two

---


\(^{62}\) (R. V. Williams, Some Thoughts on Beethoven’s Choral symphony, With Writings On Other Musical Subjects 1953)

\(^{63}\) (Kennedy 1996, 50)
predecessors). All music performed at the festival including Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* was cleared first by Stanford.⁶⁴

Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* was first performed on October 12, 1910, which was coincidentally the composer’s 38th birthday. The Leeds Festival Chorus, joined by choirs from the surrounding communities of Huddersfield, Bradford, Dewsbury and others, numbered 348 singers: 104 sopranos, 92 contraltos, 72 tenors and 80 basses.⁶⁵ The orchestra consisted of 128 members.

Other choral works performed during the 1910 festival included: Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, Brahms’ *A German Requiem*, and Stanford’s *Songs of the Fleet*. These works were performed over a span of three days with the same instrumentalists and vocalists, a very ambitious undertaking that was typical of the day.⁶⁶ Vaughan Williams, who conducted the first performance of his *Sea Symphony*, understandably was quite nervous.

He had hardly been able to sleep or eat for the last few days, and the timpanist, Henderson, fully appreciating his nervous state, gave him this comforting assurance: ‘Give us a square four in the bar and we will do the rest.’...the baritone soloist... had not helped matters in the first few minutes they stood together waiting to go on to the platform: ‘If I stop you’ll go on, won’t you?’ he said.⁶⁷

Given that Vaughan Williams knew that a good performance at such a well-attended, prestigious, and heavily reviewed festival could potentially lead to future commissions, his level of anxiety was completely understandable.

Vaughan Williams thought that the premier had not gone well; the review that appeared in the *Musical Times* stated: “The music to these words has many fine, significant moments, but

---

⁶⁴ (Herbert, The Genesis of Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony: A Study of the Preliminary Material 1994, 73)
⁶⁵ (Anon 1910, 719-720)
⁶⁶ (Anon 1910, 719)
⁶⁷ (Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964, 89)
we cannot help thinking that it is over-scored, and that the climaxes are too often tremendous.”\textsuperscript{68} Although this evaluation seems to diminish the work’s significance, the reviewer inquires at the end of the column, “When shall we have another opportunity of hearing this earnest and able work again?”\textsuperscript{69} Perhaps one should conclude that, although the performance was flawed, the work itself was appreciated as a good composition. Indeed, the same reviewer went on to state that the \textit{Sea Symphony} was “…a serious art work that may be regarded as the latest expression of musical feeling of one of the ablest and most profound of our existing English composers.”\textsuperscript{70} Even if the performance was less than stellar, there seems to have been a consensus that both the symphony and its composer had considerable promise.

\textsuperscript{68} (The Musical Times, vol. 51 [1910](London: Novello, 720)
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 729
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 719
Chapter 2: Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass

While the average person may have heard of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, he/she may know next to nothing of its evolution over its thirty-seven year “gestation.” While this evolution is interesting the current chapter will discuss the editions of *Leaves of Grass* with particular attention to editions which included the poetry from which Ralph Vaughan Williams drew for his *Sea Symphony*. Although some of the poetry used by Vaughan Williams for his first symphony was published either in newspapers, articles or journals prior to their annexation into *Leaves of Grass*, it is from this single book from which Ursula Vaughan Williams mentions that Ralph used for his inclusion of Whitman’s poetry in both *Toward the Unknown Region* and *Sea Symphony*.\(^71\) Discussion of the specific poems included in the *Sea Symphony* will therefore be relegated to their inclusion in *Leaves of Grass*.

During the years of publication (1855-1892) nine books bore the title *Leaves of Grass*. However, not all nine were, in fact, new editions. Of the nine, six are specified as editions while the other three merely reprint material which is included in the other six. Of the nine editions of *Leaves of Grass*, “six of these (are) quite different in organization and even content, though each edition after the first contained most of the poems of it predecessor in revised form, and often under new titles.”\(^72\) Other publications which use the same type setting can simply be called “issues.”\(^73\) This literary composition grew over a half of a century and along with additions of poetry the structure of the book changed as well. The initial idea for the book was Whitman’s answer the call by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his *The Poet* where he expressed the need for poets who would write about the new America. Although Whitman had published poems in various

---

\(^71\) (U. V. Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964)
\(^72\) (Allen 1986, 67)
\(^73\) Ibid, 335
journals in the 1840s and early ‘50s, "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil." Setting forth to be the new poet of the new America, Whitman published his first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855 by the Rome Brothers in Brooklyn. The book begins with a prefatory essay in prose and contains twelve poems. The term “grass” was used by publishers to indicate works of minor value. “Leaves” refers to the pages in which the poetry was printed. Clearly Whitman’s title referred to his humble nature as a poet. While the poems of this first edition were changed, reordered and added to, some critics maintain that this edition is without the stylistic corruptions of distortion of meanings which plagued other editions. The 1955 text of “Song of Myself” is now the text most often printed in Whitman anthologies. None of the poetry which Vaughan Williams used for his *Sea Symphony* is included in the 1955 edition.

The subject matter of *Leaves of Grass* was seen as somewhat “immoral” to a degree that when the firm Fowler and Wells published the second edition, they did not give the book their official imprint. The second edition was also quite controversial, but in another way. After the first edition Ralph Waldo Emerson write a letter to Whitman in which he praised Whitman for his skill as a new American poet evidenced by his *Leaves of Grass*, “I find it most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.” While this may have influenced his reason for publishing a new edition of *Leaves of Grass*, this letter must have influenced his entire career as a poet. The letter meant so much him that friends recalled that he carried the letter with

---

74 (Reynolds 1995)  
75 (Allen 1986, 81)  
76 Ibid, 81  
77 (Whitman, Leaves of Grass 1956, 346)
him in his pocket. The letter from Emerson was published in the 1856 edition and on the back strip of the book itself read in gold letters, “I Greet You at the/ Beginning of A/ Great Career/ R.W. Emerson.” While the first edition may have caused controversy regarding sexual imagery, the second edition contained more sexual content. This new theme runs through the twenty new poems of the edition, which shows Whitman’s thoughts against both ascetism and Puritanism. One of the twenty, On the Beach at Night Alone, was used by Ralph Vaughan Williams in his Sea Symphony. Williams uses this poem in his second movement.

After the printing of the second edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman began compiling his third edition. Although Whitman intended for Fowler and Wells to publish the new edition, the Boston firm Thayer and Eldridge published the 1860 edition. After finishing the edition in May, the publishers printed one thousand copies which were sold out in July. The 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass added 146 poems and contained extensive revisions of old poems with many new titles. None of these additional poems were set by Vaughan Williams in his Sea Symphony.

Gay Wilson Allen refers to Whitman’s fourth edition of Leaves of Grass (1867) as “The Workshop Edition,’ for the revisions indicate great critical activity, although in organization it is the most chaotic of all the editions.” The book was published by New York printer William E. Chapin and was distributed that year in at least four different forms: Leaves of Grass, Leaves of Grass with Drum-Taps, Sequel to Drum-Taps, and Songs Before Parting. Almost all of the sections contain revisions. His book Drum-Taps had been published in 1865 and is annexed in this edition. None of the new poems nor the poetry for poems which were renamed were set by Vaughan Williams in his Sea Symphony.

---

78 (Allen 1986, 82)
79 Ibid, 83
80 Ibid, 118
The first issue of the fifth edition was published in 1871, but a second issue of the fifth edition contained the annex of *Passage to India*. An additional issue in 1872 contained 24 new pages of poetry. Therefore, the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* has been regarded as the 1871-72 edition. Aside from the annexes this edition contains only thirteen new poems. Many of his poems are revised, however, and many of the poems were redistributed in new or different sections. Significant to this edition is the removal of a third of his poems from *Leaves of Grass* (the title of a section within the book) and rearranged in *Passage to India*. Three events of international importance probably influenced his reorganization: completion of the Suez canal, completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, and the laying of the transoceanic cable. “...he was now giving expression to the times in which he lived. Thus ‘Passage to India’ is the most occasional poem in the 1871(-72) edition.”

Allen believes this edition is a turning point in Whitman’s output for, “Both the theme and mood have changed, for instead of questioning, now the poet affirms.” From his fifth edition Vaughan Williams uses the poems *Song of the Exposition* (movement one), and *Passage to India* (movement four).

The sixth and last edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1881-82. The Boston Publisher James R. Osgood and Company began to produce the sixth edition but abandoned the idea when the District Attorney of Boston threatened prosecution if the book made it to the mail or shelves. Osgood and Company gave the plates of the text to Whitman where upon he had the book published in Philadelphia by Rees Welsh and Company. While this is the last edition of *Leaves of Grass* we do not know if this was Whitman’s intention. “In this edition the poems received their final revisions of text, their last titles, and their permanent positions.”

Whitman wrote poetry until his death, these poems were divided into three separate parts which

---

81 (Allen 1986, 135)
82 (Allen 1986, 136)
83 Ibid, 147
were annexed to *Leaves of Grass*. The meant that the 1881-82 edition was left intact and unaltered. This sixth edition contains twenty new poems. These include *Song for All Seas, All Ships* (2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt.) and *After the Sea-Ship* (3\textsuperscript{rd} mvt).

One may ask as to whether Ralph Vaughan Williams was using an American edition of *Leaves of Grass* or an English one. While there were English editions of poetry from *Leaves of Grass*. No English edition included all of the poetry which Vaughan Williams set. During the mid-late 19\textsuperscript{th} century there were two editions of poetry from of *Leaves of Grass* mass produced in England. *Poems By Walt Whitman* was published in 1886 and edited by Michael Rossetti. This publication “was both a selection and expurgation, for the only reason for not reprinting the complete fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* was the desire of Rossetti and the publisher to eliminate the ‘objectionable’ poems and Whitman would not agree to outright expurgation of the complete collection.”\textsuperscript{84} The Rossetti edition includes nearly half of the poems of *Leaves of Grass* and the preface. In 1886 Ernest Rhys edited a new edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Content of this edition was tailored to British tastes and the complete poetry of the American edition of *Leaves of Grass* was not published in England. Beginning in 1855 English publishers imported American editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Since the 1881-1882 American edition of *Leaves of Grass* was the only edition which included all the poetry which is used in Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony*, the only imported editions could have been published in 1882 by Trübner or in 1883 by the Scottish publishers Wilson and McCormick. The publishers produced issues of the 1881-1882 American edition. We cannot confirm which edition of the three that Vaughan Williams used and worked from. Since the 1881-1882 edition was the only edition which contained all of the Whitman poetry used in the *Sea Symphony*, there are only three editions from

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 10
which Vaughan Williams could have worked: 1) the 1881-82 American Edition, 2) the Trübner British edition in 1882, or 3) the Wilson and McCormick British edition of 1883.

