

THE INFLUENCE OF PLAINSONG IN THE CHORAL MUSIC OF HEALEY WILLAN

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iv
1. PURPOSES AND PROCEDURES	1
Statement of Purpose	3
Problems and Questions	5
Definitions	5
Methodology	6
Willan's Background	7
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	15
3. ANALYSIS OF MISSA BREVI	17
Missa Brevis No. 1	18
Missa Brevis No. 2	19
Missa Brevis No. 3	21
Missa Brevis No. 5	22
Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena	22
Missa SS. Phillipi et Jacobi	25
Missa Brevis No. 4	28
O Westron Wynde Mass	32
4. ANALYSIS OF LITURGICAL MOTETS AND ANTHEM AND TENEBRAE SETTING	37
O King All Glorious	37
I Beheld Her, Beautiful as a Dove	39
Fair in Face	41
Rise Up, My Love, My Fair One	42
Lo, In the Time Appointed	43
Here Are We in Bethlehem	43
Responsaries for the Office of Tenebrae	45
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	47
APPENDIX	51
REFERENCES	52

## ABSTRACT

Plainsong quotations are found in numerous choral works of British composers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to have a profound influence on the works of contemporary British composers. Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Holst, Elgar, Britten, Rutter, Tavener, and Meallor all show signs of “looking back” on the plainsong traditions of the British and continental forbearers. It stands to reason, then, that Healey Willan, a composer whose life makes him a contemporary of several of the aforementioned titans of the age, should show signs of the same influence. Passages in his compositions, notably his sacred choral compositions, reflect plainsong’s influence.

This document’s purpose is to examine a specific set of Willan’s sacred choral works: his *missa brevi*, liturgical motets, and one choral setting of responsaries for the offices of Tenebrae. Each of these genres is used to present the wide ranging influence of plainsong as a compositional consideration. An analysis of metric, harmonic, melodic, and textual techniques that exhibit plainsong characteristics is undertaken for each selected work.

The study concludes that Willan’s work is strongly influenced by plainsong through the use of varied compositional methods. It demonstrates use of these methods across all genres, identifies a specific period of Willan’s life where these techniques come to the forefront, and suggests areas of further study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Plainsong quotations are found in numerous choral works of British composers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to have a profound influence on the works of contemporary British composers. Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Holst, Elgar, Britten, Rutter, Tavener, and Meallor all show signs of looking back on the plainsong traditions of the British and continental forbearers. It stands to reason, then, that Healey Willan, a composer whose life makes him a contemporary of several of the aforementioned titans of the age, should show signs of the same influence. Passages in his compositions, notably his sacred choral compositions, reflect plainsong's influence.

Healey Willan's training, education, teaching, and professional activity demonstrate a clear and indisputable passion for plainsong from an early age. Willan's chorister school upbringing, his membership and founding role in two Gregorian societies, his insistence upon working with the Anglo-Catholic St. Mary Magdalene Church for lesser pay, insisting that his choristers all sing plainsong as an exercise in musicianship, and his access to the numerous scholarly chant and plainsong resources at the University of Toronto all lend weight to the argument that many, if not all, sacred choral compositions by Willan must be approached with plainsong's influence firmly in mind.

These influential considerations include melodic quotations, paraphrases, and intentional and seemingly subliminal borrowings of preexisting chant melodies from a variety of sources, principle among them the *Liber Usualis*, Roman *graduale*, and a handful of other chant sources that can be found at the University of Toronto's

manuscript library. The use of freely metered melodies and phrases, entire movements and works devoid of strong bar lines or time signatures, the composer's frequent written instructions of "in free rhythm", and the careful attention to use measure and metric changes to allow for the text to fall on strong beats are further evidence of plainsong influence. Furthermore, almost every piece analyzed demonstrated a uniquely florid sense of plainsong-inspired melodies and part writing, avoiding chromatic harmonies, using leading and non-chord tones sparingly, and employing diverse modal scalar passages in multiple voices simultaneously.

The way Willan incorporates plainsong into his writing is similar to that of his contemporaries in many ways. However, while many others of his age employed free meter, modal passages, or florid writing, none do so quite so frequently and overtly as Willan. The techniques are a unique concoction, a combination of ancient compositional methods of the medieval and Renaissance composers and the neo-Romantic British composers of his own day. Yet, Willan pairs these ingredients together with finesse.

However, to say that all of Willan's choral works must be seen through the lens of plainsong technique is an overreach. The works of this document are drawn primarily from 1927-1950 with a few outliers, a time in the middle of Willan's life and the full maturity of his career. His earlier works, while beautiful, reflect less of the plainsong influences of their successors, and they fail to effectively merge the old and the new into something unique to the composer. The same can be said of Willan's prescriptive post-war compositions that, while commercially successful, tend to remove much of the modal, metric, and other plainsong references of his middle period.

### Statement of Purpose

Healey Willan has quoted plainsong in several of his choral works. There are also passages in his writing that demonstrate either paraphrase plainsong melodies or characteristics of plainsong.

*The Influence of Plainsong in the Sacred Choral Music of Healey Willan* is an investigation and analysis of the influence of chant and plainsong in Willan's choral compositions, more specifically, his sacred choral music, to decide what influence plainsong had in his work in order to allow conductors and singers to make informed decisions about the performance of Willan's choral works.

This research was conducted via the following methodology: 1. Research of Willan's biography and personal and professional background for evidence of plainsong learning and teaching, as well as access to plainsong resources. 2. A three-part analysis of a selected segment of Willan's choral works that best represented plainsong influence. Plainsong influence was defined by three parameters: A. Melodic paraphrase or quotation of existing plainsong or chant melodies. Willan uses preexisting chants as the base of his own original compositions, a technique not frequently employed since the Renaissance. This is especially true of Willan's *missa brevi*, where he frequently quotes plainsong, both intentionally, and, perhaps, subliminally. B. The use of freely metered melodies to emphasize words or to accommodate a singular melodic thought or paraphrase. There are several instances in Willan's sacred music, across all genres (masses, motets, anthems, service music) where Willan omits a time signature, leaving the work in free meter with a seemingly arbitrary number of notes per bar. The result is a focus on text declamation through augmented durations, placing emphasized words at the height of a melodic line,

and through surprising shifts in harmony. C. Characteristics associated with modal melodies and modal tonalities. Willan's part writing exhibits characteristics of plainsong influence via its melodic contour. This paper posits that many chants encompass the range of a seventh, from the sub-final to the sixth scale degree above the final, ones sees this range used frequently within melodic phrases and motives, individual measures, and entire voice parts in Willan's sacred choral works. Furthermore, Willan often seems at pains to avoid intervallic leaps greater than a third, which makes the pitch sequence of individual counterpoint lines and phrases more strongly resembling plainsong melody. Willan's original melodies also frequently display this characteristic economy of space. Finally, Willan makes limited use of accidentals, sometimes avoiding any accidentals throughout entire masses and motets. Furthermore, Willan makes very deliberate use of the seventh chord, conversely omitting it completely from entire movements and works.

The paper examines eight short masses, five motets, one anthem, and one service setting through the above analysis. The analysis finds that Willan quotes and paraphrases existing chant melodies only in his short mass settings, where he quotes frequently from the *Liber Usualis* and Roman Gradual, with other sources appearing less frequently. Analysis of his motets and anthems from this period finds that all are freely metered and have non-specific tempo markings and that the freely metered, non-specific tempo markings force the singer and conductor to address the poetic meter of the language and how it is set melodically and harmonically. The motets and anthems also have the most overly modal and chromatic passages, both supporting and refuting the role of modalism as a plainsong influence.

### Problems and Questions

There are five problems and four questions the paper seeks to address and answer. The problems are to 1. Define plainsong and list its most common melodic, rhythmic, and other theoretical characteristics. 2. Procure several of Healey Willan's choral works, both sacred and secular, both in and out of print. 3. Locate passages in these pieces that are directly or indirectly influenced by plainsong, as provided by the definition. Influences include melodic, metric, and tonal/modal characteristics. 4. Determine the sources, both intended and unintended, of plainsong melodies, quotations, and characteristics in each passage. 5. Draw conclusions from the analysis that can be used to determine how plainsong should influence the conductor's approach to performing Willan's works.

