Finding the Right Voice: Glimpses of Poetic Imagery in the Hymn Tune

Treasure No 80: Finding the Right Voice: Glimpses of Poetic Imagery in the Hymn Tune by Joan Thackray
An Article from Bulletin 281, Autumn 2014

'Music of quality is a critical element in the life of the church. It is a necessity, not a luxury. It is neither a frivolous confection nor an elitist distraction from the real business of faith. Music of quality, in the context of worship, does not entertain or divert. It reveals'. The Very Reverend Dr John Shepherd, Dean of Perth, Australia. (Extract from 'Credo', *The Times*, 24th April 2010)

Introduction

Some four years ago, *The Times* 'Credo' featured an article that began with an impassioned plea for 'music of quality' in the church's liturgy. Denouncing the trite and the banal, the writer, Dr John Shepherd, appealed for music of a calibre that could not only draw us into 'an engagement so profound that its sense can never be exhausted' but could also lead us toward that monastic exalted ecstasy where the human soul can enjoy 'true contemplation of the creative stillness of God'. Few would disagree with these sentiments; good music is fundamental both to corporate worship and to the individual worshipper seeking a deeper personal experience of God.

If Dr Shepherd's distinctly abstract level of thought is perhaps difficult to engage with, we can enlarge the musical parameters beyond the strictly liturgical to include sung worship in general, and to extend his call for 'music of quality' to the hymn, as much as to the psalm, the canticle, the responses, the cantata, and the anthem. In fact, spiritual experiences during sung worship are often initiated by the hymn, for it encourages participation at all levels of musicianship and is, for many congregations, the most accessible instrument of corporate worship. It is this area that I intend to explore, mindful of the fact that although some hymns are, to today's tastes, uninspiring, many partnerships of tune and text can confer great spiritual blessing.

How though, do we define 'music of quality?' With the benefit of a century's hindsight, we can see why Vaughan Williams, writing in his preface to the first edition of the *English Hymnal* in 1906, perceived it to be a 'moral issue' to provide 'tunes of dignity' as an antidote to Victorian sentimentality. His view was clear, if somewhat misguided, for he advised that 'familiar melodies should be employed' and that the 'specially-composed tune – that bane of many a hymnal – [should be] avoided as far as possible'. Roger Lloyd, writing fifty years later in the *Manchester Guardian*, takes a rather more patronising tone:

> The editors [of the *English Hymnal*] went to hymnody to find a moral code, and what they found and applied is very simple. Those who habitually sing sentimental tunes tend to become sentimental people. Those who sing in worship trite words, platitudinous words, or enervating words will find these weaknesses built into their characters. Those who impiously alter the words or tunes of great artists dead and gone have no artistic conscience. Good music is always moral music wherever it comes from…[1]

Dr Shepherd similarly dismisses the trite, the banal and the 'musically inept'. But his simple list of various musical terms: 'evolving harmonies, rhythms, textures, modulations, orchestrations, melodies, counterpoints and imitations', as owning 'the potential to create an aural environment which enables us to contemplate the mystery of God' offers us as little help as Vaughan Williams or Lloyd in studying this spiritual (and musical) mystery. That said, most musicians – whilst agreeing that the abstract dimensions of music render it a difficult subject to pin down philosophically – would make less of a meal about it and simply assert that the most important element of any good vocal music is the quality of the relationship between text and music. The primary hallmark of excellence in vocal writing, sacred or secular, is not whether the piece is 'popular' or 'learned', 'simple' or 'complex', 'contemporary' or 'dated', 'moral' or 'sentimental' nor, as C. S. Lewis succinctly remarked, 'High Brow' or 'Low Brow',[2] but whether it is effective as a poetic unity of words and music.

When matched with the right text, music can be, as Brian Wren notes, 'emotionally evocative'[3] and this is true of both sacred and secular works. Arguably it is even more so with hymns, where tunes and words remain deeply embedded in the sub-conscious for a lifetime. Yet it does seem that in public worship of the kind in which many congregations regularly participate, there is often little expectancy of our hymns reaching towards those mystic dimensions that Dr Shepherd advocates. Of course, some do possess a musical and textual vocabulary that together may engender a deep religious experience, but many do not. The reasons are diverse. Some hymns have evolved over the centuries from metrical psalmody and plainsong melodies, simple in style and content, short, easy to sing and to memorise. Some have developed from liturgical rites and ceremonies, Anglican offices and chants, and from chorales. A good number contain out-dated language that no longer resonates, or their texts have been subject to translation. Many have scholarly origins, not written with the intention of rousing great personal emotion. But besides all these, it could be that the structural limitations imposed by strophic form extend to the very essence of the hymn itself, rendering it more suitable for the more formal type of worship which many congregations experience from week to week. If this is true, then the eminent George Thalben-Ball, who simply advocated 'a good melodic line and a strong rhythmic pulse' as the 'two great essentials of a vital hymn tune',[4] and John Wilson, who later suggested 'singability' and 'memorability'[5] as reasonable benchmarks against which to measure popularity and durability, may have said almost all there is to say. Many texts do work reasonably well within a musical framework that is unambiguous in terms of melody, rhythm, harmony and cadence, especially one that also maintains a regular pulse and has a tune that is

---

[1] Roger Lloyd, *Manchester Guardian* (24 September 1956) in Simon Wright, 'Fair Waved the Golden Corn: Taking Stock at the Jubilee'. (ed.) Luff, 2005, p 39.
[2] Lewis, (1995) pp 94-99.
[3] Wren, (2000) p 75.
[4] School Worship, Congregational Union of England and Wales, London, 1926, (See Hymn Society *Bulletin* 19/1 p 3.)
[5] Wilson, (1991) p 123.

easily recalled. In this manner, that enduring Lutheran tenet – that music should be the servant of the Gospel – is fulfilled.

