Spirituality in the Music of Edmund Rubbra

Thesis

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Spirituality in the Music of
Edmund Rubbra

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
September 2017

Music
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
The Open University
Abstract

Edmund Rubbra’s music has frequently been described as spiritual, religious, contemplative or mystical by commentators, usually linking such descriptions to his mid-life conversion to Roman Catholicism and to his interest in Eastern thought. The title of this thesis sums up these qualities under the label ‘spirituality’, a term chosen deliberately for its potential to embrace a range of meanings. The aim of the thesis is twofold: to examine the various strands in Rubbra’s life that contribute to his spirituality, positioning them both biographically and within the context of contemporaneous English culture; and to show, through detailed analysis coupled with an interpretative stance, how these aspects of his spirituality are reflected in his music. The study is structured thematically, chapters dealing in turn with Rubbra’s youthful involvement with Theosophy; his work with dancers during the early years of his career, which can be shown to have a spiritual dimension; his lifelong interest in Eastern religions and philosophies; and his spiritual response to nature. The final two chapters consider two themes with a more Christian emphasis: Rubbra’s enthusiasm for Teilhard de Chardin’s writings, which seek to reconcile Christian faith with scientific evolutionary theory, and his fascination with the figure of Christ himself. By taking a broad and nuanced view of Rubbra’s spirituality, and by subjecting the music itself to close analytical scrutiny, the thesis presents a more multi-faceted view of Rubbra’s life and music than is available in the existing literature and contributes towards a scholarly re-evaluation of Rubbra’s place within twentieth-century British music.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the many people who have helped with the process of researching and writing this thesis. Rubbra’s sons, Benedict Rubbra and Adrian Yardley, have provided invaluable resources and information from their personal collections and recollections. Christabel Grimmer added insights into the friendship between her father, Peter Goffin, and Rubbra. Other scholars have been generous in sharing their knowledge and expertise, particularly Stephen Banfield, Martin Clayton, David Hughes, John Pickard and Charlotte Purkis. Staff at the various archives and libraries listed at the front of this thesis have been unfailingly helpful.

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Fiona Richards and Robert Samuels have been exemplary supervisors: constructive, encouraging, wise and patient. Finally, my husband, Dave, and daughters, Sophie and Helen, have provided unwavering practical and emotional support during the years that I have spent working on this project.
# Contents

List of music examples........................................................................................................ v
List of figures........................................................................................................................ xi
Referencing and abbreviations............................................................................................ xiii
Place names........................................................................................................................... xiv

1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Rubbra’s music: the critical view ................................................................. 2
   1.2 Rubbra on composition .............................................................................. 15
   1.3 Research approach ...................................................................................... 19

2. ‘Point of departure’: the enduring influence of Theosophy on Rubbra’s work ............. 24
   2.1 Rubbra’s involvement with Theosophy ..................................................... 26
   2.2 Musical influence....................................................................................... 28
   2.3 Later influence .......................................................................................... 70

3. Body, mind and spirit: Rubbra’s involvement with dance ....................................... 75
   3.1 Menaka ......................................................................................................... 77
   3.2 Margaret Barr and the Dance-Drama Group ............................................. 96
   3.3 *Prism*, Op. 48 ......................................................................................... 113

4. Looking East ................................................................................................................... 134
   4.1 Early contact with Eastern music ............................................................. 135
   4.2 Post-war interest ...................................................................................... 141
   4.3 Creative tensions ...................................................................................... 156
   4.4 Resolution .................................................................................................. 166

5. ‘Pan is Playing’: Nature mysticism in Rubbra’s Music ................................................. 182
   5.1 *Nature’s Call*: rural life and influences .................................................... 183
   5.2 Symphony No. 6: ‘Canto’ .......................................................................... 190
   5.3 Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85 .................................................................... 202
   5.4 Divine immanence: *Inscape*, Op. 122 ...................................................... 218
   5.5 Retreat or progress? .................................................................................. 247

6. Rubbra’s homage to Teilhard de Chardin .................................................................... 250
   6.1 Rubbra’s early interest in evolution ......................................................... 250
   6.2 Teilhard’s cosmological theory: context and content ............................... 252
6.3 Evolutionary metaphors applied to music ........................................256
6.4 Symphony No. 8, Op. 132 ..................................................................261

7. From ‘Dark Night’ to ‘Resurrection’: The figure of Christ in Rubbra’s music 296
   7.1 Seeking Christ .................................................................................297
   7.2 Roman Catholicism ..........................................................................316
   7.3 Upheaval and renewed faith ...............................................................329

8. Conclusion ..............................................................................................368

Appendix A ...............................................................................................374
   Songs and choral music up to 1930: a new catalogue .................................374

Appendix B ...............................................................................................382
   Peter Goffin’s scenario for the ballet *Prism* .............................................382

Appendix C ...............................................................................................390
   Books by Teilhard de Chardin owned by Rubbra ....................................390
   Books about Teilhard de Chardin owned by Rubbra .................................391

Bibliography .............................................................................................392
   Library sigla ...........................................................................................392
   Archives .................................................................................................392
   Writings by Rubbra .................................................................................393
   Other writings ........................................................................................401
   Broadcasts ...............................................................................................427
   Musical scores .........................................................................................428
   Works of visual art .................................................................................430
List of music examples

All extracts from The Secret Hymnody, The Searcher, Usha, The Three Sisters, Prism, ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ and ‘Adoro Te’ that have been set using music notation software are my own transcriptions from the composer’s manuscript.

Woodwind and brass instruments are written at sounding pitch in all orchestral examples that have been set using music notation software. To avoid undue use of leger lines, double bass parts have been left untransposed except when string parts have been reduced to two staves.

Ex. 2.1: ‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2, verse 1 ........................................................................... 31
Ex. 2.2: ‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2, verse 3 ........................................................................... 34
Ex. 2.3: The Secret Hymnody, bars 1–5........................................................................... 37
Ex. 2.4: The Secret Hymnody, bars 55–8......................................................................... 38
Ex. 2.5: The Secret Hymnody, bars 15–17 ..................................................................... 39
Ex. 2.6: The Secret Hymnody, bars 232–28................................................................. 40
Ex. 2.7: The Secret Hymnody, bars 29–35 ................................................................... 41
Ex. 2.8: The Secret Hymnody, bars 52–59 ................................................................... 42
Ex. 2.9: The Secret Hymnody, bars 63–72 ................................................................... 45
Ex. 2.10: The Secret Hymnody, bars 90–106 ............................................................... 48
Ex. 2.11: Holst, The Hymn of Jesus, bars 16–18 of [R]14................................................. 51
Ex. 2.12: Bassoon melody and ‘Pange lingua’ compared............................................. 52
Ex. 2.13: The Searcher, Scene I: ‘Song of the Searcher’ ............................................... 58
Ex. 2.14: The Searcher, Scene I: ‘All orders, all’ .......................................................... 59
Ex. 2.15: The Searcher, Scene V: ‘O what a girl was Mary!’ ....................................... 60
Ex. 2.16: The Searcher, Scene V interlude ................................................................. 62
Ex. 2.17: The Searcher, Scene II interlude, ‘The killing is on’ - the barrage ............... 63
Ex. 2.18: The Searcher, fugue subject for Scene III..................................................... 63
Ex. 2.19: The Searcher, opening music ....................................................................... 65
Ex. 2.20: The Searcher, Scene III, opening: the Searcher’s melody............................. 67
Ex. 2.21: The Searcher, Scene II, the Searcher's theme ............................................... 68
Ex. 2.22: The Searcher, Scene VIII ............................................................................ 69
Ex. 3.1: Usha, bars 1–12 ......................................................................................... 86
Ex. 3.2: Tilang ............................................................................................................. 87
Ex. 3.3: Usha, phrase ac and its variants ..................................................................... 88
Ex. 3.4: Usha, [R]6, orchestration, a page from Rubbra’s manuscript ......................... 90
Ex. 3.5: Usha, [R]9, bars 115–18 ............................................................................... 92
Ex. 3.6: Usha, timpani rhythms .................................................................................. 93
Ex. 3.7: Usha, [R]4, bars 53–56 ............................................................................... 94
Ex. 3.8: Usha, [R]1 ................................................................................................. 95
Ex. 3.9: *The Three Sisters*, Waltz ................................................................. 103
Ex. 3.10: *The Three Sisters*, War scene ......................................................... 105
Ex. 3.11: *The Three Sisters*, 'War Hysteria' .................................................... 106
Ex. 3.12: *The Three Sisters*, opening Lento .................................................... 107
Ex. 3.13: *The Three Sisters*, war scene, use of motif y ..................................... 109
Ex. 3.14: *The Three Sisters*, closing passage ................................................... 112
Ex. 3.15: Seven pitch classes within the tritone ................................................ 118
Ex. 3.16: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 1–3 ........................................ 121
Ex. 3.17: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 4–8 ....................................... 122
Ex. 3.18: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 15–20 ..................................... 123
Ex. 3.19: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 21–31 (score reduced to three contrapuntal lines) ................................................................. 123
Ex. 3.20: Octatonic collection II .......................................................................... 124
Ex. 3.21: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion, bars 39–42 .............................. 127
Ex. 3.22: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion, melody based on fifths ............... 128
Ex. 3.23: *Prism*, Scene II, ‘Dance of Green Form’, opening ............................ 129
Ex. 3.24: *Prism*, Scene II, passacaglia theme .................................................. 130
Ex. 3.25: *Prism*, Scene III, Sarabande, opening phrase .................................... 130
Ex. 3.26: *Prism*, Scene III, closing bars ........................................................... 131
Ex. 4.1: ‘Fukagawa’, melody ............................................................................ 138
Ex. 4.2: Mode from which ‘Fukagawa’ is constructed ........................................ 138
Ex. 4.3: ‘Fukagawa’, bars 1–4 ............................................................................ 139
Ex. 4.4: ‘Fukagawa’, bars 100–104 .................................................................... 139
Ex. 4.5: Five-note scale used as basis of *Cantata Pastorale*, Op. 92 .................. 143
Ex. 4.6: *Cantata Pastorale*, bars 1–81 ............................................................. 146
Ex. 4.7: *Cantata Pastorale*, bars 1–18, recorder part only ................................ 148
Ex. 4.8: *Pezzo Ostinato*, scale printed at head of score .................................... 149
Ex. 4.9: *Pezzo Ostinato*, ostinato, bars 1–4 ....................................................... 149
Ex. 4.10: *Pezzo Ostinato*, figuration patterns with cross-rhythms ..................... 150
Ex. 4.11: *Pezzo Ostinato*, musical markers of points of Golden Section ............ 154
Ex. 4.12: Piano Concerto in G, bars 1–21 ........................................................... 159
Ex. 4.13: Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 4 in G, bars 1–14 .............................. 163
Ex. 4.14: ‘An Autumn Night Message’, harp ostinato ........................................ 174
Ex. 4.15: Eight-note scale used for vocal line of ‘An Autumn Night Message’ .... 175
Ex. 4.16: Scale formations used in ‘On Hearing her Play the harp’ ...................... 176
Ex. 4.17: ‘On Hearing her Play the Harp’, bars 1–3 .......................................... 176
Ex. 4.18: ‘On Hearing her Play the Harp’, bars 123–142 ................................... 177
Ex. 4.19: ‘On Hearing Her Play the Harp’, bars 193–22 ................................... 177
Ex. 4.20: ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’, bars 1–5 ... 179
Ex. 4.21: ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’, examples of word-painting (vocal lines only) ......................................................... 179
Ex. 5.1: Symphony No. 6, inscription at head of symphony ............................... 191
Ex. 5.2: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 1–16 ................................................. 194
Ex. 5.3: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 38–471 .............................................. 196
Ex. 5.4: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 58–67 ................................................................. 199
Ex. 5.5: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 91–97 ................................................................. 201
Ex. 5.6: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 32–38 ........................................... 207
Ex. 5.7: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 182–186 ...................................... 209
Ex. 5.8: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 199–217 ...................................... 210
Ex. 5.9: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, coda, bars 239–46 .............................. 213
Ex. 5.10: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 111–19 ........................................ 216
Ex. 5.11: ‘Pied Beauty’, bars 1–13, metrical patterning .................................................... 221
Ex. 5.12: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, motif x and variants (all variants written with
ic5 defined by C and F) ........................................................................................................ 225
Ex. 5.13: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 1–7 (orchestral reduction from vocal
score) ..................................................................................................................................... 226
Ex. 5.14: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 21–26, vocal lines only ............................... 228
Ex. 5.15: Comparison of accompanying figures associated with the moving lantern .... 228
Ex. 5.16: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 30–34 ............................................................ 230
Ex. 5.17: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 18–201, tenor and bass lines only .......... 231
Ex. 5.18: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 43–47, soprano line only ......................... 231
Ex. 5.19: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 58–63 ............................................................. 232
Ex. 5.20: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 64–701 .......................................................... 233
Ex. 5.21: ‘Spring’, bars 1–7, orchestral reduction ............................................................. 234
Ex. 5.22: ‘Spring’, bars 60–64 ........................................................................................... 235
Ex. 5.23: Scale used as basis of ‘God’s Grandeur’ ........................................................... 235
Ex. 5.24: ‘God’s Grandeur’, bars 1–81 .......................................................................... 236
Ex. 5.25: ‘God’s Grandeur’, flexible use of mode 3 ......................................................... 238
Ex. 5.26: ‘God’s Grandeur’, ostinato figure, bars 22–32 ................................................. 240
Ex. 5.27: ‘God’s Grandeur’, mixing of non-diatonic modes ........................................... 241
Ex. 5.28: Hexatonic collection contained within mode 3 .............................................. 242
Ex. 5.29: ‘God’s Grandeur’, bars 62–67 ...................................................................... 244
Ex. 5.30: ‘Spring’, bars 53–60 ......................................................................................... 246
Ex. 6.1: Intervallic convergence in the Symphony No. 8 .............................................. 263
Ex. 6.2: Thematic links between first and second movements of Symphony No. 8 266
Ex. 6.3: Principal motifs and themes of Symphony No. 8, first movement................. 273
Ex. 6.4: Symphony No. 8, intervallic contraction between movements 2 and 3 ....... 279
Ex. 6.5: Symphony No. 8, third movement, opening chord ......................................... 280
Ex. 6.6: Symphony No. 8, third movement themes ....................................................... 282
Ex. 6.7: Symphony No. 8, third movement, bars 21–26 .............................................. 287
Ex. 6.8: Symphony No. 8, third movement, bars 73–82 .............................................. 290
Ex. 6.9: Symphony No. 8, closing celesta chord ............................................................ 292
Ex. 7.1: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, bars 1–41 ................................................................. 303
Ex. 7.2: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, opening pitch collections/contours ............... 303
Ex. 7.3: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, opening of instrumental passage ....................... 304
Ex. 7.4: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, closing bars ......................................................... 305
Ex. 7.5: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, construction of final chord ............................... 306
Ex. 7.6: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ motif y and variants (all variants written with ic3 defined by C and E flat) ........................................................................................................................................................................... 308
Ex. 7.7: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, use of motifs ................................................................................................................................. 310
Ex. 7.8: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ bars 81–85, Violin II (Violin I doubles an octave higher) .................................................................................................................. 312
Ex. 7.9: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, bars 34–38 ................................................................................................................................. 313
Ex. 7.10: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, closing bars ......................................................................................................................... 314
Ex. 7.11: ‘Adoro te’, bars 1–51 ............................................................................................................................................................... 316
Ex. 7.12: ‘On the reed of our Lord’s Passion’: introduction, bars 34–37 .......................................................................................... 323
Ex. 7.13: ‘Upon the crucifix’, bars 1–7 ................................................................................................................................................. 324
Ex. 7.14: ‘Upon the crucifix’, bars 9³–12² .............................................................................................................................................. 325
Ex. 7.15: ‘On the reed of our Lord’s Passion’, bars 38–41 ................................................................................................................. 326
Ex. 7.16: ‘Upon the Crucifix’, bars 18–21¹ ........................................................................................................................................ 327
Ex. 7.17: ‘On the reed’, final cadence ................................................................................................................................................ 328
Ex. 7.18: Sinfonia Sacra, bars 1–5 ......................................................................................................................................................... 338
Ex. 7.19: Sinfonia Sacra, [R4], motif a ............................................................................................................................................... 339
Ex. 7.20: Sinfonia Sacra, [R]34, motif a ............................................................................................................................................. 340
Ex. 7.21: Sinfonia Sacra, bars 3–9 of [R]37, motif a ......................................................................................................................... 341
Ex. 7.22: Sinfonia Sacra, [R]52, motif a ............................................................................................................................................... 342
Ex. 7.23: Sinfonia Sacra, ‘cross motif’ and variants, pc-set 4-8 ........................................................................................................ 343
Ex. 7.24: Sinfonia Sacra, ‘cross motif’, other variants ...................................................................................................................... 345
Ex. 7.25: Sinfonia Sacra, [R]22, ‘Resurrexi’, opening bars .................................................................................................................. 347
Ex. 7.26: Sinfonia Sacra, ‘Jesus motif’, pc-set 4-11 ........................................................................................................................... 348
Ex. 7.27: Sinfonia Sacra, use of the ‘Jesus motif’ .............................................................................................................................. 348
Ex. 7.28: Sinfonia Sacra, use of pc-set 4-11 in the ‘Conversation Piece’ ........................................................................................... 351
Ex. 7.29: Sinfonia Sacra, opening of ‘Viri Galilaei’ .............................................................................................................................. 352
Ex. 7.30: Sinfonia Sacra, pc-set 4-11 in the chorales ........................................................................................................................ 353
Ex. 7.31: Sinfonia Sacra, opening bars, orchestration ....................................................................................................................... 354
Ex. 7.32: Sinfonia Sacra, [R]24, ‘Resurrexi’, orchestration ..................................................................................................................... 355
Ex. 7.33: Sinfonia Sacra, bar 4 of [R]3, use of harp .......................................................................................................................... 357
Ex. 7.34: Sinfonia Sacra, bar 6–8 of [R]58, orchestral parts only ........................................................................................................ 358
List of figures

Fig. 1.1: Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85, hermeneutic windows ............................................ 20
Fig. 2.1: Melodic contour of ‘Rosa Mundi’ as a cross ......................................................... 32
Fig. 2.2: Table showing pitch, colour and character correspondences (Scott, n.d. [1917]: 115) ................................................. 33
Fig. 2.3: Structure and text of *The Secret Hymnody*, Op. 1 ............................................. 35
Fig. 2.4: Wood engravings by Blair Hughes-Stanton illustrating *The Searcher* (Pilcher, 1929: 1, 77, 84) .................................................................................. 56
Fig. 3.1: Oriental signifiers used in *Usha* ....................................................................... 84
Fig. 3.2: Structure of *Usha* ................................................................................................ 88
Fig. 3.3: Margaret Barr, Paula Morel and Teda da Moor in a scene from *The Three Sisters*, Dartington School of Dance Mime Summer Production, 1934 (Stuart Black, *DHTA*, TPH/03/010/005) .............................................................. 101
Fig. 3.4: Margaret Barr, Paula Morel and Teda da Moor in *The Three Sisters*, closing scene, Dartington School of Dance Mime Summer Production, 1934 (Stuart Black, *DHTA*, TPH/03/010/004) .............................................................. 111
Fig. 3.5: Dramatic and musical structure of *Prism*, Op. 48 ............................................. 114
Fig. 3.6: Extract from ‘Table of the Four Forms of the Manifestation of Consciousness’, Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 1920: fold-out chart (Ouspensky’s italics) .............................................................. 116
Fig. 3.7: The yin yang symbol as it appears in a book on Jungian psychology in 1942 (reproduced in Purce, 1974: 118) ........................................................................... 117
Fig. 3.8: CIN of *Prism*, Scene 1, Prologo: Origin .............................................................. 120
Fig. 3.9: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion. Peter Goffin’s pictorial representation of the dancers leaping through the prism (reproduced in Hall, 1950b: 27) ........... 125
Fig. 3.10: CIN of *Prism*, Scene 1, Prologo: Diffusion ....................................................... 126
Fig. 4.1: Text of ‘Fukagawa’, with translation by David W. Hughes ................................. 137
Fig. 4.2: *Bee-bee-bei*, synopsis, press notice, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 September 1933 (reproduced in Foreman, 1977a, inside front cover) ...................................................... 141
Fig. 4.3: Thomas Sturge Moore, *Pan as a Mountain*, wood engraving (British Council Collection) ........................................................................................................ 144
Fig. 4.4: Structure of *Pezzo Ostinato* by number of bars .............................................. 151
Fig. 4.5: Use of Golden Section in *Pezzo Ostinato* ......................................................... 153
Fig. 4.6: Piano concerto opening bars compared ............................................................. 162
Fig. 4.7: *Mountain Landscape with the Three Taoist Star Gods of Longevity, Prosperity and Happiness being worshipped by Pilgrims to the Sacred Mountain*, Qing Dynasty, early 18th century, jade, 21 cm (Oriental Museum, Durham University, UK / Bridgeman Education) .................................................. 168
Fig. 4.8: Poems of *The Jade Mountain* ............................................................................ 168
Fig. 4.9: Yang and yin imagery in *The Jade Mountain* poems .................................... 170
Fig. 4.10: Overall structure of *The Jade Mountain* song cycle .................................... 172
Fig. 4.11: Structure of ‘A Night Thought on Terrace Tower’ ............................................ 173
Fig. 4.12: Structure of ‘A Song of the Southern River’ ................................................................. 174
Fig. 4.13: Structure of ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’ ................................................................................................................................................................................................. 178
Fig. 5.1: Cecil Collins, Adam and Eve, c. 1933, ink and graphite on paper (Tate Gallery, London) ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 188
Fig. 5.2: Cecil Collins, The Sitting Room at Monk’s Cottage (1932) (Anderson, 1988: Pl. 14) ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 188
Fig. 5.3: Common features of the pastoral topic in music ......................................................... 192
Fig. 5.4: Line drawing of a corymb, and photo of hawthorn berries (author’s photo) ......... 203
Fig. 5.5: Piano Concerto in G, hidden 'symmetry' within arch form of first movement ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 204
Fig. 5.6: Piano Concerto in G, sonata form/corymbus structure of first movement 205
Fig. 5.7: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, structure of introduction ................. 206
Fig. 5.8: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, recapitulation and coda - Golden Section proportions ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 208
Fig. 5.9: Structure of ‘Pied Beauty’ .......................................................................................... 224
Fig. 5.10: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, structure diagram ................................................. 227
Fig. 5.11: ‘God’s Grandeur’, use of tonal triads in association with mode 3 (t3) .... 243
Fig. 6.1: Reflections of Teilhard’s theory in the music of Rubbra’s Symphony No. 8 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 262
Fig. 6.2: Sonatina form and rotational form analyses of Symphony No. 8, first movement ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 269
Fig. 6.3: Golden Section proportions in Symphony No. 8, first movement ........... 271
Fig. 6.4: Introduction of pitch-classes in Symphony No. 8, first movement, bars 1–9 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 272
Fig. 6.5: Symphony No. 8, thematic structure of third movement .................... 284
Fig. 6.6: Symphony No. 8, rotational form in the third movement 285
Fig. 6.7: Musical similarities between Prism and Symphony No. 8 ......................... 293
Fig. 7.1: Three Poems, Op. 41, the triptych of texts ...................................................... 301
Fig. 7.2: Works by Rubbra designated as ‘meditation’ ................................................. 319
Fig. 7.3: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florentine Pietà, 1553, marble (Museo dell’ Opera del Duomo, Florence/ Bridgeman Education) ................................................................. 320
Fig. 7.4: Two Sonnets, Op. 87: texts and structure ...................................................... 322
Fig. 7.5: Bramantino, The Risen Christ, c. 1490 [mixed media on panel], Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 332
Fig. 7.6: Sinfonia Sacra, structure .................................................................................... 333
Fig. 7.7: Dramatic and musical progression of each section .................................. 360
Fig. 7.8: Relationship of musical Golden Section points to the narrative......... 364
Referencing and abbreviations

References to primary source archival materials are included within the running text, using the following format: (name/type of document, date if known, archive, box/file/volume, item/folio/page if known). Secondary sources and newspaper articles are referenced using the Harvard system recommended by the Open University.

The following abbreviations are used throughout the thesis to refer to archives:

- **AHC** Arthur Hutchings Collection
- **AY** Adrian Yardley, private collection
- **BR** Benedict Rubbra, private collection
- **CCP** Cecil Collins Papers
- **DHTA** Dartington Hall Trust Archive
- **FA** Finzi Archive
- **HA** Harthan Archive
- **MBC** Margaret Barr Collection 1918–1991
- **PHA** Papers of Harcourt Algeranoff
- **RA** Rubbra Archive
- **RC** Rubbra Collection
- **SRC** Supplementary Rubbra Collection
- **SWTA** Sadlers Wells Theatre Archive
- **TSH** Theosophical Society Headquarters
- **URSC** University of Reading Special Collections

See the bibliography for further details of each archive.
Place names

Colonial names have been retained for places referred to historically in Chapters 2, 3, and 6, as follows:

Now

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial Name</th>
<th>Modern Name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baroda</td>
<td>Vadodara</td>
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<td>River Jumna</td>
<td>River Yamuna</td>
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1. Introduction

The music of (Charles) Edmund Rubbra (1901–86) has frequently been described as spiritual, religious, contemplative or mystical by commentators, usually linking such descriptions to his mid-life conversion to Roman Catholicism and to his interest in Eastern thought. The title of this thesis sums up these qualities under the label ‘spirituality’, a term chosen deliberately for its potential to embrace a range of meanings. At its broadest, spirituality may be defined as ‘the concern of human beings with their appropriate relationships to the cosmos’ (‘cosmos’ carrying connotations of order and transcendence) or as ‘an orientation towards the spiritual as distinguished from the exclusively material’ (MacDonald, 2005: 8718). It may be linked to a particular religious tradition as a set of disciplines or a characteristic way of life associated with that tradition. Increasingly, though, during the twentieth century spirituality became divorced from organised or established religion and may now be more readily ‘perceived as a personal, intuitive, experiential involvement with the divine or supernatural’ (Bowman et al., 2009: 23, my italics). In this sense, it may be viewed as a way of life that fosters a person’s relationship with the divine or the supernatural, as well as an outward expression of that relationship. It may include elements of contemplation and mysticism alongside more mundane aspects of human life.

If a person’s spirituality is considered to underpin and suffuse their whole life, it is not surprising that music might be seen to express a composer’s spirituality. Rubbra was reticent about making many such claims for his music, but he did affirm his belief that ‘everything in life is connected and interdependent’ (Schafer, 1963: 66), and that ‘music does not grow and flourish in a narrowly confined area, but is the product of every force to which one is subjected through the very fact of living an active and expanding life’ (Rubbra: 1977a: 11). More specifically,

… for me religion is not in a watertight compartment distinct from my other activities. I think of my work in music as the natural product of a religious nature, which means that I lay stress in my work … on the interrelatedness of everything in the universe. … If an artist is big enough, then in the widest sense he is religious, for religion
fundamentally is a way of connecting oneself to all creation (Rubbra, 1961: 73).

For Rubbra, ‘an active and expanding life’ always included a keen interest in the non-material aspects of existence. Brought up in ‘the hymn-singing milieu of the Congregational Church’ (Rubbra, 1977a: 13), in his late teens he became interested in Theosophy and Eastern religions and philosophies, largely as an unlooked for consequence of his studies with Cyril Scott, Gustav Holst and R.O. Morris. The potentially opposing attractions of Western Christianity and Eastern thought, especially Buddhism and Taoism, remained with him throughout his life, continuing after his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1947. Alongside his religious orientations, aspects of his lifestyle, especially his choice to live self-sufficiently in the country for over twenty years from the 1930s to the 1950s, demonstrate Rubbra’s spiritual affinity with nature.

In this introductory chapter, the way in which a view of Rubbra’s music as innately spiritual emerged, developed and crystallised in the critical writing about his music is discussed first, expanded by reference to parallels in the literature on three of his near contemporaries. Rubbra’s own extensive musical criticism is represented by a selection of his writings and talks on the process of composition itself. Finally, I introduce my research approach in more detail.

### 1.1 Rubbra’s music: the critical view

The field of Rubbra studies is small. There are just three book-length studies. Lewis Foreman’s slim symposium *Edmund Rubbra: Composer-Essays* (1977) was intended as a seventy-fifth birthday tribute to Rubbra, though it was not published until the following year. It brings together eight essays by the foremost reviewers of Rubbra’s music at the time, covering all of the major genres in which he wrote, together with a brief autobiographical note by Rubbra of the first twenty years of his life, and a full bibliography and discography. *The Music of Edmund Rubbra* by Ralph Scott Grover (1993) follows the same format, presenting a full survey of Rubbra’s output, genre by genre and, within that, work by work. It also reprints the autobiographical essay from Foreman’s collection, supplementing it with transcripts of three tapes produced by Rubbra in 1980. Although Grover describes them as
analyses, Stephen Town, in his review of the book in *Choral Journal*, considers that his discussions of the works themselves ‘are better defined as descriptive comments enriched by performance reviews of the works’ (1998: 68). Nevertheless, the sheer breadth and detail of coverage make this the definitive book on Rubbra at the moment. The most recent contribution to the field, *Edmund Rubbra: Symphonist* is described by its author, Leo Black, as a ‘new study of Rubbra for music-lovers rather than fellow-composers or the writers of dissertations’ (2008: ix). Focussing on the symphonies, it weaves biographical information and discussion of non-symphonic works into the account when considered relevant. The discussions of the symphonies are presented as ‘extended programme-notes’ (Black, 2008: ix), with a few simple music examples. Black was a student of Rubbra at Oxford during the 1950s, and in many ways this is a very personal and subjective response to the man and his music, though including many insights.

To these three books can be added a short entry on Rubbra in *New Grove*, brief references in various general surveys of twentieth-century British music, and a corpus of review articles and critical writing about his music, produced for the musical press from the 1920s onwards and, more recently, as CD liner notes. In this review I will concentrate on those aspects of the literature with most relevance to my own thesis, particularly its presentation of the aspect of spirituality in Rubbra’s music. I will also look at the treatment of similar issues in writing about other British composers roughly contemporary with Rubbra, as a way of positioning the literature on Rubbra, and my own research, within a slightly wider framework. Nevertheless, for reasons of space and consistency, I shall retain a defined focus, as the review will not stray beyond British – indeed, English – music composed during Rubbra’s lifetime. This excludes much literature about the more recent generation of spiritually-oriented composers who have become popular with audiences since the 1980s, and even more writing relating to earlier non-British composers whose work is often described as spiritual, even though some of this writing has informed my research.

When Harold Truscott writes of Rubbra’s music in 1977: ‘Ultimately, and as perhaps the most potent facet of his style, all his music is about God – this is its motive force’ (1977b: 29), he is not breaking new ground. From the earliest reviews

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1 Written by Grover, so contributing no new perspectives.
of Rubbra’s work, writers comment on its spiritual qualities or apply spiritual metaphors when describing it: ‘The spiritual essence of his music is not easy to analyse. Mystic he certainly is, but he has discovered a subtle quality of mysticism common to medievalism and paganism, and informed this with a deep humanity …’ (Jacobson, 1935: 32). Once Rubbra began to produce symphonies, three writers became particularly influential in promoting his reputation: Arthur Hutchings and Wilfrid Mellers from the late 1930s until the early 1950s, and from 1950 until his death in 1979, Hugh Ottaway. Both Hutchings and Mellers greet Rubbra enthusiastically as a symphonist. Mellers initially focuses on physical qualities in the music: ‘Essentially this is masculine music … strong, civilised, inherently sane and healthy’ (1938: 1329), whilst Hutchings hails him in almost messianic terms: ‘with the symphonies, the ability for long, disciplined thinking made [Rubbra’s] texture glow with that rich flame of poetry and dignified emotion which makes it hard to hide the conviction: “This is he that should come”’ (1941: 19). Both writers value his integrity of expression and the ‘authenticity’ of his music. His individuality sets him apart from composers who seem more deliberately to court public popularity.

In a time when there seem to be musicians enough, but few whose writing is clear and at the same time really impassioned, one is impatient to hear more from a composer who has not “got the start” of the fashionable world, and, in the process, lost his soul (Hutchings, 1939: 380).

Similarly, both writers show how Rubbra’s characteristic way of approaching symphonic composition has its roots in English musical tradition, particularly in contrapuntal music from earlier periods – Hutchings often compares Rubbra’s methods to those of Purcell and earlier madrigal composers, whilst Mellers looks to Tudor models. Mellers develops this musical comparison considerably during the course of his writings, investing it with spiritual significance. He stresses Rubbra’s ‘spiritual affinity’ with the music of Tudor England (1939: 60), which he later attributes to the fact that Rubbra has a ‘fundamentally religious’ mind that enables him ‘to re-establish contact with the 17th-century devotional tradition’ (1952a: 189). Yet Mellers is one of the earliest writers to draw a distinction between composers who use the past as a form of retreat or escape from engagement with the modern
world and those who use it re-creatively in order to compose ‘music that is vitally an expression of the 20th century’ (1952a: 190). In this sense, he considers Rubbra’s mastery of counterpoint to be ‘not … a matter of technical exercise but of intense spiritual discipline’ (1939: 61). It has enabled him to achieve a different and new kind of symphonic method that Mellers describes as ‘monistic … in that the whole structure tends to grow out of a single melodic idea’, as opposed to the ‘dualistic’ symphonic movements of composers in the Beethovenian tradition, in which conflict of tonal centre and thematic material is more important (1949: 116). Mellers hardly needs to make explicit the thought that ‘this “monistic” lyrical creativity is perhaps religious in impetus’ (1949: 116): the terms he uses are suggestive enough. Unity and the constantly evolving thematic process are key elements in all of Mellers’ descriptions of Rubbra’s music, which he frequently relates to creative and spiritual integrity.

Ottaway picks up many of the same concerns. He also identifies spirituality with technique in Rubbra’s music, exemplified in its unity of style and musical process:

Rubbra’s development has been a search for unity and integration, a continual refining of his musical style … The development lies not in the outward face of the music … but in the growing mastery of fundamental issues, in particular the art of generating extensive structures from simple melodic seeds. This has been an intellectual process directed towards the embodiment of spiritual qualities; the more convincing (not necessarily the more complex) the actual headwork, the more fully realised is the spirituality. Indeed, the spiritual profundity largely derives from the intellectual penetration of the music, hardly at all from sheer sonority or the evocative power of chord or phrase’ (Ottaway, 1954: 471).

Again, his descriptions of Rubbra’s music always emphasise ‘the drawing-out of the main thematic thread: growth, textural variety, thematic oneness’, leading to the conclusion that ‘his ultimate “message”, or philosophy, is one of composure, unity, and order, perceived poetically and with an inner radiance’ (Ottaway, 1976: 711).

Mellers, and especially Ottaway, effectively establish a tradition of regarding Rubbra’s music as spiritual. In Foreman’s 1977 collection of essays, both Truscott
(quoted above) and Ronald Stevenson (1977: 43) express similar views. No other authors of short articles and reviews since have written so extensively or consistently about Rubbra’s music, but very many of them mention a mystical or religious aspect of his music, whilst also reflecting the concerns of their own generation. Francis Routh, writing in the 1970s, considers that Rubbra’s ‘claim to be considered a progressive rests on two grounds’, the first of which is ‘a personal, mystical interpretation of Christianity, which is rare among contemporary composers’ (1972: 71), whilst Louis Blois, in the 1980s, introduces Rubbra’s symphonies with the view that they ‘offer compassion and, in a religious sense, nourishment to the contemporary spirit’ (1984: 38). Writing over fifteen years later, after the rise in popularity of more overtly spiritual composers, Martin Anderson’s review of some of Rubbra’s music featuring harp from the 1960s also makes a telling comparison with contemporary music: ‘In many of these works … Rubbra effectively holds time still while his material unfolds: there is a deeper calm here than in much of the output of such “modern mystics” as Tavener and Górecki …’ (2001: 56). Robert Saxton also brings a fresh perspective. Whilst basing his assessment on familiar qualities of ‘musical unity, cohesion and organicism’ (1996: 4), achieved through ‘rigorous and challenging technical mastery’ (1995: 4), he introduces the notion that Rubbra’s music represents ‘in the deepest sense, a spiritual journey … resolution, indeed radiance, is only won by means of an internal quest’ (1995: 4). He also situates Rubbra within ‘the visionary tradition in English art, literature and music’ (1995: 4), of which there was a growing academic recognition during the 1990s.²

Few of these writers venture beyond the idea of musical unity and integrity to show how spirituality might be expressed more locally within a specific passage of music. Elsie Payne attempts this in her contribution to Foreman’s symposium. She sets out the musical signs by which Rubbra communicates the sense of a transcendent religious experience in his setting of the Song of the Soul, Op. 78, to words by St John of the Cross:

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[Music] which is mystically inclined … uses the data of music deliberately to symbolise the immediacy and completeness of a mystical experience and to suggest an atmosphere of other-worldliness.

Rubbra succeeded in the Song of the Soul in projecting into musical terms an experience which is not only humanly passionate but also rarefied or mystical. How? By melody which is forthright, positive and rhythmical, yet unmetrical and ambiguous in tonality and modality; by harmony which is lavish and varied but again insecure in tonality and frequently made up of bottomless 6/4 chords; by an instrumentation which, though colourful, is light and ephemeral, with much emphasis on harp timbre; and by an overall vivacity and sense of continuity in spite of a fluctuating momentum and a basically episodic formality (Payne, 1977: 80).

Payne’s description differs from those of earlier writers such as Mellers and Ottaway by referring to the expressive qualities of Rubbra’s use of melody, rhythm, tonality, harmony and timbre. She goes on to examine each of these elements in a little more detail, her most explicit comments referring to the harmony in the opening few bars.

Payne’s intention is clearly to illuminate how Rubbra creates a certain mystical effect in this particular work, but Leo Black (2008) apparently interprets the features identified here as universal signs that should be observable in any piece by Rubbra if it is to be described as ‘mystical’. Referring to them initially and evocatively – or maybe provocatively – as ‘stigmata’ (131) and later as ‘Payne’s criteria’ (133), he attempts to apply them to Rubbra’s Sixth Symphony. Finding only a few matches in the outer movements, he concentrates on the slow movement, a ‘Canto’ inscribed with lines from a poem by Giacomo Leopardi, L’Infinito, in which the poet contemplates nature and is caught up into

Interminable vastnesses of space
Beyond it, and unearthly silences,
And profoundest calm


Here, Black finds correspondences in the general cast of the melody and harmony, and makes some reference to timbre with his imaginative account of ‘the two great
moments when the clarinet suddenly dives into its warm bath of cello sound’ (133). His analysis is always limited by his intended readership, so lacks technical detail. His greatest insights tend to be those that make links between Rubbra’s music and his religious beliefs or the circumstances of his personal life. In the case of the Sixth Symphony, he suggests that the E-F-A-B musical inscription that heads the work is an acrostic referring to Rubbra and his immediate family (his second wife, Antoinette, and two sons, Francis and Benedict), linking the ‘Canto’ movement, in particular, to Rubbra’s relationship with Antoinette (133–34). Elsewhere in his book, to help his lay-reader identify certain Rubbra fingerprints or recall significant passages in later discussion, Black provides them with memorable labels. Whilst they could appear simply fanciful, in two cases (‘bell-like ideas’ and an ‘Alleluia feeling’) the names derive from Rubbra’s own writings about his music. In others, the appellations seem to be chosen as a way of inviting possible spiritual interpretations (for instance, the “‘All flesh is grass” feeling’) or linking the music to an image from the natural world (‘cloudscapes’ or ‘a “happy birds” effect’, for example), with the implication that representations of nature in Rubbra’s music are part of a wider nature mysticism.³

Ralph Scott Grover takes the same passage by Payne as his starting place for a discussion of mysticism in Rubbra’s music, but concludes from her first sentence quoted above that ‘any specific techniques employed to accomplish this end vary from composer to composer, and from work to work’ (1993: 389). Nevertheless, his ensuing description of ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, Op. 41, No. 1, an earlier setting of a text by St. John of the Cross than that described by Payne, identifies many similar musical traits:

… except for some very short, largely motivic passages, the chorus and solo parts are through-composed. This would seem to be a deliberate attempt to mirror the unpredictable nature of the mystical experience … Certainly, one of the most obvious ways of suggesting a vague, mystical experience is through vague, chromatic harmonies … and the greater part of the texture in this work is made up of such harmonies. There is no real

³ Black acknowledges a strain of nature mysticism in Rubbra’s music by making frequent references to the ‘Vision of Dame Kind’, one of W.H. Auden’s four categories of mystical phenomena (see Black, 2008: 103).
sense of a key … Rhythmically, the work is very flexible … Frequent metrical changes … and fluctuating tempi … work together to mirror the rhapsodic nature of the mystical experience (390–91).

Beyond this, Grover limits his discussion of mysticism to specific choral works, singling out especially those where the text strongly suggests a mystical interpretation, though he includes quotations from earlier critics who noted mystical properties in some of Rubbra’s instrumental music. He also includes a discussion of the wider spiritual content of Rubbra’s music. In common with most other writers, he links this firmly to the unity observed in Rubbra’s works ‘which operates on two levels: the purely musical, and the religious and philosophical’ (589). Although Grover goes on to describe in very broad terms the process by which religious and philosophical unity is demonstrated through musical unity (589–90), specific spiritual interpretations of individual works or movements are rare throughout the book, and where they do occur, they are proffered tentatively or apologetically. An instance relates to the Eighth Symphony, subtitled ‘Hommage à Teilhard de Chardin’.4 Following his description of the second movement, Grover puts forward the ‘pure speculation’ that ‘the various themes, the large number of fragments derived from them, and, in turn, their interactions with one another, present a balanced, unified whole that corresponds to Teilhard’s concept of unity as having emerged from multiplicity’ (161).

Two texts stand apart from the rest of this writing, both in purpose and content. John Pickard’s essay (2001) on the *Sinfonia Sacra* is neither a review of the work nor a description forming part of a larger survey of Rubbra’s works. Its aim is to examine the somewhat vexed question of generic fusion in this work which has features of both oratorio and symphony.5 In the process, he points to various aspects within the music that could also be seen as reflecting Rubbra’s own spirituality. In

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4 Rubbra was an enthusiastic admirer of the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit geologist and palaeontologist, whose fusion of evolutionary theory with Christian theology challenged traditional Roman Catholic thinking during the mid-twentieth century (see Chapter 6 of this thesis).

5 Rubbra considered it to be a symphony, but in Foreman’s symposium it is discussed within the chapter on non-liturgical choral music, where Elsie Payne defends its status as a symphony (1977: 84–85). Grover agonises over the question, having serious doubts about the work’s symphonic credentials, but concludes that as ‘most listeners will not care whether the *Sinfonia Sacra* is a symphony or an oratorio … it is probably useless to favour one category over the other’ (1993: 171). Black alludes to the debate (2008: 177–182), but passes no judgement himself.
particular, Pickard considers that the use of the words of Latin hymns from the Roman Catholic liturgy alongside Protestant chorale melodies within the work expresses Rubbra’s desire for religious tolerance and reconciliation of differences, especially given the historical context of its composition at the time of the flaring up of Catholic/Protestant sectarian violence in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s.

Some aspects of this article warrant further exploration, especially its treatment of the way in which the opening chord generates thematic and motivic material (such as a four-note motif with a cruciform contour) that is used within a purely musical development to unify the work whilst simultaneously functioning both descriptively and symbolically within the oratorio narrative. Stephen Town (2012: 217–46) does expand Pickard’s analysis considerably in his chapter on the Sinfonia Sacra, providing more detail about the way in which the opening ‘germinal unit … allows the positing of several different views of the material and of the tonal/modal possibilities of the work’ (228), and mapping recurrences of motivic material. He also begins to examine Rubbra’s symbolic use of chorale melodies by referring to their use in Bach’s Passion settings (232–33). Taking his cue from Black’s alternative reading of the Sixth Symphony, Town proposes his own view of the Sinfonia Sacra. He notes that the opening chord of the Sinfonia Sacra comprises the same pitch collection as the inscription on the Sixth, with the addition of C. As Rubbra was living with Colette Yardley, who was to become his third wife, and their teenage son, Adrian, by the time he started work on the Sinfonia Sacra, Town suggests that the expanded pitch collection signifies ‘all of the Rubbras – Edmund, Antoinette, Collette [sic], Francis, Benedict, and Adrian’ (240). Just as Black infers from the Sixth Symphony that ‘the complex of names, notes and life points to concern for those his conduct had caught up in an inextricable tangle of emotions and actions’ (2008: 133), so Town concludes:

Of course, it would be naïve simply to assume that the convenient applicability of this theory to Sinfonia Sacra offers direct and immediately understandable reflections of Rubbra’s inner life, but we must not ignore that possibility, especially when one considers it in relation to Rubbra’s decision to formalize the design of his work with chorales which were to him, as he believed they were to Bach, ‘periodic statements of an assured faith that stood rock-like amid the shifting emotions of earthly life’ (2012: 240).
To widen this review, I shall examine how writers have dealt with the aspect of spirituality in the music of other British composers of the first half of the twentieth century. To maintain a focus, I shall limit my discussion to texts about just three other composers: Gustav Holst (1874–1934), because he was Rubbra’s main composition teacher at Reading University and the Royal College of Music, and a composer for whom Rubbra maintained a deep respect throughout his life; Herbert Howells (1892–1983), because his music (especially his liturgical music) is, like Rubbra’s, based firmly on a traditional idiom yet emerges as a powerfully personal statement; and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), because he was such an influential figure in British music of this period, and because, as with Rubbra, the symphony was important in his output.

Rubbra himself wrote one of the first studies to deal with all of Holst’s music in 1947. Tellingly, he sets the music in a spiritual context by opening the book with a quotation from one of Holst’s letters: ‘Music, being identical with heaven, isn’t a thing of momentary thrills, or even hourly ones. It’s a condition of eternity’ (Holst, cited in Rubbra, 1947a: 7). Rubbra does not discuss spirituality in relation to any one specific work by Holst, but considers that ‘throughout most of his music … there burns a religious ecstasy, however mentally controlled this may be … It is this sometimes sensuous, sometimes remote, mysticism in Holst’s music that gives it its often unearthly quality, as though lit by an unrefracted light from another sphere’ (15). Fifty years later Raymond Head (1999) devotes a whole article to Holst’s The Hymn of Jesus. He considers this work to be Holst’s ‘artistic and philosophical response’ to the First World War (7). It sets a Gnostic text from the Apocryphal Acts of St. John which the Theosophist and scholar G.R.S. Mead believed to be not a hymn in the conventional sense, but an early mystery-ritual involving a dialogue between a Master (Jesus?) and a disciple, and dancelike movement (9–10). The initiate is invited both to follow Jesus and to understand why humanity suffers. Head shows quite specifically how Holst’s music uses timbre, texture, spatial separation of the choirs, tonality and harmony in order to express mystical aspects of the text. For example, ‘the presentation of Vexilla Regis by a distant choir of trebles over an orchestra of independently oscillating high chords creates a feeling of an ageless, unknowable, cosmic mystery’ (8). He also points to Holst’s symbolic
quotation of plainsong melodies and a motif similar to Amfortas’ motif from *Parsifal*⁶ which add further spiritual resonances to the music.

Like Rubbra on Holst, Christopher Palmer (1992) also draws on the metaphor of light when describing texture and harmony in Howells’ music, relating its shifting polyphony to the play of colour and light found in cathedral architecture. He describes discord within Howells’ harmony as ‘never opaque, but luminous-numinous, light-suffused, light-bearing’, and similarly, ‘we “hear” light in Howells’ textures: complex, prismatic, highly-wrought, fantastically detailed, … frankly impressionistic. It *sounds* like what Gloucester [Cathedral]’s East Window *looks* like’ (147). Palmer links spiritual and sexual ecstasy in Howells’ music, believing that ‘the ecstatic quality of his music, the sweetness, joy, warmth and light it radiates, are at least in part an expression of sexual joy’ (200). The visionary qualities in his music are also closely bound up with a sense of loss, especially in the *Hymnus Paradisi*, described by Palmer as a Paradise lost and regained. For Palmer, this dichotomy is often articulated through kaleidoscopic, dissolving harmony and texture (198).

More recent writing on Howells often takes a hermeneutic approach to the theme of loss in his music, linking it to the composer’s profound grief on the death of his young son, Michael, in 1935. In a symposium of essays that together present a richly nuanced view of Howells’ music (Cooke and Maw, 2013), Graham Barber explores the role of the sarabande as an elegiac mode of expression, present in Howells’ music before Michael’s death, but more intensely afterwards. For Howells, this stylised dance became ‘a perfect vehicle for expressing elegiac thoughts and feelings, both personal and religious’, its antique associations allowing him to achieve a sense of distance from painful emotions (271). Barber recalls Howells’ commentary on Holst’s *Hymn of Jesus*, in which he ‘drew attention to the association in that work between dancing and the mystery of the cross, which he said identified “the spirit of the dance with the nature of religious experience”’, seeing Howells’ own use of the sarabande as yet another way in which he expressed ‘sacred thoughts through secular means’ (273).

A similar duality of expression emerges from Wilfrid Mellers’ book on the music of Vaughan Williams (1989). Mellers presents Vaughan Williams as a

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⁶ A motif that has become a symbol of suffering humanity (Head, 1999: 8).
‘double man’ in several respects: the countryman versus the city-dweller, the agnostic with roots in the Anglican Church, and the traditionalist who was yet profoundly in touch with the reality of modern life. By relating his music to the various artistic influences on his work – writers such as William Blake, John Bunyan, George Meredith and John Milton, and visual artists such as Blake (again) and Samuel Palmer – Mellers shows how Vaughan Williams stands within the same English visionary tradition. He makes many references to the music through analytical and interpretative discussions of specific works. In his discussion of the final movement of the Ninth Symphony, Mellers suggests that it accepts “doubleness” not merely as the genesis of unity, but as itself a formal principle (239), for the movement essentially combines two movements in one. They unfold independently and ‘overlap but do not, in the manner of a sonata, argue or conflict’ (239). Eventually, a climax is reached ‘when the “two movements” become one through their contrapuntal interweaving’ (241). Mellers sees this as reflecting a Blakeian duality of innocence and experience: ‘So in this immensely complex movement the interweaving of long, winging polyphonies has germinated new seeds of life … innocence is reborn of long experience’ (241), with the two states, symbolised in the harmony, co-existing at the end of the movement, offering ‘alternative futures’ (239).

Mellers compares the evolutionary nature of the form and ‘polyphonic growth’ of this movement with similar features in the first movement of Rubbra’s Second Symphony (240–41), thus creating a bridge between his earlier writings on Rubbra’s music and his later interpretation of Vaughan Williams’ work. Further parallels can be drawn between the writings on Vaughan Williams, Holst and Howells outlined here and the literature about Rubbra’s music. Head, Palmer and Mellers all identify texture as an important element in expressing spirituality in the music of the composers they discuss, especially the use of polyphony. This is a common thread in the writing on Rubbra, mentioned by virtually all the writers covered in the first part of this review, though usually linked to the ideas of unity, growth and continuity in Rubbra’s music, rather than evoking a play of light and shade. A colouristic use of harmony and timbre seem to be more important in this respect in Rubbra’s music (Black, 2008: 133; Grover, 1993: 390; Payne, 1977: 80). Payne’s description of Rubbra’s Song of the Soul shows how he combines expression of the ‘humanly passionate’ with the ‘rarefied and mystical’ (1977: 80),
similar to Palmer’s linking of the spiritual light and warmth in Howells’ music with sexual joy. Black also hints at this combination when he suggests that the mysticism of the ‘Canto’ of the Sixth Symphony might express something about Rubbra’s relationship with Antoinette (2008: 133–34). Pickard and Town refer to Rubbra’s symbolic quotation of chorale melodies in the Sinfonia Sacra, comparable to Holst’s use of plainsong melodies in the Hymn of Jesus. Finally, both Saxton and Mellers link Rubbra’s music, along with that of Vaughan Williams, to an English visionary tradition in the arts that received a musical reinvigoration in the early years of the twentieth century.

As this review of the literature demonstrates, there are many common strands running through the writing about the musical side of this tradition, which suggests that Rubbra’s expression of his spirituality within his music, whilst personal and individual, is also a wider expression of the spirit of the times in which he lived. Thus in 1952 Mellers could assert that Rubbra drew on tradition in order to create ‘music that is vitally an expression of the 20th century’ (1952a: 189), twenty years later Routh still viewed Rubbra as a ‘traditional progressive’ (1972: 71), and even in 1984, just two years before Rubbra’s death, Blois considered that his symphonies had something valuable to offer to ‘the contemporary spirit’ (38). Yet none of the literature reviewed here consistently links Rubbra’s individual spirituality and beliefs to the wider cultural and social context in which they developed, so does not show how it was a product of the time and place of his life as well as being born of personal conviction. This is one omission that I address within my thesis, setting many of the musical case studies within a context that includes but goes beyond the narrowly biographical to cover some discussion of the cultural and spiritual movements that influenced Rubbra. Secondly, none of the current literature offers rigorous technical analysis of Rubbra’s music, mainly because most of it was intended for a general, rather than academic, readership. Again, I address this in my own work, as interpretations of his music within my thesis are supported by detailed and technically accurate analysis. My thesis thus both complements and augments the existing literature on Rubbra, enhancing the academic appreciation of a composer who is ‘increasingly recognized as an outstanding musical thinker, regardless of

7 As opposed to a ‘revolutionary progressive’ (Routh, 1972: 71).
stylistic boundaries’ (Saxton, 1996: 7), as well as adding to the broader historical and cultural understanding of twentieth century English music.

1.2 Rubbra on composition

Rubbra himself wrote prolifically about music, especially during the 1930s, when he contributed regularly to the *Monthly Musical Record*, and again for a decade after his retirement from his Oxford teaching post in 1968, when he frequently reviewed a selection of the week’s broadcast music for the *Listener*. His writings show him to be a perceptive and thoughtful critic, always willing to consider the new and unfamiliar alongside better known music, covering a diverse range of styles and genres. From the late 1940s, Rubbra also wrote and spoke publicly about his own music and compositional methods. These articles and lecture notes, some of which exist only as unpublished typescripts, will be surveyed here, as they afford an invaluable insight into the way that he thought about, and approached, the process of composition. 8

Rubbra acknowledged that the stimulus for a composition might be internal or external, musical or extramusical. If the last, it would have to be ‘transmuted into the gold of a musical idea’, and the musical idea alone would then become his sole concern whilst composing (undated typescript [c. 1956], 9 RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark: 1). Such initial ideas almost always came to him as a visual image of written music. Often this was fairly generalised: ‘I have a visual impression simply of a musical shape without knowing the actual notes. I know the kind of music it is, the mood and texture and timbre, but it lacks all precise details’ (Schafer, 1963: 72). His next step was, therefore, to ‘clarify’ the idea to ensure that it was ‘shaped and stated as perfectly as possible’ (1953a: 42). For him, this was perhaps the most important aspect of composition: ‘my only concern is with fixing a starting point that I can be sure of’ (to Schafer, 1963: 71). An assured starting point enabled him to look for ‘latent possibilities’ (1953a: 42) in the idea, and to reveal the ‘musical

8 All references in this section are to writings by Rubbra unless otherwise stated.
9 The typescript is untitled, but is apparently intended as a talk on ‘the problems confronting a 20th century [sic] symphonist’ (4). All of Rubbra’s symphonies up to and including No. 6 (completed 1954) are mentioned in the talk, but the Seventh (completed 1957) is not. The talk is often close in thought and expression to Rubbra’s 1956 article ‘Letter to a Young Composer’.
potentialities locked up within it’ through a process of musical ‘unfolding’ (1950d: 44). This part of the process Rubbra likened to discovering ‘what appears to be the predestined course a work should take’ (1953a: 43), requiring the exercise of finely honed critical faculties. Choosing what is relevant from all the many possibilities is, in Rubbra’s view, ‘one of the most difficult of a creator’s problems’ (undated [c. 1956]: 5). In his experience, if errors of judgement result in material that should have been rejected being accepted, ‘after a time a barrier stops further progress. The composer must then retrace his steps to find out where the wrong turning was made …’ before work can proceed (1950d: 44).

Rubbra saw form as an outcome of this process of unfolding, rather than as something to be decided beforehand. In his 1963 interview with Murray Schafer he claimed not to give form much thought at all: ‘I never know where a piece is going to go next’ (67). The statement has often been cited out of context by writers on Rubbra’s music, but it really needs to be considered in the light of his total thinking about form, as expressed both in the interview itself and elsewhere. His main concern was to avoid viewing form as something fixed in advance, which he described as a ‘rigid tabulation’ that ‘departmentalises our conception of music’ (undated [c. 1956]: 10). When he did use what he referred to as ‘classical forms’ in his music, he did so ‘instinctively, never as patterns to which I must shape my thought’ (Schafer, 1963: 67). He preferred to regard form as the logical result of the unfolding of the music over time:

What happens at any moment in [the] duration of a piece cannot possibly be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, but only as the end-product of all that has preceded it and as a stepping-stone to what is to come. What, then, we call a second subject is in reality a flowering of all that has preceded it, and has significance only in relation to the music that has gone before. It is not something superimposed at any moment just because of a desire for change. The problem for the composer then is intuitively to seize the right moment for change of emphasis (Undated [c. 1956]: 10).

This passage sheds further light on Rubbra’s comment to Schafer that he never consciously searched for a second subject, but was happy if it came ‘spontaneously, unexpectedly and in the right place’ (Schafer, 1963: 71, my italics). It seems that
Rubbra would begin composing with no definite idea of the final shape of the piece in mind, letting his ‘imagination discover the architecture’ for him as he worked (71). He would only gain a sense of the overall plan once he was ‘deeply immersed in a work’ (1975d: 18). When probed further about the way in which he arrived at the final form of a work, in a BBC interview broadcast in 1980, Rubbra reaffirmed: ‘I do arrive by accident … But it isn’t so really. It *seems* like accident, but it has to be a *controlled* accident if that can be so envisaged,’ adding, ‘if it turns out right, *that’s* the excitement of it’ (cited in Grover, 1993: 186). That the control could be quite rigorous is attested by a brief diary entry relating to the composition of his overture *Resurgam*: ‘In the morning … found a flaw in the key system. This is always worrying: but in the afternoon discovered where the fault lay and I was able to put everything right’ (9 March 1975, RA, Box 33, temporary shelfmark).

This last statement naturally prompts the question, ‘what is ‘right’?’ Certainly, as my analyses of Rubbra’s music in ensuing chapters will demonstrate, works as a whole, and individual movements within them, have an often intricately balanced and proportioned structure. Essentially, a piece will have one pervading idea (‘The British composer and the symphony’, typescript, 1949, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark: 2). Contrasts, which are necessary, are ‘those ideas which are born in reaction against the original idea’ and so may be perceived as ‘facets of a multi-sided form that only gradually shows itself as the music unfolds’ (1950d: 44). To put it another way, ‘there is always a point when the variation and development of the original idea has proceeded so far away from the original conception as to *seem* a new idea, or second subject. They are thus insolubly joined together’ (undated [c. 1956]: 12).

Rubbra often used organic imagery when describing the compositional process and its outcome. His reference to the second subject as a ‘flowering’ of all that preceded it has already been quoted. In other articles he used the image of a tree and a seed. In stressing that the initial idea for a piece must have the potential to develop, he wrote: ‘it must never be forgotten that although the tree is in the seed, the seed is not the tree. The idea must be a *seed* and not a miniature tree’ (1950d: 44). Two years later he returned to this metaphor, extending it humorously to underline the importance when composing of remaining true to one’s own artistic personality, as well as those embodied within the idea itself:
the analogy of the seed is still a true one: the seed is not the tree, but it contains all the potentialities of a particular tree. What would happen if argumentative forces within an apple tree wanted to turn it into a cactus? (1952: 7).

Rubbra felt that composers could too easily compromise both their ideals and their ideas by committing themselves to any kind of compositional system. He spoke out forcefully against both Schoenberg and Hindemith as ‘systematisers’ (1956: 379), insisting that composers should judge their work against a personal, inner standard (1950d: 43; 1952: 7; 1956: 380). In his ‘Letter to a Young Composer’ he advised that:

Awareness and not commitment should be your concern as a developing artist – awareness of the many styles being followed by disciples of this or that school, but commitment to none of them if you are to develop as an artist … your business is to find where your own roots lie … (1956: 380).

A composer ‘develops not in a vacuum, but in a world rich in masterpieces of musical thought’ (1950d: 43), both old and new. When asked about his own attitude to the music of the past, Rubbra said that, ‘the antennae of my imagination automatically dwell on certain interesting features of the music I am studying, and later, unconsciously, some of these may find expression in my own music’ (to Schafer, 1963: 68). He suggested that no composer was ‘musically self-contained: we are all eternally indebted’. Such indebtedness, expressed in Thomistic terms, could be either to the ‘accidents’, or ‘superficial appearances’, of music, or to its ‘substance’, or ‘inner essence’. A composer’s aim should be to build on the ‘substances’ of music, for in so doing ‘an individual style will be an end-product of his creative thought and not a starting point’ (1968f: 109). In this sense, the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ become meaningless, ‘for the musician, living in the present situation, and being sensitive to the complexity of the scene, can never view traditional procedures in any other than a contemporary light’ (1956: 380). Certainly it was not just the music of the past on which the ‘antennae of [Rubbra’s] imagination’ dwelt. In 1971 he listed Sibelius, Nielsen, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Scriabin, Messiaen, Vaughan Williams and Bartók as twentieth-century composers who had made a strong impact on him as a composer (handwritten responses to
1.3 Research approach

The aim of my project is twofold: to examine the various strands in Rubbra’s life that contribute to his spirituality, positioning them both biographically and within the context of English culture at the time; and to show, through detailed analysis, how these aspects might be reflected in his music. It is worth stating at the outset that I do not seek to challenge the essential premise of the received view of Rubbra’s music as spiritual (indeed, my thesis title tacitly assumes its validity). My original contributions to the topic lie in taking perhaps a broader and more nuanced view of spirituality, in extending and expanding on the scope and detail of the underlying biographical and contextual research, and in subjecting the music itself to a closer, more questioning analytical scrutiny than previous writers have done. Contextual understanding has been largely gleaned from secondary literature, and from contemporaneous newspapers and journals. The fairly meagre biographical information, supplied directly by Rubbra himself and contained in the opening chapters of Grover’s book, has been augmented by archival research, uncovering some lost or hitherto unknown primary sources. Letters to and from Rubbra, his friends and his professional contacts have been consulted, along with Rubbra’s spasmodically kept and rather self-conscious diaries, his scrapbooks of cuttings and programmes, and manuscripts of musical works, both published and unpublished. This process of following research leads, making new connections within the known facts of his life and work, or between the previously known and the newly uncovered, has enabled me to draw a more multi-faceted picture of Rubbra, the man and his music, than has been presented in previous studies.

My approach to the music is essentially interpretative: looking for, and through, what Lawrence Kramer describes as ‘hermeneutic windows’ in order to gain deeper insights into the music itself and its potential meaning (1990: 6, 9–10).

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10 Benedict Rubbra has in his private collection a journal that Rubbra kept patchily from 1949 until 1954. The Rubbra Archive at the Bodleian Library includes journal-type diaries 1975–79 (Boxes 32–33) and engagement diaries 1958–78 (Boxes 34–37) (temporary shelfmarks).
In music, such windows might be textual, paratextual, intertextual or contextual. Some of Rubbra’s works are particularly rich in such openings. Fig. 1.1 shows some that I have identified in the Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85.

