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Demystifying the Choral Music of Herbert Howells: A Pedagogical Approach via Selected Works

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DEMYSTIFYING THE CHORAL MUSIC OF HERBERT HOWELLS: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH VIA SELECTED WORKS

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ABSTRACT

The music of Herbert Howells is a mystery for many choral musicians. Howells's popularity in England is unquestioned, but knowledge of his music has grown slowly in the United States. While the BBC Singers' performance of *Requiem* in 1980 brought new enthusiasm for his music and the *Requiem*, he is still seldom performed in the United States outside of small circles which are generally in Anglican or Episcopalian communities. This is likely due to lack of exposure to his music and the perception that the music is inaccessible and mysterious. Some of Howells's more complex music is inaccessible for many choirs due to vocal demands, shifting modalities or referential collections, unusual vertical sonorities, and irregular phrase lengths. However, some of his output is accessible and would be helpful in becoming accustomed to his music.

Howells's music has proven to be a fruitful topic in academia. Many books, dissertations, and articles have been written about his music, but most of them focus on one category or genre. No content follows a progression across genres concerning accessibility. If his music was taught and programmed systematically in terms of challenges related to shifting modalities, vocal demands, vertical sonorities, and polyphonic texture, conductors and performers in the United States may be more likely to program his works. This dissertation discusses these challenging aspects of Howells's music in hopes to provide labels to the features which seem ambiguous, suggest a progression for the music of Herbert Howells regarding these challenges, provide helpful

suggestions on how to approach this music, and provide a conductor's analysis for the selected pieces. The works selected for the discussion are: *My eyes for beauty pine; O pray for the peace of Jerusalem; Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks; Here is the little door; Sing lullaby*; and: "Salvator Mundi" from *Requiem.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The music of Herbert Howells is a mystery for many choral musicians. His popularity in England is unquestioned, but knowledge of his music has grown more slowly in the United States. While the BBC Singers' performance of *Requiem* in 1980 brought new enthusiasm for his music and the *Requiem*, he is still seldom performed in the United States outside of small circles which are generally in Anglican or Episcopalian communities. This is likely because of the perception that the music is inaccessible and mysterious. The *Requiem* is labeled in various ways such as bitonal, octatonic, and impressionistic. John Bawden describes, "…the harmonic language is modal, chromatic, often dissonant, and deliberately ambiguous. The overall style is free flowing, impassioned, and impressionistic, all of which gives Howells's music a distinctive visionary quality."[1] In Istad's dissertation on Howells, he asserts:

> Howells frequently adds complicated polyphonic organization, added-note chords, pentatonic scales, poly-chords, tone clusters, and many instances of surprising dissonance to this idiosyncratic construction. Although his harmonic language is complicated and multi-layered, Howells's true compositional nature shines through in his sensitive vocal writing.[2]

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[1] John Bawden. "Requiem–Herbert Howells." Accessed November 27, 2022. http://www.choirs.org.uk/prognotes/howells%20requiem1.htm

[2] Robert Istad. "Herbert Howells's *Requiem* and *Hymnus Paradisi*: Works of Interconnected Genesis and Development." DMA Diss., (University of Southern California, 2006).

In various writings, authors will avoid categorizing the musical aspects of his music and instead focus on the perceived grief and anguish behind the writing. While the *Requiem* is just a snapshot of Howells's large output, it is one of his most well-known works at this point and its complexity is exemplary of how conductors may feel about his output in general.

Some of Howells's more complex music is inaccessible for many choirs due to vocal demands, shifting modalities or referential collections, unusual vertical sonorities, and irregular phrase lengths. The lack of exposure and the mystery of Howells's music combined with the challenging nature of teaching it are some of the reasons why his music is programmed less often in the United States. However, some of his music is accessible and would be helpful in becoming accustomed to his music. *My eyes for beauty pine* for instance, contains irregular meters, long, sustained lines with melismas, and modal harmonies. However, it is quite short, repetitive, and mostly unison except for one phrase. Because Howells's compositional voice is so unique, it takes time to become acquainted with his sound; but once one is, the rest of his output feels more approachable. This dissertation will suggest a progression for the music of Herbert Howells, provide helpful suggestions on how to approach this music and provide a conductor's analysis for the selected pieces.

Need for Study

Many books, dissertations, and articles have been written about Howells's music, but most of them focus on one category or genre. For instance, several dissertations have analyzed *Requiem* and *Hymnus Paradisi* in relationship to each other, and some have written about the progression of his Evening Canticles throughout his career. No content

follows a progression across genres concerning accessibility. Accessibility, in this case, referring to voices with some maturity. Most of Howells's music is most appropriate for collegiate choirs, advanced church and community choirs, or professional choirs. Advanced high school groups could perform a few of his pieces, but many of them would suit more mature voices better.

If his music was taught and programmed systematically in terms of challenges related to shifting modalities, vocal demands, vertical sonorities, and polyphonic texture, conductors and performers in the United States may be more likely to program his works. In providing a pedagogical progression of Howells's music, I will also discuss his musical influences and how their influence is evident in his compositional process. Understanding Howells's musical values and goals will provide insight for conductors on how to effectively perform his music.

This document in no way provides an exhaustive analysis of Howells's music. It will discuss features that are unique to Howells and provide a suggestion on where to begin. Six pieces will be discussed in detail in connection to his other works, demonstrating how the information presented can be applied to the rest of Howells's output. The pieces that will be discussed are: *My eyes for beauty pine; Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks; Here is the little door; O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem; Sing lullaby;* and "Salvator Mundi" from *Requiem.*

Literature Review

For the purposes of understanding the music of Herbert Howells, his influences, and his growth as a composer during his very long career, I am using a variety of sources including dissertations, articles, and books. The topics in these sources range from

analyzing specific repertoire, biographical information, surveys of various genres, and Howells's thoughts on music and composition.

Joseph Sargent's 2017 article takes a historical approach to explain the reception of Herbert Howells and his music in the Americas based on three case studies.[3] Howells is a very well-known composer in England. In the United States, he has become increasingly popular from the end of the 20th century into the 21st century, but his output is performed much less. The article begins with a reference to a New York Times article from 2009 called "Little Known in America" which gives insight into the obscurity of Howells's music in the United States. In this, he discusses some possibilities for why the music isn't as well-known here as well as why some people here love his music. Primarily, it comes down to the English nature of the repertoire.

Then, Sargent discusses how exposure to Howells's music came from individual commissions. On three separate occasions, an individual became aware of Howells through his keyboard music, causing them to develop an interest in his output and eventually discover his choral music. They would commission a piece from Howells and then his music would become more present in that church or community. This led to more people outside of these communities becoming aware of his music. Sargent provides a brief history of each of these cases as well as charts that summarize the performance history of this repertoire in each environment.

He provides a thesis: "This essay offers new perspectives on Howells's compositional activity in America by presenting three 'case studies'—instances where

[3] Joseph Sargent. "Herbert Howells in America: Three Commissions." *American Choral Review* 57, no. 1 (2017): 1–10.

Howells composed sacred works on commission from U.S. ecclesiastical institutions." While alluding to the fact that Howells's music is still obscure in the United States, he explains the locations where Howells is popular. This article affirms my purpose of study because Howells is a well-known name to an extent now, but his music is still obscure here, especially compared to his popularity in England. My goal with this document is to promote Howells's music and provide resources for conductors who might be interested in this music but are intimidated by its complexity.[4]

Peter Hodgson's dissertation "The Music of Herbert Howells" is an older document written in 1970. The dissertation is in three parts: 1. Herbert Howells, 2. The Music, 3. Procedure and Style.[5] The information on Howells's life is incomplete since he was still alive at this time and new scholarship has made various discoveries since then. However, his biographical information and analysis of the music will supplement the information that I provide.

The second section discusses his output and some of the misconceptions associated with it. Howells has become known for his church music even though he has a varied output of music prior to the 1940s. He wrote a great deal of orchestral music, chamber music, and keyboard music. Hodgson divides the output into two periods: 1910-1935 and 1935-1970. This second period could be extended until 1983 when Howells died. He provides a chart that categorizes the output into sacred, secular, and instrumental music with subcategories. This chart shows the shift from a prominent focus on solo songs, secular music, and instrumental music to primarily sacred music. Hodgson also

[4] Sargent.

[5] Peter John Hodgson. "The Music Of Herbert Howells." (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1970.)

talks about Howells's musical influences such as his teacher C.V. Stanford, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Tudor composers.

The third section focuses on the styles of English choral music at the time of Howells's beginnings as a composer. Tudor music became an inspiration for composers during the English Renaissance, as did English folksong. The Tudor influence is very evident in Howells's writing, although Howells uses a post-Romantic harmonic language within modal music. The folksong influence is different from his contemporaries. He did not use folk songs frequently in his music and was quoted as "loathing" this process of "folk-song potpourri."[6] His melodic material is often compared to English folk music because of his use of pentatonicism. His formal structures were not a priority in his writing, although many of his canticle settings and anthems contain a balanced structure. His goals were more in terms of affect and mood than trying to create a complex form. Some formal structures were quite complex regardless of his goals.

Hodgson's dissertation is quite helpful in understanding Howells's output in relation to his life, surroundings, and influences. The information provides a scope for the music to help the new conductor better understand Howells.[7]

Jeffrey Wilson's dissertation provides a survey of Howells's anthems. After a brief biographical sketch, chapter 3 discusses the English Renaissance which includes a survey of English music.[8] Within the third chapter of the document, Wilson introduces the music of Herbert Howells. This discussion explains Howells's various compositional

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[6] Peter John Hodgson. "The Music Of Herbert Howells." (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1970), 160.

[7] Hodgson.

[8] Jeffrey Wilson. "The Anthems of Herbert Howells (1892-1983)" (D.M.A. Diss., University of Illinois, 1996.)

periods and the motivation for writing certain types of works. His early career was focused on academic writing from his time studying at RCM and the output was diverse. After 1935, he focused his attention on writing the music to which he was most drawn. Since he wasn't writing under obligation, he could contribute to the English church music tradition.

Most of the document is an analysis of the anthems of Howells. Wilson opens this section with general observations which provide important information about the growth of Howells's compositional style. The early anthems are an exploration of the anthem and how to set these texts compositionally. The more mature works are an expansion of forms as Howells became more comfortable with his compositional voice. In this introduction section, Wilson also provides useful data about the performance of Howells's anthems. His work is performed frequently in the United Kingdom but has only received limited interest in the United States, particularly in the Episcopal church. This document was written in 1996, so this number has certainly increased, but the trends remain consistent. Wilson then provides textual and musical considerations with information about the timing of his output. In the 1910s, Howells was exploring a conservative style as he was still learning the craft of composition. In the 1920s and 1930s, he developed a more progressive style until his compositional career slowed down immensely. This was due to his duties as a teacher and the death of his son Michael. 1941 brought the "rebirth" of Howells's creative process, and with it, a much more mature sound and structure. The anthems from this time until his death are steeped in his voice and are unique to his writing style. Wilson discusses the challenge that many have in describing this sound, although many can recognize it.

Within the analysis portion, Wilson examines the 43 anthems by Howells that were available to him. He begins with Howells's limited output of Latin texts in chronological order. He provides a brief analysis of the extant anthems, as well as performance, text, and formal information for all the music that has no existing score. Then, he begins the English section in a similar chronological fashion. The analyses are brief and mostly related to form and text setting. Wilson provides descriptive words about the music, without providing specific modal/harmonic information. Wilson's document is a thorough overview of the history of Howells's output and a great place to begin as far as selecting repertoire for further study. Since he included 43 anthems in his discussion, he could not go into great of detail within each work. [9]

Joe Stanford wrote a master's thesis in 1967 which is a survey on the sacred choral music of Herbert Howells. Like Wilson's dissertation, this document provides exiguous information about Howells's sacred music output including his services, motets, anthems, and large works. Since it was written in 1967, it is not exhaustive and is not informed by newer scholarship. However, it is useful from a historiographical perspective. Reading scholarship on Howells's music from 1967 provides insight into how Howells's music was perceived at the time. It is also very interesting that Howells's music is still not overwhelmingly popular in the United States despite being the topic of scholarship from the University of Southern California in the 1960s.[10]

Paul Spicer's biography of Herbert Howells is the most thorough and authoritative text on Howells's life. It provides details about various time periods for

[9] Wilson.

[10] Joe Stanford. "A Survey of the Sacred Choral Works of Herbert Norman Howells" (Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1967.)

Howells's personal life and how it relates to his compositional output. Being one of Howells's RCM students and subsequently a teacher at RCM, he has first-hand experience with Herbert Howells and his family. This book will provide the basis for the biographical information in this document as it relates to Howells's music.[11]

Martin Ward's master's thesis takes a different approach from most of the scholarship on Howells's music. Rather than providing a survey with brief information on a large selection of works, he discusses five pieces in much more depth.[12] This approach is unique because it does not contain as much vague terminology and highlights very specific aspects of Howells's music. While Howells uses a variety of modes, tonalities, and hybrid scales, Ward seems to be focused on his use of the Lydian/Mixolydian hybrid mode with the omission of scale degree six, providing a hexachordal version of this mode. The discussion of this scale which he refers to as the "Howells Scale" is right after the introduction. Each subsequent section is a discussion of the five pieces: *Elegy for Viola, String Quartet, and String Orchestra; Blessed are the dead; Hymnus Paradisi; Take him, earth, for cherishing;* and *Stabat Mater.* This list is unique because of Ward's inclusion of varied repertoire. While most documents focus on a specific genre, Ward's approach considers a plethora of Howells's repertoire as it relates to the rest of his output. This is a very useful resource for this document because of the detail relating to each piece in terms of historical information, analysis, and the relationship to the rest of Howells's output. While this document will not focus on any of the specific pieces Ward discusses, the connection of aspects of Howells's music will be

[11] Paul Spicer. *Herbert Howells* (London: Grosvenor Group Ltd, 1998.

[12] Martin Ward. "Analysis of Five Works by Herbert Howells, with Reference to Features of the Composer's Style" (Master's Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2005.)

helpful in describing Howells's sound. *Hymnus Paradisi* and *Stabat Mater* are two of Howell's monumental, large works. The goal of this document is to help ensembles and directors develop skills and tools to approach works like these. To provide those tools, it is imperative to understand these works and how other scholars perceive them.[13] These articles, books, dissertations, and interviews will inform my discussion of Howells's life and the perception of his music.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 provides the Purpose of Study, the Need for Study, a Literature Review, and the Organization of Study. In Chapter 2, I describe some of the challenging characteristics which are perceived as mysterious or ambiguous. This includes references to a variety of specific pieces and how they feature some of these challenges. In Chapter 3, I provide an analysis of selected works as it pertains to the challenges of Howells's writing style. The works selected for the discussion are: *My eyes for beauty pine; O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem; Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks; Here is the little door; Sing lullaby;* and "Salvator Mundi" from *Requiem.* Chapter 4 contains information for further research, and I provide other examples in choral repertoire that have been influenced Howells's work or contain similar features as Howells. This will provide choirs with a connection to a variety of music and how the challenges faced in the music of Howells can transfer to other music.

By providing conductors with specific language and analytical techniques for Howells's music, they will hopefully feel more confident programming his music. They will be able to label the complex features of the music and guide their choirs through the

[13] Ward.

rehearsal process beginning with the most accessible repertoire and eventually attempting his more complex pieces such as *Take him, earth, for cherishing.*

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGING CHARACTERISTICS IN HOWELLS'S MUSIC

General Characteristics and Influences

Howells's music contains many features that are influenced by other composers as well as features that are unique to his compositional voice. To understand Howells's music, it is helpful to identify his influences: British composers, particularly those of the Tudor era, and post-Romantic composers like Stravinsky, Debussy, and Ravel. Howells works with primarily tertian sonorities within an ever-shifting modal landscape. His modern use of the modal system in a vocally melismatic context emulates Renaissance vocal music and is akin to Stravinsky's modern use of Classical forms. It takes the essence and aesthetic of older music within a modern harmonic language. David Gardner's dissertation describes Howells's influences, "Like the Tudor composers, Howells's musical language is not governed by a strict harmonic progression but is driven by melodic line. This goes hand-in-hand with the use of various modes. Howells's music moves with great facility between major, minor, and modal keys, the harmony defying quick and easy analysis."[14] Howells is frequently seen as a composer who was simply writing to emulate Renaissance-era music. While this is true, exclusively discussing these influences would omit his interest in post-Romantic composers of the time. He had the desire to establish himself as a modern composer just as much as he

[14] David Gardner. "Herbert Howells's *Requiem*: A Guide to Preparation and Performance." DMA Diss., (University of Arizona, 2003).

harkened back to the past. Furthermore, his Stravinskian and Impressionistic influences may be a direct cause for his intentional ambiguity. Identifying the music that influenced and inspired Howells gives great insight to conductors trying to understand or execute his music.

Howells's music is an amalgam of his influence and his own extremely unique style. This comes through in various ways in his music and can help describe some of the aspects that are ambiguous or difficult to label. Some of these aspects in his music are horizontal landscape, vertical sonorities, complex textures, and vocal demands.

Horizontal Landscape

The horizontal nature of Howells's music makes it the starting place for analysis. In many cases, his vertical sonorities are a byproduct of the individual lines. Some of the topics discussed here like pitch centricity could be addressed in the "Vertical Sonorities" section, but I am reserving that section specifically for vertical tendencies in Howells's music. Therefore, this section will encompass most of the information concerning pitch material: shifting modes, hybrid modes, tonal ambiguity, pentatonicism, and referential collections.

