

## Article

# Religion in the Home—The Sacred Songs of the Drawing Room

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**Abstract:** The Victorian bourgeois ballad is a distinctive genre that demonstrates the spirituality of religion transferred to the drawing room. This paper will examine in detail four examples of the genre—*The Lost Chord*, *The Holy City*, *Arise O Sun* and *The Volunteer Organist* to examine the spirituality of the genre in terms of the materials used, the musical construction, the value system underpinning it and the expressive character. It will interrogate their relationship to the spirituality of Victorian Anglicanism and the place of this spirituality in the lives of the people with whom they were popular and its role in their social life, drawing on the author's own experience. It was also a genre in which women excelled and this and the notion of spirituality will be examined culturally, drawing on Foucault's notion of subjugated knowing.

**Keywords:** bourgeoisie; ballad; religion; spirituality; autoethnography

## 1. Prelude

*It is 1953. It is a Saturday evening, and we go to my grandparents in a small village in the New Forest. We—my mother, father and I—drive in our Austin Ruby Saloon through the beautiful tree-lined roads where ponies graze on the verge and deer may appear at any time. We walk through the post office run by Grandpa Boyce, passing the counter before we arrive in the back room where the circular table is covered with a lace cloth and fine china, patterned with ivy leaves. The teapot sits with the water jug, the milk jug and the slop bowl; the sandwich plates flaunt cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off. I am on my best behaviour. I wear my best dress as Grandma Boyce does not think that little girls should wear trousers or shorts.*

*The meal ends with Grandma's Maids of Honour cakes and the table is cleared. Grandad sits down, with me sitting beside him, on the piano stool and plays a selection of the lancers, quadrilles and military two-steps—the repertoire he plays every Saturday evening for the village hop in the village hall. When the washing up is finished, the others return and my other grandfather—Grandpa Robinson—arrives from next door. He had been a gardener on one of the aristocratic estates in the New Forest but now owns his own nursery. He sings tenor regularly in the local village parish church choir. Grandpa Boyce is a Methodist but I do not think he had much relationship with the local chapel. The singing begins. He accompanies himself for 'The Lost Chord'. My mother launches into 'Arise O Sun'. Grandpa Boyce follows with 'The Volunteer Organist' and everyone joins in with the sort-of chorus. Grandpa Robinson, who is now a widower, starts his singing with 'The Holy City'. My mother follows with 'Trees' and finally, I am expected to sing my party piece 'At the End of the Day'. This is the piece that I also performed at my mother's concert party going round the old people's homes. My father and my grandmother listen throughout.*

This happened in my memory every Saturday until I was twelve. As I write this, I realise how deeply I was influenced by this repertoire—based on the Victorian bourgeois ballad and the parlour songs. I will examine these pieces in the context of the mid-twentieth



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century. My postmaster grandfather (sadly) wanted me to be a better musicker than him. My grandparents had been upwardly mobile and sought the same for the granddaughter. My grandfather had one Western classical music recording on a 78 rpm—Jose Iturbi playing Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improvisation* (Iturbi 2023). I was to transcend these parlour songs and military two-steps (which have not even entered *Strictly Come Dancing*); so, I started to learn the classical piano and soon came to despise these songs and indeed, to make satirical/comedic performances around them. I am somewhat ashamed of this. This article will examine autoethnographically and socioculturally the spirituality of the sacred songs of my grandparents' drawing-room gatherings.

Using personal narrative in an autoethnographic methodology seemed a suitable methodology to challenge the contempt in which such gatherings were held in the world of classical music.

The past, lived experiences of the researcher are privileged as sources of knowledge, as “stories worth telling” (Ellis and Bochner 2000). These “introspective stories” by autoethnographers serve to link emotion, embodiment, spirituality, morality, action, culture, history—in essence, linking the personal to the cultural and political (Ellis 2004, p. 37). (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, p. 300)

Therefore, this article uses my own personal narratives (distinguished here by using text in italics) to place the songs of these gatherings into a cultural context (the lyrics of the songs are distinguished by using bold text)—these accounts include the emotion and embodiment which are often excluded from traditional methodologies. They reveal what Heather Walton calls ‘epiphanies’:

Epiphanies will be linked to embodied experiences that are rarely voiced in institutional religious contexts and the ethnographic writing that gives them voice can convey the complexity and ambiguity of our religious selves. (Walton 2014, p. 5)

The process of doing this has involved my retrieving memories as well as musical copies of particular songs, which has proved a challenging personal undertaking.

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of conducting research and representing others (Spry 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams and Holman Jones 2008) ... as a method, autoethnography is both process and product (Ellis et al. 2010). (Autoethnography 2023)

The sacred songs of these gatherings reflect their position squashed between the folksong tradition—which in the late nineteenth century was being gathered by collectors such as Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles—and the high art Western classical tradition. They were the expression of the rise of a class whose members would not identify as either working class or upper-class. Whereas folksongs were highly regarded by the developing world of folklore studies, these written-down drawing-room sacred songs (which were notated and had an identified composer) were considered neither as authentic (or was it exotic in some way?) as orate folksongs nor of sufficient standard to enter the notated Western classical tradition. The latter has always held the domain of musical form (Construction) as crucial to the valuing of a piece and, as these drawing-room pieces often had expressive elements high on their agenda, they failed the test to enter what Classic FM still calls “the world’s greatest music”. The songs were easily and regularly ridiculed; as The Times says of the poet (a barrister) of *The Holy City*:

His fertility was extraordinary, and though it is easy to be contemptuous of his drawing-room lyrics, sentimental, humorous and patriotic, which are said to number about 3000 altogether, it is certain that no practising barrister has ever before provided so much innocent pleasure. (The Times obituary 1929)

In writing this, I have realised that my entry into music and spirituality is not a canonical story for reasons of class and gender:

We write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Kiesinger 2002; Poulos 2008), purge our burdens (Atkinson 2007), and question canonical stories—conventional, authoritative, and “projective” storylines that “plot” how “ideal social selves” should live (Tololyan 1987, p. 218; Bochner 2001, 2002). (Ellis et al. 2010)

In deconstructive autoethnography (Jackson and Mazzei 2008), the “mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions...practices...exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Caputo 1997, p. 31).

Putting the narrating “I” under poststructural scrutiny helps us unsettle what is contained in our methodological history—“the tensions, the contradictions, [and] the heterogeneity within” this history (Caputo 1997, p. 9). Our mode of inquiry here and what we suggest for a new autoethnography, then, is conducted with an eye toward the excesses of experience and the narrating “I” in autoethnography. Cixous and Calle-Gruber ([1994] 1997) write, “All narratives tell one story in place of another story” (p. 178). (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, p. 308)

By using autoethnographic methodology based on a reconstructed narrative of my own experiences of a search for metaphysical meaning (Chang et al. 2013, pp. 18–19), this article will place the sacred songs of the drawing room in the sociocultural context of a developing rift between the religion of the Church and the experience of spirituality, achieved, in this case, through musicking.

## 2. Spirituality

I now see these songs as representing part of the process of the secularisation of religion and the growth of a spirituality, drawing on religion but separating itself from it—part of a much wider social change, particularly in the class system, and the connection of this with religion. My Grandpa Boyce—then the village postmaster—was part of the developing middle class with its desire to separate itself from the working classes and its inability to enter the aristocracy; my Grandpa Robinson, who had been a gardener on the aristocratic estates in the New Forest in Hampshire UK, by the time I was born owned his own greenhouse. He had risen from that working class into the developing bourgeoisie. The 1851 ecclesiastical identified an ‘unconscious secularism’ in big towns, where funerals were the only remaining important religious ceremony. Spirituality was leaving the Church (although retaining some of its tenets) and in this more rural context was re-emerging in the drawing room. As industrialisation developed, nonconformity grew:

Nonconformist strength went on increasing, as the middle and working classes of the new industrial order continued to grow in numbers, wealth, political power and social esteem. (Scott 2001)

The religion of church and chapel mirrored the class division between the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the working class.