Out of all of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* Vaughan Williams only set five of them. Of those five, deletions of lines and repetitions did occur. Ursula Vaughan Williams mentions that throughout the process of choosing poetry he would cross out lines and make notes in the margins. While she doesn’t state the particular edition, we now know it was one of the three editions of *Leaves of Grass* described above. It is also unclear why he chose Whitman poetry for his first symphony. Important English composers had set Whitman and perhaps it was their penchant for using Whitman that prompted Vaughan Williams to use the same poet. Vaughan Williams does not discuss why he chose Whitman for the *Sea Symphony*. One might conclude that since his commissioned work for the Leeds Festival in 1907 (*Toward the Unknown Region*) was popular and used Whitman poetry that he decided to use Whitman poetry again for his 1910 Leeds commission (*Sea Symphony*). However, from his sketches and his correspondence with Holst, we can conclude that he began work on the *Sea Symphony* in 1903, four years prior to his commission *Toward the Unknown Region*. Vaughan Williams had been working on the *Sea Symphony* for at least five years before the Leeds Festival would have asked for the commission for which he used his *Sea Symphony*.

As a pre-compositional choice one can only speculate as to the method by which Vaughan Williams chose the poems he set in his *Sea Symphony*. In 1903, when he began his work on what would be called the *Sea Symphony*, the working title was *The Ocean*. We can therefore assume that he was drawn to poetry which described the sea. One can only speculate as to whether Whitman’s large output regarding the sea influenced Vaughan Williams’ decision to write upon this subject or if Vaughan Williams like the topic and decided that Whitman’s poetry

---

85 (U. V. Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1964)
was best suited for the task. These questions may never be answered. There does seem to be a history of English composers who decided to set Whitman texts.

But in the main Whitman challenged English attention as a crusader, a rebel against the status quo, who furnished to a few ardent minds a means for both social and personal improvement. It was as a moralist and a prophet rather than as an artist that he threw the gauntlet to the English, and English recruits marched to its banner because they found in Leaves of Grass disturbing intimations of a new social dispensation, a renovated humanity, deriving its vitality from the transcendent personal magnetism that the poet was said to exemplify in his own life.\textsuperscript{86}

Vaughan Williams discovered the poems of Walt Whitman as a student at Cambridge. “There seemed to him unencumbered with some of the burdens of the Classics, an attitude unfamiliar in much English literature of the-then-recent past, and as unlike as could be to the scented melancholy of many of Rossetti’s art-nouveau-erotic sonnets and pictures.”\textsuperscript{87} Vaughan Williams was not alone among British composers in his admiration for Whitman’s poetry.\textsuperscript{88}

One of the earliest settings of Whitman text by an Englishman is the choral/orchestral work \textit{Elegiac Ode} by Vaughan Williams’ teacher at the Royal College of Music, Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. The review of the first performance of the work at the Norwich Festival in 1884 includes remarks regarding the reception of Whitman’s poetry:

There are some who look upon Whitman as a poet of genius, while others regard him as a little better than a lunatic. It is not our duty now to discuss this question, but we must say that it is long since we met with anything more eccentric than the words which Dr. Stanford has selected for treatment in his Ode…This may be poetry, but to ourselves we confess it is more like incoherent maundering. Leaving on one side the question of its poetical merit, we are bound to allow that the words are well suited for musical illustration, and to add that the composer has taken full advantage of the opportunity they offered him.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 217
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 82
\textsuperscript{88} (A. V. Butcher 1947)
\textsuperscript{89} (Anon. 1884, 633)
This review gives us a further understanding that, although many composers in England used Whitman’s poetry in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the English people weren’t necessarily unanimous concerning the merits of his poetry.

Other English composers at the turn of century who used Whitman’s poetry include the cosmopolitan Frederick Delius (1862 – 1934), whose *Sea Drift* (1906) for chorus and orchestra drew its text from Whitman’s anthology of the same title (1903-1904). Portions of the poem, *Drum Taps*, were set by Vaughan Williams, Arthur Bliss, Charles Wood, Gustav Holst and others.\(^9^0\)

William Kimmel suggested that Vaughan Williams set texts from authentic folksongs, lyrics, songs, rondels and sonnets from the ages of Chaucer and Elizabeth, and a third group comprised

\[\ldots\text{entirely of poems which are definitely of a mystical nature, most of them written by modern poets, but a few of them selected from seventeenth century literature. With a few exceptions all the poems selected were written by Englishmen. The most important exception is that of Walt Whitman.}\(^9^1\)

Kimmel compares Vaughan Williams’ place in the history of English music as somewhat similar to Whitman’s within the development of American literature. Whitman, the champion of American individuality and ideals, aided the liberation of England from the influence of European literature.\(^9^2\)

And so there gradually arose in England so deep an interest in Whitman the person that even before his death he became almost legendary. Had he ever crossed the ocean to lecture – he was asked more than once to do so, - he would have unquestionably packed the halls and enjoyed a triumph greater than that of any other visiting American author. People who could not read him would have fought to see him.\(^9^3\)

---

\(^{90}\) (Butcher 1947, 158)
\(^{91}\) (Kimmel 1938, 132)
\(^{92}\) (Kimmel 1938, 140)
\(^{93}\) (Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England 1934, 221)
Although Whitman was all the rage in England, it was his poetry and how it spoke to Vaughan Williams which was the deciding factor in its inclusion in the *Sea Symphony*. 
Chapter 3: Sea Symphony, Movement I

Vaughan Williams sets portions of two separate poems from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in the first movement of the *Sea Symphony*:

   (lines 16 and 17 are repeated at the end of the section to create a musical frame)


The first text is the fifth stanza of the eighth poem of “Song of the Exposition.”

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind, speckle the green and blue,
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming in or out of port,
See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants of smoke.  

The ninth poem of Book XIX (entitled “Sea Drift”) is “Song for All Seas, All Ships”; it has two parts that provide the remainder of the text for this movement.

1.
Today a rude brief recitative,
Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship-signal,
Of unnamed heroes in the ships -- of waves spreading and spreading far as the eye can reach,
Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing,
And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,
Fitful, like a surge.

Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay.
Pick'd sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen by thee,
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest nations,
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,
Indomitable, untamed as thee.

Vaughan Williams omits the last two lines:

(Ever the heroes on water or on land, by ones or twos appearing,
Ever the stock preserv’d and never lost, though rare, enough for seed preserv’d)  

---

2.
Flaunt out O sea your separate flags of nations!
Flaunt out visible as ever the various ship-signals!
But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest,
A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man elate above death,
Token of all brave captains and all intrepid sailors and mates,
And all that went down doing their duty,
Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains young or old,
[emblem of man elate above death]
A pennant universal, subtly waving all time, o'er all brave sailors,
[one flag above all the rest] All seas, all ships.  

Vaughan Williams’ use of these two poems defines the two-part musical form of the first movement. The first large musical section (mm. 1-220) includes the first poem and the first part of the second (lines 1-12). The second musical section uses the remainder of the second poem (“A Song for All Seas, All Ships”)

Vaughan Williams—*Sea Symphony*, I—Musico-Poetical Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I</th>
<th>Part II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1 – 220</td>
<td>mm. 220 – 414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Song of the Expositions”, XIII/8 + “Song for All Seas, All Ships” XIX, 9/2
“A Song for All Seas, All Ships” XIX, 9/1

A    B    A    Coda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I</th>
<th>Section II</th>
<th>Section III</th>
<th>Section IV</th>
<th>Section V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1 – 58</td>
<td>mm. 59 – 220</td>
<td>mm. 221 – 364</td>
<td>mm. 365 - 403</td>
<td>mm. 404 – 414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, each of these sections consists of a number of smaller musical segments:

---

The segments of Section I are all defined by changes of key signature (## - 0 - ##). The definition of the three segments that comprise Section II is less easy to identify; the most obvious change from one to another involves slight changes of tempo (but no change of key signature). Clearly, the return of the opening brass fanfare motto in m. 221 and the move to the second part of Poem XIX/9 betokens a moment of formal significance, which, despite a change of key signature in m. 294, is unified by a common melodic thread. Similarly, the music of segment h initiates changes of key signature, tempo and emotional state that seem to bind this section together. At m. 364, the rubric “tempo del principio” (despite the continuity of key signature) suggests a return to the beginning, a recapitulation of sorts. This section also follows the insertion of earlier text (“emblem of man elate above death”), introducing the final lines of the complete text.

The formal shape above takes into account, at times, changes of key signature. This trait is a commonplace in Vaughan Williams’ music, signifying less change of key in the traditional sense than the onset of a new musical mood (prompted by the text). In reality, little of the music that appears under the signature of two sharps is clearly in the key of either DM or bm. It does seem, however, that Vaughan Williams generally conceived of the movement as being in D
major, although harmonically more contemporary and flexible than that term would have implied in earlier periods. Certainly, the movement ends unequivocally in D major; the beginning also uses that key area, but arrives at it in an appropriately modern way. The opening sonority is a brass fanfare in the unrelated key of b-flat minor; however, this sonority resolves by chromatic movement in both directions to a D major triad in second inversion.

![Figure 3.1: RVW—A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 1-2](image)

This motto is significant formally for it reappears at several strategic places in the movement (marked by asterisks in the table above). The first sections outer segments both open with this fanfare and it reappears in c minor to initiate the movement’s third major section (m.221). These instances aside, the signature of two sharps encompasses a great deal of music that is clearly not in D major. In toto, the fanfare appears six times in movement I:

Fanfare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 1 – 5</th>
<th>mm. 42 – 46</th>
<th>mm. 220 – 221, 224 – 225</th>
<th>mm. 232-3, 236-7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b-flat → D 6/4</td>
<td>b-flat → D 6/4</td>
<td>c minor</td>
<td>c minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E major 6/4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A more common signifier of subordinate musical sections is tempo change; indeed, eight of the
eleven sections/segments align with changes in tempo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andante Maestoso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Poco animando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Tempo I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Piu mosso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>Moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>240</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hV</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>Animato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>Tempo del principio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td>404</td>
<td>Poco piu mosso</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but two segment changes align with tempo changes. While other tempo changes do occur
throughout the movement, they are clearly less formally significant.

