

THE CHORAL MUSIC OF FREDERICK DELIUS

BY

DONALD GRAHAM CALDWELL

B.A., University of California, Los Angeles, 1965

M.A., Occidental College, 1968

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

in the Graduate College of the

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975

Urbana, Illinois

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

May, 1975

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS BY

DONALD GRAHAM CALDWELL

ENTITLED THE CHORAL MUSIC OF FREDERICK DELIUS

BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

Charles Hamm

Director of Thesis Research

Robert E. Bump

Head of Department

Committee on Final Examination

Charles Hamm

Chairman

Tom Ward

Essey E. Brown
Robert E. Bump

† Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I should like to express my gratitude for the generous assistance of several individuals in the preparation of this dissertation: to Bettina Sabersky for her help in Nietzsche translation; to Dr. Robert O. Dougan, librarian retired of the Huntington Library, for his help in library research; to my wife Eloise and my mother for their continued support and encouragement; and to Betty Hadden for her perseverance and hearty good nature during the typing of this work.

D.G.C.

PREFACE

"Had Frederick Delius never been born, it is doubtful whether the course of music history would have been changed significantly. His influence today is next to nothing; his fame appears dwindling and rests on several obscure orchestral tone poems seldom heard and known to but a few."

I wrote those words in an essay about Delius's *Mass of Life* in January of 1969. As I complete this dissertation on the choral works of Delius in 1975, it is pleasing to note that my remarks are no longer accurate. In the past six years a significant revival has begun, as evidenced by the release of a worthy number of new recordings, representing works only previously available on 78's or their LP reprints. Under the auspices of the Delius Trust, excellent new performances have been recorded of all the choral works, the operas *A Village Romeo and Juliet* and *Koanga*, and a number of lesser known orchestral works, establishing a substantive discography which represents a majority of the composer's output. Missing now are the more unfamiliar operas and performances of the bulk of Delius's songs. Especially gratifying in the United States Delius revival are the recent, highly successful Washington D.C. and New York performances of the operas *Koanga* and *A Village Romeo and Juliet*.¹

Although the popularity of Delius's music seems to be rekindling, it is his position in the eyes of musicologists, composers and performers which suffers from what I feel is misunderstanding and wholly inadequate appraisal. In most music history surveys, Delius is either omitted or referred to in the same breath with other "impressionistic" composers of the early twentieth century. "Delius ... represents the narrow kind of impressionism that composers growing up around 1920 knew best and fought against."² He is often called the last exponent of a decadent idiom which Schoenberg supposedly put in the grave - the exhausted chromatic legacy of Wagner. Delius's music has been criticized for its lack of form and organization, rhythmic variety, and melodic inventiveness. Machlis

v

describes him as:

...primarily a harmonist. He was concerned with chordal texture rather than counterpoint...he evolves free, flexible forms perfectly suited to his rhapsodic flights of fancy, and gave them poetic titles to suggest mood and scene.³

Delius's reputation and fame resides in a few short orchestral tone poems which have achieved some popularity. Most musicians are unaware that this is a composer of over eighty works, including six operas, fifty songs, four concertos, eight choral-orchestral works, and miscellaneous chamber and orchestral music. He was a composer whose vocal compositions embraced six languages and who after the highly successful premier of Part II of *A Mass of Life* at the Munich Tonkünstlerfest in 1908 was heralded by William Ritter in the *Courier Musical* as "le triomphateur de ces fetes."⁴ In a later article in the French paper *Lugdunum*, July 1908, Ritter makes an interesting comparison between Delius and Debussy:

Ce que Wagner fut à Weber, M. Delius l'est à M. Debussy. Plus complet, plus organique, plus fort, il est tout aussi subtil et multi-nuancé. Comme lui, il paraît vêtu d'arc-en-ciel dilué: une continuelle pamoison de délicats frottements d'accords nous chatouille délicieusement et, cependant, quelque chose de fort et de salubre règne dans l'ensemble, et l'architecture de l'oeuvre connaît une élévation à grandes lignes audacieuses et un plan large et aéré, mais ferme et défini. On sait d'où l'on part, par où l'on va, où l'on aboutit.⁵

[What Wagner was to Weber, Mr. Delius is to Mr. Debussy. More complete, more organic, stronger, he is both subtle and sensitive to nuance. Like him, he appears dressed in a diluted rainbow; a continual swooning of delicately shaded chords arouses us deliciously, however, something strong and healthy reigns in the whole, and the architecture of the work [*A Mass of Life*] presents an elevation in grand and audacious lines and a large and airy plan, yet firm and well defined. One knows from where one departs, where one is going, and where one will end.]