Shifting Modes

Several aspects of Renaissance music are extremely important in understanding Howells's music, perhaps most importantly, his modal writing and use of cross relations. Howells rarely uses major or minor keys as idiomatic pillars of tonality, and he will quickly shift to a new mode once one has been established. For instance, in the first 18 measures of *Here is the little door,* Howells shifts between A Aeolian, G Ionian, C

Ionian, C Mixolydian, and then cadences on a D major chord. This is demonstrated in Figure 2.1.

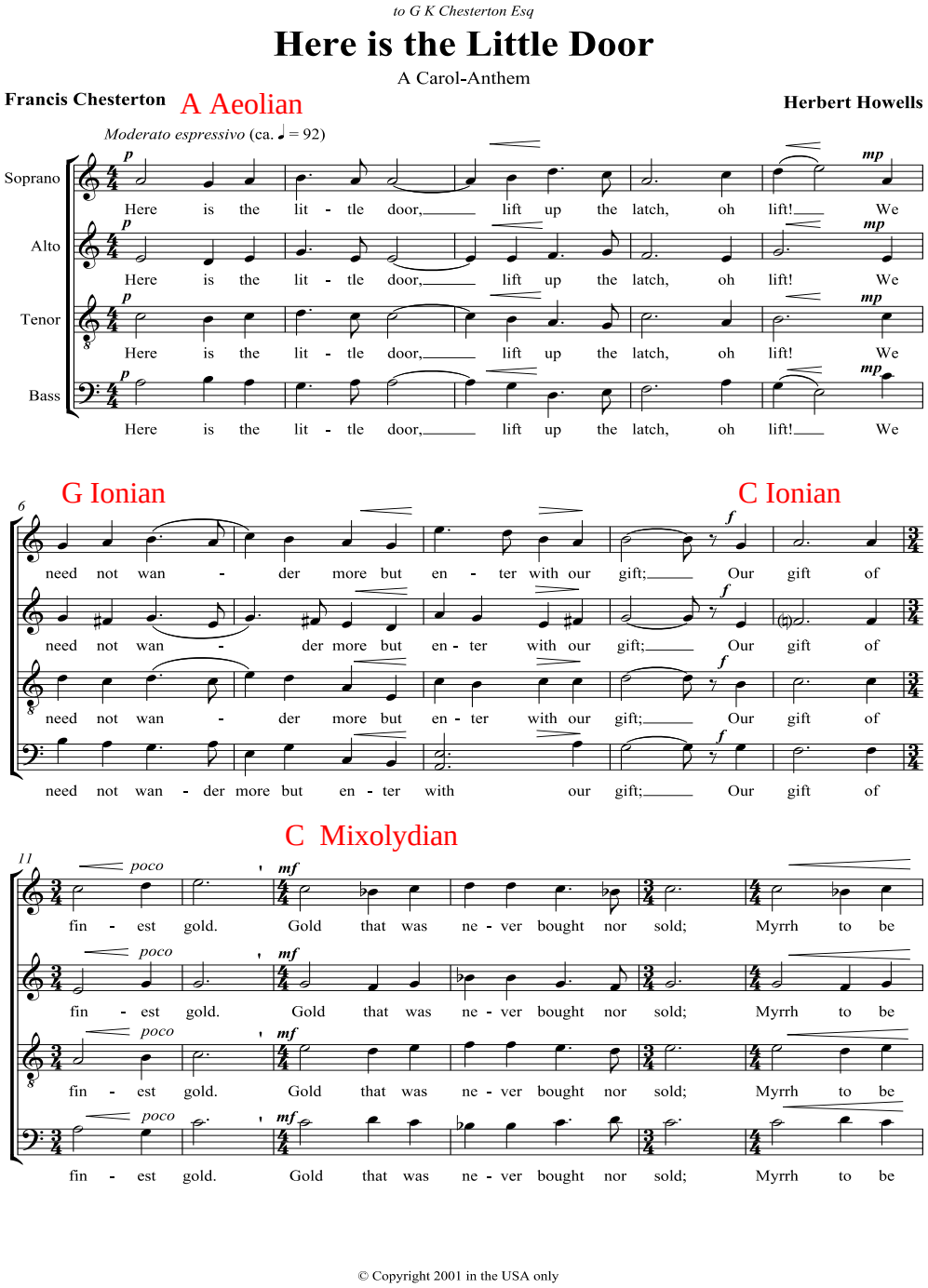


Figure 2.1 Shifting modes in mm. 1-16 in *Here is the little door*.

While this is only a brief section of the piece, it demonstrates a clear, but mild example of Howells's use of shifting modes. Each modal center feels centric, but just for a moment before seamlessly shifting elsewhere.

In some cases, Howells will keep one modal center throughout a piece or a section, but quickly alter the pitches around it, providing extreme modal mixture. "Psalm 23" from *Requiem* is exemplary of this. The centric pitch throughout is D, but Howells alternates between Aeolian, Dorian, Mixolydian, Freygish (Phrygian-Dominant)[15], and Phrygian. Some of these alterations are presented in juxtaposition. In Figure 2.2, between the first and second measure, the B-flat is changed to a B-natural.

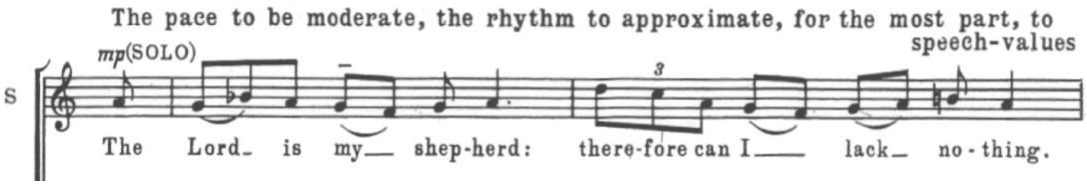


Figure 2.2 Modal mixture in mm. 1-2 of "Psalm 23."

In various other places, harkening to his Renaissance influence, he treats them as cross-relations making it challenging to clearly label the pitch collection within a section of music. Figure 2.3 from the same *Requiem* movement is shown below with mode changes indicated beneath the red text. The excerpt begins in D Freygish. In m. 15, the F-sharp in the tenor part is immediately taken over by the F-natural in the altos. In the same measure, the tenor's B-natural implying Dorian mode is immediately followed by the soprano's B-flat. With one measure of consistent pitch material, the piece finally appears to be settled in D Aeolian before a cadence on D major.

[15] Phrygian mode with a raised third; fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale.

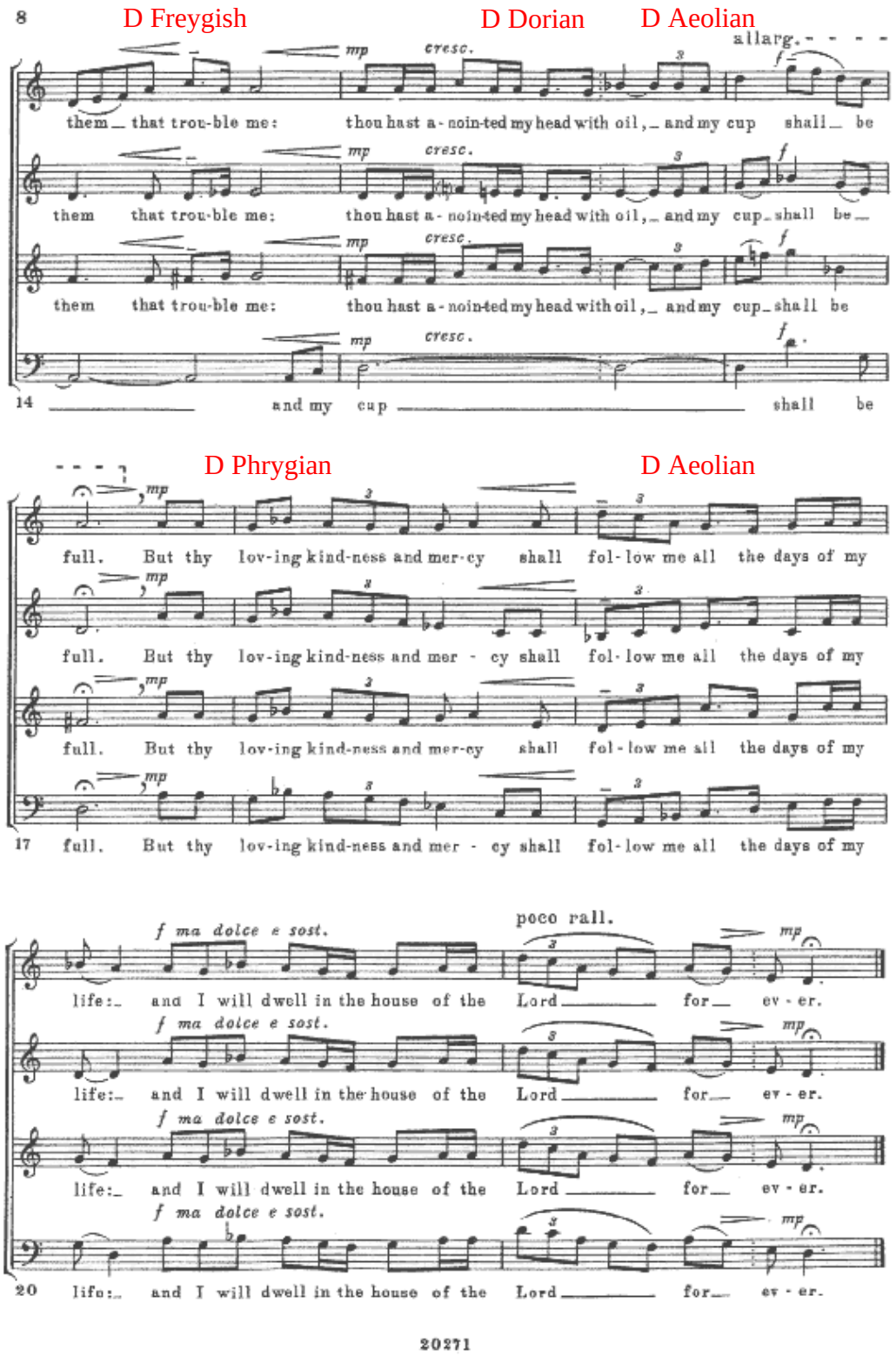


Figure 2.3 Modal shifting in mm. 14-22 of “Psalm 23.”

This is followed by a brief Phrygian inflection before a unison ending in D Aeolian. This is characteristic of a fair amount of Howells's output. If one is not experienced with modal music, this music would be extremely challenging to grasp.

Hybrid Modes

In addition to using traditional church modes that one might hear in Renaissance music, Howells uses hybrid modes as well as modes of the harmonic minor scale. One hybrid mode that Howells uses in various contexts is the Lydian-Mixolydian scale. It is a major scale with a raised fourth and a lowered seventh scale degree, borrowing features from both the Lydian and the Mixolydian modes. Most often, Howells omits the sixth scale degree making it a hexatonic scale. He utilizes this scale to such a degree that Martin Ward refers to it as "The Howells Scale" in his 2005 thesis "Analysis of Five Works by Herbert Howells, with Reference to Features of the Composer's Style."[16]

Howells uses this scale in harmonic contexts, but many of its appearances are set horizontally. Frequently in Howells's choral music, he will use it in the bass in an ascending or descending melodic line during an apex of a piece. Figure 2.4 shows an excerpt from the sixth movement of *Requiem* where the basses sing the ascending scale as voices layer above. This material is then repeated with new words making it the only part from *Requiem* where music is repeated immediately. As the voices layer in, he gradually builds the texture into eight staves with divisi, and it is the most dissonant

[16] Martin Ward. "Analysis of Five Works by Herbert Howells, with Reference to Features of the Composer's Style" (Master's Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2005.)

section of the piece.

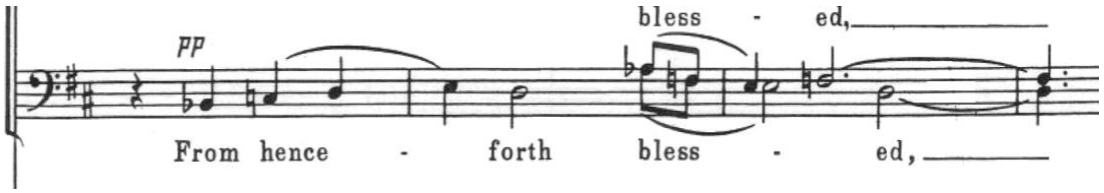


Figure 2.4 Ascending B-flat Lydian-Mixolydian mode in mm. 19-21 of "I Heard a Voice from Heaven."

Long, long ago features the same scale briefly in the bass, this time as a descending echo from the tenor line without the second scale degree. This is shown in Figure 2.5. In typical Howells fashion, he immediately returns to E Aeolian.

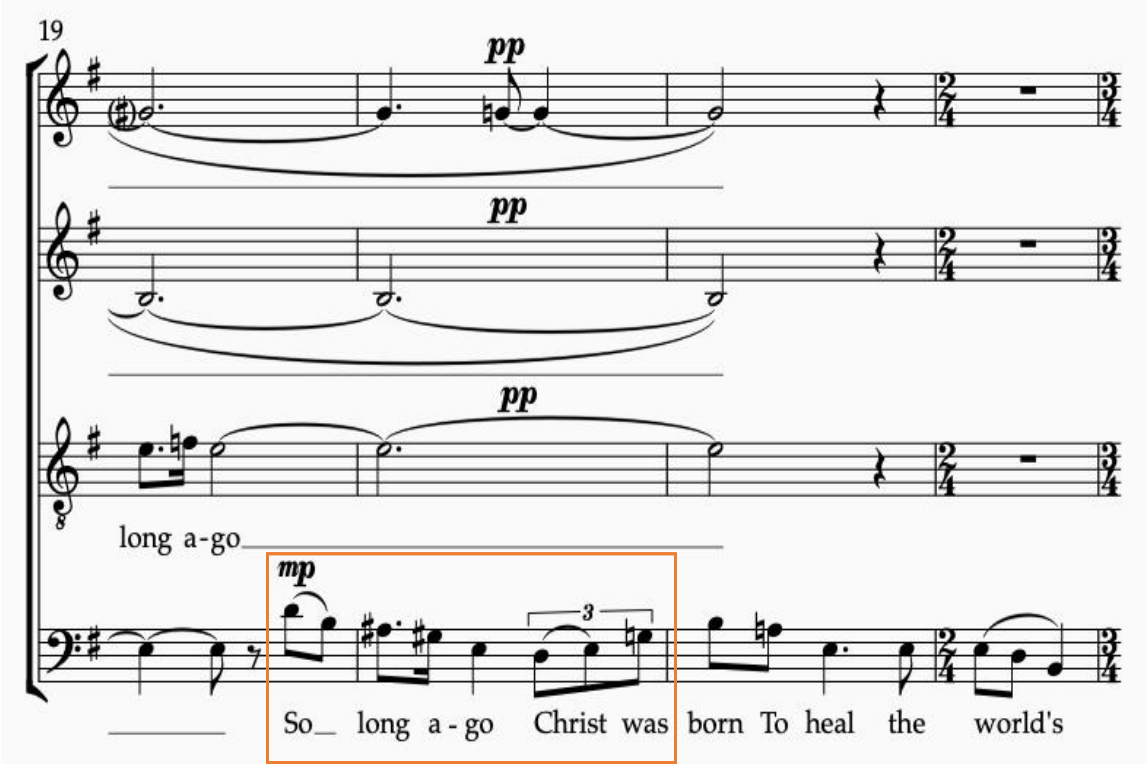


Figure 2.5 Descending Lydian-Mixolydian line in mm. 19-21 of *Long, long, ago.*

A similar scale use is seen in Figure 2.6 from *The fear of the lord.* Again, Howells sets the scale in a descending bass line with the omission of the second scale degree.