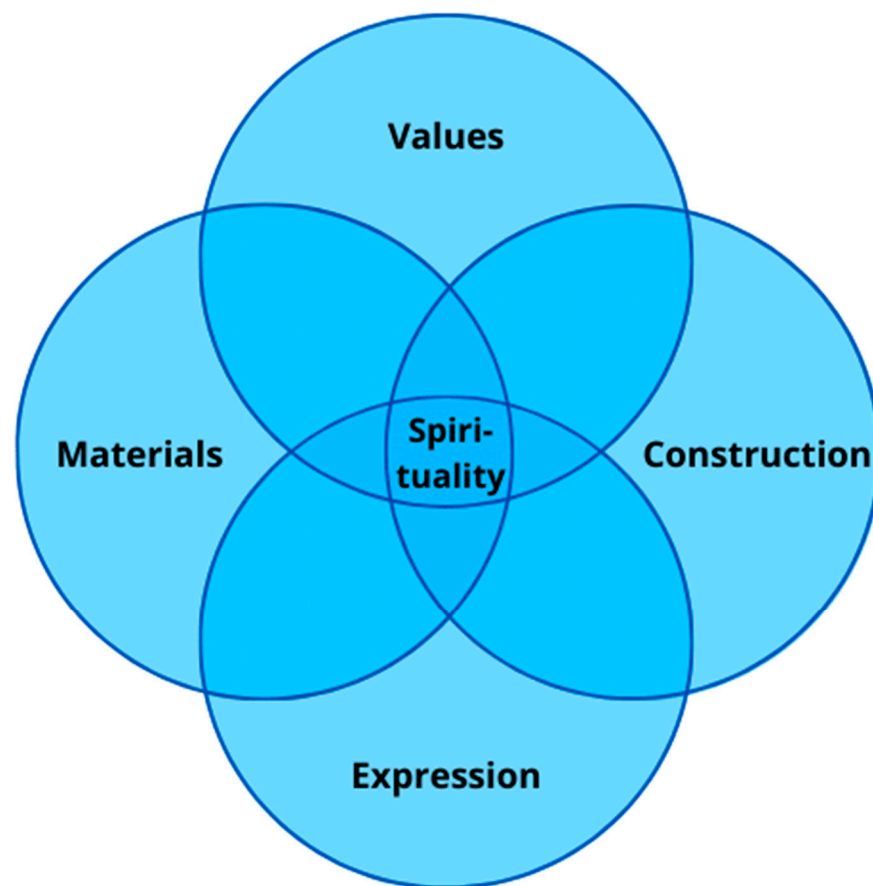
Music in the 1840s and 1850s was seen as refining the morality of the nation. “The value of song not merely as a recreation but also as a humanising and ennobling influence” was accepted by leading thinkers in this country before the period of compulsory education” (Ministry of Education 1960, p. 4). John Hullah founded in 1838 a Society for the Encouragement of Vocal Music Among all Classes “as a means of ‘Softening the Manners, Refining the Taste, and Raising the Character of the great Body of the People’” (Golding 2019). Bourgeois music became part of maintaining the dominant culture. It did this spiritually, as we shall see below, by setting out how a person’s conditions will be improved only after death, thus effectively keeping protest in this world at bay. The bourgeoisie saw themselves as cultured and the music of the drawing room represented their economic, moral and intellectual aspirations.

It also required the ability to read musical notation, which began to be taught in the early nineteenth century. Local choral societies embraced short oratorios performed in churches such as Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary* (Maunder 1904) and Stainer's *Crucifixion* (Stainer 1887) which were seen as having a salutary effect on both performers and listeners. These were still being alternated in my local church in the 1940s and 1950s. Huddersfield Choral Society (founded in 1836) accepted everyone except socialists, who were seen as potentially disruptive of the dominant culture. Courses in sight-singing burgeoned such as John Hullah's (1812–84) *Wilhelm's Method of Singing Adapted to English Use* (Hullah 1841). Music education was encouraged in Sunday schools often using the tonic solfa of school teacher Sarah Glover (1785–1867) (Southcott 2019) and John Curwen (a nonconformist clergyman and non-musician). As control of the curriculum moved from church to government, music was included because of its perceived benefits; in the 1870s, the public schools were asked to ensure that their pupils were taught how to differentiate good music from bad—a trope still found in music education discussion today. This originates in Matthew Arnold's (Arnold [1869] 1932, pp. 6, 70) concept of 'culture', which developed a liberal ideal of class equality and widespread opportunity, together with the intellectual values of critical thought, reason and debate. The developments set out in this article are situated in a complex cultural landscape in which political, philosophical, social, religious and moral beliefs are deeply intertwined. Traces of these are still to be found in my story in a British rural context.

In this article, I shall examine how the cultural growth of the middle class enabled a move of spirituality from the religion of the church into drawing-room entertainment. In this, I shall use the concepts that I have analysed within the spiritual and/or not religious descriptor in the twenty-first century, showing how these elements are beginning to emerge in the sacred drawing-room ballad. In *Experiencing Music* (Boyce-Tillman 2016), I set out the overlapping concepts within spirituality I had developed within musicology, ethnomusicology, community music, cultural studies, theology and liturgy.

- Metaphysical, concerning the encounter with mystery (Lancaster 2004; Tisdell 2007), connection with a life force, God or higher power.
- Narrative, which "refers to the fund of 'story' in which an individual 'dwells' and that constitutes the primary reference for religious identity" (Pratt 2012, p. 4), often relating to a particular tradition such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.
- Intrapersonal (within the person), often identified as transformation and change (Boyce-Tillman 2016; Mezirow 2000), characterised by empowerment, bliss and realisation (Claxton 2002) and a sense of coming home and being at peace with oneself (Jorgensen 2008, p. 280).
- Interpersonal (relational), relating to belonging and group empathy (Kaldor and Miner 2012, p. 187).
- Intergaia (relationship with the natural world), an experience of a sense of oneness and deep relationship with the other-than-human world (Kaldor and Miner 2012, p. 187; Boyce-Tillman 2010).
- Extrapersonal/Ethical, a concern for local and global ethical behaviour and the interconnectedness of all things (Tisdell 2007).
- Tradition, the use of practices from a particular tradition, often not within the context of that religious tradition (based on Boyce-Tillman 2016, pp. 73–9).

I shall examine the way music can impart the spiritual experience using this model, Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** A phenomenography of the musical experience based on [Boyce-Tillman \(2006\)](#).

The four interlocking domains in any musical experience are:

- The Materials making the sound, such as instruments and voices;
- The Expression, including the mood, feeling and emotions expressed;
- The Construction<sup>1</sup>, which concerns the shape of the form that is repeated and how often and how the ideas are put together;
- The Values, which include the context and the cultural context.

When a musical experience balances these domains<sup>2</sup> well for a person relating them effectively to their personal and cultural experience, that person enters a different way of knowing ([Boyce-Tillman 2016](#), pp. 279–87). Some would call this a spiritual experience, some would call it liminal—the crossing of a threshold or limen to a sacred moment ‘in and out of time.’

I will use the domains of musicking set out in this phenomenographic model to identify elements of the sacred in my story of musicking in my grandfathers’ drawing room and to understand how the Materials, the Expression, the Construction and the Values of the songs discussed here were able to transport a young girl into this other way of knowing.

