

## - ARTICLE -

## ‘The Higher Storie’: Alan Ridout’s Music for Counter-Tenor

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Independent

As the work of Alan Ridout (1934 – 1996) is still largely neglected, a brief biographical sketch is in order. In 1951, aged sixteen, with a year at the GSMD and two letters of encouragement from Britten already under his belt, he entered the RCM to train under Howells, Gordon Jacob, and Thornton Lofthouse. Here he won several prestigious prizes, though subsequent studies with Peter Racine Fricker and Henk Badings proved more fruitful.<sup>1</sup> He held teaching posts at the College, four universities, and the choir school at Canterbury,<sup>2</sup> undertook two extended series for the BBC, produced an assessment of the string quartets of Tippett<sup>3</sup> with whom he also studied sporadically, and edited a slim symposium on Howard Ferguson.<sup>4</sup> Primarily a composer, Ridout was exceedingly diligent and extraordinarily prolific, possessing an industriousness allied to that of Badings. Even discounting his juvenilia, which easily exceeds three figures alone, his tally of well over nine hundred works includes examples in almost every genre, including a copious quantity of religious and educational music, although very few arrangements of

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<sup>1</sup> See Alan Ridout, *A Composer’s Life* (London: Thames Publishing, 1995), his contribution to “Herbert Howells Remembered”, *RCM Magazine*, 89, no. 3 (1992): 10; and James Harding, “Composers of Today: Alan Ridout”, *Performance* 1 (Winter 1980/81): 45.

<sup>2</sup> For the composer’s own review of his work at the choir school, see Alan Ridout, “Teaching Composition to Gifted Children”, *Composer* 22 (Winter 1966/67): 7.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Ridout, “The String Quartets”, in *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Ian Kemp (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 180–93. Ridout’s Second Symphony (1964) was also a sixtieth birthday gift to Tippett, and he was clearly one of the composer’s intimates; see Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), 238.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Ridout, ed., *The Music of Howard Ferguson* (London: Thames Publishing, 1989). Ridout also contributed the chapter on Ferguson’s choral works; it is curious that neither composer mentioned the other in their memoirs.

traditional material such as folksong.<sup>5</sup> An early interest in microtonal possibilities resulted in some pioneering electronic and tricesimoprimal scores, but although these experiments (many premiered in Holland) were soon abandoned along with serialism, he valued the knowledge and techniques that he derived from them. Ridout eventually attained a fluent and accessible tonal language, influenced by modes and plainsong, characterised by an unsentimental lyricism within uncomplicated parameters – all of which, of course, placed him firmly outside much of the prevailing confederacy. Nonetheless, he greatly admired many contemporaries, particularly Peter Maxwell Davies, and foresaw with pleasure the rising acclaim of Judith Weir and David Matthews. A heart attack in 1990 led to the cessation of all his teaching but not his writing, and stimulated the fulfilment of a desire to live in France, where he remained for his last three years: first in mediaeval Vitré, then its nearest town, Caen, close to the Romanesque Abbey of Saint-Étienne. Here a renewed creative spirit blossomed in a simplified compositional style, allied to a major religious experience at Ampleforth Abbey in 1994 that engendered his conversion to Catholicism. In his final months, Ridout became an oblate of the order of St Benedict at Ampleforth Abbey, where the majority of his papers are now housed, although others are widely scattered or lost.

The composer's legacy, painstakingly catalogued by Robert Scott,<sup>6</sup> should be viewed as part of the revival of the counter-tenor in the twentieth century,<sup>7</sup> together with a parallel exploration of the extended capabilities of 'early music' instruments – particularly the harpsichord (in works from Poulenc to Xenakis), and the recorder (largely championed by Carl Dolmetsch, David Munrow and others)<sup>8</sup> – that

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<sup>5</sup> In the notes accompanying her portrait of Ridout 'which emerged during the long dark grey winter months' of 1983 (reproduced on the cover of *A Composer's Life*), Joy Finzi wrote: 'Total absorption enables him to compose at an extraordinary speed – from the first note to the last – and to accomplish a large body of work'. Joy Finzi, *In That Place: The Portrait Drawings of Joy Finzi* (Marlborough: Libanus Press, 1987). This facility is also attributed to a mere three hours' sleep a night: see Alan Ridout, "Composer in Interview", *Orbit Arts Journal* 1, no. 8 (September 1975): 5.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Scott, ed., *Alan Ridout: The Complete Catalogue* (York: Emerson Edition, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> See Peter Giles, *The Counter Tenor* (London: Frederick Muller, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Space permits only a personal list of milestones of virtuosity: the commissions for Dolmetsch from 1939; the artistry of Frans Brüggen including the commissioning of Berio's *Gesti* (1966); the similarly wide-ranging evangelism of Munrow and his Early Music Consort, plus the many hundreds of premieres undertaken by the indefatigable John Turner since the mid-1970s; the appealing use of the instrument by the highly accomplished Richard Harvey with his group Gryphon (1970s); and Piers Adams's

accompanied its reappraisal. In addition to Davies and, of course, Britten, others making pioneering incursions were Richard Rodney Bennett, Gordon Crosse, Peter Dickinson, John Joubert, Elisabeth Lutyens, and Priaulx Rainier; but it is probable that only Geoffrey Burgon approaches Ridout in quantity of counter-tenor scores, thanks to his friendship with Kevin Smith. While this paper confines discussion to works for solo performers, the music examples have a dual function: in addition to illustrating specific points, many have also been incorporated as part of a general chronological introduction to Ridout's output, as it is anticipated that the reader will be almost entirely, if not wholly, unfamiliar with it. Therefore, while a degree of formal analysis has been incorporated, more intensive methods have been deferred for the present.

#### Table of works

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author of text</b>	<b>Scoring</b>
8 Apr 1968	Multas per Gentes	Catullus	Ct solo
16 Jul 1969	Prayers from Prison [solo cantata]	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Ct, org, optional SATB
13 Nov 1969	Epitaph	Anon. 17th cent.	Ct, str qt/str orch
24 May 1970	[Three] Songs of Melancholy	Thomas Wyatt	Ct, pf
30 Dec 1970	O Dreams, O Destinations [three sonnets]	Cecil Day-Lewis	Ct, vn, vc
21 Feb 1971	The Pardoner's Tale [opera]	Norman Platt, after Chaucer	Ct, Mez, T, Bar, B, str, hpd, perc
25 Apr 1971	The History of the Flood	John Heath-Stubbs	AATBarBarB soli

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rejection of assorted composition drafts of David Bedford's Recorder Concerto (1994) on the grounds that they were simply not difficult enough (Chloe Bedford, conversation with author, 26 June 2021).

2 Oct 1972	Creation [opera]	Patric Dickinson	Ct, SATB, children's ch, pf, orch
6 Nov 1972	[Four] Love Songs	John Clare	Ct, gui
12 Aug 1973	C.3.3.	Oscar Wilde; J. W. von Goethe	Ct, SATB, wind orch
25 Nov 1973	The Ecstatic [cantata]	Cecil Day-Lewis	2 Ct, 2 rec, hpd
20 Aug 1975	Phaeton [radio opera]	Patric Dickinson	Ct, Mez, A, 2 Bar, B, SSSS or SSAA soli, TTBB soli, nar, spkrs, chbr orch, elec
13 Dec 1975	Salve lux laetitiae	Anon. 14th cent.	ATB soli
24 Apr 1979	Prologue to <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	Geoffrey Chaucer	ATB soli
23 Feb 1980	Delicious Beautie	John Marston	Ct, pf
24 Jan 1985	Soliloquy	Thomas Campion	Ct, rec, lute, vc, hpd
15 Dec 1986	King Frost [scena]	Nikolai Nekrassov, trans. Ursula Vaughan Williams	Ct, chbr orch
1 Oct 1987	The Prism of Life	John Addington Symonds	Ct, str qt/str orch
19 Jul 1989	The Second Coming	W. B. Yeats	Ct, str qt/str orch
2 Dec 1989	Whom Time Will Not Reprieve [cycle]	Lucy Boston	Ct, va
2 Oct 1990	Jesus, I adore thee	<i>Unidentified</i>	Ct solo
8 Oct 1990	I offer thee	Irish prayer	Ct solo

15 Oct 1990	Pibroch of Donuil Dhu	Walter Scott	Ct solo
27 Oct 1990	By the light [lost]	Richard Jeffries	Ct solo
27 Oct 1990	A great man [lost]	Meleager	Ct solo
22 Apr 1994	Canticle of Joy [cantata]	<i>various</i>	Ct, T, SATB, orch/kbd
18 May 1994	To a stranger	Walt Whitman	Ct solo
6 Jun 1994	We two boys together clinging	Walt Whitman	Ct solo
7 Jun 1994	Here the frailest leaves of me	Walt Whitman	Ct solo
7 Jun 1994	Full of life, now	Walt Whitman	Ct solo
24 Jun 1995	Saint Jean-Baptiste [cantata]	Matt. 3	Ct, SATB, 2 vn, vc, org/kbd
15 Nov 1995	Grain by grain	J. M. de Navarro	Ct, vn, va, vc
9 Jan 1996	When I set out for Lyonnesse [cycle]	Thomas Hardy	Ct, gui

### *Multas per Gentes*

Ridout's earliest piece for the counter-tenor voice coincided with his move to Canterbury to teach full-time at the choir school.<sup>9</sup> Having already heard James Bowman in the role of Oberon, Ridout met the singer via a mutual friend on the school staff, and immediately offered his services, thus precipitating an outstanding corpus of specifically-designed works. Remarkably, none were solicited and no fees were requested. *Multas per Gentes* is essentially a newly-minted monophonic

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<sup>9</sup> This arrangement was mentioned by John Betjeman in 'Canterbury', *Britain's Cathedrals and their Music*, Network Three, 7 January 1966. Ridout also wrote for the boys of Guildford and Ripon, as well as the choir of St Gregory & St Martin, Wye, which possessed a competent and enthusiastic choir, regularly joined by professional and semi-professional singers. See Mark Deller, *Mark, My Words: Recollections of Family and a Life in Music* ([Wye:] Mark Deller, 2021).

conductus or *conductus simplex* for unaccompanied voice.<sup>10</sup> In this largely unbarred setting of Catullus's lament on the death of his brother, a confident technique, an imaginative response, and an impressive declamatory style are all immediately evident.

Carried through many nations and across many seas  
 I have arrived to make these sorrowful offerings, brother,  
 So I could present you with a final gift to the dead  
 And in vain address your mute ashes,  
 Since Fortune took you away from me,  
 Alas unhappy brother cruelly taken from me.  
 But now accept these offerings, which by ancient tradition of our ancestors  
 Have been handed down as a sad gift to the dead,  
 All wet with brotherly tears,  
 And for ever, brother, hail and farewell.<sup>11</sup>

The material springs from a chromatically-inflected phrase containing two falling fifths (one diminished), with elements subjected to transformations to generate the rest of the composition. The melisma of the opening phrase (Ex. 1a) is immediately transposed so that the first line eventually incorporates all the notes of the chromatic scale except C-sharp, which is introduced in the third line with a great cry on the word 'mortis'. Bars 5 and 6 are retrograde versions of the two opening phrases; bar 7 interpolates pitches between the heavily-accented source material; the last two bars rework the first, with the falling tritone (D – G-sharp) employed for

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<sup>10</sup> Setting a classical text for solo voice was not new for Ridout. Peter Pears premiered three poems of Meleager, *On Heliodora*, in 1960, but later contact was minimal, despite Britten's early encouragement. The Britten–Pears Library holds a dyeline of Ridout's 1964 solo cantata for high voice and piano, *Children's Crusade 1939* – and while there is no record of any trial run, it was most unfortunate that Ridout revised the work four years later as an opera for boys' voices, piano, and percussion at the same time that Britten was conceiving his own version of Brecht's poem for almost identical forces. The prompt appearance of Ridout's piece on LP before the recording of Britten's work was issued would also have infuriated the elder composer, and it is unsurprising that not a note of Ridout's music was heard at Aldeburgh until 1983, long after Britten's death, when Pears (then actively seeking works in which he might participate as speaker) performed *Ferdinand* with violinist Hugh Maguire.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by Mark Walker, to whom the author is also indebted for confirming three textual errors in Ridout's manuscript (the composer's source has not been identified): 'adloquerer' (which should be 'alloquerer'), 'quere' (for 'quae'), and 'tristes' (for 'tristi').

the grief-filled 'vale'. Bowman gave the premiere in one of his earliest solo recitals at St Clement Danes Church, London on 9 January 1969, to excellent reviews.<sup>12</sup>

### Exs I: Compositional techniques



Ex. Ia: Opening of *Multas per Gentes*.



Ex. Ib: *Multas per Gentes*, b. 5. The same material in retrograde (the final G of the quintuplet is thus in the original, not A).



Ex. Ic: *Multas per Gentes*, b. 7. 'Decorated' with additional pitches.

<sup>12</sup> The church, almost destroyed during World War II, was re-consecrated in 1958 as a permanent memorial to all who died in the service of the RAF, and was therefore an appropriate venue for a work of such personal remembrance. Martin Cooper commented on the singer's 'keen sense of style and precision of pitch in Alan Ridout's moving unaccompanied *Multas per Gentes*. This is indeed a rare voice and a rare art, and Mr Bowman should have a great future before him'. See *Daily Telegraph*, 10 January 1969. Ridout returned to the text in 1980 to produce a different work for the chamber choir of The King's School, Canterbury, reviewed as 'a spare, triadic, beautiful piece'. See 'D.L.', "Serenade in the Cloisters", *The Cantuarian* 55, no. 1 (1980): 240.

### *Prayers from Prison*

Ridout quickly capitalised on the achievement of his Catullus piece with a miniature neo-Baroque cantata for counter-tenor and organ: *Prayers from Prison* takes lines by the dissident German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945), executed for his resistance against the Nazi regime. It comprises three recitatives (all based on similar material), each followed by more expansive movements. The sustained triadic accompaniment of the recitatives suggests long-desired calm, but the progressions are unpredictable, and the voice struggles to find repose against them. (Ex. 2a.) The first recitative is followed by an aria in flowing compound time, the second by a march accompanied by fragmented dotted rhythms over a tramping bass line (Ex. 2b), although the harmony gradually becomes more disturbing, with several instances of false relations and diminished octaves. After the third recitative, a chorale with optional SATB chorus, even more grindingly harmonised but ending on a bare fifth, brings closure of a sort. The work was completed on 16 July 1969 and Bowman performed it that year at the Ashwell Festival in Hertfordshire, where Ridout was artistic director for five years.

The image shows a musical score for 'Prayers from Prison, Recitative II'. It consists of two staves: a Counter-Tenor (C-ten) staff and an Organ (Org) staff. The C-ten staff is marked 'mf freely' and contains a recitative line with the lyrics: 'O Ho-ly Spi-rit Grant me the faith that will pro-tect me from des-pair, from des-pair.' The Organ staff is marked 'mp' and provides a sustained triadic accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and ends with a double bar line.

Ex. 2a: *Prayers from Prison*, Recitative II.

$\text{♩} = c. 92$   
 C-ten *mp* *lightly*  
 O heav'n-ly Fa-ther, I praise and thank thee For the peace of the  
 night. I praise and thank thee for this new day.

Org *p* *rhythmically*  
 [Ped.]

*f* 8' 4' 2'

Ex. 2b: *Prayers from Prison, Aria II, bb. 6–12.*

### *Epitaph*

The following year saw Ridout's first work for the senior counter-tenor of his day, Alfred Deller (1912 – 1979): the striking *Epitaph*, written for performance at the 1970 Stour Music Festival. The medium of voice and string quartet, the twentieth-century equivalent of scoring for late sixteenth-century consort song, was to become a favourite of Ridout's, as it had been also for Warlock. Here it pays particular tribute to the early repertoire that Deller performed with such distinction. Ridout's text is taken from an impressive marble memorial on the west wall of the north chancel in All Saints' Church, Boughton Aluph, to one Amye Clerk who died in childbirth in 1631 (Fig. 1); other adjacent memorials to family members are similarly fulsome. In the transcription that follows, words omitted by Ridout are shown in square brackets.



Fig. 1: Memorial to Amye Clerk, All Saints' Church, Boughton Aluph, Kent  
(photographer: Andrew Plant).

