

XI. PART SONGS

Delius wrote six short unaccompanied part songs over the period between 1907 and 1924, of which five are for mixed voices and one is for men:

*On Craig Dhu** 1907
Midsummer Song 1908
Wanderer's Song 1908
To be sung of a summer night on the water (two) 1917
The Spendor falls on Castle Walls 1924

Although unpublished and products of the composer's earliest years, Delius also wrote a group of part songs in the beginning of 1887 while studying in Leipzig. These include a version of Heine's *Lorelie*, an Ave Maria with German words, and four settings of Björnsterne Björnson poems entitled:

Sonnensheinlied
Durch den Wald
Fruhlinganbruch
Oh! Sonnenshein

Beecham comments:

They are all pleasing trifles, and while sufficiently well written, reveal little of the harmonic originality that began to make its appearance two years later [1889].¹

Discussing the later group, in no way does one find examples of lesser craftsmanship. Rather, they are miniature portraits of Delius's mature style, each rich with its own quality of imagination and sensitivity. His keen understanding of vocal color and sonority successfully imbues each composition with the sensuousness of sound, richness of harmony, and complexity of motivic construction found in the larger orchestral works. Heseltine in discussing Delius's music as a whole comments:

And so we find but little difference of style when we turn to Delius's choral works and those in which the pianoforte plays a part. In writing for the pianoforte Delius has never been particularly happy. The limitations

* Entitled *Mountain Silence* in the Boosey & Hawkes edition

of the keyboard seem to have hampered him; his figuration is often somewhat perfunctory and the long sequences of chords, lacking the glow which the individuation of the varied voices of the orchestra would impart to them, tend to become a trifle square-faced and monotonous. It is but natural also that so essentially polyphonic a medium as the string quartet should prove too slender to support the weight of his harmonic mass-formations; but their employment in music for unaccompanied voices has been as successful as it is novel and original - to modern ears, although the Prince of Venosa was using them in his madrigals three hundred years ago with surprisingly similar effects. The chorus is used homophonically, impersonally, as though it were a multitudinous voice of winds or waters, and the effect in an "impression of nature" like *On Craig Dhu* is overwhelming.²

On Craig Dhu

COMPOSED: 1907

FIRST PERFORMANCE: 1910, Blackpool, England

TEXT: No. III of three poems under the heading "Colour Studies" by Arthur Symons, from his *London Nights*, a collection published in 1895

FORCES REQUIRED: SATTB

Heseltine's description of this short work is magnificent. His words capture perfectly Delius's stunning effects in sonority and vocal color.

An examination of Symon's poem reveals a rich imagery and subjective quality which would have easily appealed to Delius. Yet the title of the group to which the poem *On Craig Dhu* belongs is perhaps more revealing of the stimulus which provided the composer with one of his most intimate and subjective statements. Symons called the poems *Colour Studies*, and such suggestion has been obviously transformed by Delius to the medium of vocal sonority.

The work is scored for SATTB with occasional further divisi, especially in the men's parts, with the resulting vocal color tending toward a dark rich quality. An additional characteristic, one which is quite peculiar considering Delius's usual use of extremes in range, is the narrow compass of the treble

On Craig Dhu

The sky through the leaves of the bracken,
Tenderly, pallidly blue,
Nothing but sky as I lie on the mountain-top.
Hark! for the wind as it blew,

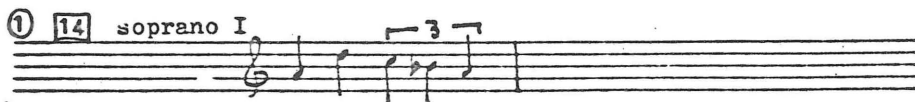
Rustling the tufts of my bracken above me,
Brought from below
Into the silence the sound of the water.
Hark! for the oxen low,

Sheep are bleating, a dog
Barks at a farm in the vale:
Blue, through the bracken, softly enveloping,
Silence, a veil.

parts, where but on two occasions do sopranos have pitches higher than D on the treble staff. Also significant is Delius's consistent use of the six part (or more) texture after the four bar imitative beginning.