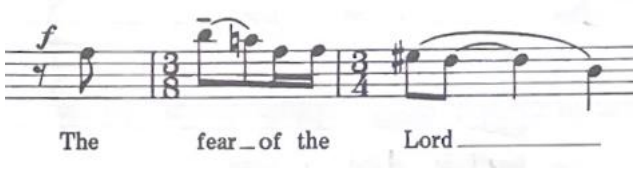
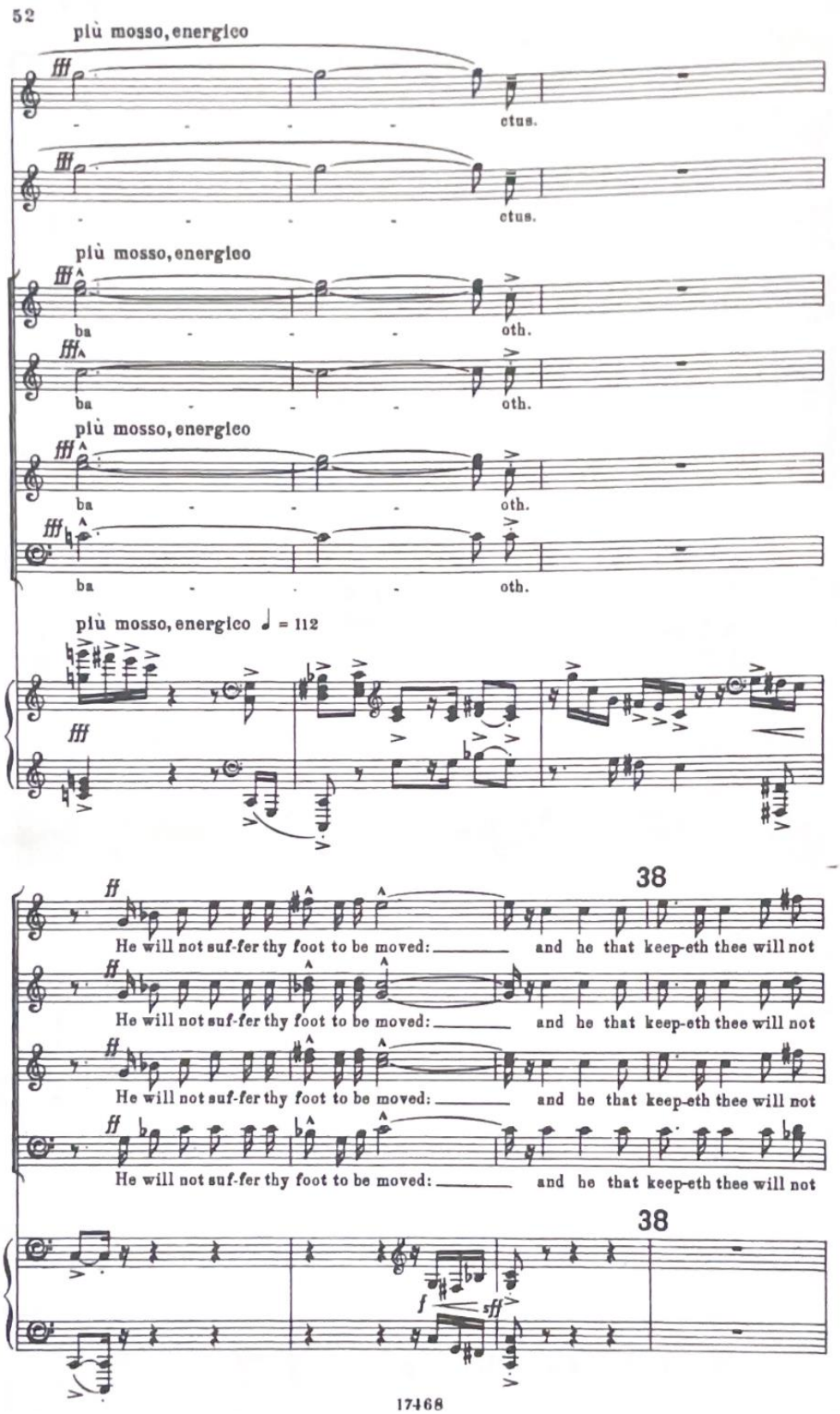


Figure 2.6 Descending Lydian-Mixolydian line in mm. 24-25 of *The fear of the lord.*

These examples show how intentionally Howells uses this scale. It is a color he desires, sometimes for less than a full phrase. Extended use of this scale can be seen in larger works like *Missa Sabrinensis, Stabat Mater,* and *Hymnus Paradisi.* Figure 2.7 shows the fourth movement of *Hymnus Paradisi,* employing this scale pervasively in both the orchestra and all the choral parts from mm. 89-97 where this excerpt begins.

Certain modes of the harmonic minor scale are also utilized in Howells's music. The augmented second featured in various parts of the scale has a haunting effect, especially with the way that Howells voices it. Phrygian-Dominant, the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale is sometimes referred to as Freygish. It is a Phrygian scale with a raised third and it has confused scholarship on Howells's music. The opening of "Salvator Mundi," the first movement of *Requiem* is set in D Freygish. In m. 9, Howells suddenly shifts to G Freygish. This effect causes the listener to interpret this as a tonic-dominant relationship in G minor. Many dissertations label it as such even though the pitch center of the movement is D. The fact that it contains the pitches of the G harmonic minor scale seems definitive enough for many despite its natural pull to the pitch D.

In the opening, all phrases begin and end on the pitch D. In many cases, Howells is intentionally ambiguous, this likely being one of them.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più mosso, energico
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He will not suf-fer thy foot to be moved: and he that keep-eth thee will not
He will not suf-fer thy foot to be moved: and he that keep-eth thee will not
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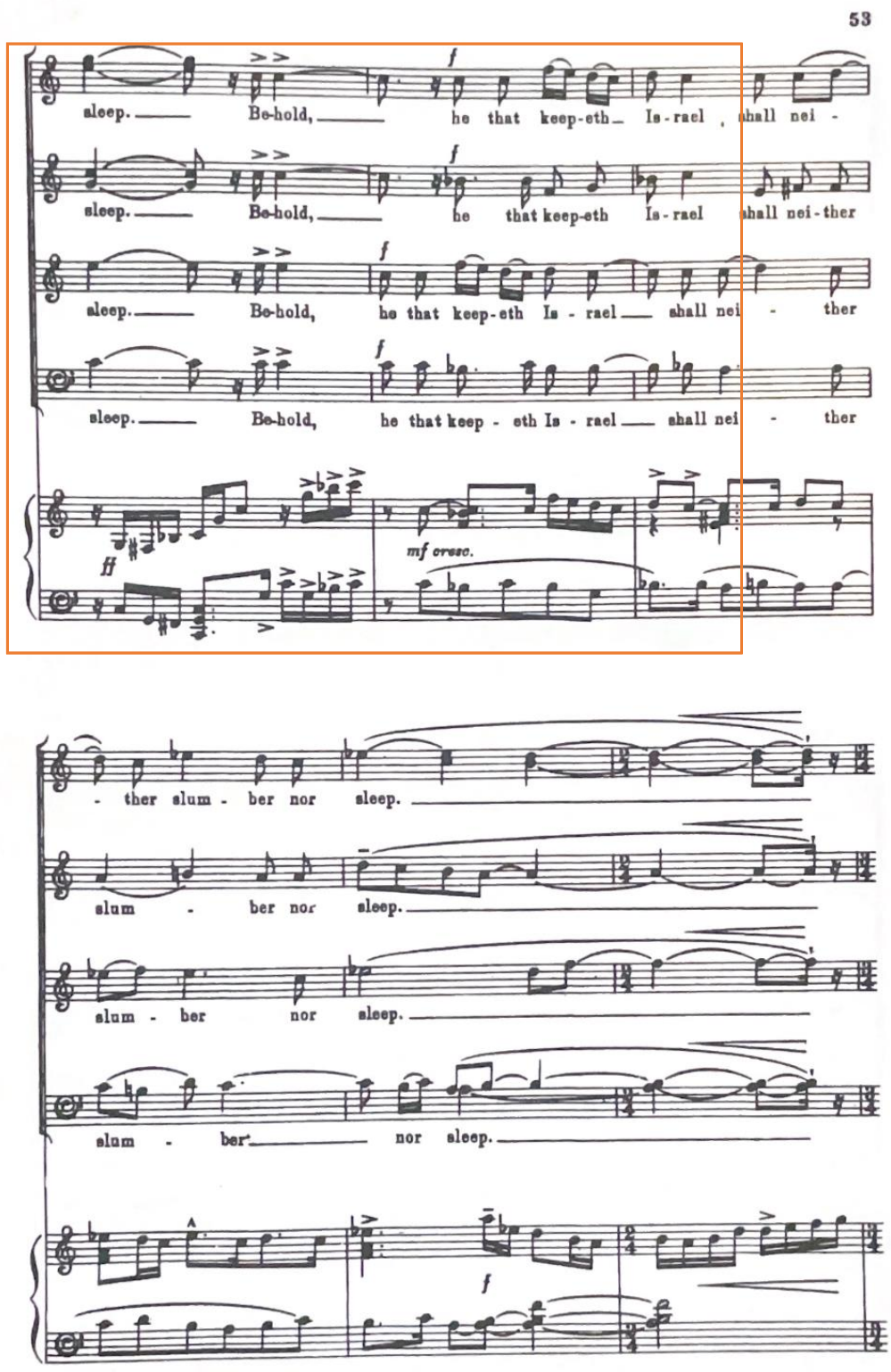


Figure 2.7 Extended and pervasive use of Lydian-Mixolydian scale in mm.89-97 of "Sanctus: I will lift up mine eyes."

Although his music is not idiomatic of tonal practices, he understands expectations associated with tonality and manipulates them in his music. This perceived tonic-dominant relationship is intentional and helps the music progress even though the pitch center is D. Figure 2.8 shows this passage moving from D Freygish to G Freygish.

Sing lullaby strikingly uses this scale at the beginning of its B section. Until this phrase, the piece has been in F Dorian and C Dorian. This phrase marks a deliberate change in its effect. The extension of the phrase returns to F Dorian before this F Freygish material is repeated. The remainder of the B section is the most harmonically dense and complex before the return to A. The Freygish motif can be seen in mm. 23-25 in Figure 2.9.

Tonal Ambiguity

Another feature of Howells's music that adds confusion to analysis is his deliberate ambiguity of tonality. As discussed previously, he does not use the tonal system in an idiomatic way, but he references aspects of it to subvert the listener's expectations. A few ways he achieves this are by avoiding mode-affirming pitches, implying different pitch centers with melody and bass line, and crafting ambiguous melodic contours.

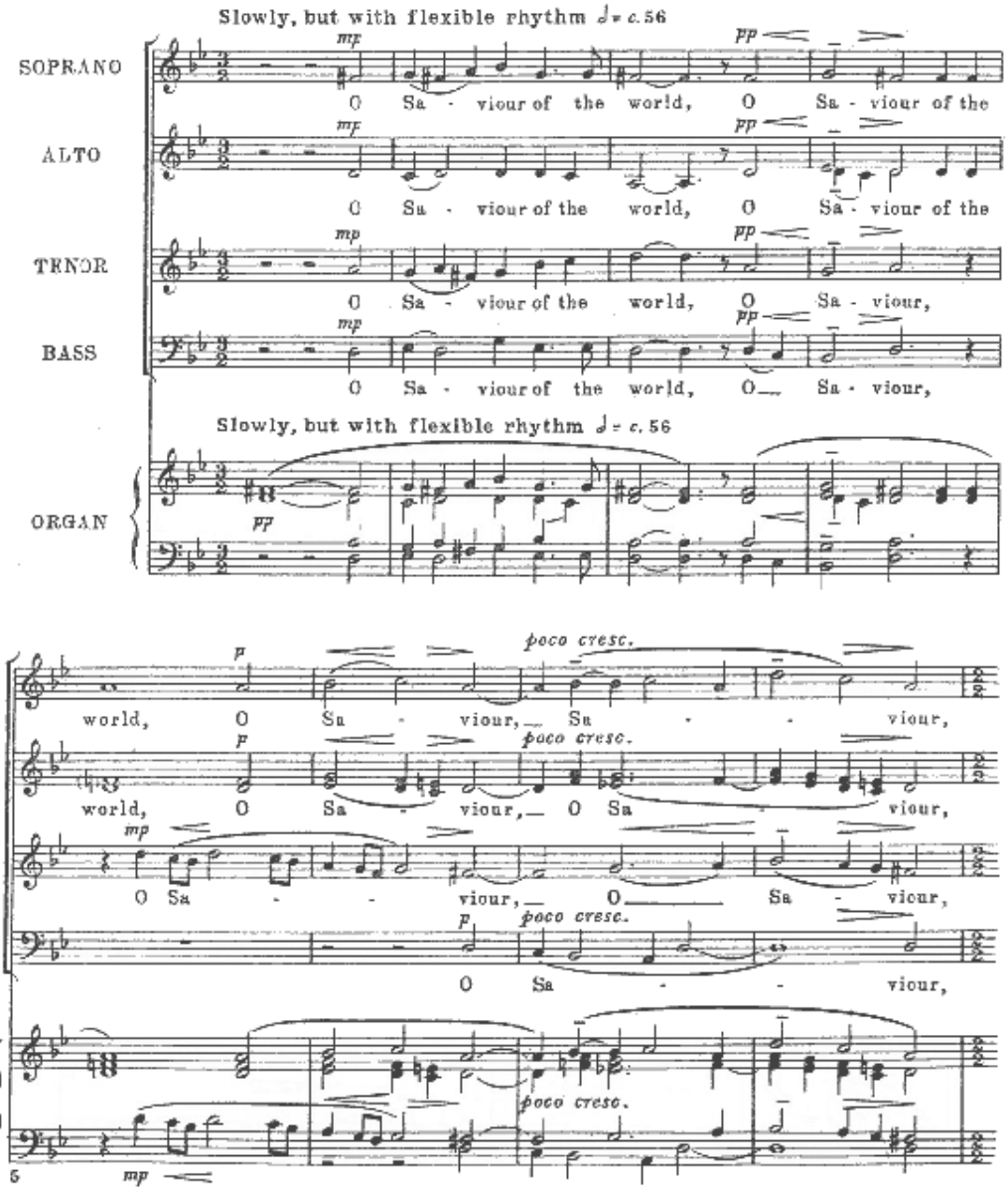
In tonal music, the tonic and dominant will generally establish or affirm a tonal center. The mediant, or third note of the scale will determine the quality of that center. Because of this, composers will often make sure to include these three notes early to provide stability in each key. When modulation occurs, composers will often provide some kind of tonic-dominant relationship and other context clues to clarify where the tonal center is shifting. Howells understands this as a practice and intentionally does the

REQUIEM

HERBERT HOWELLS

I Salvator mundi

D Freygish



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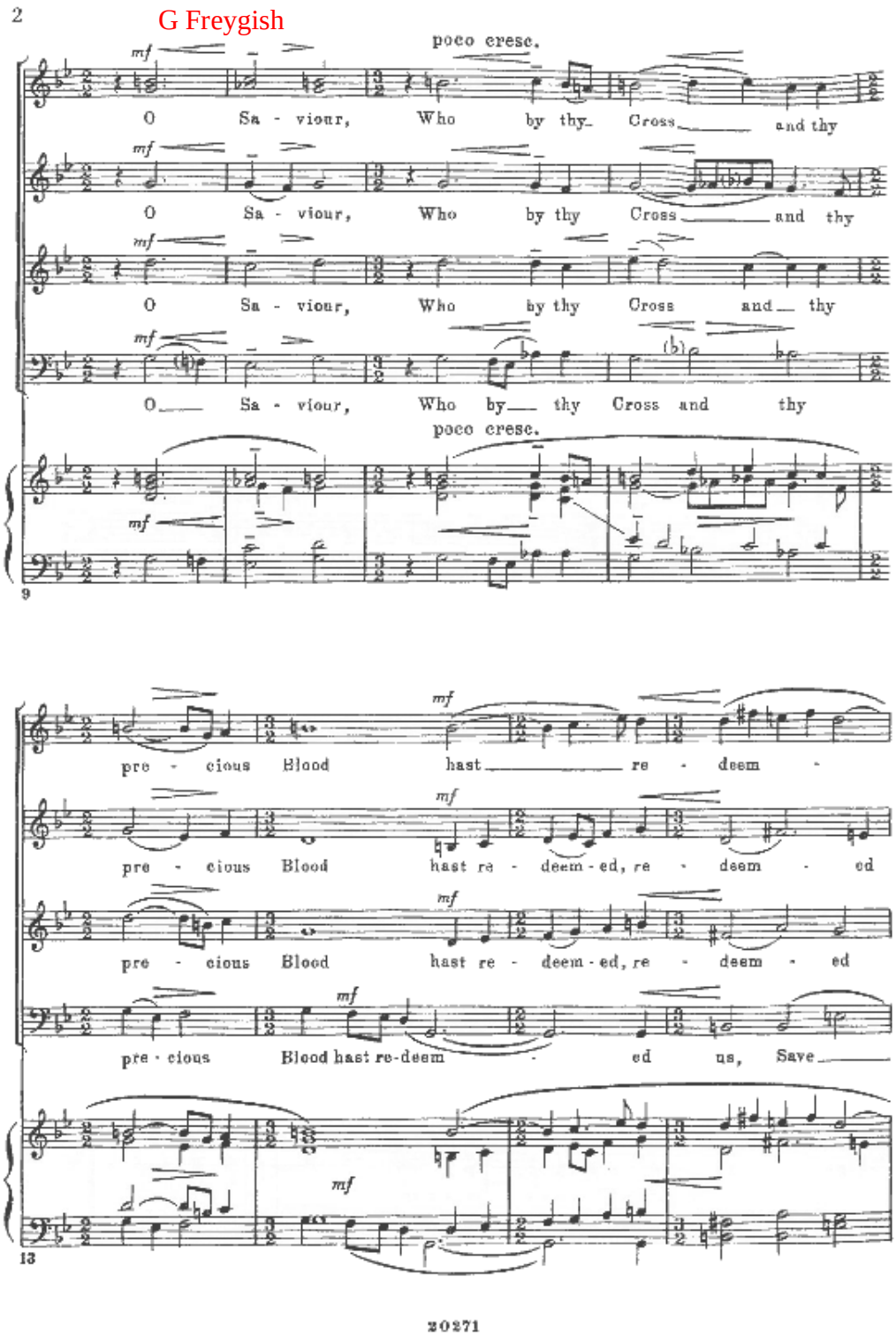


Figure 2.8 D Freygish to G Freygish in mm. 1-17 of “Salvator Mundi.”