Changes of texture and style also indicate formal units within the movement. The
clearest, most significant change involves the use of the baritone and soprano soloists. The
opening part of the movement (mm. 1-220) features the baritone soloist exclusively. It can hardly
be a coincidence that Vaughan Williams withholds the soprano soloist until the beginning of the
third major section. This change coincides with the first appearance of the brass fanfare since the
first section and the transition from the first to the second part of the poetic text of “A Song for All Seas, All Ships.”

Motives

Any analysis of the first movement of Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* must necessarily include a discussion of his use of motives, for these create the real formal continuity of the movement. Other authors’ classification of this movement as a sonata allegro design (because this is the first movement of a symphony!) do not reckon with the motivic element. Some motives clearly relate to a specific text, but many others do not.

Vaughan Williams’ use of rhythmic and melodic motives is quite complex. While not every motive is formally significant, several do rise to that level of importance. We have already discussed the critical importance of the brass fanfare motive. It may be argued that this motive plays a role quite apart from its unmistakable rhythmic and harmonic features. The resolution from b-flat minor to DM 6/4 is accomplished by chromatic motion in the outer voices of this figure. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this chromatic inflection plays a larger role in the harmonic language of the entire work.

Apart from the fanfare, Elliot Schwartz suggests that another important rhythmic figure is also structurally important.\(^\text{97}\)

\[\text{Figure 3.3: RVW—*A Sea Symphony*, I, mm. 68-69}\]

\(^{97}\) (Schwartz 1964, 21)
This cell is first heard when Vaughan Williams transitions from the first poetic text to the second at the beginning of Section II (m. 68). This cell is also associated with a change of harmony from the implicit DM to Dorian mode that the cancellation of the signature of two sharps.

![Figure 3.4: Vaughan Williams—A Sea Symphony, I, m. 58](image)

While this cell’s appearance in the first movement is rather brief, we shall see that it plays a somewhat larger role in the larger structure of the work as a whole.

Melodically, the most important motive of the first movement is first heard in measure 17:

![Figure 3.5: Vaughan Williams—A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 17-21](image)

Over the course of the next seventeen measures, this motive is used to present a series of pentatonic tonal centers—C#, Bb, Ab and F#. In addition to its obvious pentatonicism, which is a characteristic feature of the influence of English folk song on Vaughan Williams, this melody also incorporates the use of triplets.

A new and distinctly different melody in m. 128 marks the arrival of Ab major and a new melody sung by the bass soloist.
The first appearance of the soprano soloist prompts a new melody from Vaughan Williams, a semi-recitative melody that is related to figure 3.3 above in both rhythmic character and melodic contour.

The melody is, however, not new; it first appeared in the orchestral bass line in m. 17, that same enigmatic passage where RVW notates his C# melody immediately following his elimination of the two-sharp key signature (See Figure 3.7). This melody is volleyed amongst the voices of the chorus. The soloist has introduced the melody and RVW leaves the development (again) of the melody to the chorus. The soloist doesn’t return until m. 382.
The use the motive in figure 3.9 above has been used as evidence for the designation of this particular section as the recapitulation—a designation that has been argued by authors mentioned prior such as Herbert and Schwartz. For the reasons stated above, I disagree.

Continuing, the vocal forces engage in a two measure build up to the climax in measure 387. Here the violins and flutes of the orchestra recapitulate the inversion of figure 3.9 which was first written in the soprano solo melody in measures 244-245. A clear statement of this motive in its original form immediately follows.

Beginning in measure 394, there is a transition to the final segment (II) of section IV. The material Vaughan Williams uses is both figure 3.9 and the rhythmic character of the opening fanfare for “behold the sea itself.” The soprano soloist ends this section with the continuation of the line providing a variation of figure 3.9. These motives provide unity within the first movement while also presenting ideas that are often unique to a particular section. By using these discrete cells, motives and melodies Vaughan Williams is creating smaller units with which he develops material over the long form of the first movement.

While Vaughan Williams uses antiphonal technique in other sections (where he has the soloist introduce new text), he also utilizes the chorus to introduce new lines of poetry. The formal division of the movement always align with and new line of poetry. While this isn’t true at the level of segment it is at the sectional level. Below we see each line of poetry throughout movement I and the voice or voices which first introduce the text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Voice(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Section I (mm. 1 – 58)**

(SoE)  
16 Behold… Chorus  
17 And on… Chorus  
18 See, where… Chorus  
19 See, the steamers… Chorus  
20 See, the dusky Chorus

**Section II (mm. 59 – 220)**

(SFALSAS)  
1 Today a rude… Baritone Soloist  
2 Of ships sailing … Baritone Soloist  
3 Of unnamed … Baritone Soloist  
4 Of dashing spray … Baritone Soloist  
5 And out of these… Baritone Soloist  
6 Fitful, like a … Baritone Soloist  
7 Of see captains … Baritone Soloist  
8 of the few… Baritone Soloist  
9 Pick’d sparingly … Baritone Soloist  
10 Thou sea … Baritone Soloist  
11 Suckled by thee … Baritone Soloist  
12 Indomitable … Baritone Soloist

(lines 13 – 14 are omitted)

**Section III (mm. 221 – 364)**

15 Flaunt out O sea … Soprano Soloist  
16 Flaunt out visible … Soprano Soloist  
17 But do you … Soprano Soloist  
18 A spiritual … Chorus  
19 Token of all Soprano Soloist  
20 And all that went … Soprano Soloist  
21 Reminiscent … Chorus

**Section IV (mm. 365 – 403)**

22 A pennant … Baritone Soloist

**Section V (mm. 404 – 414)**

23 All seas … Baritone Soloist

The evidence above shows that all but one section change (section IV to V) occurs during a shift in the voice or voices which Vaughan Williams uses for textual exposition. For this change in section there is musical evidence which supports this section break (key signature/tonality and texture/style change). It is clear that Vaughan Williams uses specific
texture changes which agree with specific lines of poetry (which haven’t yet been sung) to create formal division. These divisions align with my structural analysis of this movement.

There are two poems from which Vaughan Williams drew text for the first moment. In addition, there is one stanza break in the second poem. These three divisions offer insight to the reason behind formal breaks the musical form of the movement. The first break in the poetry occurs between poem A and poem B. We see the end of poem A in m. 50 and the new poem begin in m. 67. Between these measures the orchestra plays an interlude from the old section (I) to the new section (II) which occurs in m. 59 (between poem A and B).

We also see a musical break between the first stanza and the second stanza in poem B. This musical break occurs in m. 221 (end of stanza one) immediately preceding the soprano soloists entrance with the new text (from stanza two). This poetic/musical change occurs between sections II and III. Here again we see Vaughan Williams use the poetic structure to drive the musical form.

All of the authors who have published analyses of the Sea Symphony conclude that the first movement of Vaughan Williams’ Sea Symphony is cast in sonata–allegro form.98 Their proposed formal design is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda (Herbert)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1–220</td>
<td>mm. 221–364</td>
<td>mm. 365–403</td>
<td>mm. 404–414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there is unquestionably an “exposition” of thematic material in this movement, Vaughan Williams also introduces new themes in those portions of the movement that these analysts designate as “development” and “recapitulation.” For example, new themes begin in m. 244 and

---

98 All authors who have analyzed this work (Schwartz, Clarke, Herbert, Ottaway) conclude that the first movement uses sonata allegro form.
m. 272, both within the designated “development” section. New thematic material also appears (mm. 368-369) in the “recapitulation.”

The same analysts all agree that a recapitulation begins in m. 365. A typical formal marker of recapitulation is the return of material initially heard in a non-tonic key in the tonic. While m. 365 (the beginning of section III) is both in D major and marked “Tempo del principio,” such reprise does not take place. The music is, at this point, undeniably in D major (i.e. 2 sharps), but there is no “recapitulation” because Vaughan Williams had already returned to D Major (2 sharps) in m. 322 (forty-three measures before the supposed recapitulation.

While development of cells, motives and melodies certainly occurs, it is in no way confined to a “development” section. Vaughan Williams does not use themes that lend themselves to development in the traditional sense of that term. Although there is instability of key center as in the development section of traditional sonata allegro forms, such tonal wandering occurs in all major sections of the movement.

Vaughan Williams does bring back material used earlier in the movement within what the previously-cited authors label a “recapitulation.” For example: the baritone solo in mm. 368-369 is clearly related to the opening motive (“behold the sea, itself”), which also returns in mm. 394-403. Such thematic return is not, however, limited to material from the “exposition,” but includes material first introduced in the “development” as well. The text “emblem of man,” first introduced in m. 262, returns in m. 348-366, all within the “development” section.

Rehearsal Strategies

The choral conductor preparing a chorus for performance of the Sea Symphony must prioritize rehearsals according to relative difficulty of elements within the work. Various motives or fragments of motives provide ample material to use as etudes that will enhance the choir’s
ability to perform the music successfully. The following section identifies [compositional tendencies?] rhythmic and melodic motives in movement I that require special attention. Each will be discussed in turn followed by an etude or rehearsal exercise to solves the specific problem it poses.

Since the following examples occur at different tempos within the course of the first movement, I have indicated the performance tempo of each example. It will, however, prove useful, even necessary to teach these at a slower tempo, eventually working up to the tempo required in the piece. This will ensure precision of rhythms, pitches, and clean diction (an essential element for any choral/orchestral work). Many of these exercises should also be done in a series of modulations (ascending or descending) that mimic the often dysfunctional harmonic shifts used by Vaughan Williams. Since many of these motives occur linearly in a wide range of tonal areas, such modulations will help the chorister solve the specific problem within the context of a larger one. When motives stay within a particular tonal area, I will indicate this.

Often Vaughan Williams develops a motive by changing one or more musical element (tonal center, harmony, rhythmic variation, etc.) with each successive presentation. In a polyphonic context, each vocal part must function as an independent melodic line that is connected to the accompanying material to lesser or greater extents. Therefore, the choral conductor should rehearse these exercises polyphonically as well as monophonically. An etude might be performed as a 2, 3, or 4 part round (some of the etudes lend themselves better for this than others). The resulting harmonic disconnects will train the chorister to maintain the integrity of a motive when surrounded by either supportive or conflicting sonorities.
Compositional Tendencies

Throughout the work certain identifiable compositional tendencies consistently emerge. These range from rhythmic patterns to the successive use of particular modes or scales. At times, these tendencies drive the piece, create momentum, and provide unity. The choral director must prepare his/her singers to notice these recurring harmonies, rhythms, scales and perform them consistently in the same manner.

