

THE ORGAN MUSIC OF ETHEL SMYTH:  
A GUIDE TO ITS HISTORY AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

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This document is dedicated to my family.

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## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) is a vibrant figure that witnessed many historical events and characters over her eighty-five-year life span. She lived through the Boer War, the Franco-Prussian War, and served as a supplementary radiographer in World War I. Her diverse interests included music, sports, politics, literature, and avid correspondence, in addition to her family and a love of sheepdogs. She was known among her peers as possessing curious ideals and wearing masculine tweed clothing – distinct qualities, especially in Victorian England. Smyth never married and was supported in her adult life by wealthy friends and patrons. This allowed her to travel to European opera houses and concert halls in order to negotiate performances of her works. Her life stories are preserved through her countless letters, autobiographical writings, and in the memories of others. Her musical and literary legacies add to our knowledge of influential patrons, such as the Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III, as well as the great composer Johannes Brahms. Whether mountain climbing in Switzerland or venturing off to Leipzig at nineteen to pursue her dream of studying music, Ethel Smyth defies the stereotype of a Victorian woman and helped pave the way for modern women.

Despite her significant musical and social contributions, Ethel Smyth has yet to receive the scholarly attention she warrants. Christopher St. John and Louise Collis are the only researchers who have written biographies on this dynamic woman. Most research about Smyth has focused on her operas and no one to date has written exclusively about her organ works. It is fortunate that Smyth published many volumes of

memoirs and saved her correspondence: I will be using these primary resources liberally throughout the document to shed light on her life and her works.

This document aims to elevate the status of her contributions to the organ's repertoire by providing an analysis of her published chorale preludes and a comparison of these works with those by Brahms, works that seem to have, at least in part, influenced her. Smyth's chorale preludes also reference stylistic elements of the Baroque era and the effects of the Bach revival through her choice of text, use of counterpoint, and conservative harmonic structure. Her other published organ work, "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air," will also be discussed. A thorough biography highlighting her early influences will serve to contextualize her organ works. This document will also provide a performance guide to these published organ works, with the goal of making them more accessible and approachable for the modern performer. This guide will provide theoretical and practical performance information, using as points of departure the performance practices of the day and organs she may have known.

## Chapter 2: Early Life and Influences

Ethel Mary Smyth was born on April 23, 1858 in London, England to Major-General J.H. Smyth, who served in the Royal Artillery, and Nina Smyth. Her parents became engaged when her father was on leave from the Bengal Army, and they spent the first years of their marriage in India.<sup>1</sup> Her mother, educated in France, had a gift for music and languages and knew French, Hindustani, German, Italian, and Spanish.<sup>2</sup> Her mother's Gallic nature is due to Ethel's maternal grandmother, Madame de Stracey, who lived in Paris and hosted salons with musical figures such as Frédéric Chopin, Gioachino Rossini, and Daniel Auber.<sup>3</sup> Ethel was the fourth of eight children, with five sisters and two brothers.

Although born in London, Smyth considered Sidcup her first home, which has been described as “a small place in rural surroundings.”<sup>4</sup> Due to her father's military post, the family relocated to this house near Woolwich, southeast of London, where he was in command of the Artillery Depot. Despite the lack of evidence that Smyth was a child prodigy, there are indications that she was very talented and that music played an important role in her early years:

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1959), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987), 36.

<sup>3</sup> St. John, 2.

<sup>4</sup> St. John, 4.

I don't think I composed in the Sidcup days, but Mary and I sang little duets, simple tunes to which I put 'seconds,'<sup>5</sup> as it was called, and in the quality of those seconds and my accompaniments, I myself, had I been listening, should certainly have detected a natural gift. But to judge these things takes an expert, and my mother had had no real musical training. Transposing and playing by ear came naturally to me, but so it did to her, so she would not have been much impressed by that; or, perhaps she thought I was conceited enough without special encouragement regards my music.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly Smyth's mother, although not professionally trained, had a musical gift, especially since she could play by ear and transpose. The inclination for Smyth to improvise accompaniments and what can be interpreted as rudimentary counterpoint also shows a high degree of natural musical skill.

The Smyth family stayed in Sidcup until 1867 and then moved to Frimhurst in the village of Frimley, where her father took a post at Aldershot.<sup>7</sup> Although in the country, Frimley had a significant turnover rate due to the large military presence in the area. One of the largest military camps in England, along with the Royal Military Academy, was at Sandhurst, a short distance from Frimley. Smyth recalls, "On reflection I think the presence of a large floating population brought rather an unstable element into life."<sup>8</sup> This may have been a factor in her affinity toward many diverse interests and activities.

One of Smyth's governesses at Frimhurst, who performed a Beethoven sonata for her at the age of twelve, served as a catalyst for her early musical drive. Smyth credits this governess, who studied at the Leipzig Conservatory, for inspiring her to dedicate her life to music:

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<sup>5</sup> "Seconds" here refers to an added musical line for harmonic purposes.

<sup>6</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 52.

<sup>7</sup> St. John, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 47.

I have said that the whole course of my life was determined, little as she realized it, by one of our governesses...I heard classical music and a new world opened up before me. Shortly after, a friend having given me Beethoven's Sonatas, I began studying the easier of these and walked into the new world on my own feet. Thus was my true bent suddenly revealed to me, and I then and there conceived the plan, carried out seven years later, of study at Leipzig and giving up my life to music...I want to make it clear that this was no mere passing idea such as children entertain and let go again.<sup>9</sup>

Smyth's singular passion for studying music in Germany may be unique for someone so young, but it reflects the cultural climate in which she lived.

In the late nineteenth century, the musical culture of England was still saturated with the musical influences of Felix Mendelssohn and George Frideric Händel as well as more modern ideas of musical education.<sup>10</sup> Queen Victoria's German-born husband, Prince Albert, received training in music and was an accomplished organist and composer.<sup>11</sup> Colin Eatock describes that upon Prince Albert's arrival in England, "[He] took an active interest in London's musical culture – especially the Ancient Concerts, for which he sometimes selected programs."<sup>12</sup> Eatock goes on to describe that "Queen Victoria especially enjoyed Italian opera, whereas Prince Albert held German music in the highest esteem, but both shared Mendelssohn's desire to raise the standards and stature of British music."<sup>13</sup> It is also worth noting that no British monarch had knighted a musician before Queen Victoria, but she went on to knight twenty during her reign.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Burrows, "Victorian England: An Age of Expansion" from *The Late Romantic Era*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991), 267.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Eatock, *Mendelssohn and Victorian England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Eatock, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Eatock, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Eatock, 78.

Donald Burrows writes, “In the 1850s, the positive attitudes of Prince Albert and writer George Grove toward music and musicians reflect a crusading spirit: They consciously attempted to educate an ‘unmusical’ public in more effective ways.”<sup>15</sup> Burrows explains that “their ambitions were fulfilled in the long term because various accommodating forces in Victorian society matched the direction of their leadership.”<sup>16</sup> One such force was the growing economy of England at that time. Although this development was significant and allowed more flexibility in terms of musical activities, it cannot have been the only major factor.<sup>17</sup> Burrows continues, “Except in choral singing, there was no sudden spectacular ‘numerical’ success: Rather, it was a matter of steady growth in many areas.”<sup>18</sup> Accompanying this growth were changed attitudes toward the acceptance of a place for music in Victorian life and towards the status of British musicians within society. Prince Albert was at the forefront of those encouraging public schemes for musical training and performance, especially the works of Mendelssohn.<sup>19</sup>

One of the highlights of Mendelssohn’s trip to England in 1842 was the London premiere of the Scottish Symphony, which was subsequently dedicated to Queen Victoria.<sup>20</sup> On June 20 and July 9, during visits to the Queen and Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace, he improvised on *Rule, Britannia!*, presented a new piano duet

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<sup>15</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>18</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>19</sup> Burrows, 267.

<sup>20</sup> R. Larry Todd, "Felix Mendelssohn," in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51795pg6> (accessed February 28, 2013).



arrangement of seven of his *Lieder ohne Worte*, and accompanied the Queen, who sang his lieder and some by his sister Fanny.<sup>21</sup> In the second visit, Prince Albert also showed Mendelssohn his chamber organ.<sup>22</sup> Mendelssohn illustrates this interaction in a letter to his mother:

I then begged that the Prince would first play me something, so that as I said, I might boast about it in Germany. Thereupon he played me a chorale by heart, with pedals, so charmingly and clearly and correctly that many an organist could have learned something from it. And the Queen, having finished her chore, sat beside him and listened very pleased. Then I had to play, and I began my chorus from "St. Paul," "How lovely are the Messengers!" Before I got to the end of the first verse, they both began to sing the chorus very well, and all the time Prince Albert managed the stops for me expertly – first a flute, then more at the forte, the full organ at the D Major part, then he made an excellent diminuendo with the stops, and so on to the end of the piece – and all by heart – and I was greatly pleased.<sup>23</sup>

From Mendelssohn's account, Prince Albert was a skilled organist who had an advanced pedal technique and practical knowledge of organ registration. Upon Prince Albert's death in 1861, the Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Victoria's second son, took up the task of bringing respectability to the music profession in the next generation.<sup>24</sup> He eventually helped establish the Royal College of Music in 1883.<sup>25</sup>

As the quality and range of music-making developed after the mid-nineteenth century, Burrows points out that "tensions arose between native and imported talent."<sup>26</sup> With the exception of church music, Italians dominated the musical professional in vocal

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<sup>21</sup> Todd, "Mendelssohn."