SACRED  
TO THE PRETIOUS MEMORY OF  
AMYE  
WIFE TO JOSIAS CLERK OF ESSEX GENT. DAUGHTER TO  
JOHN MOYLE  
OF BUCKWELL, ESQ [& OF MARY HIS WIFE DAUGHTER TO  
ROBERT HONYWOOD  
OF CHARING IN COMT KENT ESQ]  
SHE LIVED  
31 YEARES, A FAYRE EXAMPLE OF VIRGINITY, WEDLOCK  
AND SINGULAR PIETYE.  
SHE DYED  
A HAPPY MOTHER OF 2 DAUGHTERS & ONE  
SON, WHOSE BIRTH CONVEYED HER  
TO A CROWNE OF GLORY  
IN YE YEARE OF GRACE  
1631 AUG 24

To th' tender trust  
of that sadd earth  
which gaue it birth  
We recommend this sacred Dust:  
The pretious oyntment of her name.  
That had no taint, that had no soyle.  
We keepe to oyle  
The wings of fame  
The higher storie:  
Of her rare soule  
The hea'uns enroule  
In sheets of glorie:  
If perfect good  
Did ere reside  
In comon flesh and blood,  
In her it liu'd: with her it dyed.  
Reader, tis thought or uniuersall mother  
Will hardly ope her womb for such another.

[Sub cruce tuta quies.]

The modest compass of *Epitaph* from a–c” reflects Deller’s own preference. Cast once again as a recitative and aria, the factual statements are largely declaimed on a monotone over strong pillars of aching harmonies. (Ex. 3a.) The Aria’s melancholy limping phrases hymn Amye’s virtues in alternating bars of 7/8 and 4/4, the keening syncopated fourths of the violins further blurring the barlines (Ex. 3b). Ridout’s resourceful orchestration draws four-part harmony from double-stopped viola and cello, with Amye’s ‘sheets of glorie’ evoked by shimmering *tremolandi*. Finally, earthly grief is quietened with gentle chromatic sighs and a consoling chord of C major, which acts as an unspoken response to the concluding Latin benediction that Ridout left unset.<sup>13</sup> *Epitaph* was temporarily forgotten after its premiere; following Deller’s death, his son Mark invited James Bowman to champion the work, and it was included in a concert at Stour celebrating Ridout’s fiftieth birthday on 29 June 1985. It also marked the composer’s sixtieth birthday on 10 January 1995 at St John’s Smith Square in a slightly expanded version for string orchestra, and was the principal stimulus for the CD on the Meridian label (see Discography).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ridout also omitted the Latin admonitions on the adjacent panel, adjuring the reader to consider mortality.

<sup>14</sup> The manuscript cover reads simply ‘Epitaph’. References to its fuller title, *Epitaph for Amye*, often omit the final ‘e’, as in the CD booklet, which unfortunately contains four other misreadings (not, of course, present in Bowman’s rendition), at least one of which may be attributed to faulty transcription from a faint dyeline score: ‘Clarke’ instead of ‘Clerk’, ‘sacred trust’ instead of ‘sacred dust’, ‘had no soule’ instead of ‘had no soyle’ [!] and ‘in her it dyed’ rather than ‘with her it dyed.’

**Recit.** ♩ = c.66

*mf*

C-ten Sa - cred to the pre - cious me - mo - ry\_ of A - mye Wife to Jo - si - as Clerk of Es - sex, Gen -

Vn I con sord. al fine *f* > *pp*

Vn II con sord. al fine *f* > *pp*

Va con sord. al fine *f* > *pp*

Vc con sord. al fine *f* > *pp*

- tle - man, daugh - ter\_ to John Moyle of Buck - well, Es - quire. She lived thir - ty one years, a fair ex - am - ple of vir - gin - i - ty,

Ex. 3a: *Epitaph*, bb. 1-11.

[♩ = c.76]

*mp* *espress.*  
To the ten-der trust of that sadd

*p* *V*  
*p* *V*  
*p* *V*  
*p* *V*

*mp*  
earth Which gave it birth We re-com-mend this sa-cred dust The pre-cious oynt-ment

Ex. 3b: *Epitaph*, bb. 26–35.

Within this measured syllabic response where every note counts, Ridout points each simple phrase with great care, such as in Ex. 3c: an arching contour encapsulating the subject's brief life.

In her it lived; With her it dyed.

Ex. 3c: *Epitaph*, bb. 58–60.

The glorious downland church of Boughton Aluph, admired by John Betjeman and John Piper, was used extensively by Deller as a recording venue, rescued from probable redundancy and became the principal venue of the Stour Music Festival. In due course, Deller and his wife Peggy were themselves laid to rest in its quiet churchyard, ‘sub cruce tuta quies.’<sup>15</sup> A tree planted by James Bowman on the occasion of a concert to mark Deller’s one hundredth birthday, a roundel similar to the memorial in Canterbury Cathedral, and some superb musically-themed stained glass by Léonie Seliger in the tracery of the south transept window (replacing the bomb-damaged original) combine to keep the great singer’s memory alive in the place that he loved.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Safe rest under the Cross.’ Deller’s gravestone, hardly less laudatory than Amye’s, reads: ‘Alfred Deller / Counter-tenor / 1912 • 1979 / A singer of unique quality / who gave his life to the / service of music / and Peggy / 1913 • 2006 / his devoted wife whose / kindness and generosity / touched the hearts / of all who knew her.’

### *Songs of Melancholy*

The counter-tenor Peter Giles was appointed to a lay-clerkship at Canterbury Cathedral in 1967, shortly before Ridout took up his post at the choir school. It was inevitable that they should meet, and in 1971 the friendship resulted in three strophic songs for voice and piano of the Renaissance poet Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 1542). *Songs of Melancholy* form one of Ridout's most immediately attractive works, whose unifying theme – the items are more contrasted than their tongue-in-cheek collective title might suggest – is particularly evident in the first and third.<sup>16</sup> Designed to be performed without a break, they comprise a sad meditation, an amusing scherzo in a syncopated 7/8, and a beseeching prayer for clemency. 'My lute awake' opens with arpeggiated chords suggesting the instrument, alternated with darker sonorities of augmented octaves over a slowly moving three-note bass. For the second verse, the augmented intervals are inverted to minor seconds, darkening the lute-like chords before they resolve in D major. The dancing accompaniment to 'When first mine eyes did view' is instantly appealing, a delightfully mocking counterpart to the singer's barely-suppressed fury, although the metronome mark seems a little cautious. The initial phrase is repeated three times, cadencing twice in G and then in A, interrupted by a four-bar chromatically-sliding sequence of E – E minor – D – D minor. The entire sequence is then at once restated with slightly varied figurations for the second verse. One of the composer's few excursions into comedy, its transparent harmonies, syncopations, and irregular time-signature may bring to mind some of Geoffrey Bush's songs to Renaissance poets, but Ridout need fear no comparisons (Ex. 4). Since this individual item is in print, one wonders why it has not established itself as a classic encore.

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<sup>16</sup> Three *Songs of Transience* for treble and piano, to texts by Hardy, Bunyan, and Theocritus, followed two months later.

*♩* = c.176

C-ten *mp* When first mine eyes\_ did view and mark thy faire\_\_beau-ty

Pf *mp*

*mp* to\_\_be - hold,\_\_And when mine ears\_\_ lis-tened to hark the plea- sant words that thou\_\_ me\_\_ told, I

Ex. 4: 'When first mine eyes' (*Songs of Melancholy II*), bb. 1–12.

The two opening chords of the ensuing 'Disdain me not', obsessively reiterated, underpin the entire song in resonant emphasis or silvery decoration. The rising phrase in the voice forms the material for the remainder of the line, whose arching phrases suggest a lute song, subtly ornamented. Resolution of the poet's pleading 'Mistrust me not till all be known / Forsake me not now for so new' arrives in the last bar; when, we assume, a mutual reconciliation has been reached. The first performance of these uplifting miniatures was given by the dedicatee Peter Giles with pianist Martin Renshaw on 25 March 1972 in St Peter's Church, Bridge, Kent.

### *O Dreams, O Destinations: Three Sonnets of C. Day-Lewis*

Cecil Day-Lewis<sup>17</sup> experienced a post-war decline in appreciation, but was a gifted and musical writer, and it is easy to see why Ridout, whose poetry library was

<sup>17</sup> The poet's son insists that the hyphen should be present, pointing out that his father tried to restore it after previously dropping it. See Sean Day-Lewis, *C. Day-Lewis: An English Literary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), xii. Ridout's title, originally lacking the hyphen, has therefore been amended.

substantial, should observe that he 'attracted me more than Auden, whose work I only came to appreciate later'.<sup>18</sup> Several compositions to Day-Lewis's words bear testament to this, notably *The Christmas Rose* for SATB and Organ (1961), and a cantata *Torrey Canyon* (1967) for Treble Voices and Harpsichord. However, Ridout's *O Dreams, O Destinations* – nos. 1, 4, and 9 from a sequence of nine exquisite meditations on the perception of time from birth to death – is undoubtedly one of his finest achievements, evoking the numinous with great beauty and sureness of touch. This exemplary alliance of composer and writer may be compared favourably with some of the responses of Howells to Walter de la Mare; it was certainly a happy chance that Ridout chose those texts of which the poet himself was most proud.<sup>19</sup> Completed on 30 December 1970, *O Dreams, O Destinations* crowned an exceptionally productive period: it was Ridout's twenty-ninth composition in a year that already included two cantatas, an extended choral sequence, and his fourth opera. Here, with accompaniment pared down to solo violin and cello, the composer's outstanding achievement is in marshalling his slender forces to mirror the barely-sensed awareness of an unborn child, progressing to the ecstasy and clear vision of maturing youth, and calm resignation at life's diminution. A further sense of temporal momentum is achieved through careful placement of the voice within the ensemble: it is generally the lowest line in the first sonnet (thus creating a transparent quality that naturally evokes a sense of freedom from earthly concerns), moves to the middle of the texture for the second, and becomes the highest for the third. The enchantment of the opening bars might scarcely be anticipated from the austerity of the notes as written, where harmonics (*pianissimo, con sord.*) materialise like faintly thrumming telegraph-wires in a heat-haze, and the deceptively simple vocal line suggests the untroubled breathing of a sleeper, gently

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<sup>18</sup> Ridout, *A Composer's Life*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> See Jill Balcon, ed., *The Complete Poems of C. Day Lewis* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), xiii. Poet Laureate from 1968 until his death in 1972, Day-Lewis wrote elegiacs to Elgar and Beethoven and regularly included musical allusions in his work: the early *Jig* and *Hornpipe* are driven by rhythmic patterns, *Cornet Solo* muses on the plaintive sounds of a street band, and the remarkable narrative *Flight to Australia* expresses the sounds of the rickety plane in instrumental similes. Francis George Scott and Benjamin Frankel also responded to his verse, and Day-Lewis's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (the Orpheus myth) was scored in 1988 by Geoffrey Burgon as *Nearing the Upper Air*, a dramatic *scena* in memory of Deller, for James Bowman and chamber ensemble.

rising and falling as warmer harmonies gradually permeate the pervading open fifths (Ex. 5a).

The musical score for Ex. 5a is set in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c.72$ . The vocal line (C-ten) begins with a rest for four measures, then enters with the lyrics "For in-fants, time is like a hum-ming shell" starting on the fifth measure. The vocal melody consists of quarter and eighth notes with grace notes. The instrumental parts include Violin (Vn) and Cello (Vc). The Violin part is marked "con sord." and "pp", featuring a tremolo accompaniment of open fifths (B and E) with grace notes. The Cello part is also marked "con sord." and "pp", playing a similar tremolo accompaniment in the lowest register. The dynamic marking "mp" is placed above the vocal line.

Ex. 5a: *O Dreams, O Destinations* I, bb. 1–10.

At the first mention of the distant sea, the lines coalesce on unison Bs spread over three octaves, followed by the faint roar of waves evoked from sonorous double-stopped fifths in the cello's lowest register. The vocal material is then developed over *tremolando* seconds, but Ridout reserves a particular magic for the last couplet, conjuring rich four-part harmony from two instruments, as he had done in *Epitaph*. Here, as the roots of the triads shift luxuriously by the distance of a third (or enharmonic equivalent), the grace notes now decorating the opening vocal line – written as acciaccaturas but surely intended as 'Scotch snaps' on the beat – impart a wonderfully Purcellian lilt to the phrase 'They are the lispng rushes in a stream.' (Ex. 5b).

C-ten *mf*  
They are the lisp - ing rush - es in a stream-

Vn *mf* *mp* *mf*

Vc *mf* *mp* *mf*

Ex. 5b: *O Dreams, O Destinations I*, bb. 56–60.

The second sonnet is a brief scherzo, deftly handled. The motif of open fifths is taken up again, now as a driving rhythm of repeated quavers in the cello, sonorously restless. To match the exultant wide-ranging declamations – the vocal compass of this movement, a twelfth, is far greater than the outer two – the violin's trills and cascades of scales (pure Phrygian on E), combined with a little motif of two rising seconds and off-beat double-stops, suggest the fires which cast 'the dreams that flickered on our cave', dancing into the distance as suddenly as they began. Ridout treats the third sonnet as three verses of four lines each, followed by a couplet, and his manipulation of the harmony is quite Brittenish: luxuriant triads polarised against a vocal line that is uneasy and yearns to take flight, the last note of each phrase often acting as an appoggiatura to the next harmonic change. It is an inspired response to the yearning of the poet 'to escape time' and pass beyond the confines of the world. The rich A major of the opening is at once disturbed by the singer's flattened sixth (F-natural), and wherever he roams the constantly fluctuating triads do not let him rest. By the end of the 'first verse', chords have been built on nine of the twelve possible pitch centres, and any sense of stability is fast dissolving (Ex. 5c).

C-ten  $\text{♩} = c.76$  *mp espress.*  
 To tra-vel like a bird, light-ly to view De-serts where stone gods  
 Vn *mp*  
 Vc *mp*  
 foun-der in the sand, O-ccean em-braced in a white sleep with land; To es-cape time, al-ways to start a new.  
*mf*

Ex. 5c: *O Dreams, O Destinations III*, bb. 1–19.

From line 5, with a nod to the singer's phrase 'always to start anew', the harmonic pattern begins again, in irregular durations but with the key centres in the same order. At the end of this 'second verse', there is a violent tritonal lurch from A to E-flat for 'Each is our wish', after which 'Alas, the bird flies blind' is underpinned by a chord of G-flat, the furthest possible key centre from the home key of C major that we will only realise is our destination in the closing bars. Eventually the voice alights on the note G, chanting against uneasy unison string lines three octaves apart that revolve around D-sharp. This note is eventually heard as an extended appoggiatura rising to E to become the third of C major (one of Britten's favoured tonalities for evocations of sleep/innocence),<sup>20</sup> rest being attained as the world recedes and the journey is over. James Bowman, its dedicatee, premiered the sequence at the

<sup>20</sup> One of the most sustained examples is the C major lullaby, 'She sleeps as a rose upon the night' of the Female Chorus in Act II of *The Rape of Lucretia*, opus 37 (1946), together with the pervading tonality in this opera; one of the most obvious is the pure triad of C major accompanying the word 'sleep' in Keats's 'Sleep and Poetry' in the *Nocturne*, opus 60 (1958).

Purcell Room on 8 February 1971, with violinist Roger Garland and cellist Timothy Mason. He displayed much advocacy for this score, later performing the songs with Christopher Hirons and Oliver Brookes and including them on the Meridian recording, while Paul Esswood also took them into his repertoire. On reception, Stanley Sadie observed 'pleasant, gently austere music, not specially characterful but sincere';<sup>21</sup> ten years later, Stephen Pettitt was a little warmer, finding 'discernible individuality [that was] fashioned with a fastidious ear.'<sup>22</sup>

### *The Pardoner's Tale*

In the meantime, Alfred Deller was nervously contemplating a return to opera. In 1969, as Norman Platt commenced battling with the Arts Council over the financing of his newly-founded Kent Opera, Ridout had received the company's first commission.<sup>23</sup> *The Pardoner's Tale*, to a libretto by Platt himself after Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a lightly-treated moral fable based on *Radix malorum est cupiditas* ('Greed is the root of all evil').<sup>24</sup> Scored for just five voices — counter-tenor (Death), mezzo (doubling Hostess and Apothecary) with tenor, baritone and bass as the three rioters (Young, Mean, Gross) — plus a dancer, its modest accompaniment of strings, harpsichord and percussion allowed it to be presented as a double-bill with Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. The harpsichord is sparingly used, mostly doubling the strings, and could almost be omitted apart from a brief solo passage where Young purchases the poison. The percussionist is required to play timpani and six other instruments, with a prominent part for xylophone to accompany the girl's dance. Roger Norrington conducted the first performance on 1 April 1971 at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 9 February 1971.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 25 September 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Ridout also wrote *Audit haec omnes: Flourish for Kent Opera* (for two wind choirs and percussion) for the company's celebration concert in 1990, an event for which Judith Weir produced her poignantly apposite, *Ox Mountain was Covered by Trees*. For a full account of the rise and scandalous fall of Kent Opera, see Norman Platt, *Making Music* (Ashford: Pemples Publications, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> It had at least two antecedents as an operatic treatment of Chaucer's story: Ned Rorem's *The Robbers* (1956) to a libretto by Marc Blitzstein and the composer, was first produced in 1958; Erik Chisholm's setting of his own libretto with fourteenth-century material forms the second act of his three-part *Canterbury Tales* (1962).

