

VIII. SONGS OF FAREWELL

COMPOSED: 1930-1932

FIRST PERFORMANCE: 1932, Courtauld-Sargent Concert, Malcom Sargent, Conductor

TEXT: From *Leaves of Grass* of Walt Whitman

I - *Memories and Out of May's Shows Selected from Sands at Seventy*

II - *From Montauk Point from Sands at Seventy*

III - *Passage to India* - part 9 (excerpts)

IV - *Joy, Shipmate, Joy from Songs of Parting*

V - *Now Finale to the Shore from Songs of Parting*

FORCES REQUIRED: Double SATB Chorus and Orchestra

It seems only fitting that Delius chose a work with voices for what was to be his final composition and noblest achievement. This was the medium of his most profound and heartfelt statements, though possibly not the most successful or even critically acclaimed, yet those to which throughout his life he devoted the highest energy.

Because of the highly poignant and unusual circumstances surrounding its composition, more is known about *Songs of Farewell* than any other Delian work. We are provided in Eric Fenby's moving account *Delius as I Knew Him* an extraordinary portrait of Delius the man, and of the incredible task of trial and error dictation undertaken by amanuensis and composer. No one can hope to fully appreciate or understand *Songs of Farewell* without reading Fenby's account, and the following excerpts are included only to provide some background:

In 1928 Delius had accepted my offer to try to help him find a way to resume to composition after two years inaction through blindness and paralysis. The orchestral work of *A Song of Summer* and the Sonata No. 3 for violin and pianoforte were the chief fruits to date of that collaboration. When, however, I had read the text that Mrs. Delius had selected and copied out previously from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and seen the paucity of

musical material Delius proposed to use as a basis for a work for double chorus and orchestra - a few odd phrases jotted down on billheads on his last walking-tour of Norway, and groups of chords ringed "good" - my heart sank.

He had already insisted on dictating orchestral music directly into full score without a preliminary piano draft. Yet, realizing his dislike of treating the choir and orchestra as separate entities complete in themselves, I could not conceive how eight vocal parts were to be shaped and threaded into the orchestral texture in a balanced whole. Nor how, working so slowly from bar to bar, he would prevent disorder and lack of tension between the parts.

Instinct gradually led the way. After months of trial and error, with never more than a few bars to show for hours of work, and only then when Delius felt well enough to be carried up to the music-room to dictate, the score was finished.¹

...in the first three movements, the composer gives voice to the 'silent backward tracings,' the 'meditations of old times resumed - their loves, joys, persons, voyages,' that delight the heart of man in the twilight of his days. The great forces of Nature are saluted in turn, and in the fourth and fifth movements, with a joyous leave-taking, the old sailor, bidding farewell to 'land and life,' speeds from the shore upon the endless chartless voyage of Death to the sound of the hushed voices of his friends in the final *pianissimo* chord, 'Depart!' A more cheerful note is struck at the thought of Death in this work than in the *Requiem*, the most depressing choral work I know.²

Evaluating the work objectively Beecham comments:

The only epithet that can be applied to this strangest of collaborations is - heroic. But it would be idle if in our admiration for the remarkable qualities of the two participants we ignored the plain fact that it gives us little of Delius that we did not know before; and even that little does not ring with the sound of unadulterated inspiration. Let us honour it as a noble experiment and leave it at that. It remains only to say something about the man himself.³

He added:

Unexpectedly under the circumstances, we find in them a streak of hard masculine vigour, reminiscent in mood and fibre of some of the great choral numbers in *A Mass of Life*.⁴

Hutchings observed:

Concerning the proud spirit of these Whitman settings there is little to say, except that they are the last choral legacy of the composer who wrote the "Mass of Life", and that, when the arrival of his amanuensis made possible an Indian summer after the main musical harvest, nobody could have dared hope for grain so rich and still so vital as the "Songs of Farewell".⁵

I

Memories

How sweet the silent backward tracings!
 The wanderings as in dreams - the meditation of old times resumed -
 their loves, joys, persons, voyages.

Out of May's Shows Selected

Apple orchards, the trees all cover'd with blossoms;
 Wheat fields carpeted far and near in vital emerald green;
 The eternal, exhaustless freshness of each early morning;
 The yellow, golden, transparent haze of the warm afternoon sun;
 The aspiring lilac bushes with profuse purple or white flowers.