Another factor which adds to the total unity of mood established by the composition is the lack of any break or obvious change in musical declamation between either of the two stanzaic divisions in the poem. Rather, Delius has used a continuous exposition of the text according to the punctuation, thus logically connecting stanzas one and two between 16-17 and two and three in 31-32. The only real musical "division" occurs between these two connected sentences in 28-29. Delius has also obscured the stanzaic division between one and two by creating a lag in declamation by bass II during the first twenty-eight measures of the piece.

Although not readily apparent there is a certain degree of musical unity exhibited in the work, both motivic and harmonic. The composition begins and ends in a G tonal area and incorporates a repetition of ①, the only motivic unit of note, with an almost identical harmonic pattern. 13-16, with B^b VI - d6/4 and the downward sequential motion of ① passing from d6/4 to B^b, returns basically in 35-38, with ①, rhythmically altered, present in an inner voice, and ending sequentially on g₆.



Textually, the first instance occurs as an obvious pictorialization of the final line of stanza one, while the second appears with a more distinct musical point of relaxation between lines two and three of the final stanza, thus providing a symmetry of mood and a very subtle "double-entendre" between "blew" and "blue".

Much of the harmonic motion of the work is essentially chromatic, especially such a striking passage as 25-28, however, possibly the most unusual harmonic characteristic exhibited in the work is Delius's use of false resolutions or common tone modulations, as typified by D_7-E in 4-5; $Bb-Gb-Bb-D$ in 19-21; $E7-G$ in 24-25; and D_7-F in 28-29.

On Craig Dhu is an essay in a single mood on the sensuousness of unaccompanied vocal sonority. It is the first of several choral miniatures which seem to be vocal counterparts to Delius's luxuriant orchestral tone poems.

Midsummer Song

COMPOSED: 1908

FIRST PERFORMANCE: December, 1910, Whitely Bay and District Choral Society

TEXT: Delius (German by Jelka Delius)

FORCES REQUIRED: SSAATTBB

Midsummer Song is the first of the part songs to contain extensive wordless passages, a choral technique which seems to have had an early significance for Delius, as reflected by its conspicuous presence in the choral sections of his first operas, *Irmelin* (1890-92) and *Koanga* (1895-97). Whether this technique is traceable to Delius's Florida days and his exposure to Negro singing is purely conjecture, however, it is obvious that the textless choral sections occur extensively in Delius's vocal output, and considerably more so than in the works of any of his contemporaries.

Midsummer Song has a distinct ABA' form with the A sections containing the two verses of the poem, and B, the larger middle section, being entirely a lusty choral vocalise on "la". Structurally, there are five motifs, ①, ①a, ②, ②a, and ③, four of which are closely related. The four versions of ① and ② are all derived from a basic three note descending pattern found in the

Midsummer Song

On midsummer day we'll dance and we'll play
 And we'll wander and stray through the woods.
 La, la, la etc.

We'll dance and we'll kiss whilst it's youth, love and bliss
 And the night is not far away,
 Heighho!

① [2] soprano II



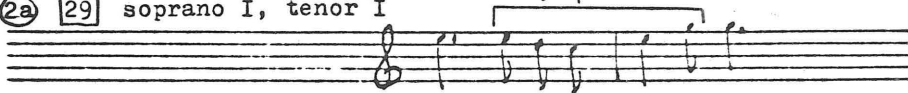
1a [6] soprano II



② [14] alto I



2a [29] soprano I, tenor I



③ [28] tenor I, bass I



second bar of the work. Harmonically, the composition begins and ends in C major and is characterized by extensive motivic sequencing of (1a), (2a), and (3).

Section A

Although quite short this section divides into two distinct parts, a and b:

a 1-5

b 6-11

a obviously contains the text of verse one and b is basically a melisma of the final word "woods", constructed from motivic sequencing of (1a). Harmonically, both sections begin and end in C major, with the end of a overlapping for resolution into b. After a one bar introduction in the basses which establishes a C tonality and the basic 6/8 rhythm, the germ motif of the work, (1), is presented in soprano II. Harmonic motion in a proceeds generally I (C) - IV-V-VII-V₇, with VII, B major, being the most unusual chord in the progression. In a of A this progression is slightly altered.

With b the sequencing of (1a) descends diatonically from C to F before returning to V₇-I in 9-10. A subtle connection with a exists in 9 where the soprano I-II melodic figure restates (1), recalling exactly the melodic material contained in 2-3.

