

‘The Slaughter of The Times’: English Piano Music and the First World War

Eric McElroy

In the early twentieth century, England was graced with a flowering of musical composition which, for the first time since the Renaissance, saw the establishment of a distinctly English style and repertoire. The proverbial *Land ohne Musik* suddenly became home to a bevy of composers who explored a variety of stylistic pathways. Folk-song, Pastoralism, Orientalism, Nationalism, Impressionism, and much else found exponents on the English compositional scene in the 1910s and the 1920s.

One of the unifying threads among these composers was a shared experience of contemporary events. Of these, the most influential was the First World War which had a profound impact on early twentieth-century artists. English composers responded to the situation with an expected outpouring of musical patriotism, but they also created a body of work which grapples, in ways both specific and abstract, with the complexity and underlying tragedy of the era. Despite the vitality of this music, much of it has suffered from neglect by both the general public and the musical establishment. This music has much to convey about life during the First World War, and this essay forms the basis for a lecture-recital which seeks to educate the general public as to how the watermarks of the war era are contained within this unique repertoire.

Cyril Scott’s Britain’s War March: A Study in Musical Propaganda

Many prominent English artists contributed to the war effort through propaganda. In the literary field, this included such

eminent names as Thomas Hardy, James Barrie, Arthur Conan Doyle, and H.G. Wells. These and many other writers were encouraged and even published by the newly created War Propaganda Bureau.¹

Musical propaganda was similarly endorsed. The Fight for Right Movement, an organization of artists which promoted the war effort through musical and literary endeavors, listed in its membership Edward Elgar and Hubert Parry, and some of England's most enduring patriotic pieces derive from this era, including Parry's *Jerusalem* (1916) and Gustav Holst's *I Vow to Thee, My Country* (1916-1921). Concert works often employed folksongs and other national tunes to bolster their patriotic message. After the invasion of Belgium, Elgar incorporated the Belgian national anthem into his *Carillon*, Op. 75 (1914), and he later used Polish themes and melodies by Frederic Chopin and Ignacy Paderewski in *Polonia*, Op. 76 (1915).

Cyril Scott's *Britain's War March* for solo piano (1914) is representative of this genre. Dedicated to the Prince of Wales, the piece utilises three patriotic melodies: *Rule Britannia*, *God Save the King*, and *Le Marseillaise*. The last of these is marked with the words 'Viva la France', and *God Save the King* is underscored by the corresponding lyrics. The march's primary theme, first appearing after the opening fanfare, is borrowed from George Friedrich Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* where it is called 'See the conqu'ring hero comes'.

The genesis of this march is something of a mystery. In his memoirs, Scott claimed to be a pacifist, and his published writings contain voluble passages on humanity's need to live peacefully and to acquire a spiritual unity which Scott personally sought through occult practices. Desmond Scott, the composer's son, has therefore expressed puzzlement over the very existence of *Britain's War March*. He described his father as 'the least jingoistic of men.' To that end, Desmond Scott suspects that the march was written for a commission, but he has found no supporting evidence of this.² Then again, perhaps Cyril Scott was merely one of the many artists who, caught up in the patriotic

fervor of the war, were inspired to write works they might otherwise not have. The march's anomalous place in the composer's catalogue is strangely poetic in that the robust optimism of the work itself appears at odds with the gloom of the era in which it was written.

Trois Petites Marches Funèbres: Lord Berners and War's Satirization

If he had not actually existed, it would have been impossible to invent such a person as Lord Berners (1883-1950). Named the 14th Baron Berners in 1918, Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt was an amateur composer of the first-rank. Self-taught in composition, Berners's musical education consisted only of intermittent piano lessons in his youth, although he did maintain cordial relations with a number of Europe's leading musicians, including Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. It was in Rome during the First World War that Berners came into contact with the Italian Futurist movement while working for the British Embassy. The radical aesthetic of the Futurists appealed to Berners's dissident nature, and it was during his residency in Rome that Berners produced his most original compositions, notably the pieces for solo piano, *Trois Petites marches funèbres* (1914) and *Fragments psychologiques* (1915).