II

From Montauk Point

I stand as on some mighty eagle's beak,
 Eastward the sea absorbing, viewing, (nothing but sea and sky,)
 The tossing waves, the foam, the ships in the distance,
 The wild unrest, the snowy, curling caps - that inbound urge and urge
 of waves,
 Seeking the shores forever.

III

Passage to India
 (excerpted from #9)

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

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

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

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

IV

Joy, Shipmate, Joy!

Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)
Our life is closed, our life begins,
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore,
Joy, shipmate, joy.

V

Now Finale to the Shore

Now finale to the shore,
Now land and life finale and farewell,
Now Voyager depart, (much, much for thee is yet in store,)
Often enough hast thou adventur'd o'er the seas,
Cautiously cruising, studying the charts,
Duly again to port and hawser's tie returning;
But now obey thy cherish'd secret wish,
Embrace thy friends, leave all in order,
To port and hawser's tie no more returning,
Depart upon thy endless cruise old Sailor.

An overview of the structure of *Songs of Farewell* reveals five separate movements which are basically dissimilar, but containing certain motivic ideas which occasionally reappear. The luxuriant choral texture combines homophonically with the instruments throughout most of the composition, creating a sonority of unusual richness and warmth which is also capable of great power and emotion.

Harmonically, the work is to a certain degree conservative in light of earlier compositions. It opens and closes with the same tonality, and although there are no key signatures employed, an unusual amount of tonal symmetry exists within the movements and throughout the work as a whole.

Another characteristic, which also adds to the difficulty for successful performance, is the extended use of a demanding tessitura. Fenby expressed his concern over this factor at the initial performance of *Songs of Farewell*, and his commentary also provides his personal insight into Delius's common use of this technique:

There was, however, this that worried me - the high soprano C at the climax 'Away, O soul, hoist instantly the anchor!' This was not the instance of a very high note coming in the stride of a work which otherwise kept for its intimacies within the middle compass of the voices, but a work in which even the quieter and more contemplative numbers were equally highly pitched. I do not think that it ever occurred to Delius that in these long rhapsodic passages the singers might need to take breath from time to time, any more than in a similar passage marked *fortissimo*, in a work like *A Song of the High Hills*, the trombone players might be given but one beat's rest in which to get their wind. Delius's entire output abounds in examples of this careless disregard for the limits of the human agency in performance. Again and again I had noticed, when working with him, that there was always a tendency in him to force up the pitch, particularly whenever the music became more animated. Sometimes he would even overleap his climax before reaching it! I have often wondered whether to attribute this failing to the deafness in one ear which embarrassed his latter years, or to his lack of the sense of perfect pitch.⁶

I

The first movement divides basically into two major sections, A and B, reflecting the two poems utilized for the text. Each of these sections can

also be subdivided and has associated motifs:

A - beginning to 32

a - beginning to 17 - ①, ②, ③

b - 17 - 32 - ①, ②, ③

B - 33 - 59

a - 33 - 42 - ③

b - 43 - 59 - ①, ④

The movement, which begins with but a single D major+B (added sixth) chord, contains two of Delius's most effective choral cadences, utilizing in both instances an exquisite sustaining soprano line suspended over delicate orchestral murmurings.

Section A

a This opening subsection which sets the initial two phrases of the first poem, begins with limited textual/musical imitation in the chorus. With the entrance of soprano I and the highest point in the choral phrase, a gradual chromatic descent leads to the unexpected cadence in 12, featuring the augmented fifth leap, and re-establishing the opening D tonality. The accompanying orchestral material presents various versions of ① in the woodwinds and simple doubling of the chorus in the strings. a concludes with ② in 12 in the harp, cello, and baritone, followed by the five measure pattern derived from ③ sounding over the sustaining strings and chorus.

b The remaining phrases of the first poem are set homophonically, describing a rising line of increasing chromatic intensity, climaxing in 23 with a striking choral sonority. The major second dissonance dissolves, relaxing the harmonic tension and leading to the lazy triplet setting of the final word. ① again appears in the woodwind accompaniment and analogous to a, the section concludes with ② and ③ repeating over the sustaining

① [4] oboe I

② [12] oboe

③ [13] flute I

④ [43] violin I

⑤ [60] cello

⑥ [69] horn I and II

⑦ [98] violin I and II

⑧ [111] chorus (rhythm)

⑨ [111] cello

⑩ [137] flute, oboe and clarinet (rhythm)

⑪ [178] soprano, tenor and violin I

⑫ [179] cello, bass

⑬ [184] soprano

⑭ [207] violin I

⑮ [242] cello

~diminution

D major of the strings. In 32, the oboe enters with ①, providing a solo transition to B.