### 3. The Cultural Context of the Secularisation of Spirituality

The development of the oratorio in the hands of Handel started the process of moving spirituality from the church into the theatre. Works such as Handel’s *Messiah* from 1741 changed the style of sacred music. Designed for performance in the theatre rather than church it used a style associated with secular Italian opera. In the Victorian drawing-room arias, such as *He shall feed His Flock*, and *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, lived on as sacred solos. The simpler arias, such as *O Rest in the Lord* from Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, found a place in the drawing room, especially if they had a narrow compass and few technical demands. Another popular piece was Gounod’s *Nazareth* ([Gounod 1856](#)), which appeared in many



versions including piano transcriptions, a violin and piano duet, and a version for piano and harmonium.

Nonconformist hymns such as those by Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and Charles Wesley (1707–88) sometimes found a place in the drawing-room gatherings with their more personal expressive character, such as the feelingful *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. In the musical settings of these texts, chromaticism was often used to enhance the expressive nature of the texts. New forms and metres were emerging such as *Jesu, Lover of My Soul*. The musical settings were influenced by the style of the oratorio.

In the nineteenth century, publications started to appear that were designed to be part of Sunday evening's domestic entertainment such as James Hook's popular *Sunday Evening's Recreation* from 1806 which contained a mixture of hymns, solos and duets with piano arrangements. Sunday school music and hymns for voice and piano were included in *Family Hymns*, published by Chappell in 1837, drawing both on Church of England and nonconformist traditions.

It was in the 1840s that the hymns sung by families on Sunday evenings began to be supplemented by more and more of the solo songs coming onto the market. Various song Construction types emerged as hymnody gave way to sacred song forms:

- The short strophic song resembling the hymn;
- The song modelled on the solo found in oratorio or drawn from an oratorio;
- The genteel style of ballad already familiar in the drawing room often concerning romantic love;
- The solo sacred song.

The Construction of a hymn was controlled by its role in collective singing. In the drawing room, the sacred solo song became a new collective way of expressing a shared spirituality. The sacred song freed itself from the hymn form. Designed for solo singing, the song allowed freedom to vary the rhythm; the metre no longer needed to fit into the established metres of hymnody. Caroline Norton's *No More Sea* from 1853, No. 2 of her *Sabbath Lays*, shows the move from the hymn to the sacred solo. It has the eight bar phrases of the hymn and a strophic form<sup>3</sup> but is designed for solo voice. Maria Lindsay's *Resignation* from 1856 resembles an oratorio aria. It uses a prose text from the Bible as a reflection on a child's death. In the domain of Construction, it includes repetition, predictable melodies and recitative, and its publication included an elaborate cover to emphasize its sacred nature. Virginia Gabriel's setting of Adelaide Proctor's *Cleansing Fires* from 1869 was strophic and contained sharp contrasts that included oratorio techniques and pulsating triplets in the accompaniment which were becoming common in drawing-room music, often indicating expressively how struggling can produce strength. This song type formed clear links between the larger oratorio works and the smaller amateur domestic sphere. Some pieces, such as Stephen Adams's *The Star of Bethlehem*, included quasi-operatic sections.

They took on a marked secular quality as their musical style became indistinguishable from the other ballads with which they vied for success in the ballad boom of the 1880s. (Scott 2001, 2023)

The sacred songs are now often seen as sweet and sentimental, but they represent a rise in the Expression domain of music rather than the emphasis on Construction in the Western classical repertoire. The ballad style that grew popular in the middle-class drawing room was characterised in Construction by a slow rate of harmony change, chromatic inflexions in the melody, a moderate or slow speed and a demanding accompaniment.

In the 1870s many collections appeared such as:

- Claribel *Sacred Songs and Hymns* published posthumously in 1869;
- Boosey *Sacred Songs, Ancient and Modern* (edited by J. Hiles), 1870s;
- Metzler *Forty Sacred Songs* second of their *Popular Musical Library* from 1873;
- Charles Sheard—*Sacred Songs* from 1874 with accompaniments for piano or harmonium.

The sacred solo took its place in the 1860s in the drawing room alongside other Construction forms and subjects:

- Shield's *The Wolf*—a through-composed aria;
- Moore's *The Last Rose of Summer*—strophic air;
- Bishop's *Home, Sweet Home!*—verse with refrain;
- Horn's *Cherry Ripe*—rondo form<sup>4</sup>;
- Russell's *The Maniac*—an operatic mad scene.

The Expression of the drawing-room songs also covered a wide range of themes:

- Character numbers often concerning adult males such as blacksmiths, bellringers and watchmen but seldom factory workers.
- Moral ballads with moral lessons;
- Love songs;
- Separation and death;
- Songs concerning the poor and the marginalized;
- Patriotic songs;
- Disaster songs often treated as operatic scena;
- Nostalgia for an imagined past;
- Songs for the young to sing, usually selected by the older family members. (Based on Scott 2001)

In the late 1860s, several changes in the domains of Values and Expression were also occurring; there was a shift from songs for domestic music-making to songs for professional singers at fashionable ballad concerts. The sacred subjects moved away from biblical episodes in favour of visionary experiences. John Boosey's London Ballad Concerts at St James's Hall in 1867 required a more predictable musical Construction for its pieces than did the drawing-room ballad. In the 1890s, the ballad became a standardized formulaic commodity. In the domain of Values, songs became introduced competitively "awaiting an instant verdict from the audience"—then published. They were sung in these contexts by internationally famous concert artists including many concert tenors and baritones.

This is a brief summary of complex cultural, religious and musical developments which produced the Saturday evening gatherings that I experienced in my grandfather's drawing room in the mid-twentieth century. I will concentrate on the spirituality of six of the sacred songs.

#### 4. The Lost Chord 1877<sup>5</sup>

*I sit by the side of Grandpa Boyce on the double piano stool. The design of the cover of the song fascinates me with curling letters that make it look somewhat old. The name of the lyricist is Adelaide which also seems somewhat grand. My Grandpa starts to play and I watch his big hands over the keys. It starts low and the notes sound rather like the music of the organ in church. It builds up in the height of the notes and the volume but then decreases in volume until the voice comes in. His foot operates the right-hand pedal all the time<sup>6</sup>. His fingers press the chords gently and the song starts on a single note:*

***Seated one day at the organ, I was weary and ill at ease.***

***And my fingers wandered idly over the noisy keys;***

*More notes appear in the piano and the key shifts. I feel the intensity rising as we approach the Amen. It is repeated, getting slower as the volume rises:*

***I know not what I was playing or what I was dreaming then,***

***But I struck one chord of music, like the sound of a great Amen.***

*The first verse is over, and the piano starts again, as at the opening. Grandpa's voice starts softly. The notes are repetitive again and the piano is high; I see the vision of the angels in my mind. I love angels. The key moves forward but it is still peaceful:*

***It flooded the crimson twilight like the close of an Angel's Psalm,***

***And it lay on my fevered spirit with a touch of infinite calm.***

***It quieted pain and sorrow like love overcoming strife,***

***It seemed the harmonious echo from our discordant life.***

*His right hand repeats an octave over and over; I marvel because I find octaves so difficult with my small hands:*

***It linked all perplexed meanings into one perfect peace,***

***It trembled away into silence as if it were loath to cease;***

*The peace seems to be evaporating as the speed increases while the octaves continue. The speed of the chords doubles. They are bright major chords and I feel a sort of desperation; I try to imagine an organ with a soul:*