My own interest in the music of Frederick Delius stems from Philip Heseltine's remarks on *A Mass of Life* in his biography of Delius written in 1923:

This colossal work, without a doubt the greatest musical achievement since Wagner, a Mass worthy to rank beside the great Mass of Sebastian Bach, is as yet almost unknown, even to musicians and those who profess to be in touch with the most recent developments of the art.⁶

This comment from an author then unknown to me concerning a work about which I knew absolutely nothing was immediately intriguing. After considerable searching for little known scores and old dusty 78 recordings, I was able to become familiar with Delius's complete choral output. It is from this initial stimulus that the present study results.

I feel Delius has been most misunderstood in the area of musical structure. There is no denying Delius felt that the emotional response to a subject should provide the shaping of a musical idea. Likewise, it is true that he hated analysis and strict formal practices. However, possibly in spite of himself, Delius's music contains a wealth of structural detail. In addition to his exceptional gift of harmonic inventiveness, he possessed an innate sense of flow and structure. He employed threads of melody, rhythmic motifs and harmonic sequences which provided a very sophisticated motivic organization, the subtlety of which is usually completely missed by the listener or possibly perceived subconsciously. The intricacy and interrelationship of Delius's ideas can only be ascertained by a close examination of his scores.

My aim in this thesis is to expose through analysis the complexity of Delius's musical logic and sense of design as found in his choral works. I have attempted to examine the music for as much detail as possible in hopes of exposing compositional technique, sense of form and harmony, treatment of the chorus and orchestra, and sensitivity to text.

Because of the nature of his music and its associated subject matter, Delius makes little use of the traditional forms of 18th and 19th century music. Rather an analyst must search out the means of structure created by motivic repetition, textual association, and harmonic symmetry. Hopefully, the immense detail and complexity present in this study will serve to illustrate to the reader that Delius's music is indeed endowed with incredible structural detail and sophistication, the likes of which should impress the demanding

music theorist or musicologist who equates structural integrity with musical worth. Granted, Delius's musical idiom and its association with the twilight of decadent romanticism has limited appeal; however, lifted from historical context and evaluated for creativity and intellectual substance, the genius of the composer comes through. The agonizing note by note dictation process utilized by Eric Fenby and the paralyzed and blind composer to create an extensive work for double chorus and orchestra, has to illustrate to any skeptic an incredible musical facility ranking with the greats of music history.

In addition, I feel it is only through the full understanding by performers and conductors of structural details such as motivic priority, textual association, repetition and symmetry, and sensitivity to vocal color, that creditable performances of Delius's choral music can be achieved. Charles Kennedy Scott, the revered English choral conductor whom Beecham praised⁷ and to whom Delius dedicated his final part songs, makes telling remarks:

He never had much to say about the performance of his music. He seemed content to leave it to others, provided he could trust their competence... Special sympathy is required in the performance of Delius's work. It will not give up its secret by rough and ready treatment. It is so sensitive and refined that the performer must have a like attitude, particularly as regards beauty of tone. If he is not a poet at heart, he had better leave Delius alone. Delius's music is above all a music of 'distance', of background rather than foreground... It is the magic of colour, the stillness of far-off things, that entrance us; lively action, which must operate close at hand, scarcely enters.⁸

Footnotes

1. *Opera News*, July, 1972, p. 22, Reports: U.S., Washington D.C.

After Frank Corsaro's perceptive staging of Frederick Delius's *Koanga* for the Opera Society of Washington last year, the company reengaged him for the local premiere of the composer's *A Village Romeo and Juliet*. Presented at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. on April 30, it was nothing short of sensational... The Delius work will be performed in St. Paul in the summer of 1973 and in Seattle in September 1973.

2. William Austin, *20th Century Music*, p. 91
3. Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, p. 147
4. Philip Heseltine, *Delius*, p. 61
5. Ibid
6. Ibid, p. 113-114
7. Arthur Hutchings, *Delius*, p. 97
8. William Austin, *20th Century Music*, p. 90

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. DELIUS'S LIFE.	1
II. DELIUS'S TEXTS	8
III. SEA DRIFT.	18
IV. A MASS OF LIFE	53
V. SONGS OF SUNSET.	139
VI. AN ARABESQUE	173
VII. REQUIEM.	193
VIII. SONGS OF FAREWELL.	225
IX. APPALACHIA	242
X. A SONG OF THE HIGH HILLS	250
XI. PART SONGS	259
XII. DELIUS'S COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES.	280
XIII. CONCLUSION	294
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	297
DISCOGRAPHY	300
VITA.	301

I. DELIUS'S LIFE

Before beginning any analysis, a brief résumé of Delius's life and opinions concerning music may be helpful. His unusual background and his highly original ideas are vital in attempting to understand and evaluate his musical creations.

Frederick Delius was born of German stock in the transplanted environs of Bradford, England on January 19, 1863. His father, Julius, was a highly successful wool merchant and stern Prussian gentleman who ruled his family with an iron hand. His disgust with vulgarity, inefficiency and laziness, and his appreciation for art and fine living were deeply impressed on his children. The elder Delius also carried the social music habits of Germany into his home life. Chamber music was cultivated, and among those who played and were guests at the Delius home were Joachim and Piatti.