The orchestral introduction neatly encapsulates the entire drama in its first four bars, the rioters scrambling noisily into view, then whining mournfully together in triads as Death's mocking discordant laughter is heard on booming open strings underneath (Ex. 6). Much of Death's ensuing figurations, frequently hovering around a triad of B minor, are already present in his first tempting injunction: as the moral of the work, this is repeated almost verbatim at the end, with a small adjustment to allow the victor to gloat on a top B for 'rest'. The trap being sprung, the orchestra then reiterates its opening material as a clattering epitaph.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes Percussion (Perc), Harp (Hpd), and String sections (Vn I, Vn II, Va, Vc, Db). The Percussion part features a Xyl. (xylophone) with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c.132$ . The Harp part is marked with  $8'4$ . The String sections begin with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c.132$  and a dynamic marking of  $ff$ . The second system continues the string parts, with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c.69$  and dynamic markings of  $p$  and  $mf$ . The Vc and Db parts include a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking. The Vn I and Vn II parts end with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The Db part ends with a  $ff$  marking.

Hp

C-ten *DEATH mp*  
Do not cease from your search Un-til you find. And when you find You shall

Vn I *pp p pp*

Vn II *pp p pp*

Va *pp p pp*

Vc *arco p*

Db. *p*

Perc. *Timp.*

C-ten *f mp*  
won-der; Won-d'ring, you shall reach the King-dom, And in that king-dom You shall have Rest.

Vn I *p pp mf mp* *div.*

Vn II *p pp mf mp*

Va *p pp mf mp*

Vc *p mf mp* *div.*

Db. *p mf mp*

Ex. 6: *The Pardoner's Tale*, bb. 1–23.

With Deller assuming the pivotal role of Death, Ridout would undoubtedly have been aware of his unease as an actor. After creating Oberon in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), where his stature ill-suited the cramped stage of Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall, Deller's theatrical experience had been limited to playing Belshazzar's Prince in the mediaeval *Ludus Danielis*, with an expanded Deller Consort in Australia.<sup>25</sup> An unnamed colleague remembered that 'he looked magnificent, until he moved, and then it was all wrong'.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the crafting of Death as the serene centre of *The Pardoner's Tale* was perfectly tailored to the singer's strengths, his favoured compass and natural mien, and it must have been something of a personal relief to read of his 'exemplary' account.<sup>27</sup> It is regrettable that no audio record appears to have been made of any of the three original performances.

The swaggering ribaldry of the bawdy toppers (whose cries of 'Death shall die!' are a drunkenly merry premonition of John Donne's 'Death, be not proud') serves only to heighten further the honeyed tranquillity of their nemesis as he lures them to destruction: a detached Prospero-like figure, akin to Oberon in Britten's original conception. He also, of course, had written specifically for Deller's range and vocal colours; as a result, the singer's dreamily ethereal upper tones, quite unlike anything heard before or since, defined the perceived dramatic capabilities of the voice for many years, and influenced a procession of 'unearthly' roles. Styles and techniques have progressed so swiftly since then that Deller's sound now often appears to originate from a world quite as distant as that imagined by Tippett on 'discovering' him. Indeed, just over a year after the premiere of *The Pardoner's Tale*, Bowman's creation of the wildly histrionic Priest-Confessor in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Taverner* meant there was no going back, but it took other composers some time to realise that the floodgates were open.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Noah Greenberg's realisation was given under the auspices of the Adelaide Festival of the Arts on 9–21 March 1964, at Bonython Hall, University of Adelaide.

<sup>26</sup> Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller: A Singularity of Voice* (London: Cassell, 1968), 141, where the year of this production is given erroneously as 1965.

<sup>27</sup> Felix Aprahamian, "Vintage jests", *Sunday Times*, 4 April 1971. Aprahamian also commended Ridout's 'thoroughly professional' setting of a 'lively, pointed and quite tonal score'.

<sup>28</sup> Davies subsequently wrote a triple role for counter-tenor in his masque-like *Resurrection* (1987), created by Christopher Robson in the Stadtstheater, Darmstadt; but despite a recording for Collins

[Ridout's] music for *The Pardoner's Tale* has the pace and attack of an experienced composer ... Roughly speaking the style is that which Britten has forged for opera over the past 25 years. It is a language strong enough to take individual inflections and does so here ... Some of [Deller's] interventions, including the opening anticipation of his final welcome to the dead thieves, seemed too compressed to allow those familiar tones to warm up and flourish, but the longer ensemble as the climax of the action approaches brought some typically refined singing ... More serious, the teller being more interesting than the tale, is the absence of Chaucer's Pardoner himself, a villainous humbug with no intention of practising the abstinences he presses on his customers. With the second layer of irony stripped away little remains but a sardonic anecdote.<sup>29</sup>

The omission of the title character was also raised by Claire Seymour when reviewing the 2011 revival.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that Ridout feared the invariable comparison with Britten's Church Parables, particularly his third, *The Prodigal Son* (1968) which opens with the figure of the Tempter sowing dissension among the family; although Davies would soon forge a new style indebted to such models with the ritualistic spareness of *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1976).

### *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*

Norrington and his Kent forces revived *The Pardoner's Tale* in 1976, with Mark Deller as Death, and toured it to the Schwetzingen Festival that summer, where its double bill with John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* was broadcast (a recording

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Classics under the composer's direction, the work has never really recovered from its disastrous premiere. See Mike Seabrook, *Max: The Life and Music of Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1994), 224. Numerous stage works by others, together with a vast panoply of chamber pieces, have continued to confirm the increasingly virtuosic demands made on this voice type, notably those by Ligeti: *Le grand macabre* (1977), with Kevin Smith; *Akhnaten* (1984), with Paul Esswood; Finnis: *Thérèse Raquin* (1991), with Andrew Watts; Birtwistle: *Gawain* (1991) with Kevin Smith, and *The Second Mrs Kong* (1994), with Michael Chance; and Adès: *The Tempest* (2004), with Lawrence Zazzo.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Crichton, "Canterbury", *Musical Times* 112, no. 1540 (June 1971): 582, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/957469>.

<sup>30</sup> 'I would have welcomed both dramatic and musical expansion of this short, powerful work. One could almost imagine this church setting as a 'frame' for the Pardoner himself, who might address us from the pulpit, gleefully explaining how he is able to dupe pilgrims with his false papal relics and rhetorical prowess, before begging us to purchase such absolution.' Claire Seymour, "The Pardoner's Tale", *Opera* 62, no. 8 (August 2011): 976.

survives).<sup>31</sup> A third production was mounted at Stour on 17 and 18 June 2011, this time conducted by Mark Deller with Michael Chance as Death. Ridout recalled that another stage work planned for Kent Opera, on the Biblical subject of Jacob, foundered on disagreements with Norman Platt, who was again to have been the librettist.<sup>32</sup> However, it is appropriate to mention at this juncture that the composer returned to Chaucer in [Aprille] 1979, setting the first stanza of the *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* in modern English for the solo ATB trio of the Canterbury Clerkes (Peter Giles, Martin Renshaw, Antony Bussell).<sup>33</sup> Despite its independence of the opera, the shapely phrases of this mellifluous jewel-like miniature, just two and half minutes in duration, would be an ideal curtain-raiser. The first bars are essentially a decorated sequence of descending tonalities, from D minor, progressing by step through C, B-flat, A, and G minor/major (Ex. 7a). Two brief Purcellian solos for tenor and bass, with dotted rhythms, precede a more luminous passage in D major and – via a suitably queasy cadence for ‘when they were sick’ (Ex. 7b) – to a tranquil conclusion. Ridout’s scoring for this refined congregation of pilgrims is poised and effective, from the sweetness of the opening solo to the scrupulous employment of added-note voicing; but it is his sense of line, now with a pleasing lyricism and a distinctly personal approach, that succeeds admirably in evoking an earlier age by the simplest means. The work was recorded in May 1979 (see Discography), with the notable first public performance at Deal Castle on 30 June that year, at a concert to mark the Installation of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

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<sup>31</sup> Held in the archive of Robert Scott and introduced in French (further details unascertained).

<sup>32</sup> Ridout, *A Composer’s Life*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> The Clerkes were formed in 1974.

$\text{♩} = c.76$

*p espress.*

C-ten *p espress.*  
 When in Ap - ril the sweet showers fall And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all the

T *p espress.*  
 ...pierce to the root, and all the

Bar *p espress.*  
 ...and all the

veins are bathed in li - quor of such pow'r As brings a - bout the en - gen-d'ring of the flow'r.

veins are bathed in li - quor of such pow'r As brings a - bout the en - gen-d'ring of the flow'r.

veins are bathed in li - quor of such pow'r As brings a - bout the en - gen-d'ring of the flow'r.

Ex. 7a: Prologue, bb. 1–8.

*rall.*

C-ten *rall.*  
 quick to give his help to them when they were sick.

T *rall.*  
 quick to give his help to them when they were sick.

Bar *rall.*  
 quick to give his help to them when they were sick.

Ex. 7b: Prologue, bb. 33–35.

### *The History of the Flood*

On 25 April 1971 Ridout completed a six-part setting of John Heath-Stubbs's darkly satirical retelling of the story of Noah, tailored to the expertise of the King's Singers.<sup>34</sup> He appears to have chosen the poem himself and may have simply presented the score as a *fait accompli*, as the Singers' career was then in its infancy and they had little resources for commissions.<sup>35</sup> Ridout abridged the poem slightly, although Heath-Stubbs at once confounds familiar expectations in recounting a cramped and uncomfortable voyage, with a laconic observation that after forty days the passenger list had increased. His menagerie is short of the cosily appealing, numbering instead the green mamba, the cottonmouth, the alligator, the drowned and bloated bodies of the rich, and the persistent banging of nails; or are they gunshots? The composer does his best to charm but even though clarity must be paramount for such a wordy narrative to be successfully delivered at speed, there are few memorable moments, and the homophony of much of the writing restricts the characterisations that might have enlivened it. The two counter-tenors (Nigel Perrin and Alastair Hume in the original line-up) are, of course, fully integrated into the ensemble, but also have an unaccompanied *scherzetto*, a tiny entomological catalogue aria enumerating the coruscating clouds of insects. (Ex. 8).

[♩ = c.120] ← ♩ = ♩ →

C-ten I & II

And the in-sects in their hier-ar-chies: A queen ant, a king ant, a queen wasp, a king wasp, A queen bee, a king bee, And all the bee-tles, bugs, and mos-qui-toes Cas-ca-ded

*cresc.*

in, cas-ca-ded in like glit-ter-ing, mur-mu-rous jewels.

Ex. 8: *The History of the Flood*, bb. 48–63.

<sup>34</sup> It was begun in Detmold, West Germany, presumably on a holiday.

<sup>35</sup> Alastair Hume, email to author, 8 September 2021.

The premiere at St John's Smith Square on 12 January 1971 was followed by a broadcast on 12 August the following year, but the piece has rarely been heard since, and its definitive recording has not been re-released.<sup>36</sup> On one of its later outings, Gerald Lerner lamented that it asked 'so little of [the Singers'] resources of skill and imagination', and summarised the work as 'irritating'.<sup>37</sup> It may be that its sinister undertones, irritating or otherwise, contributed to its lack of longevity, but simple programming constraints were probably more significant, since there was usually room for only one contemporary work in a typical King's Singers' concert. As their star rapidly rose, it was Ridout's misfortune to be overshadowed by two major commissions premiered in the next few months: Richard Rodney Bennett's virtuosic *The House of Sleep* and Paul Patterson's equally masterly and universally communicative *Time Piece*. Nonetheless, *The History of the Flood* was still being performed in 1975 alongside Bennett's score, when *The Musical Times* opined that Ridout 'exploits colourful textures in an unashamedly humorous vein, providing an ideal foil for the more serious and taxing style of [*The House of Sleep*]'.<sup>38</sup>

### Creation

The 1963 premiere at Sadler's Wells of Malcolm Williamson's *Our Man in Havana* (after Graham Greene's thriller) had drawn particular admiration from Ridout: 'It seemed to me to have everything one could hope for in an opera: drama, vitality, colour and beauty'.<sup>39</sup> Ten years later, Ridout's *Creation*, an opera in seven scenes with a libretto by Patric Dickinson (1914 – 1994) drawn from the Genesis myth, contained all the attributes he had found in Williamson.<sup>40</sup> Ridout would surely have

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<sup>36</sup> See Discography.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Lerner, "Edinburgh Festival review: King's Singers at the Freemasons' Hall", *Guardian*, 22 August 1972. The remark may be tempered with Lerner's disparagement of Poulenc's *Quatre petites prières de Saint François d'Assise* at the same recital: 'so sentimentally harmonised that you might take them for parody.'

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Messenger, "North Wales", *Musical Times* 116, no. 1593 (November 1975): 998, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/958167>.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Anthony Meredith and Paul Harris, *Malcolm Williamson: A Mischievous Muse* (London: Omnibus Press, 2007), 146.

<sup>40</sup> Dickinson, a former classics scholar and an indefatigable and musical craftsman, was on the staff of the BBC for six years from 1942, where his pioneering work in raising the standards of broadcast poetry, particularly on the Third Programme, had long-lasting repercussions. His verse play *Theseus and the Minotaur* had been broadcast on the Home Service on 30 July 1945, with music by Leighton

known his scores for younger performers: *The Happy Prince*, *Julius Caesar Jones*, *Dunstan and the Devil*, and *The Red Sea*, the latter performed at Dartington in 1972 with simple costumes and audience participation; and the elder composer's influence on the language and general atmosphere of *Creation* may be discerned. This celebratory commission for the 1300th anniversary of Ely Cathedral fell to Ridout after Britten had declined it (being fully occupied with *Death in Venice*), and Arthur Wills, the cathedral's organist-composer, had been summarily passed over (as he continued to recall to the end of his life with no little asperity).<sup>41</sup> It was likely prompted by a chamber work that Ridout had completed in September the previous year for Betteshanger School, *The Creation* for Narrator, Children's Voices and Piano. The new work was dedicated: 'R.T.D. – in memory', a tribute to Robert Thurston Dart, who had died in 1971; Ridout studied with him privately and later devoted a chapter to him in his autobiography, acknowledging his significant support and regretting his sad end.<sup>42</sup> Local identification with the huge span of time being commemorated – the innate connotation being that Ely was at the centre of this *Creation* – enabled Ridout and Dickinson to demonstrate that riches were still to be mined from cherished notions of an idealised Edenic past. Such antiquity was noted by the reviewer of *Country Life*, who perceived Ely as a 'timeless mini-city caught in a trance between the wide skies of East Anglia and the black earth of the Fens'.<sup>43</sup> There are also further signposts to Suffolk. With the communal enthusiasm of a festival, an ecclesiastical environment, an orchestra of string quintet, piano and

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Lucas. Although Ridout made no mention of the poet in his autobiography, it is clear that the partnership was fruitful as they collaborated again on *Phaeton* (see below). Ridout also set Dickinson's little carol *Advent* in 1985 but nothing is known of their working methods.

<sup>41</sup> See Arthur Wills, *Full with Wills* (Brighton: Pen Press Publishers, 2006), 111. Such ecclesiastical anniversaries were often useful prompts: Ridout's opera *The White Doe*, to a libretto by Allan Wicks, was commissioned to mark the 1100th anniversary of the granting of the first Royal Charter to Ripon in 886, and first performed on 3 December 1986 by members of the Choir School there. Adam Green, one of the soloists, remembers Ridout's cheerful and encouraging presence (conversation with author, 20 August 2021). Thanks to the enterprising Abbey label, an LP with the original cast was made the following month (Alpha ACA 562), only the second of Ridout's choir school operas to have been recorded (*Children's Crusade* 1939 had appeared on Abbey – Alpha APR 170 – by St Edmund's, Canterbury in 1968 (see note 10 above). It tries hard but feels rather stilted, with too many *longueurs* and little of the sheer gusto of its nearest counterpart, Bennett's *All the King's Men*.

<sup>42</sup> Ridout's neo-classical *Suite for Clavichord* (1960) was also dedicated to Dart.