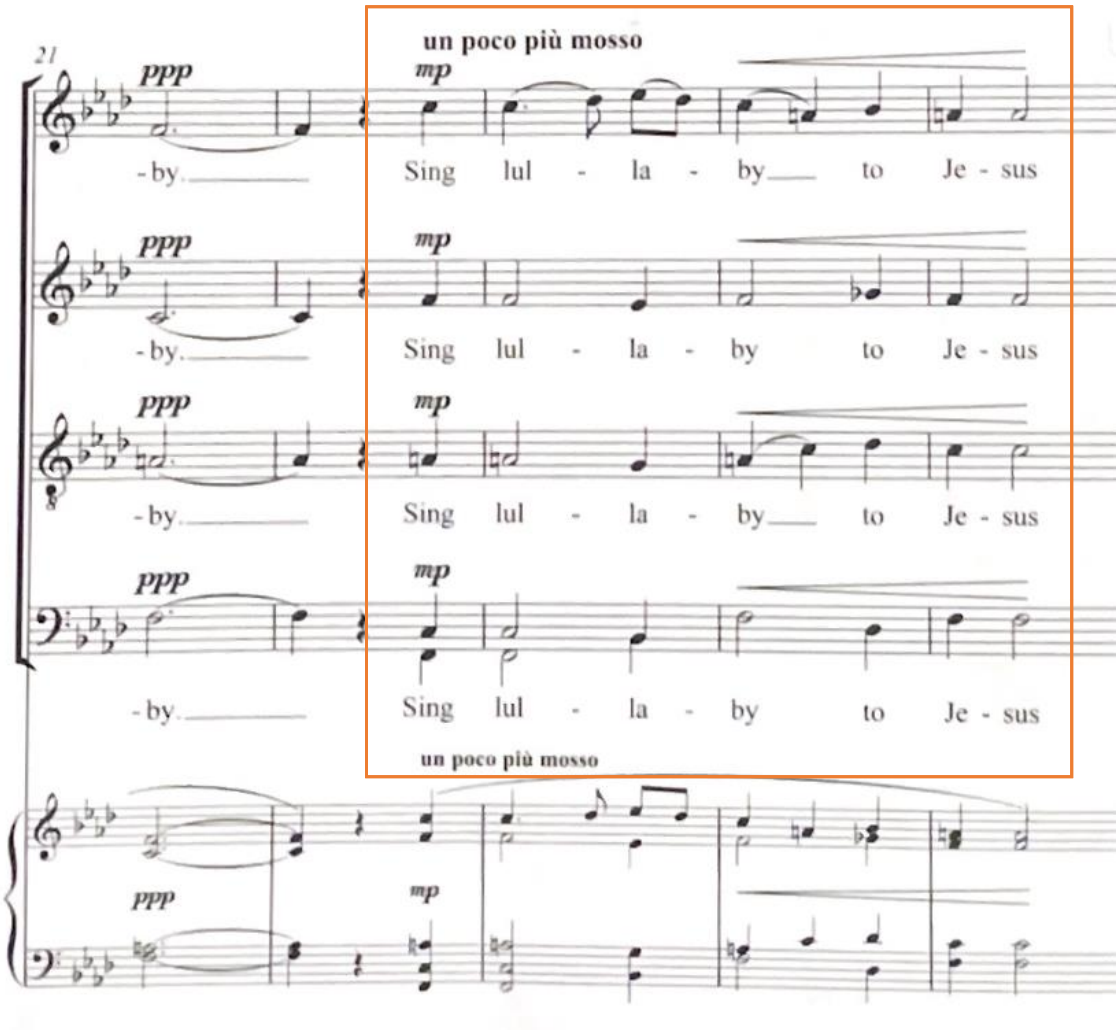


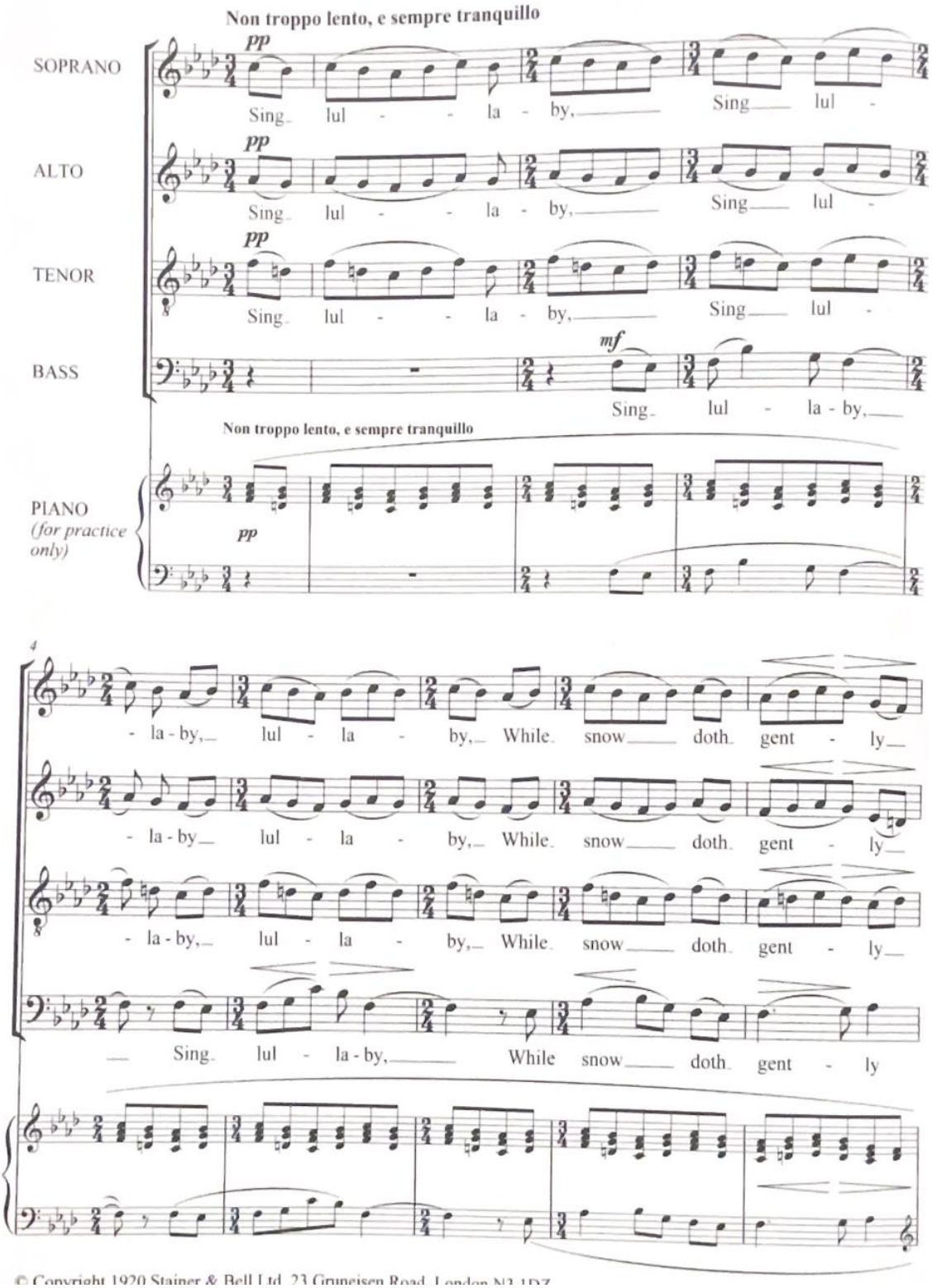
Figure 2.9 F Freygish scale in mm. 23-25 of *Sing lullaby.*

opposite. Figure 2.10 from *Sing lullaby* begins in F Dorian. However, the harmony is obscured with undulating parallel motion which contains an impressionist effect. The melody which the basses enter with does not contain the third scale degree until the very end of the melody. This happens instantly before the basses join the accompanying undulation, suddenly shifting the mode to C Dorian. While the mode can be identified, this practice gives this section a sense of mystery and instability which is reinforced by the shift in modal center.

F. W. Harvey

F Dorian

Herbert Howells



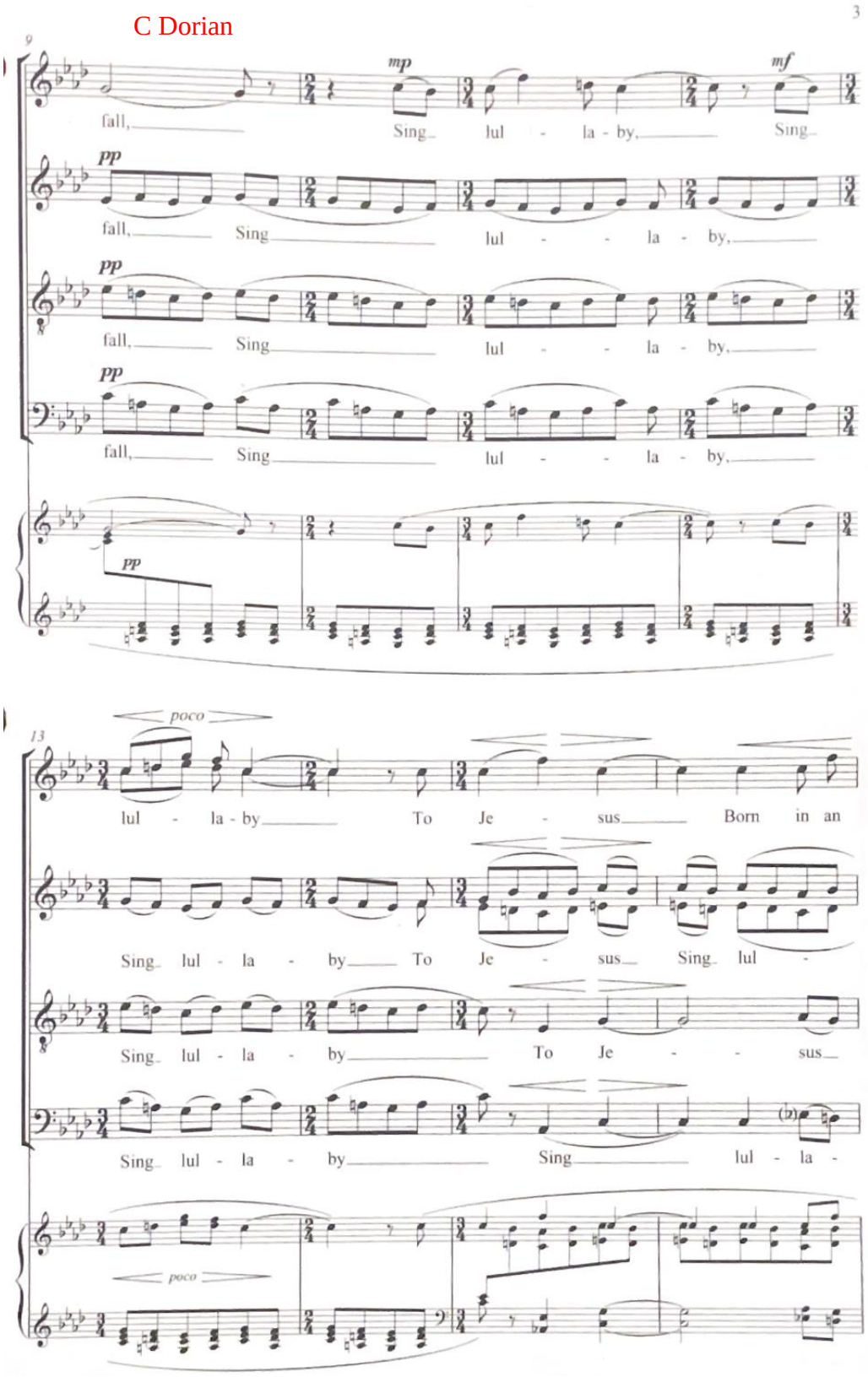
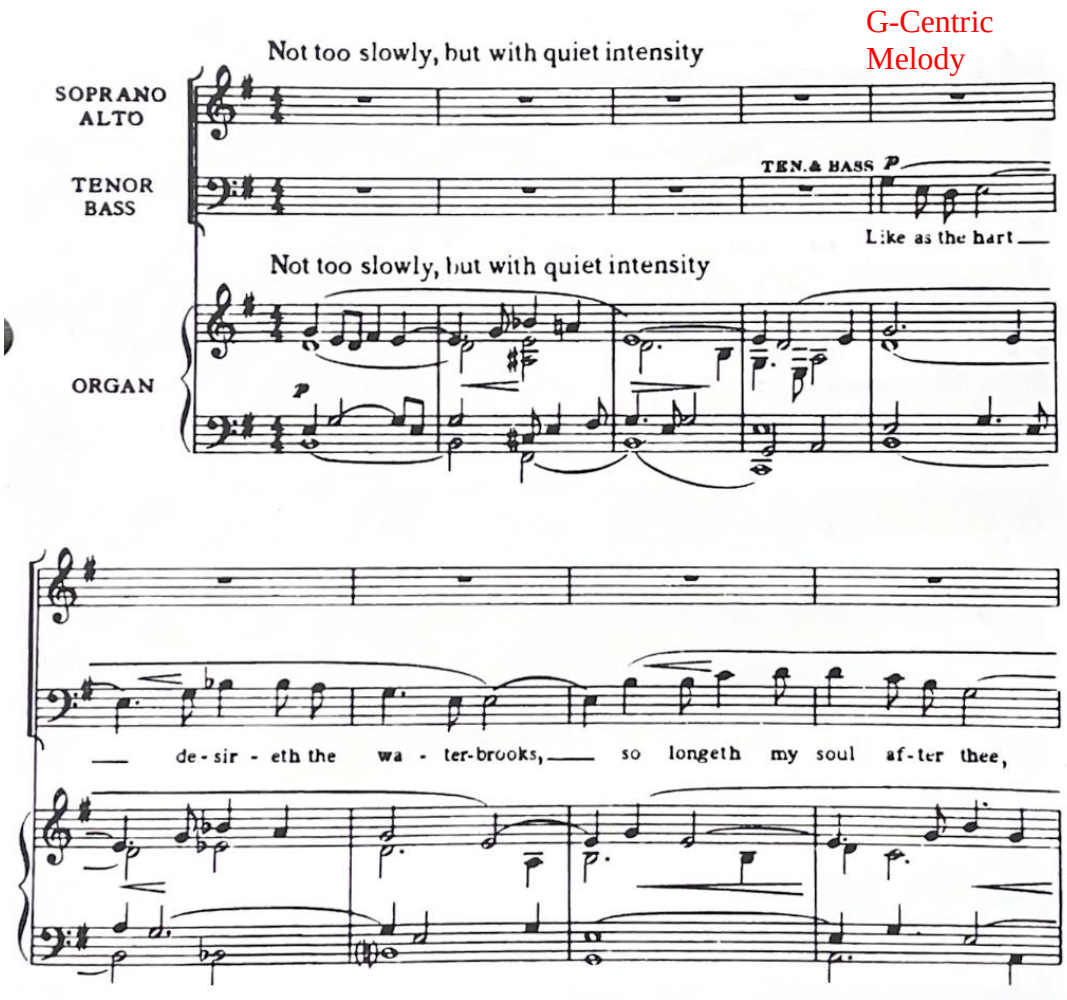


Figure 2.10 Modal ambiguity in mm. 1-16 of *Sing lullaby.*

Another way in which Howells produces ambiguity in his tonal or modal structures is to place conflicting content between the melodic line and bass line. *Like as the hart* is in E Aeolian with modal mixture throughout. The melody shown in Figure 2.11 provides ambiguity. Even without discussing the B-flats, the melody seems to revolve around the pitch G and has characteristics that strongly imply a G major tonality. Not only does it begin and end on the pitch G, but its higher focal points are B, B-flat, and D. The B and B-flat can be chord tones in either tonic triad (E or G) but having the highest point on the pitch D implies the dominant of a G tonality rather than the subtonic of an E modal center.



