



ON WENLOCK EDGE

Vaughan Williams (1909)



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- English folk song
- The English choral tradition
- French Impressionist influence
- The Song Cycle
- 20th Century techniques

NO. 1 'ON WENLOCK EDGE', NO. 3 'IS MY TEAM PLOUGHING?', NO. 5 'BREDON HILL'

STRUCTURE:

- No. 1: Five verses: AABBA/B, last verse combines both A and B elements.
- No. 3: Williams leaves out third and fourth verses of Housman's poem. Modified strophic form with three pairs of verses: 1. AB, 2. AB, 3. A1B1
- No. 5: Seven verse structure: Introduction-A-A-B-B1-C-D-A1-postlude.

CONTEXT:

- Was an English composer of symphonies, operas and vocal music amongst other forms.
- Sought to break away from German Romantic style and looked to other important influences in his life:
- English folk song: Travelled around countryside and transcribed songs, modality influenced his style
- The English choral tradition: Modal Tudor church music particularly.
- French Impressionist influence: Had studied in Paris with Ravel.: Tremolo strings and parallel harmonies.
- On Wenlock Edge: A song cycle. A group of 6 songs setting poems from A Shropshire Lad by A.E. Housman, written in 1896. Poems describe rural life and convey a nostalgic sense of lost innocence.

SONORITY:

- Unusual choice of instrumentation.: combination of solo voice and piano quintet
- Piano: Block chords (church bells), trills, parallel chords, una corda, ostinato accompaniment, arpeggios,
- Strings: Tremolo, pizzicato, cello in tenor clef, triple stopped pizz, sul ponticello, con sordino with ff for tone quality, open harmonics.

HARMONY AND TONALITY:

- Mostly consonant harmony.
- Suggestion of whole tone progression.
- Parallel chords- typical impressionist feature.
- False relation
- Harmony is modal in character.
- Pentatonic style harmony.
- Dissonance for the word 'gale'- word painting.
- Chromatic chordal movement and slides.
- Dorian harmony: 'Is My Team Ploughing?'
- Extended chords: 7ths and 11ths in 'Bredon Hill'. Common in impressionist harmony.
- Occasional 2nd inversion 7th chords

RHYTHM, METRE AND TEMPO:

- Triplets and sextuplets
- Cross rhythms.
- Rippling hemidemisemiquavers
- Important rhythmic feature: accentuation of syllables and following natural rhythms of speech.
- Is My Team Ploughing?: Long held notes enable voice to sing in free time, in recitative-like way.
- Frequent time signature and tempo changes
- 'Bredon Hill': Sustained bell chords with tied semibreves.

TEXTURE:

- Constantly varying textures.
- No. 1: Parallel first inversions, doubling, ostinatos, unison trills. end: reduced texture.
- No.3: Homorhythm, chordal homophony. block chord accompaniment, tutti.
- No.5: Sustained chords, melody-dominated homophony, triplet ostinato creating a three layered texture

MELODY AND VOCAL STYLE:

- The modal, folk influenced melodies.
- Pentatonic melodies.
- Repeated notes
- Chromatic descending melodies.
- Recitative style singing.
- No.3: Starts conjunct, but later there are larger leaps
- Non-virtuosic tenor soloist line- Occasional high notes but standard tenor range.
- Mainly syllabic, occasional melismas,
- Anacrusis fits iambic nature of the poetry,