**Fig. 1.1: Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85, hermeneutic windows**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Movement titles:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Corymb</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>III. Danza alla rondo</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paratext</th>
<th>Inscription from Dante’s <em>The Divine Comedy</em> on instrumentation page of miniature score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dedication to the Hindustani musician Ali Akbar Khan</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intertext</th>
<th>Intertextual correspondences with Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 in G, Op. 58</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Aspects that troubled contemporary critics:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Form (of first movement in particular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationship between soloist and orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(by implication, these are also textual features)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Some of these windows allow multiple outlooks. For example, the title of the first movement, ‘Corymbus’, refers to both a botanical term and a poem by Francis Thompson, ‘A Corymbus for Autumn’. The Piano Concerto will be discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, where I shall demonstrate how these hermeneutic windows inform my spiritual reading of the work.

Any interpretation must be supported by rigorous analysis. David Clarke (2011) has argued persuasively for the need to maintain a balance between the two components, seeing the tension between them as potentially most productive. Throughout my study I choose analytical methodologies appropriate to each particular work. In the case of the first movement of the Piano Concerto in G, for instance, I respond to the notion of the increasing stalk lengths of a corymb by making a proportional analysis, modelling my work on Roy Howat’s (1983) analyses of Debussy’s music. Analysis and interpretation are, however, complementary. Thus, whereas I was led to carry out the proportional analysis by looking through the hermeneutic window of the ‘Corymbus’ movement title, I might equally, and
conversely, have discovered Golden Section proportions within the music first, and only later made the botanical connection with the movement title. Yet whichever way the link is forged, it is the two elements, musical and extramusical, understood together, that strengthen the interpretation of the music.

Fundamental to my analytical approach is the premise that music is able to allude to extra-musical objects or concepts. Such allusions appear within a work as signs: musical elements that represent or bring to mind something that is not itself intrinsically musical. Although I do not refer explicitly to the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce in the course of my thesis, I implicitly accept that certain features of the music function as icons, indices or symbols, and as qualisigns, sinsigns or legisigns. In recognition that some signs have been used so widely by composers as to have passed into the ‘cultural currency’ of music, an awareness of topic theory, especially as developed by writers such as Raymond Monelle (2006; 2000) and Robert Hatten (2004) also underpins my analytical and interpretative approach.

My study is structured thematically, each chapter dealing with a different strand of spirituality in Rubbra’s life and work. Chapters 2 and 3 look in detail at aspects of the first twenty years of his career. Chapter 2 explores his youthful involvement in Theosophy, and the influence that it, and other esoteric traditions, exerted on his beliefs and music throughout his life, in particular in laying the foundations for his lasting belief in the unity of all things. Much of Rubbra’s early commissioned work related to the theatre, and Chapter 3 investigates his collaborations with dancers during the late 1920s–30s. Dance was an emerging art form at the time, with increasing recognition, especially amongst Theosophists, of its potential to unite body, mind and spirit. Rubbra’s own account of his early life glosses over much of this material. Hence both chapters expand considerably on the previously published biographical information about Rubbra. The music that he produced for dancers was, apart from his ballet Prism, assumed lost, but I have uncovered manuscripts in archival collections that are discussed in Chapter 3.

Rubbra’s enthusiasm for Theosophy resolved itself into a lifelong interest in Eastern religion, philosophy and music, which is the subject of Chapter 4. From his early work with dancers through to some of his most mature works from the 1950s–

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60s, his response to Eastern music was sensitive, shunning exoticism, and seeking to absorb the essence of Eastern musical techniques and thought into his own music. Closely related to Rubbra’s Eastern-influenced view of divine immanence was his love of the natural world. As a child, he had his own Wordsworthian mystical experience of nature, the memory of which remained fresh for the rest of his life. In 1934, he made a clear lifestyle choice by moving out of London into the heart of the Chiltern countryside, where he lived for over twenty years. Many of Rubbra’s works demonstrate his spiritual affinity with nature, a selection of which form the basis of Chapter 5.

Having been brought up in the low Protestant ethos of the Congregational Church, Rubbra’s churchmanship moved to the opposite extreme when he became a Roman Catholic in 1947. The final two chapters of my study examine topics that are more closely related to his Christian faith. Chapter 6 deals with Rubbra’s response to the writings of the Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), whilst Chapter 7 considers the figure of Christ as represented in Rubbra’s music throughout his creative life. In these chapters, too, Rubbra’s unifying tendencies are evident. Teilhard’s evolutionary theory itself seeks to reconcile the apparently opposing scientific and Catholic views of creation, and has distinct similarities with theosophical beliefs about the evolution of consciousness with which Rubbra was familiar as a young man; whilst Rubbra’s representation of Christ, specifically in his large-scale Sinfonia Sacra, shows a decidedly Eastern influence.

One spiritual theme does not receive a chapter of its own, but weaves its way through the entire study: Rubbra’s preoccupation with the feminine. In his life, this fascination is manifest in his various relationships with women. He always acknowledged his debt to his mother, a fine amateur singer whose self-sacrifice and encouragement set him on the way to a career in music. Accompanying her on the piano as a child and teenager, he encountered at first hand works as spiritually diverse as Handel’s Messiah, Stainer’s Crucifixion, and Amy Woodforde-Finden’s popular, erotically sensuous Indian Love Lyrics. As an adult, his deep need for female love and companionship is evident in the complexities of his three marriages and numerous extra-marital relationships, and his unfulfilled longing for a daughter. His attraction to the feminine is seen also in his literary tastes. He greatly admired Dorothy Richardson’s ground-breaking series of novels Pilgrimage, which are narrated entirely through the eyes of the central female protagonist, Miriam
Henderson. At the time of his death, Rubbra’s personal library included many novels written by women, often presenting a feminine perspective of a woman’s life.

In Rubbra’s music, the feminine is strongly present in his early songs, and his theatrical and dance work. It can be seen as part of the yin and yang energies of Eastern thought, and is clearly depicted in his song cycle The Jade Mountain. It emerges again in Rubbra’s Edenic view of nature and his portrayal of rural domesticity in the Sixth Symphony. Finally, a sensuous, erotic response to the feminine pervades the relationship with Christ expressed in his mystical Catholic choral works and songs, whilst women are at the heart of the resurrection narrative told in the Sinfonia Sacra.

Since the turn of the century there has been increasing academic engagement with British music of the early to middle part of the twentieth century. Rubbra’s music has never had a wide popular appeal, though it has been – and still is – widely respected amongst musicians. His reputation was at its height in the 1950s, but although much of his music has now been recorded, it is rarely heard on the radio and even less frequently in live performance. In academic circles he has likewise received less attention than ‘bigger’ names such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Britten. My thesis therefore makes a timely contribution towards a scholarly re-evaluation of Rubbra’s place within twentieth-century British music. It also adds to a burgeoning body of writing on music and spirituality, fuelled by the popularity of later twentieth-century and contemporary composers such as John Tavener, Arvo Pärt and James MacMillan, who make overt spiritual references in their music.

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12 The original series of twelve novels was first published as a complete edition in Britain in 1938 (the thirteenth novel, March Moonlight, was not included until 1967). Rubbra read the 1938 complete edition shortly after publication, and wrote to Gerald Finzi on 19 February 1939 expressing his admiration for the work (FA, Box 8, temporary shelfmark).
2. ‘Point of departure’: the enduring influence of
Theosophy on Rubbra’s work

In his teens, Rubbra was intrigued by an ‘extraordinary book’ that he stumbled across in the Northampton Public Library (Grover, 1993: 6). The book’s title was *Isis Unveiled*, and its author, Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), was a prolific and eclectic writer who drew together numerous strands of the Western and Eastern esoteric traditions. In *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and her other major work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), as well as many shorter writings, she presented ideas from Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Medieval and Renaissance mystical and cosmological writings such as those by Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme, and philosophical writings by Paracelsus and Friedrich Schelling, alongside those from esoteric traditions of Eastern religions, Kabbalism and Sufism. In 1875, she and Henry Olcott (1832–1907) founded the Theosophical Society (TS). The society’s name linked it to the broad Western esoteric traditions that were originally its main focus, but from the early 1880s, the emphasis shifted towards Eastern philosophies, with the TS setting up its headquarters in Adyar, near Madras, India. Blavatsky spent the last four years of her life in London, where a branch of the TS was established in 1888. The TS played an important role in popularising esoteric thought and the basics of Eastern religious belief in the West in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Under Annie Besant’s leadership, from 1907, its worldwide membership peaked at over 40,000 in 1929, with England alone having over 5,000 members in 1928 (Dixon, 2001: 228).

Members of the TS were not (and still are not) required to adhere to any set doctrines or beliefs, but they had to accept the three objects of the society:

- To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour
- To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science
- To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity

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1 Information about Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society in the following two paragraphs is drawn from Algeo, 2005: 9142–44 and Tingay, 2004: 320–22, unless otherwise stated.
In addition, a syncretic body of teachings arose that attempted to encapsulate the various aspects of esoteric thought represented in Blavatsky’s writings and which most members would embrace to at least some extent. Fundamental is a monistic belief in a single ultimate reality, of which all things are expressions. Everything in the universe possesses consciousness of some sort (mineral, vegetable, animal or human), and physical evolution is underpinned by a spiritual scheme of the evolution of consciousness that will eventually transcend the human, leading back to its source in the ultimate reality.

The teachings of the TS thus claimed to unite the material and the spiritual, science and religion, by presenting them as parts of an all-embracing whole. Historian Alex Owen has summed up the attractions of such a view for its early adherents:

It provided a rationalizing account of the universe, and of the place of humankind within it, that spoke to both moral order and spiritual progress while appealing to an essential unity of ‘true’ science and religion. Theosophical ideas about the universe and evolution sounded a sympathetic note in a post-Darwinian age, when creationist ideas of God’s universal ‘design’ had been largely abandoned, and accorded with Victorian notions of the progress of the human race. Theosophy offered an alternative spiritual path that did not require belief in an anthropomorphized God but still sent the comforting message that there is life beyond death. And in its reworking of the idea of the material world that did not seem so far removed from new discoveries in physics and electromagnetism in the latter part of the century, Theosophy insisted that it was itself scientific (Owen, 2004: 34–35).

The TS encouraged its members to adopt a disciplined lifestyle including meditation, vegetarianism and abstention from drugs and alcohol. At the time when Rubbra was becoming interested, it also supported, and encouraged its members to become active in, social concerns such as women’s suffrage, animal rights, alternative medicine, progressive education and the Garden City movement. Besant, along with many members of the society, also supported the cause for Indian independence.
Consequently, the TS and its ideas attracted much interest from the artistic and intellectual community for a few decades around the turn of the twentieth century, fostering an interest in Eastern, esoteric and even occult thought that went beyond its own tenets. As well as the socially and ethically aware lifestyle that many adopted, whether or not they became fully ‘paid-up’ members of the society, many creative artists incorporated into their work some of the rich symbolism of the esoteric traditions espoused by the TS, and from other occult traditions. Such imagery may relate, for example, to numerology, the so-called ‘sacred geometry’, astrology, alchemy, Rosicrucianism or tarot. The influence of these ideas on the music of composers such as Debussy, Scriabin, and Schoenberg, along with the Americans Dane Rudhyar and Ruth Crawford Seeger, has been well documented (see, for example, Ertan, 2009; Howat, 1983: 163–181; Leikin, 2002; Mirka, 1996; Tick, 1991;). In relation to English music, recent studies have explored the influence of Theosophy and related ideas on the work of Holst (Scheer, 2014 and 2010; Head, 1999 and 1993), and John Foulds and his wife, Maude MacCarthy (Mansell, 2009a and b; van der Linden, 2008). Although Rubbra was quite open about his own early interest in Theosophy, his recollections, written some fifty years after the event, are sketchy, often lacking dates or a clear sense of chronology (Grover, 1993: 1–27; Dawney, 1971: 7-10). This chapter therefore provides the first coherent, and more comprehensive, account of his involvement with Theosophy and its influence on his music during the 1920s and beyond.

2.1 Rubbra’s involvement with Theosophy

Both of Rubbra’s principal composition teachers – Cyril Scott (1879–1970), with whom he studied privately in 1919–20, and Holst, with whom he studied first at Reading University, 1920–21 and then at the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London, 1921–24 – together with his counterpoint teacher, R.O. Morris (1886–1948), encouraged his theosophical interests alongside his development as a composer. Morris, for example, lent him a copy of a book by which he was ‘very much fascinated’ at the time, Ouspensky’s Tertium Organum (Grover, 1993: 13). The picture that emerges from the 1920s shows Rubbra adopting the kind of progressive lifestyle typical of many involved in Theosophy. He became vegetarian
and dressed in an increasingly bohemian fashion, to the amusement of his friends, who quipped about his having ‘abandoned stockings or socks, so it is sandals and five toes …’, and were amused by his theatrical cloak (Ferguson and Hurd, 2001: 42, 75). For a few years he lodged in Wildwood Road, on the edge of Hampstead Garden Suburb, an area of north London recently built on Ebenezer Howard’s utopian Garden City principles (Grover, 1993: 12). When he married his landlady, Lilian Duncan (1881–1962), a woman twenty years his senior, on 18 July 1925, he simultaneously adopted her surname alongside his own in a gesture of sexual equality unusual for the time (The Times, 22 July 1925; London Gazette, 28 July 1925).

In 1924, Rubbra was approached by the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre, who needed a pianist to accompany them on tour. Founded in 1919, with socialist ideals ‘to bring the Arts into Everyday Life’, the ALS Travelling Theatre was just one part of a scheme that aimed to bring new and modern art to communities all over Britain (Elder, 1939: 7). The group had strong theosophical connections. The actress and producer Eleanor Elder, one of the founding members of the group and the main force behind the travelling players, was a stepdaughter of Major Graham Pole, a close friend of Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society. The list of sponsors and original committee members for the ALS included many active members of the Theosophical Society (Elder, 1939: 6). Harold Baillie-Weaver, Muriel Countess De La Warr and Lady Emily Lutyens, to name just three, were all amongst the circle of people involved with the English education and upbringing of the young Indian theosophical protégé Jiddu Krishnamurti (Lutyens, 1975). Rubbra’s short tour with the ALS Travelling Theatre led to several years of involvement with the company as composer, including writing incidental music for productions of Ezra Pound’s translation of a Japanese Noh play Hagaromo for the 1929–30 season and Thomas Hardy’s The Dynasts in 1933–34 (Elder, 1939: 257, 261). Rubbra was thus closely involved with theosophical ideals and enterprises during his early working life as a musician.

Rubbra met others who were deeply engaged with Theosophy and related ideas. Cyril Scott introduced him to G.R.S. Mead (Grover, 1993: 15). Mead had been a close confidant of Blavatsky, but subsequently left the TS, and founded his own Quest Society in 1909. Rubbra also had an encounter with Marie Russak, whom he described as ‘that enlightened seeress who brought back to me information
on my past Egyptian lives’ (Grover, 1993: 14). In January 1926, Rubbra and his wife joined the Theosophical Society (Membership Register January 1924–March 1933, TSH). For a couple of years, at least, Rubbra appears to have been quite active within the society, for example in providing musical entertainment after the annual conventions in London in 1926 and 1927 (General Report of the TS in England, 1926: 44; Besterman, 1927: 347). He also joined the Order of the Star in the East, an offshoot of the TS set up by Annie Besant to anticipate the coming of the World Teacher, with Krishnamurti as appointed leader. From 1924, the Order held annual camps at Ommen in the Netherlands at which the main speaker was Krishnamurti. Rubbra attended at least one of these camps (Grover, 1993: 15). Krishnamurti exhorted his followers to aspire to a higher reality, the ‘Kingdom of Happiness’, attainable only by pursuing the Truth and by obeying one’s inner voice. Awareness of the unity of all things was central to his message: ‘You are the Absolute, you are the Path, you are in every tree … in every plant, in every creature’ (Krishnamurti, 1969 [1926]: 5).

2.2 Musical influence

Of the first thirty of Rubbra’s works to carry opus numbers (in Grover’s catalogue, 1993: 595–602), composed during the decade 1921–31, twenty are songs or choral settings. There are also a number of unpublished and incomplete songs still available in manuscript (see Appendix A). Throughout his life, Rubbra’s choice of texts for vocal settings was varied, but always with a penchant for religious or philosophical themes. About half of the texts that he chose during this early period are overtly religious, but not conventionally Christian. His unpublished Op. 1 is a setting for choir and orchestra of ‘The Secret Hymnody’, a translation by G.R.S. Mead from the Gnostic Corpus Hermeticum. Rubbra also set two poems by Walt Whitman: ‘The Mystic Trumpeter’ and ‘The Imprisoned Soul’. Both texts speak of the possibility of transcendence from the physical world into a higher reality, an aspect of Whitman’s writing that particularly appealed to English composers at the time (Adams, 2000: 29–30). In choosing these texts, Rubbra was undoubtedly influenced by Holst’s settings of a Gnostic text in the Hymn of Jesus (1917) and of Whitman in The Mystic Trumpeter (1904) and Ode to Death (1919). In other,
seemingly more Christian texts, common themes emerge that show the young Rubbra, brought up in the Protestant low-church ethos of Congregationalism, responding to the draw of the more sensual ‘Other’. Several of the poems contain images of flowers, especially roses, used either as an aid to worship or as a metaphor for Christ. Others dwell on more feminine aspects of Christian experience, being lullabies, often medieval poems, in which the Christ child is either rocked to sleep by the Virgin Mary or cradled within the believer’s heart in mystical union. The spirituality of motherhood and the feminine aspects of God form a recurring theme in theosophical writings of the time (Dixon, 2001: 206–25). Other poems deal with the transience of the material world, or the mysteries of twilight, night and sleep: times when Theosophists believe that human consciousness enters, or is more receptive to, a higher spiritual plane.

A striking feature of many of these early songs, especially those from the early 1920s, coinciding with his student days at the RCM, is their unusual instrumentation. Songs from these few years tend to eschew piano accompaniment in favour of the harp, or a small chamber ensemble of strings, flute or harp. Later in the decade, Rubbra made a number of settings for voice and small orchestra. Although Stephen Banfield has noted a trend around the 1920s for English composers to move away from the traditional combination of voice and piano in their song settings, he also observes that two composers, Vaughan Williams and Rubbra, did so most consistently (1985: 327–28). Rubbra’s most immediate models for his experiments with accompanimental instruments during his student years, as with his choice of texts, were Vaughan Williams and Holst, but his continuing preference for string or harp song accompaniments throughout his life indicates that this was more than just a passing phase. One of the most intriguing instruments from this period is the kithara, the ancient Greek lyre, used to accompany the unpublished song ‘Spiritual Lullaby’ (1923). The song’s dedicatee provides a clue to the choice of instrument: Annea Spong was a pioneer teacher of ‘natural movement’ dance in London. Following the example of Isadora Duncan (with

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2 Vaughan Williams’ Four Hymns for tenor, viola and strings was published in 1920, and his settings of poems by Chaucer, Merciless Beauty, described as ‘Three Rondels for high voice with accompaniment of string trio’ (two violins and cello) followed in 1922. Rubbra also set one of these Chaucer texts in 1923, under the title ‘Rejection’. Holst’s Four Songs for voice and violin, Op. 35, appeared in 1920.
whose brother, Raymond, Spong studied), such dance was inspired by ancient Greek movement and attitudes as depicted in visual images on vases and other artefacts. Rubbra’s choice of the kithara is thus a tribute to Spong and her work, and suggests that the song might even have been intended as accompaniment to a dance. It also reflects the antiquity and spiritual content of the medieval text, which is a lullaby in which the Virgin Mary asks how she might serve her son, vowing that:

All thy will
I wold fulfill,
Thou knowest it well in ffay!
Both rokke ye still
& daunce the yer till!
& singe ‘by by lully lulley.’

Again, Banfield has recognised the spiritual connotations of Rubbra’s use of unusual timbres, observing that ‘the gentler tone and attack of the harp to the piano and … the sustaining properties of stringed instruments’ help to evoke ‘a state or a time of quiescence’ (1985: 331).

I shall discuss the music of three specific works by Rubbra from this period in more detail: his song ‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2, The Secret Hymnody, Op. 1, for chorus and orchestra, and his incidental music to The Searcher, Op. 27.

‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2

Composed during his first year at the RCM, and first performed in Northampton in April 1922, ‘Rosa Mundi’ is Rubbra’s earliest published song (concert programme, RA, Box 1, temporary shelfmark). The text is by Rachel Annand Taylor (1876–1960), a Scottish writer involved with both the Celtic revival in Scotland and Theosophy:

The Rose of the World hangs high on a thorny Tree.
Whoso would gather must harrow his hands and feet.
But oh! it is sweet.
The leaves that drop like blood from the thorny Tree
Redden the roads of the earth from East to West.
They lie on my breast.

O Rose, O Rose of the World, bow down to me,
Who can cleave no more, so pierced are my hands and feet.
For oh! Thou art sweet.

The image of the rose, signifying Christ on the cross, uniting East and West and approached only through intense suffering, is Rosicrucian. The rose is also a symbol of the feminine. Helena Blavatsky (n.d. [1985?]: 292) referred to it as ‘the symbol of Nature, of the ever prolific and virgin Earth, or Isis, the mother and nourisher of man’. The spiritual experience evoked in the poem is intense, ecstatic and sensual. Rubbra’s music captures this atmosphere.

**Ex. 2.1: ‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2, verse 1**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Several aspects of the music stand out for the listener. Most immediate is the ethereal quality created by the accompaniment of two muted violins. The two instrumental parts spin out an unbroken, gently rocking accompaniment based entirely on the opening motif (boxed in Ex. 2.1). The repetitive circling round the
note A in a quasi-ostinato, together with the avoidance of strong downbeats in the accompaniment, creates an almost hypnotic feeling that the music is suspended in time and space. The indeterminate harmony of the opening bars adds to this sense. Written in the Phrygian mode on D, the tonic is not sounded until the voice rises to D in bars 5–6, and the tritone E flat to A in the lower violin line discourages the listener from hearing the A as a dominant, so that the opening is tonally ambiguous. The one note that is foreign to the mode, A flat in the second violin part in bar 9, is emphasised by the contrary motion between the voice and accompaniment. In verse 2, this note sets the word ‘East’, adding a touch of exotic harmonic colouring. The accompaniment rarely sounds the tonic, and then only as a passing note, never settling on it. The voice floats on this continuous, ungrounded violin sound. The melodic line describes the shape of the cross (Fig. 2.1):

Fig. 2.1: Melodic contour of 'Rosa Mundi' as a cross

The melody of the first two lines of the verse, focusing on the rose, moves conjunctly from A up to D and back to A, as if the believer’s gaze traverses the cross piece and top part of the upright of the cross. For the last line of the verse, an introspective statement of the believer’s rapture, the melody plunges downwards to lower D, marking out the supplicant’s position at the foot of the cross. It is feasible that Rubbra chose these pitch-classes deliberately for their symbolic meanings. He
is likely to have been familiar with Cyril Scott’s matching of musical notes with both a colour and a character, claiming to follow theosophical principles (Fig. 2.2).

Fig. 2.2: Table showing pitch, colour and character correspondences (Scott, n.d. [1917]: 115)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Intellect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Selfless Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Psychism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rubbra owned Scott’s book, *The Philosophy of Modernism*, from which the table is taken, and as late as 1979 considered it to be ‘still very readable’ (*Master and Pupil*, BBC Radio 3, 1979). In Scott’s plan, the note A, relating to the colour indigo, signifies selfless love, whilst the note D corresponds to orange and energy. Pursuing the analogy, there is certainly a close correlation between the spread arms of the cross, represented by the persistent returns to A of the horizontal lines of the melody and the accompaniment, and the ideal of selfless love; whilst the upright axis, spanned by two Ds, symbolises a powerful redemptive energy mediating between the physical and heavenly realms.

For the last verse (Ex. 2.2), the vocal line changes. The impassioned plea to the rose begins high and falls to g’ for the word ‘me’. This is the only time this pitch class is used within the vocal line, and marks out the earthbound body of the believer as different, set apart from the divine vision. Again, a link can be made with Scott’s table of pitch and character correspondences, G signifying devotion, which in this song can be taken to represent the worshipful attitude of the supplicant. At the very end of the song, the violins peter out and stop as the vision fades, and the believer is left with the rapt memory of sweetness. Tonal ambiguity remains until the end: the penultimate bar hovers inconclusively around a 6/4 minor triad from which D emerges as tonic only in the final bar. The song is simple, but exquisitely crafted. Even fifty years later Rubbra referred to it as ‘the point of departure for my future development’ (Rubbra, 1971a: 690).
The Secret Hymnody, Op. 1

Although designated as Op. 1, *The Secret Hymnody* was composed a few years after ‘Rosa Mundi’, the manuscript being dated 1924 (*RC*, Vol. LVII, Add MS 62643, ff. 1–16). The work was given a performance at Reading University on 28 January 1925, conducted by W. Probert-Jones, another student of Holst, but remains unpublished (concert programme, *URSC*, University Orchestra and Choral Society, uncatalogued). The text of the ‘Secret Hymnody’ forms part of the ‘Secret Sermon on the Mountain’, a dialogue between Hermes Trismegistus and a disciple, Tat, on the subject of Rebirth (Mead, 1906: 219–233). Hermes explains that Rebirth involves the driving out of twelve Tormentors within the self (Not-knowing, Grief, Intemperance, Concupiscence, Unrighteousness, Avarice, Error, Envy, Guile, Anger, Rashness, and Malice) by ten divine, purifying Powers (Gnosis of God, Joy, Self-control, Continence, Righteousness, Sharing-with-all, Truth, Good, Life and Light). In this way the disciple is led to knowledge of self and of God. The ‘Secret Hymnody’ section (230–231) is a litany for worship, to be performed twice daily, at
sunrise and sunset, in which nature is invited to join with the singer in praising the God of Creation. Mead’s translation uses antiquated and formal language, matching the elevated tone of the original Greek, and can sound awkward to modern ears. Rubbra selected lines from the longer hymn, choosing those that were both most apt for a musical setting, and likely to be most readily understood by an audience unversed in hermetic thought.

The work maps out a loose ternary form with coda (Fig. 2.3). The principal structural sections are defined by changes of tempo and musical material. The difference in tempo at the return of the opening orchestral material is disguised by a difference in time signature: 5/4 alternating with 4/4 at the start, and 5/2 alternating with 4/2 at the reprise. The two outer sections both begin pp and work up to a ff climax, at bar 21 (on the word ‘Word’ [logos]) and bar 85 (on the word ‘Powers’) respectively. The faster middle section tends to be at a higher dynamic level throughout, but there is a ff climax at bars 52–55, setting the words ‘Ye powers that are within me, hymn the One and All, Sing with my Will, Powers all that are within me’, and spanning the central point of the work (by bar number).

Fig. 2.3: Structure and text of The Secret Hymnody, Op. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–5†</td>
<td>A</td>
<td><em>Orchestral introduction</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5³–28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Let every Nature of the World receive the utterance of my hymn!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open, thou Earth! Let every bolt of the abyss be drawn for me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stir not, ye Trees!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ye Heavens open, and ye winds stay still,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>And let God’s Deathless Sphere receive my Word!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Stir not, ye Trees! Ye Heavens open, and ye Winds stay still.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29–62</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>For I will sing the praise of Him who founded all, who fixed the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>earth and hung up Heav’n who made the fire to shine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Let us together all give praise to Him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of every Nature Lord!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ye powers that are within me, hymn the One and All, Sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with my Will, Powers all that are within me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Ye powers that are within me, hymn the One and All.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sing with me praises, all ye Powers!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63–68</td>
<td>A’</td>
<td>Varied return of opening material in orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69–89</td>
<td>Lento</td>
<td>Sing Thou, O Good! the Good! O Life and Light, from us to you our praises flow!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father I give thee thanks, to Thee, Thou Energy of all my Powers; I give thee thanks O God, Thou Power of all my Energies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90–99</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>‘Tis from thy Æon I have found praisegiving,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and in Thy Will have I found Rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100–106</td>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestral postlude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rubbra captures in his music the solemnity and sense of awe in the opening text, the joyful worship of the central section, and the journey towards repose in the final section. The work opens with a quiet five-bar orchestral introduction (Ex. 2.3).
The timbre is pastoral, but distinctive, with a high, penetrating bassoon melody, reminiscent of plainsong, standing out against a *pizzicato* string accompaniment and strumming harp. The overall effect would be of a timeless serenity were it not for the repeated dissonant quaver F sharp in the viola, disturbing the E minor harmony, and the alternating 5/4 and 4/4 metre, both of which impart a restless sense of expectancy. The ostinato accompaniment continues against the choir entry at bar 5\(^5\), and the tenor trombone adds an aura of solemnity to the metrically free, chantlike choral melody (Ex. 2.4).
Throughout the opening section, the full choir is never used. Even at the climax, in bar 21, the second bass part is omitted. The chanting effect is maintained with unison entries, several of which are intoned on a monotone. Whilst enhancing the sense of sacred ritual inherent in the text, this also means that the music relies for variety and interest on the changing orchestral textures and colours. The first such
variation occurs exactly halfway through the introduction, at bar 15. The harmony shifts, and bowed strings introduce a new idea, doubled by clarinets, bassoons and horns (Ex. 2.5):

Ex. 2.5: The Secret Hymnody, bars 15–17

A striking passage occurs at the end of the section (Ex. 2.6). Here the underlying pastoral topic becomes explicit, with undulating woodwind solos set against a background of sustained string chords. The celesta plays its only five notes in the whole work, providing a silvery edge to the oboe entry, and the choir intones in rapt anticipation of the heavenly praise to follow. The sense of deep hush is emphasised by the descending harmonic movement, coming to rest on an E flat major chord, a semitone lower than the opening E minor harmony. Yet the sustained D in clarinet and bassoon still adds a dissonant edge.
The B-section is marked out, structurally, with a change of tempo, a shift of tonal centre, and new thematic and accompanimental material. The full choir is heard for the first time at the start of this praise-filled *Moderato* section (Ex. 2.7). There is still much unison writing for the choir, the ‘I’ of the text being portrayed as one member of a unified whole. Yet there is also more variety of choral texture within this section of the work, with unison writing often breaking into what is essentially a two-part texture (as in bars 33–35 of Ex. 2.7), frequently in contrary motion, and, later, some briefly imitative entries. The new, arching ‘praise’ motif (marked x in Ex. 2.7) remains important for the remainder of the work.
Ex. 2.7: The Secret Hymnody, bars 29–35

Moderato

For I will sing the praise of Him who founded all, who

fixed the earth and hung up Heav'n

fixed the earth and hung up Heav'n

fixed the earth and hung up Heav'n

fixed the earth and hung up Heav'n

w. wind (fva higher) w

w
The sustained dissonant D from bar 28 (Ex. 2.6) becomes part of a new ostinato pattern in bar 29, based on G. The undulating pizzicato bass line is both energetic, with its initial rising motion, and restless, as its regular groupings of four crotchets (bracketed in Ex. 2.7), punctuated by arpeggiated harp chords, cut across the irregular notated time signatures and more freely metrical choral lines. New timbres are introduced, with brass and woodwind, now including bright trumpets, shadowing the choral parts.

The climax of this section relies on breadth for its effect. The bass ostinato ceases for a few bars, and the 4/2 and 6/2 time signatures and slow harmonic rhythm results in many breves and semibreves in the brass and bass lines, giving the score an antiquated look that is reinforced by the plainsong-like choral melodies with their reliance on motif x (Ex. 2.8).

Ex. 2.8: *The Secret Hymnody*, bars 52–59
Will powers all that are within me

Yes, powers that are within me
Despite the *fortissimo* dynamic marking, the full performing forces are not used. Strings and brass (the bass line reinforced by a 16ft organ pedal stop) support unison men’s voices and answering imitative entries by altos, sopranos and tenors. When the bass ostinato returns in bars 57–58, it is initially metrically aligned with the other parts. The restless metrical dissonance does not re-appear until bar 59.

There is a clear return to the opening orchestral material at bar 63 (section A’), although it is varied to reinforce the sense of recapitulation and of approaching rest and resolution (Ex. 2.9). The tempo is still *Moderato*, but the 5/2 and 4/2 time signatures indicate a broadening effect. The scoring is new. The opening bassoon melody is now strengthened by clarinet, viola and harp, and is presented a fifth lower, beginning now on E, the tonic note. The pizzicato string accompaniment is also redistributed. The tone is darker, with no violins. The tonic is emphasised by a low, sustained bowed pedal note in the double bass. The accompanying chord contains no third, the resulting bare fifth adding to a sense of mystery. Most significantly, the dissonant F sharp, that was present in the chord at the opening of
the movement, is absent. Tonal resolution is in sight, but not yet complete. Towards the end of this orchestral passage, the arching ‘praise’ motif begins quietly to emerge.

**Ex. 2.9: The Secret Hymnody, bars 63–72**
The tempo changes to *Lento* with the re-entry of the choir at bar 69. Both choral and orchestral music at this point have a varied correspondence with the passage beginning at bar 15 of section A (compare Ex. 2.9, bars 69–72\(^1\) with Ex. 2.5). The harmony of these bars is unusual, with a reposeful enharmonic E minor chord setting the words ‘Good’ and ‘Light’ between more dissonant chords. Thereafter, the music builds from the quiet beginning of this section to a fortissimo climax at bars 85–89, with the arching ‘praise’ motif taking on increasing importance.

In the coda (bars 90–106), both words and music attain resolution (Ex. 2.10). The unison choral chant derives from the opening bassoon melody. The gradually lengthening rhythmic values create a musical sense of the coming to rest described in the text, whilst the ‘praisegiving’ mentioned in the text is underscored by a recollection of the bass ostinato from the work’s central B-section. The regular 4/4 metre means that the ostinato is now fully aligned with the other parts, the single bar
of 6/4 serving only to invert the pattern, so that each subsequent bar starts with a more relaxed falling motion. Harmonically, the coda now rests for long stretches on E, eventually resolving onto a tierce de Picardie E major chord that both finds rest and looks forward to the divine Light and Life that will mark the disciple’s full Gnostic Rebirth. As with the pitch correspondences in ‘Rosa Mundi’, it is interesting to speculate whether Rubbra deliberately chose this tonal centre, E characterising ‘intellect’ in Scott’s colour table (Fig. 2.2). Perhaps he viewed it as most appropriate for a setting of a Gnostic text in which hidden knowledge provides the key to redemption: a text that, moreover, had been translated by G.R.S. Mead, the man whom Rubbra later described as the ‘intellectual of the Theosophical movement’ (Grover, 1993: 15).

Ex. 2.10: The Secret Hymnody, bars 90–106
Given the teacher-student relationship between the two composers, and the fact that both works are based on Gnostic texts, it is interesting to compare *The Secret Hymnody* with Holst’s *The Hymn of Jesus* (1917, first performed 1920). Rubbra retained a deep respect for the *Hymn of Jesus* throughout his life, referring to it in 1934 as ‘perhaps the highest level of Holst’s achievement’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 21), in 1947 as ‘a work in which ‘Holst’s genius flowers into another masterpiece’ (Rubbra, 1947a: 23) and in 1974 as ‘unquestionably Holst’s masterpiece’ (Rubbra, 1974b: 313). In his 1934 obituary to Holst, Rubbra described the text as being opposed to ‘contemporary materialism’, as ‘the earth becomes merely the lowest and grossest portion of that amazing Gnostic conception of a Hierarchy of worlds of decreasing density’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 21), and, in a later review, commented on its ‘even pantheistic overtones’ that link it also with the
Eastern thought of Holst’s *Hymns from the Rig Veda* (Rubbra, 1974b: 313). He considered *The Hymn of Jesus* to have a ‘visionary’ quality, with a ‘fascinating blend of earthly activity and heavenly serenity’ (Rubbra, 1947a: 23). Similar considerations might have influenced his own choice of text for *The Secret Hymnody*. Certainly it has similar pantheistic elements, with its exhortations to nature to join in the hymn of praise and its sense of the unity of all creation, and a similar Gnostic call to higher realms of knowledge.

Rubbra admired many aspects of Holst’s mature musical style, which he took to begin with the *Rig Veda Hymns* of 1908–10. He noted that, following completion of *The Planets* in 1916, Holst reverted to ‘the starkly concentrated statements and technical idioms of the *Rig Veda Hymns*’ in *The Hymn of Jesus* (Rubbra, 1974b: 313). He listed some of the technical devices from the *Rig Veda Hymns* that re-appear in *The Hymn of Jesus*: ‘pounding bass lines on unusual scales, uneven bar lengths’ (1974b: 313), and, more generically, mentioned ‘translucent non-chromatic lines, rhythms that push aside regularity of pulse, triadic harmonies freed in their movement from normal classical restraints’ as ‘the veritable starting-point of all Holst’s work’ (1974g: 376). He described Holst’s use of ostinati as ‘a binding force’, which, along with pedal notes ‘act as cohesive elements’ (1974g: 377). More specifically, Rubbra picked out aspects of the timbre and harmony of *The Hymn of Jesus* for special mention. He commented on the originality of Holst’s choice of trombones to play the opening plainsong melody (1947a: 23–24). He referred to the ‘semi-chorus “amens”’ and the ‘mysteriously clashing discords’ as ‘the real Holst’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974 [1951]: 53). Elsewhere, Rubbra elaborated on the latter observation by citing the choral passage shown in Ex. 2.11 (1947a: 25), or by describing the ‘unique but always strikingly fresh choral dissonances, caused by one choir shifting its triads by semitonal slips away from the other’ (1974b: 313).
As the preceding description of *The Secret Hymnody* demonstrates, Rubbra paid homage to Holst by using a number of these technical devices in his own Gnostic setting: uneven bar lengths are a feature of the work right up to the coda,
whilst ostinati provide both unity within each section of the work, and structural markers as they change. Rubbra’s scoring is also original. Like Holst, he uses the orchestral forces sparingly and colourfully. The opening few bars, cited in Ex. 2.3, and already discussed, illustrates this aptly, as does the carefully-added touch of celesta timbre in Ex. 2.6. Harmonically, Rubbra too uses triads in unconventional progressions, whilst the horn and lower string chords from the coda of *The Secret Hymnody* (see Ex. 2.10, bars 100–06) demonstrate a similar kind of semitonal sliding, this time against a sustained single pitch, to the progression in Ex. 2.11.

Rubbra wrote about Holst’s ‘inspired use’ of the plainsongs *Pange lingua* and *Vexilla Regis* at the start of *The Hymn of Jesus*, creating ‘an atmosphere charged with religious awe’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974[1934]: 21). Yet he also pointed out that this new departure in Holst’s writing made ‘unification of style even more difficult’ in this work. Moreover, despite his affirmation that unity was achieved in *The Hymn of Jesus* because ‘the essential nature of the Prelude is retained even where the music moves into remote harmonic fields’ (1974b: 313), he had earlier expressed reservations that the music ‘move[d] on diverse levels, to the ultimate detriment of the over-all form of the work’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974[1951]: 52).

Rubbra opens *The Secret Hymnody* with a solo bassoon melody that has striking resemblances to the *Pange lingua* plainsong, with its repeated pitches and leap of a perfect fourth (Ex. 2.12).

**Ex. 2.12: Bassoon melody and ‘Pange lingua’ compared**

a) *Secret Hymnody*, opening bassoon melody

![Bassoon melody](attachment:image.png)

b) ‘*Pange lingua*’ as played by trombones at the start of *The Hymn of Jesus*

![Trombones](attachment:image.png)

He avoids any sense of disunity of the melody with the rest of the material by integrating it fully into the formal structure of the work. The recapitulatory A'
section begins with the same melodic material, and other thematic material throughout the piece has plainsong-like melodic contours. Rubbra also avoids Holst’s use of ‘controversial spoken chorus’ (Rubbra, 1974b: 313), instead requiring the choir to intone on a single pitch, in a more ritualistic manner, in *The Secret Hymnody* (see Ex. 2.6).

**The Searcher, Op. 27**

Rubbra’s early period of theatrical work culminated in his collaboration with the Anglo-American playwright Velona Pilcher (1894–1952), a disciple of the mystic and spiritual teacher Georgei Gurdjieff, whose followers were often drawn from the ranks of the TS, in an extraordinary, experimental anti-war play *The Searcher*, produced at the Grafton Theatre in 1930. Velona Pilcher wrote her play *The Searcher* in 1928, and it was published in a reading version, illustrated with woodcuts by her friend Blair Hughes-Stanton (1902–81), early in 1929. A performance was mounted by students at Yale School of Drama in March, 1930, with set designs by Donald Oenslager. The first English production followed in May 1930, when Judith Wogan presented the play as part of the opening programme for her new London theatre, the Grafton. Wogan had been extensively involved with the ALS Travelling Players, along with Eleanor Elder, who both directed the play and took the leading role of the Searcher, so it is likely that they commissioned Rubbra to provide the music. Elder had great respect for Rubbra’s abilities as a theatrical composer, describing him as having ‘infinite patience’ and being ‘quick to grasp what effects were required’:

> The more difficult the problem the more Edmund seemed to enjoy it: I would go through the play with him marking where I wanted the music and vaguely indicating the crescendos and culminating points. He was always ready to adapt or alter his score when necessary or, if he thought that alteration would spoil it, suggest an alternative (Elder, 1939: 163)

His music for *The Searcher* remains in manuscript, as both full pencil score and performing parts, the many erasures, crossings out and alterations indicating how flexibly and closely he was involved with the production.
As a young woman of twenty-four, Pilcher had served with the American Red Cross during World War I, at the American base hospital in Bazeilles-sure-Meuse, and her play draws directly on her experiences. *The Searcher* is set in an evacuation hospital near the Front, but on which side of the conflict is not specified. The Searcher herself is a Red Cross worker charged with the task of finding information about dead and missing men from injured comrades brought into the hospital. As the play develops, she is seen to be ‘a spiritual searcher for the meaning of this war, and any war’ (Kosok, 2007: 97). She is also portrayed as a victim of the war. At the outset of the play she challenges the inhumane rule that the Red Cross worker should ‘on no account … in any way give aid or comfort to enemy wounded, sick, or otherwise incapacitated’, causing the Commanding Officer’s violent outburst, ‘Silence, Searcher! In War we do not reason. All orders, all shall be obeyed’ (Scene I: 8–9). But in scene VII, her high resolve fails in the face of the combined disapproval of the wounded men and the authority of the C.O., and she withdraws the drink that she has offered to a wounded enemy man, causing her shame from which she cannot recover. This is the Searcher’s tragedy, and it, too, was Pilcher’s own experience.

The play makes a strongly anti-war statement, which was not unusual at the time of writing, ten years after the armistice (Purkis, 2016: 1–2). The overt nature of the protest and the dramatic style were, however, strikingly *avant-garde*. Speaking ahead of the first performance, Judith Wogan stated that: ‘*The Searcher*, in which the war is seen through the eyes of a woman, cannot be compared with anything else on the stage … The technique is startling’ (*Observer*, 18 May 1930). Heinz Kosok describes it as ‘almost a model of an expressionist play, amalgamating as it does all the major characteristics to an extent to be found in few of its German predecessors’ (2007: 131). The unrealistic action, unnatural speech patterns, stylised and symbolic scenery, use of novel visual and aural effects and outspoken stance against societal norms are all typical of expressionist drama.

Alongside its pacifism, two strands of imagery particularly stand out in the play, both of which would have had a strong appeal to Rubbra: the religious and the feminine. Pilcher had a spiritual attitude towards the arts, considering that true artists have a ‘priestly, profoundly serious attitude’ towards their own work, disciplining their ‘inherited sensibility’ by ‘study and meditation’ (Bard, 1931: 2).
Considering her own chosen means of artistic expression, shortly after completing *The Searcher*, Pilcher described ‘the religious significance of metaphor’:

Its use is simply to express a religious sense of the unity of life. “Poetic license” shown to be the deepest sort of law, and a law so fundamental in all art that, by repeating the same movement and design in all emotions, it applies to vision, sound and movement – and these things are drawn into one mighty and magnificent and mystical metaphor in theatre art’ (cited in Sprigge, n.d.: 79).

This approach to art is evident in *The Searcher*. The language of the play is ‘hymnic’ (Kosok, 2007: 131) and sibylline. The religious symbolism in the play is unconventional, pantheistic, and often ‘invert[s] orthodox Christian views’ (98). In an early scene, the Searcher, despite the grief of her bereavement and the suffering surrounding her, affirms her love of earthly life in a confession to ‘Father Fire’: ‘I do desire to live! … I proclaim that there is an ardour even in agony, there is a kind of ecstasy in all experience. My desire still is toward the sun, and I do desire to live’ (Scene II, p. 17). By the end of the play, lying prostrate in the graveyard on Honeymoon Hill, overcome by the horror of the war and her own complicity, she seeks to enter right into the earth, acting out her own burial:

Glorious are thy gates, O Mother Earth, Mother of Man! Hear then my prayer; receive me and release me … Dear Death, I do adore thee, and desire thee, and am a beggar for thy beloved sleep; suffer me to slumber in thy bosom, and thy will be done in earth (Scene VIII: 83).

The action is seen entirely through the eyes of the female Searcher, yet conventional feminine views are also inverted. Grieving the loss of her husband and sons, and all the war-dead, she is ambivalent about motherhood: ‘Shall our limbs swing wide from the womb that death may be born, shall our flanks be but the gates of the grave?’ (Scene V: 54). Instead, she celebrates ‘that law of the Lord which permits the way of women to pass from us … closing our bodies forever from the sin of giving birth to more of man’s kind’ (Scene V: 55–56).
Religious and feminine imagery are reflected also in Hughes-Stanton’s woodcuts that illustrate the reading version of the play, and on which the stage designs for the London production are likely to have been based (Fig. 2.4).

**Fig. 2.4:** Wood engravings by Blair Hughes-Stanton illustrating *The Searcher* (Pilcher, 1929: 1, 77, 84)

2.4a: Scene I, a military hospital ward

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

2.4b: Scene VIII, the graveyard on Honeymoon Hill

Image removed due to copyright restrictions
In the ‘Foreword’ to the play, Pilcher described the stage as ‘a long lean sharply sloping aisle that widens towards us, like the flare of a funnel; then aprons slightly’. This ‘tunnel perspective’, which Pilcher likened to a gunbarrel, ensures that each scene gives ‘the impression of an endless series of nameless victims’ (Kosok, 2007: 131, and see Fig 2.4a) and also resembles the female birth canal. This metaphorical linking of birth and death is particularly clear in Hughes-Stanton’s final illustration within the published text, representing an exploded, shattered shell that is also reminiscent of female genitalia (Fig. 2.4c).

Pilcher was also quite specific in the ‘Foreword’ about the role of music within the play. Music should bridge ‘the moments of darkness’ between scenes, ‘a theatrical kind of music – composed of the natural noises of war unnaturally echoed, accented and anticipated’. She calls for ‘a freakish orchestral arrangement … of all the natural noises that accompany the action of the play’. It is a cinematic approach to musical accompaniment, in which music may be both diegetic and non-diegetic, and marks out *The Searcher*, with Rubbra’s musical accompaniment, as an experimental piece of music-theatre. As Charlotte Purkis confirms, Rubbra’s music is ‘far more than merely incidental music … The dramatic and musical texts construct ways of confronting audiences with the experiences of World War I dynamically as an immediate presence that was unusual in its time. This is because they are rethinking the roles of words and of music/noise in articulating experience’ (2012). Rubbra’s music is often closely intertwined with the text. In Scene I, a section entitled by Rubbra ‘The Song of the Searcher’ sets the list of questions that
the Searcher must ask about each missing man, as instructed by the Commanding Officer. Rubbra indicates that the notes are ‘not to be sung but merely the approximate inflection of voice’, hence introducing a kind of *Sprechstimme* that was still novel in London in 1930, but which is entirely in keeping with the Expressionist aspects of the text (Ex. 2.13).

**Ex. 2.13: The Searcher, Scene I: ‘Song of the Searcher’**

The significance of the military side drum rhythm that accompanies the ‘Song of the Searcher’ becomes clear later in this scene, when it underscores the C.O.’s unyielding command ‘all orders, *all*, shall be obeyed’. Its percussive rhythm becomes a *Leitmotif* throughout the play, bringing the rule to mind even when not made textually explicit (Ex. 2.14, and see also Ex. 2.20). The dissonantly clanging piano chords are the more ominous for their *piano* dynamic.
Scene V, a dance celebrating a victory in battle, introduces ‘a new performer, a gramophone … scraping a sort of melody off a scratching record turning round and round and round’ (End of Scene IV: 45). It plays the tune of ‘O what a girl was Mary!’, a parody of a music-hall song. The text, though vulgarly secular, has religious resonances:

O what a girl was Mary!
O what a girl was she!
Her bibly was born
On Easter morn,
And she blimed it all on me!

Up to the Church went Mary
Up to the Church went she!
They asked her his nime
Wot caused her shime—
And she blimed it all on me!

(Scene V: 49, 50)

In an inversion of the Christian narrative of the Virgin birth, this Mary’s illegitimate baby is born at Easter rather than Christmas, and the sordid nature of the tale appears to be in opposition to the Christian message of resurrection hope. Rubbra’s music sets the song to a leering waltz tune, a musical symbol of social decadence, that can be repeated over and over, mimicking the incessant rotation of the record (Ex. 2.15).
Ex. 2.15: *The Searcher*, Scene V: ‘O what a girl was Mary!’
At the end of the scene, when the neglected gramophone runs down, ‘unwound, but faithful’, the musical effect that Rubbra achieves both diegetically reproduces the sound of the slowing machine, and metaphorically suggests the disintegration of social mores inherent in the play’s action (Ex. 2.16).

* Rubbra’s working score has a note in the margin here: ‘Something to suggest scratching of gramophone’.
Central to the aural experience, for both actors and audience, is the presence of the barrage, the constant noise of the machinery of war. It is a ‘drumming that bores deep into the drums of our ears’ (Scene III: 31). Pilcher portrays it as some huge living beast, the words at the end of Scene III being ‘swallowed down the throat of the increasingly vociferous barrage’ (Scene III: 31), but also notes that its sound within the play should ‘swell and shallow, quicken and lessen, not according to machinery’s movements, but recording the movement made by such machinery playing on a human heart’ (Foreword). Percussion instruments play a large part from the start of the play, but the barrage really begins in earnest during the interlude at the end of Scene II, preceded by the chilling stage direction, ‘the killing is on.’ Rubbra combines the rhythms associated with the two opposing characters within the play – the Searcher and the Commanding Officer – to represent the conflict on
different levels: the physical fighting between enemy armies, the emotional and intellectual tensions occurring immediately behind the front line between those who wield authority and those who must obey, and the confrontation between masculine and feminine perceptions of war (Ex. 2.17).

**Ex. 2.17: The Searcher, Scene II interlude, ‘The killing is on’ - the barrage**

Play four times, starting $p$ and working up to $ff$ (explosion), and then another four times back to $p$.

Timpani: roll for four times through, then to rhythm of ‘Song of the Searcher’.

Typically of an Expressionist drama, the characters in the play are nameless figures that function as representatives of larger groups or embody ideas. Some, such as the Commanding Officer, are puppet-like caricatures of people. The Corporal’s appearance on the ward with Red Cross gifts in Scene III is accompanied by a cheerfully comical theme that is worked into a grotesque fugue, underlining the dark humour as the men feverishly open their inconsequential and often inept presents (Ex. 2.18).

**Ex. 2.18: The Searcher, fugue subject for Scene III**

Quick

Typically of an Expressionist drama, the characters in the play are nameless figures that function as representatives of larger groups or embody ideas. Some, such as the Commanding Officer, are puppet-like caricatures of people. The Corporal’s appearance on the ward with Red Cross gifts in Scene III is accompanied by a cheerfully comical theme that is worked into a grotesque fugue, underlining the dark humour as the men feverishly open their inconsequential and often inept presents (Ex. 2.18).
The central character, the Searcher, also has her *Leitmotif*: a theme that is heard in different contexts as the play progresses, in the same way that the changing action is viewed through her eyes. Her sinuous melody, with its irregular metre (4/4 bars alternating with 5/4 bars, but in reality sounding more like 12/8 and 15/8), representing the Searcher’s heavily-booted walk as she weaves from bed to bed across the ward, seeking information from the injured men, is first heard at the very start of the play, before curtain-up (Ex. 2.19). In Rubbra’s manuscript the melody, played by the double bass, is marked ‘sinister’, and is accompanied by a doom-laden dissonant rumbling from the piano, over which sounds the bugle-call, ‘Reveille’.\(^3\) With the semiquaver four-groupings in the piano working against the clear compound time of the Searcher’s melody (despite the 4/4 and 5/4 time signatures), the music intimates from the outset the potential for her to be swallowed up by the immensity of the war.

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\(^3\) Although Rubbra labelled a part for bugle in his draft full score of the music, there is no separate performing part for bugle. From studying the performing parts, it appears that all the bugle calls were played by flute and violin, either in unison or, in the opening passage, with muted violin providing an echo one beat behind the flute.
Ex. 2.19: *The Searcher*, opening music

\[ j = 5 \text{ (Slow)} \]
Her theme returns intact at the start of Scene III, where the audience sees her at work on the ward (Ex. 2.20). The melody becomes an ostinato, repeated for each new round of questioning, with the climax, reporting the manner of the lost man’s death, always coinciding with the highest note of the melody, as shown in bar 6 of Ex. 2.20. Fragmented pianissimo repetitions on the side drum of the rhythm of ‘all orders, all must be obeyed’ run alongside the melody, indicating musically the Searcher’s constant awareness of the C.O.’s imperious command as she carries out her distressing task.
The Searcher, Scene III, opening: the Searcher’s melody

Ex. 2.20: The Searcher, Scene III, opening: the Searcher’s melody

The melody is briefly transformed during Scene II, as the Searcher extols the virtues of life over death, its opening minor second giving way to a more optimistic major interval. The ethereal, muted violin sound suggests the ‘heavenward’ inclination of earthly growth, whilst the hushed, tolling piano chords ambiguously portray both the fertility of the soil and the death within it (Ex. 2.21).
At the end of the play, there is ‘a vague attempt at a final catharsis’ (Kosok, 2007: 97), in which Pilcher indicates that music should play an important role. She refers to it as ‘an approach to aspiration, or musical emotion’ (Foreword), endowing music with mystical, spiritual qualities (Purkis, 2012). After a final, apocalyptic event viewed from Honeymoon Hill, the Searcher is seen listening intently to the graves around her:

Do we hear nothing new? Listen … Yes, it is human humming. Half a singing, half a sighing. A sound of peace. Monotonous … The Searcher … kneels and … rocks her body back and forth as though it were a cradle, rocking it in time to the low lullaby rising from the hill (Scene VIII: 82).

Two voices gently intone the Searcher’s melody, accompanied by piano, against a tolling bare fifth in the bass, whilst she chants her final monologue. The ‘Last Post’ floats hauntingly over the top, and the inconclusive Phrygian cadence accompanies the Searcher’s final word: ‘Amen’ (Ex. 2.22). It is a
bitter reconciliation, as the Searcher, half-maddened by the war, or perhaps even dead, enacts her own burial.

Ex. 2.22: *The Searcher*, Scene VIII
The first performance of *The Searcher* at the Grafton Theatre was beset by technical difficulties, including an interruption when the lights fused and both stage and auditorium were plunged into darkness (Sprigge, n.d.: 84–85). Velona Pilcher came to believe that something had happened on a supernatural level: ‘the accident of the Searcher, a *figure of speech*, with the spoken work, the musical vibrations and the visual form combining to make an occult pattern which opened the doorway to some dark spirit’ (Sprigge, n.d.: 86). Judith Wogan later recalled that ‘the play had a terrible effect … the audience really suffered shock … at the end Rubbra was in tears …’ (Sprigge, n.d.: 88). The experimental nature of the play for the most part baffled or antagonised critics, and, though it managed a respectable run of nineteen nights, it was withdrawn earlier than planned. His emotional investment in the work, and subsequent disappointment, might have contributed to Rubbra’s frustrated outburst to Gerald Finzi shortly afterwards: ‘I am giving up my Theatre job as soon as somebody else can be got … I think a sub-meaning of the “Theatre” ought to be put in any dictionary – “an organisation for wasting a musician’s time!”’ (letter, 29 June 1930, FA, Box 8, temporary shelfmark).

### 2.3 Later influence

In the early 1930s Rubbra’s circumstances changed significantly. He remarried in 1933, his second wife being the violinist Antoinette Chaplin (1900–79), and moved out of London a year later, settling in Speen, in the Chiltern countryside. It is likely that his involvement with the TS also ended around this time. Krishnamurti
disbanded the Order of the Star in the East in 1929, being unwilling to align himself with any religious organisation. In his closing address to members at the Ommen camp that summer, he made clear his conviction that

...truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect … Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path … A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organise it (Krishnamurti, 1970 [1929]: 84–85)

As a member of the Order, Rubbra could not have failed to be aware of the reasons for its dissolution, even if he was not at Ommen himself that year. During the 1930s, at least, he seems to have agreed with Krishnamurti’s view of organised religion. In 1939, for example, he wrote to his younger friend Arthur Hutchings: ‘Don’t get tied up with the Church unless you really must. Its only an escape. The fight has got to come from the individual – or else its no good’ (21 June, Rubbra’s emphasis and spelling, AHC, folio 98).

Despite the many changes in his life at this time, Rubbra continued to demonstrate the social and ethical awareness typical of those involved in the TS. He followed a simple, self-sufficient rural lifestyle in Speen. He remained a vegetarian until it became impossible to maintain during his period of wartime army service (Grover, 1993: 15). His work involved him in various socially progressive endeavours. His involvement with the Dartington Community in Devon in the mid-30s will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In 1935, he taught for a while at Beltane School in Wimbledon. Named after the traditional May Day festival, Beltane had been set up by the radically socialist Ernst Bulova (1902–2001) and his wife Ilse (d. 1987), educating both English children and Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi Europe. The school was run on Montessori principles, encouraging creativity and independent thinking (Baumel-Schwartz, 2012: 31). Beltane may not have been the school that Rubbra refers to in interview with Dawney as ‘a Rudolph Steiner School run by the Anthroposophical Society’ (Dawney, 1971: 8), but it nevertheless embraced similar progressive methods.
There are also indications that Rubbra maintained links with theosophical and esoteric thought during the 1930s and beyond through his reading. At the end of his life he still owned a pamphlet, *Music in the Light of Anthroposophy*, comprising notes from Steiner’s lectures on music (P[ease], 1925). He also owned many of Cyril Scott’s writings, including *Music: Its Secret Influence Throughout the Ages* (first published in 1933). Rubbra’s interest in Ouspensky’s writings has already been noted, and his continuing engagement with these and similar books during the 1930s will be explored further in Chapter 3. It seems that Rubbra’s interest in such writings did not diminish after his conversion to Catholicism. Another book still on his shelf at the time of his death was *All and Everything*, the *magnum opus* of Ouspensky’s teacher, Georgei Gurdjieff, which was not published in English translation until 1950. Rubbra still referred to Gurdjieff as an ‘extraordinary “mystic”’ as late as 1971 (to Dawney, 1971: 8).

It is difficult to assess to what extent Rubbra embraced some of the more arcane views of music expounded in these books, or indeed the more esoteric aspects of Theosophy in general. As suggested in the discussion of ‘Rosa Mundi’, he seems to have had an awareness of the meanings attributed to colours by Theosophists. In his writings on Holst from the early 1930s, he refers to a ‘blue flame’ that he saw as a purifying influence within Holst’s music – blue being widely regarded by Theosophists as indicating religious feeling (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 22, 30). It is tempting, too, to connect Steiner’s and Rubbra’s views about the interval of the fifth. Steiner saw it as historically imparting an ‘experience of the Divine World-Order without and within man’s being’, but at the present time being perceived as ‘empty’, because humanity has lost all consciousness of its ‘astral nature’. In the future, the interval will become one by which humanity may experience ‘true imagination’ (P[ease], 1925: 46, 59, 76–77). Some time after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, Rubbra wrote:

> The fifth is at the same time the most positive interval we have (it immediately affirms) and the most mysterious. It seems to me to be an enclosed circle of sound that the listener and composer is [*sic*] free to fill (untitled typescript on church music, undated, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark).
As well as writing about his compositional methods, as recounted in Chapter 1, Rubbra also pondered the mystery of musical inspiration. His belief that his music was ‘given’ to him, having already an existence ‘somewhere, complete in all its developed state’ before the act of composition revealed it, underpinned all that he said (Rubbra, 1950d: 44). Subsequently, Rubbra defined ‘somewhere’ as ‘in the subconscious waiting for us to discover it’ (to Schafer, 1963: 72). The act of composition was therefore seen by Rubbra not as one of invention, but of discovering or revealing the completed work. He believed that ‘the sounds composers use have invisible roots in a world where order is basic’, and that the completed work should demonstrate ‘those fundamental but always mysterious laws that lie behind finely organised sound’ (Rubbra, 1968f: 110; 1975d: 19). As Jonathan Harvey’s (1999b) study of musical inspiration demonstrates, such Neoplatonic thinking has been common amongst composers for centuries, but especially during and in the wake of nineteenth-century Romanticism. In Rubbra’s case, though, there is an argument for his conviction stemming from, or at least being reinforced by, esoteric sources. In July 1954, Rubbra headed a letter to the literary magazine *Encounter* with words by the French occult writer Antoine Fabre d’Olivet (1767–1825):

> La musique, envisagée dans sa partie speculative, est, comme la définissaient les anciens, la connaissance de l’ordre de toutes choses, la science des rapports harmoniques de l’univers; elle repose sure des principes immuables auxquels rien ne peut porter atteinte.⁴

[Music, considered in its speculative aspect, is, as the ancients defined it, the knowledge of the order of all things, the science of the harmonic relationships of the universe; it rests on immutable principles which nothing can damage.]

⁴ The quotation is from Fabre d’Olivet’s *La musique expliquée comme science et comme art, et considérée dans ses rapports analogiques avec les mystères religieux, la mythologie ancienne, et l’histoire de la terre*, first published in book form from gathered printed extracts of the lost manuscript posthumously in 1896, and re-issued with additions by Jean Pinasseau in 1928. Rubbra is known to have visited Paris around 1930, at a time when his interest in esoteric thinking was particularly strong, so it is possible that he encountered Fabre d’Olivet’s writings through Pinasseau’s edition. Alternatively, he may have come across them through his later friendship with Peter Crossley-Holland, who had connections with the French ethnomusicologist Alain Daniélu, who, in turn, cited Fabre D’Olivet’s book in his own writings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Rubbra, Crossley-Holland and Daniélu were members of a group who were informally experimenting with a new kind of improvisatory performance practice during the late 1940s–early 1950s.
Consistent with his view that any single work should reflect the ordered world from which music derives, unity is fundamental to Rubbra’s music. Rubbra thought that one of the functions of art is ‘to find “relatedness”’ (untitled typescript, undated [c. 1956], RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark), and gave special significance to a vitality, or continuity, of line in his music: ‘For me, the relatedness of notes in a line does do something spiritually to make the nature of the unity of the universe apparent’ (1961: 74). He credited Holst with having led him towards recognition of these ‘true and lasting bases of music’ (‘The British composer and the symphony’, typescript, 1949: 7, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark: 7). Hugh Ottaway confirmed that Rubbra habitually described his music in terms of continuity and line: ‘When he takes you through the score of a symphonic movement, his emphasis is always on the drawing-out of the main thematic thread: growth, textural variety, thematic oneness – these are the qualities he most impresses’ (1976: 711).