***I have sought, but I seek it vainly, that one lost chord divine,***

***Which came from the soul of the organ, and enter'd into mine.***

*It becomes grander. The big chords are slower, and I marvel at how Grandpa's fingers move so swiftly across the whole keyboard. His big hands seem so strong and in command of the piano.*

***It may be that Death's bright Angel will speak in that chord again;***

*Death's bright angel enters my thoughts as the accented chord paints it so fiercely using a tune similar to the 'crimson twilight' before; I wonder at the majesty of it all. Everything in the music and me rises as the tune rises to its top note with an amazing chord that lifts me into a new place:*

***It may be that only in Heav'n I shall hear that grand Amen.***

*Grandpa is singing at his loudest. The voice is powerful. The words are repeated, and the speed slows; the notes get slower and longer and longer. The first syllable of the Amen seems to last forever. I too have found a chord inside me and I long to stay there with my Grandpa forever.*

This has always been one of my favourite songs and can still transport me to a different way of knowing despite all the criticism and satire that has been levelled at it. Its composer, Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842–1900) composed it during his brother's final illness in 1877 when he was becoming better known, although few of the operettas for which he is famous had been written then. He was still relatively poor, although this song was to bring him many royalties when Boosey & Co. began their ballad concerts involving professional singers. He dedicated some of his ballads to famous singers, which helped them raise money. This song was immediately successful (Jacobs 1984, p. 2) and had great commercial success in Britain and America in the 1870s and 1880s, reaching sales of half a million by the end of the nineteenth century. It was taken up by the American singer, Antoinette Sterling, who may have asked him to set the poem. It did receive its first performance at a ballad concert, sung by Sterling, with Sullivan at the piano and Sydney Naylor at the organ. The song was also sung by Mrs. Ronalds, a rich American society hostess with a flourishing London salon, who became Sullivan's mistress. The Prince of Wales remarked that he would travel anywhere in the British Isles to hear her sing it. The outstanding contralto Clara Butt also became associated with it and saw in it the grandeur of Beethoven<sup>7</sup>. Her voice was a legend that still existed in my parents' day. Her voice was so rich, full and powerful that Sir Thomas Beecham declared that it could be heard in France.<sup>8</sup> It is a timbre that is not so greatly favoured today but which I think influenced the way that female singers approached the sacred ballad—not fearing the power and timbre of the mature woman's voice. Clara Butt saw fit to accompany it in later ballad concerts with a speech affirming the Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy, in case the audience did not get the religious message of the song. It was later recorded by Enrico Caruso who had sung it in a benefit concert for the victims of the *Titanic*. Sullivan saw the song as one of his best works (Encyclopedia Titanica 2023). In 1888, it was the subject of one of Thomas Edison's first recordings in a version for cornet and piano.



Sullivan was one of the most melodically imaginative and rhythmically varied of ballad composers; and, as I saw in my account of the earlier experience, in the domain of Materials, he made his accompaniments interesting and varied, using the whole of the piano keyboard in demanding ways.<sup>9</sup> He knew how to use dramatic chords like the expressive use of the dominant minor ninth at “I have sought but I seek it vainly”. The use of<sup>10</sup> pedal points with passing chromatic chords<sup>11</sup> above it increases the intensity, especially the inner pedal at “It quieted pain and sorrow”. He uses mixolydian modal harmony on the repeat of “Like the sound of a great Amen” to increase the emotional intensity. It is his use of harmony that increases the emotional impact of the song; the harmonic chromaticism also influences the melody. The uncertainty of the lines “I know not what I was playing, Or what I was dreaming then” uses much chromaticism and many singers have found this difficult to keep in tune. The vain seeking for the lost chord is intensified by descending semitones. This contrasts with the use of a single note in the opening, which recalls the Anglican chant of the church preceded by a passage recalling the texture of much organ music. These repeated notes are transferred to the pedal on the piano that starts the third stanza. On the repeat of the last two lines, the piano doubles the vocal part, adding majesty to the death angel. The last phrase is expanded into five instead of four bars with a pause on the penultimate note, which became a real characteristic in these ballads and allowed singers to show their ability in the area of breath control and indeed sometimes in vocal ornamentation. Although the poem is strophic, the form avoids mirroring this completely (as later ballads would do (Scott 2004)) which adds sophistication to the original text. In his earlier works, he tended towards a strophic form with a chorus. The originality of his setting made Sullivan initially unsure about how popular this song would be. It is different from some of the formulae that characterised many of the ballads. It is clear how effectively Sullivan uses the interface between the domains of Materials (the complex keyboard accompaniment), Expression (the intense experience portrayed), Construction (in its use of chromaticism in melody and harmony) and Values (the religious nature of the text and its location in a drawing-room song).

It did originally have a harmonium part as well, but my grandfather’s sitting room was never large enough for this. At the final climax, the harmonium player was to use all the available stops. It does emphasize the organ-like character of the opening, but it falls silent for the first verse only appearing to hint at the great Amen. For the second stanza, the piano is silent, but then the harmonium disappears again in order to make a dramatic entrance at the end. Although as a child I never heard this version, as an undergraduate I did engage in what was a satirizing type of performance using a harmonium alone and wearing one of my grandmother’s dresses and hats with wooden fruit sculptures on it. I regret this now.

In the original edition, the name of the poet—Adelaide Anne Proctor—was placed above the composer’s name. She was at the time as famous as Tennyson; it was published in 1860 as *A Lost Chord* in *The English Woman’s Journal* (Proctor 1860). The poem deals with a fleeting heavenly insight that cannot be regained. Indeed, the middle section of the poem is an elaborate poetic description of a spiritual experience. This visionary type of experience was to recur in songs during the Great Depression of the 1880s and 1890s. It links with contemporary spirituality in the portrayal of the metaphysical—which it certainly did for me. Derek Scott (2001), however, does not see the numinous experience as central to the culture of the bourgeoisie and concentrates on the theme of constant searching, which also links with current spirituality. Another aspect that is more part of the ballad tradition is that such a vision can only be reached after death. Many of Adelaide Proctor’s poems did concern the poor and disadvantaged of Victorian society. This poem does not encourage rebellion or protest; the only hope is after death, which would have been a much more everyday part of Victorian society. It might also have given these deaths a greater meaning in terms of release.

For me, the use of the piano, so associated with my grandfather, the power of the emotional Expression, the interesting approachable musical form and the value system

of that drawing room surrounded by my family enabled a young girl to have a spiritual experience regularly on a Saturday evening and wedded me to the power of the piano and the voice which has stayed with me for a lifetime. The context did not contain the guilt of the church service or ask anything of me. It offered the possibility of an ascent to heaven. It contains many elements in contemporary spirituality—the metaphysical experience, the seeking for Wisdom and the possibility of an intrapersonal change through musicking.

### 5. Arise O Sun 1921

It is my mother's turn next. She is now over fifty and I know, even at my age, that her voice is not what it was. Her party piece and the one she performs in the little concert party that goes around (including me) to sing in old people's homes, is *Arise O Sun*<sup>12</sup>—a song written around 1921 with words by Edward Lockton and music by Maude Craske Day. Written after the First World War by Edward Lockton—who was a prolific writer of song words for the ballad tradition—it has little overt reference to Christianity, although as a child I believed that the Sun referred to in the first verse was a reference to God or Jesus or both. It is a three-stanza poem with clear divisions between the verses. It relates to *The Lost Chord* because of the sentiment that the difficulties set out in the first verses will only be resolved in death. It is a song of the subjugated (Foucault and Gordon 1980; Boyce-Tillman 2000) and bears a relationship to the American spirituals where in heaven we shall wear long white robes and starry crowns—the implication being that the struggles of contemporary life will have no resolution on earth but only after death.