Of the twelve children in the family, Fritz, as he was called in his youth, was the rebel and ring-leader in all childish pranks. He was also the most outgoing and friendly. As a boy, he was a dreamer with a vivid imagination and a great passion for adventure and the out of doors. Like his older brother Ernest, he was very proficient at improvising at the piano. He loved to invent new accompaniments to well known songs and would go to great lengths to persuade anyone to sing a melody so that he might experiment. His formal musical education began with the study of the violin at age seven. One time when a professional violinist became ill, Frederick, then aged twelve, took his place and was considered by all (including Joachim) to be an excellent replacement. For him, music became a passion - the only thing of importance. Unfortunately, his father deplored the idea of anyone, let alone his own son, following music as a profession. The elder Delius was determined that his sons should follow in his footsteps in the wool business, and thus an obvious clash was to develop between two strong-willed individuals.

Delius's father made his musical son an apprentice to the wool trade and because of Frederick's gregarious nature sent him in 1881 as a representative to Germany and Scandinavia. Frederick was enchanted by the beauty of the Norwegian countryside and spent most of his time exploring. However, he did accomplish enough so that the trip was considered a success at home. Unfortunately, several other excursions in the next two years proved to be complete fiascos as Fred blithely ignored any business tasks and enjoyed instead sojourns in Norway, Paris, and the Riviera. He was continually reprimanded and the unending argument ensued over the idea of having a musician in the family. To ease tensions, Frederick suggested to his father that it was not in England where his fortune lay but rather in the United States where he could pursue his true vocation - that of a Florida orange grower!

His father, though he did not immediately acquiesce in this new proposition, was no doubt secretly relieved to find that the horrid notion of becoming a musician had been, for the time at any rate, abandoned; and after what seemed an interminable deal of discussion, hesitation and delay, it was finally settled that Fred should emigrate to Florida as an orange-planter. Investigations were made, letters of introduction procured and in March, 1884, he left Liverpool on the Cunarder *Gallia* for New York, proceeding thence by steamer down the coast to Fernandina in Florida.¹

Young Delius was immediately enchanted by the exotic qualities of his new surroundings and completely disregarded his responsibilities as a rancher. He was quickly captivated by the highly unusual character of the songs sung by the Negroes who worked his land, and his impressions of Solano Grove were later permanently enshrined in the *Florida Suite*, *Koanga*, and *Appalachia*, the latter "wherein the composer recalls the negro song with the refrain: 'Oh honey I am going down the river in the morning'."²

Fred was soon frustrated without a piano, and decided to go down-river to Jacksonville in search of one. There in a music store he made the chance acquaintanceship of Thomas Ward, an accomplished New York organist who had come to Florida to recuperate from an illness. This friendship proved

to have a profound impact on Delius's musical career. Ward immediately recognized Fred's natural harmonic instincts and offered to teach him the rudiments of counterpoint and analysis. Delius later commented:

As far as my composing was concerned, Ward's counterpoint lessons were the only lessons from which I derived any benefit. Towards the end of my course with him - and he made me work like a nigger - he showed wonderful insight in helping me find out just how much in the way of traditional technique would be useful to me. And there wasn't much. A sense of flow is the main thing, and it doesn't matter how you do it so long as you master it.³

With Ward's hearty encouragement, Delius decided he must pursue a career as a composer. (Unfortunately Ward never lived to share in his pupil's success.) After a brief stint as the "celebrated Professor Delius", music instructor for the fair young ladies of Danville, Virginia, he finally persuaded his father to allow him to go to Leipzig where he could enroll at the conservatory. (Delius's competency as a violinist is apparent as he supposedly played quite successfully the Mendelssohn Concerto while in Danville.)⁴

Upon arriving in Leipzig in the summer of 1886, Delius began his studies with Hans Sitt and Carl Reinecke. During his student days he heard Brahms and Tchaikovsky conduct performances of their own works and met Busoni and Edvard Grieg, through whose deepening friendship he further cultivated his enthusiasm for Norway and the Norwegian language.

After the eighteen-month course of study, Julius demanded that Fred end his frolic and return to Bradford or have his monetary allowance cut off. Fortunately for Delius, Grieg, during a trip to London in support of his own music, was able to persuade Julius, who held the Norwegian composer in high esteem, that he did wrong in denying artistic freedom to his son. Thus influenced, though not convinced that music was a life for a gentleman, the elder Delius cut Frederick's allowance to a subsistence level and gave him his blessing to go to Paris to follow his musical whims.

This "blessing", however, was in name and money only. The alienation

4

between parents and son grew, and neither Julius nor Else, Frederick's mother who survived her husband by nearly twenty-five years, would admit that they had a son who was a famous musician. The subject was never discussed in the family circle, and neither parent ever expressed in public any feeling of pride in Frederick's musical accomplishments. Music was just not the trade of a professional man.