Of these two works, the former is more clearly recognizable as musical satire. The titles alone, which according to Peter Dickerson, Florent Schmitt said, 'did not fail to scandalise some critics',³ suggest a satirical agenda:

- I. *Pour un homme d'état* ('For a Statesman')
- II. *Pour un canari* ('For a Canary')
- III. *Pour une tante à heritage* ('For a Rich Aunt')

Berners did not identify any of the marches as topical, nevertheless his favourite review of *Trois Petites marches*

funèbres, written by Julien Tiersot in *Le Courier musical*, is suggestive:

I will not stop to enquire whether the period through which we are passing is one that permits of the railing at death, and making it the subject of jokes which are, moreover, out of fashion. I only draw attention to the first title as a contrast to the other two. It is evident that to the composer's idea it is as gratifying to celebrate the funeral of a statesman as that of canaries or rich aunts – and all at the time when these men devote and exhaust themselves to serve their country and secure its victory. (p. 25)

The first march is marked *Très lent et pompeux*, and its introduction parodies Beethoven's Fate motive, only here Fate is made conspicuously self-important, its four knocks punctuated by crass grace notes in the left hand, like a timpanist struggling to find the correct pitch.



Pour un homme d'état, m. 1-2

This motive will later be given the marking *sempre forte la mano sinistra*. When the march itself actually does begin, it struggles to keep moving. Fermatas on the second and fourth beats give the processional an ungainly limp. The character of the piece keeps shifting as well between light *secco* figures and *pesante* octaves. After a triumphant climax, marked *stridente*, in which the procession finally seems to have found its footing, the march

suddenly dissipates, and its final chord bleeds directly into the second movement.

Pour un canari is an impractically slow march. Here Berners gives no initial emotional instructions. The melody is to be played *marcato il canto*, interspersed with a notated bird-call, marked *incisivo*.

Gerafd Tyrwhitt.

The musical score is for a piano piece in 4/8 time, marked 'Très lent. (♩ = circa 54)'. It begins with a piano (p) dynamic and the instruction 'marcato il canto'. The melody is interspersed with bird-call motifs marked '(incisivo)' and '(sempre simile)'. The score consists of four measures.

Pour un canari, m. 1-4

As in the first march, the rhythmical flow is made uncertain by the placing of an accent on a weak beat. The rhythmic figures themselves are bizarrely reminiscent of tango, only here all emotional energy has been suppressed, and what is left is a frigid scene. Birds are unemotional creatures, and when Berners finally does call for expressivity (*singhiozzando*) it feels out of character, or even insincere, as if showing emotion would mock the seriousness of the scene.

The riotous final march, *Pour une tante à heritage*, is based on a *martellato* figure, which rises and falls in ever-changing intervals. The composer's markings of *allegro giocoso* and *molto ritmico e non troppo presto* make the music sound even more like Igor Stravinsky in its precision. Trills and tremolos add to the frenzy, but the pulsation never changes. The music builds to its logical climax, rising ever higher until it repeats the same figure in gradually compressed form then falls quickly to a final chord.

Trois Petites Marches Funèbres was described by J. & W. Chester as 'humorous miniatures of a peculiarly British type, and they are clearly the work of a musician with an amazing insight into the musical techniques of our day. Daring as they are, these

pieces never give the impression of deliberate or strained modernism; the hearer cannot help feeling their spontaneity and the sureness of touch which makes their meaning so convincing' (pp. 23-24).

This 'humorous' character is the final satirical layer of Berners's marches and the most blasphemous. It is rooted in the composer's depiction of laughter. Berners's interest in irreverent mirth is noted in his memoirs:

I have always taken an almost intoxicating delight in 'perilous laughter', that is to say laughter which, either from good manners or fear, has to be controlled at all costs. The kind of laughter which, on solemn occasions or in the presence of the great, sometimes wells up within one with such violence that the human frame is nearly shattered in the course of its suppression.⁴

It is worth noting that the second movement of Berners's next piano composition, *Fragments psychologiques*, is called *Le Rire* ('The Laugh'). A comparison of motives from this movement with *Pour une tante à heritage* confirms that the two pieces are thematically and therefore presumably programmatically related.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Pour une tante à heritage, m. 21-24'. It consists of two systems of music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system begins with a dynamic marking of 'subito f' (suddenly forte). The notation is complex, featuring many accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and a dense texture of notes and chords. The second system continues the piece with similar complexity and includes a fermata over the final measure.