<sup>43</sup> Keith Spence, "Ely's New Creation", *Country Life* 154, no. 3964 (1973): 1737.

percussion, a quantity of pageantry for children as both actors and chorus, hymns for the audience/congregation, and even a touch of humour, *Creation* is undoubtedly beholden to Britten's *Noye's Fludde* and his earlier cantata, *Saint Nicolas*. Common to all three works is the perceived uniting of temporal perspectives.<sup>44</sup> Nicolas announces his arrival 'across the tremendous bridge of sixteen hundred years'<sup>45</sup> (comparatively close to the age of Ely) to stand among his present-day congregation, and it is their essential participation in both the cantata and *Noye's Fludde* that links the centuries. In *Creation* the same enthralling legerdemain is worked: God Himself is present so that the ancient story may be refashioned anew; moreover, the subject necessarily dictates that this Creator is not an intermittent spoken manifestation, but Ridout's most substantial role for the counter-tenor voice. Cohesive social enactments in *Noye's Fludde*, termed by Philip Rupprecht<sup>46</sup> as 'divine speech and ritual', are therefore as strongly perceptible in Ridout's more stylised work, which is closer to a staged oratorio with tableaux than an opera, the foundations of the Earth being laid in cumulative dramaturgical ceremonial, each Day rounded with chorale responses for the congregation to seal the covenant and reaffirm the status quo.

*Creation* received its premiere on 22 May 1973 under the then county music advisor Guy Ratcliffe (1935 – 2010), since it had become a production involving several schools. Subterranean octave Cs on the edge of hearing evoke the empty void; slowly, and with great awareness for the cathedral's resonant acoustic, a spaciouly-voiced triad is gradually outlined, and then a flattened seventh added. This chord does not, of course, act conventionally as a dominant seventh, nor do we hear it as such: instead, a Lydian fourth is superimposed on the harmony, generating an appositely Chaotic tritone, the F-sharp eventually becoming the principal note of creation, generating fragments of whole-tone scales in varying timbral manifestations, gilded with the sparkling glockenspiel. Although it is

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<sup>44</sup> The libretto of *Noye's Fludde* (1958) was largely drawn from the Chester mystery play, but that for *Saint Nicolas* (1948) was written by Eric Crozier (the recent librettist of *Albert Herring*), to whom Britten had loaned a copy of Haydn's *Creation* (1798) as a model. Therefore, although Dickinson's template has not been identified, some degree of propagation over the centuries seems highly probable.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Crozier, *Saint Nicolas*. Text (1948).

<sup>46</sup> Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21.

possible to discern some Delian influence put to quite different ends (the opening of *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* possesses a similarly Lydian-inflected line in precisely the same tonal centre), the major inspiration is likely to be Sibelian. Ridout does not mention the composer in his writings but the gestures and grandeur of *Tapiola* are palpable here on a smaller scale, as is its structural framework commencing with a chord of the seventh (which performs a similar harmonic function to Ridout's) before the onset of octatonic passages. Weaving through Ridout's thrillingly vibrant soundscape is the burnished voice of God, shaded with contours of plainsong, decorated with steely cantillations as Light is summoned, not by the throwing of some celestial switch but one phoneme at a time (Ex. 9a). Here perhaps, as atoms shimmer into existence, Dickinson reinterprets Christopher Smart's diverse alphabetical lauding: 'For I is identity... For L is Light... For L is Love and therefore he is God...'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Smart in his devotions makes considerable play with the Hebrew ל (Lamed, the equivalent of the English L), forming interlinguistic puns on *El*, a Hebrew name for God. See Karina Williamson, ed., *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*, vol. 1, *Jubilate Agno* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 75.

$\text{♩} = c. 60$

Glock

Pf

C-ten  
GOD  
*p*  
I, I, I, I,

Vn I  
*pp*

Vn II  
*pp* *pizz.* *p*

Va  
*pp* *p*

Vc  
*p*

Db  
*p*

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Glock

Pf

C-ten  
L, L, L, L, L, L, L, L,

Vn I

Vn II

Va

Vc

Db

Musical score for Glock, Pf, C-ten, Vn I, Vn II, Va, Vc, and Db. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The Glock part has a melodic line with a sharp sign. The Pf part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The C-ten part has a melodic line with a sharp sign and a fermata. The Vn I and Vn II parts have a melodic line with a sharp sign. The Va part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The Vc part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The Db part has a bass line with a sharp sign.

Musical score for Glock, Pf, C-ten, Vn I, Vn II, Va, Vc, and Db. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The Glock part has a melodic line with a sharp sign. The Pf part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The C-ten part has a melodic line with a sharp sign and a fermata. The Vn I and Vn II parts have a melodic line with a sharp sign. The Va part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The Vc part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The Db part has a bass line with a sharp sign. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *molto*, and performance instructions like *arco*.

The musical score for Ex. 9a consists of eight staves. The top staff is for Timpani (Timp.) in 3/4 time, marked *ff*. The second staff is for Piano (Pf.), also in 3/4 time, with a *ff* dynamic and a *sc.* marking. The third staff is for Counter-tenor (C-ten), with lyrics: "LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, Bright day, Bright day". The C-ten part features a *ff* dynamic and a *sc.* marking. The bottom four staves are for strings: Violin I (Vn I), Violin II (Vn II), Viola (Va), and Violoncello (Vc), all marked *ff*. The Double Bass (Db) staff is also marked *ff*. The string parts include *sim.* markings.

Ex. 9a: *Creation*, sc. I, bb. 64–83.

Scene II is a swirling watery meditation by a rather bemused Deity on the nature of being, echoed by the children's chorus: 'O heaven haunting mind of man / Inhabitant of Earth create / This heav'n within your heart / Be mindful of its need'. Later expediency might perhaps have pruned the rather inconsequential interludes in this scene, since even allowing for stage business or the *son et lumière* that accompanied the first production, the work takes some time to get going. In Scene III, following a three-verse strophic aria, God distributes the seeds, and agriculture begins to a dynamic march: 'Wheat for the vast Canadian West / Rolling plains of the East'. The children's prayer for fruitfulness is repeated by the chorus and then by full cast and congregation, thus forming the first of five sturdily-harmonised hymns or chorales that delineate scenes. All have original tunes by Ridout, none especially striking but possessing an innate robust dignity in the tradition of the

English Hymnal.<sup>48</sup> Some attempt is made at refreshing formulaic hymnology by displacing or delaying their expected modulations, but they arrest momentum of the story, their melodic ideas are repetitive, the word underlay is occasionally awkward and (as explained above) their structural functions very similar; meaning that in such a short work there are simply too many of them. Greater inspiration is found elsewhere, such as the naming of celestial bodies and the feting of variegated constellations in Scene IV. The audible flickering starlight declaring the glory of God is derived from the chords that underpinned the Creator's first words in the opera, while his joyous reflection, 'Is it not good?' – sequential phrases arching like the heavens, occasionally clashing deliciously with the restful triadic progressions in the strings – is particularly affecting. (Ex. 9b.)

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<sup>48</sup> Ridout had gained a particular appreciation of plainsong under the tutelage of Dart, later incorporating genuine examples into other works. Perhaps he chose not to do this in *Creation* for fear of obvious comparisons and avoided using existing hymns for the same reason.

$\text{♩} = c.72$   
**GOD**  
*mf*

C-ten  
 I shall look up to the fir - ma - ment of my heav'n. Sun,

Orch strings  
*p*

— moon, pla - net, star. Is it not good?

— Is it not good? To - night I shall sleep on earth.

Ex. 9b: *Creation*, sc. IV, bb. 155–187.

Living creatures make their first entrances in Scene V: the rippling introduction over a muted viola melody followed by divided strings supporting God's address to the waters is one of the most memorable passages in the work (Ex. 9c).

[♩ = c.60]  
Sus cym.

Perc

Pf

SOLO  
con sord.

Va

Perc

Pno.

Va

B.D.

Perc

GOD *mp*

C-ten

Wa - tery, ne - ver still, O sea, Ne - ver si - lent, sing to me.

div. con sord.

Vn I

*p* div. con sord.

Vn II

*p* div. tutti con sord.

Va

*p* div. con sord.

Vc

*p* con sord.

Db

*p*

Ex. 9c: *Creation*, sc. V, bb. 9–15.

Scene VI opens with a bold Waltonian march followed by Ridout's most vigorous writing for God, who summons the creatures between rising scales, blesses his work in expansive phrases, commands the universe with leaps of a tenth, and invokes the rain through a slower chromatic intonation. This soundscape eventually dissolves into a pianissimo chord of the thirteenth with additional flattened third and seventh (so employing nine of the twelve chromatic tones) heralding the conception of mankind. A reworking of material from the opening scene precedes Adam (young tenor) and Eve each echoing the word 'I' to confirm their creation in the image of God himself – an inspired touch – before a lullaby leads to the respite and subsequent celebrations of Scene VII. As with *Fludde*, the work ends with God's benediction, here a simple falling fourth (tonic to dominant) over a reiteration of the initial themes that are now transposed by several octaves, the repeated high Cs fading into the newly-created starry heavens.

It is clear that Ridout's brief was more than fulfilled. *Creation* enjoyed four performances at Ely, although the premiere appears to have been somewhat muted, with scant publicity, moderate attendance (the nave only half-full, transepts being used for changing) and a notably disinterested percussionist.<sup>49</sup> The Cathedral archives merely recorded the date, the school magazine, *The Elean*, ignored it entirely. Only *Country Life* hymned it, but the reviewer's comparisons with Britten's craftsmanship were a clear indication of Ridout's successful reimagining of myth through modernism.

In their *Creation*, the composer, Alan Ridout, and the librettist, Patric Dickinson, have not attempted to provide any kind of challenge to Haydn ... it is comparable to Benjamin Britten's *Noyes Fludde* in its combination of singable music with a touch of modernity and the infectious enthusiasm generated in everyone who takes part in it ... *Creation* had the incomparable setting of the octagon space below the central tower of the Cathedral, which gave the producer, Ray Smith, plenty of room to deploy his army of singing and dancing children ... The whole performance was dominated by the voice of God, definitively sung by the countertenor James Bowman. His effortless declamation, ringing out in the gradually darkening Cathedral, had a slightly sinister, magician-like quality, just right for the part, from the high voiceless humming at the beginning, through the

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<sup>49</sup> James Bowman, conversation with author, 9 August 2021.

emphatic statements of 'It is good' as each day's work is finished, to the key moment of the opera, when man and woman, newly created, take on a personal identity as they echo the single word 'I' sung by God. But this is after all a children's opera, in which niceties of musical style give way to the whirling, buffeting, arm-flapping children's chorus, symbolising light and dark in cloaks black one side and white the other, rotating like stars, waving handkerchiefs in a parable of growth as life begins, slanging each other as masked fish on one side and birds on the other.<sup>50</sup>

Bowman's pronouncements were indeed appropriately *ex cathedra*, since he presided from a throne in the magnificent building where he himself had been a chorister in the 1950s. When the work was heard again in 1976 at Wye Church as an independent production (a private recording survives),<sup>51</sup> Mark Deller as God followed the original direction by singing the role from the pulpit. On its third revival as part of the 1987 Stour Music Festival, conducted by Deller, the central role was taken by David James playing an active part in the drama. He had already sung Oberon with acclaim at Aldeburgh in 1980, despite an unsympathetic production by Christopher Renshaw.

### *Love Songs*

Comprising four poems of John Clare for counter-tenor and guitar, this cycle was completed on 6 November 1972, and first performed by James Bowman and Robert Spencer on 18 April 1973 at the Purcell Room. The composer particularly relished the opportunity to write for his dedicatee's sonorous lower register: the overall compass of the cycle is from F-sharp below middle C to the C-sharp a twelfth above. The first of these miniatures, 'Love's Pains', compresses ingenuity and craftsmanship into a mere thirteen bars (Ridout omits Clare's third verse), yet with the guitar restricted to an unadorned melodic line except for the four central bars, it is remarkable how much is suggested in so small a space. As with the Catullus setting of 1968, the opening material provides all the necessary material through inversion, transposition, or similar manipulations. We are plunged at once into the

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<sup>50</sup> Spence, "Ely's New Creation", 1737.

<sup>51</sup> Collection of Robert Scott.

anguish of lost love as the chromatic lines slowly rise: together they form major or minor thirds, the accompaniment buffeted by grace notes derived from the singer's lamenting appoggiaturas. The magical fifth bar, an unexpectedly full triad of G-flat major for 'This love was once a flower', is a sweetness following so hard on the sharpness that a true poignancy is engendered. When the guitar is once again reduced to a single line, Ridout allows no rest, often moving in sidesteps by thirds: for example, from G major to an enharmonic E major at bars 8–9, thanks to the A-flat (= G-sharp) in the voice. The final bar is particularly deft: the singer's B-natural is first supported by a single A-flat (implying G-sharp minor) oscillating to A-natural and back again; until the sounding of an open fifth G–D allows a pure triad of G major – an entirely logical resolution of the semitonal shifts that have driven the song – to appear, like a sigh (Ex. 10).<sup>52</sup> The workings are wholly at the service of the emotional heart of this first-rate little gem, a feature also noted by Hugo Cole, who considered the first two songs of the cycle 'almost perfect in their economy of means and sureness of touch'.<sup>53</sup> Alan Blyth was also effusive:

The aching void described by the first poem brought forth a beautifully apt response from the composer; so did the more neutral lines of the last. Only "I lay me down" seemed too cheerful for what is surely a bitter-sweet poem. Finely laid out for counter-tenor and guitar, these songs do not seek new ground but go over the conventional with a fresh tread.<sup>54</sup>

Ridout's simplicity of language is indeed apparent throughout this cycle, which is notably less angular than Walter Bergmann's Three [originally Four] Songs for Counter-tenor and Guitar written the same year (and revised in 1983) for Alfred Deller and Desmond Dupré.

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<sup>52</sup> This fluidity around a sustained note is similar to some of the chord-shifting already encountered in *O Dreams, O Destinations*.

<sup>53</sup> Hugo Cole, "James Bowman", *Guardian*, 19 April 1973.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Blyth, "Bowman/Spencer, Purcell Room", *The Times*, 19 April 1973.

♩ = c.56

*p espress.* *mp*

C-ten

This love I can-na bear it, It cheats me night and day; This love I can-na wear it,

Gtr

*p espress.* *mp*

It takes my peace a-way. This love was once a flow-er; But now it is a thorn,

*p*

The joy o' eve-ning hour Turned to a pain ere morn. This love, wrong un-der-stood,

*p* *p*

Oft turned my joy to pain; I tried to throw a-way the bud, But the blossom would re-main.

Ex. 10: 'Love's Pains' (complete).

The remaining three songs cannot best the first in inspiration or technique, but there is still plenty of interest. In 'I lay me down' the poet is constantly distracted by thoughts of his beloved, personified in the accompaniment with a *moto perpetuo* of running quavers in 12/8. Here, the basic material (repeated for the second verse) is rather undistinguished, but still indebted to the techniques of the first song, as may be seen in the chord progressions in the central section that move upwards by semitones, as well as the interval of a third on which the two parts usually join on each beat of the bar. 'I think of thee', a dirge for lost love, opens with a descending scalic passage over a drone note, a motif that Ridout revisited some seventeen years later in the first of his songs to Lucy Boston's poems (see below). This phrase is at once inverted for the vocal line, accompanied by parallel thirds, as the voice rises in pitch to match the poet's hopes, before being reworked in similar fashion for the pensive devotion of the winter months. 'Love lives beyond the tomb' (Ridout

omits the third and fourth of Clare's six verses) opens with the voice unaccompanied and is built on thematic fragments of the previous songs. The unresolved chord of the seventh in the accompaniment, highlighted by a telling use of the guitar's sonorous open strings, is not dissipated by the closing chord of G major in harmonics, perhaps suggesting that even enduring love cannot still the pains so eloquently mourned in the first song, nor that of earthly grief in parting. James Bowman found this group to be an excellent foil to songs by Purcell, and performed *Love Songs* widely and frequently with various instrumentalists, on one occasion in Cologny, Switzerland, with Matthias Spaeter.<sup>55</sup>

### C.3.3.

In August 1973, Ridout completed a monodrama on *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* for Counter-tenor, SATB Chorus and Wind Band, dedicated to the Kent Wind Society, directed by the distinguished flautist Trevor Wye. Ridout chose nineteen verses from Wilde's lengthy lament, allotting the majority to the chorus. It was supplemented with extracts from *De Profundis*, an extended letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, written by Wilde in 1897 towards the end of his two-year incarceration in ward C, third floor, third cell: whose numeric abbreviation was his mode of address while interned.<sup>56</sup> Well-contrasted, with powerful climaxes, the work is an imaginative response to the poet's ordeal, including an aleatoric passage for orchestra and chorus depicting the howling of the incarcerated. The unaccompanied soloist begins the entire work from the very depths of his register, suitably *de profundis* – it is possible that Ridout was acknowledging (consciously or not) Morley's verse anthem for alto, *Out of the Deep*, the vocal line of which also begins on the same low F. Within these bars may be

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<sup>55</sup> Depending on the accompaniment, Bowman's usual practice in solo recitals was to contrast Renaissance and Baroque works (often Dowland, Purcell, and Handel) in the first half with a varied programme of twentieth-century items in the second. As well as Ridout and the inevitable Britten, his interpretations of Howells, Gurney, Quilter, Vaughan Williams, and Warlock were all highly effective and moving, with a regular string of new commissions to lighten them. This built on Deller's approach and it is only comparatively recently that Romantic music has become a more frequent feature of counter-tenor recitals; however, this is surely as much a reflection on the varied types of counter-tenor *Facher* now flourishing as any specific desire to broaden the repertoire.