The bourgeois ballad form was inhabited by many woman poets and composers—possibly the only musical form seen by some to be dominated by women. The life of a woman, governed by the gendered roles of her day (except for those with wealth of their own), was very much linked to housework and childbearing and rearing, with considerable restrictions limiting her access to paid work of any kind after marriage.

The Victorian 'perfect lady' was innocent and chaste before marriage and a devoted wife and caring mother after marriage. Her education took place within the family, and the range of subjects she could study was limited by the fear of making her opinionated and therefore less submissive to her future husband's views. Literary, artistic and musical skills were thought appropriate for female study. The mechanics of the subjection of women were to be found in the ideologies of purity, chastity and the family. Female sexuality was repressed by the ideology of purity and found sublimation in religion, motherhood and the spiritual side of love. (Scott 2001)

In this picture of our Saturday evening drawing-room musicking, I realise that I knew very little about Grandpa Boyce's wife—Manora—except that she was an excellent cook and laid the table beautifully, providing endless cups of tea served in a beautiful tea service and often accompanied by sandwiches with the crusts cut off and always with magnificent home-made cakes. Through the music, I knew both my grandfathers much better. Grandma was a very pretty figure but always in the background. This was different from my mother who always prized her singing voice, even when it was declining.

It was these ballads that enabled many amateur women singers to shine and indeed to be acknowledged in worship. Nonconformist notice boards often included not only the name of the preacher but also the female soloist who would sing one of these uplifting ballads. While the Church of England tradition favoured choirs of boys and men (of which my Grandpa Robinson was one) the nonconformists gave women a musical place even when they were older. The tradition became despised, even by later feminists, but it is one of the few places where women's performance and composition skills were honoured and acknowledged. I still regret that I did not persuade one of the folksong recording companies to capture the sounds of these women before they died. It was distinctive and, for many, deeply uplifting. The tradition was exported around the Empire and even in the 1980s it was often this repertoire that women from places like the Caribbean would offer

when asked to contribute to a concert. Many of them saw these songs as ways of surviving somewhat difficult and challenging circumstances.

*My grandfather starts the big opening chords—a demanding piano part even at the opening. It is strongly in a major key with rising intervals in the vocal part imploring:*

***Arise, O sun, and shine o'er land and sea***

***Bring to the world, the glorious day to be***

*Accompanied by simple chords the tune is repeated as:*

***The stars are fading and the night is done***

*But the second plea to the sun to arise uses chromatic chords that are to characterise later parts of the song and moves brightly to the dominant key<sup>13</sup>. The second verse is sadder, entering the tonic minor<sup>14</sup> key as the message is personalised. I feel like crying as the pleading is so powerful:*

***Arise O sun and shine into our hearts***

***For at thy bidding weariness departs***

*The request to*

***Show us the way and faithful we will run***

***Arise, O sun***

*takes us to the dominant key again and I feel the power of the grandiose triplets on the piano heralding the triumphant final verse—a formula often used for requesting divine intervention. This is accompanied by the chords sounding all over the keyboard similar to 'The Lost Chord'. Again, I marvel at my grandfather's huge hands managing this grand pianistic landscape:*

***Arise O sun, O light of love arise***

***When to God's morning we shall raise our eyes***

***The long night ended and the battle won***

*Inside, I rise too into God's morning, whatever this might be. The piano chords now have added sevenths,<sup>15</sup> giving the music a grandiose intensity.*

*The final*

***Arise, arise, O sun***

*contains the song's highest note which my mother approaches with caution. I know that sometimes she is forced to transpose it down the octave. She holds the top note as long as possible accompanied by a chord of the dominant thirteenth. I pray that her breath will hold out. The penultimate note has tenuto<sup>16</sup> over it and occasionally my mother risks a small mordent<sup>17</sup> to decorate it, if she has the breath. The final sustained note reminds us of the middle verse. There is a chord that is reminiscent of the middle verse (the flattened submediant chord) before returning safely to a strong tonic major chord to end.*

It was difficult to find any information about the composer Maude Craske Day and it would be possible to describe the Construction of this song with a confident major first verse, a sadder minor second verse and a strong third verse as formulaic. But, as a child in that setting with my family, all the musical domains—the skilled piano playing, the obvious emotional engagement and a form that was relatively easy to grasp—it took me to a special place. Was it in the sun? Was it religious in some way? For me, the song when heard or performed sums up the essence of my mother's Christian faith. This faith required hard work and much discipline—characteristics that she passed on to her daughter. The endless pleading to the Sun (or was it God?) to arise and help her in this endless and somewhat grim struggle epitomised her view of life. The limitations imposed by the gendered view

of the family—still fairly intact in the 1940s after the Victorian period—meant, I suspect, that her aspirations were never fully realised, and I hope that when her long march did end, they were somehow fulfilled.

In this ballad, we have, in a strange way, by the use of the sun metaphor, the emergence of an intergaian spirituality and an account of a spiritual journey and the vicissitudes it might contain. Undoubtedly, a metaphysical experience is sought here and arrived at musically, even if not in the text. The notion of dying as the ultimate solution is still there, as in *The Holy City*—a theme that disappeared as death became less part of everyday life in the later twentieth century.

## 6. The Volunteer Organist 1893 <sup>18</sup>

*Grandpa Boyce picks up the organ theme again with 'The Volunteer Organist', written by William B. Gray and George Spaulding and published in 1893. I like the story. It is set in a church and centring on an organ gives it a religious atmosphere, but I never found that this could move me in the same way as the previous numbers. The form is very simple—two verses with the same tune and the same chorus for each. I find it very easy to follow. But I miss Grandpa's spreading hands over the big chords of 'The Lost Chord' and 'Arise O Sun'. I call the accompaniment 'oom-jah'—a single octave in the left hand and a three-note chord in the right. The introduction simply introduces the tune of the song, similar to the overture to an operetta rather than the scene setting of the other openings. I see that it is called a descriptive song; it simply tells a story rather than drawing me into a different way of knowing. I am, however, fascinated by the story because again it is an organ and organist that draws a congregation into a profound religious experience. The song describes a Sunday church service whose organist is ill. A request by the preacher for a volunteer produces a ragged staggering man, who the congregation assumes is drunk. However, the music he makes is more moving than the preacher's sermon as it*

### *Told his own life's tale*

*In the chorus, Grandad makes sure that I hear the melody of the tune of 'All people that on earth do dwell' in the accompaniment and I enjoy the fact that I have learned the chorus and can join in with it. The man leaves and the preacher asks the amazed congregation to pray. There is not the dramatic lengthened ending of the earlier songs.*

The use in the domain of Construction of a chorus in this song became a feature of the development of the ballad form in the 1880s. Derek Scott links the style of this song with the developing Tin Pan Alley songs (Scott 2013, p. 97). Again, the climax is reached in the last line—potently on the word organist—but the ending does not follow the convention of the other two ballads. In it, we hear the notion of how music can conjure up a metaphysical experience but this time rooted in a human story. The interpersonal aspects of an assembled Sunday congregation are there as well as extrapersonal/ethical issues in the supposed drunkard. Grandpa Boyce was called a Methodist, although I have no memory of him talking about any relationship with the local Methodist church. My mother made my father become an Anglican in order to marry her. What was left for my grandparents was the so-called Pledge against the use of alcohol and, indeed, this song was to be developed in 1901 into a play on the evils of drunkenness. Later I was to discover many temperance songbooks encouraging us to drink water. As a child, I do not think this aspect was apparent to me. In many ways, the narrative challenges the traditional view of the drunkard and challenges some of the attitudes to drunkenness of the time. It presents the listener with an ethical dilemma.