Pour une tante à heritage, m. 21-24

Gerald Tyrwhitt.

Allegro molto.

quasi arpeggio

Le Rire, m. 1-3

Extending this interpretation to all three marches leads to further implications. The grace notes of the first movement – particularly in their latter orchestration by Berners for woodwinds – sound nasal and snickering; the bird-motive of *Pour un Canari* begins to sound more like a hiccup of laughter which ‘has to be controlled at all cost’ than the cry of a deceased canary.

In Berners’s satirical portraits, it has become impossible to distinguish between a sob and a giggle. Society during the First World War seemed likewise to lose its sense of perspective, its ability to grasp the monstrosity of modern warfare. Perhaps the real joke is on the listener. We, with our desensitization to violence, laugh at things which ought to horrify or at least disgust. Berners is thus compelling the listener to ask which is the more topsy-turvy: a world in which the carnage of modern war is deemed necessary, or one in which it is appropriate to write funeral marches for statesmen, canaries, and rich aunts.

William Baines's Seven Preludes: A Casualty of War

The music of William Baines (1899-1922) represents an enormous unfulfilled potential in English piano literature. A child prodigy in both composition and piano, Baines was conscripted into service in the final months of World War I and subsequently diagnosed with septic poisoning in France. Returning to England, Baines' final years were a swift decline until his death of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-three.

Despite his brief career, Baines left a catalogue of over two hundred compositions, mostly for solo piano. While the quality of this music varies, and much of it is imitative juvenilia, Baines can retrospectively be said to represent an English transition from Romanticism to Impressionism. His style fluctuates between Frederic Chopin and Claude Debussy. Alexander Scriabin is also a dominant influence, although exactly how much Baines knew of Scriabin's music is difficult to discern, and it is possible that some of Baines' more original harmonic conceptions were arrived at independently.

Baines was also an Impressionist. His titles evoke the same imagery of Impressionist composers: *Paradise Gardens* (1918-19), *Pictures of Light* (1920-22), *Twilight Pieces* (1921), *Shade-Imagery*, (1922), etc. Baines's biographer, Roger Carpenter, has likened this music to Impressionist paintings in the way that Baines suggests his titular images without ever bringing them clearly into focus. The musical portraits, especially in Baines's codas, fray at the edges, bleeding like Turner paintings into some indeterminate beyond.⁵



Prelude No. 1, m. 23-28 (Coda)



Prelude No. 6, m. 53-61 (Coda)

Extending this comparison, Carpenter summarised Baines's musical language as 'intuitive':

The most immediately striking feature of Baines's music is its air of spontaneity, never forced and possessing a natural flow which advanced academic training might have inhibited. He is always clear in his intentions without

fumbling, and there is no sense of striving for effect. On the contrary, the tendency is sometimes towards reticence, not through any uncertainty or lack of conviction but rather an emotional coolness of almost Holstian detachment. (pp. 55-57)

Baines's *Seven Preludes* (1919) are among his most mature accomplishments. Composed in three months, the preludes were grouped into a set at the request of their publisher, J.W. Elkin. Five of the preludes were given programmatic subtitles:

- No. 1 in C sharp minor [untitled]
- No. 2 ('Blackbird in the Convent Garden')
- No. 3 in D flat ('Amen')
- No. 4 ('Music gone astray')
- No. 5 ('poppies gleaming in the moonlight')
- No. 6 in C [untitled]
- No. 7 in B minor ("Dante" prelude')

The watermarks of Baines's nascent style can be found throughout: short forms based on an intuitive sense of climax, codas and cadences which dissolve rather than resolve, blurred harmonies resulting from pedal effects, and an emotional landscape spanning from the aggressive to the plaintive. Baines' affinity for text-painting is apparent in the second prelude, and the harmonic adventures and technical virtuosity of the fourth prelude moved the pianist Frederick Dawson to dub the piece 'the most astounding piece of music for the piano ever written by an Englishman.'⁶

Very slow. (M.M. ♩. 76) Slowly—(with serenity.) (M.M. ♩. about 92.)