Questions that arise include 1. Does Willan's training and education indicate that he would have knowledge of, and affection for, plainsong melodies and chants? 2. Are there consistent sources, texts, composers, or periods that Willan consistently draws from more than others? 3. Does this analysis place plainsong as a primary influencer of Willan's choral compositional style? A particular period of his writing?

### Definitions

Concerning modality, Grove Music states:

“From the standpoint of musical analysis, modality is probably the single most homogeneous feature of Gregorian plainchant.”

Concerning rhythm, Oxford Dictionary of Music states:

“Plainsong rhythm is the **free rhythm of speech**; it is a prose rhythm, which of course arises from the unmetrical character of the words to be recited—psalms, prayers, and the like.”

This paper will use “free rhythm of speech” and “unmetrical character” to define plainsong and will be crucial to the following analysis, as almost all of the examined works contained in this document are created to favor the natural declamation of spoken text, are left without a formal meter, or liberty of meter is taken extensively to fit either a chant melody paraphrase or the actual text itself. This paper defines modal character in a work by examining the finals of melodic phrases, the use of the seventh scale degree in the melody as either a leading tone or the highest or lowest pitch in the phrase, and through an examination of the use of chromatic pitches to determine if they are used to create a common practice harmonic progression and whether or not they are used to establish tension between tonic and dominant harmonies in the given key center.

### Methodology

This document will examine and analyze the *missa brevi* of Willan and selected liturgical motets, all dating from what the author identifies as Willan’s middle period (1927-1950). These works represent a time of mature writing where Willan employs the techniques of plainsong most frequently and where said techniques are prominently displayed in the work. The author identifies this as a period of composition of a series of sacred choral works, all published within ten years of each other and each representing, to varying degrees, Willan’s plainsong compositional style.

Works selected for this document were analyzed for three elements of plainsong, based upon the definition provided above: 1. Melodic influence, or the paraphrase and quotation of existing plainsong melodies in Willan’s sacred compositions and the compositional style of melodic contour in plainsong style. 2. Metrical and rhythmic influence, the manner in which meter and rhythms are used to focus on text and melody,

improving the clarity of the text declamation and text stress. 3. Modal influence, the use of melody and/or harmony that avoids use of the seventh chord, frequent chromatic accidentals outside of the key, usually for a specific purpose or in a specific section of the composition.

### Willan's Background

Healey Willan (1880-1968) presents an interesting figure in the history of Western choral music. For many casual American listeners, and even quite a few professionals, his name may exist only in the periphery of their global view of Western choral composers. Yet, Healey Willan's catalog of sacred works is substantial in the history of the Western canon. His choral repertoire numbers at some astounding eight hundred individual pieces, including nineteen masses, thirty-three motets, thirty-eight anthems, thirty-two hymn anthems, thirty-three partsongs, over twenty operas and choral/orchestral works, and hundreds of works for organ.

Willan, as much as any British composer of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, was immersed in a rich neo-romantic tonality and harmonic language. Simultaneously, his work looks heavily into the past, both near and distant, for inspiration and architecture. Quotes from famous works and composers are found in many works. The fingerprints of Byrd, Sweelinck, Gibbons, and Taverner all can readily be seen scattered among his music right alongside the harmonic language of Vaughan Williams, Britten, Rheinberger, Howells, and Holst.

Unlike many of his more lauded British contemporaries, Willan was not schooled at one of the nation's great conservatories, nor was he tutored by a great master of a previous age. Willan's education, in its entirety, was undertaken at the chorister school

located on the grounds of St. Saviour's Church in Eastbourne, a brief walk from the English Channel. St. Saviour's was an Anglican church that was caught up in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century movement of Anglo-Catholicism, a bid on the part of many Anglican churches to reintroduce elements of the Roman Catholic rite into worship and liturgy that hadn't been practiced in England since the Reformation. The Willan family was only three generations removed from their Irish roots, and, while Willan considered himself to be fully English, swapping Anglican worship for Catholic would have been a significant transition for his forbears.<sup>1</sup> Willan's father, James, was among one of the movement's more vocal adherents, insisting on Willan's education in such an environment. His fervor was such that he was attacked in the street while advocating on the movement's behalf.<sup>2</sup>

A chorister school was a well-established institution in Willan's childhood years, teaching students to sing, read, play keyboard, and select other instruments alongside basic subjects. A chorister student would have been well-acquainted with the Anglican liturgy, and, in the case of St. Saviour's, he would also have had a strong understanding of the Roman rite. Melodies and texts from the Roman gradual and *Liber Usualis* would have been learned alongside the Book of Common Prayer. Willan spoke on this subject, recounting how he learned to play the modes on the organ as a young boy, improvising harmonies against the modal melodies of both the Anglican Psalter and the Catholic chant liturgy.

Despite having a thorough education in the basics of theory and composition, Willan left the employ of the chorister school at the age of 16 to move to London and try

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding his national loyalties, Willan often mused that he was "English by birth, Irish by extraction, Canadian by adoption, and Scotch by absorption."

<sup>2</sup>Clarke, F. R. C. *Healey Willan: Life and Music*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983, 4.

his hand at professional writing. He worked for a time as an organist's assistant and head organist at churches in London and composed in his free time. Inspired by Bach's tireless output of liturgical music, Willan wrote original compositions for his ecclesiastical employers while pursuing the post-Romantic secular music of his age on the side. While not commercially successful, Willan's early secular work was appreciated by the small community of fellow church musicians in London, particularly his organ preludes. His choral music was simplistic, more reminiscent of part-writing exercises than finished statements, but it was mostly in the language of his contemporaries. This lack of commercial success would lead to his immigration to Canada, which would have two major consequences. First, it would remove Willan from the contemporary language of his London colleagues and away from professional aspirations, instead moving him toward a career of writing predominantly for church choirs. Secondly, it would isolate him from the greater compositional atmosphere of Europe and the strenuous philosophical debate over the role of tonality and atonality in modern composition. With every British and European composer expected to take a firm stance either for or against, removing to Canada may have allowed Willan to avoid this pressure, find some aesthetic freedom, and simultaneously contribute to his relative lack of fame.

Instead, Willan's world would become increasingly colored by his work in the church. By the time he moved to Canada in 1913, Willan had already written seventy-six works, mostly sacred. This trend would continue, though the style would become more dominated by the ideas of plainsong. That's not to say that Willan didn't continue to write music devoid of plainsong influence, only that this middle period of his writing

brings plainsong's influence to the forefront. Having joined the London Gregorian Society in 1910, Willan was influential in founding the affiliated Gregorian Association of Toronto, whose mission was to "promote the use of plainchant in the city". The society remained active in the community until the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

### Plainsong Paraphrases and Melodic Influence

Since so many of Healey Willan's choral compositions have the appearance of plainsong chant, both melodically and metrically, this paper makes a close examination of individual melodies and starting phrases of several movements to determine if each melody was derived from a corresponding source chant. In two instances, *Missa Brevis No. 4: based upon the Christmas Sequence: Corde Natus Ex Parentis* and *Westron Wynde Mass*, the source chant/melody is articulated in the title or subtitle, ensuring that any direct quotation or paraphrase was intentional. For others, determining the source material required using the Global Chant online database to determine if any chants existed that might have served as the intended source melody or simply as an unintended inspiration behind the melody.

It is occasionally difficult to ascertain whether Willan intended to quote an existing chant melody or if the similarity between melodies is purely coincidental. However, there are a few considerations that can be made in favor of these melodies being intentional or, at the very least, a product of a known chant floating around in Willan's subconscious. First, Willan was immersed in the Anglo-Catholic liturgy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so much so that he left his rather comfortable position in

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, Stephanie, and Brian E. Power. "Ancient Echoes: Stylistic Influences in Healey Willan's Liturgical Music." *The Phenomenon of Singing* 5 (2005): 220-27.

Toronto for a more financially tenuous position at another Toronto parish that embraced the Anglo-Catholic liturgy.<sup>4</sup> He was known to have developed a great friendship with many of the Catholic clergy in Toronto and spent countless hours with them in conversation about faith and musical matters.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Willan worked in and around the University of Toronto Conservatory for half a century, giving him access to its substantial early music manuscript library, one of the most comprehensive in the world.<sup>6</sup> For a composer, organist, and teacher so taken by the liturgical music and traditions of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, he would have had ample opportunity to study and explore plainsong from many sources.