One of Vaughan Williams’ signature stylistic tendencies is use of the pentatonic scale. The scale’s use of only five different notes creates (or imitates) the essential simplicity of folk song. Rehearsing the different pentatonic scales (and their inversions or rotations!) is essential to confidently executing Vaughan Williams’ style. The same is true of the ‘church modes’ that Vaughan Williams and others resurrected as an alternative to outworn tonal patterns. A conductor can easily incorporate the pentatonic scale in the context of choral warm-ups to help the choir become proficient at performing these non-tonal scales (in both ascending and descending position, beginning on any scale tone). The familiarity gained through this process allows easy identification of a solution to any melodic problem that arises within the course of the rehearsal process.

The range of this exercise is quite wide, which is why the exercise is in A major. Conductors should use a variety of different vowels or syllables, the choice being governed by the specific issues presented in the composition. Exercises should initially be performed at a moderately slow pace to allow the choristers to become proficient and confident. Once this is achieved, the speed can be increased to more accurately match the speed of the specific musical passage. The range of tempo should be between 60 – 120 beats per minute. You can also extend the overall range of the exercise to expand gradually the tessitura of the exercise. For example,
one might do A, B, C#, E, F#, E C#, B, A and then successively add another pitch to lengthen the duration and expand the vocal range of the exercise.

Figure 3.10: Pentatonic Exercise

One can either perform this exercise with a pause between measures or as one continuous line. For greater variety, the melodies can be transposed up or down by any desired interval, as well as being performed as a canon, which will introduce an entirely new series of challenges. In addition to pentatonicism, Vaughan Williams also uses modal scales throughout the work. Equal consideration should be given to practicing modal scale constructions (especially those that appear within a given passage from the work). Since modes appear with some frequency in the *Sea Symphony*, singers will be able to execute these more effectively if they learn this melodic language. Thus, modal scale melodies can be used in the same manner prescribed for pentatonic

45
melodies. As a variation of this exercise, one could assign numbers to the successive melodic pitches and do the same for members of the choir. As shown in the following figure, half of the ensemble would sing the pitches marked 1 and the others sing pitches marked 2. This alternation would pose a new problem of concentration as well as a new aural concept of the particular mode.

![Figure 3.11: Dorian Exercise](image)

Rhythmic motives

Throughout the work, Vaughan Williams continuously introduces new motivic ideas that may or may not present melodic difficulties. The differences are not only pitch-related but also rhythmic. It therefore behooves the conductor to use different rhythmic cells either as separate etudes or in combination with a melodic design. Most of the rhythmic cells given below (figure 3.13) recur. In this exercise, the choir should focus on speaking the words with the correct rhythm without concerning themselves with pitch. These examples are drawn directly from the score of the *Sea Symphony* and therefore work to solve problems actually encountered in performing the piece. As before, tempo for any exercises may vary, typically starting slower than the work requires and working up to performance speed. Effortless performance of these exercises (at tempo) will ensure accurate performance of these rhythms as they occur in the course of the first movement. Repeat signs mark the end of one short etude and the beginning of another. These etudes give the conductor a wonderful opportunity for the conductor to express his/her wishes concerning placement of ending consonants or ideas of expression (articulation,
syllabic/word stress, etc.) For example, conductors often take a short breath in the middle of the first phrase of the work “behold the sea, itself.” Often conductors place this breath on beat four of the syllable “hold,” placing the “d” consonant directly on beat four. This is not inherent in the score.

Figure 3.12: Movement 1 Rhythmic Exercises

**Melodic Ideas**

It is clear that specific melodic ideas drive particular sections of the work. Vaughan Williams often introduces a melody, then proceeds to develop it. In such cases, fragments of melody are repeated (as well as expanded or diminished rhythmically). To deal with such cases, a given melody should first be sung by the entire ensemble together. Only once perfectly accurate execution is achieved can the line be done contrapuntally. Once again, the use of variable speeds will enable the choir to gain confidence in their execution of a passage with precise rhythm and pitch.
The brass fanfare that opens the symphony is followed by a vocal fanfare. These four measures (mm. 2-5) include material that will be repeated throughout the work. Since the altos and basses have the same pitches and the sopranos and tenors have the same pitches, it would be wise to teach this short section by pairing these parts and teaching them simultaneously. As such, I’ve included only two staves in this example, one for the soprano and tenor voices and one for the alto and bass voices.

Figure 3.13: RVW — A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 2-5

Another theme that Vaughan Williams uses in various variants throughout the work is given in figures 3.15 and 3.16 and can be seen first in mm. 8-11. This short theme is fragment and often used within the orchestra with or without the vocal compliment. I’ve included two examples as the soprano and tenors are again paired at the octave (figure 3.15) and the altos and basses are paired at the octave (Figure 3.16).
The melody that occurs in mm. 272 – 277 (figure 3.17) is one that Vaughan Williams repeatedly uses to generate the music that follows. The initial rising notes, as well as the triplets, are two components of subsequent versions of this central melodic idea.

Another important motive is found beginning at m. 322 of this movement. Although this motive assumes various forms, several characteristics remain common to nearly all subsequent versions:

1) a dotted rhythmic figure for the initial four the initial four syllables “emblem of man,”
2) a skip or a leap to the word “death,” and

3) A scalar pattern (either ascending or descending) to finish the motive.

The exposition of this motive occurs in mm. 322-328. The motive as given below has been lowered a fourth to accommodate the altos and basses.

![Motive Image]

Figure 3.17: RVW—A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 322-328

While one can extract other motives from movement 1, the majority of musical content derives from these three motives. Utilized as part of either a warm-up regimen or during the rehearsal itself, study of these examples will enable the choristers to render the music of this movement accurately and confidently despite small differences of musical detail.

Conclusions

The first movement of Vaughan Williams’ Sea Symphony is not in sonata allegro form, despite the attempts of several commentators to make the case for such a reading of its form. Such an assertion is weakened because the movement is, first and foremost, organized according to the text and motives that textual images generate. The critical role of the text is exemplified by Vaughan Williams’ use of textual reprises that bear no relation to sonata design, but should be viewed as his reactions to the sentiment that underlies Whitman’s poetry.

Finally, there is the clear and important use of motivic structures throughout the movement that point toward a more open-ended formal structure than any version of sonata
allegro design. And these textual reprises summon the return of motives originally heard in connection with that specific text. These melodic shapes are often quite general as we see in the multiple guises that the pentatonic melody of the baritone (mm. 129-135) assumes.

Figure 3.18: RVW—A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 365-366

Continuity throughout the movement is created through the use of these returning motives, but the motives themselves serve a more important function on the local level. Each of the initial expositions of Vaughan Williams’ cellular, motivic, and melodic ideas are used for localized development. The development of these ideas, of which may be repeated later in the movement, create sections or formal cells which make the movement work as a whole. That is to say, rather than sonata-allegro form, Vaughan Williams uses these motivic ideas in discrete sections stacked one after another which are connected by text.

The character of each of the particular formal cells is governed by the text. For example, the opening 58 measures are a reaction to the expansiveness of the sea and how limitless it seems. Within this section we see the presentation of the brass fanfare calling our attention to the sea, unrelenting triplet figures which show the progress and might of the steamers upon the surface of the sea, and the long pennants of smoke characterized by quarter note triplets. The following formal cell begins with the orchestra followed by the first entrance of the baritone soloist. This cell is characterized by an ostinato in the basses of the orchestra (alternating thirds) above which is a bassoon solo. The texture is much thinner in reaction to the soloist and the
character of the music and the jolly nature of the text. Vaughan Williams changes the texture, mood, and color of each of these separate sections. Contrary to the symphonic writing of Beethoven or Brahms (among others) which largely use large scale forms as a vehicle for motivic development, Vaughn Williams instead utilizes smaller musical units as a vehicle for formal development. Through this method, Vaughan Williams is able to set huge amounts of text which are all separated by character, expanded through motivic use, and connected through textual theme and particular harmonic and melodic properties.
Chapter 4: *Sea Symphony*, Movement II

Unlike the multiple text sources used in the first movement, the second movement of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *A Sea Symphony*, “On the Beach at Night Alone,” involves a single poem of the same title, the fifth poem of “Sea Drift.” The text is given below, with bold type used to indicate lines that are partially or totally omitted:

On the beach at night alone,
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.

A vast similitude interlocks all,
[All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets,]
All distances of place however wide,
All distances of time, [all inanimate forms,]
All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different, [or in different worlds,
All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes, the
brutes,]
All nations, [colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages,]
All identities that have existed or may exist [on this globe, or any globe,]
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,
And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.

Vaughan Williams’ rationale for the textual deletions must remain speculation. The wholesale omission of lines 5 and 9, as well as the partial deletion in line 10 may have resulted because they are like a “laundry list” of entities that either didn’t excite the composer’s imagination or simply seemed extraneous. As for the partial omissions in lines 7, 8 and 11, the reasons are less clear, save for the fact that, by virtue of his omissions, RVW essentially combined lines 10 and 11 into a single line. What the poetic text does not indicate is the

---

99 Section markers are given to facilitate the discussion below and are mine.
composer’s reprise of the first line of the poem (and a considerable portion of the instrumental music that precedes it), an addition that creates a clear attempt at formal closure.

It remains unclear whether Vaughan Williams first edited the poetic text or whether his evolving musical setting dictated the text used. One is inclined to believe that the former was the case, that something in his reading of the poem elicited a change of musical style for the larger group of poetic lines. Whatever the reason, the musical form that results is difficult to ascertain in terms of typical symphonic structures. Clearly, this is intended to fill the role of the traditional slow movement; however, its actual musical form comes from song literature—a through-composed song to which RVW appends a recollection of the opening text and music as noted above.

**Observations on Musical Form**

Once again, RVW changes key signatures throughout the course of the movement:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mm. 1 – 53} & \quad 54 – 66 & \quad 67 – 128 & \quad 129 – 172 \\
# & \quad bbb & \quad \text{nothing} & \quad #
\end{align*}
\]

As noted in our discussion of the first movement, key signatures rarely imply the tonality traditionally associated with them and that is the case here as well. The first fifty-four measures are not in either G major or e minor (as the signature of one sharp would suggest).