<sup>22</sup> William Little, *Mendelssohn and the Organ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66.

<sup>23</sup> Little, *Mendelssohn*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Burrows, 267.

<sup>25</sup> Burrows, 287.

<sup>26</sup> Burrows, 268.

music, and Germans dominated the musical profession in instrumental music.<sup>27</sup> There was an even subtler tension between the acceptance of a highly regarded ‘classical’ repertory and the encouragement of new composition.<sup>28</sup> Burrows states, “There came a point, again towards the end of the century, when a country of imperial glory felt a self-conscious need to identify its own living composers...yet still needed the security of historic authority figures.”<sup>29</sup>

The historic figures Burrows refers to were Händel, whose veneration was well established before the end of the century, and Joseph Haydn. Burrows adds, “To the pantheon were added in succession Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and with Mendelssohn came J.S. Bach: The London Bach Society was founded in 1849.”<sup>30</sup> He contends, “The admitted mediocrity of much music composed in Victorian Britain can be attributed to the overbearing shadows of these figures, Händel and Mendelssohn in particular.”<sup>31</sup> He goes on to say, however, “There seems little evidence that genuine originality was stifled; if anything, new works were more technically accomplished because their composers had good models to work from.”<sup>32</sup> This argument can be made especially in regard to Smyth. The cultural climate in which she was brought up had a substantial effect on her musical interests.

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<sup>27</sup> Burrows, 268.

<sup>28</sup> Burrows, 268.

<sup>29</sup> Burrows, 268.

<sup>30</sup> Burrows, 268.

<sup>31</sup> Burrows, 268.

<sup>32</sup> Burrows, 268.

In Smyth's generation, the one encouraged musically by the Duke of Edinburgh, more people were attracted to music at an earlier age through singing classes and the Education Act of 1870.<sup>33</sup> This Act was built upon the literacy and religious instruction of Sunday schools, which often included basic music instruction through the singing of hymns.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Grove's first *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* appeared in four volumes between 1879 and 1890. As Burrows describes, "It was a dual monument to the availability of competent musical scholarship in Britain and to the number of 'intelligent enquirers' at whom the dictionary was aimed."<sup>35</sup>

In addition to studying Beethoven scores in 1870 at the age of twelve, Smyth began composing chants, hymns, and other music related to the church, which she comments humorously as "a well-known English malady."<sup>36</sup> Despite these early beginnings and the rich church music traditions in England, however, Smyth ultimately did not publish any sacred instrumental works aside from her organ chorale preludes. The *Mass in D* from 1891 is her only sacred vocal work, but, as described later, was not intended for a church setting. One may attribute this to the rise and dominance of science in the late-Romantic era. In many cases, this caused a decline in religious faith.<sup>37</sup> Jim Samson asserts, "Until the nineteenth century, music composed in praise of God,

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<sup>33</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>34</sup> Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 90.

<sup>35</sup> Burrows, 285.

<sup>36</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Jim Samson, "Music and Society" from *The Late Romantic Era*, ed. Samson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991), 24.

however functional or occasional, was usually an expression of beliefs sincerely held.”<sup>38</sup> With the rise of Romanticism, key figures, such as Beethoven, Berlioz, and Brahms, composed sacred music that celebrated the universal and human qualities inherent in religion: While God was not necessarily taken out of the music, his power had been “democratized.”<sup>39</sup> This contemporary atmosphere of religion and music, combined with Smyth’s progressive view on politics later in life, may explain her lack of interest in sacred music.

Another reason for her avoidance of sacred music may be attributed to the perceived role of women at this time. Female organists of nineteenth-century England had a distinct association with the church. According to Judith Barger,

These women straddled the division between public and private sphere when they used the “private” skills of playing the keyboard in the semi-public sphere of the church. Their assumption of this role challenged the notion of separate spheres of activity for men and women in music and religion. In expanding their role, female organists faced a unique set of constraints. At its root was the propriety of using their musical accomplishments in service to church and religion. That women were encouraged to view their talent as a blessing, not as a business, created hindrances regarding remuneration and recognition for females who did serve as organists. Female organists, like other musical women, were held to separate standards of musical expectations and academic preparation, which imposed limitations on the realization of a music career.<sup>40</sup>

Although female singers had made a successful transition into the public realm of nineteenth-century England, Barger reminds us, “Would-be professional female organists faced a number of obstacles thwarting their reception.”<sup>41</sup> These obstacles included the

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<sup>38</sup> Samson, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Samson, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Barger, ““Ladies Not Eligible”?: Elizabeth Stirling and the Musical Life of Female Organists in Nineteenth-Century London” (Ph.D diss., Indiana University, 2002), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Barger, 10.

prevailing social attitudes and conditions of the time, especially in regard to the education of women, the Oxford Movement,<sup>42</sup> and church politics. The organ loft was considered “a man’s domain,” and aspiring women were viewed as “encroaching on one of man’s privileges.”<sup>43</sup> The *Musical Standard* carried an advertisement by the vestry of Saint John Southwark on April 8, 1865, inviting “applications from gentlemen desirous of becoming CANDIDATES for the office of ORGANIST. Ladies, and persons afflicted with blindness, will not be eligible.”<sup>44</sup> Although Smyth did not aspire to be a church organist, the sentiments regarding the profession as she was coming of age may have discouraged her from even considering it.

In 1872, Ethel and her sister Mary were dismissed from the care of governesses and sent to school in Putney. The school curriculum was comprehensive, and teachers came from London to teach music, drawing, astronomy, and chemistry.<sup>45</sup> The resident staff also taught music, in addition to literature, history, mathematics, French, and German. Shortly after she finished school in 1875, Ethel’s older brother became ill and died. In the same year, her two older sisters, Alice and Mary, were married, thus making Ethel the oldest of the children at home. This circumstance made the prospect of leaving more difficult, especially with many younger siblings, but Ethel still had her sights on Leipzig:

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<sup>42</sup> The Oxford Movement was inaugurated in 1833 with the aim of reconnecting the Church of England with its Roman Catholic roots and of restoring “the beauty of holiness” to the Anglican communion (Tim Dowley, *Christian Music: A Global History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 168).

<sup>43</sup> Barger, 204.

<sup>44</sup> “To Organists,” *Musical Standard*, o.s., 3 (8 April 1865): 328, quoted in Judith Barger, ““Ladies Not Eligible”?: Elizabeth Stirling and the Musical Life of Female Organists in Nineteenth-Century London” (Ph.D diss., Indiana University, 2002), 204.

<sup>45</sup> St. John, 8.

All this time, whether at home or at school, the main determination of my life, though sometimes obscured, had never wavered; it was like a *basso ostinato*, which, as subsequent counterpoint studies showed me, will sometimes be shifted to a less obvious position in the midst of other voices and seem to the eye of ignorance to have vanished.<sup>46</sup>

In the biography, Christopher St. John notes that Ethel did not consider the alternative of studying in London at the Royal Academy of Music, which could have been managed without leaving home. He admits that, in 1877, the Royal Academy of Music could not offer the same degree of training as the Leipzig Conservatory.<sup>47</sup>

Although Ethel had a single-minded goal of studying in Leipzig, she recognized the challenges in facing her father with such a dream:

My father would never let me go abroad willingly, if only for reasons of economy, and I quite grasped that making an allowance to a married daughter, whose future is no longer your business, is quite another thing than financing a maiden's sterile whims. In his mind's eye he would see me, no doubt, returned on his hands a failure and knocking too late at doors in the marriage market; meanwhile his income was none too large to keep the home going.<sup>48</sup>

She understood the apprehensions of her father, especially considering her upbringing and social class, and needed a way to make him embrace her determination. Biographer Louise Collis points out, "The Smyth family lived according to the conventions of their class and position: [They had] plenty of servants indoors and out, governesses, dinner parties with local notables, dances, tea parties, hunting and other sports, visits to friends in different parts of the country, and trips abroad."<sup>49</sup> They were firm upholders of the Church of England, and Ethel's father naturally considered discipline important due to

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<sup>46</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 96.

<sup>47</sup> St. John, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 96.

<sup>49</sup> Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984), 12.

his military background.<sup>50</sup> Although generally good-natured, Collis points out that Smyth's father "did have certain fixed ideas that were destined to cause friction between himself and Ethel...One was that all artists, like foreigners, were of low moral fiber."<sup>51</sup> Given his opinion on artists, Ethel would need more than just a convincing argument to leave England in order to study music.

Ethel's opportunity came when Alexander C. Ewing, an officer in the Army Service Corps, was stationed at Aldershot. The Smyth family was eager to meet the Ewings, especially since he composed the popular hymn tune "Jerusalem the Golden," and his wife authored well-known children's stories.<sup>52</sup> With a successful songwriter for a brother, Mrs. Ewing recognized Ethel's musical talent and encouraged her husband to look at her compositions and hear her perform. As a result, he told her parents that she was a natural talent and needed to be educated immediately.<sup>53</sup>

Although her father was "furious and foresaw that the Leipzig idea would now be endorsed warmly by one who knew," Ewing began teaching Ethel harmony and analyzing her compositions.<sup>54</sup> She describes Ewing's main instrument as the organ, but he also "banged and bellowed his way [on the piano] through the scenes of *Lohengrin* and *The Flying Dutchman*, and otherwise introduced me to Wagner."<sup>55</sup> In addition to influencing her future operatic pursuits, Ewing also gave her a copy of Berlioz's famous

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<sup>50</sup> Collis, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Collis, 12.