Delius now settled in France and made Paris his home until 1896. His acquaintance with a Norwegian artist, Jelka Rosen, (who he eventually married in 1903), resulted in his establishing a residence at Grez-sur-Loing which became his home for the rest of his life; in this rustic seclusion his greatest works were written. The year 1899 marked the first time Delius's music was heard in England. On May 30, in St. James Hall, he presented a three-hour program of his own music in a concert arranged and paid for by himself. To quote Percy Young:

The reaction to this concert was that which has since become typical of the English towards "modern music." The (reasonably large) audience was polite; the critics having nothing to work on, were generally perplexed by the alternating languors and asperities of a harmonic idiom that seemed to stem from no legitimate antecedents, and by the generally exotic flavor. They stood firm on the sole assumption that the composer had something to say, but were not sure they understood his method of saying it. *The Yorkshire Post*, however, displayed an exceptional warmth: "The hearty force and intense life of the music are, however, such that it is with a feeling of patriotic pride that we are able to say that Mr. Delius was born and brought up in Yorkshire."⁵

It was eight years before the name of Delius again appeared before the English public. In the intervening period, able to live independently on his own and his wife's legacies, he composed a number of major works which won limited but influential support in Germany. The greatest stimulus to Delius during this period was probably the work of Frederick Nietzsche, with which Delius had become acquainted several years before. Although Delius later disclaimed complete agreement with Nietzsche's principles, it is obvious that their influence was immense at this time in his life. He had found a written

creed for life with which he could agree, and he had little difficulty identifying himself with Nietzsche's "Höheren Menschen". The bulk of Delius's greatest works date from this period, and the opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, his setting of Walt Whitman's *Sea Drift*, and Part II of *A Mass of Life*, based on sections taken from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, all had successful premiers in Germany.

A cheering and significant event marked the beginning of 1906; the first performance of *Sea Drift*. This was under the auspices of the Tonkünstler Verein and took place at Essen under the direction of Georg Witte... This event definitely established his [Delius] reputation in Germany and he became, together with Richard Strauss, the most admired composer of the day. Pamphlets and articles about him began to appear, demands for his music poured in from many sides, and best of all, he found a publisher [Harmonie].

In 1907 a program of Delius's music took place at Queen's Hall, London, conducted by Cassirer, and the English were again reminded "...of the limits set on their musical appreciation by the academic and otherwise restrictive conventions that prevailed."⁷ *Appalachia*, which was originally composed in 1896 but was now in a revised version which included a choral finale, had a profound effect upon its listeners. For the young conductor, Thomas Beecham, it was an electrifying experience and a most important one for the fate of Delius's music. In his biography of Delius, Beecham writes:

Like every other musician under thirty years of age who was present at the performance of *Appalachia* in November, I was startled and electrified. Here at last was modern music of native growth in which it was possible to take pride and delight. I formed the unshakeable resolution to play as much of it as I could lay my hands on whenever I had the opportunity...⁸

Beecham's total commitment to the music of Delius secured its performance in England for the rest of Delius's life. After the 1909 premier of the complete *A Mass of Life* Beecham continually included the composer's music in his programs, and in 1929 singlehandedly arranged a four-day Delius festival in Queen's Hall.

The final chapter of Delius's life is the most depressing and yet the most illustrative of his total commitment to his art. When World War I broke

out he was forced to leave Grez for a short while. Upon his return, Delius began a *Requiem* in memory of "young artists lost in the war," which was inspired by Nietzsche but made use of a text written by himself. In its London premier in 1922 it was received with mixed reactions.

Sometime during the following year, Delius began showing symptoms of a strange paralysis which by 1924 had left him completely paralyzed and blind. His creative life would have ended had it not been for the great efforts of Eric Fenby, a British youth who, upon reading of Delius's plight, came to Grez to help him continue his composing. Miraculous as it may seem, Delius dictated, note by note, three major works. His last composition was the poignant, eighteen-minute *Songs of Farewell* for double chorus and orchestra on a text by Walt Whitman. Delius died in 1934, never once giving up his determination to live for life's greatest joy - that of creating.

1. Heseltine, p. 13
2. Hutchings, p. 16
3. Ibid, p. 47-48
4. Thomas Beecham, *Frederick Delius*, p. 31
5. Percy M. Young, *A History of British Music*, p. 536
6. Beecham, p. 135
7. Young, p. 537
8. Beecham, p. 149

II. DELIUS'S TEXTS

Delius's choice of texts and his method of setting them represent curious and yet revealing characteristics of his musical language. A certain insight can be gained by noting the philosophical consistency displayed by his texts. Fenby comments:

Writers on art are consistently drawing attention to the preoccupation of certain artists with some central theme which recurs throughout their work. For instance, the Mother and Child theme which dominates the inspiration of Henry Moore. Similarly with Delius. This record contains music which illustrates varied aspects of the theme from which he rarely strayed whenever he set words to music; a theme which possessed him increasingly from his early opera *Koanga*, through the choral works *Appalachia*, *Sea Drift*, *Songs of Sunset* to *An Arabesque* - the transience of creaturely love, its partings, frailties and separations.¹

A corollary to this theme is illustrated in two other large choral works - *A Mass of Life* from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and *Requiem*. Although the text of the latter was written by Delius himself, with some Old Testament references, it clearly shows the influence of Nietzsche. Heseltine comments:

The message of Zarathustra is the same as the message of Hermes Trismegistos and of [William] Blake:

"Thou art a man - God is no more;
Thine own humanity learn to adore."