This was reflected relatively recently in a priest friend who sat one day on a Sunday morning on the porch of the church in rags and tatters as an apparently homeless, lost human being. The congregation mostly ignored this undesirable creature and entered the church waiting for the priest to come. He was apparently either late or absent. Eventually, the tattered man on the porch came in and revealed under his dirty outer garments his priest's robes.

The simplicity of musical form and the absence of a complex accompaniment did not fill me with such an intense experience as the previous songs. The links with the church were more overt and I now find myself reflecting in the domain of Materials, on the role of the organ in the two songs and its relative absence from contemporary popular songs at a time when fewer people go to Sunday services. It was an overtly religious instrument setting the sacredness of the song; now, it is often replaced and replicated by sacred instruments of more Eastern origin such as the temple bowls. The Indian form of the harmonium, used widely in Sikh and Hindu worship, and its relation to the drones of the shruti box<sup>19</sup>, now occur regularly and link the spiritual song more closely with Eastern traditions rather than Christianity.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the large harmonium with pedals and taking up about the same space as a piano was the instrument in a number of homes replicating the organ on a smaller scale; many of the drawing-room songs were arranged for a variety of instruments that might be found in homes including the harmonium, the flute and the mandolin amongst others.

## 7. The Holy City 1892<sup>20</sup>

The next song has for me the same power as *The Lost Chord*. It has words by Frederic E. Weatherly and music by Stephen Adamas (pseudonym of Michael Maybrick) which was published in 1892 by Boosey & Co., for whom he became the most popular composer. One reason for this may be that he wrote mainly for the male voice which was rising in status in the professional world of the 1880s. Like Michael Maybrick, Stephen Adams was a popular singer himself. Weatherly rejoiced in their co-operation which produced this powerful song. In the domain of Expression, it is said that the lyricist was also moved by his own poems:

If the words were particularly moving, he would frequently break down with emotion and have to wait until he could compose himself sufficiently to continue. (Scott 2023)

The text combines thoughts from The Psalms, The Gospel of Matthew and The Revelation of St John. Many extraordinary stories describe its power, including one in *The Youth's Companion* (Goodman 1994). In this story, the sound of someone singing *The Holy City* entered a US courtroom and so overcome by it were the judge and the accused that the judge dismissed the case.

*At the opening, Grandpa Boyce's rising piano chords give a sense of expectancy. The opening words set the dream sequence:*

***Last night as I lay sleeping there came a dream so fair***

*It is semi-spoken, like operatic recitative and Grandpa's beautiful tenor voice draws me into the dreaming story. There is little melody, and the simple chords underneath seem to support the story and occasionally add greater depth. The appearance of the angels in the text makes the chords become more sustained. The mood builds and a tune that I know starts too. I am excited by the angels, and the semiquaver chords that my Grandpa Boyce executes so easily add to the feeling—emerging strongly, fading and slowing into the cries of 'Jerusalem' which start softly and build over the pulsating triplets summoning the Divine presence. I always wait for this passage that is like a chorus:*

***Jerusalem! Jerusalem, Lift up your gates and sing, Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to your King!***

*It feels secure in the tonic major and I feel safe and loved. Grandpa Robinson pulls the time out as the verse closes and Grandpa Boyce stays with him on the piano beautifully. The piano chords keep my mood strong.*

*The second verse starts just like the first, softly, but the scene changes. I do not like the shadow of the cross appearing up a lonely hill. I am always frightened by the cross as it*



*always makes me feel guilty about what I have done to hurt Jesus. Words from Stainer's 'Crucifixion', echo in my head:*

***Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?***

*I feel that I have rejected Jesus in a way about which I am not quite clear. Fortunately, this does not last long here for we are already building up to the Jerusalem sequence with changed words but the same tune. I feel safe and protected, even redeemed from the guilt that I experience so regularly in church.*

*The third verse starts differently. The chords in the piano are sustained and the pace moves forward. There is more chromaticism, and I am uncertain about what will emerge. But we return safely to the secure tonic key to emphasize:*

***But all who would might enter and no-one was denied.***

*I love this line. I, who indulge regularly in the self-examination exhorted by my confirmation book with disastrously distressing effect, am very glad that no-one—not even me, a miserable sinner—is denied. My excitement rises as we no longer need stars or moon. The speed ebbs and flows leading to the last repetition of the chorus-like section. A modulation to the dominant sets up the expectant mood. The Jerusalem tune is as before but Grandad takes much more license as it comes to the end, pulling out the length of the notes and adding pauses in what seem very high notes—but he is a tenor.*

This would seem to be a real account of a visionary experience using a Christian narrative. However, Michael was a Freemason and it would also fit with the secretive beliefs of Freemasonry drawing on the wisdom of Solomon in which Jesus is seen as of the royal line of Solomon and David. The text is not so rooted in Christianity that other readings are not possible. Relatively recently, I saw how complex these intertwining narratives can be. On a stage at a Jewish university in Jerusalem with an audience of Israeli Jews, Arabs and Christians, a Korean woman sang *The Holy City* in Korean dressed in the most elaborate long evening dress. The interface of Values between Christian, Muslim and Jewish narratives concerning Jerusalem met in a curious melange for this context. It was perhaps a blessing that few understood the words.

This song never fails to transmit me to another place particularly because of the simplicity of form with a recurring memorable phrase, my grandfather's fine tenor voice, the expectancy of the narrative and my perceived relationship to Christian narrative. It combines religious narrative, metaphysical and intrapersonal elements. An ethical/extrapersonal element appears in the inclusivity of the new Jerusalem which all may enter, an antidote to the often judgemental nature of the contemporary preachers in church.

## **8. Trees 1913<sup>21</sup>**

*My mother takes over with another of her and my favourite songs, 'Trees' by Joyce Kilmer from 1913 set to music by Oscar Rasbach. It is a simple poem of two-line rhyming stanzas (Kilmer 1886–1918) which I have learned by heart and recite at school. It combines the beauty of the environment with Christianity—in this case, Kilmer's Roman Catholic Faith. The poem sees the feminine tree as looking toward God and proceeding from Mother Earth—which I love. God is never feminine in my experience in church. Its skyfacing leaves are seen as praying, while the robin's nest enhances her hair—a beautiful picture and close to a feminine version of the Divine. I understand this view of the trees of the New Forest that I love so much. The rhythm of the poem dictates the prevailing rhythm of the song, making it easy for me to grasp and remember musically and in spoken form. The piano introduction sets up that rhythm with thick chords. It adds grandeur to the poem and throughout the setting, the chromaticism, and the 7ths and 9ths added to chords intensify what seems to me a very simple poem. Near the end, the rhythm changes and my mother adds her own rubato<sup>22</sup> here—pulling the tempo about. Sometimes she does this more than at other times. It depends on the audience and her own emotional state at that time. Both her singing and the harmony emphasize the last two lines:*

***Poems are made by fools like me,***

***But only God can make a tree.***

*The closing chords include a striking flattened chord which for me adds to the feeling of this beautiful song.*

This song does mark the emergence of intergaian spirituality at a time when educationalists commended the value of grass and trees over traditional school equipment (Davenport 1997, pp. 177–9), such as Margaret McMillan in her book *Labour and Childhood* from (McMillan 1997). As a child of the New Forest who—also as an only child—felt the companionship that the trees offered, the simplicity of the song can always take me back there. In the domain of Values, it interfaces strongly with my own. A contributor to the Ignatian spirituality website has a similar feeling:

Sometimes a tune gets stuck in my head, and I find myself singing the song over and over again. Today I was happily singing, ‘I think that I shall never see, a poem lovely as a tree. . .’ . . . Singing that song resurrected memories of the tropical trees in our garden in Bombay, India when I was growing up, a long, long time ago.