To accommodate for the uncertain nature of these other source quotations, this document will use the abbreviations for difference chant sources as they are found on the Global Chant database ([globalchant.org](http://globalchant.org)), a key for which can be found in the appendices. Due to the high number of chants contained in the database and the likelihood of coincidental melodic similarity, only plainsong melodies ascribed to a chant on the same text were considered as possible source material. Direct quotation, paraphrase, intervallic patterns, and melodic contour will be considered when attempting to connect melodies in Willan's works to extant chant sources.

### Rhythmic Influences

Many of Willan's compositions are rhythmically free, a hallmark of text-centered plainsong melodies. Willan regularly employs irregular or free meter, though he often suggests a bar location for ease of counting and reading. Often a brisk quarter note value

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<sup>4</sup> Clarke, 21.

<sup>5</sup> "Interview with Scott Haynes." Telephone interview by author. November 19, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

metronomic marking is included, often at 100 or higher, varying from movement to movement of larger works, and including the caveat “about” to further muddy the water. With such lack of specifics for meter and tempo, the natural declamation of text rises to the forefront of the singer’s and conductor’s consideration. Willan pays careful attention to text setting, particularly of works in the English language. Like other British contemporaries, Willan’s treatments bring out the natural cadence and emphasis of the word and/or poetic meter, often obscuring the bar line as a result.

### Modal Influences

Another analytical consideration was to determine to what modes were employed to evoke either known plainsong melodies or to serve some other aesthetic purpose: text painting or environmental affect. Frequently, Willan places a chant-inspired melody or paraphrase in the soprano voice and weaves a strongly progressive or common practice harmonic progression underneath. However, when taken as an independent melody, many of the phrases, both quoted and original, have modal characteristics. The paper defines modal influence as the use of melody and/or harmony that avoids use of the seventh chord, frequent chromatic accidentals outside of the key, usually for a specific purpose or in a specific section of the composition. The mode most frequently encountered is Aeolian, followed by Phrygian, Mixolydian, and Dorian examples.

William H Marwick completed a thorough theoretical analysis of many of Willan’s choral works in his 1971 dissertation The Sacred Choral Music of Healey Willan. In it Marwick asserts that the complete absence, or limited inclusion, of seventh, ninth, and eleventh chords, as well as limited use of non-key signature leading tones are

good indicators of plainsong influence, a method of identification this paper will replicate. Marwick writes:

The influence of plainsong is especially evident in the sacred choral music Dr. Willan wrote in the mid-thirties. The overall effect is a clearer and more modal sound. There are no sevenths, and the altered chords are due to the plainsong style.<sup>7</sup>

With this in mind, selected harmonic analysis will be included to illustrate modal characteristics in a given work.

### Works Selected for Analysis

This document will focus on the plainsong influence in three selected sets of works: Willan's choral mass settings, selected liturgical motets, and selected liturgical choral service settings. I divide Willan's output into three distinct periods: early, middle, and late. Willan's early choral work (1895-1927) is varied in nature and technique. Many of his secular partsongs come from this period, and the influence of his British contemporaries is evident in his use of neo-romantic tonalities and original, folk-like melodies. Willan's middle period (1927-1950) is arguably his strongest period of choral work, and it is from this period that the majority of the choral works that most strongly exhibit plainsong influence originate. It is also the period that his three most well-known choral works come from: the English Epiphany anthem *Three Kings* (1928), *An Apostrophe to the Heavenly Hosts* (1937), and the Latin motet *Hodie Christus Natus Est* (1935). While his style continued to mature to the end of his life, Willan's late period (1950-1968) his focus shifted to larger works, radio plays, operas, choral-orchestral festival pieces, and prescriptive choral anthems for American church publishing

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<sup>7</sup> Marwick, William Edward. *The Sacred Choral Music of Healey Willan*. PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1970, 63.

companies that are strongly diatonic, simply metered, and do not contain the freely metered, florid chant-like melodies of his middle years.

### Plainsong-Inspired Works Not Analyzed

#### FAUXBOURDONS and PSALTER REALIZATIONS

Not covered in the following analysis is Willan's significant contribution to Anglican hymnody. Willan created fauxbourdons for the entire Canadian Anglican psalter and harmonizations for hundreds of plainsong melodies already in the liturgical calendar. With the understanding that these works are all chant-inspired or derived from older chant melodies, they are meant to solely be harmonized chant.

#### HYMN ANTHEMS

Willan composed several hymn anthems, often with a corresponding organ prelude. While some of these hymn melodies are themselves either paraphrases or derivations from older chants, their recognition as independently developed hymns excludes them from consideration as independent plainsong. They will not be covered in this document.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is little research available on Healey Willan, either biographical or analytical. What research does exist is confined to a handful of scholarly documents.

The comprehensive biography and survey of works on Willan is F.R.C. Clarke's book Healey Willan: Life and Music (1983). Clarke completes a thorough biographical sketch, starting with Willan's ancestors and family background, detailing his childhood and formal education, his professional positions and accomplishments, and considerable insight into his personal, private, and faith life. Furthermore, Clarke's biography compiles a summary of various genres of composition, discussing several of the works. Each section discusses some common compositional methods or ideas as well as separating the output into periods. The biography and works survey is long-reaching, but the biography is the stronger of the two segments. The survey of works is quite general, with little depth placed into any one work or series of works, though it is useful as a starting point for anyone looking for further analytical research of any of Willan's compositions from any genre or period.

A second document of great value in this research is Willam Edward Marwick's dissertation, *The Sacred Choral Music of Healey Willan* (1970). Marwick's research is a careful and painstaking analysis of selected sacred choral works from every genre that Willan composed. While not a fully comprehensive study, the research discovers common patterns of tonality, harmony, and other theoretical principles, with musical excerpts to illustrate major themes and a summary of each individual analysis, as well as

a table detailing intervals, accidentals, and key changes for some pieces. While the dissertation provides valuable piece-by-piece analysis, it does not discuss specific techniques, composers, or influences beyond a surface level, occasionally mentioning “plainsong” or “Tudor” traits of individual works, if the author deemed them important enough to mention in the summative paragraph at the end of the analysis.

A short article and study into the use of historical compositional methods in Healey Willan’s works is “Ancient Echoes: Stylistic Influences in Healey Willan's Liturgical Music” by Martin and Power (2005). This study examined specific segments of a small portion of Willan’s works and compared them to the stylistic and compositional techniques of composers and compositions from the Renaissance and Baroque eras. It concluded that Willan borrowed compositional techniques from both eras. The scope and detail of the article are minute, but the article serves as convincing evidence of Willan’s desire to look backward for inspiration.

## CHAPTER THREE

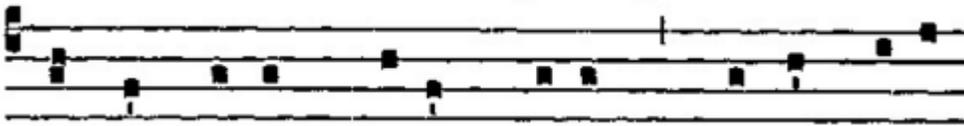
### MISSA BREVI

Analysis of Willan's short masses reveal two dominant plainsong characteristics. First, amidst the analyzed masses, motets, anthems, and service music, these mass settings alone constitute the entirety of the discovered plainsong paraphrase and quotations. The most prominent source text is the *Liber Usualis* and Roman gradual, though other chant sources find their way in more sporadically. Several mass movements are written in free meter and/or with only a suggested tempo, encouraging the singer and conductor to consider the natural word stress of the text for strong beats and articulations. Many of the mass movements employ florid melodic contour in all voices, mimicking the economic intervallic acrobatics of many plainsong chants found in the *Liber Usualis*. This in turn affects the harmonies, as Willan labors to create florid lines while simultaneously avoid accidentals by employing multiple inversions, which have the effect of destabilizing a sense of tonic and the listener's sense of common harmonic progression. Modal melodic phrases are also occasionally observed, wherein the phrase will begin on the second, third, or fifth scale degree of the given key, and, while the harmony underneath may or may not reinforce the key signature, the extracted melody maintains a strongly modal quality.

This chapter begins with shorter analytical examples that demonstrate one or two of these characteristics, followed by a more in-depth analysis of two *missa brevis* settings that exhibit all of them. Both *Missa Brevis No. 4* and *O Westron Wynde Mass* are paraphrase masses in Renaissance style.