And - "Jesus Christ is the only God, and so are you and so am I." It is the great "yea-saying" to life, the realization that change and death are only apparent, that joy is in the end deeper than sorrow, though weeping may endure for the night of time, and that all seeming discords are but the components of a greater harmony.²

Another aspect of Delius's choice of texts is illustrated in Beecham's commentary:

Apart from the thought contained in any literary work, poetry or prose, Frederick valued above all else the virtues of clarity and simplicity. This is evident in his choice of subjects where the use of English words is involved, as in *Sea Drift*, the *Idyll*, *Songs of Sunset* and the lyrics of Jonson, Herrick and Shelley. The rich and ornamental utterance of Swinburne, for example, fatigued his ear, in seeming to hinder that easy and instant perception of the point of a lyric allied to music, which for him was essential to its rapid comprehension on the listener's part.³

All the poets selected by Delius were his contemporaries, and their

poetry is rich in imagery and subjective illusion. Included are Walt Whitman, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernest Dowson, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Arthur Symonds, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Discussed in light of the compositions in which Delius used their poetry, some background on these writers helps to illustrate their similarity of outlook which so attracted the composer. A further consideration, and a bit perplexing, is Fenby's comment concerning the role of Jelka Delius in the selection of her husband's texts:

From 1895 onwards, with the exception of the text of the *Mass of Life*, which was selected from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Fritz Cassirer and the composer during a holiday together in Brittany, the composer's wife chose almost every word that he set. Whenever she came upon a poem that matched the mood of that sad longing which she had first sensed in his improvisation, she copied it out and left it on his desk. Sometimes, she told me, the music he played was so poignant that she thought her heart would break.⁴

Obviously, it is impossible to know to what extent Jelka helped or influenced Delius in his arrangement of textual material. One can only examine the original poetry and see how it appears in the resulting composition. Jelka was, however, specifically responsible for the translation into German of all non-German texts. (This was necessary for publication by Harmonie.)

Sea Drift - Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Delius's interest in the works of Walt Whitman probably stemmed from his stay in the United States. His method of setting Whitman's text here is typical of that used in other works - the poetry is not used in its entirety, but rather sections are isolated and chosen for their best adaptation to his musical purpose. Hutchings writes:

To find out what Delius wanted from Whitman, we should notice the difference between his and Vaughan Williams's selections from the series of poems entitled *Sea Drift* in the poet's *Leaves of Grass*. Vaughan Williams took three of these for his *Sea Symphony* - an exultant work which swells our pride in the *Song of all seas, all ships*, our solemnity in contemplation of the ocean at night, our delight in the play of winds and waves. Delius's aim is not a sea symphony, nor, directly, the evocation of any mood of the sea which affects the onlooker. The positions

of man and ocean are reversed. The composer is concerned with a boy's first contact with the drama of separation, his first awareness of the fact of death, as he watches and "translates" the mating, nesting and happy life of two sea birds, until one of them fails to return... The sea is always there, but the work is not a seascape.⁵

Sea Drift illustrates Delius's sensitivity to a text which would exactly fit his musical conception of "the transience of creaturely love."

A Mass of Life - Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Delius's acquaintance with the works of Nietzsche resulted in a strong influence on the composer's own philosophy of life, as well as on his musical style. Fenby, who detested Nietzsche's influence on Delius, writes:

Already as a youth, when he had left Bradford on his first visit to Florida, Delius was at heart a pagan. A young mind, such as his, that had been nurtured chiefly on detective stories and penny dreadfuls, was not likely to forget that incident he had witnessed in Bradford when Bradlaugh had stood, with his watch in his hand, calling on his creator to strike him dead within two minutes if He existed! Delius had never forgotten that two minutes.