Also significant in A is the descant style of soprano I which moves against the prominent rhythmic and melodic material of the section. This technique is more distinctive in B.

Section B

This section features a constant rhythmic ostinato out of which distinct melodic patterns emerge, noticeably (2) and (2a), and against which (3) and the soprano I-tenor I descant provide soaring counter melodies. Delius employs interesting harmonic ambiguity built on the use of added sixths and abrupt "Schubertian" alternation of major and minor. There are definite tonal areas

most of which are approached by common tone relationships or chromatic motion. Although vague, the C major+A - c minor+A progression of 16-19 and the dynamic climax of the section in 40-44 which also uses this harmonic relationship, provide a certain symmetry to B.

The section begins quite like A with the men having a similar one bar introduction. In this case it establishes the importance of the ostinato and also the new tonality of F. A typical Delian technique occurs in 14-15 where (2) is introduced quite inconspicuously in the inner voices. Through 20 the motion is quite static, almost lazy, except for the C major/c minor change and the subtle melodic movement in bass I and II.

In 21-22 the soprano I and tenor I, the most effective voices in terms of intensity and individuality, emerge with a new rising figure, strengthening the shift to B^b major, and two bars later state (2a) as a dominant melodic idea.

After the motion from f₇ to C6/4 in 25-28 a new harmonic momentum is established incorporating the sequential treatment of (3) in tenor II and bass I, the basic rhythmic ostinato, the appearance of (2a) in 29-30 and 33-34 and eventually the tremendously effective soprano-tenor descant. All these ingredients combine to achieve the soaring climax with the return of C major+A in 40. The effect is heightened by the intensity contributed by the distinct vocal color of each participant.

The gradual relaxation which follows features the descent of the soprano descant and a repetition by tenor I and bass II of (2a) at its initial pitch level, the delivery of which is marked by Delius *to come out well and distinctly*. A further echo of (2a) in 45-48 divided between soprano I and alto I brings the section to a close in C major+A. Delius provides a subtle structural "double-entendre" with the bass I and II figure in 48-49 which with its *pp* dynamics appears to conclude B, but is actually in 49 an exact return of the opening bar of A, thus leading quite subtly into A'.

Section A'

Marked *Moderato* (Not quite as fast as the beginning), this concluding section of *Midsummer Song* is altered by the addition of a different text, slight harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic variations in its a section, and extended cadential material.

Initially, the opening a texture is fuller, as all voices begin together. Both the melodic and rhythmic material in all parts have been changed slightly with a resulting harmonic motion proceeding now from I-vi-VII-V4/2 instead of the earlier I-IV-VII-V₇ from a of A. Because of the different text the declamation of the melisma has been altered slightly. However, with that slight exception, b through the down beat of 58 is identical in every way with A.

In 58 a cadential section begins which produces a built in rallentando-diminuendo and incorporates extremely subtle differences in text declamation among the eight voices. The final progression is iv-I⁷-6-I with tenor I having the prominent suspended motion

Wanderer's Song

COMPOSED: 1908

FIRST PERFORMANCE: December, 1910, Whitely Bay and District Choral Society

TEXT: from the collection *Images of Good or Evil* of Arthur Symons

FORCES REQUIRED: TTBB

With the exception of the incredible male chorus writing in *Koanga*, especially at the beginning of Act III, *Wanderer's Song* is Delius's only extended composition for men's chorus. In both cases, as well as in the numerous short sections in the various other operas, Delius's selection of the male medium is obviously due to textual considerations. Stylistically, a TTBB part song with such a spirited text should by very nature harken back to

Wanderer's Song

I have had enough of women, and enough of love,
But the land waits, and the sea waits, and day and night is
 enough;
Give me a long white road, and the grey wide path of the sea,
And the wind's will and the bird's will, and the heart-ache
 still in me.

Why should I seek out sorrow, and give gold for strife?
I have loved much and wept much, but tears and love are
 not life;
The grass calls to my heart, and the foam to my blood cries up,
And the sun shines and the road shines, and the wine's in
 the cup.