Critics have long pointed to unity as one of the most important characteristics of Rubbra’s music, especially in his symphonic writing. Many have seen this as an expression of spirituality, linking it to his interest in either Eastern monism or the contemplative aspects of the Catholic tradition (for example, Ottaway, 1976: 711; 1966: 766–67; Mellers, 1949: 116). No writer has acknowledged the formative role that Theosophy played in the development of Rubbra’s mature musical style, and it would be easy to dismiss Rubbra’s enthusiasm for the movement as a youthful following of fashion or rebellion against his low-church upbringing. Yet, as this chapter has demonstrated, it was indeed his ‘point of departure’, spiritually as well as artistically.
3. Body, mind and spirit: Rubbra’s involvement with dance

Writers on Rubbra’s music usually consider the 1930s to be significant as the decade when Rubbra produced his first three symphonies, on which he worked from 1935 until 1939, and, earlier, his first mature chamber and choral works (starting with the Second Violin Sonata, Op. 31 in 1932). There is, however, another important strand of work that runs throughout this period – his work with dancers. The dedication of Rubbra’s early song, ‘Spiritual Lullaby’, to Annea Spong, discussed in Chapter 2, raises the possibility that he worked with her dance school during his student years, perhaps playing for dance classes, though through lack of documentary evidence this remains, as yet, speculative. Later, starting in 1929, three important professional collaborations stand out: with an Anglo-Indian woman, Leila Sokhey (d. 1947), who danced under the stage name Menaka; with Margaret Barr (1904–91) and her Dance-Drama Group at Dartington; and culminating in 1938 in a project with the stage designer Peter Goffin (1906–74) to write the scenario and music for a complete ballet, *Prism*, Op. 48. In addition, around 1930 Rubbra worked for several years with two young male dancers, Algeranoff (1903–67) and Aubrey Hitchins (1906–69), who, as members of Pavlova’s ballet company, were trained in the Russian ballet tradition, but who took a lively interest in modern forms of improvisatory dance. There is even a hint, in a letter from Howard Ferguson to Gerald Finzi, that Rubbra took up dancing himself during this period (14 October 1932, in Ferguson and Hurd, 2001: 75). All of Rubbra’s dance work was in some way experimental for the time, which in itself sheds new light on his output as a whole.

Biographies of Rubbra and commentaries on his music pay scant regard to this aspect of his work. Rubbra himself, in his autobiographical contribution to

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1 Menaka’s date of birth is uncertain. The only extant biography (Joshi, 1989), from which other sources seem to derive their information about her early life, gives it as 15 October 1899. However, her record card at St Paul’s Girls’ School states that she left in the Sixth, when she would be expected to be sixteen. That implies that she was actually born in October 1890 (personal email from Howard Bailes, archivist at St Paul’s Girls’ School, 23 November 2015).

2 Despite his name, Algeranoff was English. Born Harcourt Algernon Leighton Essex, he was required to change his name to the Russian-sounding Algeranoff on joining Pavlova’s ballet company in 1921.

3 Describing a meeting with Rubbra, Ferguson wrote: ‘Shall I get a cloak like that, and take up dancing (& a yph [= wife])?’
Ralph Scott Grover’s book, mentions his work with Algeranoff⁴ and ‘ballet dancers’ very briefly, identifying it as a way of making a living during this period (Grover, 1993: 12 and 15). Lewis Foreman, perhaps under Rubbra’s guidance, was interested enough to select from Rubbra’s collection of programmes and cuttings all of the Dartington group programmes and a press notice, in Dutch, of Menaka’s work, for reproduction on the inside covers of his Edmund Rubbra: Composer-Essays (1977), but there is no commentary beyond what the programmes and cuttings themselves provide. Picking up on the information in Foreman’s book, Grover adds a paragraph at the end of his transcription of Rubbra’s tapes detailing the bare facts of Rubbra’s work with the Dartington group, with the comment: ‘This is surely a minor item in his long and varied career, but it is of interest none the less because it demonstrates yet again the depth of his interest in composing for the theatre’ (Grover, 1993: 25). Leo Black also refers briefly to the programmes reproduced in Foreman’s book, citing them as evidence of ‘how hard Rubbra worked for the Dartington Dance-Mime Group … but that was also the time when his compositions began to show a truly individual voice’ (Black, 2008: 27). The implication of Black’s comment appears to be that the other, non-dance, works of this period are more worthy of attention, and that is understandable, given Rubbra’s own attitude expressed in Grover, and the lack of easy availability of any of the music associated with these dances.

Rubbra is not always so dismissive about his early dramatic work, in any genre. In interview with Michael Dawney, for example, he points out that his ‘earliest musical experiences after studentship were … deeply connected with the theatre’, and that ‘it was all invaluable experience’ (Dawney, 1970: 9). This was clearly a formative period of Rubbra’s career, and dance itself was also an emergent art form. On one hand, classical ballet was being both challenged and reinvigorated by innovative companies such as Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, active in London throughout the 1920s. On the other, modern free dance, often looking to both Western and Eastern antiquity for inspiration, promoted a holistic view of dance as having the ability to bring body, mind and spirit into unity. A spiritual dimension is evident in all of Rubbra’s involvement with dance during this period, though variously manifested. The notion of unity, which has already been identified as a

⁴ Mistranscribed as ‘Ilgeranoff’.
guiding principle of Rubbra’s work as a composer, and the holistic view of dance itself, is extended in many of these collaborations to include all the artistic elements of the whole production. Left-wing political threads run through the work, relating to Indian nationalism in his work with Menaka, and to pacifism, often using spiritual imagery to convey a utopian message. Rubbra’s work with Menaka provides a further example of an encounter with Eastern thought and an early engagement with Indian music. The scenario for Prism demonstrates Rubbra’s interest in progressive evolutionary ideas. Finally, his work with both Menaka and the Dartington Dance-Drama Group shows him working with strong and independent women who embraced feminist ideals and must have added to Rubbra’s own conception of the feminine.

In my own research, I have taken the clues provided in the published accounts as a starting point, but have also explored both primary and secondary sources relating specifically to Rubbra’s work with these dancers, and, more broadly, to the current interest in both Eastern and Western dance of the early twentieth century amongst dance historians. In the process I have traced and uncovered manuscripts that were previously assumed to be lost relating to Rubbra’s work with Menaka and with the Dartington group, and have had the opportunity to study both the manuscript of Prism, available in the British Library, alongside an earlier draft of the music. Consequently, I am able in this chapter to offer a completely fresh perspective on Rubbra’s work in dance.

3.1 Menaka

The first record of Rubbra’s involvement with Menaka dates from the autumn of 1929, when the Northampton Mercury reported that ‘Mr Duncan-Rubbra recently completed five short ballets based on traditional Indian dance tunes for an Indian dancer’ (5). The unnamed dancer was Menaka, and the dances were intended for a promised appearance at one of Charles B. Cochran’s revues at the London Pavilion in the spring of 1930, but the contract fell through shortly after rehearsals started.

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5 Manuscripts of Indian dances associated with Menaka and a draft version of Prism were found in Rubbra’s son Benedict’s possession. Manuscripts of dances associated with the Dartington Dance-Drama group were traced to the Margaret Barr Collection, 1918–1991, AUS-Ssl, MLMSS 5545/Box 13X.
with the company. In 1956 Rubbra recalled, however, that the dances ‘were given a private performance in London’ (typescript of an article by Yvonne Mackintosh, 1956, RA, Box 17, temporary shelfmark). Rubbra could well have been referring to the performance that Menaka gave at a London hotel on 18 November, 1931, to members of the Anglo-Indian Round Table Conference that was convening in London at the time. A reviewer described this recital as ‘her first London appearance’, and was very impressed by the dances and Menaka’s charisma. Rubbra’s name was not mentioned, though ‘there was queer, queer music’ performed on ‘clucking keys’ and ‘whispering violins’ (D.D., 1931: 11).

Menaka saw herself, and is remembered by dance historians today, as a pioneer in the revival of traditional Indian dance. On her return to India in the 1930s, she concentrated on kathak dance, running her own dance company and school. In 1929, however, she was still at an early stage of her career, giving mostly solo dance recitals. She believed that ‘dance is a medium for the expression of the life and emotions of a nation’ and wanted to avoid Indian dance becoming ‘an exotic … presentation for the delectation of the West’ ([1933], cited in Joshi, 1989: 53, 57). Yet the authenticity of Menaka’s style has been questioned by some dance historians in recent years (Walker, 2014a: 120), so it is worth examining the background to her convictions in a little more detail.

Menaka was born in India of an English mother and high-caste Bengali father. Following her early education in India, for two years (September 1905–July 1907) she attended St Paul’s Girls’ School in Hammersmith, where she distinguished herself as a violinist. Holst was teaching at the school at this time, and this was also the period when he produced settings and arrangements of English folksongs. As a talented musician at St Paul’s, it is very likely that Menaka would have known about Holst’s work, and may thus have been introduced at an impressionable age to the notion of finding both national and individual creative identity through the use of folk traditions.

On her return to India, she would have found herself in the midst of a similar cultural regeneration. Motivated by nationalist ideals, nineteenth-century writers

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6 Menaka gives an account of her difficulties with Cochran in a series of letters to Algeranoff written in February and March 1930 (PHA, MS2376, Series 3, File 3, items 55, 58–60).
7 Born Leilabati Roy. Sokhey was her married name.
began to seek inspiration and artistic renewal through a return to the Sanskrit sources associated with an ancient ‘golden age’ of Hindu Indian culture (Chakravorty, 2008: 46–48; Clayton, 2007: 90; Walker, 2014a: 13–14 and 2014b: 207–08). The Bengali literary renaissance, which gathered momentum during the second half of the nineteenth century, was succeeded by similar movements in other arts. Martin Clayton has identified a number of parallels between the English and Indian musical renaissances (2007: 72), but despite similarities between the two arts in terms of their transmission (through hereditary Muslim performers) and performance environments (the Indian princely courts), the Indian dance revival lagged behind that of music. Margaret E. Walker places it within a period between roughly 1920 and 1960 (Walker, 2014b: 212). Like the musical renaissance, it sought to wrest control of the art-form from the hereditary Muslim performers and tawaifs (courtesans), who were regarded as illiterate, ignorant and (in the case of the female dancers) debauched; relocate performance from the domain of the royal courts, which were widely perceived as exclusive and decadent, into Western-style, public, urban theatres; and reconnect with the various ancient Vedic dance traditions expressed in Sanskrit treatises and portrayed in antique carvings and statues (Chakravorty, 2008; Walker, 2014a and b). In the same way that a notion of Indian ‘classical’ music emerged as part of this process, a canon of ‘classical’ Indian dance genres grew up during the middle decades of the twentieth century (Clayton, 2007: 71; Walker, 2014a: 111). However, unlike the musical renaissance, where the key figures were (Western) educated Indian men, the chief reformers in dance were upper- and middle-class women (Chakravorty, 2008, p. 53; Walker, 2014a, p. 118 and b, p. 210), many of whom faced severe family and societal disapproval in the early years of the movement. As well as the strains of nationalism and independence inherent in the Indian cultural revival generally, the dance renaissance is thus also linked with emerging feminism in India. Menaka became involved in this process in its early stages.

Many writers have pointed to a paradox at the heart of the Indian cultural renaissance: the ideal of a glorious Hindu cultural heritage, on a par with, and maybe even surpassing, those of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, derives from the work of European Orientalist scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as William Jones (1746–94). The project of Indian national cultural identity is thus closely intertwined with Western, colonial thought. In the case of dance, the
East-West entanglement is further complicated by the Oriental dance style that became popular in Europe and North America during the early years of the twentieth century. Partly exotic spectacle, partly catering for the Western fascination for the ‘mystic East’, Oriental dance was never regarded as truly authentic in India. The Western Oriental dancers nevertheless left their mark on the Indian dance renaissance (Walker, 2014a: 113). All of these complexities of ideas and influence are evident in Menaka’s early career.

Little concrete biographical information is available about Menaka in the years between her leaving school in England and the mid-1920s. According to Damayanti Joshi, her interest in Indian dance was kindled by seeing private performances by dancers in both the North Indian kathak and Southern Indian bharatanatyam traditions, largely in their original, courtly settings (1989: 10); whilst Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who became famous as a social reformer and campaigner for independence in India, recalls that, more progressively, Menaka⁸ and her ‘dancer sister’, Mira Chatterji, performed with the theatre company that she and her husband set up in the mid-1920s in an effort to revitalise Indian drama (Chattopadhyay, 1986: 64).

Despite these Indian connections, sometime before August 1927 Menaka approached the ballerina Anna Pavlova for lessons in Hindu dancing, explaining that ‘the caste system had made it impossible for her to study in India’ (Algeranoff, 1957: 168). Pavlova was well known for her genuine interest in, and support of, the ethnic dance of the many countries that she visited when touring the world, and had already ‘discovered’ the young Indian dancer Uday Shankar, setting him on his own pathway to fame. Rather than providing them herself, Pavlova asked Algeranoff, at that time an upcoming young character dancer with her company who himself had a lively interest in Eastern dance, to undertake Menaka’s lessons in the autumn of 1927 (168). Menaka continued to take lessons from Algeranoff intermittently for the next two years, learning from him ‘some footwork, and hip movements, and basic positions and movements of the arms’ (168). Algeranoff’s own knowledge of Indian dance derived from study of pictures of ancient Indian sculptures and some steps and movements that he had learned from Shankar, though Shankar himself had not

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⁸ Who she names as ‘Maneka’.
received any formal instruction, but had absorbed a repertoire of postures and movements from observing and participating in dance as a child.

Menaka travelled round India collecting folk dances, melodies and rāgas. Otherwise, her Indian artistic support during these years seems to have come from interested friends, the chief amongst them being Kanhaiyalal Vakil, a well-known Bombay art critic who was a keen supporter of the Indian cultural revival. Vakil was not a dance expert. When Algeranoff danced with Menaka in Bombay in December 1928, Vakil showed him the ‘basic steps’ of one of the dances, but left Algeranoff to choreograph them himself (Algeranoff, 1957: 183). It is therefore hard to escape the conclusion that Menaka’s formal training at this time must have reflected, at least partly, a Western view of Indian dance. In this respect, she was not unusual. For the many non-Western dancers working in Europe at this time, such eclecticism was the norm:

For the public and the journalists of that period, they were performing the authentic dances of their own country. Through their gestural art form, the performers were supposed to be interpreting the essence of their culture in a manner that matched the popular image of the ‘orient’ … In reality, on stage, the exotic dancers expressed their artistic individuality first, even if their work was still marked by the culture of their origin. Their choreography was influenced by their travel experiences, by their encounter of different body techniques found in the dances of other cultures, and, more noticeably, informed and influenced by a Western dance education (Décoret-Ahiha, 2008: 257).

9 Although Joshi states that Menaka’s first Indian dance guru, Pandit Sitaram Prasad, ‘taught her assiduously for several years’ before her first full-scale dance production in India in 1934, and that she had been his student when she presented her solo debut in 1928 (1989: 11), Menaka never mentions Prasad in her many letters to Algeranoff during the years 1928–30, nor does Algeranoff mention meeting him during either his visit to Menaka’s home or the rehearsals and other preparations for their joint recital in Bombay in December 1928. Indeed, Menaka implies in a letter to Algeranoff on 6 March, 1929, that she is searching for a good Indian teacher: ‘Tonight I am to see a so-called master of dancing … I am hoping against hope that he may be a “find” and may have something to teach us’, but no further mention is made in her letters of this ‘master’ (PHA, MS2376, Series 3, File 3, item 39). Moreover, Menaka spent a great deal of time in Europe during the years 1929–32, which would have interrupted any serious study with an Indian teacher. From December 1929 until December 1930 all of Menaka’s frequent letters to Algeranoff are addressed from London, Paris or elsewhere in France. Newspaper adverts and reviews indicate that she also spent much time in France during 1931 and 1932, with performances in Paris and Deauville in May and December 1931, and August, September and November 1932.
Even so, despite the similarities of approach, Menaka distanced herself from other Indian/Eastern dancers both in India and Europe, even at this formative stage of her career. In a letter to Algeranoff she referred to having started ‘a new movement’ ([10] January 1929, PHA, MS2376, Series 3, File 2, item 36). In interview with an English journalist in 1930, Menaka spurned the dances of the nautch girls, which she recognised as being the popular Western perception of Indian dance, asserting that ‘the dances I am trying to make known …. are either the true folk dances or in some way derived from them’, and that ‘real Indian dancing has life and vitality’ (Daily Express, 1930: 11).

Menaka’s letters to Algeranoff from 1928 to early 1930, and Algeranoff’s written accounts, mention six dances regularly by name: Usha Nritya (Dawn), Naga Kanya Nritya (Dance of the Snake-Princess), Yovana Nritya (Dance of Youth in Spring, or holi, time), Bhakti Bhava (a devotional dance), Ajanta Darshan (Episodes from Ajanta), Panghat Nritya and Abhinaya. In Sanskrit treatises on dance, the term nritya refers to ‘mime or expressive movement performed to song’ or, more broadly, music (Chakravorty, 2008: 57). Most of Menaka’s dances fall into this category, as she sought to express specific emotions through dance, and sometimes to relate stories. A review of her London appearance in 1931 said that:

She danced of the dawn, and the gods, and the queer statues in the hidden temples, and she danced of fairy tales told on the banks of Jumma River, when the twilight is on the water. She danced the Dance of Siva and the Birth of Lakshmi, and serenade and carnival (D.D., 1931: 11).

All of her dances drew on Hindu mythology and topics for their subjects, giving her dance a spiritual dimension in the eyes of both Western and Indian audiences. She was apparently not too concerned about authenticity, however. The scenario for Naga Kanya, for example, was taken from F.W. Bain’s An Essence of the Dusk. Bain’s stories, written in English and published between 1899 and 1919, professed to be translations from ancient Sanskrit sources, and at first even experts were persuaded that they were genuine. Although they were later proven to be works of

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10 All Indian names of dances throughout this study have been transcribed from Menaka’s letters as she wrote them, without diacritics.
fiction, they remained popular for many years for their imaginative and literary qualities. The London review cited above suggests that Menaka might have performed *Usha Nritya, Ajanta Darshan* (based on the statues and frescoes in the Ajanta Caves), *Panghat Nritya* (‘*panghat’*, in Sanskrit literature, has connections with the banks of the river Jumna, on which the god Kṛṣṇa sported with the *gopīs*, or cowherding girls) and *Yovana Nritya* (the *holi* that Menaka mentioned in her letter being a time of religious carnival held in spring), and possibly other dances.

**Usha**

As reported in the *Northampton Mercury*, Rubbra scored five dances for Menaka. Only two have survived in manuscript: *Usha* in its entirety, and part of *Naga Kanya*. Rubbra mentioned a third, *Ajanta*, in a letter to Algeranoff (3 January 1930, *PHA*, MS2376, Series 3, File 3, item 52). The manuscript score of *Usha* contains markings that suggest that it has been used as a conductor’s copy during rehearsal and performance, with the annotation ‘chanting – description of Dance beforehand’ written in Rubbra’s hand at the start, and indications of cuts, additional repeats and minor changes to the instrumentation (*BR*). *Usha* (*Uṣas*) is a Vedic goddess who personifies the dawn. In Vedic mythology, she restores light, life and consciousness to the world each day, and brings prosperity. Little is known about the action or choreography of Menaka’s dance. A letter from her to Algeranoff contains some tantalising glimpses: she mentions trees, a peacock, a girl’s dance and *pūjā* (a Hindu devotional prayer ritual) as all having a place within the action (6 February 1930, *PHA*, MS2376, Series 3, File 3, item 55).

Structurally, Rubbra’s music suggests a dance that depicts the breaking of day in a typical progression through a series of waves, each one having a slow, quiet opening and increasing in speed and complexity. The entire piece is based on a single theme that is varied in its presentation and accompaniment. A central section changes metre from 4/4 to a more lilting compound time. The transition is smooth, using metrical modulation: at the start of the section, one bar of 4/4 time becomes one dotted crotchet beat in 9/8, and at the end, one bar of 9/8 equates to half a bar of 4/4. The whole dance therefore has a ternary ABA’ structure, the B-section being distinctive by its metre and texture rather than its thematic material.
The (Western) Oriental dance style incorporated typical features that might evoke any non-Western, far-off culture, such as ‘sinuous arms, bare feet and gauzy and revealing costumes’ (Walker, 2014a: 111), many of which are not authentic of the cultures they are supposed to represent. In the same way, during the nineteenth-century, Western composers developed a musical style that generally represented the ‘exotic’, whether Arabic, Indian or Far Eastern, the features of which are so recognisable as to constitute a musical topic\(^{11}\) (Locke, 1998; Scott, 1998). Derek Scott has gone so far as to draw up a list of musical signifiers of this exotic ‘Orient’ (1998: 327). Aspects of the Oriental dance style can be identified in photos of Menaka in performance (in Joshi, 1989), particularly in her costume, which was most often based on a brassiere-like top and bloused pantaloons, exposing her midriff, despite her shunning of the obviously exotic. Similarly Rubbra’s arrangement incorporates many of the musical devices from Scott’s list (see Fig. 3.1) but sensitively used, complementing and enhancing the mood and action of the dance, rather than exoticising it.

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**Fig. 3.1: Oriental signifiers used in *Usha***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oriental signifier – Derek Scott’s list (1998: 327)</th>
<th>Use in <em>Usha</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tonality/modality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole tones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aeolian, Dorian and especially Phrygian modes</td>
<td>Use of non-Western pentatonic scale for melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Melody</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augmented seconds and fourths, especially with Lydian or Phrygian inflections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabesques and ornamented lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborate “ah!” melismas for voice</td>
<td>Simple, unembellished wordless vocalise at opening of dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sliding or sinuous chromaticism (e.g. snaking downward on cor anglais)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trills and dissonant grace notes</td>
<td>Accompanying trills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some grace notes in melody in passages where excitement is mounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid scale passages (especially if an irregular fit, e.g. eleven notes to be played in the time of two crotchets)</td>
<td>The main way in which the melody is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A melody that suddenly shifts to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{11}\) Or, as Scott puts it, such ‘representations [of the Orient] rely upon culturally learned recognition’ (1998: 326).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Oriental signifier – Derek Scott’s list (1998: 327)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use in Usha</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>notes of shorter value</td>
<td>varied (see Ex. 3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrupt juxtapositions of romantic, lyrical tunes and busy, energetic passages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive, small-compass melodies</td>
<td>Melody spans an octave Includes repeated motifs, and phrases are used repetitively throughout the dance (see Fig. 3.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rhythm**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ostinato</th>
<th>Rhythmic ostinato in timpani</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive rhythms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad libitum sections (colla parte, senza tempo, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of triplets in duple time</td>
<td>Not used, but shift to compound time from simple in middle section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex or irregular rhythms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Harmony**

| Parallel movement in fourths, fifths and octaves (especially in the woodwinds) | Much use of this, and quartal harmonies |
| Bare fifths | |
| Drones and pedal points | Timpani provides a pedal point on G throughout the dance Pedal points also used within shorter sections, often in fifths/octaves |
| ‘Magic’ or ‘mystic’ chords (possessing uncertainty of duration and/or harmonic direction) | Quartal harmony Sustained pianissimo string chords in slower sections |

**Instrumentation/timbre**

| Harp arpeggios and glissandi | No glissandi, but harp used to double the melody in the slower, quieter sections, and to provide a restrained chordal accompaniment that is sometimes arpeggiated |
| Double reeds (oboe and cor anglais) | Not given undue prominence in *Usha*, though included within instrumentation |
| Percussion, especially tambourine, triangle, cymbals and gong | Temple bell is used in slow passages within final section of the dance No other use of percussion except timpani – see below |
| Emphatic rhythmic figures on unpitched percussion such as tom-toms, tambourine and triangle | Timpani play ostinato rhythm throughout Unusual and subtle timbre obtained by tuning one timp out of pitch |

Algeranoff described Rubbra’s arrangements for Menaka as ‘translations’ from Indian to Western instruments (1957: 200), suggesting that Rubbra simply orchestrated the dances. This does not appear to be the case, as aspects of the
arrangements are not authentically Indian. Yet it is very likely that their basis is in genuine Indian melody. Rubbra referred to the melodies as ‘Indian folk tunes’ (Mackintosh typescript, RA, Box 17, temporary shelfmark), and Menaka wrote to Algeranoff about her ‘collection of real Indian “ragas”’ which she considered to be ‘well worth arranging for an orchestra’ (31 May 1928, PHA, MS2376, Series 3, File 2, item 27).

At the opening of Usha, a wordless vocalise is heard, sung by a hidden voice to the pianissimo accompaniment of an ostinato rhythm on the timpani. The sound immediately summons images of the ‘mystic Orient’, yet the melody sung is modest in its appeal, unembellished and with a simple pentatonic outline that would sound unusual to ears accustomed to the more familiar Western pentatonic scale (Ex. 3.1).

Ex. 3.1: Usha, bars 1–12

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12 I am indebted to Martin Clayton for his help in identifying some of the Indian elements within the music, and for directing me to the Music in Motion website for further information (personal email, 29 April, 2016). Unless otherwise stated, all references to Indian theory and techniques in my analysis of Rubbra’s arrangements draw on the information provided by Professor Clayton, or are gleaned from the website.
It equally conjures the stillness of pre-dawn. The pitch collection used has clear similarities with the rāg classified by Indian music theorist V.N. Bhatkhande as *Tilang*, with D as the tonic (*Sa*) (Ex. 3.2).

**Ex. 3.2: Tilang**

![Tilang notation]

Although one would expect *Tilang* to use the flattened seventh note (*ni*) in the descending line, it is possible that this melody uses a related folk scale. *Tilang* is identical with the rāg *Tilak* as listed in A.H. Fox Strangways’ *The Music of Hindostan* (1914: no. 13, second column, in the table facing p. 151), a book owned by Rubbra. Fox Strangways labels *Tilak* as being a ‘quiet’ rāg, appropriate for the eighth watch, that is, the period immediately before dawn.

The melody is treated repetitively throughout the dance. One or other of its three phrases (labelled *a*, *b* and *c* in Ex. 3.1), or a hybrid phrase, *ac*, formed by combining the first bar of phrase *a* with the last three of phrase *c*, is present throughout (see Fig. 3.2).
Phrase \(a\) represents the simplest possible presentation of the rāg. It occurs only in the slow opening passages to both sections A and C, and in the closing four bars. Repetitions of all phrases are slightly varied, mainly by enlivening the rhythm (see Ex. 3.3, which sets out the variants of phrase \(ac\)).

**Ex. 3.3: Usha, phrase \(ac\) and its variants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Melodic phrase (ac)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combines bar 1 of phrase (a) and bars 2–4 of phrase (c). Never appears in this form during the dance, but is the prime form of the following variants.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variants</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurs at Rehearsal [2].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given such limited melodic material, Rubbra needed to provide interest through the accompaniments, and both texture and, especially, timbre are treated inventively throughout the dance. After the opening vocalise, the slow sections all have a similar instrumentation. At rehearsal [1], the melody is carried by flute, clarinet and harp in octaves. The passage at rehearsal [6] retains the flute and harp, but adds violins instead of clarinet, whilst the closing four-bar passage replaces the flute with pizzicato violins. Derek Scott lists ‘harp arpeggios and glissandi’ as an Oriental signifier (see Fig. 3.1 and Scott, 1998: 327), crediting Rimsky-Korsakov with initiating the exotic allusion. In Rubbra’s scoring, however, the harp seems to take on an older musical meaning, pointing to a mythical and spiritual past: a significant use of timbre that has already been noted in Rubbra’s early songs and The Secret Hymnody (see Chapter 2). This connotation is enhanced by the accompaniment of sustained, quiet chords in the strings (with clarinets and bassoons in the closing bars), and, in the later two passages, the addition of a temple bell. The presence of the temple bell makes it likely that the passage from rehearsal [6] to [8] was intended to accompany the devotional prayer ritual within the dance, mentioned in Menaka’s letter. The simple orchestration at rehearsal [6] is expanded at rehearsal [7]. The melody is taken by flute, clarinet and viola, enriched by chiming contrary motion descending lines in the upper strings and arpeggiated harp chords (Ex. 3.4).
The faster sections have a more involved texture and instrumentation. The melody is always strengthened by instrumental doubling, which also creates more interesting timbres: clarinets and violin or viola, bassoon and cello or viola, flute, clarinet and viola, for example. Sometimes there is a hint of canon as instruments make imitative entries (rehearsal [2] and [8]). Pizzicato string accompaniments and trills or other decorative passages in shorter note values in the woodwind appear as
excitement mounts within each section. Sometimes these outline parallel fifths, and although they are not used as a drone, moving far too quickly, they are nevertheless suggestive of the way in which the open strings of the Indian *tanpura* are tuned to the tonic (sa) and fifth (pa) in different registers, and rhythmically strummed against the melody. Even at its fullest, the orchestration retains a certain delicacy, and the melody always stands out clearly (see Ex. 3.5, which is the climactic passage of the dance).
Ex. 3.5: *Usha*, [R]9, bars 115–18
In the central section, in compound time, there is a change of texture. The melody is presented by the flute, shadowed respectively a third and fifth lower by the oboe and clarinet. Such melodic movement in parallel fifths does not normally occur in Indian music, but is a feature of much Western Oriental music. The accompaniment in this section is sparse: a simple pizzicato bass line played by cello and double bass, with interjected short violin flourishes in the faster passages.

The ostinato timpani rhythm seen in Ex. 3.1 continues throughout the dance, becoming more excited during the faster passages. Ex. 3.6 shows how the rhythm is varied and developed as the dance progresses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex. 3.6: <em>Usha</em>, timpani rhythms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bars 1–24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rehearsal [2] Bars 25–36</td>
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<td>Rehearsal [3] Bars 37–44</td>
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<td>Rehearsal [4] Bars 45–60</td>
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<td>Rehearsal [5] Bars 61–78</td>
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<td>Rehearsal [6] Bars 79–98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rehearsal [8] Bars 99–114</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rehearsal [9] Bars 115–130</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bars 131–134</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In the sections in 4/4 time, the regular repetition of an eight-beat pattern may derive from *keherva*, an Indian *tala* frequently used in lighter, semi-classical genres such as *thumri*. In the middle section in compound time, a nine-beat cycle in the timpani continues throughout, cutting across the changes of metre from 9/8 to 12/8. In general, the actual rhythms used tend to be simpler than would be expected in Indian music. This may be due to Menaka’s inability to pass on the complex rhythms that she knew from Indian music (she complained to Algeranoff that trying to notate Indian music herself was ‘a very difficult task especially the tabla’) (letter 6 March 1929, *PHA*, MS2376, Series 3, File 2, item 39), or to Rubbra’s desire to simplify for the benefit of Western performers and playing techniques. The timbre of the timpani is distinctive, coloured by the out-of-pitch offbeat interjections within each set of rhythms, perhaps in imitation of the sound of a pair of *tabla* drums.

Rubbra does not limit the harmony to the notes of the *rāg*, but builds on the prominent interval of a fourth in the opening melody (D–G, A–D: see Ex. 3.1) to produce quartal harmony. In faster passages, drones or simply alternating chords (as in Ex. 3.7, bars 53–54) are frequently used.

Ex. 3.7: *Usha*, [R]4, bars 53–56

In the slower, devotional passages the harmony is more subtle. In Ex. 3.8, the use of C natural, B flat and F natural in bars 21–24 might suggest the Aeolian mode on D, or Phrygian on A, to Western listeners, both typically used as Eastern signifiers (see

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13 *Thumri* is a musical genre particularly associated with *kathak* dance, in which Menaka was later to be trained.
Fig. 3.1). Equally, these would qualify, to a Western listener, as ““magic” or “mystic” chords’, to use Scott’s terminology.

Ex. 3.8: *Usha, [R]I*

In his approach to these arrangements, Rubbra was undoubtedly influenced by the music of Gustav Holst. Rubbra had known the choral *Rig Veda Hymns*, Op. 26, since his early teens, when he stumbled upon them by chance. He later recalled how ‘this volume was my companion for weeks, and I can say that, by its means, Gustav Holst … began teaching me long before he actually became my teacher … in 1920 …’ (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 17). Rubbra particularly admired the lean texture and unusual tonality and harmony of Holst’s music. He was the first writer to recognise and identify Holst’s use of actual Indian rāg as in his *Rig Veda Hymns* and other works (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 33, 37 [essay originally published 1932]; Rubbra, 1947: 17–18).¹⁴ Whilst this does not, of itself, serve to make Holst’s Indian-inspired music ‘authentic’, as Nalini Ghuman observes, it nevertheless ‘reveals a different level of engagement with Indian culture than that of romanticism and its modernist offshoots’ (2014: 116). Similarly, whilst the foregoing analysis demonstrates that Rubbra’s arrangement of *Usha*’s Indian melody does not always conform to authentically Indian musical practice, there is never any sense that he

¹⁴Nalini Ghuman has more recently identified the scales on which Holst based his music as southern Indian mēlakarta, learnt from his contact with Maud MacCarth (Ghuman, 2014: 131).
employs familiar devices associated with the Orient with the intention of gratuitously exoticising the music. Musical signifiers of the East are used with restraint. A review of Scott’s list of Oriental devices in Fig. 3.1 shows that Rubbra does not draw on some of the more blatant or extreme elements, such as melodic use of augmented seconds and fourths, elaborate melodic ornamentation, or snaking chromaticism. In *Usha*, Oriental signifiers are used both allusively, to capture the listener’s imagination and conjure up an aural image of a distant and different place, and literally, to accompany the visual narrative of the dance. In the same way that Menaka’s dancing at the time exhibited traits of Western influence whilst espousing Indian revivalist ideals, so Rubbra’s music demonstrates a sincere attempt to understand the Indian origins of the melody that he is arranging whilst rendering it amenable to a Western audience. It is no wonder that, during rehearsals with Menaka and Algeranoff in London, Nawab Ali Khan,\(^\text{15}\) himself an authority on Indian music, ‘would come and listen approvingly to the “translations”’ (Algeranoff, 1957: 200).

### 3.2 Margaret Barr and the Dance-Drama Group

Rubbra continued to work with Algeranoff and his dancer friend and colleague, Aubrey Hitchins, for several years. He turned down an invitation to tour Canada with the two dancers for six months in late 1931–32 (letter Edmund Rubbra to Gerald Finzi, 21 December 1931, *FA*, Box 8, temporary shelfmark) but played the piano for an Anna Pavlova memorial performance at The Hague in January 1933 (programme, *RA*, Box 1, temporary shelfmark). Soon afterwards, he entered into another significant collaboration with dancers from Dartington Hall, near Totnes in Devon.

The Dartington school and community had been set up by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst following their purchase of the estate in 1925. The school was run along progressive lines, and was closely integrated with the rural work on the estate. It was a utopian project, and once again an Indian connection emerges: Leonard Elmhirst had spent time in the early 1920s working at Rabindranath Tagore’s similar

\(^{15}\) Sir Sayed Mohammad Hamid Ali Khan Bahadur, Nawab of Rampur (1875–1930).
educational and rural community at Santiniketan in Bengal, on which the Dartington set-up was modelled in many respects. The way in which nature, the arts and the spiritual were entwined in Tagore’s thinking had a profound influence on Elmhirst (Nicholas, 2007: 31). Both Leonard and Dorothy always envisaged that the arts would play an important role in their community. Dorothy, in particular, considered the arts to have a quasi-religious significance: ‘they were the means by which the Elmhirsts themselves, every one [sic] at Dartington, everyone everywhere, could transcend the boundaries of self and enter into a communion with what lies behind the surface of life … They were themselves the very substance of the real life’ (Young, 1982: 216). In choosing to add dance to the range of arts practised at Dartington, the Elmhirsts were far-sighted. In early twentieth-century Britain, dance had not yet fully found its place alongside the other art forms recognised as ‘high arts’, but Leonard had himself joined with Tagore in community dancing at Santiniketan, and had imbibed much of Tagore’s view of dance (Nicholas, 2007: 7, 43). Tagore described dance in spiritual terms, as ‘ecstatic meditation in the still centre of movement’ (cited in Nicholas, 2007: 31), and sought in his scheme to meliorate what he saw as the tendency of schooling and lifestyle in twentieth-century industrialised society to repress human expression through natural body movement and to destroy the unity between mind and body (Nicholas, 2007: 43). Leonard Elmhirst expressed very similar thoughts about the value of dance. He saw it as the ‘oldest and newest of languages’ which, like music, is ‘international, universal [and] can convey emotions, and stimulate the imagination in a way language itself [is] still not subtle enough to attempt’. In his view, dance is organic, springing from nature. Dance and music could give ‘wholeness and unity to human life’, and foster a sense of belonging to a community. In this respect, dance could be seen as replacing the role once played in society by organised religion (handwritten script ‘To Dance School’, 10 February 1934, DHTA, T/AD/2/B).

Another early twentieth-century model for the inclusion of dance amongst the activities at Dartington is the utopian community of Hellerau, near Dresden (Nicholas, 2007: 38–40). Its founder, Wolf Dohrn, made Hellerau a centre for Émile Jacques-Dalcroze’s new system of eurhythmics, devised as a method for teaching music combining music and rhythmic body movements, but seen by Dohrn as contributing to the ‘spiritual development of the body’, and fostering a sense of community (Beacham, 1985a: 164). From 1910 until 1913 Dalcroze and the theatre
designer Adolphe Appia produced exploratory performances combining music, dance, stage and costume design, colour and lighting in a new artistic synthesis. This progressive notion of Gesamtkunstwerk was to resurface in the dance work undertaken at Dartington during the early 1930s. Rejecting the prevailing realism of stage design using painted flats, Appia employed solid blocks, rostra and staircases to create a three-dimensional ‘rhythmic space’ on different levels, in which human movement could flow. He experimented with lighting to achieve sculptural effects, ‘to emphasise the living and expressive quality of the human body in rhythmic movement and in space’ and ‘to express the emotional nuance of the music with great subtlety and variation’ (Beacham, 1985b: 251). These innovations in staging and lighting were to be especially influential at Dartington.

One of the first dancers to be invited to teach at Dartington was Margaret Barr, who arrived in 1930. Born in India, she had grown up in both England and the West coast of the United States, where some of the most interesting developments in modern dance were taking place. In 1927–8, Barr spent a year studying and working in New York with Martha Graham, one of a young group of experimental American choreographers drawing on the techniques of free dance: ‘working on the movement that arose from their own bodies’ (Nicholas, 2007: 46). Graham’s work around these years was notable for sounding ‘a new note of social awareness and protest’, whilst a second trend in her work tended ‘towards mysticism and psychological abstraction’ (Hall, 1950a: 82). Barr’s work demonstrates the same interests, in particular a strong social and political consciousness. It was also notable, from the outset, for its cross-disciplinary nature (Nicholas, 2007: 63). Even before taking up her post, Margaret Barr sought out Rubbra to work as her pianist and composer at Dartington, but in 1930 he was unwilling to leave his work in London (letters Margaret Barr to Dorothy Elmhurst, 9 and 15 July 1930, DHTA, DWE/A/7/B1). Initially, Barr’s work at Dartington was with students in the new School of Dance-Mime, and amateurs from the surrounding community. The writer John Langdon-Davies, in a pamphlet produced before the school’s first dance-mime production in 1931, drew attention to the way in which Barr and her group could use seemingly mundane subject-matter to evoke a metaphysical quality: ‘we are transported by imaginative art into a far deeper mood and instead of these few figures dancing gravely or gaily we seem to feel all humanity treading its path of varied laughter or tears’ (cited in Lester, 2006: 47).
In 1934 Barr began to develop a small professional ensemble: the Dartington Dance-Mime Group. This time Rubbra agreed to become involved, as composer and pianist. A young Plymouth artist, Peter Goffin, designed the costumes, décor and lighting, whilst Barr herself was director of movement. After its first production at Dartington in July 1934, personal and professional tensions between the various dancers now resident at Dartington caused the group to move to London, setting up a studio in Chelsea and changing its name to the Dance-Drama Group. After the move to London, Rubbra was involved in three further full-scale productions, at the Arts Theatre Club in February 1935, the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich in November 1935, and the Rudolf Steiner Hall in February 1936. The group became part of the burgeoning London left-wing theatre scene: their production at the Rudolf Steiner Hall was presented by the New Theatre League, a short-lived umbrella organisation for various socialist theatrical groups.

The group’s publicity statement described dance-drama as ‘a new theatre-form’, springing ‘from a synthesis of movement–sound, form, light and colour, expressing dramatic ideas’ (programme note, Foreman, 1977a: inside back cover). In keeping with Barr’s socialist ideals, the group aimed to ‘express certain ideas which … will further the movement towards the liberation of the workers by means of culture and self-expressiveness’ (Barr, manifesto for the dance-drama group, 1934, DHTA, T/AD/2/B). Yet the dance critic Fernau Hall later summed up the work of the group as showing


The group worked on an egalitarian basis, both economically and artistically. Barr, Rubbra and Goffin created dance-dramas together from the earliest stages, so that movement, music, lighting and stage design grew out of each other. Hall commented that such ‘flexibility of collaboration led to remarkable spontaneity and variety in the productions: the atmosphere was exceptionally favourable for the effective realisation of new ideas’ (1950a: 140). Barr ‘believed in an organic
interplay between the theme and the final form of its expression’, allowing the shape of the work to evolve as the group creatively explored the given theme (Lester, 2007: 52). Peter Goffin drew on many of the newer European theatrical techniques that had developed from Appia’s innovative work in Hellerau, showing particular skill in creating novel lighting effects, whilst Rubbra worked with Barr so closely and with such complete sympathy that the final shape of the production was due as much to him as to her. There was considerable give and take: an idea for movement might suggest the shape of a musical phrase, this in turn might develop into another phrase, giving rise to new movements and so on … Rubbra showed admirable versatility and inventiveness, pointing the comedy and satire with diabolic zest and building up spirited climaxes in the dramatic scenes; his strong feeling for construction … preserved him from … discontinuity … (Hall, 1950a: 206).

The Three Sisters

*The Three Sisters* is a dance-drama for which both photographs and the musical score (in manuscript) still exist. As a case study it therefore affords at least some insight into how the different elements of choreography, design and music might have fitted together. Musically, it also demonstrates many of the attributes that Hall credits to Rubbra. *The Three Sisters* was first produced in the summer of 1934, with music by Rubbra, and featured in many of the group’s subsequent performances. It portrays three women of differing characters – the Spinster, the Prostitute and the Young Girl – and their reactions to the circumstances of war. Programmes from the time outline the story:

a) Preparation for the ball  
b) The ball – War declared  
c) The station  
   (Blackout to indicate lapse of time)  
d) War hysteria  
e) The Young Girl  
   (Foreman, 1977a: inside back cover).
A press release ahead of the first performance explained that two of the women accept the situation, whilst the Young Girl, by rejecting the circumstances ‘which have created false positions for the others … emerges as a symbol of new thought and a new state.’ The socialist, anti-war message is, therefore, explicit. The reviewer for the *New Statesman* described this dance-drama as ‘a superb success … there was pity in this, and resignation, and careless joy’, whilst the reviewer for *The Times* considered that ‘no praise can be too high for the beautiful characterisation of the three women dancers in their opening scene’, and felt that ‘Mr Edmund Rubbra’s music was admirably suited to its purpose’ (from cuttings books, *DHTA*, T/AD/2/29 and T/AD/2/A2).

Both music and stage design, as well as movement, contributed to the characterisation of the three women. Press reviews mention the colours of their dresses: black for the prostitute, grey for the spinster and white for the young girl (Fig. 3.3).

**Fig. 3.3: Margaret Barr, Paula Morel and Teda da Moor in a scene from *The Three Sisters*, Dartington School of Dance Mime Summer Production, 1934 (Stuart Black, *DHTA*, TPH/03/010/005)**

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. A preview version of the image can be found at https://archive.dartington.org/calmview/Record.aspx?src=CalmView_Catalog&id=TPH%2f03%2f010%2f005
Hall commends Goffin’s costume design, which ‘showed a Bakst-like sense of the emotional value of colours’ (1950a: 203). Appia, too, had chosen colours for their symbolic properties within his stage designs. Although it is a snapshot, Fig. 3.3 also conveys some sense of each character’s distinctive movements and postures. The ‘carefree’ Young Girl laughs and twirls her skirt flirtatiously, the ‘devastatingly inane and vacuous’ Spinster looks severe and angular, and the ‘vulgar, pretentious and hypocritical’ Prostitute exaggeratedly rolls her eyes (Hall’s descriptions, 1950a: 141).

Although no indications of the action are given in the score, Rubbra’s music for each of the women’s opening dances is easily identifiable, a waltz being subtly varied to depict their different characters as they prepare for the ball. The generic waltz theme (Ex. 3.9a), presumably played as the company assembles, is typical of a late nineteenth-century waltz, symbolising the decadence of the ‘old order’, and the social mores that, at the start of the dance-drama, bind the three sisters together, for all their differences of character. The allusion is emphasised by the Victorian dress of the dancers. Indeed, with its lilting theme, regular eight-bar phrasing and diatonic harmony, it is almost a parody – the most ‘waltzy’ waltz that Rubbra could write – though the B flat (bar 6 of Ex. 3.9a) adds a note of inner unrest. The rising quaver line in Piano II (bars 8–11 of Ex. 3.9a) is both typical of the genre and indicative of the busy anticipation of the dancers’ preparations. The Prostitute’s music cuts across the waltz abruptly (Ex. 3.9b). It has a brash, swaggering quality created by the held F sharp in the first three bars of the example, and the accented rising arpeggio and braying appoggiaturas in Piano II, bars 4–7. The vamping accompaniment is vulgarly emphasised by the octave grace notes in bars 1–3 and the crunching harmony. The rising, optimistic quaver line of the previous extract here becomes an extravagant semiquaver run spanning four octaves from middle C to the highest note of the piano. The Spinster’s music (Ex. 3.9c), in contrast, is very slow and quiet, and the frequent rests in the melody, always on the first beat of the bar, give it a halting quality. Rubbra has pencilled the direction ‘very dry’ onto the manuscript. The musical gestures – and, presumably, the dancer’s too – seem to be emerging with difficulty from the depths of memory of a happier youth. The Young Girl’s dance (Ex. 3.9d) returns to a lilting waltz movement, with her gracefulness and carefree character captured in the delicate contrapuntal tracery of the extract’s first three bars.
Ex. 3.9: *The Three Sisters*, Waltz

a) Theme

b) The Prostitute
As in *The Searcher*, Rubbra expresses the drama of the war scene economically and vividly in his music. Bugle calls and the tramp of marching feet depicted in the piano parts, and a drum, are perhaps obvious motifs, but are skilfully interwoven (Ex. 3.10).
One striking scene, described in the programme as ‘war hysteria’, calls for a chorus chanting war slogans in rhythmic counterpoint, set against the ominous pounding of the drum and pianos (Ex. 3.11). Again, this passage is reminiscent of the rhythmic Leitmotifs of The Searcher.
Fernau Hall, in a passage already quoted (1950a: 206) refers to Rubbra’s ‘strong feeling for construction’ that saved his work from any sense of musical discontinuity. This unitive tendency is apparent in his music for *The Three Sisters*. Ex. 3.12 shows the opening Lento passage.
This introductory section does far more than just allow the dancers and audience time to prepare for the action, as it also contains the germinal ideas for all the music of the dance-drama. From the outset, it sets up a tonal tension that will be worked out over the course of the work. The rising major thirds in bars 1 and 3 resolve firstly onto a B flat-D dyad (bar 2), and then onto a G major triad (bar 4). The B flat dyad is itself ambiguous, suggesting a B flat major triad on first hearing, though it might equally comprise a rootless G minor triad. The G major triad gradually prevails during the introduction, and becomes the key or tonal centre of much of the
ensuing music. The waltz theme (Ex. 3.9a) is in G major, as is the Young Girl’s
dance (Ex. 3.9d), whilst the Spinster’s music (Ex. 3.9c) hovers around G, with triads
sometimes major and sometimes minor. The bugle call of war (Ex. 3.10) outlines a
G major triad, and much of the marching war music is either clearly in G major,
marked by frequent perfect cadences, or, if more chromatic, has a recurring G pedal
within the tramping bass chords. G could thus be viewed as the tonal centre of the
conventional social order.

The presence of the ‘dissenting’ B flat within the waltz theme (bar 6 of Ex.
3.9a) has already been noted, and harks back to the opening B flat-D dyad. It occurs
intermittently throughout the first half of the dance-drama, usually within a G minor
triad. In the Spinster’s music, such triads are often clouded by dissonance,
reinforcing the hopelessness of her attitude. It is absent altogether from the
Prostitute’s and the Young Girl’s dance music. The former’s E minor tonality, as
relative minor of G, sits just outside of, but not counter to, societal norms; whilst the
unmarred G major of the latter is naïvely ignorant of any flaws within society.

The opening passage also introduces motifs that are to recur throughout the
sketch, acting as unifying elements (marked x, y and z in Ex. 3.12). Motif x,
comprising rising thirds, recurs exactly at the start of the Spinster’s dance (Ex. 3.9c,
bar 1 of extract). In contrast, it is exaggeratedly extended in the Prostitute’s
ostentatious dance (Ex. 3.9b, bars 4–6 of extract). Motif x also occurs in an altered
form, x’, in bars 9 and 23 of Ex. 3.12, its initial rising minor thirds giving it a more
ominous, foreboding character.

Motif y is a mournfully extended version of the pianto (‘sigh’) motif, a
falling minor second, representing lament in music since the early sixteenth century
(Monelle, 2000: 17–18, 66–73). It reappears in a slightly different guise in the
military marching music of the war scene, thus musically identifying the source of
the sorrow (Ex. 3.13a and b), whilst motif z, a snippet of the waltz theme, is not as
innocuous as at first appears. It returns within the bugle call of war (marked in Ex.
3.10), illustrating how conventional but decadent society contains the seeds of war
within it.
Ex. 3.13: *The Three Sisters*, war scene, use of motif \( y \)
a)
b)

The music of the opening Lento returns cyclically to close the drama. Although it is impossible to place the untitled surviving photos precisely within the drama, Fig. 3.4 almost certainly shows a shot from the closing scene, as the Young Girl has her moment of revelation and rejects war and all that it stands for. Facing the audience, she spreads her arms in a gesture of openness and hope for the future. The scene has a spiritual dimension: Goffin’s lighting captures the girl’s serene face and white dress, emphasising her purity and the cruciform shape of her body, with its resonances of sacrificial redemption. The other women remain trapped in the shadows. The Prostitute lounges with a cynical air of boredom, whilst the Spinster sits helplessly, locked into her inertia. The *New Statesman*’s reviewer described her
‘tapping of fingers on the table, counting the years gone and hopes defeated’
(cuttings book, 1934, DHTA, T/AD/2/A/29).

Fig. 3.4: Margaret Barr, Paula Morel and Teda da Moor in The Three Sisters,
closing scene, Dartington School of Dance Mime Summer Production, 1934
(Stuart Black, DHTA, TPH/03/010/004)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. A preview version of the image
can be found at
&id=TPH%2f03%2f010%2f004

The Young Girl has undergone a transformation of character, rejecting the
superficial societal norms that she had once innocently embraced in dancing the
waltz. The music of the opening Lento is similarly transformed (Ex. 3.14).
The motifs of mourning and foreboding, \( y \) and \( x' \) are clearly recognisable in the closing passage, but whereas G major gained precedence in the opening *Lento*, in this coda passage, B flat, the note of dissent, prevails. It provides a tonal anchor throughout the section as an inner pedal note and the note on which the work ends. However, the harmony hammered out forcefully at the start of the passage is not the serene major third of the opening passage (bar 2 of Ex. 3.12), but a minor triad that sounds particularly sombre in juxtaposition with the G major end of the preceding
military music. As war slogans are voiced and the Young Girl cries out against them, the harmony relaxes onto an open B flat-F dyad, before fading away on the reiterated B flat. Given Rubbra’s view, cited in Chapter 2, of the fifth as both ‘the most positive’ and ‘the most mysterious’ interval that ‘the listener … is free to fill’, the ending of this piece poses a musical and dramatic question to the audience: will they hold to the ‘old order’, or will they follow the ‘new thought and new state’ that Margaret Barr foresaw and hoped for?

It is not clear to what extent Rubbra and Goffin shared Barr’s political ideals. Certainly Rubbra was sympathetic to the anti-war theme of this dance-drama, having collaborated only a few years earlier with playwright Velona Pilcher on her pacifist play The Searcher. In 1938, he was also to participate in Alan Bush’s left-wing pageant Music and the People. Tellingly, though, the section of Bush’s pageant with which Rubbra was involved, Episode 2, had a semi-religious theme, drawing parallels between Herod’s biblical massacre of the innocents and the recent killing of innocent civilians in Guernica (Bailey, 2013: 93n73). Whatever their personal views, tensions developed between Barr, Rubbra and Goffin after their move to London. Peter Goffin wrote to her in March 1936 on behalf of both himself and Rubbra. They regretted that Barr’s political ideals seemed to be taking precedence over artistic goals, and were disillusioned by a recent lack of true collaboration within the group (letter, 15 March 1936, DHTA, T/AD/2/A/22).

3.3 Prism, Op. 48

Rubbra and Goffin decided to leave the dance-drama group, but they had not lost their interest in dance, nor in the ideals of artistic unity. They began work on a ballet of their own, stating that ‘no element in the composition of this work is considered more important than another. Movement, music, costume design and décor are combined to express the idea’ (Hall, 1950b: 27). The result was Prism, a ballet based on the idea of ‘a personification of the seven prismatic colours and their eventual unification in white light’ (Rubbra to Dawney, 1971: 9). The scenario, written by Goffin, is summarised in Fig. 3.5, and appears in full in Appendix B (typescript, 1938, AY).
Fig. 3.5: Dramatic and musical structure of *Prism*, Op. 48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene I</th>
<th>Musical structure</th>
<th>Dramatic structure</th>
<th>Dance action and stage directions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prologo</td>
<td><strong>First Plane: Origin</strong></td>
<td>Dark figures attracted towards a spinning white light</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>Prism descends (at end of section)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduzione</td>
<td><strong>Second Plane: Polarisation</strong></td>
<td>Primary colours dance together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fugà doppio</td>
<td>Dance of Male and Female Forms</td>
<td>Red, blue and yellow forms, male and female, gradually divide into male-female groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance of Seeking</td>
<td>Now separate in male and female groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance of Affinity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

| Scene II |  |
| 3. Interludio 1<sup>st</sup> | Prologue to Secondary Images | Green form begins to move from centre of blue circle |  |
| 4. Aria Pastorale Variata | Dance of Green Form |  |  |
| 5. Var. I Rondino | Dance of Green and Orange | Secondary colours dance together |  |
| 6. Var. II in Valse | Dance of Green and Violet |  |  |
| 7. Var. III Moto Perpetuo | Dance of Triad |  |  |
| 8. Passepiede | Dance of Composite Forms |  |  |

| Scene III |  |
| 9. Interludio 2<sup>nd</sup> |  | Composes forms mount rostrum and become invisible as they pass into the darkness beyond the hollow circle |  |
| 10. Sarabande | **Third Plane: Fusion** | Dance of White Form |  |
| 11. Movimento Retrospettivo | Dance of Potentiality | Colours dance around White Form: |  |
| |  | Three primary male images |  |
| |  | Three primary female images |  |
| |  | Secondary female image: green |  |
| |  | Secondary male images: violet then orange |  |
| |  | Two composite forms |  |
| 12. a) Canto fermo | 1. Repulsion | Groups disintegrate and briefly recapitulate |  |
| b) Sarabande | 2. Attraction | White Form dominates to the end |  |

Dark figures initially grope their way towards a spinning white light, until all are attracted into its orbit and become white. A prism descends, and the white figures leap through it in turn. As they do so, each takes on one of the colours of dispersed light – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Dances follow for the primary and secondary colours in various combinations, culminating in a Dance of
Composite Forms. Then a white female figure appears, by which the colours are gradually attracted and subdued. In Goffin’s words: ‘the White Form is the focal point of light, completely detached. Its joyous, recurring movement and sound, against the almost “shuffling” sound of the other forms, goes on as the curtain slowly falls’ (Scenario: 9).

Although the subject matter ostensibly relates to the physical properties of light – allowing Goffin to show off his skill as a lighting specialist – the action could also be seen as a metaphor for the evolution of consciousness, leading to the eventual union of the physical and intellectual realms within a higher spiritual plane. This was an area of especial interest to artists and the intelligentsia during the 1920s and 30s. In the wake of World War I, the teachings of Georgei Gurdjieff (1866–1949) and his disciple Pyotr Ouspensky (1878–1947), in particular, led to an ‘interest in the relationship between spirituality and consciousness [that] created a revitalized climate of esoteric inquiry’ in Britain, replacing the widespread enthusiasm for the occult that had marked the *fin-de-siècle* period (Owen, 2004: 231). Rubbra’s 1920s involvement in Theosophy and related ideas was examined in Chapter 2, and there is evidence that both he and Goffin were curious about this ‘new kind of spiritualized psychology’ (Owen, 2004: 231). As mentioned previously, Rubbra read Ouspensky’s *Tertium Organum*, first published in English in 1920, whilst still a student, and later both he and Goffin read *A New Model of the Universe*, first published in English in 1931. Ouspensky had reservations about taking an exclusively evolutionary stance to the development of consciousness, holding that all four of the forms of consciousness that he identified exist simultaneously in the present and should therefore be viewed as a unity (1920: 333). However, as Fig. 3.6 demonstrates, the four forms can certainly be read as a developmental succession, and bear a strong resemblance to the three ‘planes’ of Goffin’s scenario for *Prism*, with the first and second forms of consciousness apparently elided into the second plane, and the White Form representing a person who has achieved the fourth form of consciousness, if not full cosmic consciousness.

16 The date of Gurdjieff’s birth is disputed, but he himself claimed to have been born in 1866, a date that can be corroborated from other sources.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of actions</th>
<th>Forms of consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd form</strong></td>
<td>The consciousness of actions performed for a definite purpose. The possibility of a consciousness of results. The cause of actions in the outer world in impressions received from the outer world. The impossibility of independent actions without impulses coming from the outside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th form</strong></td>
<td>The certain consciousness of the results of action, and one’s participation in them. The inevitable consciousness of the moral meaning of one's actions. The starting of actions with the understanding of their cosmoical meaning and purposes. Intuitive actions. The commencement of independent actions proceeding from oneself. MAGIC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another very influential book during the 1930s, which both Rubbra and Goffin read, was *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, an esoteric Taoist text whose oral tradition can be traced back to the eighth century. Richard Wilhelm’s German translation (1929) was in turn translated into English and published in 1931 with a ‘European Commentary’ by Carl Jung. Jung’s commentary relates the teaching of the Chinese text to his own practice of analytical psychology in an ‘effort to build a bridge of psychological understanding between East and West’ (Jung, in *Secret of the Golden Flower*, 1931: 136), and so the work as a whole provides another example of the vogue for ‘spiritualized psychology’ (Owen, 2004: 231). The English translator, Cary F. Baynes, provides a summary of the Chinese concepts on which the idea of the ‘Golden Flower’, or Immortal ‘Body’ is based. It starts:

*Tao* the undivided, Great One, gives rise to two opposite reality principles, Darkness and Light, *yin* and *yang*. These are at first thought of only as forces of nature apart from man. Later, the sexual polarities and others as well, are derived from them (Baynes, in *Secret of the Golden Flower*, 1931: 73).

Again, there is a very clear link between this passage and the setting of the first scene of *Prism*, which is emphasised by the black and white costumes of the dancers described by Goffin, recalling the traditional yin yang symbol (Fig. 3.7).

**Fig. 3.7: The yin yang symbol as it appears in a book on Jungian psychology in 1942 (reproduced in Purce, 1974: 118)**

Other aspects of the visual design are influenced by esoteric symbols. Three geometric shapes feature in the stage designs for the Second Plane (see Appendix B, scenario pp. 4 and 7): a red square, a blue circle and a yellow triangle. When first revealed on stage, the shapes are separate, and are filled by dancers in different postures, creating a tableau characterising the esoteric connotations of both the
shapes and their colours: red in ‘physical’ posture, blue in ‘spiritual’ and yellow in ‘mental’. During the final part of the Dance of Composite Forms, the three shapes are united into a ‘composite shape’, the yellow triangle containing the red square, in which is a blue circle with a white central space. At the start of Scene III, the White Form dances out from this white space. In his books, Ouspensky also uses such diagrammatic geometrical combinations to illustrate esoteric ideas.

The number seven is important. As well as representing the seven colours of dispersed light, seven has special esoteric significance. Many occult traditions view it as the most sacred number, containing ‘the principle of life itself’ (Welsh, 1986: 65). The sides of the triangle and square, used in the stage design, add up to seven. Symbolic sevens are also used musically. There are, for example, seven appearances of the passacaglia theme with which Scene II culminates in the Dance of Composite Forms, carefully numbered by Rubbra in the draft manuscript (BR). More subtly, Rubbra utilises the fact that there are seven individual pitch classes within the span of a tritone (Ex. 3.15). The analysis, below, of excerpts of the ballet will show that Rubbra uses the tritone extensively within the opening two sections.

Ex. 3.15: Seven pitch classes within the tritone

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that Prism, viewed as a total, unified art work, presents a multimodal metaphor, with aspects of stage design and music both adding to the perceived meaning. On closer analysis it becomes apparent that the movements of the dancers also contribute to an understanding of the whole. The metaphor thus draws on three sensory domains: visual, aural and kinaesthetic. Fernau Hall commented perceptively that the ballet audience responds ‘not to music plus dancing, but to kinaesthetic images combining seen movement and heard music into a single four-dimensional pattern’ (1950a: 199). This notion that the audience uses signs received via different communicative media to create a deeper, synthesised meaning has similarities with the theories of cross-domain mapping and

17 Draft MS held in the private collection of Benedict Rubbra. Manuscript scores in versions for two pianos (complete), for full orchestra and for small ensemble (both incomplete) are available in the British Library, GB-Lbl Add MSs 52590, 64117 and 64118.
conceptual blending introduced from the field of cognitive psychology into music theory by Lawrence M. Zbikowski (2002). In the following more detailed analyses of two extracts from Scene I of *Prism*, I adapt Zbikowski’s use of a Conceptual Integration Network (CIN) to study conceptual blends (2002: 77–95). I use the generic space to contain the title of the scene from the ballet, that is, information that will be available to an audience at the outset from a programme or synopsis of the ballet. As they watch and listen, however, they will become aware of visual aspects of the stage design, kinaesthetic aspects of the dancers’ movements (there must, surely, be some vicarious experiencing of these by the spectator), and aural aspects of the music, and they will, providing they have the requisite knowledge, recognise aspects of esoteric symbolism. All of these elements are, therefore, included as input spaces. The whole is then synthesised in the blended, or interpretative, space, leading to a deeper emergent understanding of the work.
Fig. 3.8: CIN of Prism, Scene 1. Prologo: Origin

**Design (visual) space**
- Darkness v. circle of intense light
- Spinning, pulsing white cone
- Black v white (costumes)
- 14 ‘forms’ = 7 male + 7 female
- Mass of dancers appears black
- Individuals reveal flashes of white as drawn to light
- Whole group becomes white
- Prism descends

**Dance (kinaesthetic) space**
- Dancers are ‘forms’, move as a mass
- Contrast in movements: angular/mechanical v. undulating/curving (male/female)
- Single forms break away into the vortex of light and back – attraction/repulsion
- Movements begin slow and become faster
- Stillness

**Esoteric symbolism**
- Yin and yang opposites:
  - Dark/light
  - Black/white
  - Female/male
- Light/white = consciousness

**Music (aural) space**
- C major opening contrasts with E flat minor passage that follows
- Repeated pulsing rhythm
- Angular v smooth and undulating melodic contours
- Prominence of tritone (interval spans 7 pitch classes)
- Bitonal passage in E flat minor/A minor creates octatonic collection
- Metrical complexity
- Slow tempo increases throughout passage
- Reaches climax with sound of tam-tam, then silence

**Blended/interpretative space**
- Potential consciousness / consciousness in a latent state
- Instinctive attraction towards light
- Humanity as a mass stands at threshold of an evolutionary step forwards
Fig. 3.8 presents a CIN for the opening section of the ballet, ‘Origin’. The bold C major opening of the ballet symbolises white (it is a ‘white note’ key) and light, but the curtain-raising call to attention is interrupted by a jarring augmented fourth interval (Ex. 3.16). The angular melody suggests the movements of the male dancers, although they are not yet visible. The music thus represents the yang polarity of the Tao, being white, light and masculine.