Section B

a This section is characterized by a gradual increase in energy, reflecting the chromatic ascent in all voices from 36-41, and ③ is heard briefly in 33-35 in the flutes and oboes. The tension builds through 42 where the sweeping violin lines lead to the "Largamente" climax of the first movement.

b This climactic section is structured about sequential repetition of ④ which enters at the *Largamente*, dominating first the orchestral texture from 43-49, and then the final choral phrase in 50-53. Effective rhythmically is the eighth rest which Delius adds to the choral version of ④ in 50, dramatizing the dynamic apex of the movement.

The energy subsides after the final statement of ④, in soprano I in 53, leading to the beautiful soprano cadential phrase. An ornamented version of ① appears in the woodwinds in 54, and the movement concludes peacefully on the D major+B harmony of the opening.

II

Of all the movements of *Songs of Farewell* this is probably the most perfectly balanced and wedded to the import of the text. It is a statement of great emotional impact derived from an inspired musical portrayal of a text of vivid description. Its structure suggests a magnificent arch, shaped by tonal symmetry and the gradual building and subsiding of energy, and divided by a stirring climax of great intensity and agitation. Prominent are two motifs, ⑤ and ⑥, both of which have sequential variants.

The movement opens with a memorable cello phrase, diatonic in simplicity,

yet unfolding with great breadth and grandeur, its subtle undulations suggesting the sonorous rhythms of the sea. Delius seems to expand one's vision skyward with the entrance of the violins in 64, evolving over shifting harmonies and sequential repetition of ⑤, a phrase of great emotion, created from subtle appoggiaturas.

In 69, over a C pedal, the horns enter with ⑥, an obvious inversion of ⑤, which leads to the pianissimo choral entrance in 71. The next nine bars unfold about three measure repetitions of ⑥ and a slow harmonic descent from C through B^b to A, accompanying a choral phrase of great simplicity and beauty. From 77-80 the gradual ascending violin line again broadens the sonority skyward in reference to the text.

As ⑥ shifts to the violins in 81 and the harmonic rhythm quickens, an ascending chromatic line and tightened choral rhythms respond to the agitation suggested in the text. The movement's climax occurs between 85-89 as the chorus's descending chromatic line is joined by ⑥ in the horns and the swirling tremolo figures in the strings.

As suddenly as it began the tempest slackens in 90, leading to the *piu tranquillo* in 91 and the variant return of ⑤ in the cello and bassoon. A beautiful descending choral phrase follows in 91-92, echoed by the violin which leads to the true return of ⑤ in 93 and the mood and tonality of the opening.

The final orchestral passage is rich in emotion as the last utterances of ⑥ ascend peacefully over ⑤ in diminution to the total calm of the concluding C major+A tonality.

III

Partially analogous to II, this is the only other movement which begins and ends with orchestral material, however any internal symmetry is basically lacking. The movement begins simply and culminates into the most emotionally charged moment in the entire composition. A lengthy orchestral postlude

follows which fades to a pianissimo over sequential repetition of a second "sea" motif, ⑨, which is obviously derived from ⑤. The movement can be further characterized after the initial calm by a progressive series of choral outbursts of sudden energy, built about repetitions of two other distinct rhythmic motifs, ⑧ and ⑨, and driving to an eventual climax of incredible vocal/orchestral intensity.

Delius's harmonic language is quite varied, employing the usual chromaticism, an amazing series of third inversion dominant seventh chords, and even an oddly mundane sounding V₇-I cadence. A fourth prominent motif, ⑦, controls the orchestral prelude, and also present is an isolated reference to ①.

Examined in detail, the movement reveals distinct subdivisions:

<u>Prelude</u>	98-110	- ⑦
<u>A</u>	111-122	- ⑧, ⑨
<u>B</u>	123-138	- ⑧, ⑨, ⑩
<u>C</u>	139-160	- ⑧, ⑨, ⑩
<u>Postlude</u>	160-177	- ⑨

Prelude

Scored entirely for divisi strings, this section is constructed about repetitions of ⑦ interspersed with connecting material. It begins quietly, yet with great intensity, with ⑦ in the violins, followed by a second statement of the violin II line in the viola. The effect is quite striking due to the unexpected string sonority and Delius's use of the distant harmony of G^b major following the C major conclusion of II.

Three repetitions of a three note pattern follow, the first two occurring in violin I while the third answers in the bass and cello. A rising line leads to the third and fourth statements of ⑦, stated sequentially and intervallically altered, and a second bass-cello figure ascends in preparation for the final repetition of ⑦ in 108-109.