<sup>52</sup> St. John, 11.

<sup>53</sup> St. John, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 98.

<sup>55</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 99.

treatise on orchestration.<sup>56</sup> She notes though that Beethoven appealed to her more than Wagner or anyone else.<sup>57</sup> Ethel describes her experiences with the Ewings as the “second milestone” on her road to becoming a musician.<sup>58</sup>

Her harmony lessons with Ewing were short-lived due to his orders to leave Aldershot. There was a brief period of calm between father and daughter from 1875 to 1877, when Ethel had entered society and was enjoying her new social engagements. She enjoyed balls, but only for the sake of dancing, and admittedly had no talent for flirtation:

If I went to a ball it was to dance, and for no other reason, but I soon found out this is a very incomplete theory of balls. Being a self-sufficing person, who didn't want to cling or be clung to except in the way of dancing, what was I doing in this ante-chamber of matrimony, the ball-room?<sup>59</sup>

Despite her perceived shortcomings, Ethel was secretly engaged to William Wilde, Oscar Wilde's brother. Upon reflection, Ethel admits in her memoirs that she had accepted his proposal from “flattered vanity, light-heartedness, adventurousness, anything you please except love” and broke off the engagement after just three weeks.<sup>60</sup>

During this time of familial calm, Ethel occasionally went to concerts in London with an approved chaperone. One of her chaperones was Mrs. George Schwabe, an acquaintance of Clara Schumann, who introduced Ethel to the great pianist after a recital. Another notable occasion was a Saturday Popular Concert which featured Brahms's *Liebeslieder Waltzes*. It was the first time she had heard any music by Brahms and must

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<sup>56</sup> St. John, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 97.

<sup>59</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 105.

<sup>60</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 103.



have jumpstarted her own musical aspirations,<sup>61</sup> for she began the struggle with her father over Leipzig once again:

After a period of vain efforts to overcome his resistance, which became so terrific that it was no longer possible to broach the subject at all...I determined to make life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go for their own sakes.<sup>62</sup>

Some examples of her rebellious behavior include traveling to London without a chaperone, borrowing money from tradesmen for concerts, refusing to speak, refusing to go to church and parties, and spending most of the day in her bedroom with the door locked.<sup>63</sup> Her persistent behavior, along with the support of her mother and influential friends, eventually prevailed and her father gave his permission for her to study in Leipzig.

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<sup>61</sup> St. John, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 109.

<sup>63</sup> St. John, 15.

Chapter 3:  
Educational Experiences in Leipzig

Smyth left for Leipzig on July 26, 1877, accompanied by her brother-in-law, Harry Davidson, who knew Germany well. Within weeks of her arrival, she was already acquainted with musicians in the city, including Thekla Friedländer and Augusta Redeker, two German singers, George Henschel, a noted composer, conductor, and singer who later founded the London Symphony Concerts, and Engelbert Röntgen, the leader of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Many musicians praised her early compositions, which further encouraged Smyth's hope:

Men who have lived among musicians all their lives, who have been hand in glove with Schumann and Mendelssohn, and are so now with Brahms and Rubinstein, say they seldom saw such talent; in a woman never!<sup>1</sup>

Her observations were not exaggerated, for Henschel also wrote in his memoirs, "Ethel Smyth was destined to become...the most remarkable and original woman composer in the history of music."<sup>2</sup> She was aware of the work needed to fulfill her goals, however, and enrolled at the Leipzig Conservatory in the fall of 1877.

At the conservatory, Smyth studied composition with Carl Heinrich Reinecke, counterpoint and theory with Salomon Jadassohn, and piano with Louis Maas. Reinecke was the conductor of the Gewandhaus concerts, and Jadassohn's theoretical works were translated into English, French, and Italian. Despite the credentials of her professors, Ethel was dissatisfied with her experience at the school, which she maintained was

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1959), 19.

<sup>2</sup> St. John, 43.

“merely trading on its Mendelssohnian reputation” and criticized her experience in her memoirs: “The lessons with Reinecke were rather a farce; he was one of those composers who turn out music by the yard without effort or inspiration.”<sup>3</sup> She also complained of Jadassohn’s tardiness to his own classes and failure to correct the counterpoint exercises he assigned.<sup>4</sup> Another element to Ethel’s disillusionment with the school was the attitude of her classmates. She was disheartened by their lack of enthusiasm and observed that they had only come to qualify for teachers’ certificates.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the somewhat apathetic attitudes of the students and teachers, the relative stability of the repertoire during the nineteenth century reflects a high degree of musical judgment overall: from 1843 to 1891, the most frequently performed composers at the Leipzig Conservatory were Mendelssohn, Beethoven, J.S. Bach, and Mozart.<sup>6</sup> According to statistical tables regarding musical performances, Mendelssohn is consistently the most performed composer during this time period, often by 50 performances. Leonard Phillips adds:

Without question the place [that] Mendelssohn held in the repertoire seems excessive, but it does attest to the strong influence his music continued to hold over the Conservatory throughout the nineteenth century. These figures also show that the high standards which Mendelssohn originally proposed for the school were actually realized to a great extent and that the school did promote German music worthy of the heritage established by J.S. Bach and the Viennese composers of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 145.

<sup>4</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 145.

<sup>5</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Phillips, “The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843-1881” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 202.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, 203.

Organ instruction was not part of Smyth's education at the Leipzig Conservatory, but it is worth noting the state of organ instruction during her time there. Phillips argues, "Nowhere was the decline of one of the great German Lutheran traditions more evident than in the state of organ playing as exemplified by its position in the nineteenth-century curriculum of the Leipzig Conservatory."<sup>8</sup> He reminds us that "the few works of Mendelssohn were not sufficient to rescue the instrument and its earlier repertoire from the dormancy, which characterized it at the time."<sup>9</sup> The dormancy of the repertoire is only part of the low estate of organ playing if the following words of Moritz Hauptmann, chosen by Mendelssohn to be the first theory teacher at the Leipzig Conservatory, are in any way typical of the general feelings about the organ as an instrument:

The organ is a dead-alive instrument; massed with others, it may make an effect, but it makes none musically. Yet another defect: there is no gradation in the strength of the tone of an organ, there is a want of life, which is not compensated for by any number of mechanical *Crescendos*. Once for all, I do not like them. The purely mechanical character of the organ, *plus* the bad character of most organists, accounts, I think, for the dullness of organ recitals.<sup>10</sup>

Mendelssohn clearly did not have the same view as did Hauptmann regarding the instrument, and it was to be expected that he would give priority to organ instruction at the conservatory.<sup>11</sup> The organ instructors were in equal rank with the other major teachers, but there was a shortage of organ students: Those who did study the instrument

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<sup>8</sup> Phillips, 163.

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Moritz Hauptmann, *Letters of a Leipzig Cantor*, Vol. II, ed. Alfred Schone and Ferdinand Hiller; trans. and arr. by A.D. Coleridge (London: Novello, Ewer, and Co., 1892), 170-171, quoted in Leonard Phillips, "The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843-1881" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 163.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, 164.

were primarily pianists.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, *Dwight's Journal of Music* remarked:

The organ has not that consideration bestowed upon it which its importance deserves [at the Conservatory]. There is little demand and less employment for first-class organists in Germany. In the church services the organ is only required to accompany the chorales; if any more elaborate music be performed, an orchestra is employed. For a long time there has been a prejudice against using the organ in combination with the orchestra in oratorios etc., which is but now beginning to die away. These are generally unfavorable influences, but there are others peculiar to the Leipzig Conservatory. The instrument upon which pupils have to practice is the most miserable imaginable; asthmatic and rickety, ivories worn away from the keys, some of the stops slow in speaking, he must indeed be a devoted lover of the organ who can find anything but disgust in his hour's practice. Add to this that the organ is in a church and that Leipzig authorities seem to think that frigid mortification is meritorious and therefore churches are not heated, and some idea can be formed of the unpleasantness of a sojourn in such a locality during a German winter when the thermometer is often down to zero for days and even lower. Under such circumstances nothing more than tolerable mechanical correctness can be expected from the pupils.<sup>13</sup>

Toward the end of the century, however, interest in the instrument gradually rose.

Although Smyth was not at the conservatory for the full awakening of interest in the organ,<sup>14</sup> which would occur in the early twentieth century with Sigfrid Karg-Elert, Max Reger, and Karl Straube, she may have witnessed the gradually changing attitudes toward the instrument.

Although she was disappointed in her formal education, Ethel relished in the musical life of the city itself. She spent her free time at the Gewandhaus concerts, the opera, and the small concert hall behind the Gewandhaus that had chamber concerts. She also spent her weekends at the Old Theater, where she improved her German and her

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<sup>12</sup> Phillips, 164.

<sup>13</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature*, XXIV (1864), ed. John S. Dwight (Boston), 268, quoted in Phillips, *The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843-1881* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 165.