Ex. 3.16: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 1–3

In Ex. 3.17 (bars 4–8), the rhythmic motif on middle C represents the spinning and pulsing of the inverted cone of light, against which undulating, more chromatic and metrically complex lines, dissonant with the C, suggest the smooth movements of the female dancers, and the surrounding darkness.
This passage gives way to an extended repeat of the opening theme, in E flat minor, as the black forms of the dancers become visible. They are still outside of the orbit of (C major) light: E flat minor is the diametrically opposed key to C major in the circle of fifths arrangement, its relative major, G flat, being a tritone away from C. A first hint of the ostinato theme of the passacaglia that is to be the culmination of Scene II, the Dance of Composite Forms, emerges in bar 16, suggesting ‘latent consciousness’ (Ex. 3.18).
The mysterious accompanying diminished seventh chord is here used in an E flat minor context, but, as tension mounts, it becomes the basis of a bitonal passage (Ex. 3.19).

Ex. 3.19: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Origin, bars 21–31 (score reduced to three contrapuntal lines)
The opening idea, now in A minor (relative minor of the original C major), is set against a contrapuntal accompaniment in E flat minor. The two keys, a tritone apart, parallel the disturbing augmented fourth within the melody. Beneath this, the bass line (bar 26) unites the two keys, outlining the diminished seventh chord common to both. Taken as a whole, the set of pitch-classes used in this passage forms an octatonic collection, which can be represented as a non-hierarchical scale comprising alternating tones and semitones (Ex. 3.20).

Ex. 3.20: Octatonic collection II

It may be no coincidence that, years later, Rubbra explained his theoretical view of bi- and polytonality in language that has a particular resonance with this work:

…these terms are totally misleading. On paper there may be two or more conflicting keys, but the moment they are placed together in a complete texture distinction of key is obliterated, and in its place is a totality of new sounds, which must be accepted in their entirety. When yellow and blue are mixed to produce green the basic colours no longer exist visually (1960:42).

In this scene from *Prism*, Rubbra’s use of the octatonic collection is a powerful way to depict, in musical terms, the lack of individuality of the dancing forms as they grope their way instinctively into the orbit of light, as well as the essential unity of the various yin yang opposites within the scene. The passage reaches a climax as the shimmering sound of the tam-tam (in the incomplete orchestral and chamber versions) announces the descent of the prism.

There is some evidence of Rubbra using Golden Section (GS) proportions to structure the opening ‘Origin’ section. GS is a way of dividing a fixed length in two so that the ratio of the shorter portion to the longer portion equals the ratio of the longer portion to the whole. It is familiar in many esoteric traditions through the image of the pentagram, a five-pointed star drawn with five straight lines which

'divide one another uniquely by GS’ (Howat, 1983: 169). The symbolic shapes used within Goffin’s stage design might well have turned Rubbra’s thoughts to such ‘sacred geometry’. The tam-tam stroke/descent of the prism at the end of ‘Origin’ occurs in bar 38, i.e. after thirty-seven bars of music have elapsed. GS proportions of thirty-seven are 14:23. The passage based on a diminished seventh chord (Ex. 3.18), leading to the bitonal passage, begins at bar 15, i.e. after fourteen bars of music have elapsed. In his study of GS proportions in Debussy’s music (1983), Roy Howat has noted that division at the point of secondary GS (short portion before long) is associated with regeneration or growth. Such division is clearly most appropriate to the evolutionary context of this passage.

The new section, ‘Diffusion’, depicts the dispersion of light through the prism, separating it into the seven colours of the visible spectrum. Fig. 3.9 shows Goffin’s striking pictorial representation of this moment, the dark forms of the dancers spectacularly taking on colour as they leap through the hollow prism.

Fig. 3.9: Prism, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion. Peter Goffin’s pictorial representation of the dancers leaping through the prism (reproduced in Hall, 1950b: 27)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

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19 Derived by the calculation 37 x 0.618 = 22.866, rounded to the nearest whole number.
Fig. 3.10: CIN of Prism, Scene 1, Prologo: Diffusion

**Generic Space**
- Diffusion [dispersion] (of light)

**Design (visual) space**
- Prism takes on bluish light
- White forms take on individual colour as they leap through prism
- 7 colours of visible spectrum
- 7 circles of coloured light

**Dance (kinaesthetic) space**
- Stillness disturbed – straining towards prism
- Twofold movement – angular/mechanical v. undulating/curving
- Forms leap through prism, in ones and small groups
- Forms spin and leap rapidly – lively, effervescent, but chaotic

**Esoteric symbolism**
- Bluish light denotes glimmerings of spirituality
- 7 = the most sacred number – ‘contains the principle of life itself’ and is symbolic of the unity of spirit and matter

**Music (aural) space**
- Angular contour of ostinato set in counterpoint against undulating melody
- Jerky ostinato rhythm set against more regular compound, bounding rhythm
- Spiky pizzicato string timbre set against mellow, legato clarinet melody
- Melodic descent through seven perfect fifths, scanning a tritone
- Metrical and rhythmic complexity

**Blended/interpretative space**
- Simple consciousness
- Beginnings of awareness of own individuality, but still little awareness of others
- No sense of social order
Fig. 3.10 presents a CIN for this section of the ballet. Again, music plays a large part in building the interpretation. The section begins with a spiky ostinato scored for pizzicato strings in the orchestral version, its angular contour reflecting the movements of the male dancers (Ex. 3.21).

**Ex. 3.21: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion, bars 39–42**

Against this, a springing legato melody unwinds, to be played by the mellow toned clarinet in the orchestral version. Constructed from a series of perfect fifths descending through a tritone, it banishes the octatonic collection of the previous section by using all twelve pitch-classes of the chromatic scale (Ex. 3.22). Rubbra combines both masculine and feminine attributes in this melody, disjunct and conjunct movement alternating, but its lilting rhythm, smooth articulation and warm timbre contrast strongly with the masculine ostinato, giving it, overall, a feminine edge.
Ex. 3.22: *Prism*, Scene I, Prologo: Diffusion, melody based on fifths

**DIFFUSION**

*Allegretto*

![Musical notation]

As the dancers leap through the prism, visually they take on colour, whilst the music embraces chromaticism. Both visual and musical media now have potential for differentiation, just as the birth of human consciousness opens the way for individuality and growth. This potential is worked out in the remainder of Scene I and in Scene II. The green female form is present throughout much of Scene II. Her representation is complex. Visually, the secondary colour green is formed by mixing yellow and blue – esoterically, the intellectual and the spiritual. Musically, Rubbra picks up on the association of green with nature, and gives her an ‘Aria Pastorale’ to which to dance, marked in the draft manuscript to be played by the oboe, with its bucolic connotations (Ex. 3.23).
She thus becomes the Earth Mother, a symbol, for Peter Goffin, of ‘peaceful, stable and productive’ cultures, in which ‘the female principle was … the pivot’ (Goffin, 1946: 65). As she dances in turn with the other secondary colours, orange and purple, and then both together, her initial music is varied, evoking other dance forms typical of civilised society (a rondino that gives more than a passing nod to the Baroque bourrée, and a waltz), and a perpetuo mobile, depicting the incessant forward movement of evolution. The moment when the Green Form first dances with another colour marks another stage of evolutionary development, and occurs at bar 313, only two bars from the point of secondary GS of the whole ballet (823 bars in total, dividing by GS 314:509). Scene II culminates in the ‘Dance of Composite Forms’, a majestic passacaglia, heralded by a portentous cymbal crash. The Composite Forms, whose costumes comprise all three primary colours, represent those who have attained a perfect balance of physical, intellectual and spiritual attributes. They correspond to the third form of consciousness in Ouspensky’s table (Fig. 3.6): the moment when further evolution can be conscious only. This important evolutionary achievement begins at bar 513, missing the primary GS point of the whole ballet by only three bars. The passacaglia theme, already foreshadowed in the opening scene of the ballet (Ex. 3.18) and stated once, quietly, in the Interludio

Ex. 3.23: *Prism*, Scene II, ‘Dance of Green Form’, opening
at the start of Scene II, now sounds fortissimo out of the darkness (Ex. 3.24), seven times.

**Ex. 3.24: Prism, Scene II, passacaglia theme**

Scene III, ‘Third Plane: Fusion’, introduces the White Form, one who has attained Ouspensky’s Fourth Form of consciousness, in an elegant Sarabande (Ex. 3.25) that contrasts strongly with the more chaotic music of the ‘Prologo’ and the vigour of the intervening dances.

**Ex. 3.25: Prism, Scene III, Sarabande, opening phrase**

Rubbra’s draft manuscript gives some indication of his planned orchestration: flute solo for the melody, floating over pizzicato strings and an arpeggiated harp chord on the second beat of each bar, creating a pure and other-worldly sound. The sarabande is a particularly apt choice of dance at this point in the ballet. Its own a transformed dance, metamorphosing from an often lewd, fast dance in the sixteenth century into a slow, solemn and stylised movement of the Baroque suite, it underwent a further
transfiguration in the early twentieth century. The Sarabande from Debussy’s suite *Pour le Piano*, with its ‘evocation of the mystical’ (Barber, 2013: 247) would surely have been familiar to Rubbra, as would Vaughan Williams’ ‘Saraband of the Sons of God’ from Scene I of *Job, A Masque for Dancing* (1930). In *Prism*, its ‘swaying, ritual motion’ (Barber, 2013: 242) captures ideally the ‘slow, simple movements’ and ‘gradual awakening’ of the White Form (Goffin, scenario: 8).

Earlier musical themes are recapitulated as the primary and secondary colours gather around the White Form. The final stage direction simply announces: ‘White Form dominates to the end’. Musically, the sarabande melody is ever present in the final section of the work. As the curtain falls, the twelve chromatic notes, representing the colours, who have not yet achieved the fourth form of consciousness, are subsumed into the accompaniment. Ascent to a higher plane is signified by the overall mediant-related move from the C major that opened the ‘Prologo’ to A minor, giving way finally to a rarefied major with the closing *tierce de Picardie* chord. Yet although the tonic is the last note to sound, the chord remains suspended in first inversion (Ex. 3.26). The sense of unity is fragile, and evolution is a continuing process.

Ex. 3.26: *Prism*, Scene III, closing bars

One further inspiration for, and influence on, *Prism* deserves a mention at this point. After the failure of *The Searcher* in 1930, playwright Velona Pilcher withdrew from theatrical life for many years, retreating to the Cornish and Sussex countryside. She became associated with Maurice Nicoll, a doctor who had worked with both Jung and Gurdjieff, and devoted herself to a study of Gurdjieff’s spiritual system, known as the Work. In 1931, she began a new play, *A Play of Light*, of
which the prologue and first scene were published in a short-lived artistic and literary journal, *The Island*, in September and December of that year. The rest of the play was completed much later, shortly before Pilcher’s death in 1952, and remains unpublished. In Pilcher’s words, ‘This play is written as a vision. It is not meant to be an imaginary experience, but an experience of imagination …’ (cited in Sprigge, n.d.: 223). A passage from the prologue bears a strong resemblance to the opening of *Prism*, and also shows that Pilcher, like Goffin and Rubbra with their ballet, was envisioning the play in its totality: speech, visual aspects, music and sound effects – and in almost synaesthetic terms:

Out of the black bed of the stage a body of solid light had risen; speech had taken shape. A column of crystal had been radiantly erected; movement had materialised, thought had formed. Out of the background—like something set there from eternity, waiting for the ray that should reveal it—a pillar of fire, a prism of crystal, had grown. Like an image, like an idol, like a godhead, he stood burning up the blackness, dividing the darkness from the darkness. A flaming phallus. An incandescent obelisk. A lodestone of light.

And the Law says let there be life,

let this play have life.

But where? … There was a blaze of blinding colour, and from the flanks of the prism—the red ray opening the action—sprang the seven shades of the sun; there was a shock of sound and from some unseen orchestra as many mighty chords of music—plucked from the base of that pulsing string still beating within the walls its breathing had embodied—went striding up their scale. And then—as chords and colours hovered, as if in anguish, over the edge of their octave together,—there came a stroke like lightning and the red ray broke in two. That bright-red star, that blood-red ray, split with a shriek into division and eight loud beams of colour began dancing down the dark. Like some eight-pointed star in the throes of her creation, all the rays were throbbing, throbbing, throbbing in vibration, throbbing in radiation; waves of light and waves of sound—theatre’s primeval elements—were rolling over the shores of reason, storming the proscenium between the common senses … (Pilcher, 1931a: 92–93).
Pilcher’s play ends with a vision of an incandescent crystal city, and a dancing Angel of the Imagination who awakens ‘the sleepers, the dreamers, the dead and the very stones’ (Sprigge, n.d.: 226). There is evidence that, after their collaboration on *The Searcher*, Pilcher remained in contact with Rubbra for the remainder of her life – a letter from her to Rubbra can be dated to January 1949 (*RA*, Box 22, temporary shelfmark). It is very likely, given the closeness of the imagery in the two works, that there was some cross-fertilisation of ideas between Pilcher’s *A Play of Light* and Rubbra’s and Goffin’s *Prism*.†

This chapter has demonstrated how Rubbra’s experimental work with dance in the 1930s grew out of his early interest in Theosophy and other esoteric movements, and teachers influenced by Eastern thought, as described in Chapter 2. Subsequent chapters will explore further some of the spiritual themes that have begun to emerge in Rubbra’s work, starting, in Chapter 4, with a look at some of the longer-term influences of the East on his beliefs and music.

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† The music for *Prism* was completed in November 1938, but the ballet has never been performed. The British Library catalogues the manuscript score as one of three ballets commissioned by Harold Rubin for performance by the Arts Theatre Ballet, 1938–1941, but that is unlikely to be correct. Correspondence shows that Rubbra offered it to Ninette de Valois at the Sadler’s Wells Ballet at the time of completion, but had to write again to retrieve his score in February 1940, as he wanted to pass it to the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith (correspondence in *SWTA*, S/SWT/2/4/1/7 and S/SWT/2/4/1/14). By this time, though, the effect of the war on London performances made the possibility of mounting a new production increasingly remote.
**4. Looking East**

Rubbra’s lifelong fascination with Eastern music, philosophy and religion began in his teens. He himself traced its roots to his early familiarity with Amy Woodforde-Finden’s *Indian Love Lyrics*, his brief friendship with a Chinese Christian missionary, Kuanglin Pao, and his chance discovery of Blavatsky’s theosophical book *Isis Unveiled* (Grover, 1993: 6–7). This list of influences, in which an easternised Western woman rubs shoulders with a westernised Eastern man, and Eastern music is represented by a set of exotically Oriental parlour songs created by a female composer for a Western audience, indicates from the outset something of the complexity of Rubbra’s relationship with the East. For many years his understanding of Eastern religion was largely acquired through, and coloured by, his involvement with Theosophy, as discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, Blavatsky’s later writings, and the tenets of the Theosophical Society by the early twentieth century, have been described as ‘esoteric buddhism’ (Godwin, 1994: 307). This present chapter will demonstrate that Rubbra’s interest in Eastern thought continued to flourish throughout his life, even alongside his later Catholic faith.

Rubbra later disparaged Woodforde-Finden’s ‘outpourings’ as containing ‘musical distortions’ (Rubbra, 1958c: 3). More recent commentators have reassessed her songs, finding them to contain genuine elements of Indian music, whilst noting also their sensuality and ambiguous sexual overtones (Ghuman, 2014: 168–216; Fuller, 2007). Rubbra, however, considered that, in the absence of radio or recordings of actual Indian music, he was fortunate that the foundations of his enthusiasm for Eastern music were reinforced by ‘the stronger influences of Holst’s *Rig Veda Hymns* – a work that shows real understanding of Eastern modes and metres – and Cyril Scott’s music, which does convey something of the immediacy of improvisatory methods’ (Rubbra, 1958c: 3). Yet Scott’s music, too, was not without its exotisms. Nalini Ghuman has pointed out the similarity of melodic contour between the languid openings of Woodforde-Finden’s ‘Kashmiri Song’ and Scott’s ‘Lotusland’ for piano (Ghuman, 2014: 172–73). Rubbra was undoubtedly attracted to the sensuous aspects of harmony and timbre in Scott’s music, which he once described as an ‘almost physical lusciousness’ akin to ‘touching a ripe peach’, as well as its freedom of rhythm and form (Rubbra, 1934c). He said that it ‘opened up


a vast new territory of sound’ for him (Rubbra, BBC Radio 3, 1979). When he began his lessons with the composer, Scott’s house, too, made an immediate and lasting impact on the impressionable teenager brought up in a poor working-class home in Northampton. He later recalled the ‘expression of mysterious otherness’ conjured up by the décor, with stained glass windows, heavy Gothic furniture, a faint smell of incense and displayed quotations from Indian religious writings (Meadmore, 1949: 1–2; Rubbra, BBC Radio 3, 1969). It seems, then, that there was an inherent tension, right from the start, in Rubbra’s attraction to the East as both a source of the sensuously exotic and an intellectual ideal. This opposition, and others that will emerge from the study, will be explored further in this chapter.

4.1 Early contact with Eastern music

Rubbra’s first known contacts with actual Eastern music came through his theatrical work in the first decade or so of his career. His arrangements of Indian music for the dancer Menaka, completed in 1929, were discussed in Chapter 3. Earlier in the same year, he had his first documented encounter with Japanese music, when the Arts League of Service Travelling Players mounted a production of Ezra Pound’s translation of the Noh play *Hagoromo* (*The Feather Mantle*). The play tells the story of a fisherman, who, walking one night, finds the magical mantle of a *tennin*, an aerial spirit or celestial dancer. He intends to keep the mantle, but the spirit pleads with him to return it, as without it she cannot return to her heavenly home. He eventually agrees to do so, providing she will show him her dance. The *tennin* performs for him a dance that is symbolic of the changing phases of the moon, at the end of which she disappears, melting from sight as a mountain is hidden by the mist. As she dances, ‘there is a magic song from the east, the voices of many and many: and flute and sho, filling the space beyond the cloud’s edge, seven-stringed; dance filling and filling’ (Pound, 1916: 174). In his synopsis of the play, Pound commented that ‘the play shows the relation of the early Noh to the God-dance’ (1916: 19).

Rubbra worked from two recordings of Japanese sacred music to compose original incidental music for the play. Eleanor Elder later recalled that ‘he had … caused a domestic upheaval [sic] by playing the records for a whole week-end, after
which, having saturated his mind with Eastern modes and rhythms, he had composed something on the same lines’ (Elder, 1939: 165). The resulting music was resourcefully designed to be played by actors, using simple instruments that the company already had to hand: an Indian drum and cymbals, a triangle, a cowbell, a wooden pipe with four notes, an ocarina and a xylophone. Although dubbed ‘a strange symphony’ and ‘an oddly suggestive accompaniment’, Rubbra’s music was praised in early press reports for adding to the atmosphere of the play, which was ‘unmarred by one materialistic note’ (North of England Daily Gazette and Manchester Guardian, April–May 1929, both cited in Elder, 1939: 165–66).

Following his collaboration with Menaka, Rubbra continued to work as a rehearsal pianist for several years with her English mentor, the young male ballet dancer Algeranoff. Algeranoff had visited Japan with Anna Pavlova’s company in 1922, where he took lessons from Matsumoto Koshiro VII, a master of Japanese dancing (Algeranoff, 1957: 70). On his return to England, he frequently included Japanese dances in his programmes, initially with Pavlova’s company, and subsequently as a solo artist. Algeranoff always collected records of local music on his travels, and undoubtedly brought Japanese music home with him.

‘Fukagawa’

Rubbra’s short piano piece ‘Fukagawa’, subtitled ‘a Japanese tune arranged for piano’, and published privately in 1932, must have been written at about this time. It is not known how Rubbra came across the tune, or why he made the arrangement: possibly it was a spin-off from his work on Hagoromo, or it might have been intended as a dance for Algeranoff. Rubbra does seem to have thought of it as a dance, for in December 1936 he included it within a broadcast programme of folk dances arranged for piano. The original Japanese piece is not a dance, however, but a ha-uta – a kind of short song with shamisen accompaniment sung by geisha girls to entertain customers and audiences. The title itself, ‘Fukagawa’, refers to one of the pleasure quarters of Edo, the old city of Tokyo. Many of these songs thus originate from the hedonistic urban culture known as the ukiyo, or ‘Floating World’, which
flourished in Japan in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. One commonly-sung version of the text of the song is shown in Fig. 4.1.¹

**Fig. 4.1: Text of ‘Fukagawa’, with translation by David W. Hughes**

1) 4  ichi de yuku no wa Fukagawa-kayoi / wataru sanshō no arewai sanosa isoiso to
A river taxi goes to Fukagawa; then people cross the pier in a hurry!

2) 4  yoku no kokoro wa uwa no sora / tsude yuitai arewai sanosa nushi no sōba
A customer’s heart is like the sky above; I want to fly there and be next to my man.

3) 4  bosama futari de yoshihō-gaye / agari ochaya wa arewai sanosa isoiso to
Two Buddhist priests heading for yoshihō [another geisha district] are hurrying along to the teahouse

4) 4  tonari-zashiki o nagamureba / sashitsu osaetsu arewai sanosa kitsuneken
If you look into the next room, you’ll see them pointing and pressing, playing kitsune-ken [a hand-game]

   In the art of the *ukiyo*, as anthropologist Liza Crihfield puts it, the older ‘notion of the “impermanence of all things” in the Buddhist sense, underwent a subtle change to the idea of the “transience of pleasure”’ (Crihfield, 1979: 34). In view of the lack of traceable evidence concerning the circumstances of Rubbra’s arrangement, it is impossible to ascertain his awareness of the Japanese song’s background, but certain aspects of the piano piece might suggest that Rubbra had the concept of transience in mind. Nor is it possible to judge his understanding of Japanese musical theory, beyond his immersion in the recordings whilst composing the incidental music for *Hagoromo*, though, as with his approach to Menaka’s Indian dances, his arrangement suggests that he recognised certain innate qualities of the melody. Rubbra’s arrangement is simple. The original melody (Ex. 4.1) is presented twice, without alteration and with no framing material.

¹ I am grateful to David W. Hughes for his help in identifying the song and its genre (personal email, 19 January 2016).
The melody is constructed from a hybrid hexatonic mode closely related to the
miyako-bushi, or ‘urban/Capital melody’ scale type described by Japanese theorist
Fumio Koizumi. Its pentatonic core (boxed in Ex. 4.2) corresponds exactly to the
miyako-bushi scale, with its two matching tetrachords\(^2\) indicated by brackets.

Ex. 4.2: Mode from which ‘Fukagawa’ is constructed

The additional pitch, D, is included as a lower auxiliary to the lower E, and is also
sometimes used, melodically, to form a rising tetrachord (B-D-E) from a different
scale form, the yō. David W. Hughes refers to the melodies resulting from such
hybrid modes as ‘pentacentric’. For modes of this type, one or two of the pitches at
the outer extremes of the tetrachords will serve as finals (Hughes, 2008: 35–39). In
‘Fukagawa’, phrases final on either B or E, and the melody as a whole ends on B.

Rubbra’s accompanying harmony is limited almost entirely to the six pitches
of the mode. The ‘foreign’ note, G, occurs only twice: in bars 11–14, where it
appears as an acciaccatura to the chords, sounding as a percussive timbre, imitating

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\(^2\) Here I adopt the terminology used by David W. Hughes to describe a pitch collection spanning the
interval of a fourth: ‘It is usually enlightening, however, to analyse a Japanese octave species into two
disjunct three-note tetrachords of identical interval structure’ (Hughes, 2008: 35).
the dry, snapping sound of the shamisen, rather than as part of the harmony; and fleetingly, as a quaver passing note, in bar 75. Rubbra builds on the interval of a fourth, and its inversion the fifth, that the mode’s pentatonic core naturally favours. Yet the melody floats above the harmony in a curious way, not always matching the accompanying chord, and Rubbra seems to deliberately subvert a Western listener’s expectations in his choice of harmony. So, at the outset, where the melodic line of the first two or three bars might initially suggest a mode built on D to a Western listener, Rubbra chooses the Japanese finals of E and B to form the accompanying chord, the harmony only ‘coming right’ when the phrase ends on E (Ex. 4.3).

Ex. 4.3: ‘Fukagawa’, bars 1–4

As Western ears grow accustomed to the Japanese melody and its insistence on E and B, Rubbra subtly changes the harmony, until bar 15, where D, the pitch that had initially seemed central to the mode but is now recognised as peripheral, becomes the bass note. From this point onwards, a pedal D is maintained throughout most of the rest of the piece, occurring in seventy-nine of the arrangement's 104 bars. The final note of the melody, B, hangs inconclusively over the last chord (Ex. 4.4). If Rubbra knew of the Japanese song’s origins, this could be an apt representation of the ‘Floating World’ and its transient pleasures. If not, it could still represent his understanding of Eastern thought, with its emphasis on the impermanence and illusory quality of the physical world.

Ex. 4.4: ‘Fukagawa’, bars 100–104
*Ha-uta* typically have no tempo or expression marks, and the register in which the song is sung is left to the individual. Rubbra’s arrangement reflects this practice. Pianist Michael Dussek, who has performed the piece, comments that, although baffling at first sight, ‘this becomes liberating. The piece can be played in an infinite number of different ways …’ (Dussek, 2001: 5). In early 1930s England, such indeterminacy, adding an improvisatory aspect to any performance of the piece, must have seemed audaciously ‘different’, emphasising the transient nature of musical performance, and drawing another parallel with the Japanese ‘Floating World’.

Another work from the period that shows Rubbra engaging with the Eastern concept of *māyā*, or illusion, is his only opera: a one-act work originally titled *Bee-bee-bei*, Op. 36. Composed in 1933, the libretto is by Thomas Sturge Moore (1870–1944), a writer and illustrator whose ‘open house’ evenings in Chelsea Rubbra would occasionally attend during the early 1930s. Like Rubbra, Moore was involved in progressive circles, and had a number of literary Indian friends, having been instrumental in promoting Rabindranath Tagore’s writings in England in the early years of the century (Mukherjee, 2013).³ The opera’s plot (see synopsis, Fig. 4.2) has many elements of a farce, but also carries a more serious message about the nature of love and of reality. Although never performed, Rubbra had plans in later years to adapt the work as a television opera, renamed *The Reflection* (‘Responses to questions for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’, 5 May 1971, and diary entry, 20 March 1977, RA, Boxes 19 and 33, temporary shelfmark).⁴

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³ Moore was also brother-in-law of the stage designer Adolphe Appia, whose work was so influential on the Dartington Dance-Drama Group in the mid-1930s.

⁴ Grover gives the revised name as *The Shadow* (1993: 571), but the manuscript confirms *The Reflection* as the new title (*RC*, Vols. LIV, LV, Add. MSs 62640–62641).
4.2 Post-war interest

Despite his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1947, Rubbra’s enthusiasm for the East did not wane, and even seems to have been re-ignited around this time.

One stimulus for this might have been his writing of incidental music for Clifford Bax’s radio play *The Buddha*, first broadcast on 16 March 1947.⁵ The first part of Bax’s play presents ‘the outline of Prince Gautama’s external life’, whilst the second part is ‘a simplified exposition of a complex philosophy’, which Bax himself

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⁵ Under Rubbra’s supervision, the music was subsequently arranged by Adrian Crut as a suite for flute, oboe, violin, viola and cello, Op. 64.
admitted ‘cannot make easy listening’ (Bax, 1947b: 5). Rubbra’s music, capturing character and mood, must have been a help to the audience. His friend Beatrice Harthan wrote of it that ‘it has a lovely static quality which no other living composer can bring off as Edmund does’, but put her finger on a paradox that will be explored further in this chapter: ‘strange that he wrote this at the height of his ecstatic Catholic experience’ (letter to ‘Carlo’, 22 May 1960, GB-Ob, Mus. 305 d.10, item 12).

Another influence at this time was Rubbra’s deepening relationship during the 1950s with Evelyn Menges, wife of the conductor Herbert Menges. When Rubbra’s marriage to Antoinette finally broke down in 1957, he moved away from Speen and lived with Evelyn, in the village of Horton-cum-Studley, near Oxford, until August 1960. She was very interested in Eastern religions, especially Buddhism. Rubbra’s engagement diaries survive from 1958 onwards, and show that, during the late 1950s, he attended lectures by, and met socially with, Edward Conze, an eminent Buddhist scholar who lived and lectured in Oxford at the time. Rubbra owned several of Conze’s books and translations of Buddhist texts. The diaries show that he also attended talks and events at the London Buddhist Society and the London Buddhist Vihara during the years that he lived with Evelyn, and he often jotted into his diary titles of books about Buddhism that were of interest (RA, Boxes 35–36, temporary shelfmark).

Musically, two contacts were particularly important during this period. Firstly, in the 1940s, he developed a friendship with the ethnomusicologist Peter Crossley-Holland (1916–2001), who lived at nearby Whiteleaf, and studied composition with Rubbra privately. Crossley-Holland, a close friend and former student of John Ireland, spent some time in the early 1940s researching Indian Classical music at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Secondly, Rubbra became involved with Ayana Angadi’s Asian Music Circle, established in 1953 to promote Asian – especially Indian – music in Britain. Rubbra became the Oxford branch secretary of the society. Both contacts revived Rubbra’s interest in Indian music. Through the Asian Music Circle, he was able to attend performances by skilled Asian musicians such as the virtuoso Hindustani sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, whom he heard in London in May 1955. The result was a series of works

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6 Evelyn Menges changed her name to Evelyn Rubbra by deedpoll in December 1957, but the couple never married.
inspired by Indian music: the Piano Concerto in G (1956), the *Cantata Pastorale* (1957), and the *Pezzo Ostinato* for harp (1958). Looking further east, the song cycle *The Jade Mountain*, settings for voice and harp of poems from the Chinese T’ang Dynasty, followed a few years later.

Around this time, Rubbra wrote and talked in interview about the ways in which Eastern thought and music influenced his own compositions. He was wary of using what he called the ‘exteriors of music’ – timbre, mode and rhythm – to create a superficial exoticism. He found these musical elements fascinating, but distinguished them from ‘the interior view of Oriental music that has influenced me the most – the controlled improvisation on limited material that eventually builds up … into a big, satisfying structure’ (Schafer, 1963: 68). Central to this, in his view, was the melodic line. As noted in Chapter 2:

> There must be a continuity of line, not a collection of colours which startles for a time, and then vanishes, leaving the listener looking for something deeper.
> For me the relatedness of notes in a line does do something spiritually to make the nature of the unity of the universe apparent (Rubbra, 1961: 74).

**Cantata Pastorale, Op. 92**

The *Cantata Pastorale* is a work in which both colour and line are brought into balance. Written in 1956 to a commission from the recorder player Carl Dolmetsch, the three linked songs of the *Cantata Pastorale* are scored for high voice, treble recorder, cello and harpsichord. The whole work is based on a five-note scale pattern that Rubbra heard during Ali Akbar Khan’s London concert in 1955 (Ex. 4.5).

**Ex. 4.5: Five-note scale used as basis of *Cantata Pastorale*, Op. 92**

![Five-note scale](image)

The programme note for the first performance of the *Cantata* states that this pentatonic pattern ‘so impressed itself on the composer’s mind that he decided to use it as an appropriate melodic basis for the work’ (cited in Mayes, 2003: 57). It is
interesting to consider in what sense this Indian scale is ‘appropriate’ as a melodic basis for a work whose provenance, title and instrumentation suggest rather a Baroque model. The texts set provide a clue to Rubbra’s thinking. The three poems have a pastoral theme, celebrating nature and love. In the first, a translation by Walter Leaf of a poem by Plato, the poet calls on nature to fall silent as the god Pan plays on his pipes. For centuries Pan has been a recurring image in English literature and art, with a particular upsurge of interest during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Half goat, half man in appearance, he is always sensuous and sometimes earthily lustful, yet is also portrayed as the caring shepherd of Arcadian flocks. Sometimes mischievous or even demonic, he can become a Satanic figure. Conversely, he is also seen as a pastoral emblem of Christ. Within Western culture, Pan thus embodies dualities of thought and experience: ‘Paganism or Christian faith; hedonism or morality; the truth of Romance or the truth of science; civilisation or the retreat to Arcady’ (Merivale, 1969: 117). One of his most frequent manifestations is as the Universal Pan, the ‘all-infusing spirit of the landscape’, and a potent symbol of the Oneness of all things (Merivale, 1969: 76). Thomas Sturge Moore’s wood engraving of Pan as a Mountain (1896), in which the visual merging of Pan’s piping figure and the outline of the mountain symbolise divine immanence, may well have been familiar to Rubbra, having been acquainted with Moore during the 1930s (Fig. 4.3).

Fig. 4.3: Thomas Sturge Moore, Pan as a Mountain, wood engraving (British Council Collection)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. It can be viewed online at visualarts.britishcouncil.org/collection/artists/moore-thomas-sturge-1870/object/pan-as-a-mountain-moore-p2683/objects/all/initial/m/page/1
Given his interests, it would be logical for Rubbra to link this pantheistic – or, more correctly, panentheistic – image of Pan with the monism of Eastern religious thought and to express it by a direct evocation of Indian music.

Rubbra might also have had in mind the Hindu god Kṛṣṇa, celebrated alongside Pan as one of Albert Roussel’s *Joueurs de Flûte*, Op. 27 (1924). Like Pan in the West, Kṛṣṇa has a rich and many-faceted mythology within Indian culture. He is viewed as a ‘supreme being, actively and intimately involved in his creation’ (Johnson, 2009). He is also known as an eternally youthful cowherd, who, with his flute-playing, led the *gopīs*, or female cowherds, in a ‘dance of divine love’, the *Rāsa Līlā*. In this great circular dance, Kṛṣṇa ‘dances with every cowherd maiden at once, yet each one thinks she is dancing with him alone. Supreme love has now reached its perfect fulfillment [sic] and expression through joyous dancing and singing long into the night’ (Schweig, 2005: 2). Likewise, in Plato’s poem, set as the first of the three songs of the *Cantata Pastorale*, Pan’s playing leads to a circular dance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nymphs of fountain} \\
\text{Nymphs of tree} \\
\text{Foot it round him, dancing, dancing.}
\end{align*}
\]

Ex. 4.6 shows the opening bars of the *Cantata*. The first two instances of the five-note scale motif, which pervades all parts, are boxed.

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1 Rubbra had written an article on Roussel’s music in 1932 in which he discussed Roussel’s use of Hindu modes, and singled out ‘Krishna’ (Kṛṣṇa) for its irregular 7/8 metre (Rubbra, 1932a: 219–20).
Ex. 4.6: *Cantata Pastorale*, bars 1–8

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
On a first hearing, the timbre is the most immediately striking aspect of the music. The standard Baroque ensemble is used unconventionally to conjure up the sound of Indian music. The swirling figurations in the harpsichord recall the sounds of the sitar or sarod, and the muted cello tremolando provide the drone. This introductory section of the song is rhythmically flexible, but later, during the dance section of the song, the cello’s pizzicato notes take on the rhythmic role of the tabla (Black, 2008: 14). Although this is, by his own admission, the work in which Rubbra comes closest to applying the ‘exteriors’ of Eastern music, he guards against producing an ephemeral ‘collection of colours’ (Schafer, 1963: 68). The long improvisatory sweep of the treble recorder melody, with its imitations of Indian ornamentation, binds the whole together, playing without rest throughout the song. Most obviously, it represents Pan’s pipes, and, by association, Pan himself, the ‘Universal Soul of Nature’. Fiona Richards has identified the ‘supple, hovering melodies’, embellished with roulades, that are typical of Pan-inspired music of the early years of the twentieth century, and this melody clearly follows that model (Richards, 2000: 71). At first, it plays only the five notes of the scale motif, but as the voice enters and gradually introduces further pitch-classes (D flat in bar 5, E flat in bar 8, F sharp in bar 12), the recorder incorporates them into its line (Ex. 4.7). In context, it is a reminder of Rubbra’s words: ‘the relatedness of notes in a line does do something spiritually to make the nature of the unity of the universe apparent’ (Rubbra, 1961: 74).

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8 The whole opening passage is most likely to be heard by a Western listener as in an expanded, or altered, C major, with flattened Š and, later, flattened Ž and sharpened Ť. The same pitch collection also forms the basis of several Indian rāgas. A similar ambiguity of mode will be observed in the Pezzo Ostinato, composed the following year. In the Cantata Pastorale, Rubbra himself does not claim any more than that he was inspired by the opening five-note collection.
Ex. 4.7: Cantata Pastorale, bars 1–18, recorder part only

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Pezzo Ostinato for harp, Op. 102

If the Cantata Pastorale serves as a model of Rubbra’s restrained use of the ‘exterior exoticisms’ of mode and timbre, bound together by the uniting melodic line, the Pezzo Ostinato for harp, composed a year later, in 1958, illustrates his notion of ‘controlled improvisation’ in building a musical structure. In an article on Asian music, written in the same year as the Pezzo Ostinato, Rubbra expressed his admiration for ‘the sense that the best Eastern music gives of a controlled freedom of line and rhythm within rigidly defined limits’ (1958c: 3). As an example of the kind of ‘limits’ imposed on Eastern music, he referred to the restriction to a single rāg or scale within any performance. Similarly, the Pezzo Ostinato never deviates from the notes of the scale printed at the head of the score (Ex. 4.8):
Although to Western musicians this appears to be a scale of C harmonic minor, the notes also form the Hindustani Kīrvāṇi rāg. Rubbra’s avoidance of a conventional Western key signature in his notation of the score (see Ex. 4.9), together with the Indian inspiration for the piece, suggest that he may well have had the Eastern scale uppermost in his mind. The rāg was introduced into Indian classical music, and made popular, by instrumentalists such as Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar, and it is likely that Rubbra heard it used during the London performance in 1955.9

Theorists of Indian music variously assign either ē and ḍī, or ē and ṅī, as principal notes in Kīrvāṇi rāg (Re and Sa or Re and Pa, in Indian terminology). In Rubbra’s work, both Re and Pa are prominent within the four-bar ostinato from which the piece derives its title (Ex. 4.9), with Sa present as an accompanying pedal note. The distinctive augmented second interval between ṇ and ṇ (dha and Ni) is subtly emphasised in bar 3, standing out from the rising scale motif used in the surrounding bars.

This ostinato provides a further element of structural control, being stated twenty-two times in its entirety, with a further part-statement providing a short coda to the work. The improvisatory feeling of the music stems from the way in which Rubbra spins a constantly changing, apparently spontaneous, web of figuration around the ever-present ostinato, sometimes setting up intriguing cross-rhythms within the fluid quintuple metre (Ex. 4.10). Its continuity is reinforced by his direction to the performer that ‘there should nowhere be a break in the flow of the music.’

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Ex. 4.10: *Pezzo Ostinato*, figuration patterns with cross-rhythms

a) bars 5–8

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

b) bars 21–24

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

On closer examination, a more complex pattern of underlying structural principles emerges. At three points in the score Rubbra indicates by a \( \Theta \) sign that the harpist should ‘stop’ the vibrations of the strings, creating brief ‘breaks’, or ‘fresh starts’ in the build-up of sound, which serve as subtle structural markers (Fig. 4.4).
Fig. 4.4: Structure of *Pezzo Ostinato* by number of bars
The first two breaks divide the piece symmetrically: two thirty-two-bar sections surrounding a central twelve bars, with the three-bar coda added on. The third break divides the second thirty-two bars equally.

The breaks show another structural principle at work: Rubbra’s use of Golden Section. When discussing the use of GS in *Prism*, I calculated the length of the longer portion as 0.618 of the whole.\(^{10}\) Another way to calculate GS is by using numbers from the Fibonacci series, in which each subsequent number in the series is formed by adding together the two previous numbers: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, and so on. From 3:5 onwards in this series, each pair of consecutive numbers is in GS proportion, to the nearest whole number. Fibonacci numbers become evident in the *Pezzo Ostinato* if the twenty-two statements of the ostinato are interpreted as a ‘theme’ and twenty-one continuous ‘variations’ (Fig. 4.5).

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\(^{10}\) The exact value is irrational, but can be rounded to 0.618 for convenience.
Fig. 4.5: Use of Golden Section in *Pezzo Ostinato*
It now becomes evident that the first two ‘breaks’ divide the twenty-one ostinato ‘variations’ into groups of eight, five, and eight – all Fibonacci numbers – and arranged so that the first and second ‘breaks’ coincide with the points of secondary and primary GS respectively. Musically, the point of secondary GS is marked by a change of texture and tessitura between ‘variations’ 8 and 9 (Ex. 4.11a), whilst the point of primary GS occurs at the end of a climactic variation. It is followed by a change of dynamic, from forte to mezzo piano, and a new figuration (Ex. 4.11b). The initial eight ‘variations’ are further divided into 5 + 3 by the change in metre from 5/8 to 10/16. The third ‘break’ reverts to a more symmetrical division of the final eight statements into 4 + 4.

**Ex. 4.11: Pezzo Ostinato, musical markers of points of Golden Section**

* a) ‘variations’ 8 and 9, bars 31–34

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
Thus a deeper analysis of the structure of this short work demonstrates Rubbra exerting a high level of compositional control over what sounds, and is intended to sound, free and improvisatory. GS proportions are often found in nature, and have been used by some composers, notably Bartók and Debussy, as a way of showing their affinity with, or aligning their music with, the unity of the natural world. In Rubbra’s music, such nature mysticism often overlaps with an Eastern influence. This aspect of his work will be explored more fully in Chapter 5 of this study.

The Pezzo Ostinato is dedicated to Peter Crossley-Holland, who, as well as his interests in Indian music, also played and researched Celtic harp music. Robert L. Simon, a later student and long-standing friend of Crossley-Holland, saw his work as a composer and as an ethnomusicologist as intertwined:

Unlike some composers, however, he seems to have been motivated more by the spiritual content of the music he heard than by its sounds alone. I believe what drew him to Asian cultures, especially India, was his own reaching out to that which was mystical and spiritual … they also found expression in his own music … Peter was involved with organizational procedures using the Fibonacci series. His Invocation at Midsummerö [sic] (1993) for solo recorder
was written in its entirety using the Fibonacci series. It, too, expresses Peter’s profound religiosity (Simon, n.d. [2001?]).

There is thus a profound link here between Rubbra and his friend and student, Crossley-Holland. In his 1958 article, Rubbra commented that a performance by a skilled Indian musician, ‘despite its seeming ephemerality, remains in the mind as a significant musical and spiritual experience’ (1958c: 3). The meditative *Pezzo Ostinato*, with its surface spontaneity and deeper, concealed Golden Section proportions, produces something of the same effect on the listener.

### 4.3 Creative tensions

The case studies so far have highlighted a number of tensions or oppositions that Rubbra seeks to resolve or integrate in his Eastern-influenced music and in his relationship with the East in general. From the earliest days of his interest, as described in the introduction to this chapter, there is a duality in his attraction to the East, on the one hand as an intellectual and spiritual ideal, on the other as a sensuously enticing ‘Other’. A similar tension is evident in Rubbra’s use of the ‘exteriors’ of Eastern music, but with a concern not to exoticise them. Eastern modes, rhythms and timbres are employed in his music, but precedence is given to the more enduring quality of ‘line’. Even his professed preference for the ‘interiors’ of Eastern music, as demonstrated in ‘controlled improvisation’, contains an anomaly within it. So although Rubbra saw great potential in Western musicians learning from those of the East, he discouraged the ‘grafting of mere techniques’ of Eastern music onto Western. Rather, he encouraged ‘the understanding of basic artistic and spiritual attitudes’ (Rubbra, 1958c: 3). He contrasted the individualism of the Western musician with the unity of art, life and spirituality found in the East: ‘In the East, music is not something performed before an audience for their applause and entertainment. The musician, improvising as he plays, is making a public expression of a deeply religious nature’ (Rubbra, 1961: 72). It was this aspect of Ali Akbar Khan’s playing that Rubbra claimed had the strongest impact on him in 1955, constituting an ‘emotional shock’ (minutes of a meeting of the Asian Music Circle, 29 January 1957, RA, Box 29, temporary shelfmark). The final tension is, perhaps, between the cultures of East and West themselves: a duality that Rubbra recognised
within himself when he asserted: ‘… though I study Buddhism I am a Catholic in that I belong to Western civilization and its values’ (1961: 73).

Rubbra was of course not exceptional in experiencing such tensions. Intellectual historian J.J. Clarke (1997) has explored in detail the complexity and ambivalence of the West’s rich cultural engagement with the East. Seeking to expand Edward Said’s postcolonial concept of orientalism as rooted in Western power and domination, Clarke has taken a broad view of the role of orientalism in Western culture, where it has often represented a subversive counter-movement to prevailing norms, and consequently has, at times, itself become the ‘Other’. Clarke identifies a number of common orientalist ideals and motivations that became particularly important during the twentieth century, amongst them the theme of ‘cultural sickness’. On a material level, ‘this theme is often expressed in terms of the supposed unbalanced, unharmonious, even neurotic character of Western life, addicted to instant satisfactions and the frenetic pursuit of economic goals’, whilst on a deeper level it is aligned with the perceived ‘perilous spiritual plight’ of Western civilisation (1997: 109–110).

Such a view was certainly held by Rubbra and his group of artistic and intellectual friends in Speen. In 1928, the sculptor and stonemason Eric Gill (1882–1940) had set up a Catholic artistic community at Pigotts, just outside the village. Its foundation in the ideals of William Morris’ Arts and Crafts movement, in medieval Catholic philosophy, or scholasticism, and in the Catholic social philosophy of distributism will be considered further in Chapter 5. There was also an Eastern influence in the person of the Anglo-Sinhalese art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), whom Gill met around 1910, and who profoundly affected Gill’s view of art. Described by Peter Goffin as ‘one of the few living writers on art who gives the word its proper meaning’ (1946: 30), Coomaraswamy pointed out the close parallels between Eastern and scholastic conceptions of art. He asserted that in Indian thought no ‘distinction of kind as between fine and decorative, free or servile, art [is] to be made.’ Rather, ‘[the arts] embrace every kind of skilled activity, from music, painting, and weaving to horsemanship, cookery, and the practice of magic, without distinction of rank, all being equally of angelic origin’ (1956 [1934]: 9). The Pigotts community continued to flourish long after Gill’s death in 1940, attracting many Catholic artists, craftspeople and intellectuals to Speen, all of whom shared a view of the importance of art in everyday life. A common theme in their
writings was the dehumanising effect of modern mechanised society. Walter Shewring, a classics teacher at Ampleforth College and frequent visitor to Pigotts, considered that the Industrial Revolution overturned the normal and healthy order in which ‘the makers of things were responsible men and could lead a whole and human and integrated life’ (n.d. [1957]: 18). Considering his close friendships with many in the community, it is probable that Rubbra’s conversion to Roman Catholicism was due, at least in part, to his contact with Pigotts. If so, his acceptance of Catholicism would have been tinged from the start with Eastern thought. It is perhaps significant that the 1961 article, ‘Temple gongs and coloured bubbles’, from which many of Rubbra’s statements about Eastern music in this chapter have been taken, was published in the journal *Twentieth Century*, a monthly review edited by the Catholic Bernard Wall, another regular visitor to Pigotts.

**Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85**

The tensions set out above are perhaps demonstrated most thoroughly within Rubbra’s Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85, which has multiple resonances: a dedication to Ali Akbar Khan alongside intertextual references to Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto; an invocation of nature in its botanically-titled first movement, ‘Corymbus’, which also alludes to a poem by the Catholic convert Francis Thompson; and the truly concerted, non-competitive nature of the teamwork between soloist and orchestra, all summed up in its central slow movement, itself called ‘Dialogue’. The allusions to the natural world in the first movement of the concerto will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Here I shall examine those aspects of the work that illuminate creative tensions between East and West in Rubbra’s music.

The concerto was composed to BBC commission during 1955, and first performed in March 1956. Rubbra heard Ali Akbar Khan playing in London whilst he was still in the early stages of composition, and dedicated the work to him. In his sleeve note for the first recording, Rubbra described the ‘slow, almost tentative approach to the main body of the music’ that he heard in those improvisatory performances, and sought to emulate it in the opening of his own concerto, ‘where
the pianist feels his way, as it were, into the music by means of a simple discourse round a slow G minor arpeggio’ (1958a: 3) (Ex. 4.12):

Ex. 4.12: Piano Concerto in G, bars 1–21

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
(Music example removed)
It is an unusual opening, putting the soloist in the spotlight from the very start, but with simple, undemonstrative material. The ammetrical rhythm and improvisatory style may well stem from an Indian model, but the orchestral timbre, solo oboe and horns picking up and completing the end of the phrase, is pastoral and
typically English. At the slow tempo indicated in the score \( \dot{\text{\textit{\textbf{c}}} = 44} \), the twenty bars of Ex. 4.12 take over a minute to perform. It must constitute one of the most ruminative and understated openings of the entire piano concerto repertoire. Rubbra later singled out this movement as exemplifying his own expression of ‘controlled improvisation on limited material that eventually builds up … into a big, satisfying structure’ (Schafer, 1963: 68). Like the Pezzo Ostinato, the movement uses Golden Section proportions. Its form relates to its botanical title, and will be examined in detail in Chapter 5.

At its Proms premiere in August 1956 Rubbra’s concerto was programmed alongside Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto. The coupling is thought-provoking. There are some marked similarities between the openings of the two works (Ex. 4.12 and 4.13) which are summarised in Fig. 4.6:

**Fig. 4.6: Piano concerto opening bars compared**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beethoven</th>
<th>Rubbra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opens with piano solo – quiet, simple, unassuming material</td>
<td>Opens with piano solo (accompanied only by ( pp ) roll in bass drum) – quiet, simple, unassuming material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular five-bar phrasing</td>
<td>Opening five-bar phrase in piano is extended by orchestra to more regular six bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano and orchestra set against each other – orchestra answers piano opening phrase</td>
<td>Piano and orchestra co-operate – orchestra extends opening piano phrase by a bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of initial impact on the listener, both concertos open with five bars of piano solo, playing unassuming, relatively simple material. In both, mediant tonal or harmonic relationships are established within the opening material. In the Beethoven, the opening G major piano phrase is answered startlingly in B major by the orchestra before returning to G major; whilst in the Rubbra, a G minor chord moves to tonally unrelated triads of B minor and E flat minor, before coming to rest on V of G minor.

There are also differences: some ways in which Rubbra’s opening might be seen as a reflection, or mirror-image, of Beethoven’s. The most obvious of these is
its minor modality compared with Beethoven’s major key. There are differences too in the way in which piano and orchestra are combined. In the Beethoven concerto, they are set against each other, with the B major orchestral entry being almost as surprising as the solo piano opening, at least for the first audience. In the Rubbra concerto, piano and orchestra co-operate, the orchestra entering subtly alongside the piano to extend and complete the phrase, and to link it to the next.

The slow central movement of each concerto is cast as a dialogue between piano and orchestra. Rubbra’s slow movement even bears the title ‘Dialogue’. In Beethoven’s slow movement, the piano is notoriously pitted against the orchestra, gradually ‘taming’ it in a manner that Liszt likened to Orpheus pacifying the wild beasts. In Rubbra’s movement, however, soloist and orchestra are equals, engaging in a ‘philosophical and at times an impassioned discourse’ throughout (Rubbra, 1958a: 3). Grover explores these differences in more detail (1993: 219).

Beethoven’s movement could be seen as a representation of the Western ideal of the ‘lonely artist’, standing apart from, and confronting, society. Rubbra’s movement presents a different model: one of collaboration and unity, of the artist as part of society – the Eastern ideal.

The two concertos contain other correspondences and reflections. Beethoven’s is his fourth piano concerto, and Rubbra’s is his fourth concerted work for piano and orchestra.11 The finale of each concerto is a rollicking, dancelike rondo. The two works even have ‘mirror-image’ opus numbers, Beethoven’s being Op. 58 and Rubbra’s, Op. 85.

The parallels between the two concertos seem too numerous to be coincidental, so it is worth giving some consideration to Rubbra’s possible reasons for using such a model.12 Beethoven could be viewed as a composer epitomising the Western classical tradition in music. His influence cast a long shadow over the nineteenth century and beyond, and was certainly still felt in 1950s Britain, where the ‘heroic’ myth attached to Beethoven’s music remained strong, at least in the

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11 Previous works by Rubbra for piano and orchestra are the early work Nature’s Call (a tone poem for piano and orchestra, first performed at Reading University in 1921, with Rubbra as soloist and Holst conducting), the Piano Concerto Op. 30 (composed in 1931–32 and performed by Kathleen Long at a RCM Patron’s Fund Rehearsal), and the Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 38, composed c. 1934.

12 It is one of several more or less overt references to Beethoven in Rubbra’s music of the early-mid-1950s. Others include the ‘Cavatina’ movement of Rubbra’s Second String Quartet (1951), and the pastoral character of his Symphony No. 6 (1954).
popular imagination. Similarly, the concerto, of all Western art music genres, perhaps most fully projects the Western individualistic and competitive spirit, especially in the way that it developed during the nineteenth century, as a vehicle for virtuosic solo display. Amongst Beethoven’s piano concertos, the Fourth stands out as the one in which Beethoven himself first began to break away from the Classical Mozartian mould. This break with tradition is most evident in those aspects that Rubbra appears to have emulated in his concerto: the solo opening, with its mediant key relationships, and the slow movement dialogue. Yet in picking up these aspects within his own concerto, Rubbra transformed them, replacing confrontation with discourse, and individuality with co-operation. In his book *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934), which deeply impressed Rubbra and his circle of friends in Speen, Ananda Coomaraswamy pointed out that, prior to the European Renaissance, which fostered a more personal, individualistic approach to art,

there was a time when Europe and Asia could and did actually understand each other very well. Asia has remained herself; but subsequent to the extroversion of European consciousness and its preoccupation with surfaces, it has become more and more difficult for European minds to think in terms of unity, and therefore more difficult to understand the Asiatic point of view.

He went on to suggest that certain developments in science and modern European art, along with ‘the penetration of Asiatic thought and art into the Western environment … may represent the possibility of a renewed *rapprochement*’ (1956 [1934]: 3–4). Rubbra’s Piano Concerto in G, in which Western and Eastern ideals meet, is surely a step in that direction.

For similar reasons, Michael Tippett also modelled his Piano Concerto on Beethoven’s Fourth, claiming that he ‘was not terribly in sympathy with the late Romantic confrontation of soloist and orchestra’ (cited in Gloag, 2013: 177). Tippett’s Concerto was composed concurrently with Rubbra’s, in 1953–55, and first performed in November 1956. This similar choice of model could be purely coincidental, though a link between the two composers might be found in their mutual friend Wilfrid Mellers. Whether deliberate or not, it is further evidence of an ‘alternative’ strand of thinking running through artistic circles at the time.
4.4 Resolution

From his writings and interviews, it appears that Rubbra was seeking some finer balance or deeper integration of opposites, for which he looked to Eastern thought. In 1961 he wrote:

I am a student of Buddhism. It is a highly ethical religion and one of the purest … there is an extraordinary psychological penetration in Buddhism. They deny the duality of opposites, which they say are purely manmade concepts: light and dark, good and evil, dualities which always worried me as a Christian. The Buddhist reaches between these to a middle way (1961: 73).

Many years later, he retained the same belief, when he wrote in his diary about a TV documentary on Zen Buddhism: ‘Arriving at the truth through contradictions seems to me to be completely valid: or perhaps I should say “trying to arrive at the truth”’ (diary entry, 14 November 1977, RA, Box 33, temporary shelfmark).

Rubbra took for granted that such concerns should flow into his music, which he saw as ‘a natural product of a religious nature, which means that I lay stress in my work, just as a certain sect of Chinese Buddhists do, on the interrelatedness of everything in the universe’ (1961: 73). Such interrelatedness is also fundamental to Taoist belief, as Rubbra recognised: ‘I believe everything in life is connected and interdependent … that is why I am especially interested in Taoist philosophy, for it is concerned with this close interdependence of all aspects of life’ (Schafer, 1963: 66). Rubbra’s interest in Taoism was not new in the 1960s: in Chapter 2 I discussed the influence during the 1930s of the Taoist esoteric text, The Secret of the Golden Flower, on the creation of the ballet Prism, with its black and white costumes perhaps representing the yin and yang, dark and light, female and male polarities of the undivided Tao. His interest in China went back further, to his brief teenage friendship with Kuanglin Pao, and was likely to have been revived during the 1940s by his very close friendship with Beatrice Harthan, who had lived in China for a few years during the 1930s.14 He also knew Arthur Waley, a notable scholar of Chinese

14 Beatrice (‘Wendy’) Harthan was manager of the Rubbra-Gruenberg-Pleeth Piano Trio in the years following WWII. Rubbra had an intimate relationship with her for many years during the 1940s–50s.
art, literature and religious writings, whom he possibly first met in the 1930s at Dartington.

Taoist thought likens the cosmos to ‘a seamless web of unbroken movement and change’ and ‘every observer is himself an integral function of this web’ (Rawson and Legeza, 1973: 10). Because it is in constant motion, never turning back on itself, and never repeating itself exactly, any attempt to capture its pattern becomes a ‘conceptual snapshot’ that lacks permanence. Yet the web itself does not change: ‘It is the “uncarved block” devoid of any definable shape … the Great Whole of continuous duration, infinite space and infinite change’ (11). Taoist art seeks to capture these qualities, being ‘a projection of time, of complex process, not of static conceptual shape’ (12). Two imaginative aspects assume particular importance: ‘cyclic patterns of process’ which represent time and change, and ‘linear threads or veins of energy’ (14). The dialectic of yin and yang is introduced and brought into balance. The goal of Taoist art is to achieve harmony and ‘an ultimate tranquillity’ beyond time and change that is the Tao (12). There are clear parallels between this concept of art and Rubbra’s statements about his own compositional processes and his music: his reluctance to acknowledge any fixedness of form, instead allowing the music to follow a natural evolutionary process, his over-riding concern for unity, and his focus on melodic and contrapuntal line.

**The Jade Mountain, Op. 116**

*The Jade Mountain* song cycle, for harp and high voice, completed in December 1962, is a work in which Rubbra achieves this sense of Taoist equilibrium. It is a setting of five poems taken from the synonymous anthology of Chinese poems of the T’ang dynasty (618–906 CE), translated by the American poet Witter Bynner (1881–1968). The title is symbolic. Jade is considered a precious material in Taoism, embodying celestial power, whilst many mountains were considered as sacred.

15 Rubbra’s most immediate model for the cycle is likely to have been Britten’s *Songs from the Chinese* for tenor and guitar, written in 1957, though the musical settings by the two composers are very different in style. Rubbra was also familiar with his friend Reginald Redman’s many settings of Chinese poetry, over twenty of which were published for voice and piano, along with a number of unpublished songs with orchestral accompaniment.

16 *The Jade Mountain* is Bynner’s title. The original Chinese anthology, published in 1764, is *Three Hundred T’ang Poems*. 

167
places of pilgrimage and of spiritual retreat. A carved jade mountain was therefore a valuable and spiritually significant item. The carving shown in Fig. 4.7, for example, depicts the three star gods of Taoist popular religion, Longevity, Prosperity and Happiness, being worshipped by pilgrims to the sacred mountain. Yin and yang are harmonised symbolically within the carving, its kidney-like shape representing the female (yin) vulva, whilst the jade substance itself, and the mountain form, signify male (yang).

**Fig. 4.7: Mountain Landscape with the Three Taoist Star Gods of Longevity, Prosperity and Happiness being worshipped by Pilgrims to the Sacred Mountain, Qing Dynasty, early 18th century, jade, 21 cm (Oriental Museum, Durham University, UK / Bridgeman Education)**

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. It can be viewed online at: https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/search?filter_text=ORM59906&filter_group=all&filter_region=GBR

The texts of the five poems chosen by Rubbra from *The Jade Mountain* anthology are shown in Fig. 4.8. They are rich in the imagery of Taoism and Buddhism, both of which permeated Chinese culture during the T'ang dynasty, and are so closely meshed as to become sometimes indistinguishable.

**Fig. 4.8: Poems of The Jade Mountain**

Poem texts removed due to copyright restrictions
A Night Thought on Terrace Tower

(Wêi Chuang 836?–910)

2  On Hearing her Play the Harp

[…] a golden-fretted harp
 […] Chou Yū.

(Li Tüan ?–c. 785)

3  An Autumn Night Message

(Wêi Ying-wu 737–792?)

4  A Song of the Southern River

17 The fretted harp referred to here is probably the wuo konghou, a kind of zither played horizontally, resting on the lap.
18 Chou Yū was a famous military general (175–210) who was also renowned for his musical ear.
Certain images recur during the cycle, and display a harmony of yang and yin energies, as shown in Fig. 4.9.

**Fig. 4.9: Yang and yin imagery in The Jade Mountain poems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yang</th>
<th>Yin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jade</td>
<td>Autumn/winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>River/sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some images have other special significance. Autumn is the season of the eighth full moon, when family and friends spend time together, and remember absent loved ones. It is therefore the poetically fitting season to form the backdrop to the yearning for an absent friend or lover of the first song, and the communication with a distant friend of the third. Both the pine and the river are symbols of the Tao itself. The pine, being evergreen, also represents longevity and endurance in the face of adversity. Taoist ‘mountain men’ (spiritual hermits and sages) lived amongst the pines, eating pine-kernels and fungus, and drinking dew and rain-water, thus
absorbing both yin and yang energies. Wêi Ying-wu addressed his ‘Autumn Night Message’ to a friend, a former secretary, who had adopted this reclusive lifestyle (Red Pine, 2007: 116). Wêi incorporated Taoist imagery into his poem even though he himself was more drawn to Buddhism, ending his life in a Buddhist monastery. Rubbra omits the friend’s name from the title of his song, thus universalising the message.

Cyclic patterns of nature, relating to the Taoist I-Ching (‘Book of Changes’) are represented in the poems by the changing seasons. Autumn is itself a season of transition, and in the first song is suggested only by changes observed in the natural world, such as the fading grasses and the migrating birds. In the fourth song, the tides present another cyclic natural pattern. The songs are also infused with the idea of the unity of the natural creation, and of human life as only a small part of it: wild geese can be used as messengers,19 a falling pine-cone in the forest becomes a sign that a thought-message has been received, and a humble river-boy, his work regulated by the tides, can become so at one with them as to share their character.

The final poem of the cycle is particularly interesting in the way that it draws together Taoist and Buddhist ideas. The Buddhist priest is seen as mediating between the yin energy of the sea and the yang of the sky as he traces his path, the Buddhist ‘middle way’, across the place where the two elements meet, seeming to wane from the material world as he fades from the poet’s sight. He is followed by fishes and dragons, symbols respectively of wealth and power, but navigates his way serenely through both, impervious to their distractions, intent only on reaching his foreordained goal. In the closing line, the correlation of light, from the priest’s ‘single lantern’, with spiritual enlightenment is common to many religious traditions. In Rubbra’s arrangement of texts, it echoes the ‘solitary lantern’ seen from Terrace Tower in the first song of the cycle, providing a point of balance, and suggesting that the whole cycle might be viewed as a collection of scenes from life’s spiritual journey.