When, one wet day, a few years later, he was looking for something to read in the library of a friend...and had taken down a book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* - a book for all and none - by Friedrich Nietzsche, he was ripe for it. That book, he told me, never left his hands until he had devoured it from cover to cover. It was the very book he had been seeking all along, and finding that book he declared to be one of the most important events of his life. Nor did he rest content until he had read every work of Nietzsche that he could lay his hands on; and the poison entered into his soul.⁶

A capsule version of Nietzsche's philosophy sheds great light on Delius's outlook on life. According to Menckhen:

Nietzsche believed that an ideal human society would be one in which these two classes of men [the Apollonians who stood for permanence and the Dionysians who stood for change] were evenly balanced - in which a vast, inert, religious, moral slave class stood beneath a small, alert, iconoclastic, immoral, progressive master class. He held that this master class - this aristocracy of efficiency - should regard the slave class as all men now regard the tribe of domestic beasts; as an order of servitors to be exploited and turned to account.... He believed that there was need in the world for a class freed from the handicap of law and morality, a class acutely adaptable and immoral; a class bent on achieving, not the equality of all men, but the production, at the top, of the superman.⁷

The superman's thesis will be this: that he has been put into the world without his consent, that he must live in the world, that he owes nothing

to the other people there, and that he knows nothing whatever of existence beyond the grave. Therefore, it will be his effort to attain the highest possible measure of satisfaction for the only unmistakable and genuinely healthy instinct within him: the yearning to live - to attain power - to meet and overcome the influences which would weaken or destroy him.⁸

Remarks made by Philip Heseltine concerning *A Mass of Life* propose that the Nietzschean writings had other than a philosophical attraction for Delius.

...one need not emphasize the fact that this work is not an attempt to set philosophy to music, "as it has been foolishly described. It is Nietzsche, the poet - an incomparably greater man than Nietzsche, the philosopher - who has been drawn upon for the text; one might almost say Nietzsche, the musician, for when his creative imagination soars highest his very words "aspire towards the condition of music," seeking to express a wider significance than words alone can ever convey. Nietzsche, the philosopher, is often at variance with himself as well as with the world, but Nietzsche, the poet-musician, is at one with the great mystics of all the ages. And Delius is, indeed, a pantheistic mystic whose vision has been attained by an all-embracing acceptance, a "yea-saying" to life. Such a mind has become so profoundly conscious of the life of all nature that it has begun to perceive the great rhythms of life itself: so that all things seem to live and have their being in itself, filling it with a sense of such deep peace and beauty that the conditions of separate existence in the self become intolerable to it.⁹

As mentioned earlier, Delius was aided in the selection of the text for *A Mass of Life* by Fritz Cassirer.

It was to him that Frederick first communicated the plan of creating a wholesale work founded upon *Also sprach Zarathustra*, but confessed to finding himself in some difficulty over making suitable selections from the text of this extraordinary and monumental work. This was a task very much after Cassirer's fancy, and upon his offering his assistance, it was arranged by the pair that they should take a bicycling trip through Brittany in the coming August, leaving their respective wives at Grez. It was during this excursion that they solved a knotty problem by a simple process of devastating elimination, chiefly owing to Cassirer's insistence that what mattered vitally was a musical counterpart, not so much of the text of the work, as of its prevailing character. He expresses himself with some force on this point:

'As Zarathustra is not composed thematically an analysis in this case would be nonsense.... These analyses in music are the height of platitude: don't you take any part in them; my aim is the pure and simple rendering of the mood of the poem.'¹⁰

Regarding the English translation of *A Mass of Life*, a disagreement with his publisher, Harmonie, in 1909 brings to light the difficulties Delius experienced in presenting the first complete performance of the work. Beecham's

lengthy account is most interesting.

Just as unreasoning was the question of an English translation for the same work, which could be sung before a British audience without creating either amazement or hilarity. 'Harmonie' had not only employed a wholly inefficient person to undertake this task but had actually printed his version in both the full and vocal scores. Fully convinced of this gentleman's fitness for the task, they were now endeavouring to foist it upon me. [Beecham was to conduct the performance.] This I naturally opposed and engaged the best man I knew in London to provide me with something that could be both sung and understood. This was William Wallace, one of the most versatile figures of the day, and I make use of three of his letters to Frederick on the subject, for further clarification of the issue. The first is dated April 6th, 1909:

'I have gone through the Bernhoff text, word by word, and I am convinced that it will stand in the light of your success if it is printed in its present form. The critics are paying special attention to the words nowadays, and the revival of Berlioz's *Faust* is entirely owing, as I think I mentioned, to the fact that the new English text is intelligible and singable. I have nothing to gain in this matter. All I want to see is your work having a chance. But I am certain that its present text would be an obstacle to performances in England. As you know, many a fine work has been killed by a bad libretto.'