Missa Brevis No.1 in E-flat Major (1932)

There is only one melody that is based on a preexisting chant source: the opening phrase of the Benedictus Qui Venit has the same pitch sequence as ST413/LU240<sup>8</sup> (Examples 1 and 1b).



Musical Example 1. LU240 from *Liber Usualis*.<sup>9</sup>



Musical Example 1b. Mm. 1-3 of Benedictus from *Missa Brevis No. 1*.<sup>10</sup>

All other melodies appear to be original. An example of melodic modalism occurring simultaneously with common practice harmonic progression can be found in the *Sanctus* movement. Examining the soprano line in mm.1-6, the phrase begins on G-natural and ends on B-flat, only ranging up a sixth from G-natural to E-flat. The melody cadences on a whole step, from A-flat to B-flat, giving the entire excerpt a feeling of G-Phrygian.

There are no seventh chords in any movement of the mass, and Willan only uses three accidentals in the whole work, all D-flats (m.3 of Benedictus Qui Venit and m.21 of

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<sup>8</sup> These designations are in two parts: letters that refer to a source text (ex. LU stands for Liber Usualis) and the numbers refer to the page in the manuscript where the excerpt can be found. A comprehensive list of designations used in this paper can be found in the appendix.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous. *Liber Usualis*.

<sup>10</sup> Willan, Healey, *Missa brevis No. 1*. New York: Carl Fischer, 1932.

Agnus Dei), all functioning to create isolated B-flat minor chords. Otherwise, there are no leading tones at cadence points or chromaticisms of any kind.

Missa Brevis No.2 in F Minor (1932)

*Missa Brevis No.2* is an original composition with melodies that are chant-inspired and/or possibly containing small snippets from other chant sources, including chant fragments from the *Liber Usualis* and other sources.

While several movements of the mass contain melodic paraphrase, Willan is careful not to let any movement of the mass remain modal in character for too long. He employs accidentals/leading tones at cadences in mm.3, 6, 7, and 9 of the Kyrie, breaking the otherwise modal melody and harmony of the movement. In Sanctus Willan uses d-naturals to establish c-natural minor, which in turn establishes a strong diatonic relationship between tonic and dominant in the given key of f-minor. These same techniques reoccur in both the Benedictus Qui Venit and Agnus Dei movements. It is important to note, however, that Willan makes use of these techniques only in certain instances and not at every possible opportunity. This discretion allows the entire mass to maintain a “modal flavor” while still keeping the listener anchored to F-minor.

Outside of paraphrase and quotation, *Missa Brevis No.2* is an excellent example of the florid, plainsong-inspired part-writing of Willan’s middle period. Rarely do any of the top three voices proceed at an interval larger than a fourth, and then almost only between the ending and beginning of new phrases, not in mid-phrase. The bass line has greater intervallic freedom, as can be expected.

## KYRIE

Immediately one can observe Willan's unique approach to meter: no time signature and a metronomic suggestion for the quarter note value with the instruction "In free rhythm." While bar lines are included in the score, they divide each bar unevenly: twelve, eleven, ten, and nine quarter notes in duration spread throughout the nine measures of the movement. Each measure appears to be created to accommodate the length of the phrase, some of which are repeated.

None of the melodic fragments are exact tonal and rhythmic matches for known chants, but several of the phrases match the pitch sequence or melodic contour of existing plainsong melodies. The opening Kyrie (m.1) phrase contains the same intervallic sequence as WA163, and the second phrase (m.2) shares the same pitch sequence as LU39, GR31as, and SCH138 (Examples 2 and 2b).



Musical Example 2. LU39 from *Liber Usualis*<sup>11</sup>



Musical Example 2b. m. 2 of Kyrie from *Missa Brevis No. 2*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, *Liber Usualis*.

<sup>12</sup> Willan, Healey, *Missa brevis No. 2*. New York: Carl Fischer, 1932.

## SANCTUS

Though the first nine measures appear to be in 2/2, Willan obscures the meter by staggering the entrances of each voice. By m.10 the measures have returned to their seemingly arbitrary duration, each meant to fit the text setting with original melodic phrases. While Willan creates a standard common practice harmonic progression underneath the soprano melody, the melodies themselves are very florid and involve no leaps larger than a third, similar to the majority of plainsong melodies. An examination of each final in the given measure demonstrate that they exist within the bounds of the paper's definition of a modal melody, rising up the sixth and below only to the subfinal.

## BENEDICTUS QUI VENIT

Again, each measure is freely metered.

## AGNUS DEI

Not only does the final movement of the mass continue the trend of freely metered measures suited to fit the melody, it also seems to change the beat value from the quarter note to half note in the final measure. Though the metronomic marking indicates no change in the value of the quarter note, the augmentation of the rhythm has the effect of slowing the entire measure by half the suggest tempo.

### Missa Brevis No.3 in F Major (1933)

More influenced by polyphonic counterpoint than plainsong, *Missa Brevis* No. 3 does contain some hints of plainsong influence. The opening Kyrie phrase (m.1-2) shares a pitch sequence with MEL118. This phrase is what the ensuing imitation is based upon. Later, the return of the 1(mm. 21-22) is a paraphrase of LU60 and GR 55as.

Missa Brevis No. 5 in F Major (1935)

The first two movements of *Missa Brevis No.5* are freely metered, and Willan gives a casually suggested metronomic marking for the quarter note value at “about 108”. While Willan appropriately declaims the text on strong beats, the free meter gives him space to elongate the melodic contour of the Kyrie movement, requiring fewer intervallic leaps and maintaining the floridity of the line, a plainsong characteristic common to all of Willan’s sacred choral work. Starting with the *Sanctus* the work stabilizes in 3/2 and 2/2, though the quarter note value is still given for the metronomic marking, an indication that Willan desires attention to the quickness and stepwise motion of the shorter value, even in the augmented meters.

The mass contains only two plainsong paraphrases/quotations. *Sanctus* begins with a matching pitch sequence to THAN178. *Agnus Dei* also begins with the same pitch sequence as SCH157.

Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena (1928)

While not a choral setting, this mass features unison, “chant-inspired” melodies (that are possibly a series of quotations of other chant melodies) and an organ accompaniment with strong modal characteristics. Metrically, this work is not as creative or free as others, but it bears no time signature or metronomic marking, only the tempo indication *moderato*. It does take liberties with meter, though there are no measures containing odd numbers of quarter notes, and, by the middle of the *Gloria*, the work seems to settle quite soundly into 3/2 and the *Credo* is entirely in 4/4.

## KYRIE

Possible plainsong paraphrases include the second “Lord, have mercy” (m.3-4), which is similar to Kyrie 4 from MEL53. There is no given time signature, though only m.5 and 18 contain more than four quarter notes (six each). The melodic contour of the Kyrie has a range of a major sixth, with no seventh in the melody, an indicator of Ionian mode. The final of D is the lowest note in the movement. The only accidental Willan employs is G-sharp as a leading tone to the dominant a-major chord in the key of D-major. However, the organ accompaniment uses accidentals more frequently, including frequent c-sharps. Additionally, there are only six intervals larger than a second in the movement: five leaps of a third and a single fourth.

## GLORIA

The intonation of the Gloria movement is the same intervallic sequence as Gloria 4 (LU26), which Willan repeats in m.1-2 and then only slightly alters in mm.3-4 and mm.44-45. There is not given time signature, but only three measures are in an implied meter of 3/2: the first two measures of repeated intonation and one measure of 2/2 (m.49), which allows for the emphasized syllable of “Jesus” and “Christ” to be set on strong beats. Willan employs the entire octave of d-major in the movement, though any time he employs ascending leap of a fourth, it either leaps to the sixth of the scale or to an altered c-natural at the top of a descending line, a common technique in modal counterpoint.

## CREDO

There is no melodic paraphrase or influence in the Credo section, and the meter switches between 3/2 and 2/2 in large sections. Willan also spans the entire octave of D-major, again only leaping a fourth from third to sixth scale degree, otherwise limiting leaps to no more than a third. Though he makes frequent use of c-sharp as a passing tone, when it is the top of the melodic line or a neighboring tone, the pitch is altered to C-natural.