Piano. *pp* tranquil *molto rit.* *p* with Ped.

Prelude No. 2, m. 1-8

N^o 4. WILLIAM BAINES.

Furiously. (The semiquavers are of equal value throughout except where otherwise indicated)

Piano. *p*

Prelude No. 4, m. 1-9

It is impossible to say how extensively Baines's war experience impacted his music. He never saw active duty, making the gratuitous sacrifice of his health all the more tragic. Perhaps the fifth prelude, 'poppies gleaming in the moonlight', reflects on the melancholy beauty of the poppies which grew in abundance over corpse-littered fields in France. Or perhaps the flower was intended simply to evoke a country sentiment.

Whatever the relationship was when he was alive, Baines's legacy is inevitably tied to the war because the war marked him as one of the many might-have-beens. By listening to Baines' music in the twenty-first century, we are reminded of the disastrous effects that the First World War had on the trajectory of English musical development, and we are forced to speculate as to how altered contemporary English music might be had Baines lived.

John Ireland's London Pieces: Tranquility in Wartime

A resurgent interest in John Ireland (1879-1962) over the past few decades has obliged critics to reassess the composer's place in the history of English piano music. Often dismissed as a miniaturist, Ireland's catalogue includes piano pieces of formidable scale and complexity such as the *Ballade* (1929) and *Sarnia: An Island Sequence* (1940-41). His grasp of the piano's capabilities is evident in his idiosyncratic yet practical technique, his use of pedal, and his exploitation of diverse textures and registers. Ireland is furthermore a disciplined composer. The emotional array of the music is constantly grounded in a firm technique; the Romantic temperament is checked by a Classical adherence to form.

A graduate of the Royal College of Music, Ireland worked for many years as a church organist and choirmaster before earning a teaching position at his alma mater. The premiere of Ireland's *Violin Sonata No. 2* in 1917 caused a sensation, making the composer famous overnight, and, according to Lewis Foreman, some have found its tone to be 'patriotic'.⁷

Ireland was a pacifist. He wrote several pieces which either directly or indirectly reference the First World War. In 1915 he set Rupert Brooke's sonnet 'The Soldier':

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

Like his contemporary Ralph Vaughan Williams, Ireland also memorably set texts by A.E. Housman which, while not specifically about the war, were generally thought to reflect the melancholy of the times.

Ireland's *London Pieces* (1917-20), while also having nothing specifically to do with the First World War, contribute to a more comprehensive representation of English musical culture during the decade. This collection of three character sketches depicts three typically Londonesque scenes. The first movement, *Chelsea Reach*, is named after a London borough where the composer lived and worked for many years. It is a traditional barcarolle with undulating melodic lines and rich harmonies. The modulations and subtle chromaticism suggest a music-hall glimmer which the critic Edwin Evans, in an influential article, described as 'Cockney grave':

The first [*Chelsea Reach*] is not a picture, but a reverie in which the sentimental side of the Londoner – the side that takes 'ballads' seriously – comes uppermost. This somewhat ingenuous sentiment being thoroughly honest in its unsophisticated way, deserves to be treated kindly and without irony, for the sake of its sincerity, and where the inevitable sugar seemed excessive the composer has used

his harmonic skill to preserve the real flavor. It is a paradox in musical psychology, and an engrossing one. (p. 381)

Alan Rowlands, who recorded Ireland's complete piano music at the composer's behest, claimed that *Chelsea Reach* was conceived when Ireland, 'coming back over Battersea Bridge in his Morgan motor one evening in 1917', was 'suddenly struck by the extraordinary beauty of the scene, with the flickering gas-lamps reflected in the dark waters of the Thames' (p. 30).

This tranquility is sharply contrasted by *Ragamuffin*. An upward scale sweeps the music into a quick yet graceful tempo. Sudden modulations into remote key areas, along with a subtle rubato and rapid dynamic changes, add to the comedic flair. The atmosphere is youthful, and it eludes a Dickensian character both wicked and charming.