As my mind’s eye now travels around that garden, I can see the tall coconut tree, and trees laden with fruit: guava, mango, papaya, chickoo, jackfruit, custard apple, and pomegranate. I was in a paradise, and never knew it! . . . [It] made me think of some significant biblical stories that have happened around trees. Stepping into the Garden of Eden in Genesis, the trees there, were ‘*pleasing to the eye and good for food*.’ (Gen 2:9) . . . Gazing in awe at the pink blossoms on the crab-apple trees leaning over our fence, I sang along with Mario Lanza’s soulful recording, the end of the song that had haunted me all day. . .” (Athaide 2023)

This song was a favourite among older female teachers well into the twentieth century and in my training as a teacher, my lecturer, Michael Lane, in discussing suitable repertoires for various educational contexts told the story of a boys’ school in London’s East End in which a class sang this song with conviction, fuelled by the commitment of their middle-aged female teacher’s commitment to it. “She loved it so much that they loved it too.”

## 9. At the End of the Day 1951

And now it is my turn. My party piece is a relatively recent song by Donald O’Keefe from 1951 which had been recorded by the then very popular singer Gracie Fields —*At the End of the Day*<sup>23</sup>. It was used by Radio Luxembourg as its closing theme. It is a real example of the praying tradition of Christianity supporting moral behaviour without any doctrine. In those Saturday gatherings, sometimes someone ended the evening with *Now is the hour for me to say goodbye*<sup>24</sup>—a favourite Gracie Fields wartime song of Maori origin.

*The piano introduction is gentle, suggesting a winding down at even tide. The tune resembles a waltz—a rhythm found in very few pieces of the gatherings that I remember except Grandpa Boyce’s dance tunes. My mother made sure that I did pray each night by kneeling down every night with hands pressed together. The tune is simple and predictable, and the harmony is simple. I really have done what I am singing about,*

***tried to be good because I know that I should***

*There is no indication that there will be judgement if I fail—just gratitude—no self-examination and guilt. So, as the dawn comes, there is a faster section in the middle in 6/8 which modulates to the dominant which is brighter and hopeful in order to lead to the next section about power which is more confident and faster. I tell people they should welcome everyone. As the next section starts—still softly—I always get a bit anxious as the music broadens—getting louder and slower approaching the highest note in the song. If it is a good note and the note starts well and I have enough breath, I will sustain it as long as possible. If it is not safe, I will quickly embark on the descent to the end of the*

*section. The first section now returns. The accompaniment has many more chords than its earlier appearance, not unlike the closing sections of 'The Holy City' and 'The Lost Chord'. I cannot rival my grandfather's volume but I sing as loud as I can safely, and hope I can do credit to the revised ending that rises up higher than the first verse. The final note is as high as the one in the section before; so, I have already seen how well the high note will go in this performance. I like singing this song, setting out the possibility of a less religious but nonetheless moral new generation. I sing it regularly in the old people's homes. I know they love it because it affirms their faith in a new generation. I am being the good little girl that my parents and the wider society will affirm—if I try hard enough to be good and help other people. Fortunately, I am not confronted with the guilt of not getting it right that has plagued my young spiritual life.*

## 10. Summary

I have described the spiritual secularisation through sacred solo songs by using accounts from my own experiences from the mid-twentieth century. Music became the unwritten theology of those who lacked or rejected any formal creed and freed me from a guilt-ridden Church religion. The experience is dogma-free and contentless, and separates cultural religious concepts from the spiritual experience itself. These were once interrelated but were becoming separated. It was a tradition squashed between the Western classical tradition and the folk music of the working classes. It was an indicator of social class; musical literacy was encouraged over the more oral methods of transmission, reflected in my grandfather's desire for me to become more musically literate than him. There is still little literature around it, other than Derek Scott's (Scott 2001) detailed study. Gender, class, ethics and spirituality interfaced in my grandparents' drawing room. The drawing-room tradition was full of expression and related to a culture where death was not uncommon for all ages and where hope might only rest beyond it—a useful ploy for maintaining the existing social order. It was in my lifetime often satirized and downgraded, even by me, as I espoused Western classical music; in so doing, I downplayed what an influence those musical evenings had had, both on my view of the Church of England and on current religionless spirituality.

Women played a significant part in its development and were expected to learn piano to support these gatherings. In the 1860s, debates about the rights of women led by Mill and Ruskin were rising. The favourite subjects for women composers included religious songs, alongside love songs, and songs about children. Late Victorian and Edwardian women came to the fore in the tradition of the sacred solo song as poets and composers, such as Hope Temple, Maude Valerie White, Liza Lehmann and Amy Woodforde-Finden. Women soloists were affirmed in dissenting churches, often older and singing in a distinctive style characterized by much rubato and vibrato<sup>25</sup>. The domain of Expression was central both to the composers and performers of these songs. This sat uneasily with the centrality of Construction (musical form) in the analysis and appreciation of education in the Western classical music tradition.

I have shown that elements of current spirituality can be found emerging in these songs. The METAPHYSICAL appeared in the portrayal of transformative visionary experiences. Heaven appears more often than Jesus, with phrases like Holy City and God's morning; angels play significant roles in these phenomena as they often do in religionless spirituality. Musical motifs such as triplets of quavers indicated a sacred presence of some kind but not dogmatically defined. INTRAPERSONAL experiences are spelled out and initiated by the songs. There are experiences that transform in *The Lost Chord* and a sense of seeking meaning. A congregation cries at the transforming experience of organ playing. The INTERPERSONAL appears in the experience of gathering together in *The Volunteer Organist*, while *At the End of the Day* exhorts the person to support others when they are low. Loneliness departs when people are together. The INTERGAIAN sense of the significance of the natural world emerges in *Arise O Sun* and *Trees* where the Divine is seen as revealed in the natural world rather than in the figure of Jesus. The EXTRAPERSONAL and ETHICAL

appear in dreams of a better world in *The Holy City* and *Arise O Sun*. The dissenting link with temperance appears in songs like *The Volunteer Organist* and ethics separated from religion is clearly evident in *At the End of the Day*. But an active pursuit of justice is discouraged in the earlier songs by situating these visions after death. Death offers hope for the subjugated in life. The Christian NARRATIVE is sometimes present as in the cross in *The Holy City*, but as a story reference rather than a devotional one. The significance of the organ—a Christian instrument—features in both the text and the accompaniment of the songs. The TRADITION nearly separated from a particular faith is clear in the praying in *At the End of the Day* and “the sound of great Amen” in *The Lost Chord*. Going to Church and appropriate behaviour is represented in *The Volunteer Organist*.

My relationship with the music of the songs ensured that they would introduce me to the spiritual experience. I fell in love with the piano and voice which were so much part of family life. I particularly liked songs with large chords in the accompaniment, admiring my grandfather’s huge hands. I loved the church choir tenor sound of my other grandfather, and I admired my aging mother’s voice through which I could understand her. Expression was a central part of the tradition, and I enjoyed the drama. The forms—musical Construction—were easily comprehensible in the context of a variety of musical styles. In the domain of Values, it was in the context of family gatherings in which I felt accepted and, indeed, encouraged in my own musicking. It was nowhere near as demanding as playing and singing in examinations and competitive festivals. It espoused a set of Values without the guilt that filled the church liturgy with the sin-soaked texts of Cranmer. Secularised spirituality was dogma-less and musicking played a huge part in it. I experienced what James Atwell wrote of John Tavener’s music in cathedrals:

Cathedrals . . . seek to offer an experience without requiring evidence of faith credentials or pressure to join the club. It is precisely that liminal threshold which Tavener exemplifies. If you happen upon a Cathedral and stay for Evensong, the glory of Tavener’s music can come as sheer grace. You are simply invited to let it anoint you with its costly perfume. It is a gift. No one is demanding anything first, checking your fitness or looking for the right answers. A door is opened in Heaven. It is a moment of Christ-inspired generosity. The kingdom is offered without restriction or condition. (Atwell 2020, p. 279)

Unconditional grace was communicated to me in my postmaster grandfather’s drawing room.