## SANCTUS

There is no melodic paraphrase or influence in the Sanctus section, and the meter remains in 2/2 for the entire movement. Again, the work only spans the octave of D-major, and C-sharp is only employed once, as a descending passing tone.

## BENEDICTUS

This short movement contains no paraphrase and spans the range of a sixth, starting and ending on D. There is no meter indicated (all 2/2), but Willan places a single 3/2 measure into the movement in m.5 so that the word “Lord” falls on strong beat one.

## AGNUS DEI

The opening phrase of the Agnus Dei also matches the opening of several Agnus Dei chants from the Schildbach Catalog (Agnus Dei 2, 4, 16, 74, 119, 253, and 265). The only movement to begin in a key other than D-major, Willan does his best to mix the modal center, shifting between E-Aeolian and E-Phrygian by altering f-sharp to f-natural in certain passages. From mm.24-29 his melody begins on e-natural and finishes down a fourth on b-natural, giving it the character of hypo-Aeolian.

Missa SS. Philippi et Jacobi (1947)

In a mix of styles and treatments, *Missa Ss. Philippi et Jacobi* sets every text of the ordinary but the Credo, including two separate Kyrie treatments: one in imitative style to match the compositional style of the other movements, and one in freely metered fauxbourdon.

KYRIE 1

There is no given meter, but a metronomic indication for the quarter note value is set at a brisk 108. Willan oscillates the meter freely between four and six quarter notes per measure for the entire movement, with the soprano text declamation falling most regularly on strong beats and the underlying three voices providing counterpoint in imitative style. The melodic contour shows no sign of plainsong influence.

KYRIE 2

The indication “in free rhythm” is given at the beginning of the movement with no meter or metronomic value given. Each measure is barred to fit the melody of the text (all but the last might be considered 5/2 or 10/4), and all melodies are original. If each measure represents a separate melodic line, then each exhibits plainsong influence in both melodic contour and an absence of leading tones, altered tones, or neighbor tones. All melodies span the distance of no more than a fourth, and there is not interval larger than a third present in any of the phrases. Harmonically, Willan employs zero seventh chords in the twelve measures.

## GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

No meter or metronomic marking is indicated, and the opening measure in the bass voice is the only measure in the Gloria to use eighth notes. This incipit is an exact quotation of GR8as and LU19. The rest of the melodic phrases appear to be original, though the barring of each measure does not consistently encompass the entire phrase, and the text, even in the soprano voice, frequently overlaps the bar line. Since the text and barring seems otherwise arbitrary, it is possible that there is a melodic source yet to be discovered.

The bass line, with the exception of the first measure, does not appear to be plainsong influenced, though Willan does appear to go to lengths to keep the line as fluid as possible by using several inversions to keep the intervals as small as possible. While the overall range of the soprano melody line spans a full octave, no single phrase rises more than a fourth from the starting pitch, keeping the contour compact.

Harmonically, Willan avoids the use of seventh chords, sticking instead to triadic chords in various inversions. His use of accidentals occasionally produces a leading tone to the cadence (m.13), though the frequently used E-flat (m.12), applied for harmonic function, does provide some hint of modal tonality at variance with D-minor.

## SANCTUS

The movement contains no given meter, only a metronomic indication for the quarter note value that changes throughout the movement. While beginning in 4/4, Willan changes to 3/4 at the beginning of the second phrase, in addition to changing the key signature. The movement starts in what appears to be D-minor, but each successive entrance implies a different key center: G-minor in the tenor, E-minor in the alto, and

back to D-minor in the soprano. Harmonically, there are no seventh chords, and several suspensions are employed to sew together the different modal segments. An excellent example of modally influenced melodic contour can be seen in the final “Hosanna” section in mm.16-20. In the soprano voice the phrase begins and ends on B-natural, the root of the B-minor harmony it sits upon. Ranging only a fifth up to F-sharp, it then ends strongly where it began. The second soprano voice exists in a hypo-modal duet with the first soprano part, beginning and ending on F-sharp with a height of a sixth up to C-sharp. The lone g is altered to G-sharp, which makes the pitch sequence F-sharp Aeolian. This floridity of line is seen in all voices in this small section, with each containing melodies that generally do not deviate more than a third in any direction.

## BENEDICTUS

There is no meter or metronomic indicator, and the movement begins, again seemingly arbitrarily, with a pair of 5/4 measures. Measures are barred with five, four, three, and seven quarter notes. The first ten quarter notes allow for the establishment of E-Ionian in the alto and tenor voices through stepwise motion that sets both g-sharp and D-sharp strongly in the ear. Willan is still careful to consider text declamation, and the end of the first phrase in mm.4-5 is quite reminiscent of a freely metered chant line, with its repetition on single pitch on the word “nomine”, as well as employing a major second in either direction of the final on the fourth and penultimate syllables of the phrase. There are no source melodies. Modally, the work seems to morph between E-Ionian and E-Dorian, making frequent, but not comprehensive, use of G-sharps to make the transition between the two tonalities. Again, Willan uses no seventh chords in the movement.

Missa Brevis No. 4 in E-flat Major (1934)

Missa Brevis No. 4 in E-flat major is, perhaps, the strongest overt example of Willan's love for plainsong. This mass derives its melodic and modal inspiration from the Christmas sequence *Corde Natus Ex Parentis*, commonly known in traditional hymnody as *Of The Father's Love Begotten*. Similar to other Willan *missa brevi*, this work includes only Kyrie, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei, but each movement utilizes the plainsong line in a unique way.

The melodic contour of each voice part is plainsong influenced. Through the entire mass there are only forty-six intervals greater than a third, sixteen of which are in the bass line and help the harmonic function. As might be expected with a mass composed in paraphrase style, the intervallic palate of the work is strongly influenced by the original intervals of the source melody (Example 3).

Of the fa-ther's love be-go ten, E'er the world be-gan to be, He is Al-

6  
pha and O-me ga, He the source, the end - ing He. Of the things that are that

11  
have been, and that fu-ture years shall see, Ev-er more and ev-er more.

Musical Example 3. *Corde Natus Ex Parentis* (Of the Father's Love Begotten) original melody, as visualized by the author.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Willan, Healey, *Missa Brevis No. 4*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1934.

Here one can see that the largest interval employed inside any one of the melodic phrases above is a descending fourth, and this only happens once, in the third phrase. This type of intervallic economy manifests itself throughout the mass, in every movement.

## KYRIE

The Kyrie movement begins with the statement of the melody in the alto line in measure one, and then begins a series of “hand-offs” to the other three parts: A restatement of the *kyrie eleison* text in the tenor in m.2 also restates the melody introduced in the alto. The bass in m.3, while fulfilling the obligatory third incantation of the *kyrie eleison* text, moves on to the final phrase of the original melody. Sopranos are next in line at m.4, returning to where the alto and tenor left off with the second phrase, completing the typical handoff cycle of each voice receiving the cantus firmus in succession. This parody-styled treatment is both a nod toward the Renaissance styled masses of the same name and a fitting use of the plainsong line in an historical way.

The rest of the Kyrie movement proceeds in similar fashion, with the bass in m.6, and the first phrase of the melody returning with the return of the Kyrie text at m.7, passing to the tenor, back to bass, and concluding with a break from the melody to a cadential figure in an extended ninth measure to cadence on E-major. If any further proof was needed of the chant-like center of this work, the ninth measure is, with its double length, an accommodation of the chant line.

Willan takes a free meter with the opening movement, with no indicated meter and a metronomic marking for the quarter note value. Almost every measure has a different number of quarter notes, with ten, seven, thirteen, and fifteen and twenty-three

quarter notes in the space of only nine measures. Each measure is structured to accommodate an exact melodic fragment from the original melody, or, such as in m.7, to give Willan adequate space to roll out the entire melodic fragment and conclude the free counterpoint in the other voices to come to an effective cadence before the next iteration of the Kyrie.

## SANCTUS

The original melody does not function as heavily upon the overall structure of the *Sanctus*, as Willan abandons its use and imitation after the first three entrances, two of which occur simultaneously. The soprano begins with a fragment from the start of the melody, and the alto and tenor enter with the first and second phrase paired in parallel sixth harmony. After these initial entries, Willan breaks the melodic imitation to work his way harmonically to minor vi, which functions for the listener as the secondary dominant of his arrival on B-major at the end of the movement. As a result, the four voices engage in a free counterpoint of sorts, weaving together in chant-inspired lines that serve to root the listener in the new key (Example 4).