To understand the work's final movement, *Soho Forenoons*, one must make reference to one of Ireland's idols, Claude Debussy. The first movement of Debussy's *Images pour orchestra* (1909-12), 'Gigues', was inspired by a poem of Paul Verlaine. Written in a café in Soho, the poem alternates between images of an unnamed beloved and the refrain 'Danson la gigue!':

Dansons la gigue!

J'aimais surtout ses jolis yeux
Plus clairs que l'étoile des cieux,
J'aimais ses yeux malicieux.

Dansons la gigue!

Elle avait des façons vraiment
De désoler un pauvre amant,
Que c'en était vraiment charmant!

Likewise, Debussy's and Ireland's music juxtaposes the romantic with the banal. The wistful opening melody of *Soho*

Forenoons, singing over an accompaniment of rustling sixteenths, is interrupted by a march-like figure which the composer said should suggest ‘an alcoholically unsteady gait’ (p. 32). It is as if, like Verlaine, Ireland perceived amid the bustle of London street-life instances of sweet or mystical serenity.

John Ireland

Allegretto (quasi Tambourine) (J. 90-05)

PIANO

Soho Forenoons, m. 1-11.

Soho Forenoons, m. 27-29.

The placidness and frivolity that pervade *London Pieces* fell swiftly out of fashion after 1918 as war's dirty realism wrecked

the innocence needed to make dreamy escapism an approved style. Ireland's music and position in the musical establishment, like that of many of his generation, moved evermore toward the fringe, made irrelevant by the march of history.

Arnold Bax's Piano Sonata No. 2: The Tragedy of the Age

The profusion of English piano sonatas during the 1910s and 1920s contrasted the short forms concurrently in vogue with Continental European composers like Maurice Ravel, Arnold Schoenberg, and Igor Stravinsky. The 'seriousness and weight' of piano sonatas by John Ireland, Frank Bridge, Arthur Bliss, and others – characteristics derived in part from the wartime climate – seemed to necessitate a return to extended forms.⁸

Between 1910 and 1932, the composer Arnold Bax (1883-1953) wrote four piano sonatas, and this series represents the most substantial contribution to the genre by any English composer of that generation. Bax is best remembered for his orchestral tone poems – *The Garden of Fand* (1913), *Tintagel* (1917), and *November Woods* (1917) – and for his cycle of seven symphonies. The musical style of Bax may be described loosely as Late-Romantic, and he was an admirer of German and Russian Romantic composers. There is also a distinct Nordic accent to his music which derives partly from Jean Sibelius. Bax's Romantic temperament – he was a self-proclaimed 'tireless hunter of dreams'⁹ – was stabilised by a strict adherence to form, and he was critical of composers he considered structurally lax, notably Robert Schumann and Gustav Mahler.

An accomplished pianist, Bax performed for many of the age's musical luminaries, and his memoir, *Farewell My Youth*, recounts interactions with Claude Debussy, Arnold Schoenberg, Edward Elgar, and others. Bax's own esteem among his contemporaries was high. In a letter to *Radio Times*, Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote that he did not consider names on a recent program –

including Hindemith, Poulenc, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky – as being ‘worthy to stand beside Bax.’¹⁰

The country of Ireland, to which Bax travelled frequently, often composing in his seaside vacation cottage, significantly shaped his musical personality. Under the Irish pseudonym Dermot O’Byrne, Bax also produced a host of plays, poetry collections, and short stories, many of which utilise Irish themes. Fluent in Gaelic, Bax was particularly inspired by Irish folklore and folk music, and the modal scales and dance rhythms found in his work derives from these sources, as does the use of harp in his chamber works.

The Celtic influence is plainly visible in all his musical work which has frequently been described as the equivalent in music to the poetry of W.B. Yeats . . . Its special quality is a paradoxical blend of musical thought which, however evanescent its expression, is as definite as it is concise, with a sense of mystic beauty that demands a continuous softening of outlines . . . It is a curious beauty, eminently sane, and yet tinged with a certain wistfulness.¹¹

This Celtic ‘wistfulness’ – which represents nostalgia for something lost, whether innocence or time itself – was, like John Ireland’s conservatism, one of the indirect cultural casualties of the war.