Rubbra’s music, too, demonstrates aspects of the Taoist approach to art outlined above. The overall structure of the cycle forms an arch that is balanced in

19 In fact, migrating geese were used for this purpose by the Chinese: small scrolls were tied to their feet.
terms of mood, tempo and length of song (measured in bars) (Grover, 1993: 559), depicted graphically in Fig. 4.10:

**Fig. 4.10: Overall structure of The Jade Mountain song cycle**

Yet Fig. 4.10 also reveals that the arch is not strictly symmetrical in terms of length, but is carefully ordered in that the halfway point in the cycle occurs at the end of song two. The two halves of the cycle are structured differently. The two songs within the first half of the cycle divide the sixty-three bars in a proportion that is close to Golden Section (27:36:63 forming part of the Lucas series of numbers\(^2\) multiplied by nine). The second half of the cycle divides into two (almost) equal halves at the end of the fourth song. Roy Howat has pointed out the relationship of GS proportions to those of growing, organic nature, whereas symmetry is more characteristic of inorganic or crystalline forms that are more stable (Howat, 1983: 22). Within this cycle, then, Rubbra might be seen to encompass nature in its entirety, moving towards greater stability and balance as the cycle progresses –

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\(^2\) The Lucas series is, like the more familiar Fibonacci series, formed by adding consecutive pairs of numbers, but differs from it by reversing the first two digits, i.e. 2, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, etc.
typical, too, of the spiritual journey of those mystics drawn towards the mountains in Taoist thought.

The structure of the first song reflects that of the whole cycle (Fig. 4.11), a musical illustration of the concept of ‘divine correspondence’ that is a fundamental cosmological principle in Taoism: ‘microcosm reflects macrocosm, and vice versa’ (Little, 2000: 14–15):

**Fig. 4.11: Structure of ‘A Night Thought on Terrace Tower’**

Changes in the accompanying texture split the thirty-six bars of the song initially by Golden Section, after bar 22 (14:22:36 being part of the Lucas series multiplied by two). This break corresponds with the halfway point in the verse, where the focus changes from describing the external scene to an articulation of the poet’s yearning. The final fourteen bars are split equally.

The structure of the remaining individual songs within the cycle can be broadly summarised: ‘each consists of repeating accompanimental segments, above which are freely evolving vocal lines’ (Grover, 1993: 560). This description suggests that Rubbra applies the Taoist principles of ‘cyclic patterns of process’ (in the accompaniment) and ‘linear threads … of energy’ (in the vocal line), but does not sufficiently capture the duality of the songs’ carefully organised fluidity of structure, akin to the ever-shifting Taoist cosmos.
The third song has the simplest such structure. A one-bar ostinato in the harp (Ex. 4.14) is played five times in its entirety, followed by a repeat of the opening two beats.

**Ex. 4.14: ‘An Autumn Night Message’, harp ostinato**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Taking the three-note motif x as a starting point, the voice spins out an almost unbroken and unrepeating melodic line above this ostinato. The following song is more complex (Fig. 4.12):

**Fig. 4.12: Structure of ‘A Song of the Southern River’**
An eleven-bar harp idea is repeated, but truncated by one bar. The opening five bars are then repeated, but are cut off short with a final dry, staccato chord. The voice enters twice, each time in bar seven of the harp cycle, with a two-phrase melody that is varied on its repetition. The first two phrases end at the halfway point of the song, though the resulting symmetry is disguised by the irregular harp cycles. Similarly, the end of each vocal phrase overlaps the recurring harp cycles, so that their repetition is also hidden. The apparent irregularity of the harp cycles conceals a second set of proportions. The middle ten-bar cycle stands in a Golden Section proportion to the surrounding cycles (10:16:26 comprises part of the Fibonacci series multiplied by two). This complex tracery of symmetry and fragmented organic proportion suggests the eddying currents of the river depicted in the poem, along with its cyclic tides, recurring yet rarely identical, and the perpetual movement of the manifestations of the Tao.

In terms of musical language, Rubbra does not seek to imitate Chinese musical sounds. There is little trace of pentatonicism in the songs, and where it does appear it is subtly integrated, avoiding any sense of the exotic. Yet tonally and harmonically the songs do not follow Western practices, but tend to ‘float on a limited number of pitches, derived from non-Western modes’ (Banfield, 1977: 93). Stephen Banfield offers the third song as an example of this practice, identifying the eight-note scale, incorporating three tritones, from which the vocal line is constructed (Ex. 4.15), and from which the harp ostinato chords and melody are also derived (see Ex. 4.14).

**Ex. 4.15: Eight-note scale used for vocal line of ‘An Autumn Night Message’**

[Diagram of eight-note scale]

Banfield does not elaborate further on the way in which the vocal line uses this scale. With A flat removed, the scale is octatonic, and most of the song is based on this scale, centring around B flat. The A flat occurs only once, in the vocal line, on the word ‘thinking’. It stands out as the highest note in the song, and as a dissonance against the accompanying chord, turning the phrase ‘thinking of you’ into an expression of intense longing.
The second song also uses mode and harmony to underscore the sense of the poem. Both vocal line and accompaniment are built from a scale resembling E harmonic minor. Frequent sounding of an open fifth, E–B, in the bass reinforce this perception of key, and the first two vocal phrases end on B and E respectively. However, the opening note of the vocal line, A, and its closing note, D sharp, suggest the possibility of an alternative, quasi-symmetrical arrangement of the scale around D sharp (Ex. 4.16):

**Ex. 4.16: Scale formations used in ‘On Hearing her Play the harp’**

![Scale formations used in ‘On Hearing her Play the harp’](image)

This quasi-symmetrical arrangement is used in the contrary motion left-hand harp part, which avoids D sharp altogether. The D sharp appears in the rippling right-hand broken chords (Ex. 4.17).

**Ex. 4.17: ‘On Hearing her Play the Harp’, bars 1–3**

![Music example removed due to copyright restrictions](image)

The inversion of this pattern at bar 13 also introduces an abrupt harmonic shift (Ex.4.18), emphasising C natural in the left-hand broken chords, to the extent that Grover has suggested that this passage is bitonal, although none of the pitches used falls outside of the scale set out in Ex. 4.16 (Grover, 1993: 562).
Ex. 4.18: ‘On Hearing her Play the Harp’, bars 12³–14²

The passage does, however, serve to fix C natural firmly in the listener’s mind throughout bars 13 to 19, so that the false relation between the new C sharps in the vocal line in bars 20 and 21 and the C natural in the harp left-hand, on the words ‘she touches a wrong note now and then’, catches the listener’s ear, just as the harpist of the poem hopes to ‘draw the quick eye of Chou Yü’ (Ex. 4.19):

Ex. 4.19: ‘On Hearing Her Play the Harp’, bars 19³–22

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
As a mischievous parting shot, this humorous bit of word-painting is repeated with a single C sharp in the harp part in bar 25.

The final song of the cycle is, for Grover, ‘the culmination of the cycle, both poetically and musically’ (1993: 564). Its poetic imagery, using Taoist symbols to illustrate the Buddhist priest’s journey, both homewards and towards enlightenment, has been discussed above. Structurally, the song combines an ostinato with a kind of bar-form (Fig. 4.13):

**Fig. 4.13: Structure of ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’**

The opening five bars of harp music (Ex. 4.20) are treated as a semi-ostinato, recurring, with breaks, truncations and extensions, throughout the song. Against this accompaniment, the voice spins out a delicate thread of melody. Its initial ten bars (bars 6–15) are subsequently condensed, with decoration, into nine (bars 16\(^3\)–25\(^1\)) and five (bars 25\(^2\)–30). The scale used is essentially A natural minor, or Aeolian mode, but with various chromatic additions, in particular a Phrygian B flat towards the end of each vocal ‘section’.
There are moments of subtle word-painting. The first fleeting appearance of B flat in the melody serves, through the leap of an augmented fourth, to make the following E sound remote and dreamlike (Ex. 4.21a), matching the text, whilst the ‘fishes and dragons’ are decorated by chromaticism (Ex. 4.21b).

Ex. 4.21: ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’, examples of word-painting (vocal lines only)

a) bars 10–11

b) bars 23–25

The quietly insistent E in the harp right hand suggests the constancy of the priest’s lantern light. The vocal melody circles around this note, each phrase except the final one ending on the same pitch. Only in the closing B-section does a new, more active figure in the harp, suggesting perhaps the swell of the sea, threaten to overcome the bobbing light, but without success. The E returns in the final bar of the song. The song begins and ends quietly. The deep stream of left-hand 6/3 chords lacks any sense of urgency, but moves as relentlessly as the rolling ocean or the passing of time. Emerging from silence, and travelling into it again, the song
suggests a vastness beyond its boundaries. In Stephen Banfield’s words, ‘the sense of peace is complete, even unto Nirvana’ (1977: 94).

It is tempting to view Rubbra’s Eastern-inspired works as somehow set apart from his more ‘mainstream’ works in the Western tradition. Even such a perceptive and sympathetic commentator as his friend Bernard Stevens, writing an appreciation in celebration of Rubbra’s seventieth birthday, referred to

two hitherto opposed characteristics of his style, the abstract thought of the middle period and the sensuousness and concern with timbre of the early and late works, or if you prefer, the European tradition and that of the Orient (1971: 100).

Yet this statement is perhaps too simplistic. For one thing, as the case studies within this chapter, and his statements about the impact of the East on his own work testify, Rubbra’s Eastern-influenced music is decidedly not just about ‘sensuousness and concern with timbre.’ Line, and an improvisatory approach to structure, are equally, if not more, important. Nor does the ‘abstract thought of the middle period’ stand out as being so very different. Even in the midst of it Wilfrid Mellers considered Rubbra’s symphonies to stand somewhat outside of the European tradition. He described Rubbra’s symphonic method as ‘monistic … in that the whole structure tends to grow out of a single melodic idea’ (as opposed to the ‘dualistic’ symphonic movements of composers in the Beethovenian tradition, in which conflict of tonal centre and thematic material is more important), adding that ‘this “monistic” lyrical creativity is perhaps religious in impetus’ (1949: 116).

_The Jade Mountain_ is the last of Rubbra’s works to have an explicit Eastern connection, but that does not mean that Eastern thought was no longer important to him, or that its influence no longer appears in his music. How, for example, should Rubbra’s description of his Eleventh Symphony, composed 1977–79, as ‘a huge improvisation, but a controlled one’ be interpreted (cited in Grover, 1993: 182)? The language seems too close to his 1963 statement about the impact of the ‘interior view of Oriental music’ on his own compositional processes to be entirely accidental. Nor should the Piano Concerto in G be viewed as Rubbra’s final word on the reconciliation of Eastern and Western thought, as the analysis of his later _Sinfonia Sacra_ in Chapter 7 will demonstrate.
First, though, in the next chapter I will develop further the theme of divine immanence and Rubbra’s response to nature that has begun to emerge in this chapter, looking at it within a more Western cultural context.
5. ‘Pan is Playing’: Nature mysticism in Rubbra’s Music

The image of Pan, who appears in Rubbra’s *Cantata Pastorale*, discussed in the previous chapter, is just one way in which writers and artists have expressed the immanence of God in nature. Nature mysticism within the English literary tradition reached an initial peak in the seventeenth century, with poets such as George Herbert, who drew on sensual images of nature to express his worship of God, whilst Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne sought in nature glimpses of eternity and of humanity’s prelapsarian state. Such views are found again in poetry and art from the late eighteenth century. William Blake, in both words and visual art, and Samuel Palmer, painted ‘visionary landscapes’ portraying an Edenic English countryside that also prophetically warned of an encroaching industrialisation that was still in its early days (Mellers, 1989: 60–62). The Romantic William Wordsworth used poetry to express his own transcendental experiences of nature. A Neoplatonic view of childhood as a time of innocence, purity and greater receptivity to both nature and the spiritual underpins this tradition:

> Not in entire forgetfulness,
>     And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
>     From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

(Wordsworth, ‘Intimations of Immortality’)

Rubbra’s own love of nature had its origins in his childhood. Until the age of eleven, he lived on the outskirts of Northampton in one of a small row of houses that was ‘surrounded by fields on all sides … that meant so much to me in my childhood’ (Rubbra, 1977a: 11). Here, he too experienced an early ‘intimation of immortality’:

[A] vivid experience, and one that nothing since has been able to eradicate, occurred … when I was perhaps nine or ten years of age … It was a hot summer Sunday, and my father and I went for a longish walk which took us out of the town through a wood known as Harlestone Firs. … Before entering the
wood we rested a little, leaning on a gate that gave us a distant view of the town. Suddenly, through the hazy heat, I heard distant bells, the music of which seemed suspended in the still air. I was held motionless, the scenery vanished, and I was aware only of downward-drifting sounds that seemed isolated from everything else around me (Rubbra, 1977a: 12).

Aspects of nature (the ‘hazy heat’, ‘still air’ and woods behind) combine evocatively with religious symbolism (the distant town and bells) and with musical sounds in this account. Recalling the event in his seventies, Rubbra went on to say that the experience had since been ‘held captive … in [his] inner consciousness’, and attributed to it his fondness for writing bell-like repetitive descending scale passages in his music. Pealing bells are, of course, not uncommon in English pastoral music: Rubbra’s close friend Gerald Finzi (1901–56) included them in his Christmas cantata In Terra Pax (1954), and Vaughan Williams in his song ‘Bredon Hill’ (1911), to name but two instances; but in Rubbra’s music such descending lines become a personal stylistic fingerprint. His childhood experience thus provides an insight into his deep and lifelong affinity with the countryside, and establishes an inspirational connection between nature and his music.

Whereas in Chapter 4 I looked at Rubbra’s response to nature in an Eastern context, I now turn to an examination of some of the works in which it is reflected in a Western context, and situate it more fully within the traditions of English nature-mysticism of the twentieth century.

5.1 Nature’s Call: rural life and influences

Rubbra’s first large-scale work, composed whilst he was a student at Reading University, was a tone poem for orchestra, organ and piano, Nature’s Call. It received one performance, on 15 June 1921, with Rubbra as pianist, and the University of Reading Orchestra, conducted by Holst (concert programme, RA, Box 1, temporary shelfmark). The work is based on a poem, written by Rubbra himself, and reproduced at the start of the manuscript score (BR) and in the concert programme:
Up cliff and beach
The sea-souls preach
To men of God.

Ah! listen, sense
The sound intense
And heed to God.

The full rich roar
Along the shore
Breathes full of God.

The sea-weed sweet
Around thy feet
All glows of God.

Breathe, therefore, strong
Of Nature’s song
Ye men of God!

Rubbra’s poem speaks of divine immanence in nature and, like his description of his childhood transcendent experience, emphasises the role of sound – this time a natural ‘song’ of nature that can ‘preach’ to those ‘men of God’ whose ears are attuned to it. About a third of his early songs, dating from his student years and the first decade of his working life, likewise have nature, approached from various angles, as their subject matter (see Appendix A). Some are celebrations of the natural world, especially the new life apparent in springtime. Others view nature as an expression of the divine, or depict creation worshipping its creator. Several deal with those liminal phases of twilight and autumn that represent the transience of the natural world, alongside the suggestion that something more permanent lies behind or beyond.

Although he lived in London throughout the 1920s, Rubbra valued opportunities to spend time away from the city. In 1927, for example, he wrote to Finzi: ‘Am just off to the country. Blessed word!’, and in 1928 he reported back to Finzi: ‘We are having a magnificent time here – I never realized Surrey was so
beautiful’ (letter, 29 May 1927, and postcard, 25 August 1928, FA, Box 8, temporary shelfmark). In 1934 he made the decision to move out of London. He rented, and later bought, Valley Cottage in Speen, in the heart of the Chiltern Hills.

On a personal level, it is easy to surmise Rubbra’s reasons for moving. He wanted to devote more time to developing as a composer, and a self-sufficient rural existence within easy reach of London enabled him to continue some teaching work and musical journalism, whilst allowing him to live cheaply and quietly, away from urban bustle and distractions. His close friend, Gerald Finzi, had also married in 1933 and set up home in the country. Ideologically, both men were been influenced by the writings of William Morris for which they shared a longstanding respect. Rubbra recalled discussing Morris’ ideas with Holst during his student days (Lloyd and Rubbra, 1974: 42), whilst Stephen Banfield (1998: 67–79) has traced in detail the way in which Morris’ and John Ruskin’s ideals of ‘craftsmanship above mass production, vision above greed, quality above quantity, the vernacular past above the cosmopolitan present, mediaeval organicism above classical poise’ (67) informed the Finzis’ rural lifestyle. Such ideals were part of a well-established movement in England that can be traced back to Wordsworth, involving essentially a rejection of industrial materialism and the adoption of an alternative rural, often communal, way of life.

Such a lifestyle had many elements in common with distributism, a system of political economy promoted by Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton and others (many of them Catholics) which stated that the means of production – property, tools, and so on – should be distributed as widely as possible amongst the populace, ‘enabling rootless urbanites to return to the soil as farmers and to feel an organic connection with the actual earth that fed them’ (Allitt, 1997: 206). Distributists also favoured decentralisation, folk crafts, regional variation and dialect. Rubbra would certainly have come across the theory after his move to the Chilterns, if not before, as Chesterton lived in Beaconsfield, and Eric Gill’s Catholic community at Pigotts was largely run on distributist principles.

Although the Pigotts artistic community was in its heyday when Rubbra moved to Speen, it probably only indirectly attracted him to the village. More important was his friendship at the time with the young artist Cecil Collins (1908–89), whom he met through Peter Goffin when he began working at Dartington in 1933. Collins and his wife Elisabeth had already made their home in Speen. From
1931, they rented Monk’s Cottage, next door to Valley Cottage. Rubbra and Collins rapidly became close friends, sharing artistic interests and enthusiasms. They both read the metaphysical poets, such as Henry Vaughan and the recently rediscovered Thomas Traherne, with their mystical visions of a lost paradise (Anderson, 1988: 30; Grover, 1993: 16), along with two mystics of the Neoplatonic tradition, Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme. Seeking to break free of cloying nineteenth-century traditions, they took a great interest in art and music of a more distant past, and the creative values underpinning it. Rubbra wrote to Collins: ‘I have just bought a volume of Dowland’s songs (1597) – they are marvellous. Also I have got the medieval books Cecil saw at Schott’s – they are very interesting. One in particular is unbelievable in its modernity’ (letter, 29 May 1934, CCP, TGA923/4, Box 2, Item 1662).

A respect for medieval artistic principles was also central to the Pigotts ethos. Eric Gill, whose St. Dominic’s Press had produced the first English edition of Jacques Maritain’s *Art et Scolastique*¹ in 1923, introduced both Collins and Rubbra to this writer’s Thomist approach to aesthetics. Like William Morris’ Arts and Crafts Movement, Maritain looked back to a medieval model of art as ‘making’, hence seeing no essential distinction between the artist and the artisan. Fine art is, however, concerned with beauty, and ‘as beautiful it belongs to the realm of the spirit and dives deep into the transcendence and the infinity of being’ (Maritain, 1949: 27). Though art’s transcendent nature was recognised in the Middle Ages, Maritain considers the present age to be very different:

> imposing on man its puffing machinery and its speeding up of matter, the modern world is shaping human activity in a properly inhuman way, in a properly devilish direction, for the ultimate end of all this frenzy is to prevent man from remembering God (29–30).

The true artist therefore has an exalted, almost priestly role, ‘for in a way he is not of this world, being, from the moment he begins working for beauty, on the road which leads upright souls to God and makes invisible things clear to them by visible’ (30).

¹ Translated by John O’Connor as *The Philosophy of Art* in Gill’s limited edition. The book was subsequently published more widely in English translation by J.F. Scanlan as *Art and Scholasticism*.
There is also a clear similarity between this view and the Eastern view of art described by Coomaraswamy (see Chapter 4). Some years later, in the midst of the Second World War, Cecil Collins wrote his own artistic credo, *The Vision of the Fool* (1947), an essay that is deeply indebted to Maritain.

Another enthusiasm that Rubbra and Collins shared during these years was for the Wessex novels of John Cowper Powys (1872–1963), published 1929–36. Powys’ novels express a deep and mystical response to nature:

> He stretched out one of his hands and touched the cool-scaled stalks of a bed of ‘mare’s tails’. Ah! how his human consciousness sank down *into that* with which all terrestrial consciousness began! …

> He was a leaf among leaves … among large, cool, untroubled leaves …

> He was drenched through and through with darkness and with peace (Powys, 1964 [1929]: 404).

His distrust of mechanised society is summed up in his view of aeroplanes, ‘spying down upon every retreat like ubiquitous vultures’ (Powys, 1964 [1929]: 15). In later life, Rubbra wrote that these novels ‘seem to inhabit a dark, pagan hinterland that oppresses rather than releases’, but during the 1930s he was so excited by them that he corresponded briefly with the author (diary entry, 12 January 1975, RA, Box 33, temporary shelfmark); whilst Collins and his wife undertook a ‘pilgrimage’ to Dorset on foot (Anderson, 1988: 29).

Many similar ideas find expression in Collins’ art and in Rubbra’s music. Collins has been called a visionary painter in the tradition of William Blake and Samuel Palmer, and the paintings from his years in Speen include ‘a series of fantastic landscapes full of rivers, hills, trees, and, most notably, angels’ (Anderson, 1988: 29). *His Scene in Paradise* (1932), for example, shows angels feasting and dancing in an un.sullied imaginary landscape, complete with Palmerian apple tree (reproduced in black and white in Anderson, 1988: 35). In *Adam and Eve* (c. 1933), however, the Edenic vision is threatened, not by a serpent, but by a menacing aeroplane, recalling J.C. Powys’ image of ‘spying’ planes ‘like ubiquitous vultures’ (Fig. 5.1).
In an idealisation of his own domestic happiness, and as a sanctification of the simple rural life, Collins painted *The Sitting Room at Monk’s Cottage* (1932), in which the rustic cottage interior is transfigured by the angel’s entrance (Fig. 5.2).

*Fig. 5.1: Cecil Collins, *Adam and Eve*, c. 1933, ink and graphite on paper (Tate Gallery, London)*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. It can be viewed online at https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/collins-adam-and-eve-t07829

*Fig. 5.2: Cecil Collins, *The Sitting Room at Monk's Cottage* (1932) (Anderson, 1988: Pl. 14)*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions
There is no doubt that Rubbra, too, experienced much domestic happiness in Valley Cottage, especially in the early years of his marriage. His rural lifestyle was described in idyllic terms in an article by W.S. Meadmore, published in *The Listener* in 1949:

[Rubbra] had dug and sowed, grown his own vegetables, and there was a small orchard climbing the hill at the back, an orchard of cherries and other fruit, and he had kept a donkey and chickens. The donkey and the chickens were still there, he still dug and sowed … We went out and climbed the steep hill behind. Half-way and out of breath I paused and looked back: a lovely view, Bucks country, rolling pasture and agricultural land, trees, cows grazing in a meadow … We had tea, buttered toast and honey … Four magnificent cats watched us eat (1–2).

Two sons were born to the Rubbras in their early years in Speen: Francis in 1935 (d. 2012) and Benedict in 1938. In later years, Benedict remembered appreciatively the richness of the ‘deeply rural yet eclectically artistic’ environment in which he grew up, and the freedom that he was allowed, whilst also recalling some of the discomforts. Valley Cottage had no electricity until after the war, and lacked its own water supply. Water was collected from the roof into an underground tank, which could dry up in summer, and which had to be regularly cleared of frogs and snails. In the winter, the cold could be so intense that icicles formed inside the cottage (Pery, 2008: 18–19).

The Meadmore article cited above was the first of several that appeared around 1950 in which Rubbra, usually a very private person, allowed journalists and photographers into his family life. An extensively illustrated article by A.L. Lloyd was published in *Picture Post* later in 1949, and some of Hugh Ottaway’s early articles for the *Hallé* magazine included photographs (Ottaway, 1950; Ottoway [*sic*], 1950). It is worth speculating on Rubbra’s reasons for allowing such an intrusion. Most obviously, he had recently composed his Fifth Symphony, and clearly wanted to promote himself and his music after the at least partial hiatus of the Second World War. Secondly, the kind of rural lifestyle and family values that these articles demonstrate were especially prized in society during this period (Matless, 1998: 136–38). Yet for Rubbra, this attitude was potentially problematic, for the reality
was that his marriage to Antoinette had run into difficulties in the 1940s. Rubbra’s wartime military service had necessitated lengthy separations, and there had been a series of extramarital affairs. The situation reached a crisis point in 1947, when a brief relationship with a neighbour, Colette Yardley, resulted in the birth of Adrian Yardley, Rubbra’s youngest son, in December. In the same year, two other momentous changes occurred for Rubbra: he took up a post as lecturer in music at Oxford University, and on August 4th, the feast day of St. Dominic, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps, then, these articles were his way of quashing rumours and reassuring the religious and musical establishments – and audiences – of his stable and wholesome family life.

5.2 Symphony No. 6: ‘Canto’

Like Cecil Collins in his paintings two decades before, in the early 1950s Rubbra celebrated his rural home and family life in music. The Sixth Symphony was composed during the autumn of 1953, and received its first performance a year later. The slow movement is headed ‘Canto’ (song), and is inscribed with lines from Giacomo Leopardi’s poem ‘L’Infinito’ (1819):

Sempre caro mi fu quest’ermo colle,
E questa siepe, che da tante parte
Dell’ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.

Translated by R.C. Trevelyan as:

Dear to me always was this lonely hill,
And this hedge that excludes so large a part
Of the ultimate horizon from my view.

In a talk given just before the first performance of the symphony, and subsequently published, Rubbra said of the scene evoked by these lines: ‘Although Leopardi speaks of an Italian landscape, it is one that is also intimately mine from the window of my workroom’ (1954: 20). Rubbra’s studio, to which he withdrew to compose, had been built at the top of the hillside behind his cottage early in 1939, affording
him a fine view both down onto the cottage in the valley, and across to the hills on
the other side. His son Benedict has written about the place in terms that recall
Leopardi’s poem:

The environment that I was born into seemed to be timeless, making it difficult
to imagine that it had a beginning or would ever have an end. I imagined the
perspective of the fields, continuing for ever beyond the horizon of the rounded
hill that faced our house and the surrounding beech woods seemed
incomprehensibly deep … the mystery of being in a space with no end or
beginning will always remain within me (Rubbra, B., 1998: 11).

Rubbra, too, may have sensed the ‘timelessness’ and ‘mystery’ of his surroundings.
In his talk, he provided a longer quotation from Leopardi’s poem than is printed in
the score. The poem continues:

But as I sit and gaze, my thought conceives
Interminable vastnesses of space
Beyond it, and unearthly silences,
And profoundest calm.

In the poem, then, the natural landscape becomes a gateway onto a spiritual realm.

Four notes (Ex. 5.1) are inscribed at the head of the symphony, immediately
beneath the title.

**Ex. 5.1: Symphony No. 6, inscription at head of symphony**

Their pitch-classes spell out the initials of the four members of the Rubbra family:
Edmund, Francis, Antoinette, and Benedict (Black, 2008: 133–34). The four notes
form a motif opening the final movement of the symphony, which was the first to be

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2 Gerald Finzi had first pointed out to Rubbra the musical potential of his family’s initials, shortly
after Benedict’s birth. Rubbra thanked him for the observation in a letter, 11 May, 1938 (FA, Box 8,
temporary shelfmark).
completed, and each of the other movements uses some of them. The ‘Canto’ opens with a bare fifth, A–E: the two notes that signify Antoinette and Edmund. The Italian inscription, as well as referring to the physical landscape viewed from Rubbra’s workroom, also provides a link with Antoinette. Although she was born into a French family, she was brought up in Italy, and her family always considered her to be more Italian than French. So the musical reference of the opening chord, coupled with the Italian inscription, must have signalled to her, at least, that this movement was as much about their marriage as the place in which they had lived.

Rubbra started work on the symphony in the summer of 1953, informing his publisher, Bernard de Nevers, that the work ‘is going to be a pastoral symphony’ (postcard, 4 July 1953, RA, Box 24, temporary shelfmark). The allusion to Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, also his ‘Pastoral’, is obvious. Yet quite apart from the Beethoven connection, there is a long tradition of composers evoking the countryside in their music, often using common musical signifiers, to the extent that modern theorists have shown that a recognisable pastoral topic, or ‘subject for musical discourse’, had emerged in music by the eighteenth century (Ratner, 1980: 9). Common features of the pastoral in music, as identified by Leonard Ratner (1980), Robert Hatten (1994), Raymond Monelle (2006; 2000) and others are set out in Fig. 5.3.

**Fig. 5.3: Common features of the pastoral topic in music**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhythm</th>
<th>Compound or triple metre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of the dotted siciliana rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>Simple contour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flowing lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folksong-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melodies built on natural harmonics: hornlike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony/tonality</td>
<td>Use of pedal points or open fifth drones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Simple’ harmony: consonant, diatonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slow harmonic rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for major keys</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Like the pastoral in literature, the musical pastoral can express a ‘high’, spiritual state of contemplation in the presence of nature, or a ‘lower’, more earthy representation of rustic life. As a musical topic, the pastoral carries a strong sense of cultural continuity, making it readily recognisable to the listener even when only a few of the features listed in Fig. 5.3 are present, and accommodating sufficient flexibility of expression to enable it to be presented in a contemporary guise. In English music of the first half of the twentieth century, the adoption of the native folksong idiom by many composers (most significantly, Vaughan Williams) led to a particular manifestation of the pastoral incorporating ‘modal or modally inflected neo-tonal harmonies, rhapsodic thematic material, an often limited dynamic range (tending toward the quiet), prominent string and woodwind textures, and smoothly flowing rhythms, often in triple or compound meters [sic]’ (Saylor, 2008: 45).

Although Rubbra did not align himself with the ‘English folk song’ school of composition, he did evoke the pastoral in his music, but often in a very subtle and idiosyncratic way. His use of an unusual pastoral timbre at the opening of his early work *The Secret Hymnody*, in which the typical pastoral drone is provided by plucked, rather than sustained, strings, the woodwind melody is played by bassoon in its penetrating highest register, and the accompanying E minor chord is disturbed by a repeated, dissonant F sharp, has already been mentioned (see Ex. 2.3).

The ‘Canto’ movement from the Sixth Symphony also uses elements of the pastoral topic. The opening sustained bare fifths (Ex. 5.2) recall a typical pastoral drone, and ‘by themselves establish the sense of loneliness expressed in the poem’s first line’ (Grover, 1993: 130). Against them, the gently undulating clarinet melody suggests the distant contour of the hills on the far side of the valley, whilst its
downward plunge (bars 15–16) into ‘a warm bath of cello sound’ (Black, 2008: 133) could represent Rubbra gazing down the steep hillside to the comfort of the cottage in the sheltered valley bottom.

Ex. 5.2: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 1–16

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Yet there are unusual aspects to this pastoral sound, to the extent that Hugh Ottaway, although acknowledging that the opening fifths seem to ‘epitomise the absolute stillness of the scene’, considered it to have
little in common with the English pastoral idiom of the last forty years or so; it is closer perhaps to the poet’s Italian landscape: some of the textures have the quality of light that is so familiar from early Italian painting (1955a: 3).

The connection that Ottaway makes here with Italian painting is perceptive. Just a month before beginning work on the Sixth Symphony, the Rubbraras had visited Antoinette’s sister in Florence, where Rubbra had spent much time visiting galleries and churches, and had been very impressed by much of the Medieval and early Renaissance art that he saw. Yet Grover is probably nearer the mark in picking up on the way in which texture and timbre combine to create a sense of *shifting* light in this movement, sometimes ‘brilliant’, at others ‘darkly glowing’, which is more typical of the English landscape than the Italian (1993: 129). The muted horn timbre is immediately unusual, sounding withdrawn and remote, almost other-worldly, yet light and open. The effects of changing light and shade in this passage derive from the way in which the melody combines with the horn fifths. Rubbra described the melody as ‘clothing’ the fifths, allowing him to make ‘affecting subtle shifts of tonality’ (Rubbra, 1963: 107). These harmonic shifts can be seen in Ex. 5.2. Bars 4–7, for example, are difficult to place within a single key, looking, though not sounding, bitonal, with the A minor accompaniment and hint of C minor in the melody. Their harmonic effect is achieved by the melodic movement lagging a little behind the harmonic movement. Ex. 5.2 also demonstrates the way in which Rubbra achieves a sense of continuity and timelessness by avoiding any obvious sense of a perfect cadence, despite the archaic-sounding unprepared 4–3 dissonances that regularly decorate the dominant chord. The melodic line grows out of, or overlaps, the harmonic cadence points in bars 4 and 9–10, whilst the apparently coinciding cadences are either inexact (a ii–i progression in bars 6–7) or interrupted (V–VI in E minor in bars 11–12). Elsewhere, the harmony often moves in mediant-related progressions, and the whole effect is of the musically very old presented in a new light.

The movement is cast in an ‘inexact ternary structure’ (Grover, 1993: 131). The central section is introduced by an unmistakable reference to Antoinette the violinist, the sound of whose practising must often have drifted up the hillside to Rubbra’s composing hut. In a passage singled out by Grover as bringing ‘a momentarily brilliant light’ (131), the opening fifths are sounded a tone higher, and
with the brighter timbre of oboes and clarinets, against which the solo violin climbs in a high register (Ex. 5.3). But the melody turns quickly from B minor to the C minor hinted at in the opening bars of the movement, with a new ending to the phrase: a descending scale with an uneven rhythm, resembling a peal of bells, and reminiscent of Rubbra’s childhood experience at Harlestone Firs (x in Ex. 5.3).

Ex. 5.3: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 38–47

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
(Music example removed)
C minor becomes a more mellow, though still darker-toned, E flat major as the bell-like scale is taken up as an ostinato by hushed strings (last two bars of Ex. 5.3). There are seven statements of the ostinato, mostly played by lower strings, but with statements also by harp (bars 51–53) and brass (bars 55–57) as the music gathers intensity. At bar 59, an inversion of the bell motif (x'), played by first violins, ushers in an ominous military rhythm (y) in the trombones and timpani, which vies with, and threatens to engulf the bell motif (Ex. 5.4).
Ex. 5.4: Symphony No. 6, ‘Canto’, bars 58–67

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
This is surely a musical reference to the Second World War, which had interrupted the Rubbras’ rural idyll, and to the unrest and difficulties that ensued in their marriage. At the *fortissimo* climax of the movement, the bell motif is played forcefully by the violins, twice, in rhythmic diminution, after which the military sounds subside, and C minor relaxes onto a C major chord for a varied reprise of the opening material.

This time the hint of C minor within the opening melody is emphasised by a recollection of the E flat major of the central section, before the melody moves off into sharper tonal regions. In bar 94, an expected cadence in F sharp minor is foiled by an exquisite slide back into A minor, and the movement closes with a serenely radiant *tierce de Picardie* resolution onto an A major chord (Ex. 5.5).
The outer sections of this movement, with their melodic ‘clothing’ of the accompanying bare fifths, use a similar technique to that employed within the ‘Christe eleison’ of the Missa in Honorem Sancti Dominici, Op. 66 (Black, 2008: 133–34). The mass was composed soon after Rubbra’s reception into the Roman
Catholic Church in 1947. This was also the year of Rubbra’s affair with Colette Yardley, and Adrian’s birth, so a time of turmoil in his marriage. The significance of linking the symphonic movement, a ‘canto’ to Antoinette, in which her initial-note A forms the tonal foundation to Rubbra’s initial-note E, with the ‘Christe eleison’ (‘Christ have mercy’), was surely not lost on Rubbra. He himself pointed out the similarity in technique (Rubbra, 1963: 107), and there is another correspondence, in that both movements are in A minor. Rubbra and Antoinette celebrated their twentieth wedding anniversary in November 1953, during the period when he was working intensively on the composition of the Sixth Symphony. He was away touring with the Rubbra-Gruenberg-Pleeth Piano Trio on the day of their anniversary, but wrote to Antoinette:

My sweetest; tomorrow we shall have been married 20 years and I’m sorry we shant [sic] be together then – but we will celebrate later! I hope, my darling, you have forgiven me for all my shortcomings – oh! I never meant to hurt you. But having gone through the difficulties and trials, I find my love for you is infinitely deeper and on stronger and more lasting foundations: the remainder of our lives will be spent in an ever closer companionship. God bless and keep you, my dearest (letter, 24 November 1953, BR, also cited in Pery, 2008: 35).

Viewed in this context, the ‘Canto’ can be interpreted on many levels: as a portrait of, and celebration of, Rubbra’s and Antoinette’s marriage and the place in which they lived it; as a prayer for forgiveness and reconciliation to both Antoinette and God; and as an affirmation of the sacrament of marriage and the sanctity of a rural life lived close to nature. It is a movement in which the mystical attractions of nature and the feminine are closely intertwined.

5.3 Piano Concerto in G, Op. 85

The Sixth Symphony and the Cantata Pastorale, discussed in Chapter 4, were composed within three years of each other, but display very different ways of responding musically to nature: the symphony drawing on and adapting the pastoral topic of the Western art music tradition to capture the essence of the Chiltern countryside, the Cantata evoking Eastern modes and timbres, binding them together.
in a monistic unity of line. Composed between these two works, the Piano Concerto in G, as previously demonstrated, is a work illuminating creative tensions between East and West in Rubbra’s music. It is also a work in which he expresses in yet another way his deep love of, and spiritual response to, nature.

The first movement of the concerto, as noted in Chapter 4, signals the convergence of East and West, and conjures up the natural world, from the outset. An Eastern improvisatory approach in the opening piano bars is combined with a typically English pastoral sound in the orchestral response, the two elements melded together to form a single phrase (Ex. 4.12). Rubbra gave the movement the descriptive title ‘Corymbus’. In his sleeve note to the 1958 recording, he explained that a corymb (Latin *corymbus*) is ‘a botanical term signifying an “inflorescence of stalked flowers springing from different levels but making a flat head”. The stalks are thus of increasing length’ (Rubbra, 1958a: 3) (Fig. 5.4).

**Fig. 5.4: Line drawing of a corymb, and photo of hawthorn berries (author’s photo)**

Encyclopaedia definitions of a corymb frequently cite hawthorn (may) blossom and berries as well-known examples of the formation. Barbara Wall, a frequent visitor to Gill’s community at Pigotts from the 1930s until the early 1960s, recalled the proliferation of these flowers growing there: ‘The lane was lined with may trees, the blossom as thick and frothy as new-fallen snow, the scent heavy and sweet’ (Wall, 1989: 34). This spectacle, followed in autumn by corymbs of red berries, would have been equally familiar to Rubbra, and it is possible that he had it in mind when composing the first movement of the piano concerto. He continued his sleeve note: ‘Musically expressed, this means that each idea, whether important or unimportant, is always added to on its re-appearance. The overall shape is, however, very close to sonata form …’ (Rubbra, 1958a: 3). Rubbra’s description of the movement’s
structure sounds fairly straightforward, but, looking at how these two principles, sonata and corymbus, are combined within the movement, a more complex picture emerges.

In the score, the most obvious structural markers are the main changes of tempo, which describe a kind of arch form: adagio – allegretto – allegro – allegretto – adagio, but asymmetrically arranged around the ‘central’ allegro. There are, however, hidden ‘symmetries’ within this arch form, as demonstrated in Fig. 5.5.

**Fig. 5.5: Piano Concerto in G, hidden 'symmetry' within arch form of first movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of bars in movement</th>
<th>246</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of adagio bars</td>
<td>$53 + 8 = 61$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of allegretto bars</td>
<td>$30 + 93 = 123$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of allegro bars</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tempo changes map out the main structural sections of a sonata form movement (Fig. 5.6). The ‘corymbus principle’ is superimposed onto this sonata structure. The exposition (first allegretto) is thirty bars, the development (allegro) is sixty-two bars, and the recapitulation (second allegretto) is ninety-three bars, i.e. thirty bars are lengthened successively to $30 \times 2 + 2$ bars and $30 \times 3 + 3$ bars. The three main sections of the sonata form thus grow organically as the movement progresses.
Fig. 5.6: Piano Concerto in G, sonata form/corymbus structure of first movement
There is growth within each section, too. The inauspicious opening material cited in the previous chapter (Ex. 4.12) just starts to branch out into new piano figuration and a new orchestral theme in bar 21, the point where the extract ends. This divides the fifty-three bars of the introduction almost exactly at the point of secondary Golden Section (short portion followed by long), based on Fibonacci numbers multiplied by four (4, 8, 12, 20, 32)\(^3\) (Fig. 5.7).

**Fig. 5.7: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, structure of introduction**

In organic nature GS proportions are associated with growth or tension. Musically, as Roy Howat has observed, points of regeneration or growth tend to be associated with the secondary GS point, whilst points of maximum tension or climax are associated with the primary GS point (long portion followed by short) (1983: 22). Division by secondary GS therefore corresponds to the ‘corymbus principle’. The opening twenty bars of this movement can also be divided, following the phrasing, but at their point of primary GS, i.e. at the end of bar 12 – the shorter second portion here serving to move the music onwards towards the entry of the new material at bar 21. The point of primary GS within the fifty-three bars of the introduction as a whole is marked to a lesser degree, with the distinctive sound of the muted trumpets

\(^3\) The next number in the series should be 52, but the introduction overshoots this by one bar, having 53 bars in total. This can be explained by i) the need for the Adagio bars to total a quarter of the total number of bars within the movement, and ii) the overriding need for the adagio coda to be divisible by Golden Section, as discussed later in this analysis.
entering partway through bar 33, climbing to their first accented note on the first beat of bar 34, and helping to push the introduction towards its first point of climax at bar 38 (Ex. 5.6).

**Ex. 5.6: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 32–38**

So in this introduction, the tendencies that Howat observed are confirmed. The first main point of growth (the introduction of a new theme) occurs at the point of secondary GS, whilst the primary GS point occurs as a significant point within the build-up to the first climax.

GS proportions occur again in the build-up to the magnificent main climax of the movement, towards the end of the recapitulation. The main area of growth within this greatly extended reprise of the exposition occurs within the second subject area, where the original twenty bars of the exposition are expanded into sixty-eight bars, a multiple by two of the Fibonacci number thirty-four. The diagram in Fig. 5.8 indicates some salient thematic, timbral and harmonic landmarks within this passage.
Fig. 5.8: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, recapitulation and coda - Golden Section proportions
The forty-two bars of a primary GS occur in the *middle* of this passage (bars 184–225), marked A in Fig. 5.8, flanked by the twenty-six bars of secondary GS, which is split into two thirteen-bar portions (B and C). The start of passage A coincides with the return of the closing passage material from the exposition, marked also by a change of timbre from brass to strings, and used here to build up to the main climax of the movement (Ex. 5.7).

**Ex. 5.7: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 182–186**

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Passage A is also subdivided at the point of secondary GS, 16:26, marked by a repeat of the previous passage by unaccompanied piano from bar 200, after the arrival on the tonic, G, in the preceding bar. The twenty-six bars of this portion (bars 200–25) are yet again divided by GS (16:10), marked by the re-entry of the orchestra over a pedal G, and culminating, right at the end of the section (bars 224–25), with a cadence onto C. This accumulation of GS proportions can be represented by a Golden Spiral (shown as a solid spiral line in Fig. 5.8).\(^4\) Extending the spiral inwards (inner dotted spiral line), it passes through another aurally discernible event, the rhythmic timpani interjection on G that occurs midway through the solo piano passage, and forms the centre of the spiral (Ex. 5.8).

**Ex. 5.8: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 199–217**

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\(^4\) In this analysis, I follow Roy Howat’s model and terminology. His diagrammatic representations of such constructions in Debussy’s music suggest that the spiral grows by a factor of \(\phi\) (the Golden Ratio) for each full turn that it makes (1983: 77, 97, 142). Mathematically, a Golden Spiral is more usually defined as growing by a factor of \(\phi\) for every quarter turn (see, for example, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_spiral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_spiral)). This observation does not affect the validity of Howat’s analysis, which demonstrates that spirals based on GS can be formed in various ways.
The piling up of GS proportions within the Golden Spiral, combined with internal symmetries, gives the music a strongly cumulative effect towards the climax at bar 226. Alongside the already mentioned obvious change of timbre and new variant of the thematic material first heard as the exposition’s closing passage, the start of passage A at bar 171 is also signalled by a change of metre. The irregular six-plus-seven bar phrasing of passage B gives way to balanced eight-bar phrases, and the unusual 7/16 time signature to shorter 3/16 bars. Against this increasing metrical regularity, frequent two-against-three cross-rhythms, a feature of the movement since the triplet-against-duplet rising arpeggio of the opening bars, now create a lively, almost jazzy, dancelike effect. Even when the orchestra drops out at bar 199, leaving the piano unaccompanied at the heart of the spiral, there is no loss of rhythmic momentum or of mounting excitement. Indeed, as direct repetition has not previously been a feature of this organically branching movement, its use here only serves to heighten anticipation. The timpani interjection at the very middle of the spiral (Ex. 5.8), the point from which the whole uncoils, adds to the effect of the energetic piano left-hand part in propelling the music onwards at the phrase ending.
It serves a similar function at the end of this sixteen-bar section (bars 215–216), from whence it becomes a driving pedal G as the brass rejoin the piano, and there is a rhythmic surge of sound through the next ten bars (216–225) towards the climax of the movement. This ten-bar passage sits in secondary GS proportion to the preceding sixteen bars, a proportion that is made aurally more obvious by the direct symmetry that occurred before it (16+16 bars, reinforced by the regular 8+8-bar phrasing within those passages). The 16:10 GS ratio here represents a dramatic foreshortening of a perhaps anticipated further sixteen bars, whilst at the same time forming a satisfying proportion in itself. It allows the climax, starting at bar 226 (passage C in Fig. 5.8) to burst out with tremendous force, the piano pounding up a scale (first C major, then C minor) spanning two-and-a-half octaves, arriving back on G, the tonic of the movement, six bars later (bar 232). Golden Section (and other logarithmic) spirals occur in the natural world on both small and cosmic scales, examples being found within sea shells, satellite images of hurricanes, and the arms of spiral galaxies. In plant life, they are associated with patterns of growth such as the arrangement of leaves around a stem, or of seeds within a seed head. The musical Golden Spiral in this movement has something of the power of the tightly coiled head of a fern frond, seemingly fragile, but able to push aside soil and debris as it unfurls towards the light. In Maori culture, the spirally coiled fern shoot is a symbol of spiritual new life, and spirals more generally are commonly used as mystical symbols in art and in spiritual traditions (see Purce, 1974).

Extending the spiral outwards in Fig. 5.8 (outer dotted spiral line) would require the movement to continue for a further twenty-six bars beyond the climax at bar 226, but instead, it ends after only twenty-one bars, with a quick dropping away of tension and slowing of tempo. The question arises, then, as to whether the movement gives an impression of being formally cut short. The answer reveals some ambiguity in the ending, which creates a deliberate musical effect. On one hand, the overall balance of the entire closing passage of the recapitulation is maintained by the two thirteen-bar passages, B and C in Fig. 5.8, placed on either

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\]

In fact, there are further nested complexities within the form here, as this further six bars resolving onto G as a point of arrival, taken together with the preceding ten bars, creates another sixteen-bar section to balance symmetrically the preceding two sixteen-bar sections of passage A. This sixteen-bar section thus overlaps with the thirteen-bar section C that in turn sits in GS proportion to the eight-bar coda.
side of the Golden Spiral, and together comprising the secondary GS of the entire section. In addition, passage C, at the very end of the recapitulation, stands in GS proportion to the eight bars of the Adagio coda, which are themselves subdivided in a 3:5 GS ratio (strings: piano) (Ex. 5.9). In that respect, then, the proportions are aurally very satisfying. Yet the peaceful Phrygian cadence on G at the end of the movement, recalling a typical Baroque slow-movement link with its tierce de Picardie final chord, does have a certain open-endedness, the musical effect of which is to project forward as well as to conclude, creating an intense sense of expectation for the following movement, the central ‘Dialogue’ that sums up the confluence of East-West ideals within the work.

Ex. 5.9: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, coda, bars 239–46

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In addition to the botanical meaning to which he pointed in his sleevenote, Rubbra later claimed that he first came across the word ‘corymbus’ in the title of a poem by Francis Thompson: ‘A Corymbus for Autumn’ (Rubbra, BBC Radio 3, 1977). Rubbra pointed out the formal connection between the poem, whose opening verses gradually get longer,\(^6\) and the first movement of his Piano Concerto. The poem is striking for its combination of pagan and Christian imagery in its description

\(^6\) Only in some editions. The version published in Selected Poems of Francis Thompson, 2nd edition, London: Methuen and Co./Burns and Oates, 1908, begins with verses having successively three, five and nine lines.
of nature in autumn, Korymbos (Latin, Corymbus) being a Greek rustic demi-god of the fruit of the ivy. The sensuous revelling in the fruits of autumn described in this verse:

The wassailous heart of the Year is thine!
His Bacchic fingers disentwine
His coronal
At thy festival;
His revelling fingers disentwine
Leaf, flower, and all
And let them fall
Blossom and all in thy wavering wine.

(Thompson, ‘A Corymbus for Autumn’, lines 42–49)

contrast, for example, with these deeply mystical lines from a little later in the poem, which describe nature in imagery drawn from Catholic ritual:

Or higher, holier, saintlier when, as now
All Nature sacerdotal seems, and thou,
The calm hour strikes on yon golden gong,
In tones of floating and mellow light,
A spreading summons to evensong:
See how there
The cowlèd Night
Kneels on the Eastern sanctuary-stair.
What is this feel of incense everywhere?
Clings it round folds of the blanch-amiced clouds,
Upwafted by the solemn thurifer,
The mighty Spirit unknown,
That swingeth the slow earth before the embannered Throne?

(Thompson, ‘A Corymbus for Autumn’, lines 75–87)

As with the reference to the Greek god Pan in the Cantata Pastorale, Rubbra seems to associate the Classical, Bacchic references in Thompson’s poem with Eastern
thought. The poem is thus also an expression of the two strands of thought, Eastern and Western, that Rubbra pulls together in the Piano Concerto, with both strands related closely to nature. One passage in the development of the first movement of the concerto (bars 111–27), spanning the central point of the movement, particularly brings to mind the solemnity and peace of ‘sacerdotal’ Nature described in the lines above (Ex. 5.10). Here, once again, Rubbra creates his own distinctively individual version of the typical English pastoral sound. A slow, rocking harmonic movement and quiet dynamics create a sense of stasis. The solo oboe, joined later in the passage by flute and bassoon, intones a gently undulating melodic line, floating above the accompaniment like the incense of the poem. The piano’s swaying figure imitates the swinging of the ‘solemn thurifer’, gilded by the pizzicato chords in cello and, especially, harp, an instrument that is often associated with sanctity or the spiritual in Rubbra’s music. Like the lines from Thompson’s poem, the passage captures musically the stillness of an autumnal night, the religious imagery used to describe it, and something of the spiritual reality at its heart.
Ex. 5.10: Piano Concerto in G, first movement, bars 111–19

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
As discussed in Chapter 4, the Piano Concerto in G can be viewed as a meeting point of Western and Eastern cultures, holding up an alternative model to the Western competitive way of life. The allusions to nature in its first movement strengthen that view of the work, with the organic order of nature standing as an antidote to mechanised industrial society. It is surely no coincidence that the critical response to early performances of the concerto expressed puzzlement at precisely those aspects of the work that best illustrate its ‘alternative’ character: the non-virtuosic, non-competitive relationship of the soloist with the orchestra, and the reflection of the organic ‘corymbus principle’ in the first movement’s form. Colin Mason heard at least two performances of the work in 1956, so that when he reviewed the score in 1960 he was able to note perceptively that the piano is treated ‘as a concertante rather than a solo instrument,’ but added that ‘the writing, although often extremely florid, is not showy, and in the performances that I have heard has been almost too modest in effect’ (1960: 404). He found the form more perplexing:

The first [movement] bears the fancy title “Corymbus,” a botanical term … describing its form, which in spite of all the explanations is very hard to follow musically … It is particularly difficult to grasp the formal or emotional pattern of the several dynamic climaxes and subsidences that occur … (1956: 5).

It is perhaps significant that Mason singled out the pattern of the climaxes for special mention, for, as my analysis has demonstrated, those parts of the movement are most closely linked to the use of GS proportions.

Some years later, Ronald Stevenson showed greater insight in his brief commentary on the concerto written for Lewis Foreman’s symposium:

The composer’s analogy with botany relates him to Bartók, who patterned his music on the golden section principle built into the fir-cone and the sun-flower; though with Bartók the principle was particularised, whereas with Rubbra it is generalised. Which is in keeping with the character of these two composers: one, the fastidious scientific observer of phenomena; the other, a poetic devotee of nature and religion (1977: 47–48).
Stevenson suggests in this passage that a precise use of GS proportions in music is not compatible with the expression of religious, or spiritual, experience, but this view is not universally held. Rubbra’s close friend Peter Crossley-Holland described the Golden Section proportion as both an ‘organic structure’ and a ‘cosmic principle’, with ‘wide and varied manifestations in nature itself’, having ‘a creative potential which can reach far beyond the broad structural levels of music … [and] allows of a convincing sense of growth with a balanced asymmetry’ (Crossley-Holland, 1997: 33). Elsewhere, he recounted how he used it himself as the most appropriate basis for the movement ‘The Forest of Finchale’, from his cantata *The Visions of St. Godric* (1959), that ‘just had to teem with life and the feeling of growing things’ (Crossley-Holland, 1979: 93). Crossley-Holland thus identified Golden Section as one of the ‘forms, structures, laws and quantities’ of nature that have been contemplated by Western rational mystics for thousands of years ‘as a means of participating in the divine intellect’ (Merkur, 2015). Such elements of divine design contribute to the beauty of nature, and our response to it, despite remaining hidden until measured. In the same way, GS musical structures may not be readily grasped by the listener except as an innate sense of proportional ‘rightness’, but their presence can be revealed by analysis to be part of the compositional design, and may be interpreted as a reflection of divine pattern within the music. In the first movement of the Piano Concerto in G, therefore, the musical representation of the botanical formation of the corymb, and the use of Golden Section proportions to achieve a sense of organic pattern and growth, can be viewed as an expression of Rubbra’s spiritual response to nature. The final work to be considered in this chapter, the choral suite *Inscape*, Op. 122, also demonstrates Rubbra using pattern in various ways to evoke a sense of abundant natural life and divine immanence.

### 5.4 Divine immanence: *Inscape*, Op. 122

*Inscape* was composed in 1965, to a commission from the Stroud Festival of Religious Drama and the Arts. Rubbra has set four of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ best known poems (‘Pied Beauty’, ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, ‘Spring’ and ‘God’s Grandeur’), plus a two-line fragment, ‘Summa’, which concludes the work.
Although described on the score as a suite for mixed choir, strings and harp, Rubbra also likened the set to a choral sinfonietta (Rubbra, 1968b: 749), the mood of each movement musically matching the tone of each poem: a scintillating celebration of the variety of nature in ‘Pied Beauty’; solemn recognition of the essential loneliness of the Christian journey through life, relieved only by Christ’s mindfulness, in ‘The Lantern out of Doors’; a playful evocation of the blessing of new life in ‘Spring’; and a majestic vision of divine immanence in ‘God’s Grandeur’, followed by a brief epilogue of praise.

The title, *Inscape*, is a term coined by Hopkins himself to denote ‘the individual or essential quality of a thing’ (*OED Online*), signifying ‘the cosmic patterns that structure the world’ (Wimsatt, 2012a). Hopkins also sought to emulate such patterns within his poetry. At the front of the score, Rubbra quotes from one of Hopkins’ letters to his friend and fellow poet Robert Bridges: ‘But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling “inscape” is what I above all aim at in poetry’. 7 Perhaps it was this aspect of Hopkins’ writing that caused Rubbra to comment of the poems set in *Inscape* that ‘the language, although forged by the impact of natural things on one sensitive to them, never lets the reader be unaware of God’s immanence’ (Rubbra, 1968b: 749).

There are many ways in which poets introduce pattern and design into their work: through poetic form, rhyming patterns, alliteration and other repetitions, and so on. One of the most distinctive aspects of Hopkins’ mature poetry is its metre, particularly his innovative use of sprung rhythm. This technique derived from Hopkins’ observation that poets sometimes ‘counterpointed’, or overlaid, different metres in order to avoid complete regularity. Sprung rhythm ‘consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone’, without regard for the number of intervening weaker syllables (Hopkins, cited in Wimsatt, 2012b). The resultant free mixing of foot types, producing both adjacent and widely separated stresses, obscures the underlying regularity of the rhythm, and sprung rhythm thus corresponds more closely than regular poetic metres to the natural rhythm of speech.

Rubbra reflects Hopkins’ notion of pattern and design, and his sprung rhythms, in his music in various ways. The words themselves are set to ‘springy,
sensitive lines’ matching the natural stresses of the spoken text (Andrew Porter, cited in Grover, 1993: 460), whilst the accompaniment, for strings and harp, weaves intricate patterns of rhythmic and motivic counterpoint, along with frequent ostinati. Such features can be demonstrated in each song.

‘Pied Beauty’

The intricate metrical patterning of the opening bars of the accompaniment vividly captures the varied and irregular markings of the ‘dappled things’ described in Hopkins’ sonnet. The regular three-quaver groupings of the 6/8 metre are cut across by groups of two from the outset, the kaleidoscopic effect being heightened by the splitting of groups across instruments (Ex. 5.11, bars 1–4). A new, eight-note rising scale figure enters at bar 5, with repetitions arranged so that the start of each fresh ascent moves on one quaver within the bar (Ex. 5.11, bars 5–13). The numbers 2, 3, and 8 are all from the Fibonacci series, so that Rubbra is here emulating, musically, the patterns of organic growth. The first eight bars of the introduction are further punctuated by ringing bass harp notes into sections lasting for five, three and eight dotted crotchet beats respectively. The whole creates a continuous, subtly shifting web of sound, against which the cellos enter with a plainsong-like melody at bar 5 (Ex. 5.11).
Ex. 5.11: ‘Pied Beauty’, bars 1–13, metrical patterning

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
(Music example removed)
The first choral entry demonstrates the flexibility with which Rubbra sets Hopkins’ poetic sprung rhythm. Reserving the first, main stress of the bar to coincide with the word ‘God’, the melisma on ‘glory’ and diminishing note values push the phrase forward towards that important word. The effect of arrival is emphasised harmonically, as the dominant pedal that has underpinned the music from the start of the song simultaneously resolves onto the tonic in bar 13.

A change to 3/4 time at bar 54 marks the turn in the sonnet structure. A new ostinato figure in the accompaniment continues the three-against-two metrical pattern, and the oscillating octave on D, but the texture is initially thinner, with the harp in the foreground and the strings sustaining a high D. Unison women’s voices work in counterpoint with a high cello melody, and only gradually is the texture filled out with chords, their dissonance descriptive of the ‘all things counter, original, spare, strange’ of the text. The twenty-bar closing section of the song, setting the
final half-line of the sonnet, ‘Praise him’, reprises the opening accompanimental pattern. The voices now join with the ascending scale figures, first in an augmented rhythm, and then picking up on the quaver movement. The section divides harmonically in proportions close to Golden Section (twelve bars of dominant pedal, followed by eight bars of tonic). It is repeated in its entirety, with different words, as the final song of *Inscape*, ‘Epilogue’, where it forms a twenty-bar extended cadence to the whole work.

Although there is no further evidence of Rubbra using Golden Section proportions to structure ‘Pied Beauty’, there are nested symmetries within its form that reflect, in structural terms, the pervasive three against two metrical pattern (Fig. 5.9). The return to 6/8 after the 3/4 section divides the song almost exactly at the two-thirds point (73:37 bars – the numbers themselves have a mirror-image symmetry). Similarly, the fifty-three bars prior to the 3/4 section, when added to the closing twenty-bar section, comprise two thirds of the song (53+20 = 73), whilst the 3/4 section itself also takes up twenty bars.

Fig. 5.9: Structure of ‘Pied Beauty’

Hopkins was also interested in achieving mathematical proportions within his poetry. Elisabeth Schneider has pointed out that finding the ‘inscape’ for an experience that was to become a poem meant, for him, finding ‘its individual form, with the particular kind of formal balance it required, the organic symmetry of a living form’
(1966: 120). ‘Pied Beauty’ is a curtal sonnet: a truncated version of the usual 8+6 line sonnet, having instead 6+4 lines with ‘a halfline tailpiece’. Hopkins described this proportion mathematically as $\frac{12}{2} + \frac{9}{2} = \frac{21}{2}$, thus demonstrating that his model has the same 4:3 internal proportions as the usual 8+6 model, and, incidentally, that the proportions are very close to GS (Hopkins, 1970: 49).

‘The Lantern out of Doors’

Whereas ‘pattern and design’ in ‘Pied Beauty’ derive from its metrical intricacy, that of ‘The Lantern out of Doors’ is motivic. Here for convenience I shall use the terminology of set theoretical analysis as formulated by Allen Forte (1973), though without any imputation that Rubbra’s music is atonal. A single three-note motif, $x$, and its variants, underpins the entire piece, defining the song’s structure and illuminating the text. Ex. 5.12 shows the motif and variants in a table, along with their equivalent pc-sets. The majority of the motifs used within the song are drawn from pc-sets 3-4 and 3-5 (Forte, 1973), making prominent use of the ic1 and ic5favoured by those sets (here always presented as a minor second and a perfect fourth).

Ex. 5.12: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, motif $x$ and variants (all variants written with ic5 defined by C and F)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$x$</th>
<th>Prime</th>
<th>p-c set 3-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$x'$</td>
<td>Inversion</td>
<td>(0, 1, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^2$</td>
<td>Retrograde inversion</td>
<td>(100110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^3$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The structure of the song is shown in Fig. 5.10. Although seamless in construction, the piece divides clearly into two equal sections, marked by a return of the opening four bars at the halfway point. This also marks the turn of the sonnet, the octave being set in the first half, and the sestet in the second half. A second symmetrical division occurs in the second half of the song, coinciding with the poem’s assurance of Christ’s oversight of life’s spiritual journey.

Motif $x$ and its inversion, $x^t$, together with $x^i$, dominate the first half of the piece. Ex. 5.13 demonstrates how these motifs are woven together in the opening bars:

**Ex. 5.13: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 1–7 (orchestral reduction from vocal score)**

*Music example removed due to copyright restrictions*
Fig. 5.10: 'The Lantern out of Doors', structure diagram

- "Chant maud..."
- "Foot follows..."
- "Metre's..."
- "Chromatic..."
- "Sometimes..."
- "Men go by..."
- "Death...
- "Harp solo..."
- "Motif's..."
- "Metre's...
- "Motif's..."
The subsequent use of $x$ and $x'$ within the vocal lines associates the falling fourth with darkness, the rising with light (Ex. 5.14):

**Ex. 5.14: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 21–26, vocal lines only**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

The image of a lantern holding the eye as it moves through the darkness recalls the closing song of *The Jade Mountain*, with its description of the Japanese priest’s lantern visible on the ocean long after his boat has vanished from sight. Associated with this idea, there is, too, a distinct similarity between accompanying figures heard in the two songs (Ex. 5.15), the swelling figure steadily moving the music forwards.

**Ex. 5.15: Comparison of accompanying figures associated with the moving lantern**

a) ‘Farewell to a Japanese Buddhist Priest Bound Homeward’, bars 25–30

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
b) ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 7-11

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Motif $x^3$ is developed into an ostinato figure within the accompaniment in bars 30–34, the gently falling motifs descriptive of the ‘beauty bright’ of these spiritually enlightened people, and the ‘rain’ of ‘rich beams’ that shower from them into the surrounding darkness (Ex. 5.16).
One variant of $x$, the motif $x^7$, makes its unique appearance in this half of the song. Drawing on pc-set 3-8, as the interval vector indicates, it stretches ic1 to become ic2, and ic5 into ic6. The widened intervals capture both the sense of distance and questioning in the text set: ‘where from and bound, I wonder’ (Ex. 5.17).
The reprise of the opening bars at the halfway point of the song is followed immediately by a new manifestation of the motif, $x^4$, its rising outline marking the turn of the sonnet with the words ‘death soon consumes them’ (Ex. 5.18):

Ex. 5.18: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 43–47, soprano line only

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Following this desolate statement, the opening choral melody (Ex. 5.15b) is taken up by the harp, always an instrument with spiritual significance in Rubbra’s music. As the pilgrimage is resumed and individual ‘lights’ are forgotten, motif $x^4$ and its retrograde inversion, $x^5$, intertwine in the accompaniment, with $x^5$ and $x^j$ in the choral parts (Ex. 5.19).
The assertion that ‘Christ minds’ bursts in startlingly, and a new ostinato is introduced. Formed from a combination of motif $x$ and $x^3$, the entire ostinato pattern comprises a hexatonic collection,\(^8\) pc-set 6-20 (0, 1, 4, 5, 8, 9): a collection that reappears in Rubbra’s Symphony No. 8, where it represents Christ’s presence within the natural world. Here, it is presented as a series of interlocking rising fourths, the triple metre created by their grouping cutting across the duple metre of the choral parts, as Christ’s spiritual care cuts across the grain of earthly life (Ex. 5.20). The

\(^8\) The hexachord used here by Rubbra outlines the ‘southern’ hexatonic system as defined by Richard Cohn (1996).
ostinato dominates the closing section of the song, pointing to Christ’s continuing presence in the world, and justifying the motivic density of the preceding sections of the movement.