Despite the difficulties of writing 'quality music', most musicians would, in theory, agree that the pre-requisite for a profound spiritual experience is for both elements, tune and text together, to express specific spiritual truths. In practice though, it is very apparent that hymnody is one aspect of sung worship that, in the main, does not observe this principle, as the many open-ended partnerships between hymn text and hymn tune testify. Although John Barnard writes that 'the ideal situation must be for a particular text to be linked to one single tune',[6] Ian Sharp's assertion that 'by far the greatest number of hymn texts are sung to tunes which were composed independently'[7] exposes the reality of our unique (and indeed rich) hymnody tradition, a practice that has not only permitted, nor just encouraged, but actively promoted free movement of text and tune alike. Such freedom has cultivated a multitude of opportunities to combine music and words in a way and to an extent quite unlike any other musical genre. But it has, conversely, hindered consideration of a more profound relationship between these two elements, one where poetic imagery is fused with musical expressiveness to unite text and music together in a meaningful way. This aspect of sung worship does not appear to have been discussed much in church worship circles, possibly because we have, for a long time, accepted a musical status quo that has only been actively challenged in the past thirty years or so, although for different reasons.

Tune and Text - the Ideal in Theory

We have long accepted literary tradition that the word 'hymn' generally means just the text. It is rare nowadays to hear the name of the tune announced in services, and fewer hymn books for whatever reason, expense or lack of space, now print the melody line. Our natural predisposition towards words is present in all corners of hymnody, as Professor J R Watson, for example, introducing his remarkable historical study of the English hymn writes: 'I am convinced that the tunes are important … [but] I have quite enough to do in examining the words of hymns'.[8] Another telling sentence occurs in the Preface to the 1982 edition of *Hymns for Today's Church*: 'Although much care has been taken over the music, the painstaking revision of the words has caused nine years of hard and meticulous work by the Words Group'.[9] Nor is it surprising that the *Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland* has published far more writings on matters of text than on music. And what of the rather knotty problem of 'inspiration'? Typically it will be the wordsmiths rather than the composers who are credited with divine assistance. Some, as Frances Ridley Havergal wrote, claimed such a gift for themselves:

> I have a curiously vivid sense, not merely of my verse faculty in general being *given* me, but of every separate poem or hymn, nay every line, being *given*. I never write the simplest thing now without prayer for help. I suppose this sense arises from the fact that I cannot write exactly at will. It is particularly pleasant thus to take every thought, every verse as a direct gift, and it is not a matter of effort, it is purely involuntary, and I feel it so.[10]

William Cowper, too, admitted that he often experienced divine input, as did George Matheson, the blind hymn writer, who is reputed to have remarked that when writing 'O love that wilt not

[6] Barnard, (2008) p 6.
[7] Sharp, (2002) p 289.
[8] Watson, (1997) p vii.
[9] 1982 *Hymns for Today's Church*, (Consultant Editor's Preface)
[10] *Letter* by the late Frances Ridley Havergal, edited by her sister M.V.G.H. James Nisbet and Co., London 1885, p 59.

let me go'[11] he 'had the impression of having it dictated to me by some inward voice'.[12] It is not surprising that the hymn tune has received much less attention than the text, since most worshippers are more at ease with reading words than dealing with the intricacies of musical notation. Ultimately, though, despite all its transcendent powers, it is music's limited ability to articulate many of the finer elements of the human condition that consigns it to a supporting role. This does not deny music's own powerful vocabulary, fusing together small-scale elements into expressive writing to initiate and communicate spiritual fervour in worship, as Charles Thorp (Archdeacon of Durham, 1831–1862) – echoing Martin Luther's belief in the power of music as '[controlling] our hearts, minds and spirits' – wrote in 1824:

> If music does indeed possess such power, if it holds this sway, shall we give it up? Shall we abandon one of the most efficacious instruments for the control and reformation of man? Is it wise or well to leave it in the hands of the enemy and seducer, and not rather to direct its influence to those better purposes for which it is designed? Who would restrain the force of language here? Yet music communicates sentiment and feeling more strongly than eloquence; and we might as reasonably take away the one, as the other, from the public service.[13]

Luther's own words are no less persuasive:

> Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate – and who could number all these masters of the human heart, namely, the emotions, inclinations and affections that impel men to evil or to good? – what more effective means than music could you find?[14]

If, then, music is capable of enhancing and reflecting the written text, we cannot ignore its potential to help us in our contemplation of the mystery of God. Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), in his treatise published in 1854 entitled *On the Musically Beautiful*,[15] attempted, like Archdeacon Thorp and other musicians and philosophers before and since, to explain music's power. Why and how does music arouse certain feelings in us? Can music actually express the complexities and the capricious nature of human emotions? Do certain modes naturally signify different mental states, or are we culturally conditioned to these associations? Although Hanslick had a good deal to say on the matter, more direct guidance is offered to the would-be hymn/song writer by his near contemporary, Robert Schumann (1810-1856). Aspiring to the highest standard of text-setting, Schumann wrote admiringly of fellow musician Robert Franz (whose output similarly included more than three hundred songs), pinpointing what he believed should be the composer's ultimate objective in text-setting: '[Franz] aims for something more than agreeable sounding music. He seeks to 'recreate the poem in all its vital depth'.[16] Schumann here affirmed a profound musical truth: the text should be both the source and the inspiration for the music.