<sup>14</sup> Phillips, 165.

knowledge of theater classics.<sup>15</sup> Ethel also spent time making new friends, including Livia Frege, a concert singer, Lili Wach, daughter of Felix Mendelssohn, and Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, the wife of composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg. Kathleen Dale, who contributed a comprehensive study of Ethel's compositions in St. John's biography, asserts that her "passionate and intellectual friendships were the breath of life to her and indispensable to her creative faculty."<sup>16</sup> Smyth's friendship with Lili Wach may have further exposed her to Mendelssohn's music, and perhaps even his organ works. She describes Wach as "very musical, but being her father's daughter and extremely reserved by nature, she kept the fact so dark that few people knew it."<sup>17</sup>

Livia Frege was a celebrated concert singer, especially in her youth, and both Mendelssohn and Schumann had dedicated songs to her. She hosted small gatherings at her house, including an occasion where Smyth met Lili Wach. Smyth's most significant friendship at this time was with Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, whom she met in 1878: "From now onwards I became, and remained for seven years, a semi-detached member of the Herzogenberg family; wherever they were bidden I was bidden too; not a day passed but that one or other of my meals was taken with them...."<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth could read and play from a full score and was admired by Brahms, who valued her criticism of his compositions.<sup>19</sup> Brahms and Elisabeth wrote each other frequently and he stayed in her

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<sup>15</sup> St. John, 20.

<sup>16</sup> St. John, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> St. John, 25.

house whenever he came to Leipzig.<sup>20</sup> Smyth was fortunate to find close companionship while she was away from her family in a foreign country.

Elisabeth's husband, Heinrich, was a well-known composer and president of the *Leipzig Bach Verein*. Although he "made no claim to having anything new to say – merely hoped to hand on a good tradition," he was skilled at counterpoint and began teaching Smyth in 1878.<sup>21</sup> She left the conservatory, formally due to health reasons, and began her counterpoint lessons with Herzogenberg. It is during this time that she also found a sincere appreciation for Johann Sebastian Bach.

Smyth's admiration of Bach was gradual, despite the enthusiasm of her circle:

Strange to say he did not reveal himself to me at once, not even in the *St. Matthew Passion*, which I heard on the ensuing Good Friday for the first time. Yet is it so strange after all? Between Bach and Beethoven there is at least as wide a gulf as between Giotto and Giorgione, and at that time my musical intelligence was only cultivated in patches.<sup>22</sup>

Before six months' time, however, "Bach occupied the place he has ever since held in my heart as the beginning and end of all music."<sup>23</sup> Smyth's mention of the *St. Matthew Passion* is the only direct reference to a specific piece of work by Bach. Unfortunately, she wrote nothing in her memoirs about any specific keyboard works she may have studied. There are several instances of Bach's presence in her counterpoint exercises though. Housed in the British Library, at least four of Smyth's extant counterpoint exercises are explicitly based on themes from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and labeled as such. As labeled in the autograph, Smyth uses themes from No. 3, No. 16, No. 31, and

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<sup>20</sup> St. John, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 173.

<sup>22</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 93.

<sup>23</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 178.

No. 49 of the *St. Matthew Passion*.<sup>24</sup> There are several other counterpoint examples also based on chorale tunes, but these do not refer specifically to the works of Bach.

Although Smyth does not mention specific organ pieces by Bach she knew or studied, the influence of Brahms's circle on her may shed light on the matter. Brahms studied the free works and chorale settings of Bach. Russell Stinson asserts, "Musical scholarship was critical to his existence, and Bach was the composer he most assiduously studied."<sup>25</sup> Brahms exemplifies this vigor with many analytical markings in his personal copies of the *Bach-Gesellschaft* organ music volumes, his manuscript collection, *Octaven und Quinten*, and his study score of the Fantasy in G Major, BWV 572.<sup>26</sup> The former manuscript comprises eleven pages containing roughly 140 examples of parallel octaves, fifths, and related progressions discovered by Brahms in music ranging chronologically from Clemens non Papa to Georges Bizet: A total of nine examples stem from the organ works composed by Bach.<sup>27</sup> Based on the publication dates of his exemplars, Stinson believes that Brahms completed the first five pages between 1863 and 1864.<sup>28</sup> Brahms's study score of the Fantasy in G Major, BWV 572, seems to have originated during the 1860s as well.<sup>29</sup> He likely prepared this score in conjunction with his many performances

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<sup>24</sup> Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, ff. 1-2, British Library Manuscripts.

<sup>25</sup> Russell Stinson, *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141.

<sup>26</sup> Stinson, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Stinson, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Stinson, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Stinson, 147.



of the piece, the earliest of which dates from 1867.<sup>30</sup> In Chapter 7, I will further explore the historical precedents and influences in both Smyth's and Brahms's chorale preludes.

As mentioned earlier, the Herzogenbergs and Henschel were close friends with Brahms, and through these influential figures, Ethel came into contact with Brahms on several occasions.<sup>31</sup> Brahms came to Leipzig nearly every winter and stayed with the Herzogenbergs.<sup>32</sup> Henschel encouraged Brahms to look at a few of her early works, despite her inexperience in formal composition. After playing through two of her early songs, Ethel recalls: "I only remember...when he said, I then thought by way of a compliment, but as I now know in a spirit of scathing irony: 'So this is the young lady who writes sonatas and doesn't know counterpoint!'"<sup>33</sup> Despite the apparent lack of contrapuntal skill in her early works, she had absorbed her studies sufficiently by the time she wrote the chorale preludes, which feature canon, counterpoint, and vorimitation.<sup>34</sup>

Although Smyth never mentions it in her memoirs, Barbara Owen contends, "It is not improbable that Smyth had seen the holograph of Brahms's *O Traurigkeit* chorale prelude that was treasured by Elisabet[h] von Herzogenberg, or at least the version published in 1882."<sup>35</sup> At the very least, she was aware of the published version, especially since she wrote her own settings of the same chorale.

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<sup>30</sup> Stinson, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 241.

<sup>33</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, 75.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, 75.

In her memoirs, Ethel seems ambivalent towards Brahms's personality. While she admired his musical genius and performance capabilities, she found him abrasive and disliked his manner toward women composers and women in general:<sup>36</sup>

Young and enthusiastic though I was, it was impossible to me to join in the chorus of unmitigated admiration that prevailed in that world. For one thing, I never fathomed wherein lay the intellectual supremacy Brahms was credited with, and suspected it was a case of subscribing to a gradually built-up legend.<sup>37</sup>

Collis contends that while Smyth did not think anything Brahms said was illuminating, “She did give him credit for praising Wagner, at the mention of whose name all the smart Leipzigers were accustomed to laugh heartily.”<sup>38</sup> The most fundamental objection Smyth had to Brahms was his attitude toward women. Although he treated Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Lili Wach, and Clara Schumann with the utmost respect, he was rude to women he did not find interesting.<sup>39</sup> Despite his virtues of “being kind and fatherly in his awkward way,” according to Smyth, they were not enough to balance the fact that he refused to take her as seriously as, for instance, the Herzogenbergs and Henschel.<sup>40</sup> Smyth asserts that Brahms, as artist and bachelor, was free to adopt what may be called the poetical variant of the “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” axiom, namely that women are playthings.<sup>41</sup> This German phrase, translated to “Children, kitchen, church,” is roughly equivalent to the well-known English expression, “Barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.”

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<sup>36</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber and Company, 1984), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Collis, 28.

<sup>40</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 238.

<sup>41</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 102.

These phrases reflect the notion that women's priorities lie within the home and therefore should not work outside the home. As a proponent of the phrase, Brahms relegated Smyth to "the ranks of those fit only for the bed and the kitchen, with regular excursions to church by way of serious occupation," according to Collis.<sup>42</sup> Smyth felt very passionately that if she had been a young man, Brahms would have esteemed her works as much as they deserved.<sup>43</sup> She would be pitted against this obstacle with men permanently, especially later in life when she fought to get her works performed in concert halls.

Despite her misgivings about Brahms, Smyth did enjoy his performances on the keyboard and reveals that these were her best images of the great composer:

I like best to think of Brahms at the piano, playing his own compositions, or Bach's mighty organ fugues, sometimes accompanying himself with a sort of muffled roar... he seemed the incarnation of the restrained power in which his own work is forged.<sup>44</sup>

Smyth's autograph manuscripts in the British Library include copies of two complete Brahms songs, which further show her reverence for Brahms's compositions, despite their personality clashes.<sup>45</sup> She also comments in her memoirs about Brahms's reverential view toward the "great dead" masters and the humbleness he displayed when compared to them: "He knew his own worth – what great creator does not? – but in his heart he was one of the most profoundly modest men I ever met, and to hear himself classed with Beethoven and Bach... jarred and outraged him."<sup>46</sup> Smyth's complex yet compassionate

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<sup>42</sup> Collis, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Collis, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 104-5.

<sup>45</sup> Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, ff. 70-83b, British Library Manuscripts. The songs copied are "Botschaft," op. 47, no. 1, and the duet "Edward," op. 75, no. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 238.

view of Brahms may explain how, despite his offenses, he came to be a great influence in her organ compositions.

Through her friendship with the Herzogenbergs and association with Brahms, Smyth was able to meet other significant figures in music, including Antonín Dvořák, Edvard Grieg, Joseph Joachim, Anton Rubinstein, Friedrich Chrysander, the biographer of Händel, and Philipp Spitta, the biographer of Bach.<sup>47</sup> These associations, especially with Chrysander and Spitta, could have added to her knowledge and love of Baroque music and Bach.