Ex. 5.20: ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, bars 64–70

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
‘Spring’

In the first two-thirds of this song, setting the joyous octave of Hopkins’ sonnet, motivic, metrical and contrapuntal intricacies combine to create an effect of the bursting new life of spring. Motivic and contrapuntal complexity is evident from the outset (Ex. 5.21).

**Ex. 5.21: ‘Spring’, bars 1–7, orchestral reduction**

The theme, A, is presented in counterpoint with its own augmentation in the bass (A’). The theme itself also comprises a number of repetitions of the shorter motif, y. When this instrumental material recurs later in the song, accompanying the voices, the contrapuntal ingenuity is increased, with A' presented in inversion against the original theme, A (bars 41–45). The feeling of metrical irregularity created by the repetitions of motif x within the combined A and A' is increased when the choir sings against it in triple metre (bars 24–30).

The sestet of the sonnet takes up the final third of the song, from bar 53, with a change of mood in the music as spring's origins in the paradise of Eden are recalled. There is a passage of hushed solemnity as male voices plead with Christ to save the 'innocent mind' before it can 'sour with sinning' (Ex. 5.22). Both the vocal lines, picked out by harp harmonics, and the pacing ostinato in the strings, recalling the spiritual journeying of ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, derive from motif y.
‘God’s Grandeur’

The first line of the poem is a thrilling declaration of God’s immanence in His creation: ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God’. Rubbra captures musically the ‘pattern and design’ inherent in this concept not through motif or rhythm, but through the intervallic and other patterns related to a non-diatonic scale (Ex. 5.23).

Ex. 5.23: Scale used as basis of ‘God’s Grandeur’

This scale (pc-set 9-12), comprising three equal segments of a tone and two semitones, is listed as mode 3 of Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition. The
mode has four possible transpositions, the version shown in Ex. 5.23 being the fourth, identified as t3 by Anthony Pople (1998: 98). It is heard in its entirety at the outset of ‘God’s Grandeur’, but Rubbra disguises both its internal repetitions and the three-groupings suggested by the patterning of the introduction (motif z) through his use of rhythm and metre (Ex. 5.24).

**Ex. 5.24: ‘God’s Grandeur’, bars 1–8**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
This passage communicates a tremendously powerful creative surge, matching the sense of the opening line of the poem, and one that cannot be quenched by the marring effects that human activity has on the natural world. The opening string parts re-emerge with a crescendo from the end of the line ‘nor can foot feel, being shod’, to underscore the turn of the sonnet: ‘And for all this, nature is never spent’ (bars 37–43: see Ex. 5.25b). In this song, Rubbra unusually adds the first line of the sestet to the end of the octave in his setting, with an instrumental interlude following. He thus emphasises God’s generative creative power, rather than dwelling on humanity’s spoiling effects on nature. One final glimpse of this opening passage occurs at bars 60–61, when the first two bars, fortissimo, accompany the word ‘springs’, before the glowing setting of the final two lines of the sonnet.

Elsewhere in the song, the rising-scale accompanying figure is treated more flexibly. Always recognisable in pattern, it sometimes shifts between different transpositions of mode 3, even within one scale. Ex. 5.25a shows the accompaniment interspersing t3 scales with segments of t1, ending the passage with segments of t2 and t0. Hopkins’ line demonstrating the extremity of humanity’s impact on, and estrangement from, nature is set to a t0 scale, the most distant transposition from the opening t3 (Ex. 5.25b), but the resurgence of t3 beneath the final word of the line, marking the turn of the sonnet, as described above,
demonstrates divine power interceding and nature rebounding. The first line of the sestet is set entirely to t3, with the exception of two pitch classes (marked X in Ex. 5.25b).

Ex. 5.25: ‘God’s Grandeur’, flexible use of mode 3
a) bars 15–21, accompaniment only

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
b) bars 33–43

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
As the picture of humanity’s spoiling of nature is built up, a new accompanying figure is used as an ostinato, its six-semiquaver pattern cutting across the 4/8 and 3/8 metres (Ex. 5.26). This is an irregular scale pattern, drawing on t3, but gradually adding its pc-complement, the augmented triad C-E-G sharp. Repetitions of the ostinato figure gradually rise by ic4, each transposition introducing a new note from the complement (boxed in Ex. 5.26). These notes are also used in the vocal lines, setting the emotive words ‘seared’, ‘toil’ and ‘smell’.

**Ex. 5.26: ‘God’s Grandeur’, ostinato figure, bars 22–32**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Non-diatonic modes are mixed during Rubbra’s setting of the sestet. A passage in A flat minor, accompanied by an irregularly rhythmed three-note ostinato pattern in the strings (Ex. 5.27a) gives way to a non-diatonic passage (Ex. 5.27b) in which the contraction of the interval at the start of the ostinato, together with the change of accompanying harmony, recalls the opening motif z, and hence can be viewed as drawn from mode 3 (t3).
Ex. 5.27: ‘God’s Grandeur’, mixing of non-diatonic modes

a) three-note ostinato used in bars 49–53

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

b) bars 54–61

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
The connection is made explicit when the motif reappears in its original form at bar 60–61 (Ex. 5.27b). However, the tone-semitone pattern of motif z can also be extended to create an octatonic scale (pc-set 8-28, also listed as Messiaen’s mode 2). The vocal lines in this passage are based entirely on octatonic scales: mainly collection III, which has significant overlap with the pitch-classes of mode 3 (t3), but with the pcs of collection I used for the parallel movement in alto and bass lines at bars 56–59. The modal ambiguity in this passage is particularly descriptive of the text, capturing that transitory moment as night fades and day breaks.

Another pattern inherent within mode 3 creates a link with an earlier movement of Inscape. Mode 3 is an extension of, and thus contains within itself, the hexatonic collection heard in the ‘Christ minds’ section of ‘The Lantern out of Doors’ (Ex. 5.28).

Ex. 5.28: Hexatonic collection contained within mode 3

Christ’s mindfulness of the individual pilgrim’s spiritual journey can thus be seen as part of God’s wider presence within creation.

A distinctive feature of modes of limited transposition, such as mode 3 and the octatonic scale, is their tonal potential: ‘They are at once in the atmosphere of several tonalities, without polytonality, the composer being free to give predominance to one of the tonalities or to leave the tonal impression unsettled …’ (Messiaen, cited in Pople, 1983: 58). Mode 3 (t3) can generate six different tonal triads, both major and minor on the same root: E flat, F sharp, G, B flat, B and D. In ‘God’s Grandeur’, Rubbra uses four of them to special effect, either set against the mode or as a point of resolution within it: D, E flat and G majors, and B minor (Fig. 5.11).

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10 Although the hexatonic collection is not listed within Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition, it is identified as such by John Schuster-Craig (1990), who designates it as Mode Ib, thus relating it to Messiaen’s Mode 1 (the whole-tone scale).
All of these triads suggest arrival on a tonic chord at the point when they are heard, so could be viewed as tonal centres, even if only fleeting. Rubbra’s friend and one-time student, Wilfrid Mellers, has noted Vaughan Williams’ exploitation of the traditional affective qualities of keys in his pastoral and religious music (Mellers, 1989: 261–66). Based on comparisons with the music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, Mellers identifies D major as signifying ‘power and glory’, B minor as relating to ‘tragic experience, pain and pathos’, and G major as a ‘benign’ key of ‘blessing and benediction’. All of these qualities appear to match Rubbra’s use of the triads in ‘God’s Grandeur’, in terms of interpreting the text set. Mellers makes no mention of E flat major, but the early nineteenth-century music theorist Christian Schubart considered it to be a key ‘of love, of devotion, of intimate conversation with God’ (cited in Steblin, 1983: 122). When used in bars 37–39, where it serves as a pivot chord between the preceding passage in mode 3 (t0) and the re-entry of motif z in mode 3 (t3), the suggestion of E flat major underlines the sense in the text of God’s continuing love for His creation.

The use of harmony and tonality in setting the last two lines of the sonnet repays closer scrutiny (Ex. 5.29).
The sudden turn from a D major triad to E flat major at the start of the passage (following on from Ex. 5.27b), coupled with the use of the harp as accompanying instrument, bring a sense of relaxation and serenity. Over this harmonic pedal, certain words are picked out with a different harmonic colouring: the radiance of an A major triad for ‘warm’ and a recollection of the grandeur of God’s immanence with the D major colouring of ‘ah!’.

The harmony then shifts chromatically through a ‘bright’ E major triad, onto the state of benediction implied by the closing G major chord, as the world is enfolded protectively beneath the wings of the Holy Ghost.
Similar affective associations of key are found throughout *Inscape*. The E major tonality that opens and closes the work is identified by Mellers as ‘Edenic’ (1989: 263). The second movement, ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, with its undercurrent of weary pilgrimage and death, opens with a chromatic weaving of motifs tending towards F minor, a ‘funereal’ key (Mellers, 1989: 262), whilst the A natural minor of the first choral entry recalls the final song of *The Jade Mountain*. The closing passage, accompanied by the hexatonic motif signifying Christ’s presence, ends on an ‘enlightened’ C major chord. The third movement’s joyful evocation of ‘Spring’ opens in a difficult-to-pin-down E flat minor, but ends with the ‘benediction’ of G major. This key is also described by Schubart as expressing ‘everything rustic, idyllic and lyrical’ (cited in Steblin, 1983: 124). One passage in this movement also hints at, though never resolves onto, E major. Hopkins describes the new growth of spring as a ‘strain’ of the earth’s beauty in Eden. Sensitive to the ambiguity of the word ‘strain’, having a musical connotation as well as that of lineage, Rubbra’s harmony plays around the enharmonic equivalence of E flat and D sharp. It moves from a yearning C minor at the start of the passage to hover around a B major triad in the second part, fading away on a second inversion chord before sinking back into E flat minor (Ex. 5.30).

One further passage within the work warrants closer harmonic analysis. The startling ‘Christ minds’ from ‘The Lantern out of Doors’ uses triads derived from the accompanying hexatonic collection, the harmonic progression making sense largely because of the C sharp that is common to all of the chords, the other parts moving in parallel motion around it (Ex. 5.20, bars 64–68). The suggestion of F sharp major accords with Schubart’s description of the key (in its enharmonic version, G flat major) as expressing ‘triumph over difficulty … [the] echo of a soul which has fiercely struggled and finally conquered’ (cited in Steblin, 1983: 122). The use of an F sharp major triad here also recalls a memorable passage from Holst’s *The Hymn of Jesus*, discussed in Chapter 2, and the corresponding textual ideas of Christ/lantern and Christ/lamp make the link even more pronounced (see Ex. 2.11).
With its economy of material, yet intricacy of design, each movement drawing on a different way of forming musical patterns, *Inscape* does indeed capture both the essence of Hopkins’ poetry and the natural world that it describes. It demonstrates a different kind of nature mysticism in music than the evocation of place in the ‘Canto’ from the Sixth Symphony, or the larger-scale patterning and multiple allusions of the Piano Concerto in G. The compositional techniques used in *Inscape* are more akin to putting nature under the microscope, and the analytical methods employed have required a similarly close focus on detail.
5.5 Retreat or progress?

Much has been written in the first decade or two of this century about the relationship of twentieth-century British music, particularly that of the so-called ‘pastoral’ school, with modernism. In the process, the critical notion that the ‘pastoral’ in art represents a nostalgic seeking after a lost rural idyll, and an escape from the demands of modern life, has been challenged. Eric Saylor, for example, drawing on the writing of literary scholar Terry Gifford, contrasts this view of the ‘unrealistic nostalgia’ of the ‘soft’ pastoral with the reality of the ‘hard’ pastoral as exemplified in the hardships of actual rural life, or the experience of men battling in the trenches of ‘war-torn rural France’ (2008: 43). Quoting Gifford, he goes on to challenge ‘the view that because nostalgia is an essential element of Arcadia, the pastoral is always a backward-looking form’, pointing out that it can also imply ‘a better future’, and can be powerfully held up as an alternative to modern society: ‘not as an escapist haven, but as a brighter, more appealing world that exists parallel to (or interspersed with) the grimmer trappings of modernity’ (43–44).

Such views are not confined to artistic expression. Cultural geographer David Matless identifies an ‘organicist vision’ of rural society within English culture during the early to middle years of the twentieth century, referring to Eric Gill’s succession of distributist artistic communities, of which Pigotts was the last, as ‘centres of hope’ and ‘counter-examples’ for society (1998: 103, 140). Matless also writes about the ‘spiritual culture of landscape’ that was prevalent in England during those years (73), stressing that it was neither ‘anti-modern’ nor ‘escapist’ (85). Indeed, one of its main proponents, the geographer Vaughan Cornish, who championed the formation of the National Parks to encourage leisure use of the countryside, developed a complex, ‘landscaped theology, centred on a Christian evolutionary vitalism’ which ‘stressed principles of transcendence [and] immanence’, thus ensuring a sense of ‘true proportion between civilisation and the cosmos’ (85).

The works discussed in this chapter show Rubbra engaging with nature and rural life unsentimentally, without any hint of nostalgia, and with a sense of ‘true proportion between civilisation and the cosmos’. He manipulates the conventional musical pastoral topic, making something new of it in the process: tinged, if not by
Italy, certainly by the distant past in the ‘Canto’ of the Sixth Symphony, or by the East in the Piano Concerto. As Saylor has commented, ‘the modernity of the pastoral comes from its power to modify its conventional signifiers in ways that [are] relevant to contemporary culture’ (2008: 45). Elsewhere, Rubbra produces nature music that makes very little use of the pastoral topic: there are only fleeting glimpses of it in Inscape, and none at all in the Cantata Pastorale. None of his works hold up the pastoral as a means of escape from modern society, though it is certainly portrayed as an alternative model, and may present a challenge to audiences, as evidenced in the early reviews of the Piano Concerto in G quoted in Section 5.3 (see also Goddard, 1956: 258; Mitchell, 1956: 264). Ultimately, Rubbra presents a vision of the natural world and human civilisation co-existing, and a celebration of divine immanence. The intrusive military topic in the ‘Canto’, signifying the war that brought disruption to both his marriage and the tranquillity of the Chiltern countryside, is overcome and absorbed, as domestic and rural peace are regained and renewed. The often lonely human pilgrimage portrayed in ‘The Lantern out of Doors’ is shown, musically, to be underpinned by the same watchful divine presence that ‘charges’ nature with ‘God’s Grandeur’, which in turn is revealed as a divine life-force, regenerating the natural environment in the wake of polluting human activity.

Nor should Rubbra’s turning to earlier models of music and art for creative stimulus be seen as in any sense retrospective. On the contrary, even before his move to Speen, he asserted: ‘The paradox of progress in modern art is that the farther one goes back for inspiration, the more advanced is the result’ (1933c: 83). Such a view would have been reinforced by Rubbra’s subsequent contact with the medievalist ideology espoused by Eric Gill and his circle, but it also ran more widely through British culture at the time. Alexandra Harris, in her book Romantic Moderns, cites the artist Paul Nash, who was fascinated both by ‘ancient landscapes’ and by ‘the formal experiments of his contemporaries’, and who sought to combine the two in his painting.(2010: 21–22). Harris comments that ‘what can be read as a sign of retreat can also, perhaps, be read as an expression of responsibility – towards places, people and histories too valuable and too vulnerable to go missing from art’ (12–13). Rubbra and his artistic circle of friends in Speen, fired by their reading of Jacques Maritain and their varied metaphysical interests, might have added: a responsibility towards eternal spiritual values.
One way in which Rubbra was decidedly ‘modern’ in his outlook was in his ready acceptance of evolutionary theories, with their often implicit view of human progress through history. Typically, rather than viewing such progress as a straight line, Rubbra preferred the analogy of a spiral, in which each contracting circuit gathers up something of the old into the new in order to move on. Rubbra’s attraction to the evolutionary theory of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the musical homage that he paid to it, will be the topic of the next chapter.
6. Rubbra’s homage to Teilhard de Chardin

Rubbra’s Symphony No. 8 is subtitled ‘Hommage à Teilhard de Chardin’. At the time of its composition in 1966–68, Rubbra was at the height of his ‘enthusiastic immersion in the writings of Teilhard’ (Rubbra in Dawney, 1971: 9). His extant book collection includes nineteen titles by Teilhard, seventeen about Teilhard, and twenty-one issues of the *Teilhard Review*, a journal published by the British Teilhard Association (see Appendix C).¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French geologist, palaeontologist and Jesuit priest who in his writings sought to reconcile the apparently opposing scientific and Christian views of creation. The Catholic Church had forbidden Teilhard from publishing his non-scientific writings during his lifetime. Much of his work was therefore not generally available until the 1960s–70s, but, according to his friend, the composer Bernard Stevens, Rubbra had known his major work, *The Phenomenon of Man*, from around the early 1950s, during the period when it was proscribed by the Catholic Church and circulated privately in typescript (Stevens, 1971: 100). In this chapter I will examine Rubbra’s enthusiasm for Teilhard’s writings within the context of early twentieth-century evolutionary thought, relating it to the music of the Eighth Symphony.

6.1 Rubbra’s early interest in evolution

Rubbra grew up at a time when evolutionary thinking was still very influential within English culture following Charles Darwin’s nineteenth-century publications, and he must have absorbed some of the ideas and debates that were current during his youth. One of the earliest indications of such interest is his mention of Benjamin Kidd’s *Social Evolution* as a topic of conversation on one of his walks with Holst that sometimes took the place of composition lessons during his student years (Duncan-Rubbra, 1930c: 200). Kidd (1858–1916) was an English sociologist whose aim was ‘to give a biological basis to our social science’ (Kidd, cited in Crook, 1984: 53). His book *Social Evolution* has been described as a ‘highly idiosyncratic mix of ideas [that] created immense interest on the part of a fin de siècle generation

¹ Rubbra resigned from the Association in 1975, not from lack of interest, but because of the increasing membership fee (diary entry, 21 September 1975, RA, Box 33, temporary shelfmark).
mesmerised by speculation on the future of man’ (Crook, 1984: 2). One of its most individual features is the weight that Kidd gives to the role of religion within society. Influenced by the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and the scientific ‘law of retrogression’ proposed by the German zoologist August Weismann (1834–1914), Kidd was convinced that competition and natural selection are essential to the success of the human species, and any cessation of these factors would lead to its degeneration (Crook, 1984: 54). Yet he also maintained that the individual should be subservient to society, as it is only through society that progress can be achieved. Seeing human reason as a prime factor in humanity’s social evolution, he recognised an inherent anomaly, for reason would naturally tend to serve the interests of the individual if left uncurbed (Kidd, 1894: 82). There must therefore be a tempering, balancing force within human evolution, a role that Kidd ascribed to religion, with its ability to modify selfish human behaviour. Religion provides ‘a super-rational sanction’ for human conduct ‘for which there can never be, in the nature of things, any rational sanction’ (100). Kidd thus elevated the importance of religion above reason, asserting that ‘the evolution which is slowly proceeding in human society is not primarily intellectual but religious in character’ (Kidd’s italics), so that ‘the most distinctive feature of human evolution as a whole is, that through the operation of the law of natural selection the race must grow ever more and more religious’ (245). In providing an evolutionary justification for religion, Kidd thus argued against the Marxist-fostered view that was gaining intellectual currency at the time that society would evolve away from religion. Kidd’s book was an immediate best-seller on its publication in 1894, though its vogue was well past by the time Rubbra studied with Holst in the early 1920s. Nevertheless, Rubbra’s discussion of the book with Holst is evidence that he was already, as a young man, critically engaged with evolutionary debates in relation to human history, society and religion.

Whereas in the nineteenth century evolution had most often been equated with progress in a positive way, by the Edwardian period of Rubbra’s childhood the tone was generally more pessimistic, placing greater emphasis on the idea of struggle and randomness in the evolutionary process (Schwartz, 2005: 4–5). Against this backdrop, some thinkers introduced a spiritual dimension into evolutionary theory, countering the darker, determinist view of evolution, in which humans are at best passive participants, and, at worst, victims. One such thinker was Henri Bergson
(1859–1941), whose book *L'Évolution Créatrice* (1907, published in English translation as *Creative Evolution* in 1911) had a significant impact within intellectual and artistic circles. Bergson opposed mechanistic views of evolution with the idea of an *élan vital*, a life force or original vital impulse that embraces all forms of life and ensures that evolution is a continually creative process. Teilhard de Chardin read Bergson’s writings as a young man, and they are known to have influenced the formation of his own evolutionary theory.

Rubbra’s involvement with Theosophy and related esoteric traditions also brought him into contact with alternative views of evolution. The unity of matter and spirit is fundamental to Theosophy’s monistic philosophy. ‘All objects in the universe are imbued with consciousness of some sort, and consciousness evolves through the ages … the final purpose of evolutionary development is that the ultimate reality may become conscious of itself through its expression as the world … and the purpose of human life is to further that evolutionary development by a conscious participation in it’ (Algeo, 2005: 9143). Such thinking expands evolutionary theory to a mystical and cosmic level.

### 6.2 Teilhard’s cosmological theory: context and content

Although evolutionary ideas were widely discussed and adopted in the secular world, they were not universally accepted. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church was wary of the theory of evolution. Erich Wasmann’s article on ‘Catholics and Evolution’ in the first edition of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* in 1909 may be taken as representative of the official Church view at the time. He accepts the biological theory of evolution as a hypothesis explaining how different species of plant and animal life developed from their beginnings through purely natural causes. Human evolution is, however, problematic, the main sticking point being that, vitally, ‘the human soul could not have been derived through natural evolution from that of the brute, since it is of a spiritual nature; for which reason we must refer its origin to a creative act on the part of God’ (1909). In essence, this remained the Church’s position on evolution throughout much of the twentieth century.

As well as the scientific theory of evolution, the Church authorities were particularly suspicious of some progressive theological tendencies at the time,
especially common in England and France, which they labelled ‘modernist’. These
tendencies included the application of evolutionary ideas to theology, and the
adoption of pantheistic views. Such modernist leanings were condemned in Pope
Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* in 1907.

This tension between the Catholic Church and science was at its height when
Teilhard began his theological training in England in 1908. Even as a student, his
progressive tendencies were evident. As a geologist and keen amateur
palaeontologist, he already subscribed to the scientific theory of evolution when he
entered the Jesuit seminary in Hastings. He also had a keen sense of divine
immanence in nature, which he sometimes expressed in quite pantheistic terms, as
when he recalled

> the extraordinary solidity and intensity I found then in the English countryside,
> particularly at sunset, when the Sussex woods were charged with all the ‘fossil’
> life which I was then hunting for, from cliff to quarry, in the Wealden clay.
> There were moments, indeed, when it seemed to me that a sort of universal
> being was about to take shape suddenly in Nature before my very eyes.

During his student years Teilhard first developed an awareness of the spiritual and
cosmic aspects of evolution, describing it as ‘a deep-running, ontological, total
Current which embraced the whole Universe in which I moved’ (Teilhard, cited in
Grumett, 2009: 695), so that by the time he graduated in 1912, the basis of his own
theory of evolution was laid. His future scientific studies and fieldwork as a
geologist and palaeontologist only reinforced his conviction in the truth of the
scientific theory. In particular, the discovery of the remains of so-called Peking man
in the late 1920s and early 1930s, with which Teilhard was closely involved,
provided an important missing link in the fossil evidence for human evolution.
Teilhard’s task was to reconcile the scientific evidence with his firm Catholic faith.

Teilhard’s theory is complex, and has to be pieced together from his total
writings, although *The Phenomenon of Man*, written in Peking in 1938–40, is
generally considered to present a synthesis of his thought up to that time. Three concepts are central to his theory: cosmogenesis, noogenesis and Christogenesis. Teilhard’s view of evolution is wider in scope than either human or biological evolution: ‘he saw human beings as an integral part of the cosmos and nature, humankind as part of life, and life as part of the universe … The rise of evolution is an immense movement through time, from the development of the atom to the molecule and cell, to different forms of life, to human beings with their great diversity’ (King, 2005: 9033). The universe is thus not static, but in a dynamic state of becoming: ‘the universe no longer appears to us as an established harmony but has definitely taken on the appearance of a system in movement. No longer an order but a process. No longer cosmos but a cosmogenesis’ (Teilhard, cited in Cowell, n.d. [c. 2002?]).

Teilhard realised that the increasing complexity of life produced through evolution led to an increased interiority within organisms, with the emergence of consciousness and reflection. He referred to this as the law of complexity and consciousness (Teilhard de Chardin, 1959: 67). He visualised consciousness as forming a sphere of spirit or mind (esprit) surrounding the earth, in the same way as the atmosphere forms a layer of life-supporting gases and the biosphere is the layer of life itself. He called this ‘immense web of inter-thinking and interaction that connects people around the globe’ (King, 2005: 9032) the noosphere. Its emergence, in parallel with cosmogenesis, is noogenesis, the birth of thought, in which love is the energising factor.

With the addition of a third ‘genesis’, Christogenesis, the whole process of evolution is convergent, moving forward and upwards, but also inwards, towards a ‘centre of centres’ that Teilhard called Omega. In a leap of faith, Teilhard identified Omega with Christ, thus drawing together the cosmic, human and divine dimensions of evolution into a single process of becoming, and demonstrating the mysticism that underpins all his writings:

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2 Teilhard’s Le Phénomène Humain was published in an English translation by Bernard Wall in 1959 under the title The Phenomenon of Man (London: Collins). A more recent translation by Sarah Appleton-Weber (The Human Phenomenon, Sussex Academic Press, 1999) is considered by Teilhard scholars to be clearer and more accurate. In this essay, all quotations and references are to the 1959 translation, being the one owned by Rubbra.

3 Siôn Cowell’s undated article appears on the British Teilhard Association website. It was almost certainly written between the foundation of the website in 2002 and Cowell’s death in 2004.
Christ invests himself organically with the very majesty of his creation. And it is in no way metaphorical to say that man finds himself capable of experiencing and discovering his God in the whole length, breadth and depth of the world in movement’ (Teilhard, 1959: 325).

Teilhard often used the image of a spiral to represent the process of cosmogenesis. Its symmetrical, tapering shape represents the process of convergence towards the Omega Point. It implies that convergence is a process of ‘direction and selection, rather than an indiscriminate random gathering’ towards unity (King, 1980: 163). Theologian Ursula King describes the spiral as ‘a synthesis of the circle and the straight line’ (106), and relates it to Teilhard’s approach to the development of human societies, civilisations and religions: ‘A cyclical interpretation of history implies a fundamental recurrence of events whereas a linear interpretation leaves room for novelty. Through the image of the spiral, history is interpreted in terms of ascending levels in which patterns recur together with an element of novelty’ (106). The symmetry of the spiral model is important, because in Teilhard’s thought convergence in any field occurs around a central ‘axis’ and leads towards a ‘summit’ (163). Teilhard’s belief in the fundamental movement of cosmic and human evolution towards a spiritual culmination led to an essentially positive view of history and human progress, though its outcome cannot be taken for granted. He therefore stressed the role of human responsibility and co-creativity in making moral and ethical choices that will ensure the right future for humanity and the planet (King, 2005: 9033). Rubbra sums this up neatly:

[Teilhard’s] cosmic view of evolution gives … a picture of a purpose, a oneness, that makes nonsense of any fundamental antagonism or real separation between the world-view of science and of Christianity. The energy that is responsible for life as a whole and for later self-consciousness has not ceased with the evolution to man but becomes concentrated in him, so that with the spiritual insights given by religion he can act as a spearhead for future evolutionary development (1970a: 925).
It is not known how Rubbra first encountered Teilhard’s writings. It is likely that friends in the Pigotts community introduced him to them. Bernard Wall, the first English translator of *The Phenomenon of Man*, was a close friend of René Hague, Gill’s son-in-law, and visited Pigotts regularly (Wall, 1989). Later, Hague himself became one of the main translators of Teilhard’s work. For Rubbra, Teilhard’s writings must have provided a Christian endorsement of, and focus for, the valuing of evolutionary progress that was already deeply embedded in his thinking. He said simply:

> The writings opened so many doors, and gave to the history of man a purpose that I always instinctively felt was there without my being able to formulate it in other than subjective terms, that I wished to pay homage to Teilhard in the best way that I could, through a symphony’ (Rubbra in Dawney, 1971: 9–10).

### 6.3 Evolutionary metaphors applied to music

Before moving on to Rubbra’s homage to Teilhard, it will be helpful to consider how aspects of evolutionary theory were applied to music and its history during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how these might have coloured Rubbra’s own view of music history, musical form and the compositional process. One of the best known music historians to adopt evolutionary metaphors was Hubert Parry (1848–1918). His academic positions at the Royal College of Music (1883–1918) and Oxford University (1900–08) ensured that his approach became very influential in England. As a student at the RCM, if not before, it is very likely that Rubbra would have gained some knowledge of Parry’s two general music histories, which encapsulate his evolutionary thinking: *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (1896, originally published as *The Art of Music* in 1893) and *Style in Musical Art* (1911). Parry adopted a Spencerian view of the inevitability of evolutionary progress, tracing music’s development from homogeneity and simplicity towards diversity and differentiation of function (Allen, 1962 [1939]: 113). He saw the music of earlier composers and periods as anticipatory of more recent music, with later music having a greater ‘evolutionary value’ (Zon, 2000: 161). Individual composers were of interest only in so far as they influenced the course of musical progress, although he accorded special status to J.S. Bach, Beethoven and Wagner as
‘evolutionary apogees’ (162, 164), considering that Beethoven’s symphonies, in particular, represented an acme of achievement. In the second of these two books, Parry examined the development of differences in musical style, which he saw as ‘the outcome of the instinct for adaptation’ (Parry, cited in Zon, 2000: 162), and therefore influenced by conditions within the environment in which the music was created.

Even if he did not actually read these books, the approach that they take to music’s history and development would have been familiar to Rubbra, and it is possible that as a young man he accepted Parry’s view of musical progress throughout history. Certainly when he read Cecil Gray’s *The History of Music* (1928) in his late twenties, Rubbra declared that he found it ‘interesting and provocative’ (postcard to Gerald Finzi, 25 August 1928, *FA*, Box 8, temporary shelfmark). Gray’s book challenged many traditions, including the idea of music history representing progress (Allen, 1962 [1939]: 133), and it is feasible that it sowed some of the seeds of Rubbra’s own interest, that he shared with Cecil Collins, in the music and art of earlier periods as a stimulus to the creation of something new. Much later in his life Rubbra was asked to provide a section updating Alfred Casella’s *The Evolution of Music Throughout the History of the Perfect Cadence* (first published 1924) for its re-publication in 1964. In his ‘Supplementary Note’ to this edition, Rubbra, now an enthusiast of Teilhard’s writings, set out an alternative view of the way in which evolutionary theory might be applied to music history:

If … we view, as Casella did, the evolution of music as a gradual process of polyphonic atrophy, it is difficult to account for the re-emergence in the past thirty years of polyphony as a vital force in contemporary music … Less and less, for instance, do we see medieval music as a halting first step towards the peaks of classical achievement. Rather do we now view it as an achievement in itself which, however different in orientation, can still show valuable pointers to ways out of the present impasse (1964: x).

In his recognition that earlier periods of music had, and retain, value in their own right, Rubbra acknowledges here that musical history is not a straight line of progress, and seems instead to be applying Teilhard’s spiral analogy to musical
history. He made this more explicit in one of his further additions to the book. Describing a cadence from Benjamin Britten’s *Cantata Academica*, he wrote:

This is a splendid example of an ‘interrupted’ cadence in G that accompanies a ‘serial’ theme. Here two tonal worlds meet and fuse with complete naturalness. Such a fusion of old and new is a dominating feature in recent development, and is another indication of ‘spiral’ evolution rather than ‘progress’ in art (80).

Evolutionary theory was applied also to musical form, an approach linked to the organismic views of musical form that were predominant in England, as in Germany, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If a musical work or movement was viewed as an organism, then it was logical to assume that, like natural organisms, it would be governed by evolutionary laws. In his book *The Power of Sound* (1880), Edmund Gurney (1847–88) defined ‘the central principle of form [as] entire mutual interdependence of elements’ (cited in Zon, 2000: 132). He contrasted an architectural approach to composition, which constructs a work by placing formal blocks symmetrically, with an evolutionary approach in which the composer ‘creates from beginning to end a form without reference to external structural conceptions, but one which nonetheless coincides naturally with various conventions of proportion’ (132). Being essentially concerned with the listener’s perception of music, Gurney considered the musical work to be ‘a continuum through which the listener advances from beginning to end’ and referred to ‘the evolution of melodic form moment after moment in time’ (cited in Dale, 2003: 80). For him, the quintessential feature of organic form, which confers unity, is its ‘cogency of sequence at each point’ (cited in Zon, 2000: 130). In his contrasting of the Classical ideal of architecturally balanced form with the organic growth more typical of Romantic form there is a hint in Gurney’s account that he also viewed the development of form throughout history as evolutionary.

Charles Stanford (1852–1924) expressed similar views in his *Musical Composition: A Short Treatise for Students* (1911). He was more explicit than Gurney in his assertion that ‘the history of musical form … is a history of evolution’, and maintained that the student composer must go through a similar process in miniature, ‘beginning with short dance forms, and gradually expanding his ideas into longer movements until he can deal with symphonies and large choral works’ (76–
He also recognised the possibility of developing new forms, which should grow from the basis of existing forms: ‘To have any value at all they must in their nature be children of their fathers. The laws of evolution apply as rigidly to musical art as they do to nature itself’ (76). Stanford’s image of parents and children in formal construction is borrowed from Wagner: when Hans Sachs gives advice on song construction to Walther in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, he draws his similes ‘from the idea of a man, a wife, and the children; in other words, the idea of natural development and evolution’ (35). Stanford goes on to apply the metaphor to his phrase analysis of a Beethoven melody (37–38).

Although these books pre-date Rubbra’s student days at the RCM, the way of thinking about music and approaching composition embodied in them was still prevalent in the early 1920s. Indeed, Stanford held the post of professor of composition at the college right up to his death in 1924, and his influence continued afterwards. Liane Curtis (1997) suggests, for example, that Stanford’s evolutionary view of sonata form, as well as his emphasis on organic unity, was the primary influence on Rebecca Clarke’s treatment of sonata form in her two largest scale works, the Viola Sonata (1919) and the Piano Trio (1921). Thirty years later, another of Stanford’s students, Gordon Jacob, was still promoting Stanford’s ideas in his book *The Composer and His Art* (1955), in which he urged that ‘organic growth is the thing to aim at in sonata form and this can only be achieved by extracting from the primal ideas such latent possibilities as the composer’s fertile brain can extract from them’ (20). Whilst the idea of ‘organic growth’ might seem to be uppermost in this quotation, Jacob’s reference to ‘primal ideas’ gives it a clear evolutionary slant. Rubbra’s teacher Holst likewise studied with Stanford, and is likely to have passed on similar ways of thinking about form. Indeed, Rubbra placed himself within this tradition on a number of occasions when describing his training and inclinations as a composer and listener. He used potentially evolutionary terminology when recalling Holst’s methods of teaching composition: ‘Holst favoured the use of the word “craftsmanship” rather than “technique,” because for him it assumed a relationship with the formative power of the germ-idea’ (Rubbra, 1934: 85). Although the term ‘germ’ is widely used in organicist writing about music, referring to the seed from which the larger whole develops, there could be an additional allusion here to Weismann’s ‘germ plasm theory’, which in 1893 provided scientific evidence in support of Darwin’s theory of natural selection by its observation that an organism’s
germ cells are discrete from other body cells and are solely responsible for transmitting heritable information. Rubbra also acknowledged that he was ‘conditioned by upbringing and inclination to listen to a piece of music as an evolving structure that presumes an organic growth which ends only with the final sound’ (Rubbra, 1973d: 677), a statement that has clear similarities with Gurney’s view of the listener’s perception of musical form.

Rubbra’s own approach to composition has been described in Chapter 1. In relation to the topic of this chapter, it is useful to recall his insistence on spontaneity within the act of composition, and his method of through-composition. Discussing the creative process with his artist son Benedict in 1978, they ‘agreed that an idea, or cell, when secure, will unfold and develop with its own energy’ (Rubbra, B., 1998: 21). Teilhard’s words seem apposite: ‘the within, consciousness, and then spontaneity – three expressions for the same thing’ (Teilhard de Chardin, 1959: 62). It would appear that Rubbra viewed the compositional process itself as a kind of evolution. Parallels can be drawn between Teilhard’s view of cosmogenesis – of a dynamic universe, in a state of becoming – and the unforced method of composition described by Rubbra. Teilhard does not regard the creation of the universe as a unique event, but as a continuing process, and ‘evolution … is the expression, in time and space, of our experience of creation’ (Teilhard, cited by Cowell, n.d. [c. 2002?]). He often refers to this process as one of ‘groping’, which he describes as ‘directed chance’, as the universe moves towards its completion and fulfilment in Christ-Omega. This is reminiscent of Rubbra’s description of his own creative process as one of ‘controlled accident’ (cited in Grover, 1993: 186). His music’s clear sense of movement towards completion whilst appearing to ‘coincide naturally with various conventions of proportion’, as Gurney put it, save it from the danger of lapsing into ‘the looseness of mere slow-motion improvisation’ (Northcott, cited in Pery, 2008: 9).

Given the way in which evolutionary thinking was so closely bound up with Rubbra’s view of musical form and the creative process, it is easy to see why he would have felt that it was possible to pay Teilhard a musical homage. Rubbra was not alone in wanting to honour Teilhard in this way. Other composers who have

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4 Weismann’s germ-plasm theory is mentioned in Kidd’s Social Evolution, being another important influence on Kidd’s thinking.
been influenced by Teilhard’s thought and have either sought to express aspects of it in their music or composed musical settings of texts by Teilhard include André Jolivet (Le Coeur de la matière, 1965), Kenneth Leighton (Hymn to Matter, Op. 74, 1976), and Charles Camilleri (Noospheres for piano, 1977). Having already composed seven successful works in the genre, it was natural for Rubbra to turn to the symphony for his homage. He considered the symphony to be ‘a vehicle for the profoundest abstract statements in music … like an entire philosophical system’ (Rubbra in Schafer, 1963: 65). He qualified the word ‘abstract’ by saying that he used the word ‘to distinguish the symphony from, say, opera’ (65), thus not excluding the symphony from expressing an extramusical idea. His analogy with ‘an entire philosophical system’ is interesting, suggesting an interconnectedness and logical development of ideas within the musical work. It implies that the symphony has the capacity to carry a ‘weighty’ musical argument, equal to Teilhard’s thesis, and embody a high level of unity. Such concepts are often linked to considerations of musical structure and form, and the preceding discussion has illustrated how these aspects of a work can be influenced by extramusical ideologies such as evolutionary theory. Yet these ideas are by no means new. Indeed, the very reason why Rubbra still considered writing a symphony in the second half of the twentieth century, and after a ten-year gap, could itself be given an evolutionary explanation. In the same way that Rubbra invoked Beethoven in his Piano Concerto in G or his pastoral Sixth Symphony, only to adapt the earlier model to present a message of himself and his times, perhaps with his homage to Teilhard de Chardin he anticipated yet another turn of the symphonic evolutionary spiral, at least in terms of his own compositional development.

**6.4 Symphony No. 8, Op. 132**

Fig. 6.1 identifies a number of ways in which the music of Rubbra’s Eighth Symphony could be seen to reflect Teilhard’s theory, and thus to pay homage to him.

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3 Rubbra’s successor as Music Fellow at Worcester College, Oxford University.
Fig. 6.1: Reflections of Teilhard’s theory in the music of Rubbra’s Symphony No. 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teilhard’s theory</th>
<th>Rubbra’s 8th Symphony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmogenesis – universe in a dynamic state of becoming</td>
<td>• Move from ‘broad base’ of multiple motifs and themes in the first movement towards greater thematic unity by end of third movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of history often represented through the image of a spiral</td>
<td>• Content-based, rotational approach to musical form evident in each movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opening of the second and third movements derive from material introduced at the end of the preceding movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generative nature of first nine bars of first movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motifs gradually evolve throughout each movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cell of three repeated pitches runs through thematic and motivic material of each movement (number three is significant – Holy Trinity, three strands of genesis in Teilhard’s theory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Energising timbre of trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noogenesis – emergence of consciousness and reflection, human interaction Complexification/complexity and consciousness</td>
<td>• Gradual emergence and complexification of Theme I throughout first movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Civilised’ Theme I emerges from the opening pastoral topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Theme I in first movement is often presented in counterpoint with its own inversion (reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Busy’ nature of second movement, with a multiplicity of interconnected themes (based on interval of a third, which is used extensively throughout the movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergence and Christogenesis</td>
<td>• Convergence of intervals over the span of the work, 4th → 3rd → 2nd, does not reach unison – the Omega Point is still in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | • The intervals of the opening motif of the first
My analysis will explore these correspondences, looking first of all at these aspects in relation to the work as a whole, followed by a more detailed examination of the first and third movements which will allow me to provide more specific illustrations.

In both a *Listener* article and a related radio talk around the time of the first performance of the Eighth Symphony, Rubbra said that he had become aware of the ‘dramatic value’ of intervals, and that in this symphony ‘the play of interval against interval, rather than of key against key, provides the motivating force behind the argument’ (Rubbra, 1970a: 925; ‘Music Magazine’ typescript, 3 January 1971, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark [referred to hereafter as ‘Music Magazine’]). He referred to the contraction of the fourth to a third as forming the ‘basic interval argument’ of the first movement (1970a: 925), singling out a specific instance in the E flat-A flat to E natural-G progression heard in the trumpet parts at bars 11–12. He described both themes and accompaniment of the second movement as using ‘the scaffolding of the interval of a third’ (‘Music Magazine’), and pointed out that a further contraction from a third to a second takes place between the end of the second movement (G-B in the final chord) and the start of the third (A flat-B flat in the opening chord) (1970a: 925). This progression is illustrated in Ex. 6.1: Intervallic convergence in the Symphony No. 8

Rubbra apparently made little distinction between interval classes 3 and 4 here, his notion of contraction seeming to have more to do with the voice leading, and the way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teilhard’s theory</th>
<th>Rubbra’s 8th Symphony</th>
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<td></td>
<td>movement are gathered into the final chord of the third movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In the last movement, the third (signifying human consciousness?) is inverted into the upward-reaching, aspiring sixth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sanctification of ‘chiming’ sounds (e.g. celesta, harp) at salient points in the work</td>
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**Ex. 6.1: Intervallic convergence in the Symphony No. 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st movement</th>
<th>2nd movement</th>
<th>3rd movement</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Rubbra apparently made little distinction between interval classes 3 and 4 here, his notion of contraction seeming to have more to do with the voice leading, and the way
in which he perceived the character of each interval. Although Rubbra used the term ‘contraction’ to describe this progression of intervals, it would be possible to substitute the term ‘convergence’, in order to draw an analogy between Teilhard’s view of convergence within the process of evolution towards Christ-Omega and this essential structural principle of the symphony. Interestingly, Rubbra himself drew a different parallel, comparing ‘the intensity generated by the progressive contraction of intervals’ with ‘the energy engendered by the astronomical phenomenon of star contraction’ (1970a: 925). The energy produced by star contraction sets in motion a process that eventually forms a new star. There is thus a rich double metaphor contained within this progression of intervals, signifying both the creative energy giving rise to the cosmological evolutionary process celebrated by Teilhard, and evolution’s convergence towards its divine fulfilment.6

There is also an intriguing parallel with the esoteric evolutionary theory of the human experience of intervals proposed by Rudolf Steiner and recorded in a booklet owned by Rubbra, *Music in the Light of Anthroposophy*. Steiner describes a gradual narrowing of human perception of intervals during the ‘post-Atlantean’ period. The perception of the fifth arose in human consciousness during the second post-Atlantean period ‘with a great feeling of well-being’. The fifth provided ‘an experience of the Divine World-Order without and within man’s [sic] being’ and brought recognition of his astral nature, but much of this awareness has subsequently been lost (P[ease], 1925: 46). By contrast, at a later stage of development, experience of the interval of a third ‘brought man completely into himself, i.e. into the physical body’, enabling him to ‘make music as an earthly being’, to ‘express himself outwardly in music’, rather than ‘the Divine singing through him’, and, through major and minor thirds, to experience ‘his own inner spiritual polarity of masculine and feminine’ (47). The intervening human perception of the fourth lies somewhere in between: ‘on the boundary of his physical body, yet still united with higher worlds’. The fourth was felt ‘as Holy Breath’, placing the human ‘as a living

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6 Interestingly, it was from about the period in which Rubbra was engaged on the composition of his Eighth Symphony (the mid-late 1960s) that his close friend Robert Simpson was beginning to think seriously about using the generative power of particular intervals to replace a more conventional approach to tonality in his own music (apparent from about his Fourth Symphony of 1970–72 onwards). Simpson was a keen astronomer, and Rubbra’s use of an astronomical analogy in describing the effect of the Eighth Symphony’s process of intervallic contraction strongly suggests that the friends discussed their compositional ideas at this time and influenced each other’s thinking.
conscious being in a physical world to which he did not quite completely belong’ (46). In Steiner’s view, human consciousness stands today within the subjective experience embodied in the third, but in future, ‘through a more spiritual perception of the interval of a second, man will once again be able to recognise the etheric part of his nature and his relationship to the etheric world’ (47).

Rubbra’s description of the act of composition as a spontaneous development and unfolding of ideas can lead to musical structures that are difficult to analyse in traditional formal terms. Some may have features in common with traditional forms, but nevertheless display considerable freedom in their approach such that analysis in traditional formal terms becomes problematic. Others may have very free structures that bear no resemblance to any Formenlehre type. An analytical alternative, in such cases, is to adopt James Hepokoski’s concept of rotational form, which he originally devised as a way of approaching music that resists accepted formal categorisation.

He defines rotational form as:

a structural process within which a basic thematic or rhetorical pattern presented at the outset of a piece (the initial passing-through or ‘rotation’ of thematic and harmonic materials) is subsequently treated to a series of immediate, though often substantially varied, repetitions. Rotational form may also be described as a set of rhetorical cycles or waves, in which the end of each rotation reconnects with (or cycles back to) its beginning – that is, to the beginning of the next rotation: hence the circular connotation of the term ‘rotation’ (Hepokoski, 2001: 325).

Hepokoski sees a larger principle at work in shaping the entire set of rotations in a movement. He calls this a process of teleological genesis, which he defines as ‘the gradual production and shaping of a cumulative goal’ (327). The use of the analytical metaphor of rotation to describe a process that combines ‘circular’, yet ever-renewed, repetitions of musical material over an essentially linear timespan, coupled with an overall goal-directedness, has clear parallels with Teilhard’s use of the visual metaphor of a spiral to describe the temporal processes of convergent

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7 Although originally formulated by Hepokoski as a way of analysing the processes observed in Sibelius’ music, rotational form has since been more widely applied by Hepokoski himself, Warren Darc and J.P.E. Harper-Scott.
cosmogenesis. Analysis of the first and, especially, third movements of the Eighth Symphony will demonstrate how Rubbra’s approach to rotational form enabled him to represent the principles of Teilhard’s cosmogenic thought aurally in his music.

Rubbra himself pointed out how thematic material at the start of the second and third movements grew, or evolved, out of material heard at the end of the preceding movement (1970a: 925). The connection between the first and second movements is illustrated in Ex. 6.2.

Ex. 6.2: Thematic links between first and second movements of Symphony No. 8

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

The link between the second and third movements is intervallic. The interval of a sixth is prominent in the closing section of the second movement, and forms the basis of theme I of the third movement (see Ex. 6.6).

Rather than following his usual practice of sketching out the symphony in a preliminary short score, Rubbra tells how he instead composed directly into full score, so that ‘the balance of sounds was an integral part of the formal growth of the music’ (1970a: 925). Certain timbres stand out, and seem to take on significance, when listening to the music. At the very start of the symphony, the instrumentation contributes to a musical evocation of the natural world: sustained, hushed, widely spaced chords in the strings, over which the opening motifs and melodic fragments float in wisps of woodwind and brass sound, coloured by harp harmonics. This natural soundscape returns in the codas of both the first and third movements. The harp is used often during the symphony, its sound frequently adding the traditional mystical allusions that have been noted before, for example in The Secret Hymnody. The celesta is used sparingly, but always in a context where the heavenly
connotations of its name seem appropriate. Its use in the final chord of the symphony particularly stands out, and will be discussed below. The trumpet timbre is also frequently conspicuous, its penetrating sound often serving to push the music onwards. In the first movement, it is particularly related to motif c (see Ex. 6.3).

**The first movement**

Grover analyses this movement as an enlarged sonatina comprising ‘a normal exposition containing the usual principal and secondary themes, and a shortened recapitulation in which a development of sorts (the Allegretto) is inserted’ (1993: 157). The fact that Rubbra himself (1970a: 925) uses terminology associated with sonata form, in referring to the first and second subjects and recapitulation, lends support to this view. Fig. 6.2 maps Grover’s formal analysis against some of the principal tempo changes and thematic landmarks of the movement. In this analysis, themes I and III correspond to the expected first and second subjects of a sonata form, with theme II functioning as a transition theme. Yet there are clear differences between the structure of this movement and ‘textbook’ sonatina form, especially in the extended development of theme I, coupled with the unusual insertion of a scherzo-like section, within the recapitulation. Furthermore, as Black has observed, ‘any attempt to identify some allotrope of sonata form, however analytically justifiable, is very little help in following the flow of sound. What matters is the constant interplay of the figures, so vividly characterised and flexible …’ (2008: 167).

Fig. 6.2 therefore adds an analysis in terms of rotational form to Grover’s enlarged sonatina form. Rotation 1 (R1), the referential statement of the ideas of the movement, presents all the essential themes and motifs of the movement, and thus takes in the two sections identified by Grover as introduction and exposition. In Rotation 2 (R2), the same themes and motifs occur, and in a similar order, but are developed by the insertion of the scherzo-like section. The notion of development might also suggest extension and proliferation, but this is not the case: R2 is considerably shorter than R1 (81 bars compared with 117 bars), and, although theme I is given extended treatment during R2, other themes and motifs tend to be condensed. The analogy with Teilhard’s depiction of a convergent, spiral cosmogenesis is thus preserved. The analogy is reinforced by a strong sense of
movement towards the final statement of theme I, which occurs at bars 190–93, and provides a telos or goal for the movement, after which momentum dissolves rapidly in the final four bars.
Fig. 6.2: Sonatina form and rotational form analyses of Symphony No. 8, first movement
Whilst a division of the movement into just two rotations might seem simplistic, especially in view of the complexity of thematic material, it is justifiable as it allows other structural principles to emerge. The movement includes Golden Section (GS) proportions, consistent with a principle of organic growth, as has been observed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study. Here, the ratios are often based on numbers of the Fibonacci series multiplied by nine. The number nine itself has significance in this context, being three multiplied by three, arguably representing both the three members of the Christian Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the three strands of Teilhard’s theory of cosmogenesis (matter, life and mind/spirit).

Fig. 6.3 illustrates some significant proportional relationships within the movement as a whole. R1 comprises 117 bars, being thirteen multiplied by nine. The point of fresh departure of R2, which in this movement coincides with the start of the recapitulation within traditional sonatina form (itself simultaneously a point of arrival/achievement and renewal), follows in bar 118. Within R2, the final, culminating statement of theme I, the telos of the whole movement, occurs at bar 190, i.e. after 189 (twenty-one multiplied by nine) bars have elapsed. R1 and the part of R2 preceding the telos are thus in GS proportion, 13:8. The final nine bars of R2 allows for the telos statement of theme I to be completed, followed by a rapid dying away. It also ensures that the total number of bars in R2 is eighty-one, or nine times nine.
Fig. 6.3: Golden Section proportions in Symphony No. 8, first movement

- 189 bars (21 x 9)
- 81 bars (9 x 9)
- 72 bars (8 x 9) to telos
- 117 bars (13 x 9)

**Rotational analysis**

**Enlarged sonatina**

- **Exposition**
  - First subject
  - Transition
  - Second subject

- **Recapitulation**
  - Embedded scherzo = inserted development?
  - 1st sub
  - 2nd sub
  - 3rd sub

**Tempo**

- Moderato
- Più mosso
- A tempo I
- Quasi allegretto
- A tempo I

**Themes and motifs**

- Motifs a, b, c and Theme I
- Motifs b and c
- Theme I
- Theme II
- Theme III
- Theme III with motifs a and b and c
- Motifs a and b, then Theme II
- Theme I
- Theme III
- Theme I
- Motif c and Theme II

**Bar nos.**

- 9
- 18
- 27
- 35
- 45
- 71
- 95
- 118
- 126
- 136
- 149
- 166
- 194

**Motifs**

- Motif c overlaps
- 1 x 9
- 2 x 9
- 5 x 9

**Notes**

- Misses secondary GS of movement (primary GS of R1) by 2 bars
- Secondary GS of R2
- Final statement of theme I = telos
Within R1, two initial segments of nine bars both end with an early statement of theme I. The first of these segments is germinal, introducing the three important motifs $a$, $b$ and $c$, together with the first stirrings of theme I in embryo form, and all twelve pitch classes (see Fig. 6.4).

**Fig. 6.4: Introduction of pitch-classes in Symphony No. 8, first movement, bars 1–9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>Pitch-class introduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>B flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>C sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>D natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F natural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ends of the first, second and fifth segments (all Fibonacci numbers) are seamlessly dovetailed to the ensuing music by statements of motif $c$, with distinctive use of the trumpet timbre. Both the angular contour of the motif and the penetrating timbre serve to carry the music forward, both having a generative role within the movement. The primary GS of this rotation comprises seventy-two bars, i.e. eight multiples of nine bars. Theme III narrowly misses starting at this point, coming in two bars ‘early’ at bar 71.

GS proportions are similarly found within R2. The secondary GS of this rotation is thirty-one, and here, theme III coincides precisely with the GS point, starting at bar 149. The *poco più mosso* fugal presentation of theme I starts two bars prior to the primary GS point, at bar 166, allowing the high D flat ‘point of arrival’ of this theme to fall at the actual GS point. The GS proportions across the movement thus confirm Roy Howat’s observation that points of maximum tension or climax tend to be associated with the primary GS point (i.e. long portion followed by short), whilst points of regeneration or growth are associated with the secondary GS point, i.e. short portion followed by long (Howat, 1983: 22).

The ‘play of interval against interval’ that Rubbra identified as vital to the ‘argument’ of the symphony is most obvious within the themes and motifs of each movement. Rubbra considered the whole of the first movement to be ‘concerned with the opposition of the more austere interval of a fourth to the sweeter and more
lyrical interval of a third’ (‘Music Magazine’). Ex. 6.3 sets out the principal themes and motifs of the movement, along with their associated pitch-class (pc) sets and interval-class (ic) vectors.

**Ex. 6.3: Principal motifs and themes of Symphony No. 8, first movement**

Table of music examples removed due to copyright restrictions
The ic vectors indicate that theme I most strongly favours the formation of ic5, whilst motif a favours ic4 and both theme II and motif a’ favour ic3. These intervals feature prominently within their respective themes and motifs, both linearly and, in the case of themes I and II, vertically. In addition, all four motifs feature ic5 as a vertical interval. The ‘interplay’ or ‘opposition’ of ic5 (the fourth) with either ic4 or ic3 (both thirds, and not distinguished by Rubbra in his comments on this movement) can occur in different ways. It can come about over a period of time, as the music progresses from one motif or theme to another (see Fig. 6.2), or it can happen as motifs and themes are simultaneously juxtaposed, as when theme II is always accompanied by motif a’. It can also be integral to a motif. Both motifs a and a’ embody the interplay of intervals within themselves. Motif a employs ic5 vertically, rocking linearly across ic4 in a (0, 4, 8) augmented triad, whilst motif a’ substitutes ic3 for ic4, outlining a (0, 3, 6) diminished triad. Thus, in addition to the
opposition of the fourth to a third that Rubbra identified as central to this movement, there is also an interplay of ic4 and ic3.

The pc-sets of motif a and theme II (pc-set 6-20, and pc-set 8-28, of which the pc-set of motif a’ is a subset) are particularly interesting, forming a hexatonic and an octatonic collection respectively. They have properties in common. Both are symmetrical modes of limited transposition, and both are ‘uniquely equipped to maximize their respective dyad-classes [ic4 and ic3] from among all set-classes of their cardinality’ (Cohn, 1991: 295). The use of both pitch collections in this symphony, but especially the hexatonic collection, pc-set 6-20, creates a link with the choral suite Inscape, analysed in Chapter 5. The hexatonic collection appears significantly as a musical marker of Christ’s presence in the world in ‘The Lantern out of Doors’, and both hexatonic and octatonic collections are used in ‘God’s Grandeur’. The latter piece, with its textual celebration of divine immanence in the natural world, has clear resonances with the Teilhardian allusions of the Eighth Symphony.

Octatonic collections are also used within theme III, the eleven pitch-classes of the melody being made up of a combination of octatonic collections I and III in alternation. The pitch-classes used here, lacking A natural, also suggest an F minor tonality, though a root position F minor triad is never employed in the accompaniment. Significantly, though, the notes on which the collection changes within the melody spell out an F minor triad. Similarly, the pc-set of theme I, if considered tonally, spells out a C major scale, though again, a root position tonic triad is not present in its accompaniment. Yet this does give some idea as to how the opposition and interplay of intervals within this movement creates an argument that can replace the traditional sonata form tonal structure associated with the first movement of a symphony. Ic5 is associated with the first subject areas of the movement (theme I), where there is always a hint of latent C major tonality that never quite reaches a certainty. Ic3, on the other hand, is more present in the transitional passages and second subject areas (themes II and III), whilst motifs a and a’ carry the tension within themselves throughout the movement. It is a tension that

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is not fully resolved. As the climactic fully orchestrated statement of theme I, affirming ic5, at bars 186–93 suddenly fades, the opening C–G–C chord re-emerges, forming a backdrop to the closing statements of motif a’ and a reminiscence of theme II.

Motif c stands apart from this interplay of intervals. Its generative role within the movement has already been mentioned. In this context, its pc-set is significant, having the potential to generate just one of each interval class. Only two pc-sets of cardinality four have this property. The distinctive use of ic6 within the cell y occurs frequently in R1 as an energising accompaniment, but is notably absent from R2, where theme I takes precedence.

A final feature of several of these themes and motifs is the use of three repeated pitches, labelled in Ex. 6.3 as cell x. This cell appears in motifs b and c, and theme II, and recurs throughout the whole symphony. The significance of the number three in relation to both Christian theology and Teilhard’s theory of cosmogenesis has already been noted.

Despite its apparent role as a sonata form first subject, theme I emerges gradually during R1, gathering momentum on each appearance, but only reaching a full fruition during R2. As has been noted, both linearly and vertically it favours ic5. The melodic outline features two prominent interlocking fourths (A–D and C–F). At its first complete statement (bars 15–17) the melody is presented in parallel fourths, and, simultaneously, in inversion. This counterpoint is retained in a number of its subsequent appearances. The total melody and harmony of this first presentation of the theme uses all seven pitch-classes of the C major scale, though the tonic chord in root position is avoided, both here and in all subsequent presentations of the theme except for the final one. Until then, each statement of the theme diverts into different continuation material. The broad dotted rhythm, chordal texture, chorale-like string timbre (later emphasised by the addition of brass instruments) and latent tonality combine to suggest a change from the movement’s opening pastoral topic: a more purposeful gathering together of musical elements.

Recalling Rubbra’s observation that Teilhard's writings ‘gave to the history of man a purpose that I always instinctively felt was there’ (in Dawney, 1971: 10), theme I’s progress throughout the movement might suggest the emergence and forward tread of human civilisation. Successive statements of the theme are cumulative. Its first stirrings are heard in bars 7–8, and a first full statement in bars 276
15–17, both statements occurring towards the end of nine-bar ‘segments’ of music. Neither of these statements begins on the first beat of the bar, which gives them a slightly hesitant character, and also ensures that there is a feeling of growth and movement towards the first main beat of the bar within each statement. The third statement, which overlaps the end of the third nine-bar segment and the start of the fourth, begins more firmly on the first beat of bar 27. It forms the first climax, and thus the first point of arrival, of the movement.

Theme I is next heard at the start of R2, the moment of recapitulation in a traditional sonata form (bars 118–25). The theme is presented fortissimo by strings and brass, embroidered by an ‘overspill’ from the preceding section of conjunct descending triplet quavers in the violins and woodwind (Rubbra, 1970a: 925). Such descending scales are often associated with the sound of church bells in Rubbra's music, related in his own mind to his childhood mystical experience at Harlestone Firs. Here, the metrical dissonance between their four-beat groupings and the irregular metre of the theme could suggest the tension between Teilhard's theory of cosmic evolution and the views of orthodox Christianity, or point to the fact that human civilisation is still out of step with the spiritual dimension. Theme I dominates R2. Two further statements vary and develop the theme. The first of these (bars 136–48) presents the theme Quasi Allegretto as a 'dancing figuration' (Rubbra, 1970a: 925). This variant notably introduces the ‘heavenly’ sound of the celesta, making its only appearance within this movement, and adding a sacred dimension to the dance. The second variant of theme I (bars 166–85) is described by Rubbra as a 'remoulding and elongation' of the original material, which builds steadily towards the last, main climax of the movement. Finally, in its culminating statement (bars 190–93), the full orchestration lends Theme I something of the pomp of an Elgarian march, though subverted by the continuing irregular metre. The telos is, however, short-lived. Theme I makes its only cadence onto a root position chord of C, then fades rapidly into a return of the pastoral soundworld.

The third movement

Although Rubbra had twice previously concluded a symphony with a slow finale (Nos. 1 and 7 both end with Lento movements), this movement is remarkable for its
combination of a sense of infinite expansiveness with intensity and conciseness of expression. His choice of a slow tempo ($\frac{3}{4} = 48–50$) in this instance was undoubtedly prompted by the extramusical associations of the music, and is perhaps redolent of the finale of Mahler’s Symphony No. 3, a work similarly driven by cosmological ideas.

The intervallic contraction that is part of Rubbra’s compositional design for the symphony (Ex. 6.1) is immediately evident in the opening bar, as the ic4 (G natural–B natural) heard at the end of the preceding movement moves to ic2 (A flat–B flat) in the first chord of the finale, played against the G natural that links all three movements of the symphony (Ex. 6.4).
Ex. 6.4: Symphony No. 8, intervallic contraction between movements 2 and 3

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
By giving this intervallic contraction aural prominence, Rubbra emphasises its importance as a marker of the symphony’s spiritual allusions, unfolding temporally as the music is heard, and not solely as an element of its abstract design. The halting horn rhythm of the opening, together with a lack of clear metre and the sense of widening space engendered by the contrapuntal presentation of theme I against its own inversion, are further markers. The widening textures combined with the contraction of the prominent interval classes create an aural effect which is simultaneously that of cosmic scale and of progressive focus, as the structural intervals aim inexorably towards the G natural unison that is the symphony’s implied, though never realised, destiny.