---

[11] On 6th June 1882.
[12] Source - Cyberhymnal, but no accreditation given.
[13] 'Sermon Preached upon the Opening of the Organ in Gateshead Church, 25 January 1824'. *Charles Thorp* (Printed by J and R Akenhead, Sandhill, 1824), pp 17,18.
[14] Martin Luther, 'Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae Iucundae' in *Vol 53: Luther's works; Liturgy and Hymns*, J.J.Pelikan, H.C.Oswald & H.T.Lehmann, Ed. (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1999, c.1965), 323.
[15] Hanslick, trans. Payzant, (1986).
[16] Schumann, (1965) p 190.

Franz's approach is also commended by Ernest Newman, the renowned music critic and commentator. In 1925 he wrote of 'Robert Franz, who tries first of all to get at the central idea of the poem, and then makes every bar take a part in the expression of this idea',[17] and praised Franz's ability to set to music the writings of one of the most exacting of poets, Heinrich Heine. For Schumann, Franz and others, it was Heine who provided a rich source of textual imagery from which was to flow the composers' musical inspiration. The Bible, too, offers a generous quantity of profound writing, yet the potential of music to set alight an extraordinary text has not always been perceived. And if hymn tune writers have, in the past, sometimes failed to tap into the expressive beauty and power of music as a means of reinforcing scriptural truths, it seems that, in general, congregations, too, have been – and still are – equally content with a pleasant and familiar tune, the 'agreeable sounding music' to which Schumann refers.

How, then, do composers write music to match a text? How can they construct a musical framework that enables worshippers to reach the higher spiritual planes in worship? We can discuss abstract concepts like poetic imagery and musical expressiveness, both typically present in musical works of quality yet difficult to define or to quantify. Could it be that those works are compelling because they have a meaningful combination of music and text? Certain hymns are undoubtedly expressive and vital, but some combinations of text and tune do not always concentrate the mind upon the spiritual realm, although they may have stood the test of time for other reasons. Take WIR PFLŰGEN (also known as DRESDEN), for instance, that admirably robust, affirmative tune to which, from time immemorial, we have sung 'We plough the fields and scatter'. The wonder is how such exquisite words as 'He paints the wayside flower,/ He lights the evening star' can remain steadfastly attached for almost two centuries to a tune mostly comprised of plodding crotchets. Nor is the musical key structure of WIR PFLŰGEN anything out of the ordinary; it simply observes one of the standard harmonic templates that modulates from the home key to the dominant key (and back again) in the verse, the refrain remaining in the tonic key. Yet, despite its uncomfortably wide range of more than an octave and a half, it is a solid confident tune, sung with zest in many churches at harvest time. Many will have learnt it in infancy. Familiarity wins the day here; this particular hymn, text and tune together, is well entrenched in the hymnal repertoire and the theories of Thalben-Ball and Wilson are well-confirmed.[18]

Would it matter, then, if we sang different words to WIR PFLŰGEN? *In Golden Bells* (1925) we find not only 'We plough the fields and scatter' paired with this tune, but also a six-verse hymn opening with the words 'We're marching to the conflict/ in heavenly armour clad' by George Banaster. (The name of the tune in both cases is given as DRESDEN). Suddenly it all begins to make sense as we sing six triumphant verses about how the Christian conflict will culminate in victory for those who are the 'Children of the Light'. The subject matter and the tone of the text, somewhat different from that of a harvest hymn, are both well conveyed here in the first and final verses:

> We're marching to the conflict
> In heavenly armour clad,
> We're singing as we're marching,

[17] Ernest Newman, *A Musical Critic's Holiday*, Cassell and Co Ltd, 1925, p 43.

[18] Yet there *is* a hint of (perhaps unintended) imagery, in the first verse at least. The word 'scatter' as a high falling third imitates the ancient act of scattering; 'the good seed on the land' descends through the octave; 'but it is fed and watered' matches two separately descending phrases of four notes each; 'the warmth to swell the grain' on rising high notes seeks the source of the heat.

For Jesus makes us glad.
We know we shall be victors
When ends this mortal strife,
For Jesus leads His army,
The 'Children of the Light'.

We're marching on to conquest,
And soon we all shall stand,
Waving the palm of victory,
On heaven's golden strand.
Blessing the day when Jesus' voice
Called us from shades of night
To join His victor army,
The 'Children of the Light'.

This sense of marching is present in another set of words also matched with WIR PFLŰGEN. 'Again the morn of gladness,/ the morn of light is here' is John Ellerton's hymn for young people, with all five verses concluding: 'Glory be to Jesus,/ Let all his children say;/ He rose again, He rose again,/ On this glad day'. These words appear in the 1924 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1889 re-print) and, unsurprisingly perhaps in the light of the above, we find that it was written by Ellerton as a church processional for Sunday School children.

It is not, of course, irrelevant as to which words we sing to WIR PFLŰGEN, or any other tune for that matter. John Barnard's observation that 'it is essential that the tune be well-suited to each text to which it is assigned'[19] gives the matter some perspective, although we recognise that the term 'well-suited' can still be very accommodating. But if we had to choose which words to sing to WIR PFLŰGEN, surely its characteristic four-square rhythm and the opening four-bar octave unison (repeated in the seventh and eighth lines) best favour the 'marching' idiom?