<sup>56</sup> Remarkably, the door to Wilde's cell (or, at least, what is believed to be the item in question) still exists. See Clare Barlow, ed., *Queer British Art 1861–1967*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 61.

seen the elements of the work: piercing minor seconds and a solo line built on sevenths and minor thirds with a predominant tritone. Unusually for Ridout, no metronome mark is given at first. (Ex. 11a).

C-ten

Orch

*p espress.* blame my-self ter-rib-ly As I

*mf*

*p cresc.*

*mf* sit in this dark cell, a dis-graced and ru-ined man, I blame my - self, In the per-turbed and

*mp 3 cresc.*

fit-ful nights of ang-uish, in the long no-no-ton-ous days of pain, it is my-self I blame.

Ex. 11a: C.3.3., bb. 1–17.

Ridout allows the voice to lead and pronounce, sometimes in unadorned solo lines, at other times accompanied lightly and often quite simply with solo woodwind or a group of the same instruments. This enterprising use of the panoply of available colours occasionally recalls the exoticism of Grainger's rich scoring, varying from three muted trumpets marking the Chaplain's biting hypocrisy, to six flutes *divisi* à 3 depicting the striking clock as the singer murmurs a dreadful litany of the hours. (Ex. 11b.)

[♩ = c.50]

Fl. I  
Fl. II  
Fl. III  
C-ten

*p*  
*p*  
*p*  
*p*

At six o'clock we cleaned our cells, at seven all was still, but the sough and

swing of a migh-ty wing the pri-son seemed to fill, for the Lord of Death,

*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*

I + II div. a 3  
III + IV div. a 3

with i-cy breath had en-tered in to kill.

*mf*

Ex. 11b: C.3.3., bb. 362–373.

A solo octet drawn from the main body and singing mostly in unison is required for a brief central quotation from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–6). Their lines, derived from earlier material, evoke plainsong in response to Carlyle's translation, who refers to stanzas 'sometimes chanted, sometimes in recitative'.<sup>57</sup> The concluding pages are particularly effective, comprising a furiously aggressive orchestral march that dissolves into a grotesque chorale, and a poignant

<sup>57</sup> J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. T. Carlyle (London: Chapman & Hall, 1907), 117. Ridout substitutes 'midnight' for 'darksome', 'waiting' for 'watching', and 'heav'nly' for 'gloomy'; and elsewhere inserts the occasional apostrophe (e.g., pris'ners) for smoother word-setting.

extract from the end of *De Profundis* underpinned by the timpani beating out the last syllables of recorded time. (Ex. 11c.) As the drummer-jailer marches the weeping prisoner away, we are put in mind of a milder yet still mesmeric alliance with the profoundly moving closure of Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969).<sup>58</sup> The premiere in Canterbury Cathedral on 23 February 1974 by Bowman and the dedicatees (augmented by members of the wind band at The King's School, Canterbury) under David Willcocks, was bolstered by an account of Tallis's *Spem in alium* in a sonorous arrangement by Wye for wind orchestra. Ridout had to wait until 15 November 1980 for a second performance, this time in the Shirley Hall at King's School, Canterbury, with Tom Emlyn Williams as soloist.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Once again, Ridout tacitly alters the wording, substituting 'Mankind' for 'Society'.

<sup>59</sup> Emlyn Williams has since become a tenor. The Kent Wind Society performed under Harry Newstone, then Director of Music at the University of Kent at Canterbury. C.3.3. was preceded by Offenbach and Holst played by the school band under William McConnell, and a lecture-recital, 'Drums of the Middle Ages' by the authority Jeremy Montagu, assisted by Trevor Wye.

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system includes parts for C1, Timp, B.D., C-ten., S.A., and T.B. The C-ten. part has lyrics: "Man - kind \_\_\_\_\_ will have no place for me, has\_". The second system includes parts for C1, Timp, B.D., and C-ten., with lyrics: "none to \_of-fer; but Na - ture, \_\_\_\_\_ whose sweet rains fall on un-just and just a-like will\_". The third system includes parts for Fl, C1, Timp, B.D., and C-ten., with lyrics: "hang\_ the night with stars so that I may walk a-broad in the dark-ness with-out stumb - ling, \_\_\_\_\_ and send the". The fourth system includes parts for Timp, C-ten., and Timp, with lyrics: "wind o - ver my foot - prints so that none may track me to my hurt: \_\_\_\_\_". The fifth system includes parts for Timp and C-ten., with lyrics: "she will cleanse me in great wa - ters, and with bit - ter herbs\_ make me whole.".

Key performance markings include *Solo*, *p*, *mp*, *mf* *espress.*, *[in.]*, and *rall.*

Ex. 11c: C3.3., bb. 464–end.

### *The Ecstatic*

Ridout would have been particularly moved by Cecil Day-Lewis's death in 1972, and chose to commemorate him in the writer's own *The Ecstatic*, an affecting celebration of a skylark's song. Scored for two counter-tenors, two recorders, and harpsichord, it is designed as a companion-piece to its model, John Blow's *Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell* (1696). The manuscript is dated 25 November 1973 and was first performed by Alfred and Mark Deller at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 4 March 1974 as part of the Redcliffe Concerts series, with David Munrow and John Turner (recorders) and harpsichordist Harold Lester. Rejecting both languid pastoralism and Messiaenic ornithology, Ridout pays tribute to the recorder's long lineage of avian imitation in pairing two descants (chirruping frantically in minor seconds and false relations) over brittle reiterations and rushing scales in the harpsichord: an effulgent exaltation (Ex. 12a). The birdsong ceases abruptly at the entry of the voices, interspersing even wilder rhapsodies before the unaccompanied voices return for the second verse (Ex. 12b).

$\text{♩} = \text{c.}112$

Rec I  
*ff ritmico*  
*tr*  
*sim. (stacc.)*

Rec II  
*ff ritmico*

Hpd  
*sim.*

*f*  
*f*

7 7 7 7

Ex. 12a: *The Ecstatic*, bb. 1–15.

[♩ = c.112]

C-ten I *f* *mf* *mf*

Lark, sky-lark, spill ing your rubbed and round Peb-bles of sound in

C-ten II *f* *mf* *mf*

*mp* *mp*

air's still lake, Whose wi-den-ing cir-cles fill the noon; yet none Is known so

*mp* *mp*

*f*

small be-side the sun: Be strong your fer-vent soar-ing, your sky-ward air!

Ex. 12b: *The Ecstatic*, bb. 65–96.

The sentiments of Day-Lewis's last verse perhaps inevitably evoke the consoling lines of Eichendorff's *Im Abendrot*, as set by Richard Strauss, and one might well imagine Ridout's score benefitting from an arrangement for strings. Here he avoids lushness, responding with simple diatonicism in the harpsichord and more expansive lines as the voices sink into tranquillity (note the Purcellian 'drops'), while the false relations and gentle pipings of the recorders resist the harpsichord's pure triads, their unresolved major second left hanging. There is only space for a brief quote from some of the composer's most atmospheric pages (Ex. 12c).

$\text{♩} = c.72$

Rec I

Rec II

C-ten I

C-ten II

Hpd

*p* *mp*

*p* *mp*

*p* *mp*

Cease not till day

*mf* *mp* *f* *dim.*

streams to the west, to the west, then down that est-u-ry drop down, drop down to

*mf* *mp* *p*

peace, to peace.

Ex. 12c: *The Ecstatic*, bb. 176–end.

## *Phaeton*

This one-act opera for radio with a libretto by Patric Dickinson drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was commissioned by the BBC and completed in 1975.<sup>60</sup> Phaeton, the mortal son of Apollo, the sun god, and Klymene, the water-nymph, demands to drive the chariot of the sun for a day. His father, having rashly sworn to grant him any request, is powerless to prevent the catastrophes that ensue when the boy loses control of the horses. Zeus is forced to intervene and strikes him down with a thunderbolt, leaving his sisters, now turned into trees, shedding tears of amber for him. The trees are given in Ridout's score as poplars (they might also be alders, according to Graves);<sup>61</sup> but by the time of the broadcast, and the publication of *Radio Times*, they had metamorphosed yet again into willows, presumably because of their more familiar association with 'weeping'. Dickinson makes a number of other alterations, replacing Ovid's Hours for a quartet of Stable Lads, and having Phaeton abjure his father's fiery-named horses for a four-in-hand of black beasts named Heartbreak, Storm, Night, and Death. Ridout's writing for strings, harp, and percussion (one player) is ingenious and mostly compelling, although the work would have benefitted from a little judicious pruning. If the first seven pages (Klymene's slow languishing for Apollo, accompanied only by solo viola and harp harmonics) are not to feel interminable, then considerable demands are made of the singer to hold the listener's attention without the aid of visuals. All the scenes follow each other without a break: the first is essentially a prologue discussing the birth of the title character, the second is seventeen years later, during which the goading by his rival Epaphos, son of Zeus, precipitates the tragedy. The closing pages of the opera are also rather protracted after the elegy of the trees, although this coda does allow the characters of Apollo and Klymene to become more fully realised.

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<sup>60</sup> Phaeton had already been depicted by Britten in 1952 as the second of his *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for oboe solo. In 1954 he discussed the possibility of an operatic updating with the writer William Plomer, perhaps to that of a boy incited into stealing his father's racing car and driving it to ruin; other myths suggested were the stories of Arion and Icarus, but none came to fruition. See Peter F. Alexander, *William Plomer: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 267ff. Ridout would obviously have been unaware of Britten's plans but the medium of radio nonetheless circumvented the ingenuity that would have been required to mount such escapades in Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin, 1955).

The sections are not really developed enough for the work to be classed as a number opera, but Ridout employs several reiterated phrases or patterns to generate cohesion. These include the grating chords emphasising Phaeton's series of disasters, and the opening watery viola solo with grace note inflections – although the latter's first four notes are almost impossible not to hear as a direct quotation of the opening of the first Sea Interlude of *Peter Grimes*, whose key it shares. The rhythmically urgent writing for the eager Stable Lads also recurs, supported by the two rising fifths (one perfect, one diminished, similar to the building-blocks of *Multas per Gentes*) of Klymene's cry for Apollo, now transformed into a repeated bass motif dislocated from the natural stresses of the time signature. (Ex. 13a.)

$\text{♩} = c. 132$  NARRATOR: The stables of the Chariot of the Sun, seventeen years later.

CLIMON *mp* It's dark, still dark! Keep the fires burn-ing!

SIMONIDES *mp* Out comes the cha-riot! Ax - les arc

THEOROS *mp*

greased! What will the new day bring?

Ex. 13a: *Phaeon*, bb. 183–196.

Ridout's resources are slender but skilfully exploited, the nightmare of Phaeton's wild ride conjured from little more than *legato* strings punctuated by galloping hoofbeats on bongos, with a few bars of *col legno* and tambourine to depict the exhausted horses. Discreet contributions from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop were effective aids to the soundscape, especially during the kindling of fire and preparation of harnesses. (Ex. 13b.)

$\text{♩} = c.52$

Xyl.

Perc

Hp

Phaeton

Vn I

Vn II

Va

Vc

Db

Electronic

Soft high band of white noise, fluctuating slowly in pitch, until 8:39

Hail! Hail! I'll show my fa-ther. Up,

up, Storm... Down there, the yel-low des-ert where no-thing grows... See them toil to-wards the green o-

Perc *Bongos (with sticks)* *Xyl.*  
*mp* *f* *ff*

Hp. *ff*

Ph. *Echo voice:*  
 Brothers we are lost,  
 the sun is close to the earth,  
 the wells are dry.

a - sis, I'll help it grow, down, down\_

Vn I *mp* *ff*

Vn II *mp* *ff*

Va *unis.* *mp* *ff*

Vc *div.* *mp* *ff*

Db *mp* *ff*

Ex. 13b: *Phaeton*, bb. 786–798.

In contrast to his mother's lyrical musings, the impulsive protagonist has nothing approaching an aria, certainly not one of triumph: he is characterised by short confident outbursts, brief arguments, and crisp interjections. They usually mirror the arc of his desperate journey, rising from the lowest part of the voice to moderate heights before returning; but his mortal life blazes briefly and is gone, leaving the mourning of the unaccompanied trees as his requiem. (Ex. 13c.) Once Apollo has ensured that all is prepared for the sun to rise anew, he reluctantly permits the distraught Klymene to return to the watery element from whence she came, their voices fading as darkness falls.

Tethys  $\text{♩} = c.63$  *mp*  
 Come down to the stream and see your pop-lars.

Poplars *mf*  
 We have no tongues to tell, We sis-ters of

Vn I *pp*  
 Vn II *pp*  
 Va *pp*  
 Vc *pp*  
 Db *pp*

Poplars  
 grief weep-ing... Wind in our leaves sing, Flut-ter-ing,  
 Flut-ter-ing, Like bu-ter-flies in a web, Pray for our bro-ther.

Ex. 13c: *Phaeton*, bb. 985–1004.

The opera received its first broadcast performance on BBC Radio 3 at 21:40 on 26 March 1977, with the following personnel:

- Klymene, a water-nymph: Maureen Lehane *mezzo*
- Apollo, God of the Sun: Neil Howlett *bar*
- Phaeton: James Bowman *counter-tenor*<sup>62</sup>
- Epaphos, son of Zeus: Tom McDonnell *bar*
- Akanthos, doorkeeper of the Palace: John Tomlinson *bass*
- Tethys: Jean Allister *contr*
- Four Willow Trees (Phaeton's sisters): Patricia Hooper *sop*, Penelope Clark *sop*,  
Christine Batty *contr*, Lesley Reid *contr*
- Four Stable Lads: Paul Hillier, David Wilson-Johnson, Peter Hall, Cyril Summers

<sup>62</sup> It was an amusing coincidence that Bowman had created the Voice of Apollo in Britten's *Death in Venice* (1973) and was now playing the Voice of Apollo's Son.

Voices from the BBC Repertory Company: Geoffrey Collins, Leslie Heritage, Jane Knowles, Joan Matheson, Valerie Murray, Jonathan Scott  
 Members of the Philomusica of London, John Willison *Idr*, Levine Andrade *va*  
 Special sound: Malcolm Clark of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.  
 Elgar Howarth *cond*

Alan Blyth remarked on ‘a simple, lyrical work of some dramatic power’ and praised Elgar Howarth’s ‘tightly conceived musical performance, bringing out the fastidiousness of Ridout’s scoring for small orchestra. Neil Howlett was a sympathetic Apollo, Maureen Lehane a voluptuous-sounding Klymene, James Bowman a forthright Phaeton. I hope the piece will soon be repeated’.<sup>63</sup> It was, but not until 16 December 1979.

### *Salve lux laetitiae*

A few months after *Phaeton*, Ridout completed a brief motet for the feast day of St Thomas of Canterbury, *Salve lux laetitiae*. The fourteenth-century sequence is not particularly common, and it is likely that Ridout’s source was the collection *Analecta Hymnica*.<sup>64</sup> His curiously mock-mediaeval miniature, with organum-like parallel fifths, was originally written for the lay clerks of Canterbury Cathedral shortly before the day in question (29 December); and while Ridout’s cathedral choral music is largely outside the scope of this study, the work was revised for the Canterbury Clerkes in 1979, with some simplifying of block chords.<sup>65</sup> However, it still remains sadly unmemorable, little more than a functional introit.

### *Soliloquy*

This neo-Renaissance setting of Campion’s ‘Tune thy music to thy heart’ from his *First Book of Ayres* (1613) was commissioned by Hinckley Music Club as a memorial to its charismatic president, David Munrow (1942 – 1976), and first performed on

<sup>63</sup> Alan Blyth, “Phaeton”, *Opera* 28, no. 5 (1977): 512.