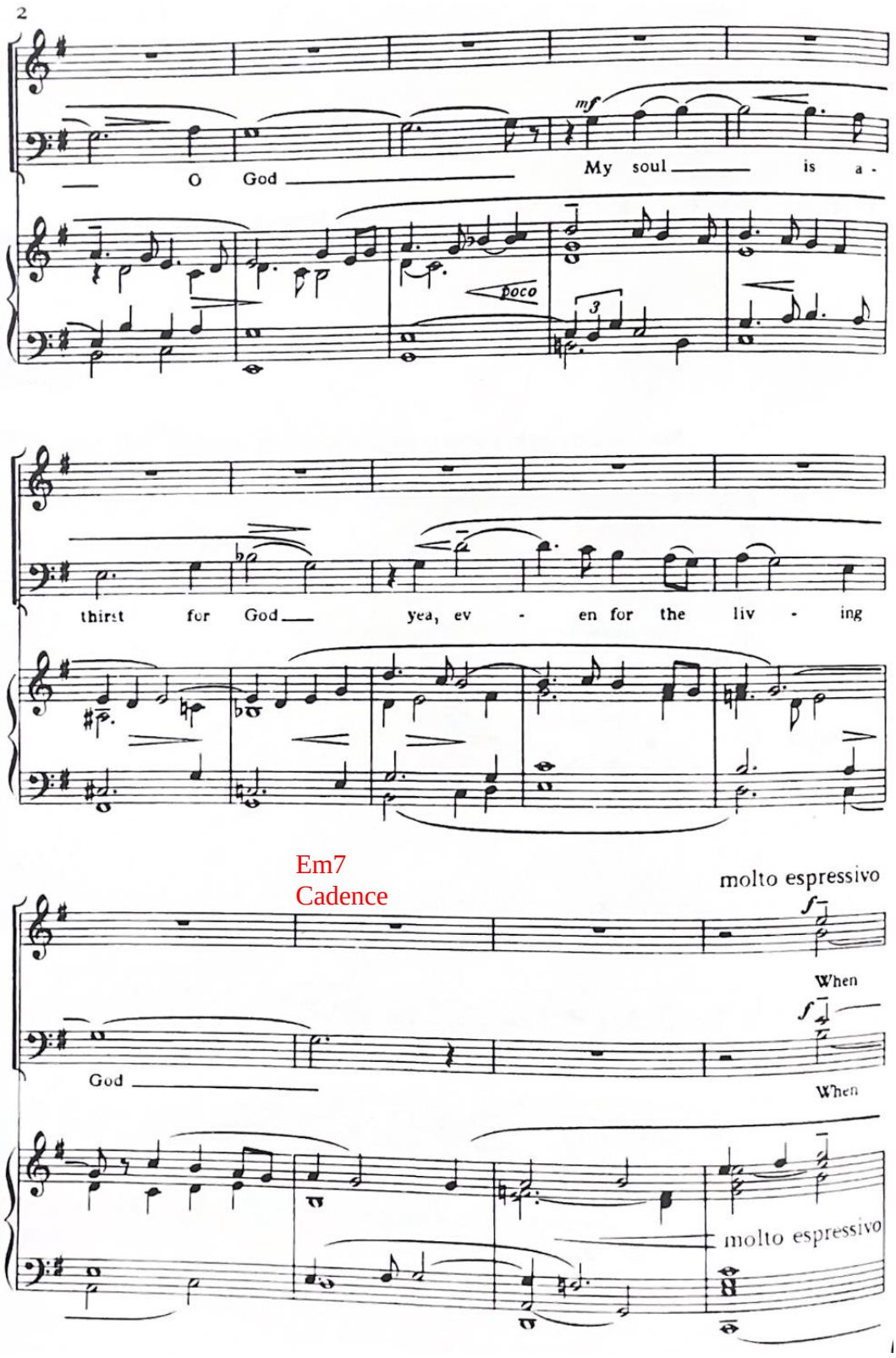


Figure 2.11 Modal ambiguity in mm. 1-21 of *Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks.*

The way Howells crafts his melodies is extremely specific to his goals. The previous melody from *Like as the hart* for instance has consistent focal points implying a misleading modal center. In other moments, he starts and ends melodies in non-idiomatic places in the scale, provides modally non-affirming bass lines, and uses harmonies that do not support the pitch center. Figure 2.12 shows the first page of the third movement of *Requiem.* The opening triad is A minor, the first bass pitch is B, and the starting note in the melody is E. Despite all these factors, the pitch center of the piece is D. The melody in the soprano ends on D in the first phrase, but it is harmonized by a B minor chord. The second phrase finally closes with a rare perfect authentic cadence in D major, but it is immediately followed by a C Lydian sonority which is local to a larger D Mixolydian. The modal center is not extremely clear until the end of the movement, providing a sense of suspended tonality. This music was eventually reworked and makes up a large part of *Hymnus Paradisi.*

Pentatonicism

An important influence on Howells's music that was previously mentioned is English folksong. During the beginning of Howells's career in composition, English compositional trends followed a nationalistic narrative with the embrace of English folksong. Unlike other composers, Howells was not personally interested in setting folk music within his output, but he embraced the folksong tradition by using modes as well as pentatonicism. While Howells makes frequent use of pentatonicism, he also uses quasi-pentatonicism that incorporates the pitch class set (025) or (0257) which are subsets of the pentatonic scale. This allows him to contain the aesthetic of folksong while having

a wider range of pitch material. It is so effective, that scholars will refer to certain pieces as pentatonic when they are not limited to the pentatonic scale.

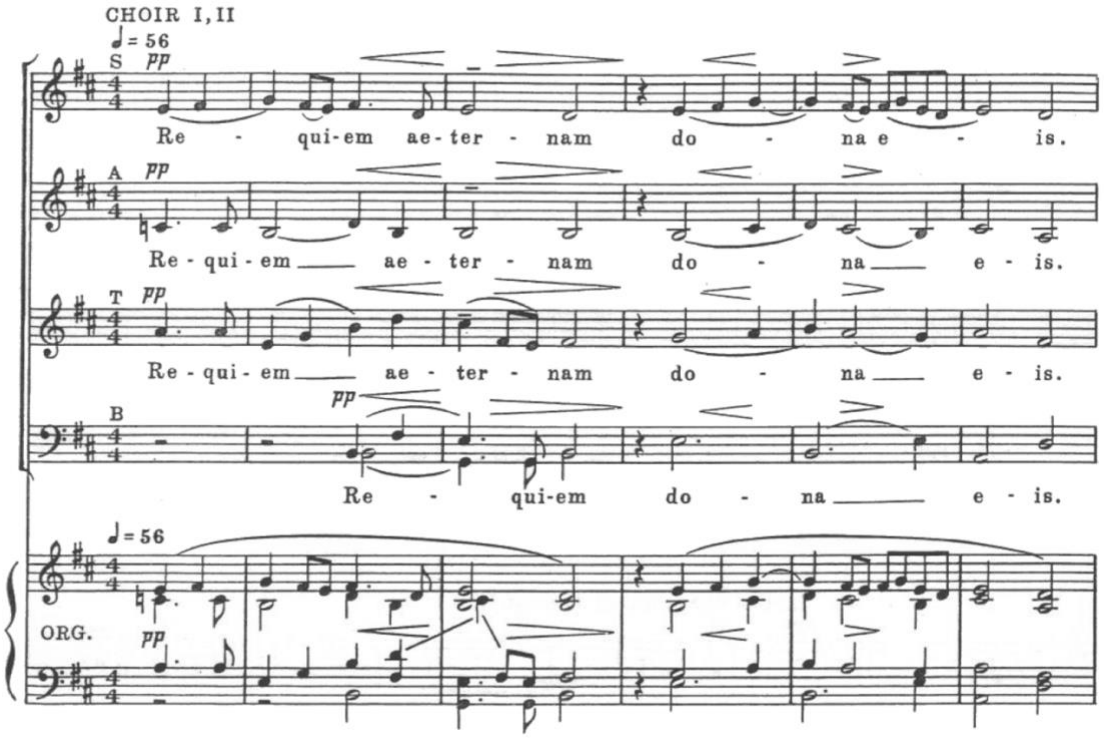


Figure 2.12 Modal ambiguity in mm. 1-6 of "Requiem Aeternam (1)."

Much of Howells's melodic material is stepwise with occasional leaps. However, the juxtaposition of a major second with a minor third is evident in a profusion of his music. The opening unison melody in the "Magnificat" from *St. Paul's Service* is not limited to pentatonic pitch material, but it gives an impression of pentatonic music using this (025) pitch class set. Only G, B-flat, and C are used for the first four measures until there is finally an A-natural in m. 5 before the choir breaks into parts. Figure 2.13 shows this use in the opening, although this pitch class set is present throughout the piece.

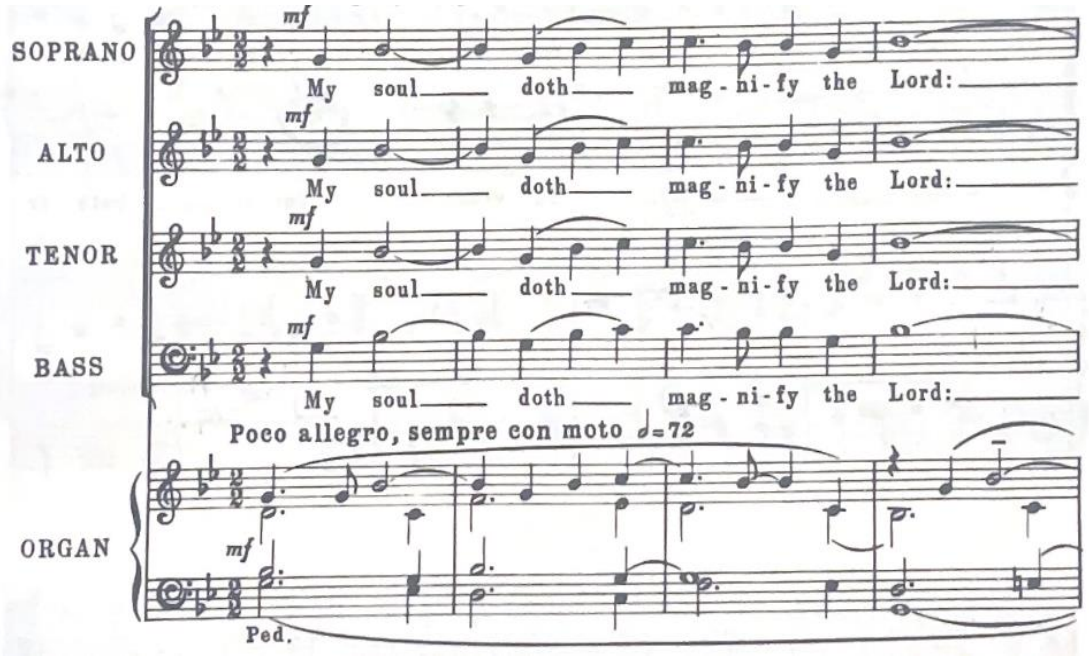


Figure 2.13 (025) in mm. 1-4 of "Magnificat"

There are countless examples of this set in Howells's music. One poignant example is the opening of the "Kyrie" from *Missa Sabrinensis.* Howells quotes the "Kyrie" theme from Vaughan Williams's *Mass in G Minor* which is based on this set class. What is unique is how he harmonizes it using inversions of the same pitch class, providing a level of symmetry, while juxtaposing this modal material with octatonicism, an incredibly different, but also symmetrical collection. Within the sections of octatonicism, he sprinkles in small (025) sets outside of the octatonic collection. Figure 2.14 demonstrates this juxtaposition.

Referential Collections

Particularly in Howells's larger works, he has moments where he strays from tonal and modal systems altogether. As mentioned previously, octatonicism is present in his works. Sometimes, this will be for extended periods, but in many cases, he uses it as

another collection as he shifts between modes. This juxtaposition is evident, especially when acknowledging the (025) pitch collection previously discussed. While this is present in many places in *Missa Sabrinensis,* Figure 2.14 is a quintessential illustration.

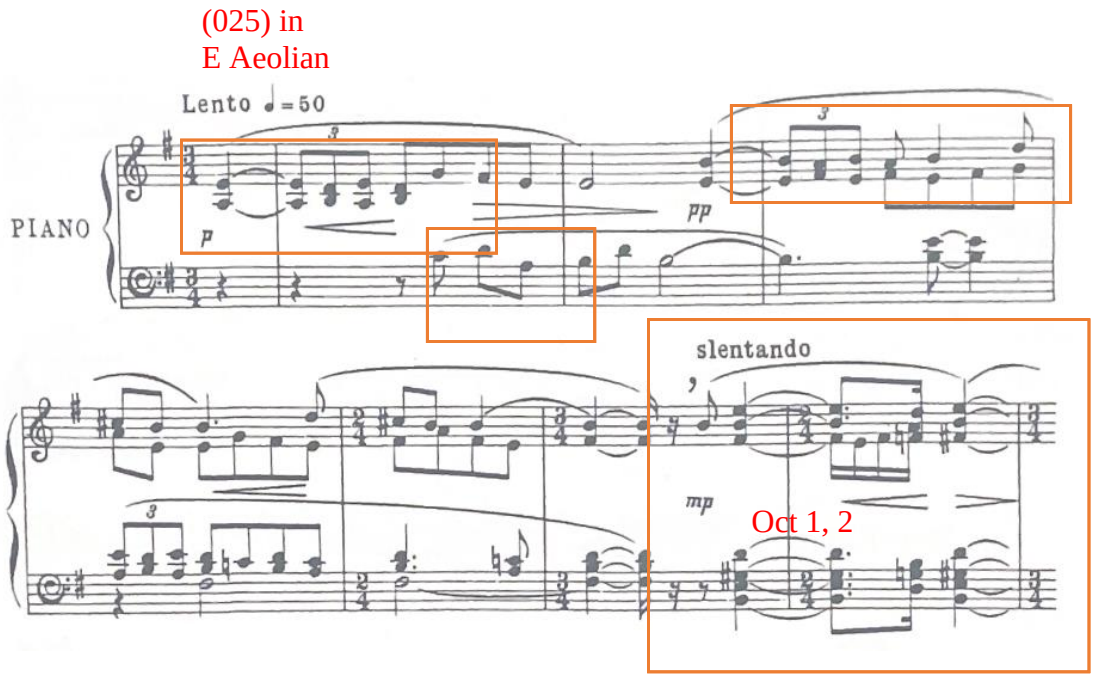


Figure 2.14 (025) juxtaposed with octatonicism in mm. 1-7 of "Kyrie."

Another symmetrical collection used by Howells is the hexatonic scale. *The fear of the lord* in Figure 2.15 uses the collection as its primary melodic material, although the scale is not presented in full. It is also interrupted by a (1,2) octatonic collection and E-flat major sonorities. This melody is then manipulated in various ways throughout the A section of the piece including the (025) modal setting and the Lydian-Mixolydian scale previously mentioned. See Figure 2.6.

Vertical Sonorities

As a result of Howells's Renaissance influence, his music is primarily written in a horizontal manner. The present vertical sonorities are largely a byproduct of

his independent vocal lines. Sophie Cleobury likens his music to Debussy's description of Palestrina's music: "this music ... is ... represented ... by melodic arabesques, which create their effect through contour, and through their interweaving, which produces something that strikes you as unique: harmony that is made of melodies!"[17]

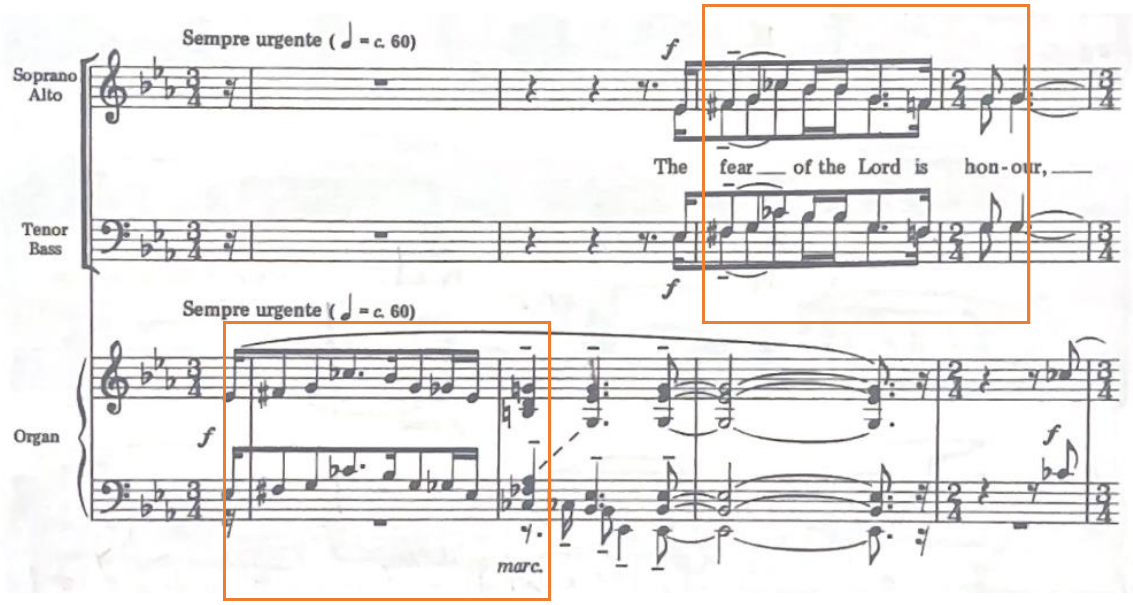


Figure 2.15 Hexatonic scale in mm. 1-4 of *Fear of the lord.*

While this is especially true with his polyphonic music and there is much more to say about Howells's horizontal landscape, he was also well-trained in vertical harmonies and occasionally displays a strong intention to them. Like Renaissance music, his moments of homophony are generally tertian and cadence moments are usually triads. He also uses extended tertian sonorities frequently or added note chords. Another technique he employed was to set a scale in a vertical space. The Lydian-Mixolydian scale mentioned in the horizontal landscape section is sometimes used in a vertical setting as a sharp-

[17] Sophie Cleobury. "The style and development of Herbert Howells's Evening Canticle settings." Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2007, 83.

eleventh chord. This can be seen in Figure 2.16 from *Take him, earth, for cherishing* where he sets this scale based on C vertically after the initial B Major chord. With E in the bass, he sets C, D, E, F-sharp, G, and A-sharp. The A-sharp in this case is the lowered 7th scale degree spelled enharmonically for voice-leading purposes. Juxtaposed by tertian chords B major and D minor 7th, he uses this chord several times in this figure. A similar approach can be seen with use of the octatonic scale. Figure 14 begins in E Aeolian, but Howells quickly asserts octatonic collection (1,2) by alternating E7 and G7 chords as subsets. Similarly, the third movement of *Requiem* begins modal, but as soon as the texture thickens into two choirs, Howells sets a C-sharp7 chord over a sustained E7 chord. Figure 2.17 shows the piano reduction of this moment in m. 16. Because of this practice, Howells's music is sometimes labeled as bitonal even though he does not establish two keys very often. He does have moments of polychordal material which is usually a byproduct of using octatonicism vertically. He also uses cross-relations[18] frequently which sometimes results in a split third chord causing further modal ambiguity as seen in the B major chord in the second measure of Figure 2.16.