That being said, a case can be made for a sort of tripartite form based not on tonality, but on the character of the music. The opening segment (and its reprise at the end) clearly seems to be Vaughan Williams’ attempt to portray the mystery of standing alone on a beach at night. The first device used to create this mood is the chromatic shift from the initial c minor harmony to E major, a progression heard four times in the seventeen measures of the orchestral introduction.
Figure 4.1: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 1-2

The shift from c minor to E major is strikingly similar to the progression that opened the first movement (b-flat minor to D major 6/4). Vaughan Williams closes this segment of music (mm. 47 – 53) with a reversal of the same progression: EM – cm – EM – cm.

The change of key signature to three flats at m. 54 would traditionally suggest either c minor (which has already appeared in the opening music) or E-flat major. This move, apparently prompted by the textual notion of a “vast similitude” that encompasses “All” of the ensuing textual references, is reinforced by Vaughan Williams’ use of an ostinato bass line (of the kind that appears so frequently in the music of his colleague and friend, Gustav Holst), an expansion of the choral forces to include the male voices (albeit still only a semi-chorus!) and, most importantly, the reappearance of the rhythmic motive associated with “Today a brief rude recitative” in movement I:

Figure 4.2: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, m. 54
While the signature of three flats is short lived (mm. 54 – 66), the presence of this motive dominates the music until the reprise of the opening material that brings closure to the movement. The series of statements of this motive appear in the following array of key centers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>m. 54 f.</th>
<th>m. 67</th>
<th>m. 71</th>
<th>m. 74</th>
<th>m. 77</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eb major</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>A minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>m. 99</th>
<th>m. 107</th>
<th>m. 114</th>
<th>mm. 118, 121</th>
<th>m. 123</th>
<th>m. 126</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>Eb minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>A major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is this series of statements that give structure to the unfolding vocal setting, which I have previously characterized as through composed. It is this motive’s repetition in these various tonal centers that gives coherence to the larger portion of the movement (mm. 54 – 129).

There is certainly a textural component to the layout of this larger section. As already noted, the opening segment is scored vocally for solo baritone and the altos of what Vaughan-Williams describes as a “semi-chorus.”\(^{100}\) Within this section Vaughan-Williams also alters the pattern of interaction between the baritone soloist and the choral forces. In the first movement and through the opening section of this movement, the soloist and chorus operated in a stereotypical “call and response” format. But beginning at letter F, the baritone actually follows a choral entry rather than the other way around. After a departure from this template (mm. 85-107) in which the baritone resumes the role of leader, Vaughan Williams returns to the previous pattern just prior to the first and only entrance of the full chorus (m. 115). This forte tutti marks the culmination of the poem, Vaughan Williams reserving the last two lines of the poem (“This vast similitude…”) for the full choral ensemble in a rather clear piece of text-painting.

There are two interesting thematic elements that appear in this segment of movement two that require comment. The first is the prominence of ascending perfect fifths (sometimes heard in

\(^{100}\) Interestingly enough, there is no indication in the score about the approximate size of this semi-chorus, unlike the note at the end of the first movements that suggests a proportional division of the bass 1 and 2 parts. I address this issue in the “Rehearsal Strategies” section below.
imitation). This occurs at letter F (A-flat – E-flat and E-flat – B-flat), letter G (C – G and G – D), and around letter H (F – C, D – A, and A – E). Not only is this evidence of the interactive relationship between chorus and soloists, but of the sequential nature of the fluid changes of harmony. Where this figure disappears (before I), Vaughan Williams brings back another motive from the first movement.

![Figure 4.3: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 85-88](image)

This descending chain of suspensions appears in movement I at two places in the first movement (mm. 292 ff. and 300 ff.). While this fleeting allusion cannot assume formal significance, it is yet another in the series of inter-movement quotations of motives that occurs in all four movements of the *Sea Symphony*.

As was the case in movement I, Vaughan Williams uses the rubric *Tempo del principio* to indicate a reprise of the opening material; in this case, that reprise is both more literal (mm. 139-159 as the same music in the same key as mm. 18-38) and more clearly conclusive than the first movement. These framing segments of the larger movement also rely on two distinctive motives, one rhythmic and one melodic. The rhythmic motive is:

![Figure 4.4: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 1-2](image)
Its identifying aspect is the agogic stress of the second beat. Melodically, the gesture appears both in this configuration and in inversion. The melodic characteristic common to these sections is a static, monotone-like intonation that may reflect the mystery and awe of the poet standing alone on the beach at night:

![Figure 4.5: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 18-20](image)

Rehearsal Strategies

The second movement of Vaughan Williams’ A Sea Symphony is neither terribly difficult nor long. Nonetheless, there are exercises that will enable the chorus to perform this relatively brief movement with precision. The few motives presented in this movement do not develop to the extent found in movement one; rather, the motives are short lived and used for very short, local development, appropriate to the local text.

**Rhythmic motives**

While the music of measures 29-32 are not very difficult, extraction of its rhythm will better prepare the altos of the chorus to perform it with precision. The melody, as well as the orchestral accompaniment, suggests nine-eight rather than three-four meter.

![Example 4.6: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 29-32](image)
The brief tutti portion of the second movement (mm. 115 – 126) is completely homophonic. Once again, while this example isn’t inherently difficult, precision can quickly be aided by practicing this short rhythmic example. The conductor should have the entire chorus speak this passage together at a constant tempo, addressing any difficulties that arise; once they have successfully completed this, the notated variations in tempo and requisite dynamic intensity can be added.

Example 4.7: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 115-126

Melodic Ideas

The amount of development of motives in the second movement is commensurately smaller than that found in the first movement. The larger melodic spans of the first movement are smaller here and, as a result, involve less development. A commonality that all the motivic ideas share is the leap of an ascending perfect fifth, which is prominent in mm. 54-131. This interval is the foundation of imitative entrances that overlap each other. While leaps of a perfect fifth (in this motive) are the most common interval, other intervals also occur. The exercises below are not exactly the same as any excerpt found in the second movement, but rather a rhythmically condensed version of that material.
Figure 4.8: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 59-63

Figure 4.9: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 66-69

Figure 4.10: RVW—A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 77-80
One other issue regarding rehearsal strategies includes the assignment of forces for the semi-chorus section between mm. 20-114. The idea of the semi-chorus is to achieve the *misterioso* and *dolce* affects Vaughan Williams indicates. While one can assign either the 1st or 2nd of each section to semi-chorus (the altos have 2-parts here), the ultimate decision will be based upon the balance between the orchestra, soloist, and the chorus. The choral director should be prepared to add or subtract voices depending on the final balance. Therefore, I would suggest that the conductor prepare the entire ensemble to perform the section. He/she could then ask the last row of singers to perform the section and add rows as necessary. This will enable the director of the work to choose how many forces will achieve the correct affect and the chorister will be prepared for any scenario.

Conclusions

This movement is in ternary form, the three constituent parts being:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>1 – 53</td>
<td>mm. 54 – 129</td>
<td>mm. 130 – 172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These sections are defined by texture (I and III being substantially smaller in forces than the large middle section that contains the single brief full tutti scoring), harmonic orientation (I and III both rely on the juxtaposition of c minor and E major, whereas the E-flat major suggested by the change of key signature [m. 54] and harmonic movement through the circle of fifths are the driving force of section II) and the re-appearance of motives derived from the preceding movement that occurs only in section II.

While motives do exist, their development is short lived based upon the local affect Vaughan Williams wishes to achieve, based on the text.
Chapter 5: *Sea Symphony, Movement III*

The third movement of the *Sea Symphony* is the only movement that sets one poem from *Leaves of Grass* without any omissions. “After the sea-ship” is the tenth poem within *Sea Drift*. and Vaughan Williams sets it as a sprawling, swirling Scherzo. Vaughan Williams explicit use of term Scherzo prepares one for a rapid movement in triple meter that assumes the traditional ternary design (Scherzo-Trio-Scherzo). The relative brevity of this poem initially doesn’t seem to lend itself to this format; indeed, an examination of Vaughan Williams’ use of it reveals a good deal of text repetition. The original twelve lines of text—

1. After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
2. After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
3. Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,
4. Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,
5. Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,
6. Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,
7. Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant, with curves,
8. Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the surface,
9. Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the ocean yearnfully flowing,
10. The wake of the sea-ship after she passes, flashing and frolicsome under the sun,
11. A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,
12. Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.

are repeated to create the following tripartite design:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. mm. 1 – 129</th>
<th>II. mm. 130 – 278</th>
<th>III. mm. 279 – 381</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2-3-1-2-3-4-1-5-6-7</td>
<td>8-9-10-11-1-11</td>
<td>1-2-3-12-11-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The elements of a Classical scherzo are:

1. Tripartite form (with or without coda) in which the first and third sections are frequently either identical or very similar

2. A contrasting middle section (Trio)

3. Use of triple meter and rapid tempo
Vaughan Williams may be seen to have followed these criteria, albeit loosely, supporting his use of the term Scherzo as part of the movement’s title.

But the formal picture is more complex. At m. 279 we once again find the rubric *Tempo del principio*, suggesting, as it did in the two preceding movements an element of recapitulation. Indeed, the first three lines of text recur, in a modified reprise of the opening, first in g minor (line 1) and then in G major (line 2). Then, at m. 321, Vaughan Williams recaps the music that began the second section (line 8, g minor) to set the poem’s concluding lines (12-11-12) in G major. This is no simple Scherzo, but a hybrid form in which the essence of the Scherzo is present (fast, triple meter) but combined with an element of Sonata-allegro recapitulation. The following table presents a summary of the musical correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>281 – 285</th>
<th>297 – 300</th>
<th>300 – 306</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>11 – 14</td>
<td>25 – 27 + 30 - 32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another facet of the formal design is the use of the same key signature to begin each of the three principal sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I</th>
<th>Section II</th>
<th>Section III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-31</td>
<td>32-129</td>
<td>130-173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b b</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>b b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174-272</td>
<td>273-290</td>
<td>291-314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b b</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Vaughan Williams feels free to vary tonality to a much greater extent than his Classical predecessors, he still retains this element of formal similitude (even if the middle section uses B-flat major as its starting tonality in contrast to the g minor found in sections I and III).