Frederick had sent on Wallace's letter to 'Harmonie' and had received a reply which he forwarded to London. On April 26th Wallace writes again:

'It is perfectly absurd for a German firm to speak of Bernhoff as a 'first-class, literary, highly cultivated artist'. Breitkopf had to cancel his atrocious version of Berlioz's *Faust*, and only a few days ago I was told by another German firm that though they had accepted and paid for the translation of a big work, they had to get it done all over again by someone else. It is in the style of inferior ballads and the sooner German firms recognize that English singers are not all uneducated and refuse to sing words that make the audience laugh, the better their sales will be. Every German firm should have an Englishman as adviser as to translations. German or semi-German composers, like d'Albert, who have lived so long out of England that they have no notion of decent English now, are not the best judges of what a good text is, and though Bernhoff may have letters from many thanking him for his work, they fail to see that the English will be criticized by Englishmen and not by Germans. Take the first line of Bernhoff. This will be sung - "O Thou my wi--ill". Page 8; the word "cleped" is obsolete, and probably not one in 100 of your audience will know what it means. Page 14; who will understand what is meant by 'prepared to mine ego', etc? Page 56; last line of text "Wilt thou my hound" etc., is not grammar. "That is a dance" is foolish. *Now for a dance* is English. "pitiless Columbine"!!! Page 113; "Rages" has two syllables, not one. Page 131; "ululating, inebrating" is simply putting a weapon in the hands of your critics. Page 180; what singer will have the assurance to get up and declare "I'm a temulent dulcet lyre (liar)"? On Page 184 it is the

turn of the poetess to be "temulent"! Page 202; that word "awfuller" gives the text away. You cannot afford to have your critical taste in English shown up with this sort of thing. Every musician who has seen B's text has said that it will damn the work if it is printed in the programme. I understand that "Harmonie" says, "We have no objection to a performance with the new text, on the supposition that it will be sent to us for disposal with all rights". I made the new text for the sake of yourself and Beecham, and I will not allow it to be used for any other performance. If "Harmonie" thinks that it is to their advantage to cancel Bernhoff's, they will have to pay for their mistakes like other people.'

This correspondence terminates on May 5th, Wallace writing again to the composer:

'Many thanks for your letter and the enclosure from "Harmonie". As far as I can see, you are allowed to use and to print in the programme my text for THIS performance ONLY. That is to say, "Harmonie" will not allow the next text to be used at any other performance of your work in this country. *Why do they stand in their own or in your light?* I also gather that they will not pay for the new text, and that they claim to have sole rights of translation. Now I am told by the publishers of the English translation of Nietzsche that there is no copyright, and that anyone can translate and publish his own text of *Zarathustra* in English without hindrance. I got this information a moment ago from Fisher Unwin, the publisher of one of the English texts of *Zarathustra*, and he is scarcely likely to be wrong. I think it very important that you should have a clear understanding with "Harmonie" as to what they will allow in the case of other performances of your work after Beecham's. It strikes me that "Harmonie" are not very anxious that your work should have the best possible chance, but they ought to realize that whatever we may be as a musical nation, some of us understand what is good English and what is bad. German firms spend thousands in pushing German songs here, but ninety-nine in one hundred are never sung because the translations are so bad. That I suppose is what they call "business enterprise"!!!!!!

Songs of Sunset - Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)

Delius employed a variety of Dowson's poems to provide the text for his *Songs of Sunset*. *Cynara*, perhaps Dowson's most perfect poem, was to have climaxed the work, but Delius wisely omitted it in the final version as tending to disturb the mood-sequence he had planned. A.K. Holland writes in reference to *Cynara* and its author:

It is Dowson's most characteristic poem, as Dowson was the most characteristic poet of what has been called "the Beardsley period," - the *fin de siècle*. Of this poem, Mr. Osbert Burdett, has written: "Not only did he (Dowson) say all he had to say, but summed up in four stanzas the rebellious temper, the artistic ideal of the group. It is a poem of

ennui and of reaction, of the inconstant flesh at issue with the constant soul, paradoxically combining the fine and the sordid as if content with nothing less than both extremes.... The whole is sung to a haunting and original music, and the rhyme which gives the line of beauty to the whole will not be forgotten by posterity."¹²

Although this comment pertains only to *Cynara*, I think Burdett's sentiments can easily be applied to the entire text of *Songs of Sunset*.

An Arabesque - Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847-1885)

Delius was strongly attracted to Danish poetry, utilizing it in twelve different song settings. The most influential poet was Jacobsen, whose works also provided the texts for Delius's opera, *Fennimore and Gerda* (from the novel *Niels Lyhne*) and the choral setting of *An Arabesque*. Of the latter text, which exists in three languages (Danish, German - translation by Jelka, and English - translation by Heseltine), Fenby comments: "Jacobsen's poem is a strange utterance in which human passion is personified in the god Pan; a lover's rhapsody on the briefness of bliss."¹³ Holland's remarks are also enlightening:

Jacobsen was a man of his time, and the study of his hyper-sensitive dreamer, Niels, of his doubts and indecisions, is to some extent a self-portrait. His naturalistic stories are placed in a setting of highly artificial prose, in which language is used for a conscious psychologic effect. "He follows a movement - the coming of rain, for example - in all its articulations; he seeks always to transpose all the impressions of the senses into pregnant impressions, and these again demand a new style, re-tuning the language of prose. The vocabulary is extended and refined; the language is worked over from a musical standpoint; inversions and alliterations give the sentences their particular tonal hues and the periods are harmonized into rhythmical unities." (H.G. Topsoe-Jensen: *Scandinavian Literature*). His poems published posthumously, are full of subtleties and refinements of melody and colour. Georg Brandes has said of his style: "Every drop which we seize from the hushed fountain of his language is weighty and potent as a drop of elixir, fragrant as a drop of precious essence. In his manner of writing, there lies something bewitching, intoxicating." He has some affinity with Flaubert, and in his prose style with our own writers, De Quincey and Pater.¹⁴

Requiem

The *Requiem* text was compiled by Delius from his own philosophy and from Old Testament Biblical passages which suited his imagery. The tenor of the resulting poetry (which was originally written in German - perhaps supportive of the contention of Neitzschean influence) proved to significantly detract from the initial impression made by the work at its 1922 premier.