The opening chord, Ex. 6.5, played by horns and violas, is seminal to this movement. Comprising pc-set 3-2 (0, 1, 3), it has an ic-vector (111000). Rubbra emphasises ic2 with the close proximity of A flat and B flat, whilst the other intervals are present in inversion. This chord has emerged from the process of intervallic contraction that has been going on throughout the symphony, the anomaly being that, as the intervals become progressively smaller, so their inversions become wider, and Rubbra exploits this property within the themes of this movement.

Ex. 6.5: Symphony No. 8, third movement, opening chord

All of the thematic material of the third movement derives from this opening chord and its intervals. The two principal themes, I and II, are illustrated in Ex. 6.6. Theme I has three distinctive continuations, to be referred to as A, B and C. Continuations A and C are very closely related to the opening chord: indeed, continuation C has an identical pc-set. All three continuations tend to make use of ic1 and ic2, particularly continuation B, which, with its use of the octatonic collection, recalls theme II of the first movement. This favouring of small intervals gives continuation B a meandering, wandering quality. Continuations A and C also use ic3 in inversion, and are more obviously variants of theme I itself.

Theme I has a very distinctive contour. The upward-reaching major sixth (the inversion of ic3 which played such an important role in the first movement),
which continues to stretch upwards, beyond itself, through the major seventh and onto the octave before collapsing back, gives a yearning, aspirational quality to the melody. Even in the second half of the melody, where the first two bars are inverted, the underlying counterpoint in the bass repeats the original, upward-reaching form. The tonal ambivalence of the melody, with bars 1–2 suggesting G major but bars 3–4 apparently in E flat major, adds to the impression of stretching after something that cannot quite be achieved. There is a sense that the melody strives after G major but is pulled back to E flat by the accompanying harmony.

Hugh Ottaway has said that theme II ‘has the magic of a new discovery, yet this, too, is drawn from the basic material’ (1977: 40). Initially, the rising major sixth contracts to a fifth. The significance of the fifth for Rubbra as ‘the most positive interval … and the most mysterious’ has been cited previously, coupled with Steiner’s view of this interval as ‘an experience of the Divine World-Order’. Its use within theme II, coupled with frequent returns to D, contributes to this theme’s greater sense of repose.

As in the first movement, cell x of three repeated pitches is prominent in both continuation C and theme II.
Ex. 6.6: Symphony No. 8, third movement themes

Music examples removed due to copyright restrictions
The third movement is even more formally elusive than the first. Fig. 6.5 shows the thematic structure of the movement. The vertical dotted line in the middle of the diagram indicates the exact halfway point of the movement. Theme II makes its first appearance at this point. The first half of the movement is made up entirely of theme I and its various continuations, whilst in the second half, themes I and II work together. It is difficult to label the form of the movement in conventional terms. The diagram bears no resemblance to any Formenlehre type. Grover sidesteps any mention of this movement’s form. Rubbra himself calls it ‘a long meditation’ on the opening chord (1970a: 925), whilst Black refers to it as ‘one of his inimitable long, slow waves’ (2008: 171), but neither description really does justice to the intricacy and balance of its design.
Fig. 6.5: Symphony No. 8, thematic structure of third movement
Fig. 6.6: Symphony No. 8, rotational form in the third movement
As with the first movement, applying Hepokoski’s rotational principle to the formal analysis allows an analogy to be drawn with Teilhard’s spiral model of evolutionary progress and cosmogenesis, as illustrated in Fig. 6.6, where the musical rotations are overlaid onto the thematic structure, and Teilhard’s spiral is reproduced beneath the diagram. As described in Section 6.2, Teilhard adopted the visual metaphor of the spiral to capture his notion that recurring patterns combine with elements of novelty throughout history (King, 1980: 106). In the same way, each musical rotation picks up material from the preceding rotation, whilst presenting it in a new light. The tapering shape of the spiral should not be taken to indicate that the temporal proportions of each rotation become shorter as the movement progresses. Indeed, as Fig. 6.6 makes clear, the rotations are of irregular length, and there is some overlap of material, particularly in the first half of the movement, which blurs the structural edges – between R2 and R3, for example, where continuation material spills over from one rotation into the start of the next, giving the music a sense of seamless growth (Ex. 6.7). Similarly the central point of the movement does not coincide with the start of a rotation, though it is marked out aurally in other ways that will be discussed below. Thus the movement has a kind of lopsided symmetry as a continuous thread of musically evolving material wraps itself around the central axis which provides the point of balance. The whole movement grows towards a point of climax, or telos, in bar 78, around which the number nine, which informed much of the structure of the first movement, is again significant. Rotation 8, at the end of which the climax occurs, is nine bars in length, as is the coda that immediately follows, which itself stands as the ninth rotation.

The number nine is part of the summative series of Lucas numbers multiplied by three, that also includes eighty-seven, the total number of bars in the movement (6, 3, 9, 12, 33, 54, 87). As noted within the first movement analysis, three is a significant number, both theologically and in relation to Teilhard’s theory of cosmogenesis. It is not surprising, then, to find that Golden Section proportions are also present within the movement, adding a further aspect of ‘dynamic symmetry’

to the form. R4 and R6 begin respectively one bar before the secondary and primary GS points, R4 at bar 33 and R6 at the upbeat to bar 54. This missing of the precise

Ex. 6.7: Symphony No. 8, third movement, bars 21–26

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
point of GS might be seen as yet another way in which Rubbra blurs the structural boundaries in order to simulate more closely the organic process of evolution, although the GS points themselves are marked out audibly in other ways, such as the emphatic timpani strokes that push the music forward over the barline in bars 33–34. As noted in Section 5.3, GS proportions are not readily perceived by the listener, especially since the proportions of sections measured against each other only become evident in performance after the music has finished. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Rubbra intended them to combine formally with the aurally more discernible rotational processes as part of the integrity of the whole composition, and as a way of aligning the form with cosmic principles.

The point of primary GS division marks a further way in which the form of this movement emulates the shape of Teilhard’s broad-based evolutionary spiral tapering to a point. Musical correspondences between the two parts of the movement suggest that the shorter portion is in fact a condensed ‘meta-rotation’ of the preceding larger portion. There is certainly a greater concentration of thematic material in the shorter portion of the movement, as the discursive continuation themes disappear, being replaced by use of theme II in conjunction with the aspirational first part of theme I. In addition, whereas R1 through to the opening of R5 builds gradually and then relaxes onto the central point of repose of theme II, R6–R8 drives more forcefully towards the climactic telos chord in bar 78. R6–R7 most specifically reflects the musical material of R2–R5, with correspondences of tonality/harmonic movement, texture and timbre between the two portions of the movement.

After the expansive first rotation, in which theme I is set out most fully, early rotations are characterised by a brief surge of new growth/reaching out (theme I) at the start of the rotation (in a remote F sharp major at the start of R2, in canon of both the original and rhythmically augmented forms in R3) which dissolves swiftly into passages in which stasis and forward motion are delicately balanced. In R2, the wandering quality of the solo oboe melody (continuation B), hovering above the uncertain harmony of a diminished triad and coloured by the rarefied timbre of harp harmonics and sul ponticello tremolando violas, is offset by the ‘ticking of a clock’ effect (Black, 2008: 171) of the steadily repeated (and now metrical) rocking crotchets in the accompaniment (see start of Ex. 6.7); whilst in R3 the thrumming harp arpeggiations, gradual crescendo and increasing insistence of continuation C
push the music onwards despite being anchored by the sustained E flat pedal point (bars 27³–32). Although R4–R5 continue to build, with the sweeping inverted statement of theme I at the start of R4 (bar 33) taken up and intensified by the more penetrating timbre of the trumpet at the start of R5 (bars 40–42), the anticipated first climax is not attained. Instead, the dynamic level swiftly drops in bar 43, and the halfway point of the movement is marked by a relaxation of tension onto the tranquillo theme II (see Ex. 6.6 and accompanying discussion). A thinned orchestral accompaniment and suspension of harmonic movement add to the sense of repose: the sustained pedal D continues for nine-and-a-half bars, broken only by a brief upward surge at bars 48–49, whilst the woodwind, and later horns, circle gently round chords in which seconds – both ic1 and ic2 – are prominent. Yet despite the sense of resting throughout this passage, resolution of the pedal note onto the G to which the opening theme aspired is avoided.

In R6–R7, the most audible landmarks from R2–R5 are revisited and presented in a more concentrated guise. R6 recalls the sharpwards shift of key heard at the start of R2, with the ending of theme II stepping chromatically upwards to D sharp and a B major chord that, with added A and G, hints at E minor (bars 52–53). Both timbre and texture of the latter part of R2 are reprised throughout the very brief R6, but more edgily: the ‘ticking’ harp harmonics now syncopated and the sul ponticello tremolando moving up to the violins. Through an enharmonic transition, R7 picks up the E flat pedal of R3, now hammered out by strings and timpani in marcato quavers that forcefully push the music onwards through this first climax (bars 58²–62), towards a restatement of theme I with the same piercing trumpet timbre heard at the start of R5 (bar 64). When theme II reappears in its original guise and a warm lower string sonority, it is over a sustained pedal G (bar 66–69).

The final big push to a climax occurs in R8. Instigated once more by the clarion tones of the trumpet (bars 70–71), and a rapid crescendo, theme I dominates this rotation. It is taken up by woodwind and strings, its characteristic yearning rising sixth ‘made more forcible by being expressed in sixths’ (Rubbra, 1970a: 925), and tension mounts very quickly, with stretto entries in the brass. A cadence in C seems imminent but is interrupted in b. 78 by a powerful tutti chord. It is a moment of culmination, Christ/Omega revealed as ‘supremely present’ (Teilhard de Chardin, 1959: 296), as the C towards which the harmonic movement of R8 is moving, and which underpinned the first movement of the symphony, is enveloped by the three
pitch-classes with which the final movement opened, along with the E flat that has so often anchored the harmony throughout the movement (Ex. 6.8), creating a pc-set 5-27 (0, 1, 3, 5, 8). A comparison with the opening 3-2 set from the opening of the movement indicates that this later 5-7 set is notably more tonal in its implications, with an ic-vector (122230), suggesting that the tonal/harmonic argument is moving towards resolution.

**Ex. 6.8: Symphony No. 8, third movement, bars 73–82**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
The nine bars of the coda follow immediately and balance the nine bars of R8 that lead up to the telos. Timbre is vital to the effect of this passage. The music returns to the pastoral soundworld that framed the first movement of the symphony, with sustained horns intoning their opening chord of the movement (pc-set 3-2), to which thrumming harp chords add the pitch-class C, a widely spaced string chord for
the final five bars, and solos from low strings and woodwind. There is a sense that
the whole of the natural world is caught up in this final redemptive resolution. A
cadence in C is forgotten, and the G major that has been looked for since the opening
bars of the movement is now achieved: a perfect cadence in that key happens in bar
82 – the only perfect cadence in the whole movement. The symphony overall thus
demonstrates progressive, or emergent, tonality, the tonic C of the first movement
being transformed by its encounter in bar 78 of this movement. Then theme II, in a
retrograde version, and theme I are brought into their closest proximity – the only
time that statements of these two themes overlap. Just the first two bars of theme I
are used, their reaching out to G major at last fulfilled as they rest over the tonic
chord. Finally, the celesta makes its only entry in this movement, its silvery chiming
sound enhancing and sanctifying the closing chord. The celesta’s notes comprise pc-
set 6-20, a hexatonic collection identical to motif a that opens the first movement of
the symphony (Ex. 6.9), with its resonances of Christ’s presence in creation.10

Ex. 6.9: Symphony No. 8, closing celesta chord

![pc-set 6-20](image)

(0, 1, 4, 5, 8, 9)
(303630)

At this point of final resolution, the ic-vector emphasises intervals predominantly
associated with tonal music, including mainly major and minor thirds and perfect
fourths/fifths. Notably, ic2, emphasised at the start of the final movement, is absent
from this vector. Motif a was used to initiate a tension between fourths and thirds
from the very first bars of the symphony. So the two intervals that played an
important role in the first and second movements of the symphony are brought
together in its closing bar. The process of intervallic convergence that has taken
place over the course of the symphony has not reached a unison, just as the Omega
Point that is for Teilhard the true goal of cosmogenesis is still in the future. But it
has reached a state of unity, holding out, like Teilhard, a message of hope.

10 This time the hexachord used outlines the ‘western’ hexatonic system as defined by Richard Cohn
(1996).
6.5 Comparison with *Prism*

There are some significant similarities between both the extramusical inspiration and the music itself of Rubbra’s Eighth Symphony and his earlier ballet, *Prism*. The extramusical content or allusion is the most obvious: both works deal with an evolutionary ‘journey’ from primeval origins to a higher plane or goal of existence. Whilst *Prism* relates to the evolution of consciousness specifically, the Eighth Symphony embraces the whole creation.

**Fig. 6.7: Musical similarities between *Prism* and Symphony No. 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>Prism</em></th>
<th>Symphony No. 8</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progressive tonality</strong></td>
<td>C to A</td>
<td>C to G</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No full sense of finality at end</strong></td>
<td>Ends on first inversion chord</td>
<td>Projected unison of process of intervallic contraction not achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descending chromatic bass line and diminuendo to nothing suggest that musical progress continues in some unheard realm</td>
<td>Final chord gathers in the notes of the celesta chord over the tonic G, but their ‘falsifying overtones’ destroy any sense of key (Rubbra, 1970a: 925)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Octatonicism used to express a rootless seeking</strong></td>
<td>In Prologo: Origin as figures move towards the spinning white light</td>
<td>In themes II and III of first movement, and continuation B of theme I of third movement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Also during second phase of Dance of White Form</td>
<td>All tend to be transitional or second subject material – no sense of repose</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Symphony No. 8</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of ic(6) (interval of augmented fourth) to energise and propel music forward</td>
<td>In Prologo: Origin – within opening theme and in octatonic/bitonal passage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within motif (c) (cell (y)) of first movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Similar thematic material</td>
<td>Accompanimental figure in Phase 3 of Dance of White Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme II of first movement (music example removed due to copyright restrictions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural similarities</td>
<td>Three main divisions (scenes) split the evolutionary progress into three stages: birth of human consciousness, human interaction and activity, and awareness of potential to achieve a higher plane of existence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Three main divisions (movements) split the evolutionary progress into three stages: natural creation and the birth of human civilisation (cosmogenesis), human interaction and activity (noogenesis), awareness of potential to achieve a higher reality (Christogenesis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golden Section proportions in evidence:</td>
<td>Golden Section proportions in evidence:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opening ‘Origin’ section, up to descent of the prism, is divided at point of secondary GS</td>
<td>• First movement makes structural use of Fibonacci numbers multiplied by nine to create many GS relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dance of Green Form (representing the Earth Mother?) occurs very close to point of secondary GS of whole ballet</td>
<td>• Final movement makes structural use of Lucas numbers multiplied by three: Rotations 4 and 6 begin very close to points of secondary and primary GS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dance of Composite Forms</td>
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294
Some of the musical similarities between the two works are outlined in Fig. 6.7. These correspondences of musical language, despite the thirty year period separating the two works, help to endorse the interpretation of each in evolutionary terms. Rubbra has chosen, at times, to use a similar vocabulary to express similar ideas.

Rubbra concluded his 1970 *Listener* article on the Eighth Symphony by stating that: ‘it was no part of my intention, even if possible, to translate these [Teilhard’s] ideas into music: but they meet, I hope, in a like optimism’ (1970a: 925). My analysis of the symphony contests this view: I believe that Rubbra has, in ways that I have demonstrated, translated Teilhard’s ideas into music. Two years later, writing about Messiaen’s music, Rubbra commented perceptively that:

> theology in itself has no power to make a musical structure cohere. The external premises on which music is based receive their sanction only when the pressures from these concepts result in a transmutation that enables the music to remain subject to its own terms and laws (1973d: 677).

This is indeed what Rubbra has achieved in the Eighth Symphony’s homage to Teilhard de Chardin.
7. From ‘Dark Night’ to ‘Resurrection’: The figure of Christ in Rubbra’s music

Rubbra’s Eighth Symphony, through its translation of Teilhard de Chardin’s complex theory into musical terms, presents a rather cerebral concept of Christ as the Omega, the endpoint, of the cosmic evolutionary process. This image of Christ undoubtedly resonates with aspects of Rubbra’s spirituality explored in earlier chapters: his theosophical interest in the evolution of consciousness, and both Eastern- and Western-derived views of divine pattern and immanence in nature. There is, however, another, more personal, image of Christ that appears in Rubbra’s works throughout his life: that of Christ incarnate.

The Christ-child is a frequent figure within Rubbra’s early lullabies and cradle songs (see Chapter 2 and Appendix A), as also within his later choral carols from the 1950s–60s. Other early songs centre on the Easter mystery. In Rubbra’s unpublished setting of George Herbert’s ‘Easter’ (1921–22) the poet/singer brings flowers to greet the risen Christ, whilst in ‘The Mystery’, Op. 4, no. 1, Christ presents a rose to the singer. In ‘Rosa Mundi’, Op. 2, which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Christ himself is seen as the Rose of the World, hanging ‘high on a thorny Tree’. A common feature of these early miniatures is their sensual imagery, from Mary enfolding the baby Jesus in ‘her mantle of blue’ (‘Cradle Song’, Op. 8, No. 1) to the Rose that is ‘Heaven to smell’ (‘The Mystery’, Op. 4, No. 1), and the mystical ‘He is o’er us, though within, Jesukin is on my breast’ (‘Jesukin’, Op. 4, No. 2), all expressed with exquisite musical simplicity.

From the mid-1930s, a new sense of spiritual seeking enters into Rubbra’s Christ-centred works. Both the sensual imagery and the theme of spiritual union are developed within a more sophisticated harmonic language, with an increasing emphasis on Christ’s body as an object of adoration. This chapter will explore a selection of the most significant of these works, setting them within the context of Rubbra’s personal and spiritual development.
7.1 Seeking Christ

As observed in previous chapters, fresh influences came into Rubbra’s life around the time of his marriage and move to Speen in the early 1930s. His new wife, Antoinette, was a Catholic by birth and upbringing. The friendships that he began to make in Eric Gill’s Catholic community were undoubtedly important in directing Rubbra’s attention towards the figure of Christ, and the related works that Rubbra produced during the 1930s have a greater depth and seriousness than his early songs. Yet his beliefs may still have been far from those of an orthodox Christian.

An impression of the direction that Rubbra’s new interest in Christ took during these years can be gained by looking at the literature that he read during these years. Two novels stand out during the 1930s. Both explore the variety of spiritual experience, and both include unorthodox representations of Jesus. The first, given by Rubbra to Antoinette in 1938, is *The Brook Kerith* (1916) by George Moore.¹ Moore (1852–1933) was involved with the Irish Literary Revival and was friendly with leading Dublin Theosophists of the day, amongst them George Russell (‘AE’) and W.B. Yeats. *The Brook Kerith* presents ‘a study of how men intellectually shape God to their liking in their own image and of the effects this has on their total selves … [and] an analysis of contrasting types of religious experience’ (Cave, 1978: 198, 222). It focuses in turn on three different biblical characters: Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus and Paul. In his account of the Passion story, Moore exploits loopholes in the gospel accounts to suggest that Jesus did not die on the cross, but was in a deep coma when his body was taken for burial by Joseph of Arimathea. His resurrection is therefore a gradual process of recovery, both physical and psychological, achieved through a combination of Joseph’s nursing care and Jesus’ return to an earlier vocation of shepherd for the Essene community. He is portrayed as a nature mystic:

> God is always about us. We hear him in the breeze, and we find him in the flower … he had come to comprehend that the world of nature was a manifestation of the God he knew in himself (Moore, 1927 [1916]: 342, 344).

¹ The book is still in the possession of Benedict Rubbra. The inscription on the flyleaf indicates that Rubbra gave it to Antoinette on 20 August 1938.
At the end of the novel, Jesus meets the apostle Paul, who has developed his belief in Jesus’ resurrection and messiahship into a rigid doctrine. Travelling together, the two men part company as Paul turns westwards towards Rome, to institute the church, and Jesus eastwards towards India. It is easy to surmise, given Rubbra’s spiritual inclinations outlined in preceding chapters, and his expressed mistrust of organised religion during the 1930s, that he would have been sympathetic to Moore’s portrayal of Jesus.

The second novel is *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), by John Cowper Powys. Late in life, Rubbra wrote of his ‘initial excitement’ on reading this book soon after its publication (diary entry, 1 March 1979, RA, Box 33, temporary shelfmark). Set in contemporaneous Glastonbury, this epic novel explores the influence on the town and its people of the Christian and pagan legends that surround the place.² Whilst on the surface a drama of local politics, and the tensions between rural tradition and modernising industrial forces, at its heart it presents a quest, both individual and collective, for the Holy Grail, so that beneath the action ‘we are encouraged to imagine a fundamental and universal battle of good and evil’ (Esty, 2004: 65–66). Central to the novel is an account of the staging of a pageant, including a Passion play, in which one of the townspeople, anxious to salve his personal feelings of guilt, elects to play the part of Christ, and almost dies of pain and asphyxiation during the enactment of the crucifixion.

Rubbra’s friend, neighbour and fellow Powys enthusiast in his early days in Speen, Cecil Collins, was also drawn to universal concepts of good and evil at this time. One of his most impressive early paintings is a large canvas representing *The Fall of Lucifer*, painted in 1933, in an outhouse that Rubbra later purchased from the artist for use as a woodshed.³ The painting relates to Collins’ recurring theme of the loss of Paradise (discussed in Chapter 5), as, theologically, Lucifer’s fall is usually taken to precede Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In

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² Arthurian legend was popular amongst British composers during the first decades of the twentieth century, with works such as Arnold Bax’s *Tintagel* (1917–19) and Rutland Boughton’s cycle of Arthurian dramas. Boughton settled in Glastonbury in 1914, where he established an annual summer music festival on which Powys very probably used as his model for the pageant in *A Glastonbury Romance*.

composition, the painting has similarities with some medieval representations of the same scene, having three distinct horizontal layers of action. Unusually, however, hell is not placed at the foot of the picture. Instead, Lucifer plunges into a flaming building, the Dantine citadel of Dis, in the centre of the canvas. The painting is inscribed on the back ‘The Holy War’, drawing attention to the angelic battle between the ranged forces of good and evil that rages around the falling figure (Collins, J., 1989: 12–13; Anderson, 1988, 36–37).

In Christian theology, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ represent a second battle between the forces of good and evil, in which the earlier expulsion from Paradise is overturned and a message of hope is held out to the whole of creation. That this battle also intrigued Collins, despite his lack of affiliation to any organised religion, is evidenced by his use of the title Resurrection for a painting exhibited in 1935, but since lost. Indeed, the spiritual connotations of his paintings caused his rift with the Surrealists, with whom he exhibited in 1936, when one of his paintings included in the exhibition, Virgin Images in the Magical Processes of Time, was found to have the word ‘resurrection’ painted eleven times in red capital letters on an amoeboid form (Collins, 1989: 13; Anderson, 1988: 42).

The friendship and artistic empathy between Rubbra and Collins was very close at this time, and in 1935 Rubbra set one of Collins’ poems to music. ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ was intended as one of Rubbra’s unfinished Three Poems for choir and small orchestra, Op. 41.

Three Poems, Op. 41

The setting of Collins’ poem was completed first of the three, written out neatly in ink, bound in brown paper, and titled ‘Poem for choir and small orchestra’ (RC, Vol. LVIII, Add MS 62644, ff. 1–16). It is unclear from the manuscript whether, at that stage, Rubbra intended it to become one of a set. Shortly afterwards, however, he started work on two companion settings: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, by the sixteenth-century Spanish Catholic mystic St John of the Cross, and the thirteenth-century Latin hymn ‘The rhythm of St Thomas Aquinas in honour of the adorable sacrament’. ‘The Dark Night’ was completed in short score in January 1936, but
was not fully scored until 1942, when it was also published separately. 4 ‘Rhythm’ remains unfinished, only ten-and-a-half bars surviving in pencil draft (RC, Vol. LVIII, Add MS 62644, ff. 24–25).

Looking back at the Three Poems, Rubbra (1968b: 748) described the set as a triptych, which is an apt analogy, given that the disparate texts (Fig. 7.1) are linked by a common focus on the body of Christ, in the manner of many altarpieces. Collins’ poem stands at the centre of the triptych. Described by Elsie Payne as ‘strange and enigmatical’ (1977: 78), it draws on imagery associated with Christ’s crucifixion: ‘vinegar’, ‘spears’, his body ‘stretch[ed]’ on a ‘cross of earth’, ‘darkness’, ‘dead god’, ‘pierced’, and the opening ‘unwithered eagle void’ that represents the powerful yet spiritually empty Roman Empire and, by extension, all worldly systems of authority. Yet, ‘down bowed’, the Christ figure forgives, and loves. In his later writings, Collins described Christ as ‘the greatest fool in history … this Divine Fool, whose immortal compassion and holy folly placed a light in the dark hands of the world’ (Collins, 1991 [1947]: 19).

This central crucifixion scene is flanked by poems that use equally symbolic language, despite their differences in expression. ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, which can be seen as the left of the triptych, is an allegory of the soul’s spiritual yearning after, and mystical union with, God, cast in terms of physical lovemaking. Its sensual imagery is reminiscent of the Biblical Song of Songs. The male figure in the poem can be identified as Christ, an interpretation that is reinforced by the allusions to cedars, a traditional symbol of Christ. As the right-hand panel, St Thomas Aquinas’ seven-stanza hymn deals with yet another manifestation of Christ’s body. The hymn is traditionally used as an act of devotion at the Eucharistic elevation of the host: a solemn moment in the Catholic liturgy signifying the resurrection of Christ’s previously broken body, which, according to Catholic doctrine, is actually present in the transubstantiated bread. Although Rubbra’s setting breaks off, unfinished, part way through the second stanza, he presumably intended to set the entire hymn. Subsequent verses set out the mystery that, although Christ’s deity was hidden on the cross, his humanity is also hidden in the host, visible only to the eye of faith.

4 Though still designated as Op. 41, No. 1.
Fig. 7.1: *Three Poems*, Op. 41, the triptych of texts

Poem texts removed due to copyright restrictions
The hymn ends with a prayer:

Ut te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriæ.

(That the sight of your face being unveiled
I may have the happiness of seeing your glory.)

Just as the three texts have very different poetic and linguistic styles, yet are linked by a common Christ-motif, so the musical settings are also very different in style, yet motivically linked. In a painted triptych, such as an altarpiece, the viewer’s eye might dwell first of all on the central panel, and then be drawn outwards to first one then the other side panels. In a musical triptych, the time dimension of performance means that the listener will experience the panels in sequence from one ‘side’ to the other. Had Rubbra completed Three Poems, he would have expected the settings to be heard by order of opus number, with ‘Dark Night’ first, then ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, and finally ‘The Rhythm’. Yet the order of composition did, apparently, run from the centre outwards, so it is appropriate to begin discussion of the music of the set with No. 2.

‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ has never been performed. In later years, Rubbra was somewhat apologetic about his use of a ‘Schoenbergian idiom’ in his setting, justifying his stylistic choice with a reference to Collins’ interest at the time in Schoenberg’s music (Grover, 1993: 17). He, too, was interested enough to perform Schoenberg’s Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19 in a recital broadcast on 6 April 1936 (Doctor, 1999: 319). Rubbra described the first five of those pieces as ‘concentrated mood-states of a stark and tragic intensity’, making a comparison with the ‘subjectivism of such a painter as Kandinsky’ (1936b: 651). Similarly, when considering his setting of Collins’ poem, it was ‘the intensely subjective nature of the words … [that] turned my thoughts to a serialist technique that remained, however, intuitive rather than calculated’ (Rubbra, 1968b: 748).

There is no immediate evidence of twelve-note technique in the piece, though the harmony has a ‘peculiar stringent piquancy’ that Mellers compared to the early work of Bernard van Dieren (1939: 62–63). On the contrary, analysis of the opening four bars (Ex. 7.1), circling around D in the vocal line and around G in the orchestra
(reduced to pitch collections in Ex. 7.2), suggests an ambiguous underlying tonal centre of D or G.

**Ex. 7.1: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, bars 1-4**

**Ex. 7.2: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, opening pitch collections/contours**
Pc-set 4-4 is simply an extension, by one pc, of set 3-1, as (0, 1, 2) becomes (0, 1, 2, 5). Ex. 7.2 also demonstrates the importance of ic1 which is made clear in the interval vectors of the two pc-sets and, in the vocal line, of ic3. Ic1 is used both melodically and harmonically, often with octave displacements (motif x in Ex. 7.1) stretching the chord vertically in the latter case. There is thus a cruciform shape outlined in these opening bars, with the upright depicted in the dissonant, if subdued, opening manifestation of motif x and sustained string chord, and the horizontal crosspiece in the narrow compass and many repeated pitches of the vocal melody.

The suggestion of G tonality is made more explicit in the central, more homophonic instrumental passage (Ex. 7.3), where a G minor triad provides a pedal point beneath chromatically descending triads in the upper strings and a sinuous cor anglais melody that winds its way through the middle of the texture. Based on ic1 and ic3, the melody transforms the motifs of the opening section (Ex. 7.3).

Ex. 7.3: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, opening of instrumental passage

The closing bars of the song return to material that is very similar to the opening. The recitativo-like melody, sung now by a solo soprano, again favours ic3, but expands the original pc-set 4-4, ascending sequentially as Christ’s spirit leaves his body (Ex. 7.4).
Ex. 7.4: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, closing bars
The melody can be segmented in various ways. The markings in Ex. 7.4 cut across the sequences in order to demonstrate the repeated use of pc-set 3-2, (0, 1, 3), with interval vector (111000), and its reliance on ic3. The final melodic F sharp merges into the last statements of motif x, with its accented individual notes graphically evoking the ‘pierced’ of the text. The chord here, pc-set 6-Z19, built up as the pitches descend, and coming to rest on a bass D, could be interpreted tonally as displaying the same G/D ambiguity of the opening bars of the piece. Ex. 7.5 illustrates various possible harmonic interpretations.

**Ex. 7.5: ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, construction of final chord**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pc-set 6-Z19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a)</strong></td>
<td>(0, 1, 3, 4, 7, 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(313431)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant extension in G minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As well as the colourful use of harmony, timbre is also an important element. The orchestra used is small – double woodwind plus cor anglais, two horns, timpani and bass drum, and strings – and Rubbra indicates on the score that the choir, likewise, should ‘consist of no more than about thirty voices’. He provides further precise instructions: the E string of the double basses should be tuned down to D, and the solo vocal parts should be sung by members of the choir, from their places, whilst the choral scoring for contraltos, rather than the more generic ‘altos’, indicates a preference for the darker richness of women’s voices. As indicated in Exx. 7.1 and 7.4, the instrumental scoring is often delicate and selective, akin to Schoenberg’s use of Klangfarben, with precise indications of dynamics and articulation.

The first of the Three Poems, ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, is a through-composed, seamless series of orchestral interludes alternating with accompanied passages for choir and/or contralto soloist. The first half of the piece sets the first five stanzas of the poem (see Fig. 7.1), narrating the journey of the soul towards union with Christ, with the halfway point of the song, by bar number, coinciding with the words ‘[transformed] in the Beloved’ (bars 79–80), whilst the second half deals with the rapture itself. Towards the end of each half of the piece, the predominantly contrapuntal texture is broken by a homophonic passage for unaccompanied choir (‘O night that guided me … in the Beloved’, bars 70¹–82; ‘With his gentle hand … to be suspended’, bars 126–135¹), drawing attention to these lines of the text by allowing the words to be heard more clearly. A closing passage (bars 135²–158) reprises material from the beginning of the piece. Whilst much of the music is to be performed piano or pianissimo, it rises to a forte climax.
in the first half for the setting of the words ‘this light guided me’, and the preceding orchestral interlude. A more intense and sustained climax occurs in the second half, with a *fortissimo* wordless melisma immediately following the words ‘parted his locks’, and the ensuing unaccompanied choral passage still marked *forte*.

The yearning and erotic imagery of the text are characterised by what Grover describes as ‘vague, chromatic harmonies that are not so dissonant as to call undue attention to themselves’ (1993: 390). There is little real sense of key, although frequent pedal points during vocal passages provide some stability. The first of these occurs beneath the initial choral entry. During the orchestral introduction the bass note G moves to B, and then settles on E (Ex. 7.7a), and this pitch is subsequently sustained beneath the canonic entries of women’s voices (Ex. 7.7b). In this passage, the static pedal note and frequent repeated pitches in the vocal lines, gravitating around B and E, are expressive of both the stillness of the resting household, and the anticipation of the journeying soul.

A single three-note motif, *y*, and its variants provide unity throughout the piece (Ex. 7.6).

**Ex. 7.6: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ motif *y* and variants (all variants written with ic3 defined by C and E flat)**

| Prime | pc-set 3-2  
|-------|----------------------|          |
|       | (0, 1, 3)             | (111000) |
| Inversion |                       |          |
| Retrograde inversion |                     |          |
| Expansion | pc-set 3-3  
|           | (0, 1, 4)             | (101100) |
| Inversion of *y*^i^ |                     |          |
Motifs $y$ and $y^2$ dominate the first half of the piece, as the soul journeys towards the beloved, and the closing passage, in which the soul lies in rapture following its union with Christ. Their pc-set, 3-2, is also used in ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ (see Ex. 7.4), in a passage where it similarly signifies the soul’s humility before God, its love, and its seeking for union.\(^5\) Use of these motifs in the introduction and first vocal passage are bracketed in Exx. 7.7a and b. Thematically, too, there are close similarities between the vocal lines in Ex. 7.7b and those of ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ (Ex. 7.1), especially in their use of repeated pitches, ic3, and the falling chromatic line at the end of the phrase.

\(^5\) Rubbra used the same pc-set 3-2 some thirty years later to provide the pitch collection of the opening chord of the final movement of the Eighth Symphony, and the yearning, upward-reaching opening of theme 1 in that movement (see Chapter 6). In the ‘Three Poems’, by contrast, the use of the close, uninverted intervals conveys the more introspective character of the spiritual experience described.
Ex. 7.7: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, use of motifs
a) introduction, bars 1-3

Lento - quasi grave \( \frac{\text{j}}{} \) = c. 46

accel. ------ rit.

Bassoons

Horns

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

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b) first vocal passage, bars 13–15

A motif combining $y^1$ and $y^2$ appears in the solo contralto line at bar 34 (see Ex. 7.9), and this and similar gently arched lines are frequently used throughout the remainder of the first half.

Motifs $y^3$ and $y^4$ are used in the second half of the piece, describing the union itself. Pc-set 3-3 adds the possibility of the brighter ic4 to the more sombre ic1 and ic3 of pc-set 3-2, signalling the bliss of union. A new theme based on these motifs starts the contrapuntal orchestral interlude at bar 81 (Ex. 7.8), and builds steadily to the tutti climax at bars 116–125.
Ex. 7.8: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ bars 81–85, Violin II (Violin I doubles an octave higher)

The orchestra required is slightly different to that of ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’, with trumpet added, but no cor anglais or bass drum, but again, Rubbra creates subtle and unusual effects. The dark colouring of the horns, bassoons and lower strings contrasted with high, light *con sordino* violins in the opening three bars of the piece (Ex. 7.7a) foreshadows in miniature the narrative of the text and its musical setting from the yearning of separation to union with the beloved. Another delicately orchestrated passage sets the words ‘In the happy night … I beheld aught’ (Ex. 7.9). Against a backdrop of a sustained perfect fifth, the flexibly undulating solo contralto line makes use of the combined \( y/y^2 \) motifs. High above the voice, a solo flute spins out a thread of counterpoint, each note picked out by semi-staccato articulation, and doubled by *pianissimo* pizzicato violins.
Rubbra referred to the ‘almost breathless excitement’ created in this passage by the ‘unmetrical vocal line in six-four against an accompaniment in four-four’ (1968b: 748). This state of anticipation is intensified as the choir enters, the metrical dissonance of four-against three-groupings becomes more urgent, and the dynamic level rises as the music approaches its first climax.

In the closing passage, which mirrors the opening material, the bass remains suspended on B, rather than moving to E, whilst *divisi* violins sustain the chord.
originally heard at the end of bar 3 of the introduction. This dissonant pitch collection, pc-set 5-20, (0, 1, 3, 7, 8), ic vector (211231), favours the construction of ic5, and is described by Rubbra as ‘consisting of superimposed fifths’ (1968b: 748). Fading to nothing in the final bar, its ethereal timbre, created by a combination of muted strings and harmonics, together with the haunting solo contralto parlando, derived from the choral lines in Ex. 7.7b, exquisitely capture the ecstatic, visionary quality of the text (Ex. 7.10).

**Ex. 7.10: ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, closing bars**

![Musical notation showing 'The Dark Night of the Soul', closing bars](image-url)
The surviving sketch for the final piece in the set, ‘The rhythm of St Thomas Aquinas’, is so short that it is impossible to guess how Rubbra might have developed it. Its opening unison bars, with their frequent returns to emphatically repeated Ds in the melody, and unequivocally harmonised cadences in F sharp minor are, initially, aurally quite shocking after the chromaticism of ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ and quasi-atonality of ‘O Unwithered Eagle Void’ (Ex. 7.11). Yet even here there is some tonal/modal ambiguity. The first of the F sharp minor cadences comes as a surprise, for the expected harmonisation would be in either D or A major, whilst the F natural in bar 3 and C natural in bar 4 occlude the modality even further. Thus even in these few bars Rubbra manages to capture both the solidity of faith inherent in the devotional text alongside the elusiveness of the Christ who is paradoxically both hidden and revealed in the sacraments.
7.2 Roman Catholicism

In later years, Rubbra was to say that his setting of St. John of the Cross’s ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ marked ‘the beginning of a period that ended in my reception into the Catholic Church’ on 4th August, 1947, the Feast of St. Dominic (untitled typescript for a talk given in Dublin, 28 May 1950, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark). Although he was never specific about his reasons for choosing Roman Catholicism, he provided a hint when he said that he had always believed in ‘a sort of diffused Christianity … but when … I was received into the Roman Catholic Church, my beliefs became crystallized’ (untitled typescript for a talk on church
Both Patrick Allitt (1997) and Adam Schwartz (2005), in their studies of intellectual and literary converts to Roman Catholicism, identify the attractiveness of the authority, clarity and certainty of Catholic doctrine to those disturbed by an increasingly materialistic and pluralistic twentieth-century society. Yet such acceptance of Catholicism as an enduring and authentic spiritual tradition coexisted with the recognition that it possessed still the power to be transformative. These converts ‘were thus simultaneously conservative and radical’, viewing Catholicism as ‘an everlastingly valid vision of reality … [that] not only preserves the wisdom of the past, but is dynamic enough to translate inherited truths into each time’s unique idiom’ (Schwartz, 2005: 24–25). Such belief that ‘the way forward is the way back’ (22) is really a statement, on a broader spiritual front, of Maritain’s philosophy of art that had first attracted Rubbra in the 1930s (discussed in Chapter 5). Certainly Maritain’s writings had not lost any of their appeal for Rubbra by the 1950s. He recorded his impressions on reading The Range of Reason (1952) whilst on holiday in 1953:

> Found it a tremendously stimulating experience … I have never read a book that stated so clearly the Catholic position in things pertaining to this world, & somehow it connected up with all the faith and eternal values expressed in the beautiful works of art I have seen on this visit to Italy (diary entry, 18 September 1953, BR).

This link between Rubbra’s Roman Catholic faith and his longer-standing aesthetic orientation suggests again that his friendships with members of the Pigotts community were influential in his conversion.

As well as its historic position of authority, Rubbra was attracted by the universality of the Roman Catholic Church and the prospect of becoming one of a body of believers transcending time and place. Rumer Godden, a friend of Rubbra from the time of her move to Speen in 1948 until the mid-1950s, and whose own spiritual journey had much in common with his, wrote about the Catholic Church: ‘it seems to me to be one of the solutions – maybe the only solution. It is universal, it has a common tongue. It was founded by Christ, not man’ (Godden, 1987: 174). Rubbra, too, was moved by the ‘common tongue’. He wrote about the Latin mass’s
‘aura of universality by reason of an agelong accumulation of religious emotion without distinction of nationality’, and the fact that, though he consequently approached it with ‘greater awe’, he could identify ‘warmly and emotionally’ when setting the text (Rubbra, 1963: 103–04). Even so, he was also aware that, as a composer of Catholic liturgical music, he had to move beyond his individual, personal expression in order to be ‘sufficiently impersonal – or should I say, supra-personal? – to add something to the participants’ aspirations’ (untitled typescript for a talk on church music, undated, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark).

It is interesting that Rubbra remarked on his own emotional identification with the Latin mass, as, according to family and friends, this was a striking aspect of his Catholic faith, especially during the early years.6 Recalling Rubbra’s teenage response to the exotic ‘Otherness’ of Cyril Scott’s house, it is easy to imagine how the sensual nature of Catholic ritual would have appealed to him, with its embrace of sound, colour, movement and perfume placing it in direct antithesis to his more Puritan childhood experience of Christian worship. He was, however, also drawn to the simpler side of Catholic ritual: its quietness, meditative prayerfulness, and sense of mystery. In September 1950, for example, he visited Buckfast Abbey, and recorded in his diary:

Arrived in time for Vespers and Compline. How lovely the church looked with just four dim altar lights. One’s identity is lost in worship at these moments: & when the inner silence is enclosed by reiterations of a single bell – rung at irregular intervals – the peace is almost unbearably beautiful (diary entry, 18 September 1950, BR).

Three years later, whilst staying with Antoinette’s relations in Italy, he visited the Franciscan Convent at Fiesole, near Florence: ‘Peace unbelievable & the longing for such a life welled-up in me’ (diary entry, 2 September 1953, BR). Rubbra composed a number of shorter works, or sections of works, which he either named, or described as, ‘meditation’ (Fig. 7.2). All but one of these works dates from the few years

6 Benedict Rubbra has mentioned this to me in conversation (17th May, 2014), and Rubbra’s close friend Beatrice Harthan, who was undergoing Catholic instruction at the same time as Rubbra, in early 1947, commented in her diary that, whereas her instructor was insistent that ‘“feelings” must not enter in – it must be belief and reason’, Rubbra was far more emotionally involved (diary entries, 11 March and 6 May, 1947, HA, Box 3, Books 1 and 2, temporary shelfmark).
immediately following his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and contemporaneous with the above-quoted statements.

**Fig. 7.2: Works by Rubbra designated as ‘meditation’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date of composition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Meditazioni sopra ‘Cœurs Désolés’,</em> for recorder and harpsichord, Op. 67</td>
<td>Completed Easter Monday, 1949</td>
<td>Trio closes with a ‘Tema’ followed by three ‘Meditazioni’ and a ‘Coda breve’. The meditations ‘totally change the work’s direction, taking it into extreme stillness’ (Black, 2008: 115). The coda builds to one of Rubbra’s most radiant imitations of pealing bells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Trio in One Movement, Op. 68</td>
<td>1949–50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola Concerto, Op. 75</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Third movement has the title ‘<em>Collana musicale</em>’ (‘Musical necklace’), and was described by Rubbra as ‘nine interrelated meditations … without central theme but linked together in spirit’ (cited in Grover, 1993: 237–38). The idea of the music as a string of beads may call to mind the rosary, and the number nine a ‘novena’, or special period of nine days’ devotion, which is often accompanied by rosary prayer amongst Catholic Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation for organ, Op. 79</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditations on a Byzantine Hymn for unaccompanied viola, Op. 117</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Based on the hymn ‘O quando in cruce’, used liturgically as part of the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure of Christ, especially in Catholic portrayals of his physical body, continued to fascinate Rubbra during this period. On the 1953 trip to Italy, he was
deeply impressed by Michelangelo’s Pietà, seen in Florence, describing it as ‘tremendously powerful. The weight of the relaxed body & head of Christ is almost physically felt & the emotional impact is tremendous’ (diary entry, 5 September 1953, BR). The statue Rubbra saw would have been the Florentine Pietà, also known as The Deposition, in which a group of people, comprising the Virgin Mary on Christ’s left (the viewer’s right), Mary Magdalene on his right, and a hooded figure variously identified as Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, support Christ’s dead body (Fig. 7.3).

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions. It can be viewed online at https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/search?filter_text=DGA502245&filter_group=all&filter_region=GBR](https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/search?filter_text=DGA502245&filter_group=all&filter_region=GBR)

Leo Steinberg has discussed the erotic allusions of this grouping, especially as it would have originally appeared before Christ’s left leg was broken off. The statue provides a reminder that, in Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary can be regarded not only as the mother of Christ, but also as his bride (as can also the church and the individual soul). Mary Magdalene, too, is embraced by Christ as she supports his body, and his unwound garment caresses the front of her body, recalling the medieval tradition of the erotic association between them (Steinberg, 1968: 345). There is thus some correspondence between the visual imagery of the statue and the textual imagery of ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, in which the soul’s union with Christ is expressed in sexual terms.
Two of Rubbra’s works from the early 1950s stand out as direct successors to the earlier *Three Poems*, Op. 41. The first, *The Song of the Soul*, subtitled ‘in intimate communication and union with the love of God’ and completed in 1952, is a further setting of St John of the Cross, in this case translated by Roy Campbell. Where ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ traces the spiritual journey that culminates in union with the Beloved, this poem opens at the point of union, similarly expressing a state of spiritual rapture through humanly erotic imagery. I have quoted Elsie Payne’s analysis of the way in which Rubbra translates this mystical experience into musical terms in Chapter 1. The second work from the 1950s, setting texts by a less well-known poet, is the *Two Sonnets of William Alabaster*, Op. 87.

**Two Sonnets, Op. 87**

This coupling of songs is linked to the *Three Poems* not just by its non-descriptive title and appellation as a ‘diptych’, but also by its subject matter. The sonnets of William Alabaster (1567–1640) date from a period in his life when, although an Anglican priest, he had temporarily converted to Catholicism, following a visit to Spain in 1597. The two chosen by Rubbra are meditations on aspects of Christ’s Passion (Fig. 7.4). In the first, ‘Upon the crucifix’, the poet contemplates Christ’s body as it hangs on the cross. As his yearning for an ever closer physical communion increases, he longs to be transformed by love into a climbing plant that can wind itself intimately about Jesus’ body, starting from his feet, and ending by forming a garland for ‘his wounded browes’. In the second sonnet, the poet imagines himself as the ‘hollow Reede’, put into Christ’s hand as a sceptre by the Roman soldiers as they mocked him following his condemnation to death. He contrasts his own waywardness with Christ’s mercy, demonstrated in his crucifixion wounds, enabling him, by an extension of the reed metaphor, to ‘gather sapp, and rise, and stand’. The poems thus combine images from Christ’s Passion with intense expressions of physical and spiritual love, and botanical metaphors that must have particularly appealed to Rubbra, a keen gardener and plant-lover.

Fig. 7.4 sets out the texts and structure of the songs. They are designed to be sung without a break, and are musically linked by the closing two bars of the first song, the material of which reappears at the end of the diptych.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar no.</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–9³</td>
<td>‘Upon the crucifix’&lt;br&gt;Now I have found thee I will evermore&lt;br&gt;Embrace this standard where thou sits above,&lt;br&gt;Feede greedie eyes, and from hence never rove;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9⁴–13</td>
<td>Sucke hungrie Soule of this eternall store;&lt;br&gt;Issue my hart from thie two leaved dore,&lt;br&gt;And lett my lippes from kissinge not remove.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13⁵–17</td>
<td>Interlude (viola and piano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>O thatt I weare transformed into love,&lt;br&gt;And as a plant might springe upon this flower,&lt;br&gt;Like wand’ring Ivy or sweete honie suckle:&lt;br&gt;How would I with my twine about it buckle,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–30</td>
<td>And kisse his feete with my ambitious boughes,&lt;br&gt;And clyme along uppon his sacred brest,&lt;br&gt;And make a garland for his wounded browes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–33</td>
<td>Lord soe I am, if heare my thoughts may rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34–37</td>
<td>‘On the reed of our Lord’s Passion’&lt;br&gt;Introduction (solo viola)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38–41</td>
<td>Long tyme hath Christ (long tyme I must confesse)&lt;br&gt;Held me a hollowe Reede within his hande,&lt;br&gt;That merited in Hell to make a brande&lt;br&gt;Had not his grace supplied mine emptines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41⁴–43</td>
<td>Interlude (viola and piano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44–47</td>
<td>Oft time with languor and newfangleness&lt;br&gt;Had I bene borne awaye like sifted sande,&lt;br&gt;When Sinn and Sathan gott the upper hande,&lt;br&gt;But that his stedfast mercie did mee blesse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47⁵–51</td>
<td>Interlude (solo viola)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52–55</td>
<td>Still let mee growe upon that livinge lande,&lt;br&gt;Within that wounde which iron did impresse,&lt;br&gt;And made a springe of bloud flowe from thie hand:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–63</td>
<td>Then will I gather sapp, and rise, and stand&lt;br&gt;That all that see this wonder maye expesse&lt;br&gt;Upon this grounde how well growes barrennes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rubbra’s settings follow the structure of the sonnets closely. The first is unusual in that the sestet precedes the octet. The instrumental interlude marks this important division. In the second song, the viola interludes play a more dynamic role, introducing each section of the more conventionally structured text with an intense, disjunct recitative-like passage, heavily reliant on ic6 (the traditionally diabolic tritone), having the effect of an impassioned prayer (Ex. 7.12).

Ex. 7.12: ‘On the reed of our Lord’s Passion’: introduction, bars 34–37

| Music example removed due to copyright restrictions |

After the introduction, each subsequent interlude breaks in across the ending of the preceding vocal line, is varied metrically, and transposed. The final occurrence, at bars 47–51, is pitched a tritone away from the original statement. The voice enters with the same melody after the introduction and first interlude, matching the piling up of remembered sins expressed in the text. Rubbra later said that, although wanting to set the poems for some time, he delayed until he found ‘the right medium for such intense words’ (typed radio script ‘Brahms is the ancestor’, from the series ‘Poetry into Song’, broadcast Midland Home Service, 5 April, 1957, RA, Box 19, temporary shelfmark). Following the model of Brahms’ Zwei Gesänge, Op. 91 (the influence of which is also apparent in the plain-speaking title), he chose the relatively unusual combination of medium voice, viola and piano. This allowed him to create a dark-hued and sensuous soundworld, in which the voice and viola function as equal partners. Timbre is expressively important, often intricately linked with texture and harmony.

The viola sound plays a particularly important role, as already demonstrated, in Ex. 7.12 and its subsequent appearances. At the opening of the diptych, its two solo notes lead the listener into the song with their low register and dark tone,
afterwards forming a subtle counterpoint to the voice (Ex. 7.13). Its emphasis on the mediant of the prevailing D major triad adds to the warmth.

**Ex. 7.13: ‘Upon the crucifix’, bars 1–7**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

As the poet’s fervour increases, so does the viola range, adding a more agitated pattern of rising triplet arpeggios (Ex. 7.14).
Repeated piano chords are a frequent feature in the accompaniment. In Ex. 7.13 the rhythm of three repeated quaver chords pushing towards each bar line helps to prevent a feeling of complete stasis, whilst their low register and regularity still contribute to the deep sense of repose in this passage. In the second song, as Grover notes (1993: 552), the pulsating piano chords at bars 38–41 both suggest the passing of time, and rhythmically control the potentially more fluid vocal line and first viola interlude, preventing them from breaking out with the unrestrained vehemence of the solo viola passages. This restraint underscores the sense of the text, as the poet imagines time passing as he is held in Christ’s hand, supported by his mercy (Ex. 7.15).
Ex. 7.15: ‘On the reed of our Lord’s Passion’, bars 38–41

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Similar piano chords, enriched by viola doublestopping, later convey a sense of deep-rootedness and growth in Christ (bars 52–59), whilst the surging dynamics in this passage also suggest a passionate yearning.

A rocking accompaniment of spread chords underpins the latter part of ‘Upon the crucifix’ (Ex. 7.16), the pairs of chords (initially bracketed in the example) wrapping around the regular triple metre like the twining tendrils of the plant described in the text. The vibrato pizzicato viola sound here contributes to the idea of transformation.
As the poet’s imaginings become more intimate, the piano accompaniment becomes more intense, with a throbbing, syncopated rhythm within a more urgent 2/4 metre, against which the viola anticipates the poet’s envisaged union with Christ, playing in octave unison with the vocal line.

The diptych opens, and each song ends, in D major. Variously seen as signifying ‘power and glory’ (Mellers, 1989: 262) or ‘triumph … Hallelujahs … [and] victory-rejoicing’ (Schubart, cited in Steblin, 1983: 124), the key becomes, in this context, one of quiet, but intense, spiritual fulfilment. The tonal clarity of the opening bars, with their frequent returns to a D major triad, soon becomes sullied by chromaticism in the more fervent passages (such as Ex. 7.14), or pedal points are required to ensure tonal stability and maintain the brooding atmosphere (e.g. Ex.
The cadential resolution, the same at the end of each song, returns to a mood of utmost peace, the bass line falling conjunctly and inevitably to the final tonic beneath the expressively repeated three-note viola motif (Ex. 7.17).

**Ex. 7.17: ‘On the reed’, final cadence**

![Music example removed due to copyright restrictions](image)

In a review of the published songs, written in 1956, Peter J. Pirie described them as ‘almost embarrassingly explicit’, with the poems’ ‘exacerbated religious emotion’ and ‘obvious sexual imagery’ matched by the music’s ‘weaving voices and yearning harmonies’ (cited in Grover, 1993: 554). He likened them in tone and content to the ‘Geistlicher Lieder’ from Hugo Wolf’s *Spanisches Liederbuch*. It is an interesting comparison, for two reasons. Firstly, Rubbra was particularly fond of Wolf’s Lieder, writing appreciatively of the ‘extraordinary precision and … epigrammatic force’ of his harmony, his ‘concentration of purpose … in allowing a basic idea to stay for the whole course of a song … subtly changing its expression or emphasis in accordance with the shifting of the poetic imagery’, and his skilful composition of a vocal line that is both independently ‘sensitive to every rhythmic nuance of the words’ and ‘moulded to the harmonic movement of the accompaniment’ (Rubbra, 1973g: 317–18). The same could be said of many of Rubbra’s own songs, and certainly of the *Two Sonnets*. Secondly, there is an illuminating personal link between the Wolf cycle and Rubbra’s *Two Sonnets*. Rubbra completed the *Sonnets* during Holy Week of 1955, and dedicated them ‘To Antoinette, 21. 4. 55’, for her fifty-fifth birthday. Some twenty years earlier, Rubbra had romantically inscribed the front cover of his score of the *Spanisches Liederbuch* with the initials AC and ER, enclosed within a circle, and dated ‘Christmas 1933’:
Antoinette Chaplin and Edmund Rubbra, just one month after their marriage (GB-Ob, Mus. 305 d.3 (7)). Inside, the score is heavily pencilled with analytical annotations, particularly the opening cycle of ‘Geistliche Lieder’, indicating that Rubbra studied the songs in detail. Preceding the settings of four poems about Christ’s Nativity and four in which the poet expresses an anguished consciousness of his own sin, ameliorated only by thoughts of Christ’s redemptive death, are two poems addressed to the Virgin Mary in the manner of ‘the classical device of invocation of a Muse and the poet’s dedication to her’ (Youens, 2002: 11). Rubbra’s own dedications to Antoinette, of both his Wolf score, and, later, the Two Sonnets, mirror this poetic, and spiritual, dedication. They are a reminder that Rubbra was intensely aware of ‘the feminine’ as an artistic and spiritual attribute, and that his sometimes complicated amorous and sexual relationships were also closely bound up with his creativity and spirituality.

7.3 Upheaval and renewed faith

Only two years after dedicating the Two Sonnets to Antoinette, Rubbra’s marriage irretrievably broke down when he left her to live with Evelyn Menges. His increased interest in Buddhism during this period has been discussed in Chapter 5. Although Rubbra never deserted his Catholic faith, and continued to compose works intended for liturgical use, his relationship with the church became uneasy for a while. Early in 1958, as a result of the publication in the Sunday Express of an article drawing attention to his Buddhist involvement, Rubbra had to defend himself to the Church Music Society of St Gregory who had recently commissioned the Missa à 3 Op. 98. Although Rubbra alleged that the article was inaccurate, he pointed out that I have been interested in Buddhism and many other philosophies all my life, that I have always felt that these wide interests have enriched my music, and that I have undergone no radical change in my thought and feeling during the last twelve months …’ (letter to Mr Morrison of the Church Music Association of St Gregory, 26 February 1958, RA, Box 25, temporary shelfmark).
Nevertheless, it was 1960, when Rubbra’s relationship with Evelyn was nearing its end, before he set any more texts on a Christian theme: a long hiatus when compared with the years that immediately preceded and followed. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Rubbra was in a state of some emotional and spiritual turmoil during this period. When his publisher, Bernard de Nevers, mooted the idea of an oratorio in November 1957, it was two months before Rubbra responded that he was ‘really not in the mood to do a religious work at the moment’ (letter to Bernard de Nevers, 4 January 1958, RA, Box 25, temporary shelfmark). He preferred to devote time to composition of the Violin Concerto, which was undoubtedly a pragmatic decision, but also a telling one. Many commentators on the Violin Concerto have noted its intense, sometimes sombre, mood, and its many echoes of the Sixth Symphony (Black, 2008: 153–55; Grover, 1993:249–58). The central, slow ‘Poema’ of the Violin Concerto especially recalls the ‘Canto’ of the symphony, as Hugh Ottaway was first to point out, in his programme note for the first performance of the concerto (17 February 1960, RA, Box 10, temporary shelfmark). Given the significance of the Sixth Symphony in evoking his rural home, marriage and family life, as noted in Chapter 5, and of the violin as Antoinette’s instrument, the concerto surely expresses Rubbra’s restless unhappiness at this time. He did, however, promise to give consideration to de Nevers’ proposed oratorio on the resurrection ‘when the time is ripe’. This undertaking eventually resulted in the *Sinfonia Sacra*, Op. 140, subtitled ‘The Resurrection’, but the work had a long gestation period: the scoring was not completed until Good Friday, 1972, some fifteen years after the idea was first discussed.


The figure of Christ is central to the work. The texts that Rubbra chose to set as he returned to Christian themes in his compositions during 1960 show him gradually being drawn into closer consideration of Christ’s life, ministry and glorified body. *The Beatitudes*, Op. 109 (1960) sets the famous text from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, whilst *Lauda Sion*, Op. 110, dating from later in the same year, sets a sequence by St Thomas Aquinas used liturgically at the feast of Corpus Christi. Like the unfinished ‘Rhythm of St Thomas Aquinas’ from the *Three Poems*, the text
celebrates the institution of the eucharist, and Christ’s body and blood as they appear in the bread and wine. Even closer to the subject of the proposed oratorio, Rubbra’s *Cantata di Camera*, ‘*Crucifixus pro Nobis*’ (1961) sets a poem by Patrick Cary (c. 1624–57) that presents scenes from Christ’s life (‘*Christ in the Cradle*’, ‘*Christ in the Garden*’, ‘*Christ in His Passion*’), to which Rubbra appended the resurrection sonnet by Edmund Spenser (1552?–99), ‘Most glorious Lord of life’. Finally, on 19 September 1961, Rubbra announced in a letter to de Nevers: ‘Have today noted down the beginning of ‘The Resurrection’. I have waited for this beginning for a long time’ (*RA*, Box 25, temporary shelfmark). By this time Rubbra had separated from Evelyn, and was living with Colette Yardley (1907–90), with whom he settled for the rest of his life, marrying her in 1975. Yet, despite his more stable domestic circumstances, progress on the work continued to be slow and spasmodic, with composition frequently interrupted whilst Rubbra worked on other commissions and projects. Several of these show his preoccupation with the topic spilling over into other works, most notably the *Meditations on a Byzantine Hymn* for solo viola (1962), based on the melody of ‘*O quando in cruce*’, a hymn used during the service of the Adoration of the Cross in the Orthodox Christian tradition, and closely related to the Improperia (Reproaches) of the Catholic Church. A few years later, the *Advent Cantata*, ‘*Natum Maria Virgine*’ (1968), with its melding of English and Latin texts in a continuous work, and its use of a closing Lutheran chorale melody, anticipates structural aspects of the *Sinfonia Sacra*. There are correspondences on a deeper level, too. The cantata’s joyful celebration of Christ’s incarnation, his first coming, ends with the final verse of Charles Wesley’s advent hymn ‘Lo he comes with clouds descending’, looking forward to the fullness of Christ’s kingdom as it will be revealed at his second coming.7 The chorale melody to which these words are set, taken from Bach’s Cantata BWV27, is, however, more usually associated with a text relating to death: ‘*Welt, ade! ich bin dein müde*’ (World, farewell! I am weary of you). Musically, then, Rubbra’s cantata ends with a reminder that death and renunciation of worldly trappings are inherent within Christ’s birth, even as it heralds the coming of his kingdom. A similar symbolic use of chorale melodies in the *Sinfonia Sacra* will be discussed below.

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7 Rubbra slightly alters the last two lines of Wesley’s verse: ‘O come quickly, quickly come. | Alleluia. Come, Lord, come.’
Two significant deaths occurred during the composition of the *Sinfonia Sacra*. Bernard de Nevers’ son, Geoffrey, was killed in an accident whilst acting as a marshal at the Silverstone motor racing circuit, on 21 July, 1962 (*The Times*, 23 July 1962). The second death happened at a much later stage in the work’s composition, when it had been set aside for several years. Rubbra’s longstanding friend and legal adviser, Maurice Davies, lost a very close female companion, again in a motoring accident. His loss led him to commission Rubbra to complete the work, and its dedication is ‘In Memoriam P.E.B. 1926–1969’. As well as being a memorial to the deceased, the work must also have served as an expression of condolence and consolation from Rubbra to his bereaved friends.

The most profound inspiration for the work seems, however, to have been Rubbra’s encounter with the painting *The Risen Christ* by the Italian Renaissance artist Bramantino [Bartolomeo Suardi] (c. 1465–1530) (Fig. 7.5).

**Fig. 7.5: Bramantino, The Risen Christ, c. 1490 [mixed media on panel], Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid**

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. It can be viewed online at [https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/bramantino/risen-christ](https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/bramantino/risen-christ)
Rubbra saw the painting at a special exhibition at the National Gallery in March 1961, and immediately urged de Nevers to go and see it, writing: ‘This is what I’d like my music to be like …’ (letter, 18 March 1961, RA, Box 25, temporary shelfmark). The picture is unusual amongst resurrection paintings of the period in placing less emphasis on Christ’s triumph over death, and more on the suffering through which it was achieved. His body has a ghostly pallor, merging with the folds of the white shroud, so that his wounds are clearly visible, and attention is focused on his face. His eyes are red from weeping and his expression is strained and haggard. The dark space immediately behind him suggests the tomb, and the shape of the ship’s mast in the background resembles the cross (del Mar Borobia, n.d.). The picture thus encompasses the opposites of life and death, darkness and light, good and evil, showing all as bound up together in the miracle of resurrection. This is the aspect of the painting that surely captured Rubbra’s imagination, and which he wanted to express in his music.

Perhaps, then, it was this concern to present crucifixion and resurrection, darkness and light, as part of a unified redemptive process that caused Rubbra to halt composition of the *Sinfonia Sacra* for several years whilst he questioned the validity of his original conception of a traditional oratorio ‘pattern of recitatives, arias and choruses’, eventually recognising that ‘the desired unity could be achieved only by shaping the material and textures to symphonic ends’ (Rubbra, 1973a: 220). Fig. 7.6 shows the resulting structure, with section titles taken from Stephen Town’s analysis (2012: 230–31).