We get closer to the heart of the issue when we consider the practice of setting a new hymn text to an existing hymn tune. New texts are always more plentiful than new tunes; hence an existing 'suitable' tune is appropriated. This is not to say that the reasons for this activity – whether to update language, to record current doctrinal trends, to eliminate dubious theology, or simply to express a personal faith – are not worthy ones, even if, by Schumann's lights, it does mean that the musical cart is placed well and truly before the horse. A quick glance through any hymnal will show, over a period of time, one tune appropriated by two or three, or half a dozen or more texts.[20]

Yet settings of new texts to old tunes are not always successful. Many have still to reach the point where worshippers will instantly connect a familiar tune with its new words. For instance, there are now three texts – Alan Gaunt's 'Praise for the mighty love/ which God through Christ made known' or David Mowbray's two sets of words 'Spirit of God most high,/ Lord of all power and might' and 'Lord of our growing years,/ with us from infancy' – to sing to Martin Shaw's tune LITTLE CORNARD, a tune that has been inextricably linked, since its composition in 1915, with Charles Oakley's vivid text 'Hills of the North, rejoice'.[21] That bleak

[19] Barnard, (2008) p 6.
[20] CyberHymnal lists seventeen hymn texts for Dykes's ST. AGNES, for instance, first published in 1866 in John Grey's *Hymnal for Use in the English Church*. And there are still more.
[21] When first published in 1870, Oakley's words were sung to Darwell's 148th, not the most compatible of tunes.

opening declamatory phrase in the minor key, with its emphasis on 'North' and 'rejoice' still induces a visceral shiver, with minds and bodies instantly attuning to the icy textural imagery of the second line: 'river and mountain-spring'. Then, as the final two lines of the verse re-assure us that 'the Lord is nigh' the harmony slips almost imperceptibly into the major mode, the transition paved by a midway picardy third[22] at the end of the fourth line. In three of the five verses, the text does not make enough of this pivotal G major chord linking the opening C minor and the closing Eb major tonalities, but it is nonetheless effective in the first and fourth verses where it is matched with two words 'sing' and 'song'. The texts of Gaunt and Mowbray have yet to dislodge Oakley's intensely descriptive poetry, although its omission from the 1982 and the 1987 editions of *Hymns for Today's Church* (probably due to its out-dated language and approach to missionary outreach) may encourage its demise. It is pleasing, though, to see it still in the 1986 edition of *The New English Hymnal*.

There are other practical difficulties to overcome, too, when setting a new text to an existing tune. The melody can provide a helpful outline for the new words, but the matching process will be restricted from the outset by its existing form and metre and by its harmonic structure, and may even be subconsciously influenced by the preceding well established set of words. Yet for all kinds of reasons, writers believe that they can improve on the original texts (and they may be right, of course) or have simply felt called to write a text on a different aspect of biblical thought and appropriated an existing tune as 'suitable'. But where one tune serves half-a-dozen or more texts simply because of a compatibility of metre and stress, any kind of musical imagery to encourage or enhance worship is certain to be limited. Watson's comment that 'sometimes a particular hymn will become indissolubly wedded to its tune'[23] seems not only to affirm that many tunes and texts are seen to 'do' as well for one as another, but also assumes congregational approval of the 'mix and match' practice. Ideally, the tune should be 'well-suited' to its text. But what can we say of the many hymn tunes that, during their extended life, have been fitted to several texts? When do melody and harmony lose their appropriateness for a particular message?

Subjectivity, too, is always a critical issue when decisions are made about the suitability of a tune for a newly composed text, since compatibility of stress and metre alone are, in many instances, insufficient for a newly-formed partnership to work well. To one worshipper, a seemingly perfect union of tune and text may just as easily be judged by another to be entirely inappropriate; opinion divides as to whether CONVERSE is truly suitable for 'What a Friend we have in Jesus', for instance. But Brian Wren clearly saw no problem in setting his vigorous new Easter text 'Christ is risen! Shout hosanna!' to the gently lilting Polish Christmas Carol tune W ZLOBIE LEZY ('Infant Holy, Infant Lowly'), nor the consequences of the tune being 'sung and played brightly and at a quicker tempo',[24] for it is only a very short (and easy) step to find oneself singing that famous round, 'London's burning!'

The Millennium Hymn Competition presented a golden opportunity for wordsmiths and melody writers to produce an original complete hymn:

> Early in 1998, the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral announced a competition for a millennium hymn. Words and tunes were to be judged separately, and even if someone

[22] A Tierce de Picardie (picardy third) is the unexpected move from the minor key to the tonic major triad, simply by raising the third degree of the scale. It occurs typically at the final cadence.
[23] Watson, (1997) p 22.
[24] Wren, (2000) p 80. Arguably, the tune's stress pattern could make better sense musically if each line is notated as beginning on the third beat of the bar, rather than the first.

submitted both words and a tune, each would be judged on its own merits. They specified the metre, 8787D, which ensured that the winning text and the winning tune could be brought together at no notice, never having met before.

The decision of the Millennium Committee not to encourage collaboration between writer and composer but rather to adjudicate words and music separately is puzzling. For how may a text with no thought for its tune (or a tune that has no knowledge of its text) be judged a winner? It can surely only be serendipitous if a good hymn emerges from such a blind date. Some 'matches' between text and tune 'strangers' do succeed, but many make minimal impact. Compatibility of metre and stress alone do not create an outstanding hymn, especially if they disregard the necessity for musical expression. The ideal must be where melody and harmony together express the ideas contained in the text.