Bax’s was a philosophy that was expressed through a technique then just brought to perfection: a technique that, in common with that of many of his contemporaries, was left dry on the sands of time, a victim of August 1914. After the war the prevailing view of life was no longer a romantic one. Bax could not change his musical idiom, at least not overnight, but he could adapt it, and the conflict between beauty and horror, between dream and reality generated in Bax, until the fires dimmed in the 1930s, a powerful body of romantic music in which the old and the new united in a unique art.¹²

The ‘conflict between beauty and horror’ is illustrated perfectly by Bax’s *Sonata No. 2* (1919, rev. 1921), which is the most often performed of his piano sonatas. It is a work of imposing scale and covers, in the course of its single-movement, a huge range of emotional material. Comparison with Franz Liszt’s *Sonata in B minor* has been frequent as both sonatas utilise a single-movement form, but there the structural similarities end; although each is unified by cyclical motives, Liszt’s controversial, poetic excursions from the formal narrative are at odds with Bax’s strict, almost obsessively logical structure. Other correlations between Liszt’s and Bax’s sonatas, noted by Edwin Evans, include how both ‘have somewhat the nature of epic poems’ and ‘explore the dramatic possibilities of the lower notes of the piano’.¹⁸ But these are, Evans insists, tenuous generalizations. In any case, comparison with Liszt’s sonata invariably hinders the critic from observing what makes Bax an original and not an imitative composer.¹³

The sonata’s introduction is one Bax’s most stunning pianistic effects. Simultaneously implying C minor, B minor, and G major – all crucial key centers to the sonata’s structure – this dramatic passage, in which dissonant waves surge progressively higher above a murky bass, precedes Maurice Ravel’s parallel effect in the *Concerto for the Left-Hand* (1929) by ten years.

To Miss
Harriet Cohen.

SECOND SONATA

ARNOLD BAX.

Lento, Tenebroso.
Slow, Gloomy and Menacing in mood.

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Sonata No. 2, m. 1-7

In sustaining this tonal ambivalence, the primary motive (see below, m. 10-12) reinforces what is the central characteristic of the sonata: ambiguity, or uncertainty. For instance, the menacing primary motive and aggressive swells of the introduction transition into a march in G major, marked *Brazen and Glittering*,

which could not be more contrasting in its glory (m. 52-56). After preparing the listener for a triumphant climax, this material suddenly returns to the darkness of the primary motive. A subsequent development section that alternates between the heroic and tragic motives precedes the sonata's *Lento* section, marked 'Very still and concentrated' (m. 286-289), which in turn is overtaken by a lilting vivace before being restated in full trionfale texture.

The chords soft, but thick and heavy.

Sonata No. 2, m. 10-12 (Primary motive)

Moderato Broico. *Brasen and Glittering.*

Sonata No. 2, m. 52-56.

14 *Lento.*
Very still and concentrated.

Sonata No. 2, m. 286-289

This marks the sonata's recapitulation, only 'from this point Bax seems to retrace his steps in an imperfect or distorted mirror-image.'¹⁴ The return of the G major march, now even more stentorian, passes into a long and contemplative coda in which all of the sonata's motives and tonal centers are visited in turn. Although the final cadence is in G major, the conclusion is anything but definite. The last two pages consist of an ostinato based on the primary motive, which rises over a chromatically descending bass. The intensity of this passage, and the unexpectedness of its G major resolution, leaves the listener, again, uncertain as to what the exact mood of the sonata should be.

Identifying the inspiration behind this complex piece has sparked numerous theories. Frank Merrick, the English pianist, claimed that Bax believed the sonata 'in some degree typified a struggle between good and evil', and Harriet Cohen, the sonata's dedicatee, proposed that it is 'an epic conception, this time taking the form of a contest between a legendary hero and the powers of darkness'.¹⁵ However appealing they may sound, these are nevertheless unsubstantiated claims.