But when the same concert-goer, travelling to business on the morning of October 28th, thought he would read the composer's explanation of the work played on the previous night, his reactions to the following verbiage would have made an interesting study:¹⁵

It is not a religious work. Its underlying belief is that of a pantheism that insists on the reality of life. It preaches that human life is like a day in the existence of the world, subject to the great laws of All-Being. The weakling is weighted down thereby and revels in magic pictures of a cheerful existence hereafter. The storm of reality destroys the golden dream-palaces, and the inexorable cry resounds, "You are the creature of the day and must perish." The world tries to soothe the fear of death; "the highways of the world give birth to gods and idols." The proud spirit casts off the yoke of superstition, for it knows that death puts an end to all life, and therefore fulfillment can be sought and found only in life itself. No judgement as to doing and not doing good and evil can be found in any ordinance from without, but only in the conscience of man himself.... Thus independence and self-reliance are the marks of a man who is great and free. He will look forward to his death with high courage in his soul, in proud solitude, in harmony with nature and the ever-recurrent, sonorous rhythm of birth and death.¹⁶

Arthur Hutching's condemnation of Delius's commentary provides additional perspective.

This passage should be perused by all who talk of Delius as more intellectual than most great artists. It is not required of a great artist that he possess or develop intellect, provided he is intelligent in his art. Delius was more intelligent than most of us, even outside his art, but he had so large a measure of egocentricity that he developed blind spots in his intelligence. He thought himself the enemy of religious faith, but was himself the slave of a self-concocted religion more bigoted than the most ultramontane forms of catholicism or the most Calvinistic forms of protestantism. His reading, if widespread, was not intellectually wide. He read where he was sure to find what he liked, where his own nature and mode of life was flattered. That is the artist's mentality, not the impartial, broad-searching nature that makes a philosopher.¹⁷

Examined in detail, Delius's text makes use of only one actual excerpt from the Bible - Ecclesiastes 9: 7-10, quoted in Part II. In three of the remaining four sections one finds "Biblical allusions" rather than direct quotations:

Part I - Ecclesiastes 6:7 and 12: 1-8; Psalms 13:3, 102:11, and 109:23;

Proverbs 6:10 and 24:13

Part III - paraphrase of Song of Solomon - an expansion of 1:14 and 8:6

Part V - the final stanza is loosely Genesis 8:22

Songs of Farewell - Walt Whitman

The text for Delius's final work is from selected verses chosen by his wife from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Even though the text for *Songs of Farewell* is taken from four different sections within Whitman's work, there is a strong sense of unity. The first three parts capture Delius's love of nature, its splendor and vastness, while the latter two (which are taken in proper sequence from Whitman's own *Songs of Parting*) magnificently display the courage of a dying man.

Part Songs and Appalachia - Miscellaneous Authors

Of the three short choruses with texts, Arthur Symons (1865-1945) provided the words for two, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) provided the third. Symons wrote *On Craig Dhu* (one of seven poems under the heading of *Intermezzo: Pastoral*), and *Wanderer's Song* (from a collection known as *Images of Good and Evil*). *The Splendor Falls on Castle Walls* was taken from Tennyson's *The Princess*. All three poems provided imagery consistent with that found in the larger works, and in no way did Delius's creative powers wane when working with these short miniatures. The brief text found in the conclusion of *Appalachia* comes from a negro song Delius heard in Florida.

1. Eric Fenby, Record Jacket, Angel #S-36606.
2. Heseltine, p. 106-107
3. Beecham, p. 81
4. Fenby, p. 205
5. Hutchings, p. 104-105
6. Fenby,
7. Henry L. Mencklen, *The Philosophy of Freidrich Nietzsche*, p. 72-73
8. Ibid., p. 110
9. Heseltine, p. 105-106
10. Beecham, p. 132-133
11. Beecham, p. 160-163
12. A.K. Holland, *The Songs of Delius*, p. 21-22
13. Fenby, Record Jacket (op. cit.)
14. Holland, p. 18-19
15. Hutchings, p. 40
16. Clare Delius, *Frederick Delius: Memories of my Brother*, p. 195
(Hutchings included only part of this commentary in his quotation.)
17. Hutchings. p. 41