The first two movements have conditioned us to expect the reappearance of motivic material from earlier movements. In the case of movement III, the obvious example is the reappearance of the fanfare motive that figured so prominently in the first movement.
While the rhythm is not exactly the same and the chromatic shift are absent, the use of a minor triad brass fanfare clearly recalls the opening movement of the symphony. As was the case in that movement, Vaughan Williams reprises this fanfare motive several times during the course of the Scherzo:

Vaughan Williams—*A Sea Symphony*, III, Fanfare motives

  a. mm. 1-2
  b. mm. 20-22
  c. mm. 275-276
  d. mm. 281-282
  e. mm. 386-387 (G major)

Vaughan Williams also takes the title of the poem as a pretext for crafting a new motive that is unique to this movement, a motive that for lack of any better description may be called the wave motive. It is true that the various representations of waves show variation in pitch, rhythm and
harmony, it is also true that a general use of melodic contours that mimic the rise and fall of the sea recur throughout the third movement. The first instance of a wave contour occurs in mm. 14-15.

Figure 5.3: RVW—A Sea Symphony, III, mm. 14-15

Another version of this gesture appears in the upper strings in mm. 246-247.

Figure 5.4: RVW—A Sea Symphony, III, mm. 246-247

The wave gesture also manifests itself in the melodic lines that ascend and descend rapidly as we see in the chromatic motion of the orchestral bass line of mm. 37-41 (Figure 5.5) and the choral parts at m. 33 ff. (Figure 5.6):
Rehearsal Strategies

One compositional device that Vaughan Williams shows in the third movement is the use of the chromatic scale in keeping with a pictorial impression of the text’s primary subject, “waves.” Throughout the third movement, we find passages with either chromatic ascending or descending scalar passages (e.g., mm. 24, 33-38, 64-66, 90-93, 96-100, 170-174, and 338-342). Every vocal line at some point contains some degree of stepwise chromatic movement.
Therefore, the wise conductor should use chromatic scales as part of the chorus’ warm-up regimen.

Here are a series of etudes based on the chromatic scale (figure 5.7). In these, numbers have been used as the “textual” component, but conductors should feel free to substitute a neutral vowel or particular syllable based upon the specific demands of the movement’s music.
While these warm-ups enable the choir to train their ears to perform and tune the chromatic scale, such unison passages are rare in movement III; to facilitate passages where there is chromatic movement in multiple parts, another series of exercises is included. These use specific passages from the *Sea Symphony* that involve chromatic scalar movement. These should be performed as notated and also with sequential repetition that involves a variety of intervallic
separation (not just consecutive half-step motion!). It is interesting to note that Vaughan Williams is careful to avoid extended passages of rapid chromatic movement with multiple pitches in the choral parts; such textures do abound in the instrumental parts, however.

Figure 5.8: RVW — *A Sea Symphony*, III, Chromatic Examples
One of the greatest challenges presented by movement three is the rapid repetition of texts. To improve the precise performance of these quick passages, attention should be focused on those more intricate rhythmic declamatory passages. Figure 5.9 offers five examples that force the chorus to hone their skills in such rapid text declamation. Once again, the author recommends concentrating on the text alone without pitch initially.

Figure 5.9: RVW — *A Sea Symphony*, III, Rhythmic Motives

**Melodic Ideas**

Unlike movement 2, movement 3 involves the rapid restatement of thematic/textual ideas through different key areas, as well as with varying intervallic content, and rhythmic diminution or augmentation. Like the first movement, many of these passages involve polyphonic treatment that demands greater independence of the various vocal parts. While the number of motives treated in this fashion is not large, acquisition of this skill will have both local and broader application.
The initial entrance of the sopranos and altos (repeated later by the tenors and basses) demands rapid articulation of text and music, made more challenging by slight variations that accompany successive statements of new text. This series of motives first occurs in mm. 3-12 as a variety of arpeggiations of a g minor chord. Practicing the quick alternation of various inversions of the essentially the same harmony will substantially improve the choir’s facility in dealing with such passages. Figure 5.10 contains ten exercises appropriate for both female and male voices in three part divisi, since this is the texture Vaughan Williams uses most often. These exercises focus on quickly switching from one inversion of a basic minor triad to another. As in other etudes offered in this study, these exercises should first be mastered at moderate tempo before advancing to the quicker tempi required in the actual composition. Although the last few exercises have text, the first examples should be performed using syllables determined by the conductor. Here, the syllable “bum” has been used to create a detached, staccato articulation. Since this motive returns throughout the movement in different tonal areas, performance as warm-ups should involve both ascending and descending modulation.
In measure 188, Vaughan Williams introduces a new motive that recurs through the remainder of the movement. The text “A motley procession” is performed by the entire chorus ranging from two-voice duets to tutti homophonic statements. The initial interval between voices is a third or a sixth, reflecting inversion of the triads that Vaughan Williams desires. These exercises (figure 5.11) feature both abstract exercises in both thirds and sixths and two versions taken directly from the score. As these motives occur in various keys, often within the same section, the conductor should require the choir to sing the final two examples in a variety of keys.
Conclusions

It is clear that Vaughan Williams believed he had created a Scherzo and there seems to be enough evidence to sustain his intent. That said, the form of this movement is more complicated than a simple Scherzo, due to the element of recapitulation; The form of the Classical Scherzo (and its predecessor the Minuet) included a literal reprise of the opening section after the Trio; in this case, we get no such literal repeat, but one that presents music previously heard in a different key in what can be loosely called a “tonic”. The title of the movement—“Scherzo.-The Waves”—is the only explicit indication of Vaughan Williams’ symphonic intentions in the entire work. The textual/music product aligns with this form. Those crucial indicators of scherzo form are nearly all realized. The movement is divided into three large sections and the outer sections are similar. Vaughan Williams creates this congruency with the use of repetition of text and motive from the first section to the third. The middle section contrasts with the outer section in a
number of ways, but the most striking is the sudden shift to a *Largemente* tempo and the use of Bb major at the onset of the movement. The Bb major contrasts with the g minor tonality used at the onset of both the first and third sections. The character of the music (defined previously) also is different in the middle section. Finally, Vaughan Williams uses an orchestral interlude before and after the middle section to set it apart from the outer sections.
Chapter 6: Sea Symphony, Movement IV

While the third movement of the Sea Symphony used a single poem with no omissions, the fourth and final movement confirms the uniqueness of that usage by employing excerpts from three different poems from Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. The three poems are the fifth, eighth and ninth elements of Book XXVI, which is entitled “A Passage to India.” Vaughan Williams extracted the first twenty-five lines of poem 5, eighteen non-consecutive lines from poem 8 and ten of the thirty-two lines of poem 9 for the text of the final movement. Vaughan Williams sets these three poetic texts in a rather linear way, each containing some sort of substructure without consistently following a preconceived pattern. It may be best to say that the resulting musical form emerges from the composer’s reaction to the texts that comprise it. Thus, we must proceed to study the derivation of the poetic text in terms of how its compilation might have affected the shape of its musical setting. The textual layout of the finale’s three musical sections is:

Part I – Poem V
A. lines 1 – 7   B. lines 8 – 15, 19 – 25

Part II – Poem VIII
C. lines 1 – 7, 12 – 18   D. lines 19 – 21, 31 – 38

Part III – Poem IX
E. lines 20 – 21, 25 – 28   F. lines 29 - 32

The text itself follows, using bold font to indicate poetry omitted by Vaughan Williams.

101 In the absence of direct evidence to the contrary, we assume that Vaughan Williams himself selected the passages to be set to music.
Part I: Passage to India, Poem V

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Covered all over with visible power and beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless
stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees,
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

(This broken line appears in the text given at the outset of the choral score!)

Down from the gardens of Asia descending radiating,
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,
Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations,
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts,
With that sad incessant refrain, Wherefore unsatisfied soul? and
Whither O mocking life? 102

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who justify these restless explorations?
Who speak the secret of impassive earth?
Who bind it to us? what is this separate Nature so unnatural?
What is this earth to our affections? (unloving earth, without a
throb to answer ours,
Cold earth, the place of graves.)
Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist, the
geologist, ethnologist,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.
Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists and inventors,
shall be justified,

All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,
All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told,
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and
link'd together,

102 Whitman italicizes these lines in LoG
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth, shall be completely justified,
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the true son of God, the poet,
(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,
He shall double the cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)
Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

Part II: Passage To India, VIII

Section C:

O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship O soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless we too launch out on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul.)
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

With laugh and many a kiss,
(Let others deprecate, let others weep for sin, remorse, humiliation,)
O soul thou pleasest me, I thee.

Ah more than any priest O soul we too believe in God,
But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing,
Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

Poem VIII, D:

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection's source—thou reser-
voir,
(O pensive soul of me—O thirst unsatisfied—waitest not there?
Waitest not haply for us somewhere there the Comrade perfect?)
Thou pulse—thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space,
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how speak, if,
out of myself,
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual Me,

And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding O soul thou journeyest forth;
What love than thine and ours could wider amplify?
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours O soul?
What dreams of the ideal? What plans of purity, perfection,
  strength?
What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all?
For others' sake to suffer all?

Reckoning ahead O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,
The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

Part III: Passage to India, IX

Section E:

Passage to more than India!
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?
O soul, voyagist thou indeed on voyages like those?
Disportest thou on waters such as those?
Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?
Then have thy bent unleash'd.

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems!
You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never reach'd you.

Passage to more than India!
O secret of the earth and sky!
Of you O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!
Of you O woods and fields! Of you strong mountains of my land!
Of you O prairies! of you gray rocks!
O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!
O day and night, passage to you!

O sun and moon and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter!
Passage to you!

Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!

Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!

Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?
Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough?

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

Section F:

O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Examining the deletions, it becomes clear that Vaughan Williams decided to omit those lines of text that refer to India, as their specificity runs counter to the more universal values he sought to project. He also omitted those lines that describe the soul’s final resting place of the soul, preferring to leave this detail purposefully vague. By so doing Vaughan Williams’ text focuses on the soul’s journey rather than its destination.
The first two of these three textual/musical units begins with the first line of their respective poems. Vaughan Williams’ decision regarding the third poem involved starting with line 20. In all three instances, the chosen text becomes the basis of the musical structure. Unlike the three preceding movements, Vaughan Williams makes no attempt to impose an internal musical unity on his setting of these three disparate texts, a decision that results in a massive final movement that is essentially through-composed. He creates subdivisions within the musical settings by means of a variety of musical markers—fermati, change of key signature, change of vocal texture, change of tempo or internal orchestral interludes.