This vertical dissonance is a direct influence of English Renaissance music, especially in the music of Thomas Tallis and can be seen in motets like *Audivi vocem caelo.* This is also an important distinction for execution because polytonal music requires sections of music where the ensemble performs in two different keys. Howells's use instead has moments of unusual sonorities that typically do not last very long.

[18] Referring to minor seconds between two voices in English Renaissance polyphony resulting from voice leading; a key feature in the music of Thomas Tallis in particular.

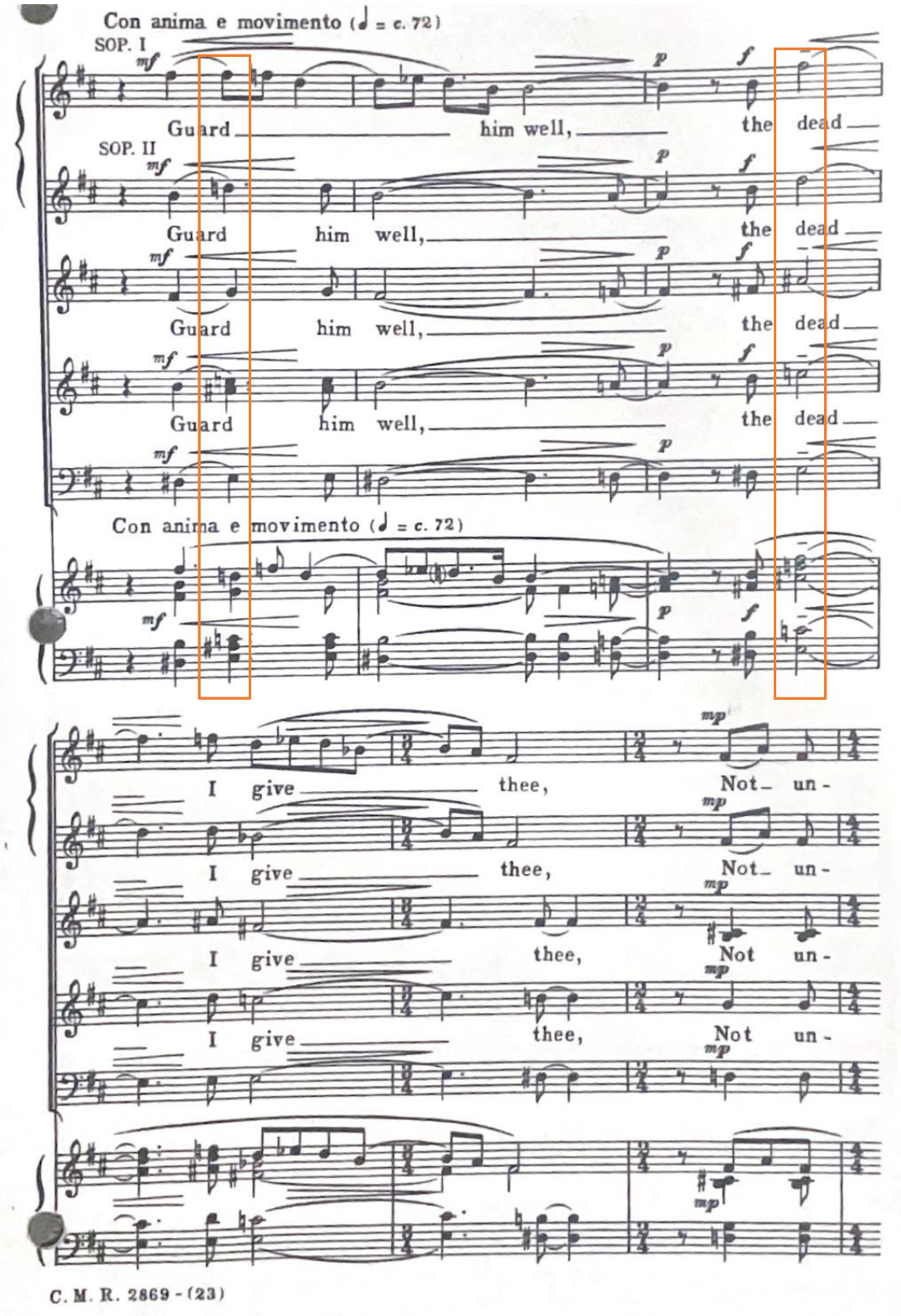


Figure 2.16 Vertical Lydian-Mixolydian scale in mm. 19-24 of *Take him, earth, for cherishing.*

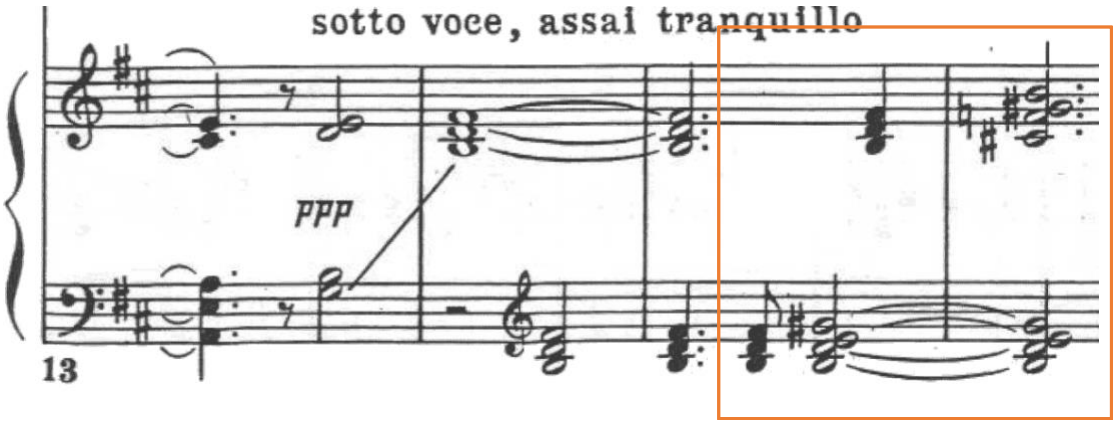


Figure 2.17 Octatonic polychord in mm. 16 of "Requiem Aeternam (1)."

Both figures previously mentioned illustrate his vertical use of octatonicism, but also feature chromatic mediant relationships. A great deal of choral music in the Twentieth Century uses this tonal relationship. It has become so popular, that its function seems to replace a tonic-dominant relationship in cases. Howells does not overuse this relationship, but he certainly seems to have an affinity for it. In some of his earlier choral works, the chromatic mediant was used as a formal characteristic. For instance, *My eyes for beauty pine* does not frequently shift modes, but it begins in E-flat major, modulates to G major for the B section with a cadence in C Mixolydian, before returning to E-flat. Both new key areas are a chromatic mediant away from E-flat major.

Complex Textures

A feature of Howells's music that comes from his Renaissance influence is the use of polyphonic or thicker textures. While not every piece of music by Howells contains polyphony, it is a defining element of his music. Some of his music resembles Renaissance points of imitation without it being excessively complex. However, in his most challenging works, the amount of polyphony used is a primary variable in its inaccessibility. Pieces like *Hymnus Paradisi, Missa Sabrinensis,* or even *Requiem* require

larger forces as well as incredibly strong musicianship since many voices, orchestral and choral, are all in polyphony. *Missa Sabrinensis* sets the soloists as an extension of the polyphonic texture. A progression towards trying to execute his most complex music might be to find some of his more economical textural settings. Howells has a fair amount of music that contains other challenges with pitch material, vertical sonorities, and vocal demands, but only contains a single melody line or even a duet. Some examples of this are *My eyes for beauty pine*, *Like as the hart,* the opening section of *Take him, earth, for cherishing,* and the homophonic *Here is the little door.* Even with pieces that contain some polyphony, he frequently has moments of unison or homophony. These moments can be a useful tool for tone-building and listening while working toward the goal of executing the more complex or thick textures.

Vocal Demands

When discussing the difficulty in the choral works of Howells, a few vocal challenges are important points of focus. The largest challenge is the length of the phrases since they are usually long and melismatic. After Howells's time studying composition when he was only composing for an academic setting, he primarily wrote for commissions and specific spaces. Since his compositional focus was generally Anglican church music, the spaces where his music works best are in large, resonant cathedrals. This gives him the freedom to write for very long and sustained melodic material since those spaces are so forgiving. Singers can stagger breathe within a sustained note without much decay in the sound.

Howells's melodic content is greatly influenced by medieval plainchant. This influence not only takes shape in the length of his melodic lines but also the use of

melismas, the primarily stepwise motion, and the irregular meters and phrase lengths. English music coming out of the Anglican church had been primarily syllabic since the origin of the Church of England. While the Romantic era brought some newer approaches to composition in England, this melismatic content is still a feature that is distinctive of Howells's style. Like chant, his music emphasizes the text and utilizes melismas for important syllables or words. While it does not contain the virtuosity of Bach or other instrumentally conceived types of music, the healthful execution of melismatic material is an important factor in Howells's music.

Howells uses leaps in his melodies, but they are used similarly to composers like Palestrina. Rather than setting several leaps in a row or in different directions, he will write a leap with stepwise motion in the opposite direction to fill the gap. His music is generally legato and flowing. The (025) class set is also frequently employed making the music feel smooth and even directionless at times. This synthesizes the sound of plainchant with folksong. His melodies are never angular or disjunct and seem like they can last forever. In a criticism, Gerald Finzi described Howells's skills, "This brilliance has been both his bane and his blessing. It has led to note-spinning when inspiration has slackened and to the excessive complication, not of the fumbler, but of a mind which really seems unaware of technical difficulties."[19]

The aspect of Howells's melodies that makes it sound mostly like chant is the use of irregular meters and phrase lengths. The meters are generally set in a way to emphasize the text and alternate groupings of two and three, as one would use to execute a chant. Figure 2.18 displays *My eyes for beauty pine*. Not only do all the anacruses begin

[19] Gerald Finzi. "From the Archive: Notes from the Underground," *The Musical Times* 138, No. 1858 (Dec. 1997): 26-7, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1004055?seq=1

in different places in the measure, but they have different lengths, and the 7/4 measures have inconsistent groupings. While being very reminiscent of plainchant, it contains the leap with contrary stepwise motion, quasi-pentatonicism, and melismas on important syllables. This is a quintessential Howells melody, making it an excellent introduction to Howells's elusive style. Not only does it contain various aspects that are characteristic of his melodic style, but it is conservative in other areas such as horizontal landscape, vertical sonorities, and overall texture.

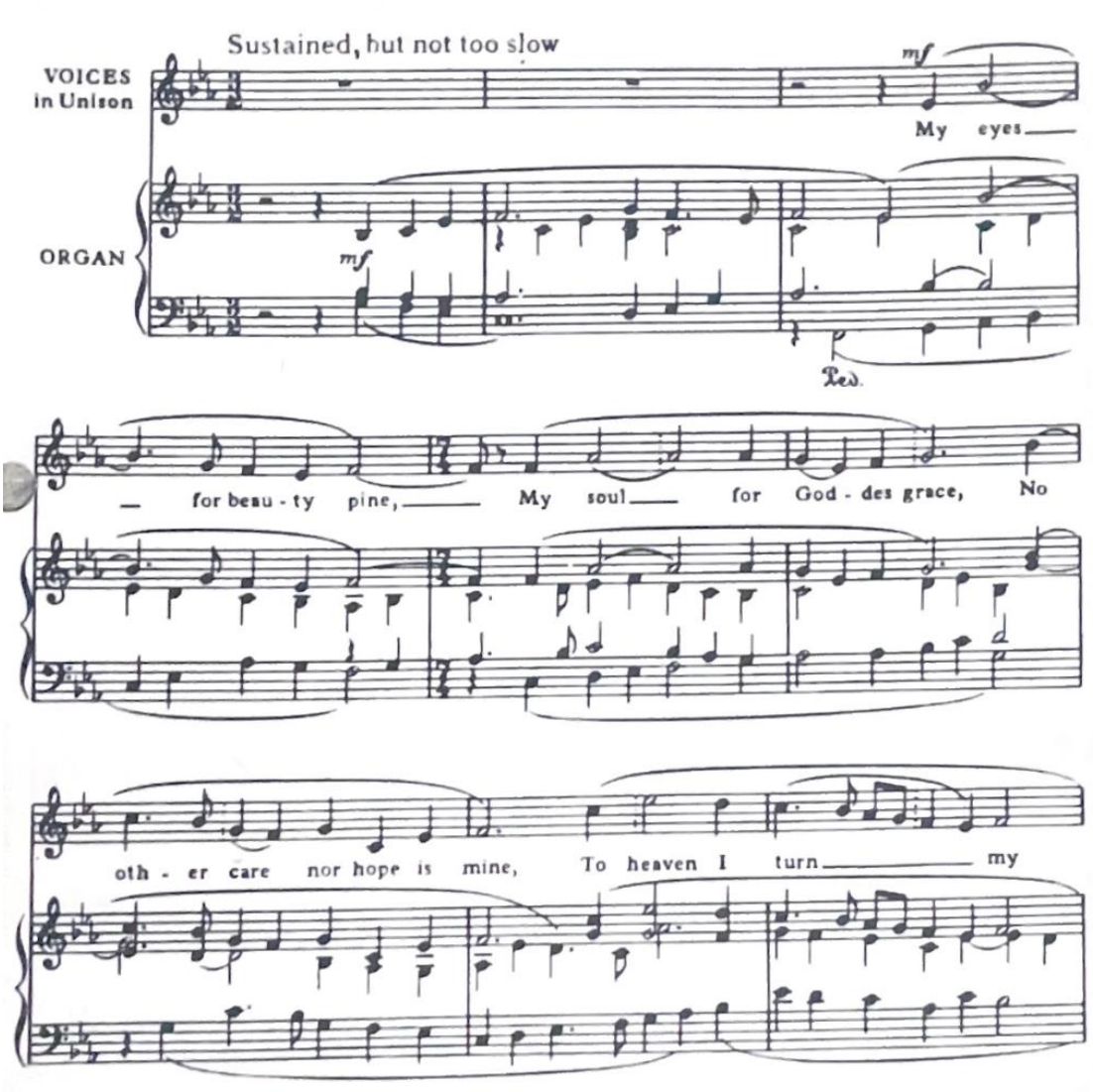


Figure 2.18 Irregular phrases in mm. 1-9 of *My eyes for beauty pine.*

Conclusion

Once a conductor is familiar with the challenges what will be faced in Howells's music, they will be ready to examine his scores with these challenges in mind and prepare for rehearsal accordingly. While the difficulties presented here are not exhaustive of what will be faced in the execution of Howells's music, attention to horizontal landscape, vertical sonorities, texture, and vocal demands will give the conductor a sense of how much difficulty will come with a given piece of music.

CHAPTER 3

SUGGESTED WORKS

Attempting Herbert Howells's music can be daunting for conductors and choirs. This is especially true when looking at his large choral/orchestral works, *Requiem,* or even some of his popular short forms like *Take him, earth, for cherishing.* The horizontal landscape, vertical sonorities, complex textures, and vocal demands are categories of difficulty that make some of these works feel impossible if someone has never programmed Howells before. However, there is repertoire by Howells that is accessible regarding one or more of these factors.

Some works that would be ideal to explore first are: *My eyes for beauty pine; O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem; Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks; Here is the little door; Sing lullaby;* and "Salvator Mundi" from *Requiem.* In this chapter, I will provide basic background and formal information for these works followed by analytical information concerning the categories of difficulty mentioned. The formal structures of these works are also much clearer than much of Howells's output. Since the vocal demands are similar for each piece, they will be discussed in the "Process and Considerations" sections.

My Eyes for Beauty Pine

Background/Form

Perhaps one of Howells's most accessible works, *My eyes for beauty pine* is a short anthem that was written in 1925 with text by Robert Bridges. The piece is written

for SATB chorus, but it is completely unison apart from one climactic phrase. The score gives the option to perform the work unison throughout, providing the harmony from the organ. The text is written in three stanzas which Howells sets in an ABA form.

Horizontal Landscape

Melodically, this is one of Howells's most accessible works since it is almost completely diatonic with the use of only three key centers. The structure of each section is surprisingly traditional with periodic phrase pairs. The melody begins in the organ introduction which the choir is added to in m. 5. Uncommon for Howells, the beginning and ending sections are in E-flat Ionian with no accidentals in the vocal line. While the melodic writing is traditional in the context of Howells, there are still some peculiarities. The melody is diatonic, containing all the pitches in the E-flat Ionian scale, but because of the frequent use of the (025) pitch class set, it could easily be mistaken for a pentatonic melody which likens it to English folksong.