Although Smyth was socializing with some of the most profound musical figures of the late-nineteenth century, this circle of musicians was notably guarded in their view of opera, especially ones by Wagner. With the exception of Mozart and Beethoven, Smyth reveals that her group considered opera a negligible form of art, “probably because Brahms had wisely avoided a field in which he would not have shone, and of which the enemy, Wagner, was in possession.”<sup>48</sup> Besides this, she maintains that “the Golden Age of Leipzig had been orchestral and oratorical, and both musicians and concert public were suspicious of music-drama.”<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding their negative opinions, Smyth continued going to operas and eventually wrote six works for the stage. She notes that her favorite opera was *Carmen* and was indignant when “Bizet, Chopin and all the great who talk tragedy with a smile on their lips...were habitually spoken of as small people.”<sup>50</sup> In addition to their biased view

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<sup>47</sup> St. John, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

of contemporary operatic arts, Brahms's circle also neglected the art of orchestration and Smyth laments that it played no part in her instruction.<sup>51</sup> She does not criticize these great musicians much in her memoirs, however, and appreciates the influence they had on her:

But whatever the defects of my environment may have been, in it I learned the necessity, and acquired the love, of hard work, as well as becoming imbued with a deep passion for Bach, which I think is in itself an education.<sup>52</sup>

It is safe to assume that her cultivated love of Bach and admiration of Brahms influenced the style of her organ works. She references stylistic elements of the Baroque era through her choice of chorale text, use of counterpoint, and conservative harmonic structure, especially within the context of the high Romantic tradition of Wagner. Smyth's use of neo-Baroque idioms, like Brahms, reference the compositional world of Bach. These elements are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

Smyth explored new interests, musical and extra-musical, during her summer vacations. Some summers were spent doing counterpoint exercises, composing works, and organizing local performances of Brahms,<sup>53</sup> while others were spent abroad. In the summer of 1882, she spent time mountain climbing with the Wachs in Switzerland. That same year, she spent the winter in Florence, Italy, taking a break from the study of counterpoint. Ignoring Herzogenberg's reminder that Brahms had restudied counterpoint from beginning to end when he was over forty, Smyth absorbed other genres of art, including sculpture and painting.<sup>54</sup> Through her friends in Leipzig, Smyth was able to befriend Adolf von Hildebrand, a sculptor who St. John claims was unknown in England,

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<sup>51</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> St. John, 27-28.

<sup>54</sup> St. John, 39.

“but on the Continent, especially in Germany, he was at one time nearly as famous as Rodin.”<sup>55</sup>

It was at this time in Italy that Smyth also befriended Julia Brewster, Elisabeth von Herzogenberg’s sister, and her husband, Harry Brewster. He would later provide original librettos and translations for her operas, along with becoming a romantic partner to Smyth. Although their relationship defied standard social customs, especially since he was married, it occurred after her chorale preludes were written and the few social ramifications will not be discussed in detail. Only relevant information regarding Brewster’s contributions to her works will be mentioned in the ensuing chapters.

While some winters were spent abroad, Smyth always spent her summers in England. Her appreciation of Bach, cultivated by the Brahms circle, manifested itself further by Smyth’s organ study. She took up organ lessons when she was home in England during the summer of 1885. She describes herself as being “bitten with organ-playing, which, as a sort of athletic exercise, appealed to me far more than the violin, not to speak of the prospect of tackling Bach on his own instrument.”<sup>56</sup> Her teacher at this time was Sir Walter Parratt, organist of St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle from 1882 to 1894 and Master of the Queen’s Music in 1893. Sir George Grove also invited Parratt to become the first Professor of Organ at the Royal College of Music, which was a position he held from 1884 to 1923. Smyth dedicated her set of chorale preludes to him in 1913.

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<sup>55</sup> St. John, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 348.

Parratt is best remembered for the part he played in the renaissance of English music, along with Charles Hubert Hastings Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford.<sup>57</sup>

Frederick Hudson and Rosemary Williamson explain that “his taste and style were founded upon his early association with Samuel Sebastian Wesley and the latter's promotion of J.S. Bach's works, which Parratt continued.”<sup>58</sup> He was a leading supporter and teacher of the organ in England and worked to raise both the standard of organ playing and the status of the organist.<sup>59</sup> Hudson and Williamson highlight Parratt’s overarching philosophy and attitude toward the organ:

He rejected his contemporaries' attempts to make the organ imitate the orchestra, advocating instead a style founded on technical accuracy, clarity of phrasing, and simple registration. From his youth onwards Parratt was conscious of the general decline of taste in church music and, from his appointment to St. George's Chapel, set a standard in his choice of works ranging from Thomas Tallis to Wesley: Here also many works by the rising school of church composers led by Stanford received their first performances.<sup>60</sup>

One of these rising church composers, Herbert Howells, dedicated one of his psalm preludes (op. 32, no. 1) to Parratt.

Walford Davies and Harold E. Darke have written anecdotes about Parratt’s musical tastes and teaching style for the Royal College of Music.<sup>61</sup> As a chorister at St. George’s School in 1882, Davies recalls one of his first lessons at the piano:

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<sup>57</sup> Frederick Hudson and Rosemary Williamson. "Sir Walter Parratt," in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/20942?q=sir+walter+parratt> (accessed January 18, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Hudson and Williamson, “Parratt.”

<sup>59</sup> Hudson and Williamson, “Parratt.”

<sup>60</sup> Hudson and Williamson, “Parratt.”

<sup>61</sup> Walford Davies and Harold E. Darke, “Sir Walter Parratt,” Royal College of Music Center for Performance History, <http://www.cph.rcm.ac.uk/Tour/Pages.Parratt.htm> (accessed February 28, 2013).

He showed me how to play Bach's D major Prelude (From the Forty-eight) and advised me to teach the right-hand part to my left-hand. He taught me score-reading by lending me Palestrina motets; and the score teaching has taught me to feel caged-in, if ever I have to sit at an organ with a close-score arrangement. I can only wish all organists the Parratt-discipline in open-score and clef-reading early in their lives, as also the transposing discipline.<sup>62</sup>

One can assume that Parratt's approach to piano pedagogy parallels his views on organ pedagogy, especially the emphasis on keyboard skills and the Bach repertory. Darke discusses the technical aspects of Parratt's organ teaching:

He laid the greatest stress on cleanness of phrasing and part-playing, and accuracy of notes – qualities especially important in the performance of music which is characteristically polyphonic in its texture. He was intolerant of untidiness and smudginess, and his quick perception soon penetrated superficiality in a performance...No master was more exacting in attention to details of technique; but in the wider aspects of teaching – interpretation and registration – he guided, then wisely left his pupils to work out their own salvation. Perhaps this trait, more than any other, emphasizes his greatness as a teacher. He taught his pupils to think for themselves. Even in the interpretation of Bach, he allowed his pupils the widest latitude. He disliked formality, and encouraged enterprise and initiative. Although his style was restrained he rarely played a piece twice in the same way, or with the same registration. He delighted to seek new ways of interpretation.<sup>63</sup>

These anecdotes shed light on Parratt's pedagogy style and teaching philosophy, which are especially helpful when trying to determine Smyth's experience with organ lessons. Darke describes some of Parratt's favorite and often-performed pieces, including Josef Rheinberger's *Pastoral Sonata* and Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 6.<sup>64</sup> He also reminds us that Parratt was a child prodigy who performed the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier* by memory at age ten. It can be assumed that Smyth, even in her brief summer of lessons

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<sup>62</sup> Davies and Darke, "Sir Walter Parratt."

<sup>63</sup> Davies and Darke, "Sir Walter Parratt."

<sup>64</sup> Davies and Darke, "Sir Walter Parratt." *Pastoral Sonata* refers to Rheinberger's Organ Sonata No. 3, op. 88.



with Parratt, would have been exposed to these composers and Parratt's understanding of organ performance and pedagogy.

Smyth never explicitly states where her organ lessons took place, so it is difficult to determine on what instrument or instruments she would have studied or practiced. Since Parratt was employed both by St. George's Chapel and the Royal College of Music in the summer of 1885, it is likely that Smyth had access to instruments utilized by both institutions. Gray and Davison reconstructed the organ at St. George's Chapel in 1843.<sup>65</sup> The design of the Swell box was commended because it enabled the organist, "from a scarcely audible sound, to arrive at the full Swell by the most gradual increase," according to a review from 1844 of the newly renovated organ.<sup>66</sup> This effect was enhanced by the unusual thickness of the Swell box and the improved shutter mechanism.<sup>67</sup> The reconstruction also included the extension of the compass to F, the addition of a double diapason, fifteenth, and sesquialtra to the flue chorus, and the addition of a corneopane, clarion, and a new hautboy to the reed chorus.<sup>68</sup> Smyth may have also been familiar with organs in churches closer to the family home in Frimley. These would have been more modest parish organs used primarily to accompany the services, in contrast to the large organs in London or at St. George's Chapel.

Along with her lessons with Sir Walter, Smyth also had the opportunity to spend time with Sir Frederick Ouseley, another well-known organist, composer, musicologist,

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<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

<sup>66</sup> T. Willemant, "An account of the restoration of the collegiate chapel of St. George, Windsor" (London: 1844), quoted in Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

<sup>67</sup> Thistlethwaite, 116.

<sup>68</sup> Thistlethwaite, 116.

and Professor of Music at Oxford University.<sup>69</sup> Sir Frederick studied music at the Leipzig Conservatory with Mendelssohn, worked at Hereford Cathedral from 1855 to 1889, and taught Sir John Stainer. Apart from her lessons with Parratt and Ouseley in England, Smyth also refers to having lessons in Leipzig around this time.<sup>70</sup>

Smyth's determination to pursue music brought her to Leipzig at nineteen, and she remained based in Europe for the following ten years: Her early compositions, mostly songs, piano pieces, and chamber music, were frequently heard at private concerts in Germany, while public performances of her works include the String Quintet, op. 1 (1883) and Violin Sonata, op. 7 (1887) at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 349.

<sup>70</sup> Smyth, *Impressions*, 348.