The Prelude uses an economy of means yet its simplicity carries great emotion, preparing beautifully for the quiet choral opening in 111.

Section A

This section presents an effective contrast of sonority following the string Prelude, with the warmth of an unaccompanied choral texture against repetitions of ⑨ in the cello. It functions like a textured counterpart to the Prelude, presenting in the first three lines of the text a mood of calm and a scene of natural splendor. The sea is of course represented by the subtle undulations of ⑨, and Delius has cleverly exposed in the first choral measure a rhythmic motif, ③, which will become the dominant ingredient of the orchestral accompaniment in B and C. The initial tonal area of C major and its correlated statement of ⑨ clearly resembles the choral beginning of II.

Section B

This section is dominated almost entirely by ③, the rhythmic motif first heard in the chorus, and it now appears in the orchestra and has been adapted to include several different intervallic patterns. Other orchestral material presents the reference to ① in flute I in 125; ⑩ in the treble woodwinds; and several lesser triplet patterns occurring as counterpoint in 134-138. The choral setting delineates the next three lines of the poem with distinct phrases, and offers a welcome variety in texture with the alto-bass duet that begins the section. The intensity increases with the first of the several choral outbursts occurring with the unexpected leap to a soprano B natural in 137 on "clouds".

The harmonic activity in B includes chromatic and diatonic motion with an odd moment existing in 131-132 where Delius employs an incredibly straightforward V₇-I progression to D major in support of the unison choral attack of the fifth textual phrase.

Section C

The beginning of this the climactic section of the movement is delineated by harmonic activity. From 139 to the tremendous climax in 157 the harmonic motion consists almost entirely of a series of consecutive seventh chords, appearing first in the orchestra with ⑩ and then eventually with the twelve measures of tremelo-poco crescendo strings from 145-157. The associated orchestral material presents ⑩; five sequential repetitions of ⑧; the string tremelo together with another appearance of ⑩ in 155-156; and finally accompanies a tutti fortissimo return of ⑧ in 157-159.

The choral setting again begins briefly with two voice counterpoint, and is dominated in 142-148 by three consecutive climaxes of high intensity. The second is especially effective, occurring after three repetitions of ⑧ and employing the leap of a major sixth in the soprano. As in 139 the brief choral silence in 148 allows the harmonic motion to become more apparent, as Delius builds to the dramatic climax over the consecutive sevenths chords. The placement of these chords in the intense upper registers of the strings and chorus, coupled with the general ascending lines and agitated tremolo sonority progresses to the high C climax on "away" with tremendous urgency. The total effect of the climax is increased with the fortissimo entrance of the entire brass compliment stating ⑩ together with the woodwinds and strings against the choral material.

Postlude

As the triumphant choral phrase concludes with the words "hoist instantly the anchor!", ⑨, the second "sea" motif sounds in the lowest strings. The old sailor's journey has begun and Delius portrays the rhythms of the waiting sea in the gradual decline which concludes the movement. The material is structured about sixteen repetitions of ⑨ and three repetitions of a four measure treble phrase consisting of the simple descending fifth from A to D

over subtly altered harmonies. This final harmonic sequence is built about successive tension and resolution, and the intertwining of stable Delius chords - major+6th (F in 160-169 and b^b in 172-177) with the highly pungent harmonies of B^b minor+major 7th and E^b major 13th creates a totally distinctive Delian effect of great beauty and emotion, drawing the movement to a peaceful conclusion.

IV

This is the most straightforward of all the movements, having one basic mood, obvious melodic material, and tonal symmetry. However, Delius manipulates the text to create a rather clever tripartite structure delineated by repetitions of (11), the main melodic idea. The movement illustrates quite clearly Delius's oft employed technique of stratified composition, i.e. writing choral parts over orchestral material, and reveals his genius for creativity in textual emphasis.

Examining first the orchestral accompaniment, one finds three related sections, a, a', and a'', each introduced by (11):

a - 178-189

a' - 190-198

a'' - 199-206

a and a' are substantially the same in melodic material, with the latter having slight variations in orchestration and supporting chromatic harmony. Close examination reveals the following correlations:

<u>a</u>		<u>a'</u>	
178-179	-	190-191	
182-185	-	194-197	violin parts
185-186	-	197-198	cello and bass

In the character of the beginning bass line in each case there is a distinct difference: a employs (12), a leaping pattern of fourths and fifths which reappears at the conclusion of a and at the end of the movement; and a' uses an ascending line with an identifying rhythmic tie over the bar line.

a'' suggests a recapitulation of a, beginning with (11) accompanied in the bass by (12), the identical opening measures of a. The remaining measures of a'' can also be traced both melodically and harmonically to the conclusion of a: 184-188 matching 201-206. In addition it is interesting to see how Delius has subtly extracted (13), the vocal high point of a, for the climax of a'' in 201-202.