The B section sets the same melody, but this time in G Ionian, a chromatic mediant above. All the pitches in this section are local to G Ionian except for an F-natural in m. 18 and in the very last phrase when the unison choir finally breaks into parts. Howells uses this modal shift to C Mixolydian to build into the climax as the choir exclaims "'Tis love, 'tis heavenly love" in harmony for the first and only time in the piece. After this cadence, the organ begins the same melodic pitch material from the beginning of the piece, but this time in F Dorian. This shift is short-lived as he abbreviates the melodic passage only to restart in the home key of E-flat Ionian to reintroduce the A material.

Table 3.1 Modal Centers in *My eyes for beauty pine*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-11	My Eyes for Beauty	E-flat Ionian
12-16	One Splendour thence is shed	G Ionian
17-20	…name is said	C Mixolydian
21-30	Interlude	E-flat Ionian

Vertical Sonorities

The vertical pitch space is almost as clear as the horizontal, but it comes with a few more oddities. While the melody contains periodic phrasing on its own, this traditional idea is thwarted by the modally ambiguous organ harmony. Within each phrase pair, one would traditionally expect some kind of dominant harmony followed by a tonic harmony in cadential moments. In place of the dominant harmony, he sets an F minor chord (ii), and instead of tonic, he sets G minor (iii) in the first phrase pair. The second phrase pair contains the same ii chord in the antecedent, and finally a tonic triad in the consequent.

The B section contains the same harmonic scheme, but in the second antecedent, he employs D minor (v) instead of the A minor (ii) one would expect. Since this is approaching the apex of the piece, the place where Bridges breaks the flow of the text, and where all other musical elements are altered, it is the moment of the shift to C Mixolydian.

The last stanza begins following the harmonic scheme from the first A section. However, in the final phrase pair, he replaces the expected F minor (ii) chord with a D-flat major (♭VII) chord followed by an F Major chord in the organ part. The D-flat chord

provides a Mixolydian contrast in the accompaniment. The F Major chord is treated as a cross-relation, typical of Howells's polyphonic music.

Texture

The vocal line of the piece is set monophonically throughout besides the four-part melismatic homophony in mm. 19-21 with an anacrusis. One of Howells's strengths and defining compositional features is his polyphonic writing. While this strength is not featured in the choral setting of the text, the organ is set polyphonically in the interludes. As mentioned previously, the choral melody begins as an addition to the organ melody that precedes each stanza. During the verses, the organ provides a hymn-like chordal accompaniment. This is a rare piece with its simple texture, the beauty being in its simplicity and soaring melody.

Process and Considerations

This piece is an excellent choice for a choir to experience Howells for the first time. Its simple texture, conservative harmonic structure, and diatonic melodic material make it accessible. The long, irregular phrases challenge the choir with the pacing of breath, syllabic expression, and shape. These challenges can truly be the focus without trying to tune challenging chords or read complicated shifts in the mode. The irregular meters can be taught by echoing the phrases with syllabic stress and feeling the correct length of the syllables. Over-rehearsing the rhythm on the page could cause the music to be too rhythmic and angular.

This piece also lends itself to unifying the tone of the ensemble. In many choral settings, the priority is to teach parts and then unify each sections sound, sometimes not being afforded the time to homogenize the ensemble at large. To begin a rehearsal

process with this piece gives the conductor the opportunity to find a tone concept they are content with and then apply it to other repertoire. Howells's music, like Renaissance music, works better without varied tone color between sections. The unison singing in this piece provides the opportunity to unify and give feedback to the ensemble as far as placement, volume, and vowel structure. Since it is largely unison, the choir can sit in formations they might not normally get the chance to experience. The skills gained in the chant-like style of singing can be transferred to much of Howells's output.

O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem

Background and Form

In the first days of 1941, the Howells family was snowed in in Cheltenham. Howells spent this time composing new works including *Four Anthems* which were originally called *In Time of War*.[20] The title seemed appropriate since the works were composed on Davidic Psalms. After reflection, Howells decided that the psalms were appropriate for any circumstance and that the pieces would have been written with or without war, so he changed the title. Each anthem was written in a day including *O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*[21] The set is dedicated to Thomas Armstrong, a composer, conductor, organist, and friend of Howells. This anthem uses Psalm 122, verses six and seven. The form of the piece has a surprisingly clear and simple ABA structure with a contemplative demeanor.

[20]Paul Spicer. (*Herbert Howells.* London: Grosvenor Group Ltd, 1998), 119.

[21] Palmer, Christopher. (*Herbert Howells: A Celebration* 2nd ed. London: Thames Publishing, 1996), 395.

Horizontal Landscape

This piece is another example of Howells's music that is not overly complicated when it comes to pitch material, but it does have ambiguous features that will transfer to other pieces. While the piece does shift in its modal language, it does not do so at a fast enough rate to add significant challenge to the rehearsal process. Instead, it seamlessly modulates at or right before cadence points, using a common tone to shift to a closely related mode. In a few instances, one note is altered to briefly change the mode before returning to the original mode. Mode is a clear identifier of how Howells thought of the form since it coincides with text, texture, and dynamic changes.

The piece begins firmly in D Aeolian with reinforcement from the organ part. The high focal point in both opening phrases is C. This does not obscure the mode, but it is not typical to emphasize the subtonic without a strong pull to the tonic. If anything, it affirms the mode further because D minor would contain C-sharp. This choice also makes use of (025), providing a pentatonic aesthetic. As the basses and tenors come to the end of their phrase, they hover on A which switches function from the dominant in D to the tonic in A Aeolian where the sopranos and altos sing a transposed version of the original melody. In a similar fashion, they end their second phase on F setting up a new F Mixolydian section. The melody from the beginning returns with its subtonic emphasis, this time harmonized by a subtonic triad using the four-part texture. This Mixolydian color is then alternated with E-natural before the eventual closing of the A section in F Ionian.

An abrupt modulation begins the B section in D Ionian, a chromatic mediant below F. The first strain of this section remains in D Ionian with only diatonic material.

As this strain of the B section nears its end, F-sharp becomes the modal center. At first, G-natural is employed to assert a Phrygian landscape, but as the music transitions into the second strain of the B section, G-natural is replaced by G-sharp keeping the music in F-sharp Aeolian until the end of this strain. The codetta of the B section contains a brief shift to A Dorian before the return to A material. The A section contains the same modal scheme as the initial A section, closing in F major.

Table 3.2 Modal Centers is *O Pray for the peace of Jerusalem*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-9	O Pray for the peace	D Aeolian
10-19	O Pray for the peace	A Aeolian
20-35	O Pray for the peace	F Mixolydian/Ionian
36-43	Peace be within	D Ionian
44-61	Peace be within	F#Phrygian/Aeolian
62-67	And plenteousness within	A Dorian

Vertical Sonorities

The chordal structures within this piece are generally triadic and diatonic within each modal center. In some cases, he will use an inversion in a situation where one might expect a root position chord, but most of the work is modally clear, though not functional. The B section is the most ambiguous regarding Howells's use of vertical sonorities. As the first strain of the B section transitions to F# for its closure, other notes seem to be the focal point in different moments. For instance, in mm. 44, the downbeat asserts F-sharp minor in first inversion. As the choir enters on unison F-sharp, the organ plays a B before the voices move to E minor. This section is ambiguous as it has moments that seem to be local to E minor, B minor, and F-sharp minor. Howells intentionally avoids tonal qualities that would affirm pitch center. However, the phrases generally begin and end with an F-sharp minor chord or unison, sometimes in an unstable second inversion. The

imitative entrances in mm. 52 enter on notes of the F-sharp minor triad further clarifying the mode.

The codetta begins in F-sharp but closes with a shift in mode. The unison melody in the choir implies a shift to E Aeolian, but the underlying organ harmony asserts A minor, the dominant of D. To obscure this further, the organ plays an E half diminished 7^{th} chord right before the choir enters. The returning A section again ends in F major, but the final chord is preceded by a striking G major chord.

Texture

The length of the piece and its lack of modal shifts require contrast in other musical factors. Howells uses a variety of textures to accomplish this, but they are not extremely complex. He uses texture as a tool to build the shape of the piece and to provide more intimacy in other areas. Howells uses the texture as a rhetorical device.

The A section begins in monophony with the tenors and basses introducing the melody, quickly imitated by the sopranos and altos. The second half of the A section contains animated homophony, something that Howells does well; he seldom has all four parts written homorhythmically. Instead, he will have a general homophonic texture with variation in each part.

The B section alternates between polyphony and monophony. He introduces a new section with points of imitation and remains in polyphony for a few measures before returning to choral monophony. He does this first with a triplet motive in D major in m. 36 to begin the B section. Once all the voices are in, he staggers entrances with more individual motives using only a dotted rhythm to unify them, eventually leading to a cadence on A major. As the choir re-enters, they set the mode with a unison F-sharp. This

mode is developed with brief homophony before a new section of imitative entrances. These anacrusic phrases remain in polyphony until finding unison again on F-sharp with the omission of the bass voice. The codetta contains a brief homophonic phrase followed by a unison closure on E. The returning A material is slightly altered with the addition of the sopranos and altos on the original melody.

Process and Considerations

While this piece is long and has a fair amount of musical material to teach, the biggest challenge will be to pace the phrases with breath support without losing clarity of tone. The pacing can be taught with count singing initially, giving attention to each eighth note. This can be transferred to pulsing eighth notes on a neutral syllable. This process will help the choir to not peak too soon or plateau their shape of phrase. For pacing the breath over the longer phrases, the singers would benefit from singing the lines on a lip trill or sustained "v" or "z" sounds. Having the singers engage in some resistance like a slow squat, plié, or using resistance bands while singing would be helpful. Resistance and density in the conductor's gesture will also assist in this.

Teaching the notes of the music is accessible in this music since it remains diatonic in local sections and lends itself to solfège. Since the shifts in modality in most cases are not frequent within a section, changing of syllables will be minimal. Depending on the modal approach of solfège for a choir, the second strain of the B section can be read in D major with alterations to the raised 4th ("Fi"). While the pitch center is F#, a valid approach is to keep the solfège diatonic so D major fits. When the G-sharps occur, the choir could also switch to A major solfège. The author prefers to sing "Do" as the tonal/modal center regardless of the mode. This often will lead to more chromatic solfège

syllables, but the function is clearer. The music from mm. 42-61 can be read with F# as Do, eventually replacing "Ra" with "Re."

Like as the Hart Desireth the Waterbrooks

Background and Form

Like as the hart is from the same setting of *Four Anthems* as the previous piece. It was written in one sitting, three days after *O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. This anthem uses Psalm 42, verses 1-3 as its text source and it also has a simple ABA structure, although he adds a countermelody as well as a descant for the return of the A material.

Horizontal Landscape

The pitch centricity of the piece is clarified by cadence points and the beginnings of sections. However, the B section strays the furthest from this centricity. The centric pitch throughout is E, but melodically, the vocal part in the opening localizes G major. This ambiguity is emphasized by quasi-pentatonicism (025), and by placing focal points of the melody on G, B, B-flat, and D implying an emphasis on a G tonic triad with modal mixture. The G, B, and B-flat are members of the true tonic triad, but like *O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem,* the pinnacle of this section is the subtonic. The B-flat is one of the signature features of this work by providing the aesthetic of a blue third,[22] even though it is the fifth scale degree. Both larger phrases in this first section end on G. After this opening section, the choir is set in two voices with a much clearer E Aeolian landscape with a clear closure on E minor.

[22] In Jazz, Blues, and popular music, a scale degree may be sung lower for purpose of expression.

The B section is much more ambiguous with short lived localities in various modes. None of the modes are clearly asserted and the modal centers could be interpreted in multiple ways. He intentionally hints at the key centers before quickly shifting elsewhere. The modes leading up to the climax of the piece are G major with modal mixture and B major. The apex on the text "Where, where is now thy God?" contains strong D minor exclamations. These key areas are the same as the melodic focal point from the A section. The text and music leading up to the apex, "My tears have been my meat day," is then repeated with alterations, this time hinting at A minor which alternates with A-flat major, eventually ending on an E minor 7^{th} chord.

The A section repeats with a soprano and alto countermelody further affirming E Aeolian. The final chord is set with a Picardy third in the tenor voice implying an ending in the major mode. This would be an unusually straightforward ending to an ambiguous piece, but as the choir sustains their final chord, Howells introduces two brief melodic organ lines that use C-natural and G-sharp. This minor inflection provides mystery as to the piece's final mode. Modal mixture is such a defining feature of this piece, but not in the traditional sense of occasionally adding a borrowed chord. Howells intentionally manipulates the mode to obscure the listener's perception. This manipulation is so smooth that is provides mystery and an impression of a mode rather than a strict modal setting. This can be credited to his French influences such as Debussy and Ravel.

Table 3.3 Modal Centers in *Like as the hart*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-31	Like as the Hart	E Aeolian
32-40	My tears have been	G/B with modal obscurity
41-48	Where, where in now thy God?	D Aeolian

49-56	My tears have been	A Aeolian with modal obscurity
57-100	My tears have been	E Aeolian

Vertical Sonorities

The vertical space in this piece is what gives it such an astounding and sensual character. As mentioned previously, the opening melody sounds firmly in G major, but the organ accompaniment is what grounds the piece in E Aeolian. The melody hints at G major chord tones with focal points in the melody. The B section furthers this triadic outline tonally, by providing a countermelody of sorts in the organ part with sparse, chordal hints at G major and B major before the pinnacle on D minor. The text repeats with an altered melody. This time, the melody is metrically offset, beginning on beat two rather than beat four. This adjustment changes the harmonic strong points in the phrase. Here, Howells again uses a chromatic mediant relationship, beginning with A minor, moving to C minor, and then to an F7 chord that does not resolve functionally. Instead, he sets an A-flat chord moving to A minor and back to A-flat major. Rather than trying to understand this relationship functionally, it is more efficient to apply Neo-Riemannian theory which would label this movement a slide, meaning that the third remains constant and the root and fifth move up or down by a semitone. The music moves back to E minor before the end of this section.

A brief organ interlude in E Aeolian would transition smoothly back into the A material, but just as the ear expects this, the organ interrupts with C minor 7^{th}, another chromatic mediant relationship before the E Aeolian material returns. Besides the B-flat from the beginning section, most of this section remains diatonic except for a few non-functional dominant 7^{th} chords in the organ. M. 77 contains an F-sharp 7th chord below

the A in the soprano and alto line. Directly after comes a C7 chord to accompany the B-flat in the tenor and bass line. M. 81 contains a G7 chord followed by A minor. None of these are resolved traditionally, but the voice-leading is smooth enough that these moments are not offensive to the listener, though they are unique. The piece ends with E Aeolian with a Picardy third in the tenor voice. After the previously mentioned modal mixture with the C-natural in the organ, he closes with an F-sharp minor and G-sharp minor chord before again cadencing on E major. Since both chords are local to E major, it is as if Howells finally provides modal closure.

Texture

Like as the hart contains many impressionistic and ambiguous moments regarding its pitch material. The beauty of the writing, though, is in its simplicity of texture. Polyphonically, the piece only reaches a three-part texture. Four parts are only used at the apex of the piece, and he uses a five-part texture in the closing chords. The remainder of the music is set in unison or duets with various pairings.

The A section is unison until m. 23 when the sopranos and altos are added. Here, he sets the basses and altos in octaves as well as the tenors and sopranos. As this section closes, Howells cadences with these same pairings with no 3rd. However, he splits the basses to achieve E2. The B section begins with the sopranos and altos in unison. At the climax of this section and the piece at large, he sets the voices in four-part homophony for the only time. After this brief interjection, the tenors and basses resume the melody followed by a closing soprano, tenor, and bass texture with staggered entrances. As the A section returns, the tenors and basses sing their melody from the beginning of the piece, but with a new countermelody in the soprano. When the soprano/tenor and bass/alto duet

returns, Howells adds a short, "descant-like" soprano solo which lasts only a few measures before being paired down to homophony. The piece ends in five parts with low, soft, and thick chords.

Process and Considerations

Vocally, this piece requires attention to breath support and even tone throughout different registers. Since a homogenous sound is desired in all voices, the unison passages will aid in achieving this and the duets will assist in gaining unity between parts. This piece is a logical next step in the progression after having sung *My eyes for beauty pine,* and *O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem* since it requires the same skills to perform, but now there is a bit more chromaticism and modal ambiguity as well as slightly more complex textures.

While the piece is modally ambiguous, the notes and rhythms are not extremely challenging to learn. If solfège is used, some of the sections might be difficult to read in the actual mode that is being implied, so I will offer some other possibilities. The initial melody in the A section lends itself well to the use of "La" based minor since it focalizes the relative major. If a program prefers "Do" based minor, this section could still be learned in G major. When E Aeolian is more defined in m. 23, the choir could switch to E minor solfège.

The B section contains several shifts so the use of solfège will be much more challenging to apply. While solfège can be used with either chromatic alterations or changing syllables according to modal center, this section for most choirs is probably best learned on a neutral syllable or text. This section could be a challenging exercise in learning material intervallically if careful planning is done by the conductor.