## 11. Postlude

*The car is now a Ford Mazda. The road through the forest is part motorway (M27) and part dual carriageway. I do not think the post office exists anymore. I doubt if there are community dances every Saturday as the village hall is now probably expensive apartments. I do not know who got the round table or the piano when my grandparents died, but I do have two of their chairs. I do cherish my grandfather’s bound volume of schottisches, quadrilles, and military two-steps that he played each Saturday night. I used the military two-step ‘Over the Top’ in one of my pieces about the New Forest with grandfather’s name in it.*

*These gatherings ended when my grandparents died. The ivy leaf tea set is now in my loft and unlikely to be sought-after by my two sons. There are no more Maids of Honour, or big hands on a piano or my mother’s aging voice. These have been replaced by recordings, radio, television and the Internet. At that time, I was going to church, as expected of me by my parents, although I was already starting to question what was taught there. In church, I learned about God, but, in these musical gatherings, I encountered the experience of the Divine which had a variety of names. In church, to understand God, I needed to know the meaning of certain significant words all of which ended in ‘tion’—incarnation, creation, redemption, salvation. I do not remember there being any of those words in the drawing-room songs. Their words were relatively simple and understandable. Prayer for*

me at that time involved the acronym ACTS—adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication—more ‘tions’. My prayer involved much self-scrutiny as to whether I had done it right. The simplicity of prayer as set out in ‘The End of the Day’ was appealing and let me off the self-persecution of the religious teaching.

I went on to study music and learn that this music was sentimental and to be despised. I think my own satirisation of ‘The Lost Chord’ was an attempt to belong in these circles and share their value systems. But at Oxford in the 1960s I could not belong. There were only three women in my year and thirty-six men, who, in general, had come through the cathedral choir schools from which I had been excluded. There were no women lecturers and no women in the curriculum. There was little place for a grammar school girl.

I realise that in those drawing-room gatherings I did have a place and a contribution to make. Controlled by the adults concerning my repertoire, nevertheless, I had an offering alongside them, unlike in the church worship. I reflect on my best-known hymn (Boyce-Tillman 2006) ‘We Shall Go Out’ and its final line

**Including all within the circles of our love (Boyce-Tillman 2006, pp. 80–81)**

*I wonder if that line was born in ‘The Holy City’:*

***And all who would might enter and no-one was denied.***

*I entered a world of pass/fail examinations, competitive festivals and final recitals where I was compared with others and external standards. In these Saturday gatherings, I was who I was and was valued for that. The sounds of all the participants were valued, even though two participants did not sing. These are the ones—my father and grandmother—who I feel I knew least. I found out about the adults in my family through their singing—the power of Grandpa Boyce, the sweet tenor of Grandpa Robinson, the aging tones of my mother.*

*All the elements I identified at the beginning of this article were there. I encountered a metaphysical presence—only sometimes called God. There were profound interpersonal relations and sharing. Many of the pieces included extrapersonal/ethical elements, particularly what I was asked to sing. There were intergaian elements—in a post office in the New Forest—the sun and the trees, for example. They linked with my experience in a school assembly whose songs were drawn from the hymnbook ‘Songs of Praise’ (Dearmer et al. 1925) which—in an effort to be less denominational—found the natural world a safer place to find the divine rather than dogma and creed. ‘Morning has broken’, ‘All things bright and beautiful’ and ‘Daisies are our silver’ were some of my favourites. They certainly transformed me intrapersonally. My young voice was not being taught or corrected—it was simply accepted as it was. I had a valuable practical contribution to make, which was more than I could say about the church and religion. I realised in writing this paper how the sacredness of these gatherings shaped me.*

*There is a regret about what the initiation into the classical tradition made me feel about this repertoire—now still clearly loved when I look at the numerous recordings on YouTube and the songs the Caribbean members of my congregation enjoy. If Sunday church music was sometimes boring then, and I was excluded, these pieces represented a context in which I was included, and maybe my interest in religionless spirituality began with ‘The Lost Chord’. If the Church was complicated, mostly spoken and exclusive, the drawing-room gatherings were simple, inclusive and totally sung.*

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In the domain of Construction, I have used technical terms such as ‘dominant thirteenth chords’ in my autoethnographic accounts, although such technical terms would not have been familiar to me at the age I was for these experiences. I do this to describe the Construction of these songs for the reader and the way that their often intense expression was achieved.
- <sup>2</sup> These domain names are given capital letters in the text.
- <sup>3</sup> Strophic form uses the same tune for each verse.
- <sup>4</sup> In rondo form a tune recurs regularly in a piece interspersed with contrasted sections.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Lost Chord* is available on YouTube: [youtube.com/watch?v=f9L-L6X4xBY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9L-L6X4xBY) (accessed on 10 August 2023).
- <sup>6</sup> The so-called sustaining pedal which was needed to sustain the big chordal accompaniments of the songs.
- <sup>7</sup> Available on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_bauqCoMOMM&NR=1&feature=fvwp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bauqCoMOMM&NR=1&feature=fvwp) (accessed on 14 August 2023).
- <sup>8</sup> See [http://www.cantabile-subito.de/Contraltos/Butt\\_Clara/butt\\_clara.html](http://www.cantabile-subito.de/Contraltos/Butt_Clara/butt_clara.html) (accessed on 23 August 2023).
- <sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ9KUuqsBIQ> (accessed on 14 August 2023) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9L-L6X4xBY> (accessed on 14 August 2023).
- <sup>10</sup> A pedal is a note repeated during several bars of a song.
- <sup>11</sup> The term chromatic refers to notes which are outside the notes of the key in which the song is situated.
- <sup>12</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWETTdRCWXA> (accessed on 23 August 2023).
- <sup>13</sup> This is the key based on the fifth note of the original scale.
- <sup>14</sup> This is a minor scale based on the home key of the song.
- <sup>15</sup> To the three notes of a chord a fourth one is added seven notes above the root note of the chord.
- <sup>16</sup> Tenuto means hold and is the equivalent of a pause and involves lengthening the note if possible.
- <sup>17</sup> This is a little extra two notes—a ‘twiddle’—a decoration of the original note.
- <sup>18</sup> The *The Volunteer Organist* is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwAFRXAUMnE> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
- <sup>19</sup> This instrument has a reedy tone, is operated by a hand-operated bellows and is used to produce long single notes to accompany singing.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Holy City* is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG9pYsTc8vk> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
- <sup>21</sup> *The Trees* is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcnnUpsAVRI> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
- <sup>22</sup> Rubato is a term used to indicate when a singer pulls the original rhythm about, going faster and slower for often for emotional effect.
- <sup>23</sup> Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkpFKiuzmuQ> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
- <sup>24</sup> Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeVlIapgT0w> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
- <sup>25</sup> This style of singing not only centres on a note by moves around it—often called wobbling in a disparaging way—but part of an older woman’s singing style and timbre.

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