I have had enough of wisdom, and enough of mirth,
For the way's one and the end's one, and it's soon to the
 ends of the earth;
And it's then good-night and to bed, and if heels or heart
 ache,
Well, it's sound sleep and long sleep, and sleep too deep to
 wake.

the tradition of Glee singing, and its associated vitality in the hands of an English composer, and Delius has created a robust descendent of this style, brimming with energy, sonority, and his own special sense of harmonic direction.

The work sticks quite closely to the stanzaic divisions of the original poem and even parallels musically the implied symmetry in the text with an obvious ABCA' structure. Delius's harmonic style is excessively chromatic and his declamation rather awkward, yet the lusty rhythm, harmonic drive, demanding tessitura, and resultant brilliant sonority create an effective work whose totality outweighs the abundance of slithery chromatics and errors in textual stress.

Section A

This initial section divides in half, with Delius employing two distinct metrical patterns to delineate the separation. The first two lines are set abruptly while the second two flow within a quicker 6/4 meter. Harmonically, the implied F never appears solidly until the last few bars of the section and then in minor.

Section B

This section is also in 6/4, beginning in the neighboring tonality of A^b and concluding rather oddly in F[#]. The new expression mark *Fresh* demarcates stanza three and commencement of C.

Section C

The flowing quality of A and B is replaced here with an initial dotted pattern which leads into an appealing up beat rhythm and sequential use of appoggiatura. This second section (32-36) is repeated with subtle changes in resolution, and the eventual motion to F in 39-40 prepares for the return of A'.

Section A'

From 41-55 there is an almost exact musical repeat of A, with obvious changes in rhythm to accommodate textual differences. The cadential section has the identical f minor goal of A but incorporates a striking chromatic preparation of the final chord with an effective six part divisi.

Because of the extreme tessitura demands on tenor I (over forty notes higher than F) and the subtle chromatics, Delius has created a short part song with performance requirements of a virtuoso ensemble. The work easily provides a stunning example of the great expressive potential of the male chorus, and it is unfortunate, yet understandable, that no satisfactory recording of the work exists among the current wave of new Delius releases.

To be sung of a summer night on the water

COMPOSED: 1917

FIRST PERFORMANCE: 1920, London, Oriana Madrigal Society,
Charles Kennedy Scott, Conductor

TEXT: wordless

FORCES REQUIRED: SATTB; SATTB with Tenor solo

It would seem a natural progression for Delius to eventually write an entire composition for wordless chorus considering his great fascination with that medium, and in the late spring of 1917 he composed two such pieces under the collective title *To be sung of a summer night on the water*. They are dedicated to Charles Kennedy Scott and his Oriana Madrigal Society of whom Hutchings comments:

Coming late on the scene, when England was ready for Delius's greatest music, Charles Kennedy Scott did for Delian choralism what Beecham did for the orchestral works, merely from high standards and ideals, and the ability to make the singers share them. Collaboration of the two musicians, as in the memorable last concert of the 1929 Delius Festival, made possible performances which have not yet been

surpassed and, in view of the wretched standard of present-day singing, are likely to remain unsurpassed in our time.³

These two compositions of which the first is a kind of flowing reverie and the second a folk song fantasy, magnificently portray the essence of Delius's vocal art. Their subtlety reveals not only his techniques of motivic development and harmonic manipulation, but also an incredible sensitivity to vocal color and expression. The works are obviously conceived as vocal compositions and not merely "instrumental" transcriptions. Interesting evidence is Delius's concern with choral phrasing as illustrated by the precise performance directions for each piece:

I - Sing on vowel "uh" (as in love) with very loose mouth, almost closed in the *pianissimo*, but which should be gradually opened or shut according as more or less tone is wanted. Breath should be taken only at the sign ",", if possible, and quietly and quickly in order to preserve the *legato*.

II - The Solo voice should sing to syllables as indicated, introducing delicate *staccati* at appropriate places (which are generally where the syllable "luh" is put). On *staccato* notes the vowel should be sung for a very short time and the remainder of the notes continued on the sound of "l". [the letter l]

The accompanying voices should sing on "uh" (as in love). A slight aspirate, though without taking the voice off before it, may be made at (1) all repeated notes and (2) the first note of slurs (unless it happens to come after a breath, in which case the aspirate is best omitted).

The "breath" directions are the most intriguing as they often differ from part to part creating a sensitive overlap and an obvious concern for legato and phrasing.