The war years were stressful and complicated for Bax, not only because of the war itself, but also for personal reasons which his memoir does not detail. A number of his friends were killed in combat during this time, and the political upheavals of the era – the Russian Revolution and Easter Rising – were matters in which Bax was ideologically deeply invested. The shattering of these ideals weighed heavily on him, and this can be traced in a number of his compositions. Shortly after the events in Ireland, Bax composed a chamber work called *In Memoriam* (1916), and his *Symphony No. 1* includes a funeral dirge. In addition to all this, there was the disintegration of Bax's marriage and his passionate though tumultuous affair with the domineering Harriet Cohen, a young pianist.

It is probable that the moodiness and anger which saturate the *Second Piano Sonata* grew out of all these things, and that it is both a personal and a public narrative. In other words, it was the

reaction of a composer to the calamity of his own life and times, in this sense, analogous to Yeats's *The Second Coming*.

Like Yeats, Bax sought to express the tragedy of his age, and, in the final moment of his work, envisions an unequivocal procession towards some unknown yet radically disturbed future.

The image shows a page of musical notation for the Coda of Elgar's Piano Sonata No. 2. It features four systems of music. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic and a 'poco f' marking, followed by a 'cresc. sempre' instruction. The second system includes a mezzo-forte (m.f.) dynamic, a 'ff dim. subito' instruction, and a piano (p) dynamic. The third system is marked 'Più lento.' and 'pp'. The fourth system starts with a '599 b' measure number, a 'Still slower' instruction, and a piano (p) dynamic, followed by 'foco f', 'dim. m.d.', 'p', 'dim. e morendo', 'ppp', 'm.s.', and a '592 basso' measure number.

Piano Sonata No. 2, Coda

Conclusion

The time in which a piece was written can say much about the piece itself. But it is also true that a piece can have much to say

about the time in which it was written. The compositions and composers discussed here – their aesthetic characteristics, programmatic aspirations, and, above all, their emotional content – are an essential ingredient to any comprehensive understanding of the First World War. They recreate the essence of wartime as vividly as footage or photographs. Without this music, the pictures remain in black-and-white; the film reels revolve in silence. Music colorises history.

There is a moral element to Art and to music in particular, which is the articulation of emotion through abstract though not undecipherable metaphor. The soldiers and civilians of the First World War are gone, but their feelings and expressions have been preserved in the music of their time. Even those composers who saw no active combat managed to contribute to this cultural conservation. They acted as mirrors which both absorbed and reflected those who stood before them.

Music, serving as a capsule of expression sent through time, allows us to recall and to relive the experiences of past individuals and of their otherwise eroded societies. It is the artist who has a moral responsibility to assert this power and to continually remind society of the experiences of history so that we may, perhaps, learn something worthwhile about the business of living today.

Eric McElroy is a composer and pianist who has performed throughout the United States and Europe.

NOTES

¹ Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), p. 148.

² Bob Van der Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism, and Cross-Cultural Communication* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 24.

³ Peter Dickerson, *Lord Berners: Composer, Writer, Painter* (Great Britain: Boydell Press, 2008), p. 24.

⁴ Lord Berners, *First Childhood* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 42.

⁵ Roger Carpenter, *Goodnight to Flamboro': The Life and Music of William Baines*, British Music Society Monograph 4 (Bristol: Triad Press, 1999), p. 60.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷ Lewis Foreman, *The John Ireland Companion* (Great Britain: Boydell Press, 2011), p. 5.

⁸ Bernard Hughes, [CD Review] '*Arnold Bax: Piano Sonatas 1-4. John Ireland: Piano Sonata. Frank Bridge: Piano Sonata by Arnold Bax, John Ireland, Frank Bridge, Malcolm Binns*', *Tempo*, 63, 247 (Jan., 2009), 88-89.

⁹ Arnold Bax, *Farewell, My Youth* (Wesport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 42.

¹⁰ Lewis Foreman, *Bax: Composer and His Times* (London: Scolar Press, 1983), pp. 373-374.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁴ Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Arnold Bax* (London: Dent, 1973), p. 109.

¹⁵ *Bax*, p. 170.