<sup>64</sup> This text is 0935203b in:

[https://www.uniregensburg.de/Fakultaeten/phil\\_Fak\\_I/Musikwissenschaft/cantus/AH/Sequences.txt](https://www.uniregensburg.de/Fakultaeten/phil_Fak_I/Musikwissenschaft/cantus/AH/Sequences.txt) (accessed 20 September 2021). The author is grateful to Fr Abbot Xavier Perrin for drawing his attention to these volumes.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Giles, email to author, 17 September 2021. There remain a very few minor works of Ridout for men’s voices that have not been discussed here; see Scott for a complete list.

23 March 1985 at Holy Trinity Church, Hinckley by James Bowman, John Turner *recorder*, Christopher van Kampen *cello*, Robert Spencer *lute* and Keith Elcombe *harpsichord*. Ridout revised the work almost immediately, omitting the lute for practical reasons, and giving the treble recorder – Munrow incarnate – several solo passages. Nonetheless, this ‘melancholie galliard’ is also rather forgettable, redolent of a score for a masque that might have been reassembled from incomplete fragments. A mournful five-bar phrase for recorder recurs between an expressive cello line; the voice enters with the first segment of the recorder’s theme over chords replete with added-notes, mostly sevenths and minor seconds, giving the impression of viewing the past through a distorting mirror (Ex. 14). Reiteration of the opening material brings the work to a close.

The musical score for Ex. 14 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Recorder (Rec) in 3/4 time, with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c. 50$ . It features a melodic line with dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf* *espress.*. The middle staff is for Counter-Tenor (C-ten) in 3/4 time, with lyrics: "Tune thy mu - sic to thy heart; Sing thy joy with thanks and so thy sor-row." The bottom staff is for Harpsichord (Hpd) in 3/4 time, marked *sf only* and *p*, providing harmonic support with chords and some melodic fragments.

Ex. 14: *Soliloquy*, bb. 34–41 (cello part omitted).<sup>66</sup>

Despite the subsequent expert advocacy of Robin Blaze and John Turner,<sup>67</sup> it is fair to designate *Soliloquy* as an ephemeral *pièce d’occasion*, markedly less imaginative than such commemorations as Gordon Crosse’s *Verses in memoriam David Munrow* (1979) for the same forces. Part-writing is minimal, being reduced to imitative phrases, while the doubling of cello and recorder between verses lends an exotic air, reminiscent of a stereotypical soundtrack for a Far Eastern documentary. Ridout’s intention was laudable enough, particularly as Munrow

<sup>66</sup> The unorthodox beaming, implying 6/8 in an actual time of 3/4, is Ridout’s original, but is no more than a typical example of his idiosyncratic notation that habitually placed stems and tails on the wrong side of noteheads.

<sup>67</sup> See Discography.

himself had accepted a number of virtuosic scores from Lutyens and others to illustrate the expertise of his Early Music Consort of London, although these ventures also ran the risk of inadvertently highlighting the challenges of composing for period instruments in a contemporary idiom. Perhaps Ridout also realised that some rejuvenation was required, as he then largely ceased writing for counter-tenor until 1986, busying himself with orchestral scores, including three symphonies (his total now reaching eight), a ballet *Fisherboy*, and a good deal of church music. He also found time to deliver a posthumous tribute to Deller with *Le Tombeau de M. Alfred Deller* for Viola da Gamba solo (1982). A weak but mercifully brief setting from 1980 of John Marston's *Delicious Beautie* for Counter-tenor and Piano (inscribed on the cover, 'Jonny / with love / from Alan') is the only such essay from this period, and no further information concerning its history has come to light.

### *King Frost*

The New Zealand counter-tenor Geoffrey Coker had taken up a choral scholarship at King's College, Cambridge in 1971, where he received composition lessons from Ridout, afterwards studying with Paul Esswood at the RCM. After Coker's return to Wellington, he forwarded recordings of New Zealand music to Ridout and received a selection of scores in return, which he performed and disseminated as far as possible, including *O Dreams*, *O Destinations*,<sup>68</sup> *Epitaph*, the Clare cycle of *Love Songs*,<sup>69</sup> and an unaccompanied setting of Abelard's *Dolorum solacium* (David's Lament for Jonathan), suitably transposed.<sup>70</sup> Ridout also sent full scores of *The Pardoner's Tale* and *Phaeton* in the hope of revivals in New Zealand, but these came to nothing, being subject to prevailing nationalistic attitudes that favoured native composers over others. On one of Coker's regular visits to the UK, Ridout

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<sup>68</sup> New Zealand Public Radio studio broadcast (date not ascertained) with Zita Outram *violin* and Farquhar Wilkinson *cello*.

<sup>69</sup> Approximately ten performances in the early 1980s with guitarist William Bower on a tour of small towns around New Zealand, sponsored by New Zealand Railways.

<sup>70</sup> Originally for tenor. Coker gave the first Australian performance in the transposed version on 21 November 1979 at Druids House, Swanston Street, Melbourne for the British Music Society of Victoria; and the first Wellington performance on 19 August 1980 at the great timber-framed church of St Peter. On this second occasion he also sang the unaccompanied antiphon from *Prayers from Prison*, having given the New Zealand premiere on 4 July 1980 at St Paul's Cathedral, Dunedin. Ridout made another setting of Abelard's words for SSAATBB in 1982.

offered to write him a work along the lines of Britten's *Phaedra* (1975) and requested suggestions for a subject; a legend of King Arthur was initially considered, but eventually *King Frost* was completed in the bleak midwinter of 1986.<sup>71</sup>

The Russian figure of Ded Moroz or 'Grandfather Frost' has now largely been amalgamated with Santa Claus; but unlike St Nicolas, the benevolent foundation of much Western tradition, he was originally Morozko, an evil personification of ice and snow from Slavic mythology. The classic narrative is Nikolai Nekrasov's extensive poem in thirty-six parts, *Moroz krasnyĭ-nos* (*Red-nosed Frost*) of 1864, which invests the spirit with a dark unassailability, deepening to black malevolence. Ridout turned to Ursula Vaughan Williams for assistance, whom he had probably met through Howard Ferguson; her free translation is mostly drawn from Nekrasov's 31st Canto. In the 1886 edition of Nekrasov by Ticknor & Company (Boston), three fine engravings by W. J. Linton in the tradition of Thomas Bewick, or perhaps the Pre-Raphaelite associations of Arthur Hughes, give this king of shadows some degree of corporeality. Nevertheless, it is clear that the creature is no pantomime ogre, rather a dauntless and impersonal spirit of nature, an amoral Power unconcerned with the sensibilities of mankind. His minor counterpart in English folklore is Jack Frost, whose inherent threat as a denizen of Faerie has long been reduced to mere capriciousness, and it seems that Ridout's models were Oberon or the Erl-King, rather than the indomitable embodiment of pagan Russian winters.

Each tree around you is a guard I set  
To keep your way, and now that we have met  
They close around the path you must forget. [...]

I enter graves and closer shroud the dead,  
I freeze all hearts, I sleep in ev'ry bed,  
Strangle at birth thoughts waiting to be said.

My lash has broken lives and blinded eyes.  
My tyranny permits no hopes, no cries,  
Silence is where the captive spirit dies.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Geoffrey Coker, conversation with author, 30 March 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *King Frost*. Text (1986). It does not appear in her *Complete Poems* (Albion Music, 2003).

Given the translator, it is no surprise to find some influence in Ridout's score of *Sinfonia Antartica*. The persistent triple-time trudge and the falling instrumental phrase over the drone in Ridout's last pages (Ex. 15a) are especially redolent of Vaughan Williams's Prelude (*Andante maestoso*).

The musical score for Ex. 15a, *King Frost*, measures 211-214, is presented in a score format. At the top left, a tempo marking indicates a quarter note equals approximately 56 beats per minute. The score includes a C-tenor part with the lyrics "cries." and a string section consisting of Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The C-tenor part features a melodic line with a falling interval, while the strings provide a steady, rhythmic accompaniment.

Ex. 15a: *King Frost*, bb. 211–214 (wind doubling omitted).

Ridout reveals his bitter surroundings with care and an economic use of his available forces (which are, of course, far less extensive than Vaughan Williams's): double woodwind with a single bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, percussion, and strings.

I wrote it for the resources you specified (though I found just 1 bassoon a little odd) and I must say am very pleased with it. Ursula Vaughan Williams provided the translation. It's an austere piece but we both discussed the sort of work at some length and felt that it made an excellent subject for countertenor and orchestra.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Alan Ridout, letter to Geoffrey Coker, 17 December 1986. In the end, Britten's model was not adopted: Ridout's work is a *scena*, not a solo cantata. A second *scena* to Ursula Vaughan Williams' words, *Jacob and the Angel* for Soprano, Baritone, and Orchestra, was written in 1988.

Ridout's biting minor seconds and major sevenths, high keening flutes, icy harmonics, tritone-laden progressions, and shivering flourishes from woodwind and brass, are all stock-in-trade cinematic responses to bleak yet beautiful landscapes, effective enough in conveying a sense of numb desolation.<sup>74</sup> Other picturesque orchestrations include heavily-accented chords to point the sentient trees, timpani (outlining a triad of B-flat) reinforcing the demon's name, heavily ominous bass drum strokes, sustained strings highlighting 'the captive spirit', and so on. Vaughan Williams's score reveals a similar antecedent to Ridout's verse summoning the 'servant winds', which utilises *tremolandi, sul ponticello* strings, rising over a suspended cymbal roll to conjure freezing gales (Exs. 15b and 15c). It is also worth noting that the brief epigraph from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, with which Vaughan Williams prefaced this section of the symphony, includes the line, 'To defy Power, which seems omnipotent'.

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<sup>74</sup> Another filmic score indebted to *Scott of the Antarctic*, not apparently previously remarked upon, is that for the BBC's 'Doctor Who' story, *The Ice Warriors* (1967), by Dudley Simpson (1922 – 2017). Its opening shots of glaciers and snowy wastes are backed by solo wordless soprano, vibraphone, xylophone, and suspended cymbal, with added echoes by means of tape loops.

$\text{♩} = c. 56$

Fl *ff*

Ob *ff*

Cl *ff*

Bn *ff*

Hn *mf* *ff*

Tpt *mf* *ff*

Sus. cym. *p* *cresc.* *mp*  
 on the crown (hard sticks)

B.D.

C-ten *mf cresc.* *f*  
 My ser-vant winds - pur - sue both young and

Vn I *ff* *sfz* *cresc.* *mf*  
 sul pont.

Vn II *ff* *sfz* *cresc.* *mf*  
 sul pont.

Va *ff* *sfz* *cresc.* *mf*  
 sul pont.

Vc *ff* *sfz* *cresc.* *mf*  
 sul pont.

Db



[Andante maestoso ♩ = 80]

Sus. cym.  $\text{tr}$   $pp$

Vn I non. div.  $p$

Vn II non. div.  $p$

Va  $p$

Vc  $p$

Db  $p$

Ex. 15c: Vaughan Williams, *Sinfonia Antartica*, I (Prelude), at fig. 2  
(wind and brass omitted).

*Sinfonia Antartica* by Ralph Vaughan Williams © Oxford University Press 1953.

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Coker was obliged to copy all the parts himself before the first and only performance on 8 October 1987 at the Memorial Theatre, Victoria University of Wellington. This was the final concert of the academic year but was allotted only a single cursory rehearsal with a student orchestra under Peter Walls.<sup>75</sup> Ridout's metronome mark seems far too leisurely and was ignored, but general problems of balance had also not been completely solved, particularly with the brass, as may be ascertained from the archive recording.<sup>76</sup> The work still made a favourable impression on a knowledgeable group of staff, including David Farquhar (1928 – 2007), whose

<sup>75</sup> Geoffrey Coker, conversation with author, 30 March 2020. Unfortunately, Steven Rickards's entry concerning the premiere in his *Twentieth-century Countertenor Repertoire: A Guide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 245, is incorrect, as are several other listings concerning Ridout in this volume. It should be noted that Rickards gathered the information in good faith after the composer's death, and that Ridout's rather disordered lifestyle in his later years cannot have helped matters.

<sup>76</sup> Collection of Geoffrey Coker.

Eight Blake Songs for Voice and Piano received their first performance immediately following the Ridout; although several opined drily that, compared to the potency of *King Frost*, Blake's mere despondency sounded quite jovial.

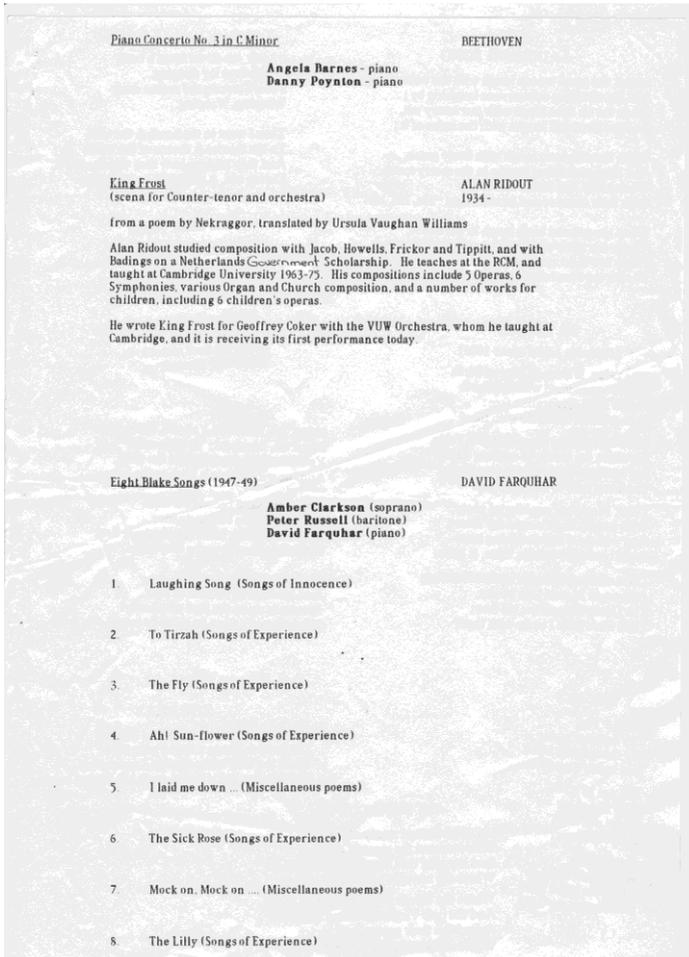


Fig. 2: Page from the programme of the first performance of *King Frost*, Victoria University of Wellington, 8 October 1987 (courtesy of Geoffrey Coker). Some idea of the haste pervading the event may be deduced from the misspelling of the poet's name.

Despite such an assured depiction of his glacial realm, the anti-hero himself is painted rather one-dimensionally, a predatory spectre reduced to palely loitering. For the most part his phrases are rhythmically unexciting where greater expansiveness is desirable, relying for much of their effect on the harmony surrounding them. A similarly measured line had well-served the plainsong-influenced voice of God in *Creation*, but the declamatory nature of that role, its dramatic accoutrements, and the calculated manipulation of sound in a large building all worked to quite a different end. It may be that Ridout had simply failed to ‘find the right notes’ (as Britten would have put it)<sup>77</sup> to express clearly and precisely what was in his mind; but since he professed himself highly satisfied with *King Frost*, it is necessary to examine his intentions more closely. Geoffrey Coker, who also found there was ‘not too much to sing’ in the work, recollected Paul Esswood’s account of *O Dreams, O Destinations* at the RCM when the singer was greatly impressed by them but (fresh from studies of Purcell) struggled to make anything of the texts as scored; while Ridout was equally captivated by Esswood’s virtuosity and musicianship but objected to his apparent desire to illustrate every word.<sup>78</sup> The composer’s principal concerns in *King Frost* were ostensibly very much those of Vaughan Williams: the evocation of atmosphere, the representation of emotions, the presence of an all-pervading oppression within a crystalline landscape. However, Ridout makes Frost himself a commentary on his own kingdom, so that a successful realisation must depend on a different measure of vocal theatre, allied to the charisma and qualities of the executant. James Bowman received a copy of the score at some point, but it proved difficult to programme in both the UK and abroad, and no further performances are known.

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<sup>77</sup> In referring to the composition of his solo song *The Birds* (the earliest work he personally allowed to be published), Britten remarked, ‘I had a terrible struggle with this before finding what has been called “the right ending in the wrong key”’. See “Britten Looking Back”, *Sunday Telegraph* (17 November 1963), reproduced in Paul Kildea, ed., *Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 250. Six years later, in a radio interview with Donald Mitchell for the CBC, the composer alluded to the commencement of the compositional process as ‘the kind of music it’s going to be rather than the actual notes, they come very much later.’ (Kildea, 323). See also Philip Reed, “Finding the Right Notes” in P. Banks, ed., *The Making of ‘Peter Grimes’* vol. 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), 79.