Also of note is Delius's choice of the same SATTB divisi found in *On Craig Dhu*, thus displaying a definite affinity for this warmer sonority, especially where vocal color is a chief concern.

I

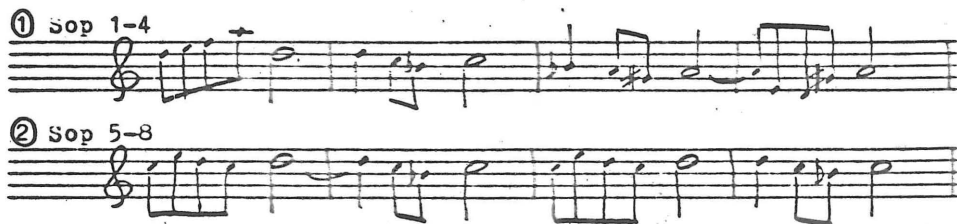
The basic form of this piece is quite straightforward, with three obvious repetitions of an eight bar melody (which is in turn divided into two related

four bar phrases, 1 and 2.) The accompanying harmony confirms a basic tripartite ABA' pattern in which A' has been sequentially extended to cadence in a third tonality (differing from A):

A - d minor 1-8

B - a minor (v) 9-16

A' - d minor 17-24 + extension B^b major+G 25-30



The true interest however, is not in the form or even in the subtle manipulations in Delius's chromatic palette, but rather in his treatment of the voices. Most striking is the subdivision of the melody among various parts in B, and his creative avoidance of simple repetition in A'. Although from 17-24 the harmonic direction is substantially similar to A, Delius has not only re-distributed the melody but also completely rewritten the "five" other parts. The result, although musically the same, gives the impression of a total "re-orchestration" (this technique is also employed in II).

The subdivision of the melody reveals an obvious sensitivity to vocal color and intensity as illustrated by the presence of the Tenor in its highest range in B-2 and in A', and by the parallel employment of the Soprano in a descant function.

Delius's spacing of the voices has also created interesting effects in sonority ranging from an octave in 1 and 9 to a maximum of three at the two climaxes in 15 and 25.

Looking briefly at the harmony, basic progressions are implied by the

melody, and Delius has liberally used chromaticism (mostly descending) to achieve effortless transition. Correlated to his wide spacing of parts is an amazing awareness of the effects of complex chords in various inversions. Excellent examples appear in 6-7: $E^b_{11}-G_9$ and in 24-26: $A^b_{11}-B^b_9-F_{11}$.

The piece as a whole is beautiful and flowing as its phrases unfold effortlessly, creating an organic breathing quality from beginning to end.

II

In contrast to the placidness of I, Delius presents a lively folk song fantasy for tenor solo and six part chorus. Considerably more complicated, the basic melodic unit is a two bar phrase, (1), answered by a second idea, (2), which is derived from the first. Both motifs undergo variation during the piece, especially (2), which appears in inversion, (2a), and augmentation, (2b) and (2c). In total these ideas combine to create as in I, a basic tripartite form, again supported harmonically:

A - D major 1-7

B - developmental treatment 8-18 g,C,F,d,A(V)

A' - D major 19-24

Coda - 25-33

Initially impressive in the work is the tremendous complexity in dynamics, counterpoint, chromaticism, and of course color and chord spacing. Unlike I, the intricacies of motivic structure and the resultant form are quite significant.

① 1-2 tenor solo

② 3 solo

②a 4

②b 5

②c 12 soprano

Section A

Consisting of the first seven bars, A presents all the major motifs with the exception of the once stated (2c). The solo material easily dominates the

music from 1-5, stating the various motifs and including a catchy echo effect. In the final two bars the chorus swells into importance as the solo and soprano lines merge, creating the first climax of the work.

Section B

This section is multifaceted and consists of various statements of ① in other tonalities. In 8, marked *rather slowly*, ① appears in g minor, slightly altered in part b, and answered by ② and ②c. At *Tempo I*, ① is stated successively in F major and d minor, with the d section varied by the *rallentando* in 15. At *a tempo*, ① shifts to A major followed by a choral swell reminiscent of 7, and leading to D major and the return of A' in 19.

Section A'

Similar to I, the repetition reveals differences in choral part writing against identical melodic material. The section is one bar shorter than A and is closed by another sonorous climax where the choral sopranos dominate.