But despite the restrictions of format, style and content to which the hymn has been subject, and despite the diverse practices of matching (and mis-matching) text and tune, there have been, over the years, a number of exquisite hymns that combine imaginative words with fittingly inspirational music. All of these are testament to the musical intuition of those who united them, for the result is considerably more than just a fortuitous mix of words and tune. In the following section, I examine several hymns that, to my mind, display complementary elements of poetic artistry in both tune and text. My choice has been limited to mainstream, familiar hymns published in hymnals during the past century and a half, mainly of the Anglican tradition, although no denominational distinctions are drawn. These hymns, as Dr Shepherd would surely agree, have the capacity to lift us out of the mundane and reveal to us new spiritual dimensions.

Tune and Text - The Ideal in Practice

Compare two texts set to the tune SPIRITUS VITAE. The first is the original pairing, around 1914, of the music of Mary J Hammond with the text of Elizabeth Head in the hymn that opens: 'O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us'. Effective from the first note, text and music intimately acknowledge each other throughout. Unusually, the tune begins at the high point with a long-breathed minim ('O') before floating elegantly down on to 'Breath', a procedure repeated at the commencement of each of the first two verses, the third changing to 'Wind'. The words are faithfully captured by the tune as it makes its gentle descent from above before rising again, by the interval of a fourth, at the end of the first and third lines. And who can fail to be inspired by this optimistic upward rise, as the words 'come sweeping *through* us', 'come, cleanse, re-*new* us', 'come, breathe with*in* us', 'Christ, afresh to *win* us', 'come bend us, *break* us', 'in tenderness re*make* us' create an expectant mindset, an anticipation of the work of the Spirit.

Our expectations of a text powerful enough to displace Elizabeth Head's distinctive images are, however, immediately disappointed as we sing the opening line of 'Thank you, O Lord of earth and heaven', James Seddon's later setting to the same tune. The effectiveness of 'thank you' has been well tested by hymn writers over the centuries, so its repetition (eight times in the first four verses) does not benefit the text appreciably. Moreover, the stress pattern that works so well in 'O Breath of Life' works less well in 'Thank you, O Lord' – a mildly irritating detail admittedly, but one of several factors that sadly combine to make it a less favourable comparison with the Hammond/Head original.

From the 1920's comes the exquisite miniature 'Speak, Lord, in the stillness'. Rev. Harold Green of the South Africa General Mission composed the tune QUIETUDE for the words of Emily May Grimes, herself a missionary in South Africa and later wife of Dr T W Crawford of the Church Missionary Society. Green clearly has mastery of the short form, a surprising fact,

given that, so far as is generally known, this is the only music he wrote, or at least that he published.[25] And if, as seems, the original key was Db major, Green must also have been well versed in music composition, for this is hardly a key in which a beginner would choose to write. His choice of key, too, as the most suitable for Emily Grimes's text, demonstrates his awareness of the subtle colours of the harmonic key spectrum, for Db major has a tranquillity and resonance about it that lends itself well to the text. This has, over the years, given way to the more practical D major. Within the compact 6.5.6.5 metre, Green elegantly incorporates two brief modulations, first one from the home key to the dominant, and then one to the sub-dominant, the historically typical I,V,IV harmonic progression, well used by classical composers. A little piquancy, too, is introduced with a rising chromatic step in the third line of the melody, all these aiding the construction of a pentatonically influenced tune that is tonally balanced, easy to sing and satisfying. Based upon 1 Samuel 3: 9-10, the text is extravagantly imaginative within its economical musical structure. All verses are a prayerful evocation of God's presence, and the grace and artistry displayed in this partnership lift both words and music into a creation that is more than just the sum of its parts. The hymn first appeared in the 1919 *Church Hymnal (Church of Ireland)* and shortly afterwards in *Golden Bells* (1925). Text and tune have remained faithful to each other for almost a century in many hymnals and their joint appeal continues.

An inspired pairing of text and tune comes from the great Scottish Presbyterian preacher Horatius Bonar and the celebrated Tractarian tune writer John Bacchus Dykes. No tune having been publicly ascribed to Bonar's 1846 text, "I heard the voice of Jesus say,/ 'Come unto me and rest'", Dykes composed in 1868 the affirming VOX DILECTI. Dykes's approach here is the one that Schumann advocated, namely that both melody and harmony should illuminate the text. Here, too, text and tune have remained largely faithful to each other, the only exception being Ralph Vaughan Williams's appropriation of the text for his 1906 arrangement of a folk tune entitled KINGSFOLD. This competed against VOX DILECTI for many years, until the 1931 edition of *Songs of Praise* (edited by Vaughan Williams and Percy Dearmer) excluded VOX DILECTI entirely.