Soprano  
glo - ry: Glo - ry be to thee, O Lord,

Alto  
glo - ry: Glo - ry, glo - ry be to thee, O

Tenor  
glo - ry: Glo - ry be - to thee, O

Bass  
glo - ry: Glo - ry be to thee, O

5  
S. Most high.

A. Lord, Most high.

T. Lord, Most high.

B. Lord, Most high.

Music Example 4. *Missa Brevis No. 4*, mm. 11-16.<sup>14</sup>

## BENEDICTIUS

Even more independent of the original plainsong melody, *Benedictus Qui Venit* borrows only the first seven notes from the first phrase before running off in similarly chant-like free counterpoint.

## AGNUS DEI

In a brilliant final utilization of the original *Corde Natus* melody, Willan employs it as a true *cantus firmus* in the *Agnus Dei* movement, beginning in the bass and moving from part to part. Soprano takes up the melody at m.10, on to alto at m.15, and back to the bass at m.30. Finally, Willan writes the last phrase of the melody in the soprano line in the final five measures, with alto and tenor producing free counterpoint before cadencing

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

from dominant to tonic in solid E-major. Willan is careful to avoid any prolonged hints at the original melody in the other voices, leaving the voice holding the cantus firmus to carry the focus of the listener and relegating the other three voices to an ornamental role, though a role of delicately woven free counterpoint against the cantus firmus. One sees Willan's penchant for infusing the plainsong line into a traditional web of polyphonic texture.

*O Westron Wynde – Mass for Four Voices (1936)*

While not within the definition of plainsong as previously established, Willan's *O Westron Wynde* mass is another parody mass in the same vein as *Missa Brevis No. 4*, and its treatment warrants its inclusion. Based on the 16<sup>th</sup> century melody of the same name, the work features the five ordinary movements out of order, making use of both the *Westron Wynde* melody in three movements, as well as directly quoting *Gloria in Excelsis* (LU 23) from the Roman missal to begin the movement of the same name. In all movements of the mass the melodic fragments of the original melody are contained almost entirely in the soprano voice, with the three accompanying voices either occasionally carrying the melody or providing the same florid, chant-like counterpoint that is hallmark to Willan's sacred works.

KYRIE

The first melodic phrases leads off in the alto voice, followed by two reiterations in the soprano line. The third melodic phrase then takes up in the soprano line at m.4, repeats at m.6, then is followed by the first and second phrases in m.7 and m.8, respectively. Phrases three and four then conclude the first Kyrie.

While the modality of the original melody is open to interpretation (G starting pitch and F final, Willan seems to favor the final F as tonal center, cadencing on F-major, B-flat major, and D-minor in the first three measures. However, the way Willan separates the different phrase segments gives him space to explore the tonal center of each phrase. In a sort of reversal of his first phrase treatment, where G-Dorian is indicated but F major is affirmed in the harmony, The second phrase is more soundly in F, beginning on B-flat and finishing on F-natural. Yet, when Willan adds harmony to this segment for the first time in m.6, he begins with a G-minor chord, which he works his way back to two more times before throwing in a surprise C-minor chord (added E-flat) and abruptly moving to D-minor, what amounts to a sort of iv-v progression in a G-minor/Dorian tonality. Just two measures later, however, Willan replaces the E-flat with a new E-natural, returning the tonality back to D-minor more assuredly. But, in the final two measures of the movement (mm.9-10), Willan finally moves on to the third and fourth melodic fragments and sets up an *ars perfecta* inspired IV-I cadence in the final measure, from C-major to an open fifth with G as the final.

With not given time signature or established meter, the conductor is left to focus on the consistency of the quarter note pulse. The first three measures might be classified, loosely as belong to 13/4, while the next three measures are in 10/4. These two time signatures return before the penultimate measure (m.9) of the movement, which contains sixteen quarter notes before finishing in a 4/4 bar with fermata. All of these measures are created to accommodate the duration of the chant line, the melisma of the Kyrie text being stretched to suit the quoted melodic segment of the *Westron Wynde* melody.

## SANCTUS

Here Willan begins to deconstruct the original chant melody and graft his own melodic and harmonic underpinning to the phrases he more or less directly quoted in the *Kyrie*. Starting off again in the alto, Willan uses a variation on the second melodic phrase to start the movement, echoed with a slightly different rhythm in the tenor and modulated up a third in the soprano. Willan adds additional melodic contour to the original phrase in each instance, more reminiscent of a fugal development than exact repetition.

Here one can see Willan beginning to hint at the G-Dorian modality more strongly, even though he is not restricted to the original melody as he was in the *Kyrie*. He employs many more E-flats in movement, exclusively for the purpose of creating C-minor harmonies, and like the good student of modal counterpoint that he is, he only approaches E-flat in stepwise motion or from a leap of a third as the high or low turning point of the melodic line in every voice. These C-minor harmonies always precede D-minor (with one exception, m.16, where it precedes F-major), again establishing iv-v in G-Dorian. Further evidence that Willan intends to establish Dorian mode over G-minor is the complete absence of leading tone F-sharps or C-sharps. He ends the first portion of the movement with a strong 4-3 suspension into G-minor from C-major, similar to the final of the *Kyrie*. His final approach finally transitions to G-major from C-major, furthering solidifying G as the more important pitch

Due to this more freely developed melody, Willan remains within 4/4 for the entire movement, as he has no cause to fit any more notes into a given measure.

## AGNUS DEI

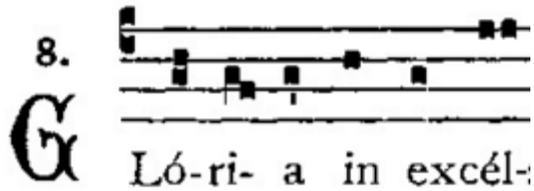
Willan returns to the original strategy in the Agnus Dei, placing the first and second melodic phrases together to start the soprano part, followed by a repetition of the second phrase. The other voices do not imitate or expand upon the original melody, but again provide a counterpoint harmony to the soprano quotation. With some exposition in the middle measures, the melodic fragments return in the final measures, with phrases 1, 2, 4, and 5 completing the final thirteen measures of the work.

With the exception of a solitary  $\frac{3}{4}$  measure the start the movement, Willan enjoys no adventurous metric liberties with the movement, keeping it soundly in measured 4/4.

Like the Kyrie and Sanctus movements before it, Agnus Dei continues to affirm G-Dorian as the tonal center for the work, again including E-flats in the same function as before and cadencing on an open fifth with G as the final.

## GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Breaking from the original *Westron Wynde* melody entirely, Willan places a direct quotation from the *Liber Usualis* (LU23) as the starting melody for the *Gloria in Excelsis* (Examples 3 and 3b). The following melody appears to be original, though it matches the melodic pattern of chants from other extent sources. Tonally, the *Gloria* movement is solidly in mixolydian, which is the original mode of the LU23 chant. Willan keeps the tonality sound centered around the F final and uses not a single accidental to shift tonality away from B-flat and E-flat in the scale.



Musical Example 3. *Gloria III* from *Liber Usualis* 23.<sup>15</sup>



Musical Example 3b. Incipit from *Gloria, O Westron Wynde Mass.*<sup>16</sup>

Not only does one see a continuation of freely metered measures in the Gloria, one can also see the eighth note become the primary value of duration. Meter and melisma are arbitrary.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous. *Liber Usualis*.

<sup>16</sup> Willan, Healey, *O Westron Wynde*. Westminster: The Faith Press, Ltd. 1936.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITRUGICAL MOTETS AND ANTHEM AND TENEBRAE SETTING

The influence of plainsong in Willan's shorter works is similar in many regards to that of his short masses. Willan uses free meter, flexible tempo markings, and florid, plainsong-inspired melodic contour and the resulting tonic-obscuring harmonic progressions to set the text of these works. There is not a single plainsong paraphrase or quotation in any of these pieces. All of the motets come from a series of seven liturgical motets published together. The most notable common characteristic they exhibit is free meter, which in turn focuses the singer and conductor's attention on the declamation of text for accent and articulation. The included anthem, *Here Are We In Bethlehem*, exhibits every analyzed aspect of plainsong influence: modalism, melodic contour, melodic paraphrase (the melody, however, is Willan's original melody), and free meter. Finally, the service setting *Responsaries for the Office of Tenebrae* exhibits free meter.