<sup>78</sup> Geoffrey Coker, conversation with author, 30 March 2020.

### *The Prism of Life*

Ridout's many fruitful years of dedication to the Anglican choral tradition at Canterbury should not be taken as proof of an unassailable conventional faith. By 1975, even while expressing his devotion to the mystical writings of all religions, he was still admitting to being 'unsympathetic to God-images, and doubtful about notions of life after death'.<sup>79</sup> Although this might be considered a conspicuously Holstian viewpoint, it is likely that Ridout would also have been sympathetic to the hopeful agnosticism espoused by Vaughan Williams.

In his sonnet *The Prism of Life*, John Addington Symonds regarded the phenomenon of splitting white light into a spectrum as an allegorical representation of man's sundered union with God, contending that it is only when the prism itself is broken that the diffracted light may resume its purity. Ridout's setting for voice and strings was completed on 1 October 1987 and intended as a prelude and companion piece to *Epitaph*, to which some of the scoring pays homage, particularly the *tremolando* passage for 'Break but that three-edged glass'. Notwithstanding the composer's proposition, this metaphysical meditation on eternity suggests a more effective placement would be as the second of a pair; but it may also be regretted that Ridout never contemplated adding lines by such as Traherne to form a triptych. *The Prism of Life* begins with an iridescent phrase on unison violins cushioned by lower strings, answered by its inversion. It is from this 'reflection' that the singer's 'All that began with God, in God must end' is derived, and it is echoed more closely at 'Rays of pure light'. The *divisi* scoring has some affinity with *King Frost* but opaqueness now yields to clarity and brilliance in the outer moments, contrasted with the warmer triads of the central section, melting subtly from one key centre to another like colours of the rainbow (Ex. 16).

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<sup>79</sup> Alan Ridout, "Composer in Interview", 7.

$\text{♩} = c.54$

C-ten  
Rays of pure light, which one frail prism may rend In-to con-flict-ing co-lours, meet and

Vn I  
*pp*

Vn II  
*pp*

Va  
*pp*

Vc  
*pp*

Db  
*pp*

kiss With ma-ni-fold at-trac-tion, yet still miss Con-tent-ment, while their kin-dred hues con-tend.

unis.

Ex. 16: *The Prism of Life*, bb. 22–31.

Once the *tremolandi* strings have underscored the destruction of the prism, the harmonies gradually recede until we are left once again with a unison violin line, fading to nothing as it ‘resumes through death the eternal unity’. A similar equanimity is found in the luminous *Lento cantabile* of his Second Quartet, completed a month later. The public premiere of *The Prism of Life* was given by James Bowman, its dedicatee, at Chartres Cathedral on 3 June 1994 with Ensemble Orchestral Harmonia Nova under Hervé Niquet, although Bowman had already recorded it for the Meridian disc.<sup>80</sup> Few better ‘prisms’ could be found than the

<sup>80</sup> The attributions in Rickards, *Countertenor Repertoire*, 247, are again incorrect.

Cathedral's glorious mediaeval stained glass, 'weaving pure light in flawless harmony'. There is little doubt that Ridout would latterly have regarded this miniature with particular affection, since it is in the confident expectation of a return to perfect completeness with God that his strengthened credo, indeed his Epitaph, may be discerned. But that time had not yet fully arrived; in the meantime, he tackled a much blacker and knottier text.

### *The Second Coming*

This is one of W. B. Yeats's most well-known visions and also one of his most disturbing, in which the equilibrium of the Christian era is about to be overturned by a ferocious new order. The timeframe from Christ's birth to the apocalypse is symbolised by the flight of a hawk, whose spiralling arcs have reached their maximum extension, and the poet now prophesies the advent of a terrifying apparition in a world where opposing polarities are heralding an unspecified apocalypse.<sup>81</sup> The relatively civilised medium of counter-tenor and string quartet might be thought a curious choice to narrate such a nightmare, and Ridout's moderate harmonic language placed him at a further disadvantage in illustrating it. However, he succeeded in emphasising Yeats's dream-like qualities, particularly in the procession through quivering heat-haze, even if this soft tread over wind-sculpted dunes became a gentle stroll rather than an approaching menace. (Ex. 17.)

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<sup>81</sup> Myfanwy Piper encountered the poem when wrestling with her libretto for Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), borrowing the phrase 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned' for the triumphant colloquy of the ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel.

[♩ = c. 58]

*mp*

C-ten  
some - where in the sands of the des - ert A shape with li - on bo - dy and the

Vn I  
*p*

Vn II  
*p*

Va  
*mp*

Vc  
pizz. *mp*

*p*

sim.

sim.

head of a man, A gaze blank and pi - ti - less as the sun, Is mov - ing its slow thighs, while

*cresc.*

*mf*

all a - bout it Reel sha - dows of the in - dig - nant des - ert birds.

*cresc.*

*mp*

*mp*

*cresc.*

*mf*

*mp*

Ex. 17: *The Second Coming*, bb. 53–62.

If the composer could do little to disentangle these ambiguities, he was not alone; but, as with *The Prism of Life*, difficulties of programming must have been apparent from the outset, and it is a pity that no larger home, such as a Yeats cycle, was found for this curiosity. The score, dated 19 July 1989, was written for a concert at

Blackheath Concert Halls on 30 March 1990, given by James Bowman with violinists Tina Gruenberg and Jacqueline Hartley, violist Andrew Byrt, and cellist Lionel Handy. When a small string ensemble was available at some later date at Stour, the composer added a double bass and divided the cello line in order to add resonance to the ominous march of triple-stops.

### *Whom Time Will Not Reprive*

Lucy Boston (1892 – 1990) is best-known for her superlative children's novels, particularly *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954), in which the transience and flexibility of her fictional worlds is reflected in the use of music as simile, instigator, historical reference, and narrative structure. Her only collection of poetry, *Time is Undone*, published at the age of eighty-five, is an anthology of twenty-five meditations in which silence, like a contemplative *leitmotif*, is induced habitually by name or as a consequence of the main theme and its aftermath. Paradoxically, although musical terms make significant appearances in the poems, Boston's most frequent use of such references is to evoke the absence of sound. The volume contains a subset of seven *Poems in Old Age*, and Ridout scored four of these for counter-tenor and viola in December 1989 as *Whom Time Will Not Reprive*. They were once again dedicated to Bowman who gave the first and only performance to date on 7 November 1993 at the London Lighthouse, Ladbroke Grove. The violist was Martin Kelly, then a principal with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. A strong influence on these soliloquies, particularly the ultimate song, is the plaintiveness of Vaughan Williams's *Ten Blake Songs for Voice and Oboe* (1957), a work also in Bowman's repertoire; but Blake uses clearly-sketched images to comment on universal ills and aspirations, whereas Boston addresses personal internalised grief. The first three poems in the cycle are not merely regretful or admonishing but unremittingly bleak, and really require greater space than Ridout has allowed them. While the ideas are assembled with care, the composer largely fails to penetrate the deepest gloom or match Boston's intensity of expression and fluidity of line. Moreover, the word underlay is somewhat idiosyncratic and unyielding in this cycle, perhaps because at least one song (the first) appears to be

fitted to already existing music. Nonetheless, Ridout was able to draw on his considerable experience in writing for Bowman's instrument, and the cycle is well-matched to his dramatic capabilities, flexible delivery, and vocal colours.

The first song, 'Chef Grison', marked in Boston's original as 'after Ronsard', is a reflection on the first of the elder poet's sonnets from *Le Second Livre des Sonnets pour Hélène*: 'Soit qu'un sage amoureux ou soit qu'un sot me lise / Il ne doit s'esbahir voyant mon chef grison, / Si je chante d'amour: tousjours un vieil tison / Cache un germe de feu sous une cendre grise'.<sup>82</sup> In considering the unexpected dawning of doomed love arriving too late and the despair of a potential lover trapped at the wrong end of time, Boston compares the last years of life to a 'decorous pavan'. Her original title of the collection, 'To my Love Weeping', recalls instrumental pieces and songs by Dowland, such as the 'Lachrimae' Pavan, and 'I saw my lady weep'. Ridout builds it around a descending figure based on a reworking of the material that opens the third song 'I think of thee' in the Clare cycle (the poetic sentiments are not dissimilar: Clare's mention of 'evening shadows grey' may have provided impetus for the appropriation). This motif is hammered out over a double-stopped drone, perhaps to point the weight of time on a heavy head, and divides the poem into two unequal halves, the second largely repeating the material of the first. An oscillating minor third (E-flat to C, *pizzicato*) as of the measured ticking of a clock, generates the momentum of the second song from which the set takes its title. Its opening bars showcase the dedicatee's resonant lower register, whose despairing text is highlighted by the imprecise tonality. Although seemingly in transposed Aeolian mode, the implied key centres a fifth apart (C in the viola, G in the voice) also suggests the voice to be really in transposed Phrygian: and this appears to be confirmed in the middle section where the voice takes over the key centre of C, and the flattened second (D-flat) of this mode is at variance with the natural minor of the accompaniment. 'Incommunicado', a slow lament built over a Purcellian ground bass, evokes a halting, half-forgotten waltz, again with a vocal line whose inherent emphases frequently cut across the triple time, curiously adrift.

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<sup>82</sup> 'Whether a wise lover or a fool reads me, he should not be astonished, on seeing my greying head, if I sing of love: an old smouldering log still conceals a germ of fire beneath grey ashes'. Pierre Ronsard, *Selected Poems*, trans. M. Quainton and E. Vinestock (London: Penguin, 2002), 49.

Ridout reserves his eeriest sounds for the central desolate lines beginning 'Lost is reality', amplified by tremolo *sul ponticello* to suggest the quivering cobweb. Perhaps the strongest is 'Farewell to a Trappist', whose richer lyricism comes as something of a relief after the preceding desolation. It opens with an unaccompanied vocal line (Dorian until the appearance of a B-flat in bar 7), soon joined by the muted viola that blossoms into triadic harmonies with Vaughan Williams-like sidesteps. To end, the instrument reiterates the initial phrase to which was set, 'This then is love, deep joy that you should be', now warmed by a consoling major third in the voice (Ex. 18). Once again, an affiliation with the *Love Songs*, this time the first (Ex. 10 above), is highly apparent.

♩ = c. 54

C-ten *mp*

In life-long, so-li-ta-ry thought Your wil-ling heart out of it - self will wreak the po - et's hea-ven that you

Va *pp*

seek, While I, an out-er sa-tel-lite caught, Dear love, see on - ly you, on-ly you.

*p*

Ex. 18: 'Farewell to a Trappist' (*Whom Time will not Reprieve*, IV), bb. 20–30.

## Monodies

Writing had always been an essential way of life for Ridout, but he appears to have had much less concern for performance as the years progressed. While the increasing simplification of his harmonic language threatened to imperil the overall quality, the sheer quantity of his continuing output is truly remarkable, especially given his uncertain health by 1990. This was a year of almost Schubertian fecundity, with forty-nine works, many with several movements, including two collections of nine carols each, a group of twelve pieces for recorder, a cantata, and a wind quintet; individually, they total well over one hundred pieces. Five monodies for counter-tenor solo were written in October that year, although two are lost: *By the*

*Light*, a setting of Richard Jefferies intended for Peter Giles,<sup>83</sup> and what was probably a translation of a Greek epigram by Meleager, *A Great Man*, intended for Mark Deller in memory of Alfred. Neither of these two dedicatees received copies, although it is probable that we need not mourn overmuch, since the majority of the remaining a *capella* pieces, although noted here for completeness, are extremely slight. *Jesus, I Adore Thee* is a very brief unbarred solo, beginning ‘Jesus, preaching good tidings to the poor’, most probably intended as a devotion at Mass; its dedicatee, Brian Davies, has not been traced. An ancient Irish prayer, *I offer Thee*, in rather evangelical mode, similarly displays Ridout’s growing commitment to modern Catholic liturgy. It was written for Michael Muchmore, sometime member of the Choir of St Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, and premiered by Steven Rickards at the University of Indianapolis on 20 October 1997.<sup>84</sup> Four very brief Whitman songs written for Rickards in 1994 (*To a stranger, We two boys together clinging, Here the frailest leaves of me, and Full of life, now*) are also disappointingly bland chippings from the workshop and remain unperformed. In some ways they anticipate Craig Urquhart’s intimate through-composed meditations on Whitman, but Ridout’s restrained lines are insufficiently engaging without accompaniment. Undoubtedly the best of these later solos is *Pibroch of Donuil Dhu*, beginning as a distant skirl from afar, gathering momentum as it marches inexorably to a robust conclusion. In contrast to its traditional tune in compound time, Sir Walter Scott’s fighting talk is here allied with a stirring reel, instantly memorable, whose melodic shape, Scotch snaps, harmonic implications, and decorative grace notes all evoke *piobaireachd*. (Ex. 19.)<sup>85</sup> As such, it makes perfect sense as an unaccompanied piece and would have well-complemented the vibrant vocal qualities of its dedicatee, Paul Esswood;

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<sup>83</sup> In the absence of evidence, one may only speculate that it was an extract from Jefferies’s prose-poem *The Story of my Heart* (1883), which contains many sensuous meditations on light.

<sup>84</sup> The prayer appears anonymously in various anthologies for both children and adults, but Ridout’s source is unidentified.

<sup>85</sup> Written by Scott for the collection of music and poetry entitled *Albyn’s Anthology* (1816), it supposedly refers to a skirmish led by Donald Balloch, who in 1431 defeated the greater forces of the Earls of Mar and Caithness at Inverlochy.



[♩ = c.108]

*mp semplice*

C-ten

The lit - tle drop of the Fa - ther On thy fore - head, be - lov - ed one.

Orch

*p* *mp*

Ex. 20: *Canticle of Joy*, Part One, IV, bb. 5–10.

The duet in Part 2, ‘The sun that warms you’ is taken from Eleanor Farjeon’s *The New Book of Days* (1941) where it is subtitled ‘a Russian proverb poem’. Ridout casts it in quintuple time with imitative lines and a unison ending for the soloists. The key centre hovers around the note B, hinting at both Hypolydian and Lydian; but though supported by consonantal harmony, the tonality is fluid, only fully established by the closing major chord. In Part 3, the ‘scherzo’, Emily Dickinson’s ‘Through the strait pass of suffering’ is driven by a marching Holstian bass, over which the soloists move mostly in parallel thirds. The movement closes with a lively duet to Rupert Brooke’s ‘Heaven’, describing not an earthly paradise but an aquatic utopia for fish. Part 4, a setting of *Veni Sancte Spiritus* translated by Brian Moore, S.J., begins mysteriously but rapidly gains momentum with a pounding accompaniment. Apart from a brief duet for the soloists, most of the supplications are left to the chorus.

Alan Ridout’s *Canticle of Joy* given its world premiere in Hereford Cathedral on August 25, made an instant and vivid impression as a work of great originality which knows exactly what it wants to say and how to say it. *Canticle of Joy*, the composer tells us, “aims to strike a blow, however inadequately, in favour of the angels of light.” [...] Ridout’s angels are not like Gounod’s, all sweetness and light, borne aloft by harps and much-divided strings; they are creatures of unpredictable and sometimes ferocious power. There is no padding, little word-repetition, and no graceful bowing-out at the end sections – Ridout says what he has to say, then stops. But the final *Veni Sancte Spiritus* builds up over a persistent bass *ostinato* figure to a perfectly timed ending.