VOX DILECTI can still be found in many current hymn books, although it is not sung as often as it used to be; Bonar's rather 'ponderous style'[26] may be the reason. Dykes sets up an imaginative G minor/G major musical contrast (the 'before' and 'after' states of the supplicant), neatly placing the word 'rest' upon the F#, the structural leading ('leaning') note of G minor. The move to G major at the beginning of the fifth line transforms weariness into comfort and, in the second and third verses respectively, thirst into revival and dark into light, as the invitation is accepted. The seventh and eighth lines of each verse rise up to a confident conclusion as the weary traveller finds his needs fulfilled. Some have found the major/minor polarity too obvious, but the change from minor to major as the believer's earthly load is metaphorically lightened is nonetheless very effective. In contrast, the rather stolid KINGSFOLD has been variously assigned to other texts,[27] although few of these are included in recent hymnals and most are little

[25] Very little is known about Harold Green and QUIETUDE has generally been assumed to be his only musical work. However, the copyright listings in *Golden Bells* (1925) credit the South Africa General Mission as owner of the copyright of a second tune attributed to Green. Its title is SATISFACTION, and the text, by an unknown author, begins 'He will never disappoint you!' The key of this second tune is also Db major.

[26] Watson, (1997) p 505.

[27] Amongst them 'Come, let us use the grace divine', 'How shall I meet thee?', 'I feel the winds of God today', 'O Jesus crowned with all renown', 'O King of Glory, David's Son!', 'O Sing a Song of Bethlehem', 'T'was in the Watches of the Night', and 'When Jesus left his Father's Throne'.

sung today. The best known is probably Michael Perry's 'He lives in us, the Christ of God', to be found in *Hymns for Today's Church* (1983) and *Anglican Praise* (1987).

Critics of the major/minor tonality of VOX DILECTI actually have little to complain about. Surprisingly few hymn tunes are set in the minor key, although a common harmonic template incorporating a 'modulation' from the major home key to the relative minor (and back again) part-way through the verse is a fairly standard occurrence. Those that are set in a minor key, following VOX DILECTI'S format of modulating part-way from minor to major – for example ABERYSTWYTH ('Jesu, Lover of my soul'), EBENEZER ('O the deep, deep love of Jesus'), LEONI ('The God of Abraham praise'), VENI EMMANUEL ('O come, O come, Emmanuel') and HEINLEIN ('Forty days and forty nights') – all return to the minor mode at the end of the verse.

Very few therefore remain in the major key after modulation from the minor. One is Dykes's ST. AELRED (composed for Godfrey Thring's 'Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep') which begins with a bass line rumble in C minor and eventually modulates – via a brief G major chord at the end of the second line and a subsequent brief nod to Ab major – to the relative major (Eb major) for Christ's words of gentle admonition and calm, 'Peace, be still', on the final line. This type of ending, consisting of three consecutive monosyllables, is also unusual in hymn texts, but Dykes takes musical advantage of Thring's well-expressed contrast between fear and safety by placing 'Peace' on the tonic (usually the final note of a hymn), with a rise to the major mediant (the third degree of the scale) for the word 'still'. Deryck Cooke,[28] who has made a close study of melodic outlines and basic terms of musical vocabulary, observes that the tonic is generally 'the point of repose' and that the major uplift from tonic to major mediant is expressive of 'looking on the bright side of things'. The contrast between this hopeful ending and the threatening minor rumble in the bass that begins the hymn is an excellent one. Both tune and text were published together in 1862, and they have been inseparable since.

For musical imagery at its best, few hymn texts and tunes can match the eventual union between Thomas John Williams's minor tune EBENEZER of 1890 and Samuel Trevor Francis's words of 1875 'O the deep, deep love of Jesus,/ vast unmeasured, boundless, free'. EBENEZER (also known as TON Y BOTEL) was not written specifically for Francis, but was taken from the second movement of Williams's anthem 'Light in the Valley' and had already been associated with several older texts. Amongst these were John Bakewell's 'Hail, our once rejected Jesus!', (1757), Richard Mant's 'Round the Lord in glory seated', (1837), Arthur Coxe's 'Who is this with garments gory?', (1844) and James Lowell's 'Once to every soul and nation' (1845). All these, like two twentieth-century unions – with George Brigg's 'God has spoken by his prophets' (1952) and with Martin Franzmann's 'Thy strong Word did cleave the darkness'(1969) – are admirable, but their undeniably four-square nature and dense theological content make them less than ideal partners for EBENEZER. Williams's tune may be in common time, but the careful placing of upward-rising minor triplets on each of the weaker second beats in each bar perfectly replicates the rhythmic feel of the deep, powerful, rolling ocean that is embodied in all three verses of Francis's text. Three brief passing interrupted progressions in bars 1, 5 and 13 offer a discreet change of colour with a nod to the major mode, as does a brief sortie to C major via Ab major before a return to the relative home key of F minor. (EBENEZER has also been published in E minor, F# minor and G minor.)

[28] Cooke, (1959) p 115.

A much earlier hymn text that also comes to life through its union with a later tune – Frederick Gore-Ouseley's thoughtfully constructed CONTEMPLATION – is Joseph Addison's 'When all thy mercies, O my God,/ my rising soul surveys'. Addison's fourteen verses were first published in *The Spectator* on 9 August 1712, more than a century before Gore-Ouseley was born, as part of a set of six hymns. Every verse contains some deep truth, but nowadays only five or six verses are sung.