Examining now the choral material, Delius has divided the seven line poem to correlate with the orchestral subdivisions, and added a third statement of "Joy, Shipmate, Joy!" to match the return of a''. An obvious relationship exists between choral and orchestral material in 184-186 where (13), the soprano climax of a, is imitated by the violins.

A powerful use of imitation distinguishes a, both at its beginning and in 196-197, where the vocal line responds clearly to the textual stimulus "she leaps." Delius inserts an additional response to this textual imagery with two statements of 1 in the trumpets and trombones. The other interesting characteristic of a' is its similarity in melodic material with a, with 194-199 matching closely 182-187. Both sections reach a soprano A, yet individuality is determined by the accompanying harmonic motion and the contrapuntal character of the a' climax

The thrilling conclusion of the movement involves the ingenious combination of the poem's final phrase with a'', uniting the "joyous" choral outbursts with (13), a motif whose original text, "our life begin", most assuredly approaches the philosophical sentiment of the work.

V

With Whitman's poignant phrase "Now finale to the shore" Delius begins the final movement of the last work he would ever compose. There is no sadness here. Delius the yea-sayer to life approaches its conclusion not with sorrow but with ecstasy. One senses the yearning of Zarathustra for "Mitternacht", the passionate desire for freedom and eternal joy and the eagerness of its anticipation. For Delius and Whitman alike the final journey is the same, it is in the constancy of the sea that they have found their peace.

The contents of the final movement are easily predicted in light of the earlier sections of *Songs of Farewell*. After a quiet opening, a climax of great intensity follows, much as in III after a lengthy series of seventh and ninth chords, and a final orchestral postlude of beauty and simplicity built over an ostinato suggestive of the sea concludes the movement. These sections, A, B, and C, are delineated as follows, accompanied by four significant motifs, ④, ⑦, ⑭ and ⑮:

A - 207-226 - ⑭

B - 226-242 - ⑭, ④

C - 242-263 - ⑮, ⑦

Section A

Delius sets the first seven lines of the poem and includes smaller subdivisions derived from the organization of the poetic phrases. Musically, there is the suggestion of an aba' structure, with the return of the opening chord progression, choral rhythm, and vocal line of 207 in 222:

a - 207-215

b - 216-221

a' - 222-226

⑭, which appears in many variant forms, is employed consistently throughout A, with its most prominent exposure occurring in b as accompaniment to phrase

four in violin I.

Delius's harmonic language in A is lush and distinctive with his subtle manipulation of ascending and descending chromatic lines.

Section B

Beginning with an effective *subito piano* contrast in 227 Delius creates the momentum for the climax of the movement by a series of seventh and ninth chords from 227-234 linked by a chromatically ascending bass line. The intensity builds as the treble instruments reach their highest registers, accompanying the surging vocal line. The ecstatic D6/4+B climax involves an overlap as the strings and woodwinds culminate on the downbeat of 234, followed effectively on beat three by the highest choral outburst, whose line suggests ⑭ in its conclusion.

After an orchestral measure whose dissonance and descending chromaticism suggest the conclusion of the *Requiem*, the dynamic climax of the movement occurs on a triple forte G major chord with the reiteration of "Depart". An immediate diminuendo effectively concludes the phrase and after an orchestral recollection of I suggested by ④ in violin II, viola, and oboe (an obvious emotional reference) the section ends with a second extended statement of the final poetic phrase over additional repetitions of ④.

Section C

The concluding section of V and of the entire composition is structured about peaceful repetitions of ⑮, the last of the "sea" motifs. Delius makes reference to III with two suggestions of ⑦ in the strings, and the work ends in the tonality of its opening with one final statement of the word "depart", creating a D major +B harmony, over the distant tympani roll and lulling sounds of the endless sea.

Footnotes

1. Eric Fenby, Record Jacket, Angel 36285
2. Fenby, p. 102
3. Beecham, p. 217-218
4. Ibid., p. 208
5. Hutchings, p. 101-103
6. Fenby, p. 115-116