#### O King All Glorious (1928)

The melody of *O King All Glorious* displays few characteristics of plainsong influence. There is no given meter in *O King All Glorious*, and bar lines are implied but not formalized. A metronomic marking for the quarter note pulse is indicated. The first phrase of the piece includes measures of four, five, and eight quarter notes. The meter falls into a regular implied meter of 3/2 in the second phrase, breaking in the final two measures to allow the establishment of F-sharp major and to appropriately set the text declamation. The third phrase (m.15-20) uses rhythmic augmentation to draw emphasis to the first three words (Thou, O Lord) in 4/2, then oscillates between quarter-note and

half-note pulse through the end of the phrases, with uneven distribution of quarter notes in each. The final phrase of the work (m.21-34) seems to return to a series of uneven measures where the quarter note is the most important duration. In these final measures Willan uses half notes and whole notes to help declaim the text, using the longer value to add weight to words and syllables and the shorter value to either create a more florid melisma or to create an iambic meter across a bar line, moving quarter note to half note, unstressed to stressed. An example of this approach is illustrated in Example 5 below:

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "it may please thee to place us in the number of thy". The Soprano line starts with a half note on G4, followed by quarter notes on A4, B4, and C5. The Alto line starts with a half note on G3, followed by quarter notes on A3, B3, and C4. The Tenor line starts with a half note on G3, followed by quarter notes on A3, B3, and C4. The Bass line starts with a half note on G2, followed by quarter notes on A2, B2, and C3. The lyrics are: "it may please thee to place us in the number of thy".

Music Example 3. *O King All Glorious*, mm.25-27.<sup>17</sup>

The melody encompasses the range of an octave and a major third. There is some evidence of modal counterpoint technique, as the first page demonstrates imitation and

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, *O King All Glorious*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1928.



the harmonization tends to avoid the leading tone, the melody features too many intervals to be considered chant-like. The text is derived from an 8<sup>th</sup> century responsory from the Office of Our Lady, itself a text set to chant. The first phrase sets up this idea:



Music Example 5. *I Beheld Her, Beautiful as a Dove*, mm.1-4, soprano voice.<sup>19</sup>

Willan gives no time signature, though the suggested tempo gives the conductor room for a brisk 4/4 or more *divoto* (tr. with religious emotion) 2/2. The suggested meter seems to indicate 4/4. He starts the phrase on the second beat of the 4/4 measure to allow for the appropriate text stress on the second syllable of “beheld”. The first syllable of the word is both shorter and at the lowest point in the line, allowing it to receive the least amount of volume as well as setting up the second syllable to be more pronounced at the height of the line. The word “beautiful” is also placed with the first syllable on the strong beat and set to a quarter note triplet, a very close proximate of the word’s naturally spoken cadence, and, like in spoken English, the line descends so as to deemphasize the second and third syllables, a “trailing off” of the word. Following this phrase to its entrances in the alto and tenor lines (m.4), Willan again sets the first note across the bar line synchronize the second syllable of “beheld” with the stronger third beat.

This text alignment continues in all voices through m.11, where the time signature is altered for a single bar to 6/4 to accommodate the placement of the first syllable of “raiment” on a strong beat, as well as to set up the placement of the first syllable of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, *I Beheld Her, Beautiful as a Dove*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1928.

“perfume” on the strong beat of m.12, all in the soprano line. Willan returns to 4/4 in the m.12 but breaks to 6/4 with no formal change of time signature in m.17-18 before returning to 4/4 in his approach to the cadence. In the final verse he breaks away further from 4/4, moving to 6/4 in m.23, 24, and 26, throwing in a single measure of 5/4 in m.27, returning to 4/4, then finishing the work with four consecutive measures in 6/4 (m.31-34) before resolving to a 4/4 measure sustained by fermata to close the number.

There is no use of plainsong paraphrase or quotation in the motet. Harmonically, no accidentals are employed throughout the short work, and the leading tone d-sharp is rarely used to establish harmonic progression. The melodic contour of each individual line is more chromatic than modal in that it features accidentals that create a sense of common practice chord progression rather than keeping within the pitches of the key to solely provide the progression.

#### Fair in Face (1928)

There is no established meter in *Fair in Face* (only a metronomic indicator for the quarter note duration), though the implied meter is  $\frac{3}{4}$  for the first twenty-six measures before Willan augments to half notes in a  $\frac{5}{2}$  measure (m.27) as he approaches the first fermata and end of the phrase. From m.27 to the end of the work the half note takes over as the dominant duration in each measure, though each measure’s duration is unmetred, leaving Willan to use the quarter and half note for text declamation, syllable emphasis, and a form of augmenting and diminishing the pace of individual words within the phrase.

There is no plainsong quotation or paraphrase in the motet. Like *I beheld her, Beautiful as a Dove*, the melodic contour of the melody is expansive, though it rarely

leaps more than a third in any direction before returning to the characteristic, undulating stepwise motion that evokes plainsong melody.

Rise Up, My Love, My Fair One (1929)

*Rise up, my Love, my Fair One*, the fifth of his seven liturgical motets, contains similar plainsong rhythmic characteristics as *I beheld her, Beautiful as a Dove*. There is no formally given time signature, only the suggested bar line locations, as before. However, the metronomic indication is preceded by the instruction “In free rhythm”, which, while open to interpretation, would seem to indicate Willan’s desire to allow the conductor further liberty with tempo and time in order to focus on the text. Again, he employs a 6/4 bar at mm.7 and 10, a 8/4 bar at m.11, and another 6/4 bar in m.13 before returning to 4/4 for the rest of the piece. All of these changes seem to be expressly intended to align the strongest syllables of the text with the appropriate strong beats. This is well illustrated in mm. 21-28, where bars of 6/4 and 4/4 are mixed together to ensure that the non-metered text aligns on the appropriate strong beat.

There are no seventh chords employed in the motet, and there are no accidentals employed throughout the work. The melody itself works to move the listener away from the indicated key of D-flat major, as it never begins or finishes a phrase on tonic throughout the work. Many of the lines begin and end on g-flat and f-natural, which is never the root of the supporting chord. Taken by itself, the melody might be thought to be in a mixed mode between f-Phrygian and g-flat Lydian. This type of dual tonality, one linear and one vertical, is characteristic of several sections of Willan’s sacred writings.

Lo, In the Time Appointed (1929)

While consistently metered in 3/2 from the beginning, there are no strong measures indicated, only suggested ones, and, rare amongst his motets, Willan gives a metronomic marking for the half note rather than the quarter note. This decision seems more editorial and practical than due to some element of plainsong technique.

Willan indicates that the text is “from a Sarum antiphon”, though there is no known or documented source melody quoted or paraphrased in the motet. The part-writing frequently follows the rules of modal counterpoint, with suspensions functioning as the only non-chord tones, and leaps and arpeggiations receiving the proper treatment.

Again, there are no seventh chords used in the harmonic structure. In the first fifty measures of the piece Willan employs only two solitary accidentals, both A-naturals (mm.14 and 24), functioning as leading tones to the dominant harmony of B-flat major. In m.53 there appear the first accidentals that contribute to harmonic progression, creating G-major to C-minor to F-major on the text “alleluya”, a stronger and more surprising treatment of the text than might be accomplished by using E-flat major tonality.

Here are We in Bethlehem (1930)

The Epiphany motet *Here Are We In Bethlehem* is another of Willan’s work that exemplifies his plainsong influence through melodic, metric, and modal example. An artful display of a variety of plainsong characteristics, it is unique among Willan’s motets. He uses the first original melody as the source melody for the rest of the work, a paraphrase of a chant he seems to have invented. It has no prescribed meter, begins with

a metronomic suggestion for the quarter note value, and includes the instructions “in free rhythm” and “simple and devout”.

The piece begins with what appears to be a unison incipit in the soprano voicing. Each measure is freely metered, though the melody is not from an identified chant source or earlier melody based on the same text. The soprano voice starts the choral segment of the work with the first line of the incipit melody with a slightly varied rhythm. The next measures (7-8) are a combination of the first and fourth measures of the incipit melody. Willan leaves the incipit melody alone for four measures before returning to it in m.13-14 with a repetition of the first two measures again. Mm.15 begins the same as the first measure of the incipit, then moves away briefly, while m.16 is an exact repetition of the second measure of the incipit. The final measure is almost, but not quite, an intervallic inversion of the second measure.