<sup>71</sup> Sophie Fuller, "Dame Ethel Smyth," in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26038> (accessed November 8, 2012).

## Chapter 4:

### Career as Musician, Suffragette, and Writer

After her time studying and traveling abroad, Smyth settled back in England by 1890 and lived with her parents. She made her orchestral debut in London the same year, with her *Serenade in D* and *Overture to Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra.'* After these performances, Smyth's mother died in 1891, and she continued to live with her father at Frimhurst.

With the financial help and lobbying of influential friends, the Royal Choral Society of London performed Smyth's *Mass in D* in 1893. These friends included Mary Ponsonby, the wife of Henry Ponsonby, a British soldier and royal court official who served as Queen Victoria's private secretary, and the Empress Eugénie, who moved to Farnborough in 1885 after the death of her husband, Napoleon III. Farnborough was located in the next town over from Frimley, where Smyth lived. Both Mary Ponsonby and the Empress Eugénie were close with Smyth, who benefited from their influential friends and connections.

Although inspired by her friendship with devout Catholic Pauline Trevelyan, Smyth's *Mass in D* was not meant for church use. She chose to re-order the traditional order of Latin Mass movements so that her Gloria, "the most tempestuous and...best number of all"<sup>1</sup> would take its position as the final movement, mirroring the Anglican

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<sup>1</sup> Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), 191.

order observed during Smyth's lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Despite being inspired by her friendship with Trevelyan, it seems that Smyth's interest in Catholicism waned after completing this work:

Into that work I tried to put all there was in my heart but no sooner was it finished than, strange to say, orthodox belief fell away from me, never to return; and ridiculous as it seems, the fact that Thomas à Kempis would have condemned Shakespeare's sonnets had a great deal to do with it.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the work's premiere, Smyth's father died in 1894. Following the settling of his estate, Smyth moved to a small cottage near Frimhurst, which she called One Oak.<sup>4</sup> From 1894 to 1898, her main goal was to complete and launch her first opera, *Fantasio*. Smyth collaborated with Harry Brewster on the libretto, which was based on a play by Alfred de Musset. She worked tirelessly to get it performed at British and European opera houses, which proved to be very difficult. She makes a reference to characters from Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* to illustrate her recurring situation with opera houses:

My pathetic belief at each of these places that "all was now settled" was due to the ignorance of a tyro who did not realize that an intendant and his first conductor are Spenlow and Jorkins.<sup>5</sup>

In the story, Mr. Spenlow uses Mr. Jorkins's name as an excuse to avoid difficult confrontations with people. Paralleled in Smyth's situations with opera houses, she describes that conductors (i.e. Mr. Spenlow) are not afraid to say that they will produce

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<sup>2</sup> Modern day practice of the Church of England allows for two types of Communion (Mass) liturgies: Order one keeps the Gloria in the traditional place, and order two has the Gloria at the end (<http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/principal-services/holy-communion.aspx>). Edward C. Trenholme documents the history of the switch in his essay, "Anglican Low Mass," from 1931. An online version is available at <http://anglicanhistory.org/liturgy/trenholme1931.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 164.

<sup>4</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 206.

<sup>5</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 219.

your work, because in the background “is the person who has the decision, and who is generally ‘away at the moment but returning shortly’” (i.e. Mr. Jorkins).<sup>6</sup>

After four years of anticipation and disappointment, *Fantasio* premiered in Weimar in 1898. She continued her collaboration with Brewster on her next opera, *Der Wald*, which was premiered in Berlin and London in 1902. The opera that garnered the most acclaim in its day, however, was *The Wreckers*. Premiered in Leipzig in 1906, a *Musical Times* critic described it as “one of the very few modern operas which must count among the great things in art.”<sup>7</sup> Brewster wrote the original libretto in French. Sophie Fuller describes this music as a “lighter, less Germanic style, doubtless influenced by her exposure to Parisian musical circles through her friendship with the influential French patron, the Princess de Polignac.”<sup>8</sup> Her favorite opera, *Carmen*, was also a likely influence in *The Wreckers*.<sup>9</sup>

Her previous difficulties with opera houses did not stop Smyth from asserting her artistic rights. She describes in her memoirs that the conductor in Leipzig, referred to as Hagel, cut the third act of her opera “into an incomprehensible jumble.”<sup>10</sup> Despite a discussion after the performance where Hagel agreed to restore the opera to its original state, Smyth received a note the next morning to the contrary: “A curt word from Hagel saying that the opera must either be played exactly as last night or not at all.”<sup>11</sup> While

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<sup>6</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 219.

<sup>7</sup> Sophie Fuller, “Dame Ethel Smyth,” in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26038> (accessed November 8, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>9</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 268.

<sup>11</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 269.

most female composers at this time would have obliged the conductor, especially in light of previous difficult experiences, Smyth took bold initiative:

I sent express notes to both men, saying that unless my suggestion was adopted I should withdraw the opera, and waited till evenfall for a reply. As far as I remember neither of them replied...on the third day [I] went down early to the empty orchestra, removed every scrap of *Wreckers* material which was still lying on the desks, including the full score, and departed by the midday train for Prague.<sup>12</sup>

Although this may not have been the wisest career move, Smyth's actions in this situation demonstrate her audacity in maintaining her artistic integrity.

*The Wreckers* did not receive its London premiere for another three years. Fuller attributes this delay to the British musical establishment, which "was not well disposed to an unconventional, German-educated female composer."<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, her friends were able to underwrite the premiere, which made the performance possible.<sup>14</sup> Smyth faced considerable difficulties in obtaining public performances, especially in England:

Although her songs from 1908 were successful in France and Germany, they were mainly heard in Britain at private parties given by society patrons.<sup>15</sup>

Despite her difficulties as a composer, Smyth was fortunate to have a circle of influential and wealthy friends who supported her, even beyond musical ventures. Mary Dodge, a rich American friend of Smyth's sister Violet, allowed Smyth to use a room in her house for musical gatherings. Dodge paid the performers and enjoyed the music

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<sup>12</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Fuller, "Smyth."

<sup>14</sup> Fuller, "Smyth."

<sup>15</sup> Fuller, "Smyth."

“hidden behind a locked door in a contiguous chamber, enjoying the music in peace.”<sup>16</sup>

Even more generous than the use of her “exceedingly acoustic” room and paid musicians, Dodge gifted Smyth with enough money to purchase land, build a house, and establish an annual subsidy.<sup>17</sup> Smyth lived in the house and received this annual subsidy until her death in 1944. Without the generosity of Dodge, Smyth’s life and career would certainly have been more arduous, especially as an unmarried woman during this time period.

In 1910, Smyth met Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the Suffragette movement and one of the founders of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). Within a few weeks, Smyth decided to dedicate two years of her life to the women’s suffrage campaign, after which she would return to music:

It became evident to me that to keep out of the movement, to withhold any modicum it was possible to contribute to that cause, was as unthinkable as to drive art and politics into double harness. I decided that two years should be given to the WSPU after which, reversing engines, I would go back to my job.<sup>18</sup>

Smyth participated in rallies, riots, and even vandalism towards the home of Lewis Harcourt, a colonial secretary who offended her with comments regarding the movement.<sup>19</sup> After throwing a rock through his window, Smyth was immediately arrested, put on trial, and placed in jail.<sup>20</sup> She also composed “March of the Women,”

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<sup>16</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 272.

<sup>17</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 272.

<sup>18</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 294.

<sup>19</sup> Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber and Company, 1984), 113.

<sup>20</sup> Collis, 113.

which was a unifying and inspiring feminist hymn that all suffragettes involved in the WSPU were obliged to learn.<sup>21</sup>

Her musical offerings may have been her most significant contribution to the movement as a whole. She composed the “Songs of Sunrise” for chorus and optional orchestra, which used “The March of the Women” as a final movement. The work, directed by Smyth, had its premiere in 1911 at a concert of her music given by the London Symphony Orchestra and Crystal Palace Choir.

Her involvement in the suffrage movement intensified her awareness of her own political position as a woman.<sup>22</sup> Her next opera, *The Boatswain's Mate*, was composed from 1913 to 1914 and is considered her most overtly feminist work.<sup>23</sup> Composed to her own libretto after a short story by William Wymark Jacobs, the opera features a spirited heroine who outsmarts her blundering suitor. It is a lighthearted comedy and, although not performed until 1916, became the most frequently staged of her six operas.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after the composition of *The Boatswain's Mate*, England was involved in World War I. Fuller describes, “For a composer who considered Germany her spiritual home and who had two important opera performances scheduled there for 1915, World War I was particularly devastating.”<sup>25</sup> In her memoirs, Smyth writes:

Mrs. Pankhurst declared that it was now not a question of Votes for Women, but of having any country left to vote in. The Suffrage ship was put out of

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<sup>21</sup> Collis, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>23</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>24</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>25</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”



commission for the duration of the war, and the militants began to tackle the common task.<sup>26</sup>

Smyth served her country by working as a radiographer and was attached to the Thirteenth Division of the French army in Vichy during the war.

During this time, she also began to confront her gradually declining hearing.<sup>27</sup> She continued to compose, but also began writing essays and memoirs, beginning with her autobiography, *Impressions that Remained*, in 1919. Ronald Crichton, editor of her memoirs, concludes that the “isolation from normal surroundings, musical or otherwise, may explain the spontaneity with which she was able to recall and recreate events and feelings of half a long lifetime.”<sup>28</sup> Her vivid depictions of the people, passions, and adventures of her life, coupled with her animated writing style, were popular with the public and supplemented her annual subsidy.<sup>29</sup> Table 1 lists her published books, all of which were published during her lifetime:

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<sup>26</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 314.