Coda

From 25 to the end, ①-a appears twice more, first answered in 26 by a b variant similar to 15, and finally by two repetitions of ②b in the baritones in 31-32. The solo line seems to suggest a languid reminiscence of ② in varied augmentation in 28 and 31-32, and a beautiful choral effect is created by the sighing line of the sopranos in 30 which floats above the final statement of ①.

In overview, II is subtly complex in part writing; employs clever use of dynamics; and presents some of Delius's most beautiful lush sonorities created by an occasional seven part divisi. The harmonic style is identical to I with implied melodic direction, extensive passing chromaticism, complex chords, and having an obvious influence on the structural format. With both pieces Delius has created compositions of great appeal, demonstrating a total grasp of the potential of wordless choral writing in a tonal idiom. Left for the reader's musing is the *raison-d'etre* for their unusual title.

The Splendor Falls on Castle Walls

COMPOSED: 1924

FIRST PERFORMANCE: Delius Festival in 1929 ?

TEXT: From the opening of IV of *The Princess* of Alfred Lord Tennyson

FORCES REQUIRED: SATB

After an interval of seven years during which Delius was beset by the initial effects of his final illness, he composed the last of the part songs, aided by his wife Jelka who transcribed his dictation. It would have been his last choral composition had it not been for the later collaboration with Eric Fenby which produced *Songs of Farewell*

The work presents a fascinating combination of texted and wordless singing, the effects of which unite to produce the most original and possibly most appealing of Delius's part songs. It is obvious after an examination of the poem that Delius was most attracted by the "refrain motif" with its reference to bugles and dying echoes, rather than the total textual import. He set only two of the three stanzas of the poem and over two thirds of the music is devoted to "word painting" of the refrain, highlighted by the stunning wordless horn calls.

Structurally, the following form results:

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|------------|----------------------------|
| | <u>A</u> - 1-9 text 4/4 |
| | <u>B</u> - 10-18 refrain |
| | <u>C</u> - 19-26 horn call |
| Stanza One | <u>B'</u> |
| | - 27-35 refrain, horn call |
| | <u>C'</u> |
| | <u>Coda</u> - 36-44 |

The Princess

IV

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

- D - 45-53 text 4/4
- B'' - 54-61 refrain
- Stanza Two
- C - 62-69 horn call
- Coda - 70-78

The various sections seem to share distinct phrase lengths of either eight or nine bars, usually 4+4 or 4+5, reflecting the poetic meter. In addition the wordless sections and coda material similarly imitate this metrical framework.

Overall:

A, C, D, B'' - 4+4

B, Coda I and II - 4+5

B', C' - 5+4

Sections A and D, which contain the actual text, are musically dissimilar in every respect except for their use of 4/4 meter. B' and B'' are transpositions with subtle harmonic variation, and C' is simply a transposed repetition of the second four bar section of C, stated contrapuntally with B'. The two codas share a similar concluding idea, although I has some text and contrasts male and mixed sonorities, while II simply repeats a three bar idea three times, with beautiful dynamic contrast.

Harmonically, the work has no distinct tonality, but rather employs extensive chromatic accompaniment to the treble melodies. An obvious exception is found in the horn call sections which are clearly tonal and simplistic by nature. The subtle re-harmonizations throughout the various B sections again illustrate Delius's aversion to simple repetition or transposition.

The most distinctive characteristic of the work are the unusual sonorities, especially the horn call and coda sections, where Delius has specified an additional group of tenors and basses: *Separate chorus to be hummed with a closed mouth imitating horns*. The final chords of both coda sections are

beautiful examples of apparent dissonant harmonies which because of vocal color, sonority, and dynamics, diffuse, creating perfectly the enchanting effects described by the text.

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A final overview of the part songs illustrates the tremendous variety and imagination to be found in their composition. They contain not only definitive examples of Delius's harmonic palette and motivic manipulations, but more significantly reveal his creative use of vocal color and sonority. In no way "does one feel that portions of greater works have been cut out to make smaller. Each little work is a distinct personality."⁴

Footnotes

1. Beechem, p. 36
2. Heseltine, p. 145-146
3. Hutchings, p. 38
4. Ibid., p. 118