**Fig. 7.6: Sinfonia Sacra, structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Starts at rehearsal</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Liturgical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>The Crucifixion</td>
<td>Orchestral introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wooden clapper sounds. Clappers (crotalus) used in place of altar bells from after the Gloria of Maundy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 In his letter Rubbra named the artist as [Donato] Bramante (1444–1514), but the painting is now more often attributed to Bramante’s pupil, Bramantino.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Starts at rehearsal</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Liturgical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baritone solo, choral interjection, and orchestra</td>
<td>Last words of Christ on the cross Matthew 27. 46/ Mark 15. 34, John 19. 30, Luke 23. 46</td>
<td>Thursday evening until the Gloria of the Easter Vigil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestral interlude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus and orchestra</td>
<td><em>Crux fidelis</em> (Faithful cross)</td>
<td>Latin hymn for the Good Friday service of the Adoration of the Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorale. Orchestra, then unaccompanied chorus</td>
<td>Almighty Lord, we pray thee teach us always (de Nevers)</td>
<td>Lutheran chorale melody by Johann Crüger (1598–1662). Associated with the Passiontide hymn ‘Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen’ (O dearest Jesus, what law hast thou broken?). Used by J.S. Bach in both the <em>St Matthew</em> and <em>St John Passions</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contralto solo, orchestra (recitative)</td>
<td>Jesus is laid in the tomb John 19. 41, Mark 15. 42–46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>The Entombment</td>
<td>[R]12</td>
<td>The women go to the tomb to anoint the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[R]15 + 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Starts at rehearsal</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Liturgical significance</td>
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<td>body</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mark 16. 1–2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luke 24. 2, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]18</td>
<td>Echo chorus of <em>divisi</em> tenors, orchestra</td>
<td>The angels speak to the women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luke 24. 5–7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]21 + 6</td>
<td>Contralto solo and orchestra (recitative)</td>
<td>The disciples do not believe the women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luke 24. 8–9, 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]22</td>
<td>Chorus and orchestra</td>
<td>Resurrexi (I arose)</td>
<td>Intintro for mass on Easter Morning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First use in the work of chiming, bell-like sounds (glockenspiel), replacing the wooden clapper of the opening. Heard following the ‘alleluia’, and at the ‘gloria’. ‘Alleluias’ not allowed in Catholic Church during Lent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 3

**The Mystery of the Resurrection**

<p>| [R]27  | Contralto solo and orchestra (recitative) | Peter and John go to the empty tomb |                |
|        |         | John 20. 3–10 |                |
| [R]32 + 4 | Contralto solo and orchestra, + soprano and baritone solos | Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus for the gardener |                |
|        |         | John 20. 11–17 |                |
| [R]38 + 6 | Chorus and orchestra | Regina caeli (O Queen of Heaven) | Marian antiphon in honour of the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Starts at rehearsal</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Liturgical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorale. Chorus and orchestra, then unaccompanied chorus</td>
<td>Abide with us and save us (de Nevers)</td>
<td>Blessed Virgin, here linked to Mary Magdalene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[R]42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[R]43</td>
<td>The Ascension</td>
<td>Spoken narration, contralto solo, unaccompanied</td>
<td>The road to Emmaus Luke 24. 13–16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]44</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Conversation Piece’: Orchestral interlude</td>
<td>Based on a motif setting the discarded text: 'and their words seemed to them as idle tales', Luke 24. 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]57 + 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contralto solo (recitative) and orchestra</td>
<td>Jesus blesses the disciples and ascends into heaven Acts 1. 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]59</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus and orchestra</td>
<td><em>Viri Galilei</em> (Ye men of Galilee) Text based on Acts 1. 11</td>
<td>Introit for mass on Ascension Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R]61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bells accompany the ‘alleluia’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
De Nevers’ libretto was compiled from gospel texts taken directly from the Authorized Version of the Bible, alongside short verses that he wrote himself to be sung to chorale melodies. Rubbra pared down the biblical narrative, but added in the words of three Latin hymns to provide ‘focal points’ and ‘act as periodic summings-up’ (Rubbra, 1973a: 220). The positioning of the hymns and chorales breaks the work into four sections, three of which end with both a hymn and a chorale, and one with just a hymn. Sung by the chorus, representing the supra-personal body of believers, both the Latin hymns and de Nevers’ specially-written chorale verses form a textual commentary on, and response to, the gospel narrative that they follow.

Whereas the gospel narratives often emphasise the difficulty of belief (Black, 2008: 178), the Latin hymns represent the strong faith inherent in Catholic tradition, and de Nevers’ chorale texts are prayers for guidance and redemption in living the Christian life. In addition, the hymns all point towards appropriate moments within the Catholic liturgy, as indicated in Fig. 7.6. The chorale melodies also function symbolically, as they are better known for their associations with more familiar texts, especially those to which they are set in J.S. Bach’s Passions. They therefore add another layer of meaning to the texts used in the *Sinfonia Sacra*. This is especially true of the closing ‘Passion Chorale’, which brings the work full circle with a ‘reminder that for all its concluding joy the *Sinfonia Sacra* is a reflection on a dark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Starts at rehearsal</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Liturgical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[R]63 + 7</td>
<td>Chorale. Chorus and orchestra.</td>
<td>Thy blessing be upon us (de Nevers)</td>
<td>Chorale melody by Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612). Known as the ‘Passion Chorale’, associated with the words ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’ (O sacred head sore wounded). Used extensively by J.S. Bach in the <em>St Matthew Passion</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and sacred mystery’ (Black, 2008: 181). This is just one of the ways in which Rubbra integrates the opposites of suffering and joy in this work.

The *Sinfonia* opens in the midst of the drama of the crucifixion. The score is headed: ‘There was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour’. The opening chord, shown in Ex. 7.18 expresses the darkness in its ‘quiet, almost stifled dissonances’ (Rubbra, 1973a: 220).

**Ex. 7.18: Sinfonia Sacra, bars 1–5**

![Music example removed due to copyright restrictions](image)

Comprising pc-set 5-20, it is the same pitch collection as used by Rubbra in the closing bars of ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’, even using the same pitch classes, though in a different disposition (see Ex. 7.10). In the earlier piece it evoked the mystical darkness of the soul’s lingering bliss following union with the beloved. In the *Sinfonia Sacra*, the darkness is one of more painful separation and fulfilment: Christ’s separation from God as he hangs on the cross, coupled with fulfilment of his earthly mission in death. The pitch collection occurs in these opening bars as part of a four-bar harmonic progression in which the chords change through the semitone movement of one part at a time (labelled motif *a* in Ex. 7.18). The dotted rhythm is also distinctive. The rhythm and linear movement of the top part of the texture recalls theme I of the first movement of Symphony No. 8, though in a compressed and distorted form (see Ex. 6.3). In chapter 6 I likened that theme to ‘the emergence and forward tread of human civilisation’. In the *Sinfonia Sacra*, composed on either
side of the Eighth Symphony, the progression suggests a dystopian view of civilisation: the world turning ‘on its dark side’.  

Motif a and its variants recur throughout the work. It appears frequently in section 1, where it is directly associated with the darkness of the crucifixion hours. It bursts out furiously to suggest the calamitous events following on Christ’s death (Ex. 7.19) and, in varied forms, underpins the whole of the Crux fidelis.

Ex. 7.19: Sinfonia Sacra, [R4], motif a

Later in the work, it appears as a reminder of the opening darkness. Accompanying Mary Magdalene’s response to the angels at the empty tomb, a varied form of motif a, recognisable by the recurrences of pc-set 5-20 and the brass timbre, but with the chords sounding quietly and unrhythmically, as if in her memory, makes it clear that she still associates Christ’s body with the darkness of death, rather than resurrection light (Ex. 7.20).

9 First line of the libretto of Michael Tippett’s A Child of Our Time, 1939–41.
As Jesus says her name, a much-transformed version of motif $a$, recognisable mainly by its texture and rhythm, and with an eagerly surging bass line, is heard in the orchestra (Ex. 7.21). In this variant, pc-set 5-20, with its connotations of darkness, separation and death, is not present at all.
In Section 4, the darkness of the crucifixion is a distant memory as the risen Jesus leads his disciples to Bethany, but his mention of Jerusalem recalls both the event and the motif more clearly (Ex. 7.22). Both here and later in this section, the motif soon dissolves into rising chords that look forward to the imminent ascension.
Rubbra considered the opening 5-20 pitch collection to be the source of ‘the intervals that shape so much of the vocal writing’ (1973a: 220). Especially important are the four notes played by the timpani in bars 4–5, where their angular contour suggests the shape of the cross (Ex. 7.18). This is a subset of 5-20, pc-set 4-8 (0, 1, 5, 6), with interval vector (200121). The symbolism is made explicit when the same pc-set, with only slightly different contour, sets the word ‘crucified’ during the narrative of the entombment, with a rhythmically augmented version occurring
simultaneously in the bass line (Ex. 7.23a). The same motif and variants built from the same pc-set occur in the orchestra just before and at the end of the angels’ echo chorus, with its exhortation to ‘remember’ (Ex. 7.23b). A further variant is used to set the word ‘garden’ (Ex. 7.23a), thus linking the place of burial with the place of crucifixion, whilst the phrase ‘laid him in (the sepulchre)’ aptly inverts the original ‘cross motif’ (Ex. 7.23c).

Ex. 7.23: *Sinfonia Sacra*, ‘cross motif’ and variants, pc-set 4-8
a) [R]12

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
b) Before ‘Echo duet’

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

End of ‘Echo duet’

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
c) Bar 6 of [R]14

Elsewhere, the contour of the cross motif is more important than its pitch-collection, and is always aurally recognisable (Pickard, 2001: 34–36). The opening four notes of *Crux fidelis* have a similar contour, with the central ic5 interval expanded to ic6. The pc-set, 4-16, is different, but is still a subset of the generating opening 5-20 set (Ex. 7.24a). Later, the central interval is further expanded as Jesus foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples (Ex. 7.24b), the cruciform shape of the melodic line ‘symbolically underlining the link between that power and its agency, the cross’ (Pickard, 2001: 38). For double emphasis, this passage also includes a variant of the pc-set 4-8 motif.

**Ex. 7.24: Sinfonia Sacra, ‘cross motif’, other variants**

*a) ‘Crux fidelis’, opening, soprano line only (bars 5–81 of [R]7)*

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
b) ‘Ye shall receive power’, baritone line only (bars 3–9 of [R]55)

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

Hence Rubbra uses elements of the opening pitch-collection to allude to the
darkness, suffering and death of the crucifixion throughout the work.

Conversely, another pitch collection, 6-33 (0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9), its interval vector
(143241) indicative of the large number of consonant, tonal intervals that it contains,
occurs at two significant moments within the work that are associated with light and
joy. It accompanies the first six bars of the Easter introit, ‘Resurrexi’, as well as
appearing within the upper of each pair of vocal lines in these bars (Ex. 7.25). Later,
6-33 is the pitch collection on which the upward drifting chords come to a halt as
Jesus ascends into heaven (see Ex. 7.34).
A motif that occurs throughout the work, from Section 2 onwards, is associated with Jesus’ physical body. It first appears in the entombment narrative, setting the word ‘Jesus’ in the vocal line (Ex. 7.26). Its pc-set, 4-11 (0, 1, 3, 5), is a subset of 6-33, but not of 5-20, the work’s opening ‘dark’ pitch collection. Although it has some similarities of contour with the ‘cross motif’, the ‘Jesus motif’ is narrower in range, featuring a central ascending ic3. As with some statements of the ‘cross motif’, a rhythmically augmented version of the ‘Jesus motif’ is heard simultaneously in the orchestra at its first appearance, this time harmonised to form a progression comprising mainly 6/4 chords.
John Pickard has pointed out that, by using the same motif only nine bars later to set the word ‘linen’ (see Ex. 7.23c), Rubbra creates ‘an identification between the body of Jesus and the linen in which it was wrapped’ (2001: 34). This connection is exploited in Section 3 of the work, when first John (Ex. 7.27a), then Peter (Ex. 7.27b), and finally Mary Magdalene (Ex. 7.27c) look into the empty tomb and see the discarded grave clothes. In these passages, the ‘Jesus motif’ in both its melodic and chordal forms haunts the orchestral texture as the disciples search for Jesus’ body, and its use also musically identifies the cause of Mary’s weeping.

Ex. 7.27: Sinfonia Sacra, use of the ‘Jesus motif’

a) John

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
b) Peter

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
c) Mary Magdalene

Its close association with the tomb and grave clothes suggests that the motif refers particularly to Jesus’ physical body. Later in the work the 4-11 pc-set is used to allude to Jesus even though the motif itself is not recognisable, just as his physical body has been transformed in the resurrection. The main idea of the orchestral ‘Conversation Piece’ derives from a discarded section of narrative, originally setting words from Luke’s gospel (see Fig. 7.6 and Ex. 7.28a). In the draft manuscript, Rubbra labelled these notes as the ‘Road to Emmaus motif’. As they appear at the start of the ‘Conversation Piece’, with an E pedal in the bass, they constitute pc-set 4-11, and thus allude musically to Jesus, who is walking and talking with the disciples, even though they do not recognise him (Ex. 7.28b). The manipulation of the motif in this and subsequent versions of the pc-set may remove it so far from the original that it is no longer perceptible to the listener, but that is precisely Rubbra’s point. Just as Jesus is no longer recognised by the disciples, so the ‘Jesus motif’ is
no longer recognisable to the listener, but it nevertheless continues to exist within the fabric of the music, contributing to an underlying motivic unity.

Ex. 7.28: *Sinfonia Sacra*, use of pc-set 4-11 in the ‘Conversation Piece’

a) discarded recitative, ‘Road to Emmaus motif’

b) ‘Conversation Piece’, opening

Similarly, the Latin hymn ‘*Viri Galilaei*’, sung immediately after Jesus has been taken out of sight into heaven, uses pc-set 4-11 as the opening notes in all four parts. His spiritual presence is still felt by the disciples, even though he is hidden from view (Ex. 7.29).
Use of 4-11 also helps to explain Rubbra’s smooth integration of the final two chorale melodies into the flow of his own music. The first four pitch classes of Melchior Teschner’s and Hans Leo Hassler’s melodies both comprise pc-set 4-11, musically underlining de Nevers’ texts by suggesting musically Jesus’ resurrection presence (Ex. 7.30a and b). It is 4-11, too, that is responsible for the flattened seventh colouring within the final radiant A major chord of the symphony (Ex. 7.30c), noted by Leo Black as the ‘final sign of the mixture of pain and joy in the Passion and Ascension story’ (2008: 181). Given the connection between this pc-set and Christ’s body in the symphony, the aural association of the presence of these notes within the final chord with suffering parallels Bramantino’s *Risen Christ*, whose anguish is still so clearly visible in his face and body.
Ex. 7.30: *Sinfonia Sacra*, pc-set 4-11 in the chorales

a) ‘Abide with us’, soprano line only, melody by Melchior Teschner

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

b) ‘Thy blessing be upon us’, melody by Hans Leo Hassler, opening

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

c) ‘Thy blessing be upon us’, final chord

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions

The allusion to suffering through the use of 4-11 in the final chord is timbral, as well as harmonic, the notes of the pc-set penetrating the texture with a solemn brass colouring. Timbre is important in denoting darkness and light, pain and joy, throughout the *Sinfonia Sacra*. Stephen Town has written about Rubbra’s subtle,
‘carefully considered’ orchestration, which he describes as ‘beautiful beyond compare’ (2012: 224, 242). Here I shall discuss a selection of significant passages and instrumental usages.

The opening bars transport the listener into an extraordinary soundworld (Ex. 7.31).

Ex. 7.31: Sinfonia Sacra, opening bars, orchestration

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
A feeling of oppressive darkness is created by the blending of muted brass and violas, with menacing interjections from timpani and *pizzicato* cellos and basses. The brass sound, though later unmuted, remains characteristically associated with this dark opening material throughout the symphony (see Exx. 7.18, 7.19, 7.20). An unusual addition to the timbre in bars 10–11 is the dry knocking of wooden clappers. As well as imitating the hammering sounds of the crucifixion, the four beats signifying the four nail wounds, it also recalls the use of the wooden clapper, or crotalus, in Catholic liturgy during the Easter Triduum, when both bells and light are banished from the altar from Maundy Thursday evening until the Gloria of the Easter Vigil.

Liturgically, bells and light return to the altar together with the lighting of the Paschal candle, symbolising the resurrection of Christ, the Light of the World. Likewise, bell-like sounds are first heard in the *Sinfonia Sacra* during the singing of the celebratory ‘Resurrexi’. In the passage from [R]24, illustrated in Ex. 7.32, the parallel flute and clarinet lines are coloured by the silvery chiming of the glockenspiel, whilst harp harmonics delicately pick out the same, rhythmically augmented melody on the muted trumpet. Their metrical interplay is dancelike, and also suggests the inwardly probing searchlights implied in the text.

**Ex. 7.32: Sinfonia Sacra, [R]24, ‘Resurrexi’, orchestration**

Music example removed due to copyright restrictions
Towards the end of the work, as the hymn ‘Viri Galilae’ becomes ‘a magnificent paean of joy’, the rich pealing of tubular bells pierces through the tutti orchestration to accompany the alleluias in the choir (Town, 2012: 227). Thus bells are allotted a traditional role as signifiers of benediction and joy in this work, but are sparingly used.

Other instruments also function as traditional signifiers. Rubbra uses the harp frequently for its connotations of spiritual timelessness. It accompanies Jesus’
last words from the cross with gently pulsing, alternating bass notes that give some
tonal stability to the agonised chromatic vocal line (Ex. 7.33), and features
prominently in the two narrative sections centred around the sepulchre.

Ex. 7.33: *Sinfonia Sacra*, bar 4 of [R]3, use of harp

| Music example removed due to copyright restrictions |

In more joyful sections the harp provides a sparkling, rippling accompaniment (Ex. 7.25), or adds lush glissandi to the orchestral tutti.

The celesta similarly retains its traditional role as heavenly signifier. Ethereal upwardly-wafting celesta chords accompany Jesus’ foretelling of his ascension (bars 10 of [R]37–5 of [R]38), culminating in the hymn ‘*Regina caeli*’, set in the celestial key of B major. At the moment of ascension itself, ‘the music … surrounds Jesus in an aura of veneration as He disappears from sight’ (Town, 2012: 227). Instrumental colour is essential to the effect (Ex. 7.34).
Supported by quiet woodwind and harp chords, muted strings rise to stratospheric heights, the high viola and cello trills creating a cloudlike effect. A softly reverberating tam-tam stroke and harp glissando evocatively transport Jesus from sight as the music fades. John Pickard has identified this as one of just four tam-tam strokes in Rubbra’s symphonic output, each of which occurs at a structural or
emotional turning point in the music (Pickard, 2016). A more direct spiritual comparison might be with the similarly transformative tam-tam stroke that occurs at the descent of the prism in Rubbra’s ballet (see Chapter 3).

The above analysis of the harmony, melodic motifs and timbre can draw attention to the way in which opposites such as darkness and light, or life and death, are represented musically within the work, but it does not give an impression of how they are experienced as the work unfolds. Some generalities about the distribution of the signs across the work can be inferred from the preceding account. As befits the dramatic narrative, most use of the opening ‘darkness’ chord (pc-set 5-20) and associated motif, and of the ‘cross’ motif (pc-set 4-8) occurs within the first two sections of the work, dealing with the crucifixion and entombment (Exx. 7.18, 7.19). However, the ‘darkness’ motif and chord do still appear within the third section, as Mary Magdalene broods outside the empty tomb, revealing the true focus of her thoughts as she responds to the angels’ question: ‘Woman why weepest thou?’ (Ex. 7.20), but they are later transformed by her encounter with the risen Christ (Ex. 7.21); and again as Jesus leads the disciples out towards Bethany in the fourth section (Ex. 7.22), so that remembrance of past events runs throughout the work. Similarly the motif associated with Jesus’s body (pc-set 4-11) is transformed as the work and narrative progresses. Its original form (Exx. 7.26, 7.27), referring to the physical body, occurs in the second and third sections of the work, played out around the tomb; but the motif appears in altered form from the end of Section 3, symbolising Christ’s transformed resurrection body and his hidden presence in the world (Exx. 7.28, 7.29, 7.30). A final recollection of the suffering endured by his body appears within the closing chord of the work (Ex. 7.30c). Signifiers of light and joy are more localised and infrequent within the work. The pc-set 6-33 occurs only twice in the work, to celebrate Christ’s resurrection and to mark his ascension into heaven (Exx. 7.25, 7.34); whilst the settings of the hymn ‘Regina caeli’ and the chorale melody by Tschner that conclude Section 3 are presented in the ‘heavenly’ key of B major (a key that has been foreshadowed in the harmony accompanying the angels’ words in Sections 2 and 3). Even after the transcendence of the ascension, the radiant A major of the mounting jubilation of ‘Viri Galilaei’ has an occasional A minor shadow cast over it, whilst in the final triumphant chorale, A major is withheld until the very last chord, and is still tinged with darkness, as previously described.
Pacing and flow have a part to play in the aural perception of these signs, both across the work as a whole, and within each of the four sections. The work has been criticised for being ‘too slow too much of the time’ (MacDonald, 1981: 731). The only genuinely fast passage is the setting of the hymn ‘Resurrexi’ which closes the second section, marked allegro vivo (\( \dot{J} = 72 \)) and lasting only fifty-four bars.¹⁰ Yet, as Pickard observes, there is ‘contrast of mood and pacing’ (2001: 37), whilst Elsie Payne points to the ‘frequent fluctuations of momentum within each of the separate movements [i.e. sections]’ (1977: 85). Often, changes of momentum are achieved as much by changes of harmony or tonality, timbre and dynamics as by changes of tempo, such as the large-scale crescendi of ‘Regina caeli’ or ‘Viri Galilaei’.

Another example is the change from solo recitative to canon for two vocal parts at [R]18+2, the angels’ voices both echoing around the empty tomb and, in conjunction with the accompanying harmony (an out-of-context V\(^7\)d of B major), creating an other-worldly effect, seeming to come from a great spiritual distance.

Aspects of the musical and dramatic structure contribute to the pacing, both within and across the four sections. Dramatically and musically, each section broadly moves from darkness and suffering, or a recollection of them, towards resolution of some kind, and from action towards reflection (Fig. 7.7).

**Fig. 7.7: Dramatic and musical progression of each section**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1: The Crucifixion</th>
<th>Begins</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Darkness, suffering and death as Jesus hangs on the cross</td>
<td>‘Crux fidelis’ and chorale text: reflection on the role of the cross, and acceptance of God’s wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td>‘Darkness’ chord and motif (pc-set 5-20), brass timbre, timpani</td>
<td>‘Crux fidelis’ features the ‘cross’ motif (in pc-set 4-16 variant) and its accompaniment is</td>
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</table>

¹⁰ Equating to less than two minutes out of the roughly forty-four total for the whole work.
suffused with the ‘darkness’ chord and a variant of the opening motif, but ends with a sweet D major *tierce de Picardie*; the chorale begins hesitantly, but the homophonic choral prayer for understanding of God’s wisdom brings acceptance, and the section ends on a peaceful G major *tierce de Picardie*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 2: The Entombment</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Jesus’ body is placed in the tomb, and the stone rolled into place</th>
<th>‘Resurrexi’ celebrates Christ’s resurrection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Entombment narrative is coloured by ‘cross’ motif (pc-set 4-8), giving way to ‘Jesus’ motif (pc-set 4-11) as the body is laid to rest</td>
<td>Light, dancing, joyful hymn setting counters the disciples’ disbelief: <em>allegro vivo</em>, use of pc-set 6-33, ‘celestial’ harp and string accompaniment, with trumpet, woodwind and chiming glockenspiel added later</td>
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</table>

<p>| Section 3: The Mystery of the Resurrection | Narrative | The disciples go to the empty tomb | Choral affirmation of Christ’s resurrection (<em>‘Regina caeli’</em>) and prayer to know his |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Section 4: The Ascension</strong></th>
<th><strong>Narrative</strong></th>
<th><strong>Music</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Recollection of preceding events, followed by narration of the events leading up to the ascension</td>
<td>‘Conversation Piece’ mulls wordlessly over preceding events – much use of 4-11 pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td>Praise to the ascended Lord, and prayer for reception into God’s everlasting kingdom</td>
<td>Depiction of ascension is a moment of transcendence – rising strings, harp glissando,</td>
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collection, and other themes from Section 1 are recalled. Opening of recitative includes musical references to the ‘cross’ motif and ‘darkness’ chords/motif

‘transformative’ tam-tam. Hymn setting is another large-scale crescendo, starting pp, orchestration gradually increasing until reaches ff with brass and tubular bells. Chorale setting begins and ends with choir in unison – a united church – and again is a massive crescendo to a triumphant conclusion. Underpinned by strong harmonic movement: pedal E throughout last eight bars of hymn resolves onto A as chorale melody emerges in the bass. Entire chorale setting thus becomes a kind of extended final tonic chord

In addition, notwithstanding the close relationship of the music to the text, salient dramatic and musical events fall at Golden Section points throughout the work (see Fig. 7.8): generative events at the points of secondary GS, and moments of affirmation or culmination at points of primary GS.
Fig. 7.8: Relationship of musical Golden Section points to the narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across work as a whole (654 bars, GS = 250:404)¹¹</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary GS (bar 251)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1: The Crucifixion (123 bars, GS = 47:76)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary GS (bar 48)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Section 2: The Entombment (166 bars, GS = 63.5:102.5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary GS (bar 64² of section/187² of work)</td>
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¹¹ The passage of spoken monologue has to be ignored when counting bars within the work. The orchestral ‘Conversation Piece’, which is not printed in the published vocal score, has 74 bars and is counted as falling within Section 4. Section 1 is based around numbers from the Lucas series (2, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11 … 47, 76, 123), whilst the GS ratios of the whole work and of other sections have been worked out to the nearest whole number using the calculation: no. of bars x 0.618.
The two clearest manifestations of unalloyed light and joy in the work, the hymns ‘Resurrexi’ and ‘Regina caeli’, coincide with the GS points of the work as a whole. Although it is unlikely that the GS proportions will be perceived aurally, their use nevertheless underscores the narrative of God’s redemptive plan with music structured around divine proportions, giving the work a musical and dramatic coherence that is innately felt by the listener, even if not precisely understood.

The way in which transitions from one mood to another occur is important to their aural effect. The abrupt way in which the dancelike, joyful ‘Resurrexi’ begins and ends increases its impact as a moment of spiritual illumination within the work. It bursts out from the bleak account of the disciples’ disbelief, its accompanying harmony even overlapping with the narrator’s word ‘not’ (see Ex. 7.25), and subsides equally swiftly into more earthbound concerns with a sharp change of tempo, texture, rhythm and dynamic level ([R]27). As in life, such moments of revelation are rare and to be treasured within the Sinfonia Sacra. Yet there is a no less important spiritual message implicit in, for example, the beautiful polyphonic unfolding of the ‘Crux fidelis’ over its dark orchestral accompaniment, teaching acceptance of suffering as its intertwining parts reach a unison of faith when the

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Section 3: The Mystery of the Resurrection (163 bars, GS = 62:101)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary GS</strong> (bar 63 of section/352 of work)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 4: The Ascension (202 bars, GS = 77:125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary GS</strong> (bar 78 of section/530 of work)</td>
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</table>
textual focus turns from the cross to the ‘sweet weight’ that it bore (‘dulce pondus sustinet’). Likewise the final transition from the joyful praise of the A major ‘Viri Galilaei’ to the majesty of the closing chorale is unostentatious, its well-known melody creeping in almost unnoticed as a bass line beneath the final ‘amen’ of the hymn, before building into a tremendous, victorious climax. Yet the solemnity of its natural minor mode, intruding right into the closing major chord, its slow tempo, and the strong associations of the melody with Christ’s passion are significant reminders of the profound events that led up to this state of salvation.

According to Ralph Scott Grover, Rubbra considered the Sinfonia Sacra to be his ‘finest achievement’, assuming this to be mainly because of the work’s fusion of symphony and oratorio genres (1993: 165, 170–72). Both Elsie Payne (1977: 83–85) and John Pickard (2001) agree that this fusion is skilfully executed, and Pickard praises ‘the work’s extraordinary unity of conception’ (38). Yet, given the high level of unity in all of Rubbra’s compositions, it seems unlikely that this musical aspect alone would account for his own particularly high estimation of the work. Rubbra’s son, Adrian Yardley, records rather that Rubbra called it his ‘most personal achievement’ (1996: 6, my emphasis). As described in Chapter 1, Stephen Town therefore proposes a biographical reading of the work in which all the members of Rubbra’s broken family are caught up into the opening chord, the implication being that their emotional pain might be musically subsumed within the redemptive process of Christ’s death and resurrection (2012: 240).12 Town’s reading certainly carries some weight, though I personally consider the correlation of the opening pc-set 5–20 with the closing pc-set of ‘The Dark Night of the Soul’ to be more compelling, in this case, than any familial connection. On a less intimate level, Pickard concludes that Rubbra reached his high opinion of the work because it ‘represents a profound synthesis of all the main concerns, musical and philosophical, that shaped his life’ (p. 38). Pickard’s interpretation, also described in Chapter 1, draws on aspects of both the work’s internal structure and the historical context of its composition to suggest that the Sinfonia Sacra presents a message of religious tolerance and reconciliation to contemporary society (2001: 37). Though undoubtedly a valid reading of the work, it is limited in that it fails to acknowledge,

12 By extending the cypher, Rubbra’s first wife, Lilian, who died in 1962, could also be included, L equating to the note E.
beyond a passing mention, Rubbra’s longstanding interest in Eastern religions and philosophies. Yet commentators have found hints of the East in the *Sinfonia Sacra* too. Calum MacDonald opined that ‘for all its mixture of Catholic and Lutheran musical traditions, the quiescence – even passivity – of spirit is strangely Oriental in effect’ (1981: 730), whilst Stephen Town has noted the ‘oriental-like’ colouring of some of the instrumentation (2012: 225). For an alternative reading of the work, it is worth reconsidering Rubbra’s excitement in 1961 on seeing Bramantino’s *The Risen Christ*, with its representation of the resurrection as encompassing ‘opposites’, and his desire, recorded several months before notating any musical ideas, to make his music ‘like’ the painting.\(^{13}\) 1961 was also the year in which Rubbra’s article ‘Temple gongs and coloured bubbles’ was published, in which he set out his admiration of Buddhism for its denial of ‘the duality of opposites, … : light and dark, good and evil, dualities which always worried me as a Christian’ (Rubbra, 1961: 73). I previously quoted this article in Chapter 4, where I demonstrated how the integration and equilibrium of opposites, which relate also to Taoist ideals of art, were manifest in Rubbra’s explicitly Eastern-influenced song cycle *The Jade Mountain* (1962). In the *Sinfonia Sacra*, Rubbra applies this non-dualist principle of unity to the heart of the Christian faith, the resurrection of Christ. Whilst the textual narrative of the work moves essentially in a straight line from death to resurrection to ascension, Rubbra’s music, through its use of harmony, motif and timbre, demonstrates more vividly how the darkness and suffering of death are still contained within the ensuing light and joy of resurrection and glory, even as they are transformed by them. For Rubbra, this synthesis of Eastern thought and Christian faith was, indeed, an intensely personal achievement.

Although Rubbra was to complete another fourteen opuses before his death in 1986, the *Sinfonia Sacra* is the last of his works to focus on the figure of Christ. It is also his largest-scale work, standing as the longest of his eleven symphonies in performance. Nos. 10 and 11 are, by contrast, particularly condensed, single-movement works. It is therefore a fitting ending-place for this study of spirituality in Rubbra’s music.

\(^{13}\) Rubbra even wanted a reproduction of the painting to be published as a frontispiece in the score of the *Sinfonia Sacra*, but de Nevers demurred on account of the cost of good colour printing (letters Rubbra to de Nevers, 18 March 1961 and de Nevers to Rubbra, 20 March 1961, RA, Box 25, temporary shelfmark).
8. Conclusion

This study has focused on one aspect, spirituality, in the life and music of one man, Edmund Rubbra. Yet it cannot be viewed as one-dimensional. Despite his withdrawal from the bustle of the city to the peace of the Chiltern countryside for much of his life, Rubbra’s own outlook was far from insular, being global, even cosmic, in scope. His career was varied, embracing composition, performance, teaching and music journalism. As a composer, he was prolific, producing work in all the major genres: eleven symphonies, five concertos (including the Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 38) as well as shorter works for soloist and orchestra, four string quartets and a significant body of other chamber music for various instrumental combinations, over sixty choral works, songs, solo piano pieces, a ballet and a short opera. Likewise, his spiritual interests and influences were diverse, from the ‘hymn-singing milieu of the Congregational Church’ in which he grew up (Rubbra, 1977a: 13), through his involvement with the Theosophical Society and related esoteric ideas, to the dual threads of Roman Catholicism and Eastern thought that were so closely woven into his later religious experience.

The thematic, contextual and biographical approach that I adopted in this study grew naturally out of the material itself, and is consonant with Rubbra’s belief, cited in Chapter 1, that ‘music … is the product of every force to which one is subjected through the very fact of living an active and expanding life’ (1977a: 11). I have demonstrated the breadth and variety of ways in which Rubbra expressed his spirituality through music, manifested in the collaborative dance and theatrical projects with which he chose to become involved during his early career, in the extramusical inspirations for some of his works, in his choice of texts for musical settings, in his approach to the craft of composition, and in his manipulation of the elements of music themselves. Particular passages within his music capture the listener’s attention as moments of especial spiritual illumination. From the large-scale works analysed in this thesis, such moments might include the turn from the expected F sharp minor to a radiant A major at the end of the ‘Canto’ of the Sixth Symphony; the worshipful, incense-swinging stillness at the heart of the first movement of the Piano Concerto in G, as well as the powerful energy of the ensuing climax and sense of pastoral repose in its brief coda; the revelatory climactic chord
and redemptive coda of the finale of the Eighth Symphony; and the rare passages of spiritual light and joy scattered amidst the darker recitatives of the *Sinfonia Sacra*.

Yet the affective impact of such moments would be weakened without the underlying foundation of deeper patterns and structures within the music. Although beauty of melodic line, harmony, timbre and texture are the most expressive elements, writers on Rubbra’s music have long recognised unity and an organic sense of growth as fundamental to the way in which it communicates a sense of profound spirituality. As my analyses have made evident, all of his works, from the smallest-scale songs such as the early ‘Rosa Mundi’ and the individual numbers of *The Jade Mountain* to large-scale symphonic and concerto movements, are meticulously structured. In view of Rubbra’s statements about his spontaneous, quasi-improvisational approach to composition cited in Chapters 1 and 4, one of the most surprising discoveries to emerge from this study was his use of Golden Section proportions to structure his music. Two questions must arise: were these proportions intentional? And how can their presence within his music be reconciled with his averred disregard for musical form? Without any direct proof, my own view is nevertheless that Rubbra did knowingly use GS proportions, especially when the numbers involved are drawn from the Fibonacci or Lucas series or their multiples. For Rubbra, as for his friend Peter Crossley-Holland, the use of such proportions would have been a way of connecting his music with the natural energy of organic growth, and with cosmic and divine principles. Indeed, it is feasible that he remained silent about their use in his music precisely because of the hiddenness of such patterns within nature, as an underlying aspect of design that can only be discovered by close examination and measurement. The fact that they are difficult, or even impossible, for a listener to perceive, except at the most intuitive level, does not make them any the less an expression of Rubbra’s own spirituality. Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012), a composer of the next generation to Rubbra who shared remarkably similar spiritual interests,¹ as well as identifying unity as an important spiritual attribute of music, laid an equal emphasis on the role of ambiguity (Harvey, 2017; 2010; 1999a: 23-46). The tension between spontaneity and controlled

¹ After a Christian upbringing, Harvey became intrigued by Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical writings, and subsequently followed Buddhist teachings and Vedic meditative practices, whilst never relinquishing his Christian roots (Harvey, 1999a: 1-6).
structure in Rubbra’s music is one such ambiguity, and the listener’s experience of such tension between opposites in a piece only reinforces its unity.

The works discussed in this thesis span a large part of Rubbra’s career, from the 1920s to the 1970s, and include examples from all genres in which he wrote apart from chamber music. Whilst it is perhaps natural to consider the mature, larger-scale orchestral works as the most ‘important’, all of the works chosen have value in affording insights into Rubbra’s expression of spirituality within his music, and a number (Inscape, The Jade Mountain and the Pezzo Ostinato, to name just three) are smaller masterpieces in their own right. Spread over a long and productive career, and coupled with an enquiring and eclectic mind, the inevitable outcome of Rubbra’s strong spiritual belief in the unity of all things was an increasing tendency towards the integration and synthesis of potentially conflicting beliefs. The Eighth Symphony, with its celebration of the reconciliation of science and Christian teaching in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, and the Sinfonia Sacra, with its Eastern accommodation of the Christian dualisms of darkness and light, suffering and joy, and even death and life, might justly be viewed as peaks of his achievement. Yet it is worth remembering that similar dualisms – of pain and bliss, masculine and feminine, East and West – were already contained within the earliest of Rubbra’s works analysed in this study, his little student song ‘Rosa Mundi’. For all its diversity, Rubbra’s was a congruous journey, both spiritually and musically.

Throughout the thesis, some points of comparison have been drawn between Rubbra’s music and parallel works by other, roughly contemporaneous, composers. Holst’s Hymn of Jesus was suggested as a model for Rubbra’s own Gnostic setting in The Secret Hymnody (Chapter 2), being still recalled by Rubbra in his much later Inscape (Chapter 5). Links were also made between the almost exactly contemporaneous Piano Concertos of Rubbra and Tippett, both works apparently referencing Beethoven’s Fourth Concerto in similar attempts to break away from the more prevalent late-Romantic virtuosic model (Chapter 4); and between the techniques and cosmically-oriented processes used by Rubbra and his friend Robert Simpson in their later symphonies (Chapter 6). In Chapter 5, Rubbra’s musical response to nature was positioned more generally in relation to twentieth-century English music and current academic discourse on the pastoral, without invoking any specific works by his contemporaries. Vaughan Williams’ ‘Pastoral’ Symphony is often held up as a test case in such debates, but beyond some superficial
resemblances in the two works’ use of a pastoral topic, and their references to war, they seem to have very different intentions. Indeed, as has been noted in that chapter, Rubbra’s musical expression of his nature mysticism tends to be quite distinctive, and is often mixed with spiritual references to the East.

Whilst Bach was Rubbra’s immediate model for the symbolic inclusion of chorale melodies in the *Sinfonia Sacra*, the way in which they seamlessly emerge out of his own music in performance is reminiscent of the way in which Tippett blends Afro-American spirituals into his oratorio *A Child of Our Time*. There is also a similar concern within the two works with the integration of the opposites of darkness and light: Tippett’s from the perspective of Jungian intrapersonal wholeness and Rubbra’s from a theological viewpoint. During the years when Rubbra had paused composition of the work, the *St Luke Passion* by Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–) appeared, its first broadcast and performance in England occurring in May 1967 (BBC Genome). Whilst Rubbra’s work is only briefly concerned with the passion story, and his musical language is very different from that of Penderecki, it is possible that the success of the new work, and Penderecki’s linking of its Biblical narrative with the suffering of the holocaust, thus broadening its relevance for a morally aware, but largely unreligious, post-war audience, provided Rubbra with an additional spur to rethink his own setting for a late twentieth-century context.

More generally, Rubbra’s œuvre is significant, amongst English composers, at least, for its consistent focus on spiritual concerns. In many ways, Rubbra was ahead of his British contemporaries in his attempts to integrate Eastern thought and musical influences into his own compositions, and in his willingness, especially in the late 1950s–early 1960s, to speak and write about his spiritual preoccupations. In displaying this openness, he had more in common with Jonathan Harvey’s generation, including other overtly spiritually-oriented composers such as John Tavener and Arvo Pärt, whose music Rubbra’s small-scale, Eastern-inspired pieces of the late 1950s–60s seemed to foreshadow in their stillness and economy of material (see Anderson, 2001: 56). Of his wider contemporaries, maybe only Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) is comparable to Rubbra in his focus on spiritual concerns, and there are strong similarities in the two composers’ spiritual allegiances, combining Catholic faith with an interest in Eastern philosophies and music. Despite, or maybe because of, the differences in their musical language, Rubbra was intrigued by
Messiaen’s music, which he knew from at least the 1940s, although he often struggled to listen to music that was so differently constructed from his own. He heard the *Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine* in 1947, which he at first dismissed as being ‘like cheap stained glass. Then he found he was fascinated by the strength through sheer repetition especially in the last movement’ (diary entry, 18 May, 1947, *HA*, Box 3, Book 2, temporary shelfmark). With the Rubbra-Greenberg-Pleeth Trio and Jack Brymer, he broadcast the *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* in 1952 (BBC Genome), so would have become intimately acquainted with many of Messiaen’s compositional techniques, including his use of modes of limited transposition, through performing them. Rubbra’s own most overtly Messiaen-influenced piece is ‘God’s Grandeur’ from *Inscape* (Chapter 5), with its use of Messiaen’s mode 3 and patterns derived from it. One of the attractions of Messiaen’s music for Rubbra was its sensuous soundworld (1973d: 677), and it is possible that Messiaen’s colourful orchestration encouraged Rubbra to return to a more adventurous use of timbre in his orchestral works from the mid-1950s.

Although I have concentrated on Rubbra’s spiritual interests, this study also leads to wider fields of research. Kate Bowan has written of ‘how a life’s interaction with its era can provide the historian with a rich avenue of investigation’ (2012: 240). Rubbra lived through most of the twentieth century, and his artistic and spiritual interests reflect many of the preoccupations of the period. This study of one man’s music and its biographical context therefore opens onto a broader picture of twentieth-century British culture, and meshes with several areas of current scholarly research in the arts and humanities. Rubbra’s involvement with Theosophy and esoteric thought in the 1920s–30s provides a case study that augments recent academic interest in Theosophy, modernism and the arts, adding to the literature on English music by Christopher Scheer, James Mansell and Raymond Head, cited in Chapter 2; whilst both early twentieth-century experimental dance and the revival of traditional dance styles associated with the Indian cultural renaissance have been objects of recent investigation for dance scholars (of whom Larraine Nicholas and Margaret E. Walker, cited in Chapter 3, are just two amongst many). Rubbra’s engagement with Eastern music, through his work with dancers and through his later contacts within the Asian Music Circle, offers yet another perspective to the writings of scholars such as Nalini Ghuman (2014), Martin Clayton (2007) and Sophie Fuller (2007), all of whom have recognised that individual East-West musical interactions
of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were more complex and diverse than the subsequent postcolonial Orientalist discourse would suggest. Similarly, Rubbra’s intensely personal musical response to nature resonates with recent scholarship that seeks to situate the twentieth-century English pastoral within, rather than in opposition to, modernism in the arts (Harris, 2010; Saylor, 2008; and contributors to Riley, 2010). This thesis thus demonstrates how a focus on the life, work and spirituality of one composer can, nevertheless, ‘bring together a range of discourses to reveal unrecognised connections and relationships’ (Bowan, 2012: 241).
Appendix A

Songs and choral music up to 1930: a new catalogue


Publication dates refer to date of first publication only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of composition</th>
<th>Opus number, publication date or archival information</th>
<th>Title and text author</th>
<th>Performing forces</th>
<th>Dedication Other comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undated (looks very early)</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>From oversea (Fiona Macleod [,= William Sharp])</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>Composer given as Charles E. Rubbra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undated (looks early)</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>The Cloths of Heaven (W.B. Yeats)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undated (1923?)</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>The Last Invocation (Walt Whitman)</td>
<td>Two tenor voices, flute, two violins and piano</td>
<td>Completed version, with different instrumentation, of ‘The Imprisoned Soul’ (see below, summer 1923)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undated, after 1925</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>Virtue (George Herbert)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>Composer given as E. Duncan-Rubbra, hence after July 1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1920</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>Thought-voices (Ernest Dowson)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>‘For Lilian Noon’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1920</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished</td>
<td>Twilight (John Masefield)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>‘Dedicated to my friends the Rev. and Mrs. S.J. Hooper’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of composition</td>
<td>Opus number, publication date or archival information</td>
<td>Title and text author</td>
<td>Performing forces</td>
<td>Dedication Other comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1921</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished ‘Op. 2’ RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 3–4v</td>
<td>Easter (George Herbert)</td>
<td>Voice and violin</td>
<td>‘For Ena’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1921</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, f. 5</td>
<td>Nod (Walter de la Mare)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1921</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 6–7</td>
<td>Requiem (Robert Louis Stevenson)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xmas 1921</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished BR</td>
<td>The Shepherdess (Alice Meynell)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1922</td>
<td>No opus ‘Op. 3, No. 2’ (Banfield) Unpublished RC Vol. LXXIII, Add MS 62659, ff. 9–10v</td>
<td>A Litany (Phineas Fletcher)</td>
<td>Voice and string quartet</td>
<td>‘For Maurice Jacobson’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 (before April)</td>
<td>Op. 2 ‘Op. 2, No. 2’ (Banfield) Published Lengnick, 1976</td>
<td>Rosa Mundi (Rachel Annand Taylor)</td>
<td>Voice and two violins (or piano, in published version)</td>
<td>MS has dedication ‘to Joan Elwes’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of composition</td>
<td>Opus number, publication date or archival information</td>
<td>Title and text author</td>
<td>Performing forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1922</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished ‘Op. 2, No. 1’ (Banfield) ‘Op. 7’ RC Vol. LXXIV, Add MS 62660, ff. 9–10</td>
<td>Easter (George Herbert)</td>
<td>Voice and string trio</td>
<td>Different setting of the poem set in March 1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1922</td>
<td>No opus ‘Op. 3, No. 1’ (Banfield) Unpublished RC Vol. LXXIII, Add MS 62659, ff. 1–8</td>
<td>Tears (John Dowland)</td>
<td>Voice and string quartet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 1922</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished RC Vol. LXXIV, Add MS 62660, ff. 7–8v</td>
<td>I see His blood upon the rose (Joseph Mary Plunkett)</td>
<td>Voice, flute and harp</td>
<td>Unfinished/ discarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1922 Op. 13, No. 2 Published OUP, 1925</td>
<td>A Hymn to the Virgin (Anon. medieval)</td>
<td>Voice and harp (or piano)</td>
<td>‘For Joan Elwes’ Rubbra directs: ‘if this accompaniment is played on the piano it should sound as harp-like as possible.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 Op. 4, No. 1 Published Lengnick, 1976</td>
<td>The Mystery (Ralph Hodgson)</td>
<td>Un accomp. voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 Op. 4, No. 2 Published Lengnick, 1953</td>
<td>Jesukin (St Ita)</td>
<td>Voice and harp (or piano)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of composition</td>
<td>Opus number, publication date or archival information</td>
<td>Title and text</td>
<td>Performing forces</td>
<td>Dedication Other comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Op. 5 Revised 1952, published Lengnick, 1953</td>
<td>O my deir heart (Anon medieval)</td>
<td>Voice and string quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1923</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 8–9</td>
<td>Spiritual lullaby (Anon. medieval)</td>
<td>Voice and kithara (or violin)</td>
<td>‘For Annea Spong’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1923</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished RC Vol. LXXIV, Add MS 62660, ff. 11–14v</td>
<td>The Imprisoned Soul (Walt Whitman)</td>
<td>Two tenor voices, flute, harp and piano (or two violins instead of harp)</td>
<td>Unfinished/ discarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1923</td>
<td>No opus ‘Op. 7, No. 1’ (Banfield) Unpublished RC Vol. LXXIII, Add MS 62659, ff. 15–17</td>
<td>Rejection (Chaucer)</td>
<td>Voice and string quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1923</td>
<td>No opus ‘Op. 8, No.2’ Unpublished RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 17–18v</td>
<td>There is a lady (Anon.)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 1923</td>
<td>Op. 13, No. 3 Published OUP 1925</td>
<td>It was a lover and his lass (Shakespeare)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>‘For Lilian Duncan’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Op. 8, No. 1 Published Lengnick, 1976</td>
<td>Cradle Song (Padraic Colum)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of composition</td>
<td>Opus number, publication date or archival information</td>
<td>Title and text author</td>
<td>Performing forces</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Op. 8, No. 2 ‘Op. 8, No. 4’ (Banfield) Published Lengnick, 1976</td>
<td>Orpheus (attrib. John Fletcher)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 1923</td>
<td>Op. 8, No. 3 Unpublished RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 19–20</td>
<td>Who is Silvia? (Shakespeare)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1924</td>
<td>Op. 15 Published OUP, 1928</td>
<td>Rune of Hospitality (Old Gaelic, trans. Kenneth Macleod)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>Published song dedicated to Hugh Mackay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Op. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 Published OUP, 1925</td>
<td>Dormi Jesu (The Virgin’s Cradle Hymn) (Latin text by Hieronymous Wierix C16–17, trans. S.T. Coleridge)</td>
<td>No. 1: SATB No. 2: arranged for SSA</td>
<td>First of Rubbra’s works to be published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of composition</td>
<td>Opus number, publication date or archival information</td>
<td>Title and text author</td>
<td>Performing forces</td>
<td>Dedication Other comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924 or later</td>
<td>Op. 6 Published OUP, 1928</td>
<td>Afton Water (Robert Burns)</td>
<td>SATB</td>
<td>Arrangement of traditional Scottish melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924 or later</td>
<td>Op. 7 Published Curwen, 1928</td>
<td>Dear Liza (trad., collected by Hugh Mackay)</td>
<td>Two voices and piano</td>
<td>Arrangement of Scottish folk song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924 or later</td>
<td>Op. 10 Published OUP, 1928</td>
<td>My Tocher’s the Jewel (Robert Burns)</td>
<td>SSATB</td>
<td>Dedicated to Hugh Mackay Arrangement of Scottish folk song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1925</td>
<td>Op. 13, No. 1 Published OUP, 1925</td>
<td>Out in the Dark (Edward Thomas)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autumn 1925</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished BR</td>
<td>The Millwater (Edward Thomas)</td>
<td>Voice and small orchestra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 1925 [?1928]</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished BR</td>
<td>Lights Out (Edward Thomas)</td>
<td>Voice and string orchestra</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Summer 1926</td>
<td>No opus Unpublished BR</td>
<td>In September (Francis Ledwidge)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<td>A Prayer (Ben Jonson)</td>
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<td>1926</td>
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<td>Invocation to spring (James Thomson)</td>
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<td>1926–27</td>
<td>Op. 18 Unpublished RC Vol. LXXI, Add MS 62657</td>
<td>Rhapsody</td>
<td>Soprano and string septet, flute, oboe, clarinet, two horns and harp</td>
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<td>Op. 20 Published OUP, 1928</td>
<td>A Duan of Barra (Murdoch Maclean)</td>
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<td>Op. 22, No. 1 Published Curwen, 1929</td>
<td>Take, O take those lips away (Shakespeare)</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>Op. 22, No. 2 Published Curwen, 1929</td>
<td>Why so pale and wan? (Sir John Suckling)</td>
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<td>RC Vol. LXXV, Add MS 62661, ff. 46–49</td>
<td>When last I went (same text as above)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Op. 28 Published OUP, 1931</td>
<td>A Widow Bird Sate Mourning (Shelley)</td>
<td>Voice and piano</td>
<td>Dedicated to Hubert Foss.</td>
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Appendix B

Peter Goffin’s scenario for the ballet *Prism*

*PRISM*

Plan for a ballet by PETER GOFFIN

First Plane - ORIGIN

A chord of music. Quick curtain.
A dark space is discovered. In the space, to the left, a circle of intense light. In the core of the light a WHITE SHAPE like a cone point downwards. The white shape is spinning, not continuously but in regular pulses.

Dially visible, to the right of the circle of light, and moving slowly towards it, fourteen BLACK FORMS massed together. These forms are impersonal and unconscious. That is to say, they appear as a unit and not as individuals. Their movement is caused, not by an impulse within them, but by the living centre of light which appears to attract them magnetically.

The nature of the movement in the black unit is twofold: seven forms move in an angular or mechanical manner, and seven in a series of undulations or curves. This division of movement may be regarded figuratively as male and female.

Each individual form in the unit is half black and half white, the ‘male’ forms back and front, and the ‘female’ forms left and right sides. Thus, in order to appear wholly black as they move towards the light, only the backs of the ‘male’ forms and the left sides of the ‘female’ forms should be visible.
Tempo increases as the black unit advances. Individual forms and small groups break away from the unit and hover briefly in the light-circle in such a way as to reveal their white divisions in momentary flashes before returning to the unit. This process of attraction and repulsion continues at increasing speed until the whole black unit is drawn into the vortex of light and becomes white. The spinning cone is now hidden and remains invisible.

Absolute stillness and silence as THE PRISM DESCENDS.

The PRISM, which is a thin white frame forming a 'skeleton' triangular prism, comes to rest diagonally.

The stillness of the white forms in the circle of light is disturbed by a new impulse. Energy appears to gather in them and they begin to strain towards the prism. Unlike the first movement of black forms, this movement is impelled from within, but it is still unconscious or 'blind': instinctive.

The area of the light-circle widens and extends to the prism. A bluish light grows in the prism itself.

The twofold or 'male' and 'female' nature of the original movement is retained, but it is now larger and more coherent. A moment of high tension is reached. The forms mass together near the prism. The group begins to break as forms in ones and in small groups leap through the prism. Immediately, seven small circles of coloured light spring to life in the darkness beyond the prism, not simultaneously but in the following sequence at irregular intervals: RED, ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, BLUE, INDIGO, VIOLET.
(3)

The arrival of each form or group of forms in the area into which they leap must coincide exactly with the appearance of each coloured circle of light. Thus, the forms will appear to change colour instantaneously as they emerge from the prism.

The sequence of 'leaps' is as follows:

1st. leap - One MALE FORM (appearing RED)
2nd. leap - One MALE FORM (appearing GREEN)
3rd. leap - One FEMALE FORM (appearing YELLOW)

Pause.

4th. leap - One MALE and one FEMALE FORM (appearing BLUE)

Pause.

5th. leap - One MALE and one FEMALE FORM (appearing MINT)

Pause.

6th. leap - One MALE and two FEMALE FORMS (appearing INDIGO)
7th. leap - Two MALE and two FEMALE FORMS (appearing VIOLET)

As they emerge from the prism the forms spin and leap rapidly over the area covered by the seven circles of light. The white division of each form will reflect each colour in turn, but not in any special order. The twofold nature of the movement: female 'undulating', and male 'angular', is retained. The mood is lively and effervescent, but chaotic.

The lights fade. DARKNESS and SILENCE.
Second Plane - POLARIZATION

In the momentary darkness closing 'ORIGIN', the prism and the black backstage curtains are raised out of sight. A low, stepped rostrum occupying the whole width of the backstage is revealed. On this rostrum, left: a PRIMARY RED SQUARE, centre: a PRIMARY BLUE CIRCLE, and right: a PRIMARY YELLOW TRIANGLE. These geometric shapes are hollow with black backings. Above them, as though suspended in space, a WHITE STAR with three rays emerging from its centre and reaching down to each of the shapes.

MUSIC OPENS. The three geometric shapes gradually appear in three separate areas of white light. In each geometric shape two forms are discovered.

In the RED SQUARE: A DARK RED MALE FORM and a LIGHT RED FEMALE FORM.
In the BLUE CIRCLE: A DARK BLUE MALE FORM and a LIGHT BLUE FEMALE FORM.
In the YELLOW TRIANGLE: A DARK YELLOW MALE FORM and a LIGHT YELLOW FEMALE FORM.
(In addition to colour each form has a black division - see costume designs.)

These are the THREE PRIMARY IMAGES.

While the three areas of light grow to maximum intensity there is no movement. The primary images appear in 'set postures'; as tableaux; indicating three ideas.

The RED FORMS in a 'PHYSICAL' posture.
The BLUE FORMS in a 'SPIRITUAL' posture.
The YELLOW FORMS in a 'MENTAL' posture.
These static "postures" are momentary. As though actuated by the music the images begin to move, at first slowly and within the limits of the three light-areas. Light spreads below the rostrum. The three DARK FORMS and the three LIGHT FORMS emerge from the geometric shapes, descend from the rostrum and divide into two disassociated groups of three: MALE FORMS and FEMALE FORMS respectively.

The DANCE OF MALE AND FEMALE FORMS begins. Each group expressing the three ideas of the 'postures', and retaining, but in a more developed form, the 'undulating' and 'angular' movements which were established in 'ORIGIN'.

Gradually the two groups became aware of each other. The idea of individual attraction is conceived. The groups disintegrate and the DANCE OF SEEKING, of trial and error, commences. Various combinations of male and female forms are made and broken. A resolution is reached when the following forms unite:

1. DARK RED with LIGHT YELLOW.
2. DARK YELLOW with LIGHT BLUE.
3. DARK BLUE with LIGHT RED.

The nature of the three respective 'levels' of meeting may be indicated by the terms already used to describe the 'postures'.

The DANCE OF AFFINITY begins: the three groups of two forms disassociated but moving simultaneously. At the end of this movement the first two forms (1) enter the red square, (2) the blue circle, and (3) the yellow triangle. They become invisible as the light dims to a faint glow on the geometric shapes.
MUSIC CONTINUES AND CHANGES. Light grows.

Three new forms appear; one in each geometric shape. These are the SECONDARY IMAGES.

In the RED SQUARE and ORANGE MALE FORM,
In the BLUE CIRCLE & GREEN FEMALE FORM,
In the YELLOW TRIANGLE & VIOLET MALE FORM.

(The male forms have small black divisions in addition to their colour, but the female form is wholly green)(see design)

Light intensifies on the blue circle (centre) and the green form emerges and descends from the rostrum.

The DANCE OF THE GREEN FEMALE FORM.

Light intensifies on the other two geometric shapes and the male forms emerge.

The DANCE OF GREEN AND ORANGE

The DANCE OF GREEN AND VIOLET

The DANCE OF THE TRIAD, or the union of three.

The mood of these dances is sparkling, and the nature of the movement rapid, almost acrobatic, and not without humour.

The final phase of TRIAD takes place centre-stage in a circle of brilliant white light. Darkness surrounding. The geometric shapes become invisible as the black backstage curtains are lowered during this ending. The brilliant circle of light fades. The movement of the three figures, now ecstatic, continues with the music into darkness.

MUSIC CHANGES IN DARKNESS. Two circles of light grow; stage left and right. In the circles of light are discovered two COMPOSITE FORMS, male and female respectively.
The male composite form contains the three dark, and the female form the three light primary colours.

Movements of attraction begin from one circle of light to the other. The two circles merge into one.

The DANCE OF THE COMPOSITE FORMS. In a subtle and more 'conscious' manner, the three ideas of the primary 'postures' are expressed. Light intensifies slightly and reveals a new geometric form on the rostrum backstage. It consists of a yellow triangle containing a red square, and within the square a blue circle. The circle is hollow with a white backing, but at this point it appears dark because there is no light focused on it.

The dance of composite forms reaches its climax and the two forms mount the rostrum and become invisible as they pass into the darkness beyond the hollow circle.

MUSIC CONTINUES in semi-darkness
MUSIC CHANGES. Light intensifies in the circular centre of the composite geometrical shape. A WHITE FEMALE FORM becomes visible in the circle. Movement begins as the music is established.

THE DANCE OF THE WHITE FORM.

The movement of this dance is divided into three phases.

The FIRST PHASE occurs on the rostrum immediately before the geometric shape. It should cover a limited area and consist of slow, simple movements. It might be described as a gradual 'awakening'.

The SECOND PHASE brings the White Form forward into the main area below the rostrum. Movement becomes more certain and considerably stronger. Tempo increases. The White Form swings with fine balanced movement through all the 'ideas' previously stated; 'physical', 'mental', 'spiritual'; weaving them together and considering them apart, controlling them. The nature of this movement will include both 'angular' and 'undulating' qualities.

The THIRD PHASE. The complex texture of the second phase gradually simplifies into strong, continuous movement suggesting not finality but 'wholeness'. That is to say, the White Form has become a balanced entity without desire or need to develop further, but with the power to continue on the level it has attained. This idea might be indicated both musically and in movement by a strong recurring theme or figure, but a repetition appearing or sounding monotonous would destroy the desired significance.
Appendix C

Books by Teilhard de Chardin owned by Rubbra

The following books by Teilhard de Chardin were in Rubbra’s personal library at Lindens, Gerrards Cross, Bucks, at the time of his death. The date of English publication is given in brackets.

*Activation of Energy* (1970)
*Building the Earth* (1965)
*Christianity and Evolution* (1971)
*Human Energy* (1969)
*Le Milieu Divin* (1957)
*Let Me Explain* (1970)
*Letters From a Traveller, 1923–55* (1962)
*Man’s Place in Nature* (1966)
*On Love* (1972)
*Science and Christ* (1968)
*The Appearance of Man* (1965)
*The Future of Man* (1964)
*The Hymn of the Universe* (1965)
*The Phenomenon of Man* (1959)
*The Vision of the Past* (1966)
*Toward the Future* (1975)

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1 This list is compiled from a listing of Rubbra’s books sent to me by Adrian Yardley. Yardley’s list contains some errors. Minor corrections have been made without comment where it is obvious what book or author is intended.

2 Listed by Adrian Yardley by its French title, so presumably owned in French by Rubbra. The date of publication in French is given here. It is published in English as *The Divine Milieu* (1960).
Books about Teilhard de Chardin owned by Rubbra

Hanson, Anthony, ed. *Teilhard Reassessed* (1970)
Kopp, Joseph. *Teilhard de Chardin Explained* (1964)
Nooney, C. *A background to Teilhard de Chardin*4

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3 Yardley lists the author by surname only, as Berry. Thomas Berry has written about Christianity and evolution, but most of his publications are since Rubbra’s death, and nothing has this title. It seems more likely that the book by Benz was owned by Rubbra. If Yardley’s list was typed from a handwritten script, it is possible that Berry and Benz could be confused.

4 Yardley lists this book, but I can find no record of author or title in any catalogue. It seems probable that the author should be Christopher Mooney, who has written widely on Teilhard, but nothing with this title. The most likely of his titles, being most cited, would be *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (1966).
Bibliography

Library sigla

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Archives

Adrian Yardley, private collection.


Ballets Commissioned by Harold Rubin, GB-Lbl, 3 vols., Add. MS 52588–52590.

Benedict Rubbra, private collection.

Cecil Collins Papers, Tate Gallery Archive, London.

Dartington Hall Trust Archive, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter.


Finzi Archive, GB-Ob, uncatalogued.

Harthan Archive, GB-Ob, uncatalogued.


Rubbra Archive, GB-Ob, 37 boxes, uncatalogued.


Sadler’s Wells Theatre Archive, Islington Local History Centre, Sadler’s Wells Ballet correspondence, S/SWT/2/4/1.

Supplementary Rubbra Collection, GB-Lbl, 10 vols., Add. MS 64110–64119.

Theosophical Society Headquarters, London.

University of Reading Special Collections, University Orchestra and Choral Society, uncatalogued.
**Writings by Rubbra**


Rubbra, Edmund. 1969b. Last Week’s Broadcast Music (on Don Banks, Richard Rodney Bennett, Stravinsky, David Gow, etc.). *Listener*, 27 Nov.: 769–70.


Other writings


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Rao, Suvarnalata and Wim van der Meer. (n.d.) *Music in Motion: The Automated Transcription for Indian Music (AUTRIM) Project by NCPA and UvA.*


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Musical scores

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**Unpublished works and manuscript sources**


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**Works of visual art**


Buonarroti, Michelangelo. 1553. *Florentine Pietà*. Marble. Museo dell’ Opera del Duomo, Florence/ Bridgeman Education.


http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/collection/artists/moore-thomas-sturge-
Qing Dynasty. Early 18th century. *Mountain Landscape with the Three Taoist Star Gods of Longevity, Prosperity and Happiness being worshipped by Pilgrims to the Sacred Mountain*. Jade. 21 cm. Oriental Museum, Durham University, UK / Bridgeman Education.