<sup>27</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>28</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 317.

<sup>29</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

**Table 1: List of Ethel Smyth's Books with Original Publication Information**

Impressions That Remained	London: Longmans, Green, 1919
Streaks of Life	London: Longmans, Green, 1921
A Three-Legged Tour in Greece	London: Heinemann, 1927
A Final Burning of Boats, Etc.	London: Longmans, Green, 1928
Female Pipings in Eden	Edinburgh: Peter Davies, 1933
Beecham and Pharaoh	London: Chapman and Hall, 1935
As Time Went On	London: Longmans, Green, 1936
Inordinate (?) Affection	London: Cresset Press, 1936
Maurice Baring	London: Heinemann, 1938
What Happened Next	London: Longmans, Green, 1940

Smyth wrote ten books in all, whose success came at a fortuitous time since the deterioration in her hearing prevented her from composing.<sup>30</sup> In her memoir, *As Time Went On*, dedicated to Virginia Woolf, Smyth remarks, “slight yet authentic deafness began to get between me and music.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite her gradually worsening condition, Smyth received many honors in recognition of her work. She received an honorary doctorate from Durham University in 1910, became a Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 1922, and was awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford University in 1926. Her music received numerous performances throughout the 1920s, including revivals of the *Mass in D* and a revised *Boatswain's Mate*. She composed new works during the decade as well, including two operas (*Fête galante* and *Entente cordiale*), a concerto for violin and horn, and her last large-scale work, *The Prison*. She set this last work to a metaphysical text by Brewster.

Smyth was also in demand both as conductor of her own works and as a broadcaster.<sup>32</sup> She used her celebrity, access to the press, and campaigning abilities to fight for causes important to her. These included opportunities for British opera composers and the right for women to play in mainstream professional orchestras.<sup>33</sup> Smyth also composed one final organ piece, “Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air,” in 1938.

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<sup>30</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>31</sup> Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 2, <http://archive.org/details/astimewenton000555mbp> (accessed July 10, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>33</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

Her final years were invigorated by intense relationships with, among others, the writers Edith Somerville, to whom the “Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air” is dedicated, and Virginia Woolf.<sup>34</sup> Woolf mockingly describes their relationship: “An old woman of seventy one has fallen in love with me. It is at once hideous and horrid and melancholy-sad. It is like being caught by a giant crab.”<sup>35</sup> While this description makes Smyth’s affection seem one-sided, the two corresponded until Woolf’s unfortunate suicide in 1941.

Following Woolf’s death, Smyth suffered from diabetes, bouts of bronchitis and pneumonia, and became completely deaf.<sup>36</sup> She died on May 8, 1944.

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<sup>34</sup> Fuller, “Smyth.”

<sup>35</sup> Collis, 180.

<sup>36</sup> Collis, 204.

## Chapter 5:

### Contextualization of Organ Works

As explored in the previous chapter, some of Smyth's works were received to great acclaim, while others remained in the shadows. The output of her organ works is limited and has been generally overlooked, but deserves closer attention. These works display sophisticated compositional skill, which are comparable in construction and inspiration to the chorale preludes of Brahms. By using historical forms and techniques, Smyth's organ works also solidify her involvement in the nineteenth-century Bach revival and contribute to the elevation of English instrumental music. She is already a significant figure in history and women's studies due to her multi-faceted career as a musician, author, and suffragist in Victorian England: it only follows that her organ music warrants more consideration as well.

Novello published Smyth's chorale preludes in 1913 and the set is dedicated to her organ teacher, Sir Walter Parratt. The date these works were composed, however, is less certain. They are generally associated with the 1882-1884 period, but may have been written sometime during or after her Leipzig studies.<sup>1</sup> Owen also contends that "some of them may date from the early days of her study at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1877, where the writing of chorale preludes and fugues was part of the counterpoint curriculum, or from her private study with Herzogenberg."<sup>2</sup> Other chorales may also originate after

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Owen, 74.

1885, when she began taking organ lessons from Sir Walter Parratt.<sup>3</sup> Smyth's autograph manuscripts include different orchestrations of some of these chorales. She wrote sectional orchestra versions of "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," "Du O schönes Weltgebäude," and "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott," and arranged "Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag" for a variable brass ensemble. While there are no specific dates associated with the autograph scores or performances of these unpublished works, the organ versions and existing string and brass versions are essentially transcriptions of each other. This may point to the works as being instrumentation exercises.

In addition to these chorale preludes, Smyth also composed "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air," which was published in 1939 and dedicated to her friend Edith Somerville. The origin of the air is unknown,<sup>4</sup> but is presumed to have been a well-known and beloved melody of Smyth's. It may also have been a favorite melody of Somerville, who was an Irish author. Although this piece post-dates her organ chorales, it still uses a vocal melody as its inspiration and has sections in four-part chorale style: Solo recitative-like lines, labeled *Andante*, or *Tempo I*, alternate with sections in four-part chorale writing, labeled *Meno mosso*, or *Tempo II*. The melody of the Irish tune occurs in quarter notes in the soprano line during these latter sections.

A few unfinished and undated early works supplement Smyth's collection of organ works. These unpublished autographs are located in the manuscript collections of

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<sup>3</sup> Owen, 74.

<sup>4</sup> George Petrie, *Petrie's Complete Irish Music: 1,582 Traditional Melodies* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003). The melody from "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air" cannot be found in this comprehensive collection of traditional Irish melodies. Charles Stanford added two additional volumes to Petrie's original collection (initially published in 1851) in 1902 and 1905. It is possible that Smyth's prelude is based on a newer Irish melody, especially since this piece was not published until 1939, but efforts to determine the original melody have been unsuccessful. Other instances where Smyth uses an Irish melody are clearly marked (e.g. Variations on "Bonny Sweet Robin").

the British Library, and include an organ fugue in B minor and a study on “O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are sketches for two three-part fugues and a four-part fugue in D minor and dozens of counterpoint exercises.<sup>6</sup> Although these works are unfinished, the historical style, use of counterpoint, and choice of chorale texts, where applicable, show the influence of Bach.<sup>7</sup> This influence can also be seen in her piano works, especially in her choice of form. A recently published edition of Smyth’s complete piano works show that she composed canons, preludes, fugues, and baroque dances (e.g. the minuet, sarabande, bourrée, and gigue).<sup>8</sup> This reiterates her interest in and inspiration from historical models, not just in her organ works, but in all her keyboard works. By featuring historical forms and techniques in her keyboard compositions, Smyth, like Parratt, contributed to the elevation English instrumental music.

In order to contextualize Smyth’s works in the larger scope of organ literature and music history, Table 2 shows pieces contemporary with Smyth’s chorales, both when she was working on them and when they were published:

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<sup>5</sup> Sophie Fuller, “Dame Ethel Smyth,” in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26038> (accessed November 8, 2012). It is prudent to note that Brahms wrote a setting of “O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen” as well.

<sup>6</sup> Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXI, ff. 22b-35b, British Library Manuscripts.

<sup>7</sup> Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXI, ff. 22b-35b, British Library Manuscripts.

<sup>8</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Sämtliche Werke für Klavier*, vol. 2, ed. Liana Gavrilă-Serbescu (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 2002).

## **Table 2: Musical Works Contemporary with Ethel Smyth's Chorale Preludes**

\*arranged chronologically and by location (not an exhaustive list)