While it might seem that this series of repetitions would make the work strophic in nature, Willan’s creative barring breaks any monotony the listener might perceive. Even looking at the barring it is difficult to see any semblance of symmetry. In the original incipit, the first two measures have nine and six quarter notes, respectively, as they do in mm.13-14, but every other iteration has just enough variance to throw off a pattern.

Willan also draws some harmonic and tonal inspiration from the original melody, which is clearly in Phrygian mode. The significance of the third mode is not lost on the text, which is describing the visitation of the three kings to Jesus in the manger, as well as the general triune nature of Christ incarnate. Harmonically, Willan arrives at E-flat major, G-minor, and C-minor chords, all of which would indicate C-minor as the

strongest possible key center. However, the soprano line, which carries the opening incipit fragments throughout the piece, hardly strays from the G-Phrygian flavor it began with. Mm. 9-12 could be thought of in hypo-Aeolian C-minor with measures starting on C, F, and A, though the finals of each measure resolve to G in every measure but m.12.

### Responsaries for the Offices of Tenebrae

These three works for Holy Week follow the previously observed pattern of text-driven metric change, no established time signature, and no plainsong paraphrase or quotation in the entire work. Melodic contour and modalism take a back seat in this movement to word stress, text declamation, and the employment of free meter to generate that effect.

#### MAUNDY THURSDAY

In the Maundy Thursday movement of the work, Willan employs two different accidentals: E-flat and C-sharp, which he uses to C-minor and A-major, respectively.

The entire movement is freely metered, with no given time signature or metronomic marking. With the exception of pick up notes, the entire work could fit meters of quarter and half note duration.

There are no paraphrases or quotations found in the movement, though Willan's part writing maintains its usual continuity, rarely reaching outside the third interval in the melody line. In the more fauxbourdon-style of Part II, the work stays entirely between the sub-final e-natural and the subdominant of B-flat, all while moving entirely in stepwise motion with the exception of the penultimate note, where it leaps down a third to create the dissonance for the cadential 4-3 suspension in the soprano and alto lines.

## GOOD FRIDAY

In Part I the work continues to be freely metered, and text declamation and appropriate word stress take the forefront. One observes a rare triplet figure in mm.10 and 20, employed for the same effect. The tightness of the harmony and the homophonic character of faux-bourdon style make the text stress more obvious.

Parts I and II both feature melodic lines that, while not influenced by a specific plainsong melody, feature the characteristics of chant incipit. This is best illustrated in mm.1-8 of Part II, where the soprano voices repeats f-natural tonic while the rhythm provides all of the variation to match the text. The two deviations from f-natural are only a major and minor second up and down, respectively. These notes inflect the text at the end of the phrase as it would be inflected with the spoken voice.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### Summary

The analysis and demonstration in this paper has allowed the author to make a couple of conclusions about Willan's compositional style.

First, Willan's use of plainsong is most prevalent in his published music between the years of 1927 and 1948. I would classify this time as Willan's middle period. While plainsong influence can be found throughout his catalog, this two decade period not only produced most of Willan's most well-known choral works, but it also exhibits some of the strongest plainsong influence. Willan's work from London and the first fifteen years of his time in Canada is a mixture of styles with no singular technique rising to the forefront. His work from this time often exhibits strong characteristics of the harmony and color of his British Neo-Romantic contemporaries. Similarly, Willan's works in the last years of the forties through the end of his life in 1968 were increasingly oriented toward the commercial market. New publishers were eager to publish anything he wished to send them, and his output from this time becomes overwhelmingly, though not entirely, prescriptive: hymn anthems and contemporary anthems written in straightforward, common practice style. Gone are the freely metered motets, modally-influenced masses or masses written with Renaissance compositional techniques. In this way, I would like to offer the use of the identified plainsong techniques in Willan's published choral music as a means of redefining his middle period.

Secondly, this evidence of plainsong influence in Willan's compositional technique should serve as a guide to conductors and singers looking to perform any of Willan's sacred works, from his middle period or any other. Furthermore, I believe that the accessibility of Willan's writing, and the various historical methods Willan employs in his setting of plainsong can be used by a variety of ensembles and in a number of contexts to teach them. Since Willan wrote primarily for amateur church choirs, his compositions are not only saturated with historical techniques, but those techniques are far more accessible to ensembles of various ability levels and experiences. A work like *Missa Brevis No. 4* could readily be used as a teaching tool. It's sight-readable for many choirs, consists of several technical examples, and is less than six minutes long, so it wouldn't consume an entire concert cycle with an ensemble of even modest reading ability and pace.

#### Further Study

For scholars wishing to continue investigating the role of plainsong in Willan's work, the author offers several possible routes of inquiry. Possibilities include:

1. A similar analysis of selected secular choral compositions. A comprehensive study and review of Willan's secular works remains to be completed in any form. While his sacred work appears to have more plainsong influence than his secular, a perhaps more compelling argument for plainsong's role in Willan's compositional method would be evidence that its influence can be felt in all of his choral works generally, regardless of the intended arena. Examining Willan's smaller catalog of partsongs, choral/orchestral works, and radio plays and operas for plainsong influence could yield fascinating results.

2. A comparative analysis of compositional techniques used by Willan in his three compositional periods: early, middle, and late. While plainsong seems to be confined most heavily to Willan's middle period with a small proportion of his early period works included, Willan's compositional method displays other consistent tendencies. Principal among them is the influence of modal counterpoint and Tudor-influenced composition, as well as seemingly direct quotations from other Renaissance compositions (the opening phrase of *Hodie Christus Natus Est* bears striking resemblance to the motet of the same name by Sweelinck). Additionally, much of Willan's harmonic language, particularly in his later works, is more reminiscent of common practice progressive harmony, always with a bit of neo-Romantic chromaticism and voice leading.

3. An analysis of plainsong influences in Willan's vocal/choral service music. While this document has focused primarily on *missa brevi* and liturgical motets, Willan's notable body of service music exhibits the same strong plainsong influence. The influence of introit, incipit, antiphon, and other elements of Anglican service music that have long been associated with unison chant or solo chant are found frequently in these works.

4. An investigation into other possible chant sources and manuscripts that Willan may have drawn upon that are not readily available. While the Global Chant Database has been invaluable in discovering chant melody paraphrase and quotation for this study, there remain several plainsong-influenced melodies that appear to have a source but remain uncatalogued. A comprehensive review of the chant manuscripts available at the University of Toronto Conservatory library, as well as possible sources available to

Willan through his schooling at St. Saviour's and his participation in both the London and Toronto Gregorian societies could yield even more sources.

### Recommendations

It is my hope that this analysis of the compositional influence of plainsong on Willan's work will encourage more conductors to program his music for instructional and artistic purposes. As his work is indicative of several more well-known composers of his generation, Willan's more accessible choral works might act as a starting point on a journey toward understanding the plainsong influence of composers such as Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Britten, and Finzi. The strongly florid and melodically driven nature of Willan's part writing lends itself to choirs of all ages and abilities, allowing them to access the techniques and ideas of a generation without having to risk works of overwhelming complexity.

APPENDIX

LIST OF CHANT SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

Cited from <http://globalchant.org/about.php>

- GR Graduale Romanum (Graduale ascrosanctae Romanae ecclesiae): Paris, Tournai, Rome; Desclee No. 696; 1952
- LU The Liber usualis with introduction and rubrics in English; Tournai, New York; Desclee No. 801; 1961
- MEL Margaretha Landwehr-Melnicki, Das einstimmige Kyrie des latenischen Mittelalters; Regensburg, 1954
- SCH Martin Schildbach, Das einstimmige Agnus Dei und seine handschriftliche Uberlieferung vom 10. Bis zum 16. Jahrhundert; Erlangen-Nurnberg, Diss., 1967.
- ST Bruno Stablein, Hymnen I., Die mittelalterlichen Hymnenmelodien des Abendlandes; Monumenta monodic medii aevi 1, Kassel und Basel, 1956
- WA Antiphonaire monastique (Pal. Mus. XII), Le Codex F. 160 de la Biblioteque de la cathedrale de Worcester (13<sup>th</sup> century)

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