Part I (Poem V)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 − 43</td>
<td>44 − 133</td>
<td>134 − 213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V: 1-7</td>
<td>V: 8-15</td>
<td>V: 19-25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>T/B—SA semi-choir</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II (Poem VIII)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213 − 239</td>
<td>240 − 288</td>
<td>289 − 336</td>
<td>336 − 359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Orch.]</td>
<td>S/B soli</td>
<td>S/B soli</td>
<td>S/B Chorus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part III (Poem IX)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E</th>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401 − 457</td>
<td>458 − 521</td>
<td>522 − 570</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>S/B, Chorus</td>
<td>S/B, Chorus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the formal structure of this movement does emerge from the text rather than assuming a priori the use of any of the formal conventions applied to nineteenth-century symphonic finales (rondo, theme and variation or sonata-allegro). One may well argue that the Finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (op. 125) broke the mold for typical symphonic finales, providing any requisite precedent for choral symphonies of the future. Despite various author’s
attempts to shoehorn Vaughan Williams’ finale into one of these, it remains essentially monolithic.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Motives from earlier movements}

In our discussions of the first three movements, much has been made of the cross-fertilization of one movement with motivic material from one that preceded it. Strangely, the fourth movement seems nearly devoid of obvious reference to the principal motives of the first three movements. The one similarity to previous motivic material is the following melody:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig61.png}
\caption{RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 213-214}
\end{figure}

This is nearly identical to the orchestral melody that appears in movement I at letter A (mm. 13-14):

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig62.png}
\caption{RVW-A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 13-14}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{103} Various authors who have analyzed this work (Schwartz, Clarke, Herbert, Ottaway) conclude that the fourth movement uses one of these conventional fourth movement forms.
We also see this melody, in the baritone soloist’s line also from movement I, in mm. 243-44.

![Figure 6.3: RVW-A Sea Symphony, I, mm. 243-44](image)

There is also an implicit reference to the unison recitative motive initially heard in the baritone solo at the beginning of movement II. The entirety of the men’s first statement is intoned on the pitch [d], reminding one of the similar vocal figure first heard in “On the Beach at Night alone.”

![Figure 6.4: RVW – A Sea Symphony, II, mm. 18-20](image)

Yet another common melodic motive, perhaps the most commonly encountered of all appearing in every movement, is an ascending perfect 4\(^{th}\) or 5\(^{th}\). Examples from each of three prior movements follow.
Figure 6.6: RVW—*A Sea Symphony*, I, mm. 94/4-95

Figure 6.7: RVW—*A Sea Symphony*, II, mm. 59-63

\[\text{See also the imitative passage that begins at m. 325.}\]
We see this ascending motive throughout the fourth movement.

---

Figure 6.8: RVW—A Sea Symphony, III, mm. 209-210

Figure 6.9: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 146-148

Figure 6.10: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 408-409

Figure 6.11: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 444-445
Whereas these motives can be seen in previous movements, the abundance of motive which are unique to the fourth movement far outnumber those we’ve seen before.

Fourth Movement Motives

In prior movements, Vaughan Williams used cells, motives, or melodies to create unity within a movement, but in movement four this is not a significant factor. Most of the motives are confined to a single section/segment. There are two notable exceptions. The first motive appears in mm. 240-241:

![Motive in mm. 240-241](image)

Figure 6.12: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 240-241

While this motive is most prevalent in section C, it recurs in others as well. In section D, the baritone sings the same pitches but different words and, consequently, different rhythm.

![Motive in mm. 375-376](image)

Figure 6.13: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 375-376

In section F, the motive returns in both the orchestral and vocal parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 522-523</th>
<th>mm. 526-527</th>
<th>mm. 529</th>
<th>mm. 530</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Sopranos</td>
<td>Tenors</td>
<td>Soprano Soloist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sopranos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because this motive permeates the last section and recalls material used earlier in the movement, it creates some degree of unity within the movement.

The other motive used in multiple sections/segments of the final movement is a reprise of the melody heard prominently in the first movement as an orchestral interlude. First heard at m. 213, the repetitions of this motive occur only in the final segment within the orchestra (see mm. 539, 541, 546, and 549).
The overall impression created within the fourth movement is one of continuously unfolding melody; rather than a formal structure based on motivic return, one is aware of a succession of vaguely familiar melodic ideas that are, in fact, unique to the locale in which they occur.

Part I features a single motive that appears through its entirety; everything else is limited to a specific text or formal segment. The motive that transcends this limitation first appears in the orchestra in mm. 59-60:

Example 6.16: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 59-60

In mm. 134-140, the motive forms the basis of a point of imitation sung by the chorus.

Example 6.17: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 134-140

Early in the movement, the chorus spins out the following melody as a point of imitation:

Example 6.18: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 6-8

As is his wont, Vaughan Williams explores this general melodic contour throughout the first segment of movement IV. Although sung to different words and varied slightly in intervallic content, an undeniable similarity of melodic design underpins this entire section.

Wave Gesture
Although the third movement was entitled “The Waves,” melodic gestures appear throughout the fourth movement that evoke the shape and movement of waves. While one cannot make a direct correlation between these gestures and the theme of the sea, they occur so frequently that they must be mentioned here. As said earlier, each instance of this “wave” gesture has unique intervallic and rhythmic content, the constant being an ascending and descending melodic arc.

The gesture takes many forms, the first appearing in mm. 44-45. Here, upper lines ascend while the lower lines invert that motion.

Figure 6.19: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 44-45

Later, a bass motive appears that is relentlessly re-stated, mimicking the waves of the sea.

Figure 6.20: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 92-93
Figure 6.21: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 169-171

Figure 6.22: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 298–301

Figure 6.23: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 335-336
Such gestures, while not rising to the level of a motive, permeate the entire fourth movement, providing another minimal form of unity in this through-composed movement. Specifically, this motive appears twenty-eight times to accompany the male chorus beginning in m. 92. Vaughan Williams uses texture (male chorus alone – male chorus and SSAA semi-chorus) to create a binary period framed by fermatas that appear like bookends in m. 43 and 136. The second statement of which is a transposition of the first.

This section, framed by fermatas (m. 43 and m. 136), seems to lack any distinguishing motivic material. The initial entrance of the male chorus (m. 50) features two ideas that have been heard before. The first is the veiled presence of the motive first heard in m. 59:
The second is a reference to the incantational motive first heard in the second movement (see Fig. 6.4 above):

While other motives occur, all are restricted to a localized continuity. While crucial to the segment in which they appear, their presence creates no larger unity. Rather, the relentless unfolding of new motives (a metaphor for the sea?) support the categorization of this movement as through-composed.

**Tempo**

Like its three predecessors, this movement has its share of tempo changes.\(^{105}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grave e molto Adagio</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Andante con moto</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Poco animando</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Tempo I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Animato</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{105}\) The use of bold font indicates tempo changes that articulate formal segments.
Of the seventeen tempo changes that appear in this movement, nine signal the beginning of a new formal section or segment. The sole exception to this functionality is section D of Part II M. 360 ff.).

Text

Logically, the texts of these three poems had to complement each other. That is essentially why Vaughan Williams chose these texts and their placement. Their juxtaposition creates a story that has a clear beginning, middle, and end, which begins with a description of our place on this earth and the inevitable question of why we exist (section A). The story continues with the first “questionings” of Adam and Eve (section B), followed by an answer to the existential question that takes the form of a description of our journey from earth to the afterlife (section C). Uncertain of the journey’s eventual destination prompts questions about the identity of God (section D). Once these are resolved, comes an eagerness to begin the journey (Part III)—“sail forth” (section E), a journey that ends with another call to move onward toward the afterlife (section F).

By using specific texts, Vaughan Williams uses the Whitman poetry to give one a complete story of the soul from beginning to end. This textual construction is unique to the
fourth movement; within its vast dimensions, the text constitutes a story that serves to conclude his first symphony in a way that is both uplifting and also mystical.

Rehearsal Strategies

Like the second movement, in the fourth movement Vaughan Williams exercises his penchant for presenting a series of new themes, which receive only brief development or re-statement before yielding to a new idea. While a number of themes are repeated (see below), this occurrence is neither frequent nor extended. This fact results from the essentially through-composed nature of the fourth movement, a process marked by the absence of the predictable or regular thematic/tonal return typically of closed forms. Therefore, the following warm-ups and exercises focus on those rhythmic ideas or motives that are repeated or developed to some extent.

Rhythmic Motives

Throughout the work Vaughan Williams has a penchant for composing the rhythmic duality of two against three. So the chorus may better prepare how to sing this relationship, I have included an exercise (figure 6.27) that would work well in the warm-up regimen.
Of the many rhythmic motives in the fourth movement, only two are developed extensively. The first of these motives first occurs in m. 185 and persists through m. 201. This motive is the basis of an imitative texture that involves all of the choral voices. While the harmony and intervallic content are not particularly difficult, the contrapuntal texture in which this motive operates does create a challenge for the chorus. In figure 6.28 (below), I have extracted the first entrance of this motive. This motive should first be spoken in rhythm but without pitch to assure mastery of the two-against-three rhythms. Once this brief excerpt has been mastered, the conductor might then ask the choir to do their own parts in a similar fashion for the entire passage.
One of the most difficult sections of the entire work occurs in mm. 404-440 of this movement. The extreme difficulty is largely due to the entrances of the choir, which nearly always occur on a sub-division of the beat in a fast tempo. Additionally, the members of the choir have to keep count of numerous measures between entrances. One of our aims as conductors is to train our choristers to continually keep track of rhythm (especially sub-pulse) at those times when they are not singing; by so doing, they are able to anticipate their entrance within the larger musical flow and not enter as if startled. Here is an exercise that vocalizes this internal counting (counting figures are italicized) and focuses on the off-beat entrances by having
the members of each part clap the beat during which they make their sixteenth-note entrance.

Figure 6.29: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 406-418
While the measures in the figure below (mm. 407-418) aren’t the entirety of the section, they exhibit those rhythmic characteristics which are common to the rest of the section. Although the tempo is marked Allegro one should begin very slowly through the exercise. Over time, the conductor should ask that the choir replace the clapping with counting. The choir could then not speak the counting, but work for its internalization. By using the exercise below, the conductor will coach the chorus to count in their mind’s ear for the rest of the section.

Melodies
While there are motives that Vaughan Williams develops, these moments are brief and occur infrequently. In the following exercises, I have selected motives that are repeated more than once or become more difficult because of their participation in an imitative texture. The first such motive occurs in mm. 185-201.

