

Points of interest:

* English folk song
* English choral tradition
* French Impressionism
* The song cycle
* Twentieth Century vocal techniques
* The poetry of A. E. Housman

On Wenlock Edge

No. 1 ‘On Wenlock Edge’, No. 3 ‘Is My Team Ploughing? No. 5 ‘Bredon Hill’

Ralph Vaughan Williams 1909

**Most commonly used time signatures**

**4/4 - 4 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**3/4 - 3 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**2/4 - 2 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**6/8 – 6 quaver beats in a bar.**

Vocal Music

Set Work 3

**Harmony & Tonality**

* Mostly consonant harmony.
* Uses whole-tone ideas.
* Parallel chords are used.
* False relations create tension.
* The harmony is often modal.
* Pentatonic harmony is used.
* Much use of chromaticism.
* Dorian Mode used in ‘*Is my Team Ploughing?’*
* Extended chords used (7ths & 11ths).

**Melody**

* Melodies influenced by modal folk music.
* Pentatonic melodies used.
* Many chromatic descending melody lines.
* Recitative style singing used.
* Non virtuosic vocal line.
* High register used on occasion.
* Often conjunct but leaps create tension at dramatic points.

**Structure**

* No. 1: Five verses AABBA/B, last verse combines both A & B elements.
* No. 3: Vaughan Williams leaves 2 verses out of Housman’s poem to create a modified strophic form with three pairs of verses.
* No. 5: Seven verse structure:

Introduction-A-A-B-B1-C-D-A1 Postlude

**Social & Historical Context**

**Sonority**

**Texture**

**Rhythm, Metre & Tempo**

* Constantly changing textures.
* No 1 uses ostinato patterns and unison trills.
* No 3 uses homorhythm and homophonic accompaniment.
* No 5 uses sustained accompaniments, melody dominated homophony and ostinati to create different layers of music.

Wider listening: *Die Wintereisse* – Schubert, *La Cathederale Engloutie –* Debussy, *Pavanne Pour Une Enfant Defunte -* Ravel

* Vaughan Williams tried to break away from English Romanticism.
* He studied and transcribed Old English Folksongs.
* He had a passion for English Tudor music.
* Vaughan Williams was influenced by French Impressionism, especially the works of Debussy & Ravel
* *On Wenlock Edge* is a song cycle based on poems by A.E. Housman collectively known as *A Shropshire Lad.*
* Unusual combination of instruments: Vocal & piano quintet.
* Piano block chords emulate church bells.
* Piano techniques include: trills, parallel chords, pedals, ostinato and accompanying arpeggios.
* String techniques include: tremolo, pizzicato, high registers, triple stopping, sul ponticello, con sordini & open harmonics.
* Triplets and sextuplets used.
* Cross rhythms feature prominently.
* Rhythms follow natural speech patterns (recitative)
* Long held notes accompany the vocal, singing in free time.
* Frequent changes in metre and tempo.
* *‘Bredon Hill’* simulates church bells with sustained piano chords.