CONTEMPLATION is by far the best of many that have been linked with Addison's text over the years – BELGRAVE, BELMONT, WESTMINSTER NEW, ST STEPHEN, ST FULBERT, WINCHESTER OLD, BISHOPTHORPE, ST PETER or MANOAH, for example. It was not until towards the end of Gore-Ouseley's life that this partnership was permanently established, but it has since become, like the Bonar and Dykes union, a hymn tune and text 'made for each other'. Although Addison's text can accommodate both triple time and common time (the above listed tunes are fairly equally divided on the matter) the natural rhythmic flow of the text is undoubtedly triple. Within its short 8.6.8.6 (CM) length, the music accommodates three brief modulations, including one by means of an interrupted cadence approached via a diminished triad[29] at the end of the first line. The upward leap of a fourth at the beginning of the second line presages in each verse respectively the following cheerful words: 'my rising soul', 'your tender care', my daily thanks', 'your goodness' and 'a joyful song'. Nowadays generally sung in the key of Eb major (although published in E major in the 1924 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1889 re-print), the unexpected Db (flattened seventh) at the apex of the melody towards the end of the third line (at the words 'I'm lost') induces a physical chill akin to the sun temporarily disappearing behind a cloud. Almost immediately, though, the subsequent words, 'In wonder, love and praise', are warmed by the re-appearing sun as the Db is naturalised. The contrasts in subsequent verses are less clear-cut but still effective, especially the fourth and fifth verses which contrast 'after death, in distant worlds' with 'the glorious theme renew' and 'but all eternity's too short' with 'to utter all your praise'.

Sir Joseph Barnby, in setting Rev Edward Caswall's 1854 translation of a German text 'When morning gilds the skies' to his own specially composed tune LAUDES DOMINI, seems to have taken Schumann's advice to heart. The first performance was given in 1868 in St Paul's Cathedral, and since then, text and tune have largely remained faithful to each other.[30]

The verb 'gild' is an apt choice to set the scene for a bright and cheerful C major opening. 'When morning gilds the skies' and the resounding response 'My heart awakening, cries' are two well matched ascending sequences which jointly affirm the third line as it completes the declamation 'May Jesus Christ be praised!' The expansive nature of these initial three lines reflects the promise of a fresh new day and the delight of the early morning. The two subsequent lines, 'Alike at work or prayer' and 'to Jesus I repair', emphasise the tonic/dominant polarity, finally leading into the sixth and final line, 'May Jesus Christ be praised!', which occurs in the same configuration through all six verses.

---

[29] The diminished triad (four notes each a minor third apart) is not an altogether rare occurrence in hymn tunes, but its usual setting is within an ongoing progression, as in FULDA, ST ANDREW (THORNE), LUX EOI, BEVERLEY or GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS for instance, and hence is easily overlooked. Two notable exceptions are David Mansell's 'Jesus is Lord' (1974), where the word 'Lord' sits resoundingly on a diminished chord, and in 'O Jesus I have promised' (DAY OF REST) where the word 'I' is placed on the diminished chord.

[30] Louis Bourgeois's O SEIGNEUR from the Geneva Psalter of 1551 has also been, and still is, associated with the text.

Structurally, there is little unusual to attract attention, apart from it being a six-line hymn. Likewise, the melody and harmony have nothing exceptional to claim, except perhaps a particularly strong dominant/tonic pull. Here, the fourth and fifth lines of the text emphasise the repeated and extended dominant pitch (G) in the melody, making the move to the tonic at the end, 'May Jesus Christ be praised!', all the more triumphant. This near perfect partnership of original tune and original words can hardly be improved upon, although Susan Peterson's[31] recent re-setting is admirable. However, whilst Peterson's text is carefully worked through, it does not seem to exude the same gloriously crisp energy of the original Caswell/Barnby collaboration. Without denigrating Peterson's work, I set alongside two verses of each, so that readers may judge for themselves:

Peterson/Barnby: (1998)	Caswall/Barnby: (1868)
O God, my heart is steadfast; With all my soul I sing; I give You praise, O Lord. Sweet music I will make; The dawn I will awake; Hear now my praise, O Lord!	When morning gilds the skies My heart awakening cries May Jesus Christ be praised! Alike at work and prayer To Jesus I repair May Jesus Christ be praised!
Among the many nations And peoples on this earth; I'll sing Your praise, O Lord. For great is your vast love; High as the heav'ns above; Hear now my praise, O Lord!	Does sadness fill my mind? A solace here I find – May Jesus Christ be praised! When evil thoughts molest, With this I shield my breast – May Jesus Christ be praised!

In 1884, Albert Peace composed ST MARGARET (8.8.8.8.6), an unusual five-line musical partner for George Matheson's very personal 'O love that wilt not let me go'. Two other tunes, HAMPSTEAD (H Walford Davies) and WYKE (Leslie H Heward), have been linked with Matheson's text, and both appear in the 1924 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1889 re-print), to ST MARGARET'S exclusion. Critics may dismiss ST MARGARET as an example of Victorian mawkishness, but Peace's musical understanding of Matheson's grief is elegantly realised, and is a rare example of tune and text poetically and musically intertwined. The melodic contour, incorporating suspensions at the end of the first, second and third lines, emphasises the nature of Matheson's anguish and unrelieved longing. A weak high-point occurs early in the verse at the voicing of the writer's entreaty to 'Thee'. The tune is typically set in Ab major, and from there it modulates twice, first to its relative (F) minor at the end of the third line, then secondly, to the new key of Eb major (the dominant) by a similar harmonic progression. The delay in reaching the 'correct' home key chord of Ab major suggests that some previously withheld relief is now at hand. The sentimentality of both words and tune may not suit all worshippers today, but Peace's music undoubtedly touches the core of Matheson's distress, rather more so than that of Heward or Walford Davies, who each follow the standard modulation template to the brighter dominant or to the relative minor.