The process of developing a unified tone could be achieved through a strategic sectional rehearsal schedule. Since the voice pairings alternate between SA/TB and ST/AB, combining those voices respectively would save rehearsal time and those sessions could be used to listen and build tone. The accompaniment does not necessarily hinder the choir's ability to learn notes, but the underlying harmony does not lend itself to intuition; the harmonies are somewhat unexpected, given the melodic material. It is important to have the choir experience the harmony early in the rehearsal process.

Here Is the Little Door

Background and Form

This work was written in 1918 as the first piece in a set of *Three Carol-Anthems.* It is dedicated to GK Chesterton who found the text for him in his wife Frances' typescript poems.[23] The poem is comprised of two eight-line stanzas which Howells sets in an AA' form. The repetition of material is almost an identical setting of the new text, but with a few harmonic alterations.

Horizontal Landscape

Here is the little door is an excellent example of Howells's use of modal material, and the impunity with which he shifts from one mode to the next. Most phrases in this piece contain a modulation, but each one is done so smoothly that it does not feel abrupt or jarring to the listener. He does this by altering one note at a time so it sounds like it could be a brief chromatic idiom such as secondary function or modal mixture. It only really becomes clear that a shift has occurred when he provides a closure in a closely related mode. Some of the phrases are quite short so it is astounding that he achieves this

[23] Palmer, Christopher. (*Herbert Howells: A Celebration* 2nd ed. London: Thames Publishing, 1996), 399

seamlessness so efficiently. Most often, he will begin the following phrase wherever he closed the preceding phrase, but not every time. Table 4 shows all the modal centers in this piece with their corresponding measure numbers. The localities in modal centers range from three measures to nine measures.

Table 3.4 Modal Centers in *Here is the little door*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-5	Here is the little door…	A Aeolian
6-9	We need not wander	G Ionian
10-12	Our gift of finest gold	C Ionian
13-17	Gold that was never bought	C Mixolydian
18-21	Incense in clouds	D Freygish
22-30	All for the child	G Aeolian/Dorian

Vertical Sonorities

For Howells's music, this piece is extremely tertian, mostly triadic, and homophonic. The phrases gradually shift to new modes with cross-relations, but the piece is conservative compared to a great deal of Howells's music. The chord changes are not functional harmony in a tonal sense, but because of the homophonic nature, the vertical sonorities are much clearer than his other music and triadic analysis is quickly discernable. Howells is writing a chorale-style piece, but the counterpoint is quite interesting. In many moments in the piece, the bass and soprano lines are moving in contrary motion with the altos and tenors moving in parallel motion.

Texture

The texture of this piece throughout is homophonic. The four-part texture has moments where Howells will modify the rhythm in one voice to add interest, but largely the texture remains chorale-like which is extremely rare in the music of Howells.

Process and Considerations

To gain unity in tone, rehearsing on a neutral syllable is advised. This will clarify the harmonic structure of the music as well as encouraging the singers to listen and unify their tone. Since the shifts from modal centers are closely related, the shifts will typically rely on one altered note to succeed in shifting correctly and adjusting to the new center. Bringing attention to this in the rehearsal process will make the ensemble aware of them and these shifts will be intuitive.

Salvator Mundi

Background and Form

Requiem was written in 1932 but was not performed until 1980 and was published in 1981. The piece was thought to have been written in response to the death of Howells's son Michael in 1935 and Howells never corrected the mistake. Further scholarship discovered a letter written to Diana Oldridge in October of 1932 mentioning that he had written an unaccompanied *Requiem* based on Sir Walter Davies' *Requiem* and that it was written especially for King's College, Cambridge.[24] Oddly, the piece was never sent to King's and never performed until the very end of his life. After his son died, Howells reworked much of the material into a large choral/orchestral work called *Hymnus Paradisi.* "Salvator Mundi" is the first movement of *Requiem* and contains a through-composed AB form.

Horizontal Landscape

The pitch material in this movement of *Requiem* is not all that complex if understood. Howells uses D Freygish for his pitch material in the opening seven

[24] Paul Spicer. (*Herbert Howells.* London: Grosvenor Group Ltd, 1998), 95

measures. This section is often labeled G minor because all the pitches fit within G harmonic minor. However, this would mean that these measures are an extended dominant prolongation and by the time the G chord is reached. When the G major chord sounds it is within a G Freygish modal landscape. The modal scheme of this movement can be observed in Table 5.

Table 3.5 Modal Centers in "Salvator Mundi" from *Requiem*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-7	O Saviour of the World	D Freygish
8-14	O Saviour, Who by thy Cross…	G Freygish
15-22	…Redeemed, Save us	B Phrygian
23-29	We humbly beseech thee	D Mixolydian

Howells does not stray far from a given mode once it is established, but as with most of his music, he obscures the mode by use of cross-relations. The opening section is in D Freygish, but in m. 4 the first altos have a sustained F-natural even though it is surrounded by F-sharps in other voices. This careful use of pitch material in the B section adds dissonant color in a subtle way that does not lose its beauty, but it adds mystery to the analysis. This foreshadows the increased dissonance that will follow in later movements of *Requiem.*

Vertical Sonorities

The relationships between harmonies make use of traditional tonal ideas in a non-traditional way. All modes besides the very ending Mixolydian section are Phrygian based. Howells uses the lowered second scale degree as a leading tone and he uses chords like ♭II and ♭vii as a dominant function for tonic prolongation. This can be seen even in the opening phrase. Broken down, this phrase is simply a I chord with decoration. As

phrases become longer, he strays further from tonic and adds more variety to the employed harmony.

Another way Howells uses harmonic function within a modal context is the emphasis on the dominant. The first phrase makes use of pitch material from G minor, but the modal center is D. This choice makes G chord in mm. 9 sound almost predictable, but then he employs A-flat and subverts expectations. The transition to the ending phrase in D Mixolydian is set up by an A minor chord with a pedal A in the bass. Rather than using a traditional A major chord, this harmonic choice functions as a dominant harmony without the strong leading tone pull to the tonic.

Texture

The texture in the A section is essentially four-part animated homophony with various sections standing out with melodic lines. The B section divides the ensemble into two choirs which function as two separate batteries. Like the A section, each choir is in animated homophony with added counterpoint. The resulting harmony is more dissonant with less discernible triadic material as is true with the remainder of the larger work. The most dissonant music in *Requiem* results from contrapuntal double choir textures.

Process and Considerations

This piece contains long lines in various places like his other works, but because the texture is thicker, it is easier to plan corporate breaths as well as staggered breathing. The most challenging aspects of this movement are the unusual harmonies because of the Phrygian modes and double choir texture as well as some of the rhythmic motives within a legato structure.

To achieve good intonation in this piece, the nature of the mode must be in the performers' ears. Singing the mode on solfège and relating it to Aeolian and Phrygian modes would help to get the singers accustomed to this unique scale. "Do" based or "Sol" based systems would both work for this, although "Do" based would help them understand the mode as it relates to other modes. Once they are comfortable with the scale itself, having them experience some of the alterations like the F# and F♮ will prepare them for the cross-relations in the music. The B section with two choirs would benefit from split rehearsals. Having the two choirs rehearsal separately will give them a chance to be successful within their own choir. Then, they will be more present to the interaction with the other choir when they are added back together.

This movement, like much of Howells's music, contains intricate rhythms while not being intrinsically rhythmic. If the score was marked *poco marcato,* the rhythmic precision would feel more natural in the rehearsal process. However, the legato nature of the music could obscure the precision, particularly in more contrapuntal sections. Count-singing would be extremely beneficial in this process because it would increase the awareness of the division of the beat while enforcing the shaping of phrases and preserving the legato quality.

Sing Lullaby

Background and Form

The third piece from *Three Carol-Anthems* is *Sing lullaby,* a setting of a short poem by Gloucestershire poet F.W. Harvey, was written in 1920. Like most of the pieces suggested here, this piece has a clear ABA form with alterations to the returning A section.

Horizontal Landscape

Sing lullaby does not shift in modal center as often as some of Howells's output, but it certainly provides many challenges regarding pitch material. The opening section employs the pitches of the F Dorian mode, but melodically avoids mode-affirming tones. The bass melody uses scale degrees 1, 2, 4, and 5 (0257), avoiding the third until the end of the melody when the mode is shifting to C Dorian. The soprano melody follows the same pitch structure in the new mode before shifting back to F Dorian, closing on an F major chord.

The B section begins with F Freygish and alternates back to F Dorian periodically before shifting to A. A is the pitch center beginning in m. 32, but it alternates between A Aeolian and Dorian with cadence points on A major and with the use of cross-relations. The returning A section follows the same structure as the beginning.

Table 3.6 Modal Centers in *Sing lullaby*

Mm.	Text	Mode
1-8	Sing Lullaby	F Dorian
9-14	Sing Lullaby	C Dorian
15-22	To Jesus	F Dorian
23-31	Sing Lullaby	F Freygish/Dorian
32-43	To weave his diadem	A Dorian

Vertical Sonorities

Howells uses the accompanying voices to create an undulating accompaniment with parallel harmony which creates a sound world for the melody. The pitch material is F Dorian and voices alternate between F minor and G major, but the chords are not used as functional harmonies. A shift occurs to C Dorian but with much the same effect. The

section closes with a clear shift back to F Dorian with use of strong dominant-tonic assertion in the bass.

The B section alternates pitch material between F Freygish and F Dorian in three-measure increments. There is a shift to A as previously mentioned, with Aeolian, Dorian, and Ionian moments, though they are obscured. After this shift which seems to have a clear A centric pitch, there is a quasi-sequential, ever-shifting moment in mm. 35-38 which makes up the most harmonically tense moment of the piece. This is followed by a clear cadence on A minor with A Dorian undulation in the sopranos before returning to F Dorian for the return of A material.

Texture

Sing lullaby contains some challenges within the texture, particularly in the B section. The A sections contain clarity in the analysis of the foreground, middle-ground, and background. The first 14 measures contain a melody in the bass and soprano parts respectively with an undulating accompaniment in the remaining voices. The rest of the A section sets the tenor and bass voices as a middle ground while maintaining accompaniment in the alto and melody in the soprano. The B section begins with a melody in the sopranos with animated homophonic accompaniment in the other voices. As the section develops, the accompanying voices increase in melodic interest blurring the lines of function. This is a characteristic of Howells's music that is common in his polyphonic music, but here is an example of the harmony being a byproduct of several melodies in a homophonic context.

One of the largest challenges within the texture of the piece is maintaining a seamlessness in the accompaniment as it changes which voices are used. For instance, the

undulating accompaniment at the beginning is set in the soprano, alto, and tenor voices with the melody in the bass voice. In m. 9, the bass voice and soprano abruptly switch roles. A great performance of this piece will make these transitions without a drastic change in sonority. This role change happens in various places within the undulation.

Process and Considerations

The primary challenge of this piece will be to clarify the foreground, middle ground, and background within sections with unity and learn the most difficult shifts in tonality. The undulation accompaniment must be precise and without too much shape or individuality. This parallelism is likely inspired by French *Fin de siècle* composers and is more of an effect than individual lines. Teaching this on a pure vowel such as "Noo" will help achieve this uniformity. Other areas simply require attention to balance to highlight the foreground material.

The challenges within the pitch material will not be great in the A material. For those sections, the singers can easily switch from F Dorian to C Dorian once they have the mode in their ear. Singing a scale can help with getting them accustomed to these sonorities. However, the B section contains an extremely disorienting shift from mm. 32-40. The notation might take time to discern for the musicians as there are double flats and the music intentionally does not fit into a key or mode. To succeed in teaching this section and promoting strong intonation, it is advisable to rehearse in various voice pairings and ask the ensemble to listen to how their part fits with the others. Repetition is important.

Conclusion

This selected repertoire is by no means an exhaustive list of works by Howells that are accessible. It is designed to be a starting place for interested conductors and performers. The suggested progression could be altered depending on the strengths and needs of a particular ensemble. The last chapter of this document will discuss how this process can transfer to repertoire by Howells or other composers as well as ideas for further research.

CHAPTER 4

FURTHER RESEARCH

The repertoire suggested in Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to Howells's music and only discusses a small portion of his output. Howells has written an enormous amount of choral music including fifteen choral/orchestral works, 89 sacred choral works, and 60 secular choral works. While he is most known for his choral music, he also has a large orchestral, organ, piano, solo voice, solo instrument, and chamber output. The research and analysis on his music in scholarship has only scratched the service, especially since most of it pertains to his sacred music. As much of his music was being rediscovered during his centenary, Christopher Palmer describes the general knowledge of Howells's music:

> Howells can scarcely be described as a neglected composer; the day must be rare indeed when nothing of his is played or sung in one or more of the cathedrals or collegiate chapels up and down the land. But he has certainly hitherto been a circumscribed composer; pigeonholed, marked 'file under sacred music', the sheer range of his output unknown; unguessed at; ripe and waiting for rediscovery.[25]

Further investigation of Howells's secular music as well as his instrumental and solo pieces through the lens of the topics discussed in this document would be fruitful.

In addition to the plethora of repertoire to be examined, Howells's influence on English choral music is a topic that has received less attention than it deserves. As

[25] Palmer, Christopher. (*Herbert Howells: A Celebration* 2nd ed. London: Thames Publishing, 1996), 454.

discussed in Joseph Sargant's article "Herbert Howells in America: Three Commissions," Howells's music is extremely popular in England. Not only is it performed in Choral Evensong services daily at various cathedrals and college chapels, but his music and teachings have impacted composers and their music throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries. During his time at RCM, he taught composers such as Michael Ball, Hugo Cole, Martin Dalby, Richard Drakeford, Dr. Harry Gabb, Gerald Hendrie, Bryan Kelly, Robert Macfarlane, Harry Newstone, Philip Radcliffe, Robert Simpson, Gordon Jacob, James Bernard, Paul Spicer, Madeleine Dring, and Imogen Holst.[26] His name invites reverence in the circles of British choral music. Composers such as John Rutter and Sarah McDonald are leaders of the Herbert Howells Society following in the footsteps of David Willcocks, their first president.

His music has influenced many composers after him. In many cases, his influence is difficult to discern on the surface since composers do not attempt to copy the music of their mentors or influences. Other cases seem obvious, and the work done to learn the music of Howells can directly apply to some of these other composers' output.

Cecilia McDowall is a very popular British composer and while her music does not sound exactly like Howells's music, there are similarities that cannot be ignored. In her motets, she often uses shifting modes in addition to extended and added-note tertian sonorities. One of the key features in her award-winning *Night Flight* is the use of various Freygish modes. While this scale is used in other contexts, it is primarily an idiom in jazz music and does not appear frequently in the choral repertoire. Because McDowall has a rhythmic drive in her music, the listener might not make a connection very quickly, but

[26] Palmer, Christopher. (*Herbert Howells: A Celebration* 2nd ed. London: Thames Publishing, 1996), 217-251.

the singers in the choir will be able to approach that music more readily after experiencing Howells.

This transfer of skills not only applies to composers Howells influenced, but also the composers who influenced Howells's music. It is well-known in English choral communities how much Howells was influenced by Ralph Vaughan Williams after experiencing *Variations on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* at the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester Cathedral in 1910.[27] The two became close friends and had many similarities in their compositional values. When this connection is made, the similarities easy to see, especially comparing *Missa Sabrinensis* to Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G Minor* where Howells quotes the opening melody of the "Kyrie." Both composers as well as others at the time seemed to have similar ideals: finding an English sound within a new era of music using modes and pentatonicism while revering the great English composers of the Tudor and Elizabethan periods. Vaughan Williams had perhaps the largest influence on Howells's music, but comparison could be made with any of his influences such as Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky, Elgar, and his RCM teachers Hubert Parry, Charles Stanford, and Charles Wood.[28]

Conclusion

Learning the music of Herbert Howells is beneficial for musicians on its own, but outside of Anglican cathedrals, it has not become standard repertoire. Musicians who have been exposed to his works typically become enthusiasts for this music, but even in such cases, they might not program his pieces. The four categories of difficulty examined here could be applied to any of his repertoire and would be a useful starting point in the

[27] Paul Spicer. (*Herbert Howells.* London: Grosvenor Group Ltd, 1998), 22.
[28] RCM Composers also involved in English Renaissance revival for nationalistic influence.

score study process. Once a choir has experienced the six pieces from Chapter 3, they will be much more prepared to approach some of his larger forms. As one begins to study the music of Howells, even with some modal proficiency, the analysis is a slow process with confusion. The practice of studying this music meticulously makes the process easier and more efficient.

This progress can be applied to the choral experience as well. The first time a choir experiences some of Howells's shifting modes, it might be a slow and frustrating process. Since Howells has pieces which vary in difficulty within the four categories of difficulty, it is advisable to find pieces that highlight one or two of these challenges at a time. After having experienced varying degrees of shifting modal landscape, unusual vertical sonorities, complex textures, and vocal demands, choirs will have the skills needed to attempt a piece like "Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing" or challenging repertoire by other composers.

Howells's unique compositional style is highly sought after in England and is becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Approaching his music will challenge choirs and conductors alike with the ability to learn complex pitch material within a shifting modal landscape. The skills gained from rehearsing this repertoire will transfer to a wealth of choral literature from England and beyond. The beauty and expression of his music provides ensembles and audiences with an incomparable aesthetic experience. Doing so will also foster skills that will transfer to many English composers of the twentieth and twenty first Centuries as well as Renaissance music.

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