Roy Massey (the festival director), conducted a clean, sharply defined performance, in which the Festival Chorus and the Bournemouth Symphony

Orchestra distinguished themselves in music that must have been a pleasure to sing and play.<sup>87</sup>

### *Saint Jean-Baptiste*

Ridout was received into Roman Catholicism in 1994 and became an oblate of Ampleforth soon afterwards. With an abiding love of almost all French composers (he had an unexplained aversion to Debussy),<sup>88</sup> Ridout's choice of Caen as his ultimate domicile would also have been at least partly influenced by the presence of its *Maîtrise* (choir school), founded by Robert Weddle in 1987, which still flourishes at the time of writing. As with Cathedral choir schools in the UK, a boys' choir is maintained, joined for certain services and concerts by twelve professional adult singers; and although the *Maîtrise* is integrated into the state educational system rather than being attached to a religious foundation, the spectacular baroque church of Notre-Dame de la Gloriette has been restored for use as a concert hall. On 19 December 1995 this saw the premiere of Ridout's short chamber cantata, *Saint Jean-Baptiste*, for Alto solo, Choir, Two Violins, Cello, and Organ, given by James Bowman and the forces of the *Maîtrise* under Weddle. The dedication implies a birthday gift ('à Jean-Baptiste Meurisse: pour Juin 24') and the biblical text, originally set in French but also given in English, is from Chapter 3 of St Matthew's Gospel. The scoring is flexible, since the strings may be omitted and the organ part does not require the use of pedals, so may be played on a keyboard, a substitution also sanctioned for *Canticle of Joy*. Regrettably, this work is a further response to the trend of populist church music then gaining ground: the harmony is almost entirely triadic, the choral writing feebly undistinguished, and even the alto's agitated central admonition in 9/8 (mostly cast as 3 + 2 + 2 + 2) does not disguise the overall paucity of invention. In the concluding bars, a soprano solo joins the counter-tenor in benediction over a C major chord, which is effective but does not go nearly far enough to redeem the preceding pages. Bowman was unimpressed, considering the composer to have become rather embittered in his later years. 'After he left England, it didn't really gel; he changed. I think he felt that he had not

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<sup>87</sup> Hugo Cole, "Music", *Country Life* 188, no. 36 (1994): 82.

<sup>88</sup> See Harding, "Alan Ridout", 46.

received the accolades that he deserved.<sup>89</sup> Something of this hardened attitude is to be found in Ridout's autobiography, and a brief correspondence concerning 'good and bad music' in *The Musical Times* also betrays a rather prickly carapace.<sup>90</sup> While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Ridout's conversion, part of it may well have originated in a deep desire to reconcile himself with a comparative lack of worldly acclaim.

### *Grain by Grain*

Some former inspiration had returned the previous month with *Grain by Grain* for Counter-tenor and String Trio, a setting of a poem by José Maria de Navarro (1896 – 1979) depicting the slow trickle of time through an hour-glass. A measured processional with a sighing motif in the violin punctuated by ominous *pizzicati* in the cello, this neatly-sculpted meditation has some affinity with Lucy Boston's laments for love separated by the years, but also advises that life should be enjoyed while it lasts. It packs much emotion into a small space, with an anguished depiction of the 'constricted glass', and some typically Ridoutian sidesteps (Ex. 21). One rather wishes for a few more musing bars to extend such a haunting envoi, although of course the work's very brevity may itself be part of its message. The dedicatee was Reiner Schneider-Waterberg, then a postgraduate counter-tenor in the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge; Ridout almost certainly met him through Howard Ferguson, a close friend of the singer, who also wrote for him. It appears that Ridout's piece was not publicly performed before the dedicatee changed from counter-tenor to baritone, and Ferguson later rewrote the accompaniment for piano.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> James Bowman, conversation with author, 15 September 2021.

<sup>90</sup> *Musical Times* 135, no. 1820 (October 1994): 607ff, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1003120>.

<sup>91</sup> See Howard Ferguson, *Music, Friends and Places: A Memoir* (London: Thames Publishing, 1997), 94. Schneider-Waterberg retrained as a baritone at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and later joined the distinguished German sextet Singer Pur.



faith was by then of a different dimension to the writer's customary fatalism. *In time of 'The Breaking of Nations'*, is for tenor; that for counter-tenor, *When I set out for Lyonesse*, is well-contrasted, progressing from untroubled geniality to meditative soliloquy. Under the sadly posthumous title, 'Remembering Alan Ridout', Martyn Hill and James Bowman premiered the cycles with Craig Ogden on 1 August 1996 in the glorious Georgian chapel of St Mary, Lulworth Castle, Dorset, along with a repeat performance of the four *Clare Love Songs*.<sup>93</sup> Bowman sang *Lyonesse* again at the memorial concert for Ridout at St John's Smith Square on 21 April 1997, and also at the Purcell Room on 12 July 2002 with guitarist Helen Sanderson.<sup>94</sup>

At the premiere, Martyn Hill also performed what is probably Ridout's closest thematic counterpart among twentieth-century cycles: Britten's *Songs from the Chinese* (1957), which addresses comparable topics of time and mortality with a similar acquiescence. Ridout's handling of the instrument remains confident but limited. He does not approach Britten's innovative writing, nor find any place for the athleticism of Walton's *Anon in Love* (1959), the angular gestures of Tippett's *Songs for Achilles* (1961) or even the dream-like sketches of Berkeley's *de la Mare* cycle *Songs of the Half-Light* (1964).<sup>95</sup> His musical watercolours are attractively subtle, unassuming but insightful, with hints of folksong. Unfortunately, the eponymous song that opens *Lyonesse* must be regarded as a miscalculation. The cycle progresses from delight to introspection and Ridout was no doubt attempting to establish a mood of innocence; but his breezy foursquare melody in the guitar's bright home key of E major, here spiced with a sharpened (Lydian) fourth, is a fatally insipid response to Hardy's vision, diluting its vivid otherworldly encounter down to

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<sup>93</sup> Ridout was aided in his selection of the poems by James Gibson, who introduced the concert and paid tribute. See David & Nancy Jones, "The Twelfth International Thomas Hardy Conference, Dorchester, 27 July–3 August 1996", *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 12, no. 3 (1996): 21.

<sup>94</sup> Bowman was not convinced by the fourth song, 'Faintheart in a Railway Train' and did not include it in any performances (it therefore still awaits a hearing), with the remainder treated as a collection rather than a cycle, presented in the following order: I, III, IV, VI, II.

<sup>95</sup> More closely akin than these latter three works is *The Palantine Coast*, subtitled 'Three Folkish Songs', by Ridout's good friend Bernard Stevens. First performed by Sophie Wyss and Kenneth Baker in 1953, the texts by Montagu Slater, including a moving nocturnal seascape, have some affinity with Hardy, and the piano accompaniments to their open-hearted melodies often suggest the guitar. The third song, in 12/8, might also be seen as a forerunner to the second of Ridout's settings of *Clare*, discussed above.

a carefree excursion. In comparison, Finzi's setting from *Earth and Air and Rain* (1936) possesses a thrilling accompaniment and miraculously quicksilver modulations that bring the traveller striding straight out of legend into the concert-hall with an overpowering immediacy that Ridout cannot begin to contest. Happily, matters quickly improve. 'Great things' was John Ireland's first setting of Hardy (1925), a drinking-song in the Warlockian mode, all chorus and clattering cyder-pots; and Ridout's tipsy roistering in 9/8 matches Ireland in conviviality and contemplation if not in decibels, his smaller-scale cordiality being also well-suited to the aside where the singer muses on the transience of things. Following naturally from this is perhaps the strongest member of the cycle, 'The Sun on the Bookcase', subtitled by Hardy, 'Student's Love-song'. This touching meditation is less defeatist than some of the poet's reflections and, notwithstanding Hardy's comprehensive corpus of work, it is curious that such an attractive little poem seems to have escaped the attention of other composers, particularly Finzi, who must have frequently contemplated the shadows of the apple-trees traversing his library at Ashmansworth. Ridout responds by employing the sweetness of parallel triads as a thoughtful delineation of the procession of dusk. He also borrows another initiative from his Clare cycle: chords of the instrument's open strings used as an imaginative illustration to the onset of night – an accretion of emptiness – before starry arpeggiated harmonics precede consolation (Ex. 22a).

[Moderato (♩ = c. 100)]

*p* *espress.* *cresc.*

C-ten  
Once more the caul-dron of the sun Smears the book-case with wi - ny

Grtr  
*cresc.*

*mp* *cresc.*

red, And here my page is, and there my bed, And the ap-ple-tree shad - ows

*mf* *f*

tra-vel a - long. Soon their in - tan - gi - ble track will be run, And dusk grow

*mf* *f*

strong And they have fled. Yes:

*mp* *p* *sul E* *port.*

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of four systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (C-ten) and a guitar line (Grtr). The first system starts with a tempo marking [Moderato (♩ = c. 100)] and dynamic markings *p* *espress.* and *cresc.*. The lyrics are: "Once more the caul-dron of the sun Smears the book-case with wi - ny". The second system has dynamic markings *mp* and *cresc.*. The lyrics are: "red, And here my page is, and there my bed, And the ap-ple-tree shad - ows". The third system has dynamic markings *mf* and *f*. The lyrics are: "tra-vel a - long. Soon their in - tan - gi - ble track will be run, And dusk grow". The fourth system has dynamic markings *mp*, *p*, and *sul E*. The lyrics are: "strong And they have fled. Yes:". The guitar line features various chords and textures, including a section with a quintuplet pattern.

Ex. 22a: 'The Sun on the Bookcase' (*When I set out for Lyonesse*, III), bb. 8–23.

Then come two poems that deal with sins of commission and omission. 'One Ralph Blossom Soliloquizes', in Hardy's humorously grim vein, is a nocturnal searching of a troubled conscience concerning past assignations, set to measured muttering recitative, sparsely harmonised until some degree of acceptance is attained. 'Faintheart in a Railway Train' is a similar outpouring of regret, this time for what might have been. A neat little ostinato pattern in quintuple time suggests the lumbering of the carriage; it stops for precious seconds as the beloved is sighted, but as soon as the train starts up, we know the moment has passed, the platform is receding and with it any chance of fulfilment. Eventually the singer arrives at 'Beeny Cliff', below which 'the opal and the sapphire' wash the Cornish coast where

Hardy courted his first wife Emma, and afterwards returned to mourn her early death. Ridout crafts a spacious lament with a sonorous accompaniment redolent of the incessant motion of the tide, richly harmonised with added seconds and sevenths. Over this, and derived from it, perhaps thereby implying that the singer and his beloved are now at one with the landscape, rides one of the composer's most yearning melodies, weaving in and out of the ebb and flow to sorrowful resignation (Ex. 22b). It is a memorably heartfelt conclusion to another work that well merits wider currency.

Lento (♩ = c.48)

C-ten

Gtr

Sul A...E...D...G

*p*

Sul A...E...D...G

*cresc.*

Sul D...A...G...D

Sul D...A...G...D

*mf*

*mp espress.*

3

O the o-pal and the sap-phire of that wan-der-ing wes-tern sea. And the wo-man ri-ding high a-bove with

Sul D...A...B...D

*p*

bright hair flap - ing free - The wo-man whom I loved so, and who loy-al-ly loved me.

Ex. 22b: 'Beeny Cliff' (*When I set out for Lyonesse*, VI), bb. 1–12.

Ridout died at his home in Caen on 20 March 1996. The funeral was held at St Thomas R.C. Church, Canterbury, with the homily given by a monk of Ampleforth Abbey, to which foundation all Ridout's books, manuscripts, copyrights and royalties were bequeathed. He was buried, as he requested, in a quiet corner of Wye churchyard under the same nameless cross that commemorated his mother. However, there were inevitably many enquiries as to his resting-place, and after

some ten years it was decided by his remaining family that a stone should mark them both (Fig. 3).<sup>96</sup>

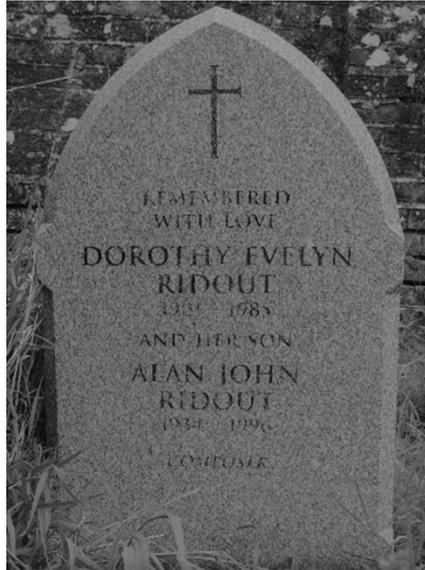


Fig. 3: Memorial to Alan Ridout and his mother,  
St Gregory & St Martin Parish Church, Wye, Kent  
(photographer: Andrew Plant)

## Evaluation

For all Ridout's fluency and assurance, it is almost inevitable that such an extensive output should result in an uneven legacy. The abiding impression is of melodic ideas conceived and fixed almost instantaneously within finely-crafted settings; sometimes he hit gold, sometimes not, but by then the next target was already in sight. While his scoring is always resourceful, well-tailored, occasionally inspired, wholly successful works such as *O Dreams*, *O Destinations* possess not only full integrity and a certain inevitability of form, but also longevity that continues to yield

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<sup>96</sup> Mark Deller, conversation with author, 4 August 2021.

fresh delights over the years, leaving the listener convinced that an indissoluble alliance of music and words has been gratifyingly achieved. In cases where this condition appears notably less apparent, such as several from Ridout's final decade, it should be remembered that Allan Wicks commented: 'Ridout had the technique to be simple, which is very difficult for a lot of people because of an obsession with notes'.<sup>97</sup> Even the composer's autobiography discusses his compositions only superficially, employing such deflections as 'it is part of the frailty of the human condition to bungle visions of perfection'.<sup>98</sup> This recalls his summation of Tippett's music, 'The flaws are the result rather of an imperfectly realized vision than of an inadequate technique',<sup>99</sup> and was seemingly as close as Ridout cared to get to personal analysis. If a degree of self-criticism be thought wanting, Ridout always maintained that his compulsively feverish pace was inescapable: 'Sometimes, under pressure from others who are disturbed by my fecundity, I have tried to check my production, but it has never proved a good idea, for illness usually follows'.<sup>100</sup> Harding perceived his nearest equivalent in outlook and prodigality to be Milhaud, a comparison that the subject evidently relished.<sup>101</sup>

Ridout was nonetheless hopeful that something of himself might be discerned in his works, but although one may observe certain fingerprints, such as the updating of older formats or structures, a single solo note acting as pivot to a subsequent harmonic twist, or some occasionally individualistic word-underlay, whether he attained a truly personal style is open to debate. Yet while he lacked neither livelihood nor commissions, few of the latter were forthcoming from major institutions, and the quantity of scores for educational and amateur markets may also have adversely affected his perceived standing. It is greatly to be hoped that modern techniques of digitisation, the miracles of notation software and the widespread adoption of desktop publishing – all of which Ridout would surely have

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Georgina Luck, "Choral Cathedral Music in the Church of England: An Examination into the Diversity and Potential of Contemporary Choral-writing at the end of the Twentieth Century" (MA thesis, Durham University, 2000), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2019/> (accessed 26 April 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Ridout, *A Composer's Life*, 120.

<sup>99</sup> Ridout, "The String Quartets", in Kemp, ed., 180.

<sup>100</sup> Ridout, *A Composer's Life*, 101; and *Composer in Interview*, 5.

<sup>101</sup> Harding, "Alan Ridout", 45.

embraced with alacrity – will eventually allow editions of much that is now languishing, leading to new performances to enthral fresh audiences and willing ears.

*To escape time; always to start anew.*

\* \* \*

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## Acknowledgements

Aside from Ridout himself, the central figure in this narrative is James Bowman, whose many premieres discussed here are only a fraction of the new works prompted by his artistry over some fifty years. Without his friendship and generosity in making numerous scores and memories freely available, this survey would not have been possible.

The copyright to all Ridout's works, published and unpublished, is now vested in Ampleforth Abbey Trust, the papers being housed at the Abbey and College Library of St Lawrence Abbey. I am most grateful to the Archivist, Fr Michael Anselm Cramer, for his patience with my enquiries over many difficult months, for providing copies

of scores and permitting the inclusion of all the music extracts. I am also indebted to the expertise of staff at the British Library, Cambridge University Library and the London Library.

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## Discography

### *Epitaph*

*O Dreams, O Destinations*

*The Prism of Life*

James Bowman, Downshire Players of London, Peter Ash. 1988. Compact disc. Meridian CDE 84158 © 1988.

### *The History of the Flood*

"Concert Collection". The King's Singers. 1976. LP. EMI CSD 3766. © 1976.

*Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*

*Salve lux laetitiae*

"Eternal Triangle". Canterbury Clerkes. 1979. LP. CMS NM 13. © 1979.

*Soliloquy*

"Remembering Alfred Deller". Robin Blaze, John Turner et al. 2014. Compact disc. Divine Art. DDA 25114. © 2014.

The Meridian CD also features Ridout's seven orchestrations for strings of English songs, specifically requested for the recording (very much in the tradition of Warlock, whose orchestration for string quartet of his own *Sleep* is included). As straight transcriptions rather than arrangements, they are neatly and sonorously done, 'Full Moon' benefitting particularly in its new sustained guise.

Howells: 'Full Moon' (from *Peacock Pie*) and *O my deir hert*

Vaughan Williams: *How Can the Tree but Wither?*, *Linden Lea* and *The Sky Above the Roof*

Warlock: *Love for Love* and *My Own Country*