Originally written in the resonant Db major, is CHRIST'S OWN PEACE (H.Ernest Nichol, 1862-1926) which partners the text 'Lord, it is eventide' (Colin Sterne.) Published in *Golden Bells* (1925), it has all but disappeared from most mainstream hymnals, apart from *Hymns of Faith* (1964), although it makes a re-appearance in *Mission Praise* (1990), albeit in the new key

[31] Susan Peterson (1950-2004)

of D major. Sterne was Nichol's pseudonym, under which many texts were written. Few are sung today, owing to their outdated language. In his best known, 'We've a story to tell to the nations' (MESSAGE) and 'Christ shall lead us in the time of youth' (CHRIST SHALL LEAD US), as with CHRIST'S OWN PEACE, Nichol takes an unusual approach to form and in all three reveals his predilection for diminished harmonies.

Despite their unusual format, we might expect to glean something about text-setting from these hymns, text and tune having been written by the same person. However, whilst they share some similarities (each has a refrain, for instance), there are differences. CHRIST'S OWN PEACE begins with a verse comprising four long lines (13.12.13.12), written in common time. This is coupled by a short link to the refrain of five shorter lines (10.10.6.6.10) written in triple time. This is such an unusual format that I have been unable to locate a hymn tune of similar structure elsewhere. What all three tunes do share, however, is a harmonic format wherein the modulation away from the home key occurs at the end of the verse, in order to prepare for the refrain.

What we can learn from Nichol is how (or how not) to incorporate a passing diminished chord[32] at an appropriate place in the text. Diminished harmony can be used as an aid to colour and depth, but unless used sparingly and at appropriate places, it can become a device of sentimentality. Neither MESSAGE nor CHRIST SHALL LEAD US show any cognisance of its value as a subtle harmonic tool. In CHRIST'S OWN PEACE, however, the diminished chord is placed at slightly more strategic points – suitably in the connecting line 'O grant unto our souls', and in passing at the end of the refrain. But its placing at the end of the first line on *wan*-ing, and in subsequent verses on *heal*-ing, on temp*tat*-ion and on *giv*-ing, may perhaps be just a little too much.

Last Word / Final Note

Many tunes and texts have enjoyed lengthy partnerships. That a good number have remained entirely faithful to each other is undoubtedly due to inspired writing and inspired pairing, along the lines that Schumann advised. Many others have remained together because of their well-suitedness. Other partnerships have survived because their rhythmic metres and stress patterns have coincided well. And a good number, have, for all their paired unsuitability, found their niche in the hymnal for other reasons. For such lasting partnerships, we owe as much to the hymnal editors, the editing teams, the arrangers, the ministers, the organists, the choirmasters and choirmistresses as we do to the composer and the hymn writer.

As many hymn writers have discovered, the strophic form, by its nature, does not easily lend itself to capturing musical and textual imagery. Rhyming verse, too, inevitably limits the scope of musical line and phrase. With this in mind, I have sought to show some composers' attempts to reflect in the music a sense of the texts' spiritual content, and also how, serendipitously, a perfect partnership has sometimes been cemented by other means. In these few examples (and there are plenty more to be found), the partnership between words and music has generally remained secure over their lifetime – or nearly so.

I began by stating that poetic imagery and musical expressiveness are hallmarks of 'quality music', of the type Dr John Shepherd was endeavouring to define. This is the ideal. That said, a vast range of hymns do not conform to the ideal, yet still remain popular. But if I have stimulated thoughts about the different ways in which text and music can be mutually enhancing and whether this does, or can, lift our worship to higher spiritual planes, then maybe others will be curious to investigate further.

[32] See note 29.

Select Bibliography

Barnard, John. *Understanding Hymn Tunes*, Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland Booklet, January 2008.

Beeson, Trevor. *In Tuneful Accord: the Church Musicians*, SCM Press, 2009.

Cooke, Deryck. *The Language of Music*, Oxford University Press, 1959.

Dunsby, Jonathan M. *Making Words Sing*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Hanslick, Eduard. *On the Musically Beautiful*, translated by Geoffrey Payzant, Hackett Publishing Company, 1986.

Leckebusch, Martin. *Hymn or Song?* Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland *Bulletin*, January 2009 pp 19-24.

Lewis, C.S. *Christian Reflections*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995.

(ed.) Luff, Alan. *Strengthen for Service*, Canterbury Press, 2005.

Schumann, Robert. *Schumann on Music: a Selection from the Writings*, translated and edited by Henry Pleasants, Dover Publications Inc., 1965.

Sharp, Ian. *When words call the tune*, A version of a paper given at the Hymn Society Annual Conference at Leicester, 23 July 2002. (See *Bulletin* 223, Vol XVI, no 12, Oct 2002 and *Treasure 68* on the Hymn Society website https://hymnsocietygbi.org.uk/2002/10/14/treasure-no-68-when-words-call-the-tune/).

Temperley, Nicholas. *The Music of the English Parish Church*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Watson, J R. *The English Hymn: a Critical and Historical Study*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Wilson, John. *Looking at Hymn Tunes: the Objective Factors*, The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland, *Occasional Paper*, Second Series No. 1 (June 1991).

Wren, Brian. *Praying Twice: the Music and Words of Congregational Song*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Joan Thackray

Joan Thackray lives in Buckinghamshire and is a private music teacher, choir accompanist / coach and freelance researcher. Her doctoral thesis on the structure of Debussy's music was completed in 2007. Having sung and played hymns for many years, she investigates why some hymn texts and tunes seem to be 'made for each other' and why others fail to inspire.