For pedagogical purposes, I have reduced the motive to its simplest form. This is a theme that lends itself easily to sequential repetition, even to use as a round. While the intent of the exercise isn’t necessarily to become familiar with the motive in a series of different keys, this result is an ancillary benefit! Given that the motive occurs within the context of G major, a series of related exercises that help ground the choir in that tonality may be a useful adjunct.

In measure 461, Vaughan Williams introduces a new melodic cell. The repeated calls to “sail forth” create a choral accompaniment for the baritone and soprano soloists’ duet. Given the alternating presentation of this motive in the tenor and soprano voices using different intervals,
the conductor must ensure that these voices can confidently sing the required major sixths, perfect fourth and perfect fifth and minor third. In the following exercise I’ve condensed the distance between the entrances and added the settings of “steer for the deep water only” that occur antiphonally. The soprano line of this duet is the soprano part (mm. 475-6) and the lower line is the men’s unison version (mm. 476-477):

![Figure 6.31: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 461-478 (condensed)](image)

The choral material (S, A, T) initiated in measure 481 consists of a series of varied repeats of a similar descending scale. The problem is that none of the scales are the same either in successive entries in different parts or successive entries in the same part,

![Figure 6.32: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 481-483](image)

This figure presents the initial soprano entry on c minor with a slightly pentatonic flavor (the minor third in the second measure). The utility of this exercise is limited to the first entry of the sopranos since none of the subsequent presentations imitate precisely the same intervallic or tonal pattern due to the vintage harmonic fluidity we associate with Vaughan Williams.
Consequently, each part needs to compare their version to this melody and note the differences of interval and tonal orientation.

Although the chorus has no prominent melodic motive throughout this section (mm. 407-428) Vaughan Williams does employ a recurring melodic pattern. The words “Away, O soul” appear in the choral parts as an accompanimental fabric made up of presentations of these words to a fanfare-like rhythm that traverses three distinct tonal areas. The author has condensed these entries into a series of three arpeggios, one in each of the three key areas and following the variable intervals of the various choral entries. Whereas the exercise in Figure 6.29 was primarily concerned with the rhythmic component of these words, this exercise emphasizes accurate acquisition of pitch material. These exercises should initially be done under tempo and gradually worked up to the performance tempo (Allegro). Although Vaughan Williams always uses the upper notes (when octaves appear in the exercises), in this study the lower octave is included for the lower voices.

Figure 6.33: RVW—A Sea Symphony, IV, mm. 407-409 (condensed)
Conclusions

It is clear that the fourth movement of Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony* consists of three textual parts, based on the three separate poetic excerpts from Whitman’s “A Passage to India” that the composer chose. However, taken as a whole, they present continuous unfolding of melodic ideas in response to these separate texts. Therefore, the fourth movement is essentially through-composed. None of the three share any common musical material, nor do their “stories” connect to form a typical narrative. Curiously, Vaughan Williams does not reprise motives heard in earlier movements as he quite consciously did in the first three movements. The three textual parts dictate changes of tempo, texture, scoring and style. Vaughan Williams creates a degree of unity within the movement through his use of motives, which appear in conjunction with each text and undergo limited local development. The one melodic commonality is a collection of separate and distinct “wave” gestures that appear throughout the movement. As such, these generic gestures unite rather than divide the movement, if only in a quite generic way. Despite the use of three separate poems, Vaughan Williams manages to craftily knit them together, although his alchemy is elusive to the potential analyst. The three poems merge together to form a larger whole, losing the specific characteristics each potentially brings to the larger movement in the service of a larger, if somewhat ill-defined coherence.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* is a mammoth work. Aside from the lengthy passage for the soloists in the fourth movement, the chorus sings continuously throughout. The conductor’s thorough understanding of the score will better prepare him/her to present the material to the chorus in a manner that is both efficient and accessible. The goal of this study is to assist in that process.

Text

Formal design and the musical motives that create unity in the work are both based upon pre-compositional decision’s Vaughan Williams made regarding what text from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* he would set. Indeed, Vaughan Williams was the sole arbiter of the text used and the order of its use in *A Sea Symphony*. Vaughan Williams’ respect for the poetry is evident in his refusal to augment the poetry with additional words (his own or others); he does, however, omit and rearrange lines to accommodate his compositional desires. His reasons for these omissions must necessarily remain speculation. The resulting journey from sea to land and back again offers a perfect vehicle for Vaughan Williams to display his penchant for mysticism.

The flow of the movements (both separately and together) results from the text and the musical motives that it generates. In the fourth movement, text is the principal agent for the purely localized musical development that takes place. Vaughan Williams manages to link these separate musical sections to the movement as a whole by the musical ideas that they engender. Whereas the three musical sections of the movement align with the three separate poetic excerpts, the composer manages to tie them together in ways that are not easily verbalized. That he is successful in this piece of compositional sleight-of-hand is evidenced by the listener’s lack of awareness that the last movement’s text is a pastiche.
Form

The formal design of each movement does not reflect conventional notions of symphonic form. Rather, like any composer who deals with words, Vaughan Williams generates a formal design acceptable to the listener on the strength of his music’s ability to project the imagery of his texts. That said, he does provide clues that allude to the fact that *A Sea Symphony* is part symphony, part tone poem, part cantata. While the individual movement forms do not reveal an obvious indebtedness to such traditional symphonic forms, the first and third movements possess enough of the traits of sonata-allegro and scherzo to allow the listener to believe that he/she is listening to a symphony. The fourth movement is the least symphonic in form and, unlike its three predecessors, does not contain any thematic references that would tie it to earlier movements. The conclusion to which an analyst must come is that the final movement is a through-composed musical story that succeeds more by virtue of the strength of its musical ideas than by any historical verisimilitude or reference.

Tonal Center/Mode

Vaughan Williams has some decided compositional tendencies relevant to the use of tonal center and mode in the *Sea Symphony*. One such tendency is the recurrent use of harmonic third-relationships involving chromatic cross-relationships. Indeed, the opening measures of the first movement announce the special harmonic design that becomes a commonplace throughout the work as a whole.
Figure 7.1: RVW – *Sea Symphony*, I, mm. 2-5

There, the b-flat minor triad used for the first two words resolves rather unexpectedly by contrary chromatic melodic motion (f – f# and b-flat – a) to a chord the pitches of which negate the upper two pitch classes of its predecessor (i.e., the f natural and d-flat of the first chord are contradicted by the f# and d natural of the second). Vaughan Williams uses this special harmonic relationship for both simple chord changes and more large-scale changes of tonal center.

Befitting the experience he derived from collecting and transcribing the folk music of his native land is Vaughan Williams’ reliance on modality (especially Dorian mode) and pentatonicism. In both principal melodic motives and accompaniment figures alike, one constantly finds the footprint of these non-tonal scales.

Motives

Whereas conventional formal design dictates a subordinate role for the use of motives, in the *Sea Symphony* Vaughan Williams uses motivic ideas as a means, deliberate or otherwise, to subvert symphonic formal conventions. The sheer number of individual motives in each of the movements is massive. The amount of development each of these motives receives varies greatly, however, with the greatest development occurring in the first and third movements.
The character of motives derives from textual images. While individual lines (or groups of lines) prompt motives with an appropriate character, a new motive usually appears in response to new text. To counteract the ensuing disjunctive result, Vaughan Williams often borrows distinctive aspects of a current motive to smooth over the change to its replacement. By so doing, he creates a kind of unity within the section or movement, as well as the work as a whole. The fourth movement is no exception to this practice despite its through-composition and lack of reference to motives heard earlier.

Rehearsal Strategies

The rehearsal strategies that appear within chapters three through six offer suggestions intended to aid the preparation of the chorus. These are by no means the totality of such aids, but merely suggestions of the types of exercise that may be helpful; the exercises devised by the author reflect the prevailing compositional tendencies in the work. I have also included etudes that will help the choir perform the more difficult melodic motives and rhythmic figures found within any given movement of the work. Exercises have not been included for those motives that play little role in the larger structural development of a movement; suffice it to say, that any enterprising conductor can construct his/her own exercises in a manner similar to that presented here without great difficulty.

Whereas the rhythmic and melodic components of these etudes change from one to another, the strategy used to implement them should remain constant. Conductors should always begin using a slow tempo to teach a gesture, thereby allowing the choir to experience immediate success before increasing to performance tempo. In addition, the exercises should be performed at a moderate dynamic (mezzo-forte or less) before attempting the dynamic printed in the score. By following this graduated approach, the chorus will not only gain confidence in executing
these passages but will also develop the stamina necessary to carry out their substantial role in this work. Additional exercises designed to address range and stamina should be incorporated into the choir’s warm-up regimen. Sample exercises of this type appear in the appendix.

Further Research

This study is by a choral conductor and intended for choral conductors. The document does not attempt to analyze this large work in depth, but this is an academic endeavor that would greatly benefit understanding of the complex tonal relationships and formal designs found in the work. Confusion exists surrounding the genesis of the Sea Symphony. While Herbert Andrew has done fine work in compiling preliminary material, additional work remains to be done regarding how the final composition was put together. Such an exploration should definitely address possible reasons that the originally-proposed fifth movement was cut. Such contextual analysis might also improve our understanding of Vaughan Williams’ influence on English composers who wrote similar choral/orchestra works after him. While the influence of his teachers’ compositions (Parry and Stanford) has been discussed, concrete links to Vaughan Williams’ compositions remain speculative. Such a study would also lend insight into Vaughan Williams’ role in the evolution of English composition in the mid-twentieth century.

---

106 (Herbert 1994)
Appendix A

As stated above, Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* is a large work in which the chorus sings continuously throughout. There are many areas in the work which add difficulty by use of extreme range and a high tessitura. The warm-ups below are designed to prepare the choir to maintain their tone over longer periods and to extend their range with the hope that the challenges the higher tessitura presents will be more manageable.

Figure A.1: Warm-up Exercise #1

Figure A.2: Warm-up Exercise #2

Figure A.3: Warm-up Exercise #3

Figure A.4: Warm-up Exercise #4
Figure A.5: Warm-up Exercise #5

Figure A.6: Warm-up Exercise #6

Figure A.7: Warm-up Exercise #7

Figure A.8: Warm-up Exercise #8
Bibliography


—. "Bach and Schumann." The Vocalist, June 1902: 72.

—. "Brahms and Tschaikowsky." The Vocalist, October 1902: 198-200.


—. "Good Taste." The Vocalist, May 1902: 38.

—. "Palestrina and Beethoven." The Vocalist, May 1902: 36-37.

—. "Soporific Finale." The Vocalist, April 1902: 31.