	<b>Organ pieces contemporary when composed (1882-84)</b>	<b>Organ pieces contemporary when published (1913)</b>
<b>England</b>	W.T. Best, <i>6 Concert Pieces for Organ</i> , (c. 1867) W.T. Best, <i>4 Concert Fantasias for Organ</i> , (c. 1880)	B. Harwood, <i>Organ Concerto</i> , op. 24 (1910) C.V. Stanford, <i>Fantasia and Idyll</i> , op. 121 (1910) John Ireland, <i>Capriccio</i> (1911) C. Wood, <i>16 Preludes</i> (1911/12) F. Bridge, <i>Organ Pieces</i> , Book II (1912) B. Harwood, <i>Sonata no. 2</i> , op. 26 (1912) C.H.H. Parry, <i>Chorale Preludes</i> , set 1 (1912) C.H.H. Parry, <i>Fantasia and Fugue in G Major</i> (1913) H. Howells, <i>Rhapsody No. 1</i> , op. 17 (1915) H. Howells, <i>Psalm Preludes</i> , set 1 (1915-16) C.H.H. Parry, <i>Chorale Preludes</i> , set 2 (1916) R. Vaughan-Williams, <i>3 Preludes</i> (1920)
<b>France</b>	A. Guilmant, <i>Sonata No.1 in D Minor</i> (1874) C.M. Widor, <i>Symphonies 5-8</i> (1879, 1887) C. Franck, <i>3 Pieces</i> (1883) C. Saint-Saëns, <i>Preludes and Fugues</i> , op. 99 (1894)	M. Dupré, <i>3 Preludes and Fugues</i> (1912/20) M. Dupré, <i>Elevation</i> (1912) L. Vierne, <i>24 Pieces in Free Style</i> , 1913 L. Vierne, <i>Symphony No. 3</i> (1913) L. Vierne, <i>Symphony No. 4</i> (1914) H. Mulet, <i>Byzantine Sketches</i> (c. 1920)
<b>Germany</b>	J. Rheinberger, <i>Sonatas</i> , (1868-1901)	J. Brahms, <i>11 Chorale Preludes for Organ</i> (1896) S. Karg-Elert, <i>Chorale Improvisations</i> , op. 65 (1909) M. Reger, <i>Neun Stücke</i> (1913) M. Reger, <i>Introduktion, Passacaglia and Fugue</i> (1913)
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	L. Janáček, <i>Chorale Fantasia</i> (1875) L. Janáček, <i>2 Pieces</i> (c. 1884)	
<b>America</b>	J.K. Paine, <i>Fantasia on Eine' feste Burg</i> , op. 13 (c. 1869) D. Buck, <i>Sonata No. 2 in g minor</i> , op. 77 (1877) H. Parker, <i>Geschwindmarsch</i> (1881) H. Parker, <i>4 Compositions</i> , op. 17 (1890)	C. Ives, <i>Variations on America</i> (1891) C. Ives, <i>Adeste fideles</i> (1897)  [L. Sowerby, 1942-1966, Baroque Response Period]
	<b>Other works contemporary when composed (1882-84)</b> (Major orchestral, chamber, operatic, vocal works, etc.) C. Saint-Saëns, <i>Danse Macabre</i> (1874) J. Strauss II, <i>Die Fledermaus</i> (1874) G. Bizet, <i>Carmen</i> (1875) E. Grieg, <i>Peer Gynt</i> (1875) P. Tchaikovsky, <i>Piano Concerto No. 1</i> (1974-5) J. Brahms, <i>Violin Concerto</i> (1878) M. Bruch, <i>Scottish Fantasy</i> (1880) P. Tchaikovsky, <i>1812 Overture</i> (1880) L. Delibes, <i>Lakmé</i> (1881-82) J. Brahms, <i>Symphony No. 3</i> (1883) C. Saint-Saëns, <i>Carnival of the Animals</i> (1886) G. Verdi, <i>Otello</i> (1887) A. Dvořák, <i>New World Symphony</i> (1893)	<b>Other works contemporary when published (1913)</b> (Major orchestral, chamber, operatic, vocal works, etc.) G. Puccini, <i>Madame Butterfly</i> (1904) E. Elgar, <i>Music Makers</i> (1912) C. Debussy, <i>Jeux</i> (1912-13) C. Debussy, <i>Preludes for Piano</i> , Book II (1912-13) S. Prokofiev, <i>Piano Concerto No. 1</i> (1912) M. Ravel, <i>Daphnis et Chloe</i> (1912) G. Holst, <i>St. Paul's Suite</i> , (1913) S. Prokofiev, <i>Piano Concerto No. 2</i> (1913) A. Schoenberg, <i>Pierrot Lunaire</i> (1912) I. Stravinsky, <i>Rite of Spring</i> (1913)



One can see the variety of music being composed at this time, from organ pieces to symphonies and operas. The late-Romantic tradition was flourishing in the late nineteenth century, while more modern elements, including modality and expressionism, were becoming prevalent in the early twentieth century, especially in the works of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky. A brief scan of the chart will show that Smyth's works look to the past more than the future. Although she did not explore new territory in terms of harmony, form, or style, Smyth was not singular in her attempt to preserve older forms. The conservative nature of her organ compositions reflects the influence of musicology and interest in older music. Her style also echoes the conservative sensibilities of the English and German composers and teachers with whom she associated. C.H.H. Parry, who is credited with reviving English music along with Stanford and Parratt, also composed two sets of organ chorale preludes during this time.

*The Musical Times* reviewed Smyth's chorales in 1913, the same year they were published. The review commends Smyth's stylistic restraint and compares these works to Parry's:

Dr. Ethel Smyth is best known as a writer of involved, rugged, and highly emotional orchestral music. In the works under review she has achieved simplicity, regular outline, and intellectual calm without sapping the strength of her style. ... The Choral Preludes are written throughout in four real parts, and as is proper and necessary, the tonality is guarded. These restrictions, which place an unwonted control upon the composer's imagination, never seem to put her at a loss for a distinctive idea. There are few composers who can write living music in this form, and it is satisfactory to find that two of those who can do it well – and think it worth while – are British musicians. Patriotic organists who are jealous of their artistic standard have an opportunity to satisfy both claims by giving to these works the attention which they have shown to the choral preludes of Sir Hubert Parry.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Short Choral Preludes, Vol. I., No. 1-3. Vol. II., No. 4-5 by Ethel Smyth," *The Musical Times* 54, no. 846 (Aug. 1, 1913): 524, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/905782> (accessed October 3, 2013).

Although Smyth bore rejection and complaints throughout her career, which are amply described in her memoirs and letters, the musical establishment of *The Musical Times* seemed to have given her a rave review immediately after her chorale preludes were published. This only reinforces the need for modern performers to understand the quality of her work.

Many composers included in Table 2 wrote in older styles in the Romantic and Modern eras. Chorales, especially, served as a wellspring of inspiration, even for Catholic composers. Max Reger used expanded harmonic language while maintaining Baroque forms in his *13 Chorale Preludes*, op. 79b, from 1903 and other works like fantasies, preludes, and fugues. Reger also added a third musical part to Bach's *Two-Part Inventions* with Karl Straube in 1903, thus creating his *Schule des Triospiels*.<sup>10</sup> Sigfrid Karg-Elert, who studied at Leipzig Conservatory, featured older forms, while incorporating expanded tonality, in his *Choral-Improvisationen*, op. 65, from 1909. Marcel Dupré also explored chorale treatments, albeit more conservatively, in his *79 Chorales for Organ*, published in 1932.

The influence of musicology and historical research of the nineteenth century affected American composers as well. Composers like Charles Ives wrote in variation form and based works on familiar tunes. Leo Sowerby, another American, went through a "Baroque Response Period" from 1942 to 1966 and wrote preludes and meditations on hymn tunes, chorales, and chants.<sup>11</sup> Although these composers do not have a direct relationship with Smyth, they all share the overwhelming influence of historical forms.

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<sup>10</sup> John Williamson, "Max Reger," in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23064> (accessed November 8, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Rayfield, "Leo Sowerby," *The American Organist*, Vol. 10 No. 11, (Nov. 1976): 40.

Smyth's contributions to the traditional genre of organ chorales were relatively conventional, but nonetheless comparable to contemporary male composers.

The amount of compositions produced by Smyth is not as great as others who dedicated their lives to music. This may be the result of her many interests, including the aforementioned ventures into writing and politics. Nonetheless, her output is diverse, with major stage, vocal, chamber, and instrumental works. Table 3 shows her complete published works list, organized by genre and date:

**Table 3: List of Published Musical Works by Ethel Smyth**

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	<b>Premiere</b>
<b>Stage</b>	Fantasio	1892-4	Weimar, 1898
	Der Wald	1899-1901	London, 1902
	The Wreckers	1902-4	London, 1909
	The Boatswain's Mate	1913-14	London, 1916
	Fête galante	1912-2	Birmingham, 1923
	Entente Cordiale	1923-4	Bristol, 1926
<b>Vocal</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	<b>Premiere</b>
	Lieder und Balladen, op. 3	c. 1877	Leipzig, 1886
	Lieder, op. 4	c. 1877	Leipzig, 1886
	Song of Love, op. 8	1888	n/a
	Mass in D	1891	London, 1893
	Spring Canticle	1899-1901	Mainz, 1903
	Songs	1908	London, 1909
	Hey Nonny No!	1910	Leipzig, 1911
	Sleepless Dreams	1910	Vienna, 1912
	March of the Women	1910	London, 1911
	Songs of Sunrise	1910	London, 1911
	3 Moods of the Sea	1913	Vienna, 1913
	3 Songs	1913	Vienna, 1913
	Dreamings	1920	London, 1920
Soul's Joy (from Fête galante)	1923	London, 1923	
The Prison	1929-30	London, 1930	
<b>Orchestral</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	<b>Premiere</b>
	Serenade in D	1890	London, 1890
	Overture to <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	1890	London, 1890
	Fête galante, suite	1924	n/a
	2 French Folk Melodies	1929	n/a
	2 Orchestral Preludes	1929-30	n/a
Entente cordiale, suite	1935	n/a	
<b>Chamber</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	
	String Quartet in d minor	1880	n/a
	Piano Trio in d minor	1880	n/a
	String Quintet in E major, op. 1	1883	n/a
	String Quartet in c minor	c. 1883	n/a
	String Trio in D major	1887	n/a
	String Quartet in e minor	1902-12	n/a
	Variations on Bonny Sweet Robin	1927	n/a
Hot Potatoes	1930	n/a	
<b>Duet/Solo</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	
	Piano Sonata in C major	1877	n/a
	Piano Sonata "Geistinger"	c. 1877	n/a
	Piano Sonata in D major	1877	n/a
	Variations on an Original Theme	1878	n/a
	Aus der Jugendzeit!!	c. 1878-80	n/a
	Individual Pieces	c. 1878-1889	n/a
	Prelude and Fugue in f (piano)	1880	n/a
	Cello Sonata in c minor	1880	n/a
	Chorale Preludes (organ)	1882-4?	n/a
	Prelude and Fugue for Thin People (piano)	c. 1883	n/a
	Cello Sonata, op. 5	1887	n/a
	Violin Sonata, op. 7	1887	n/a
Prelude on Traditional Irish Air (organ)	1938	n/a	

Table 3 shows Smyth's range as a composer.<sup>12</sup> Few female composers of Smyth's caliber worked so tirelessly to make their compositions known. By exploring her skills as an organ composer, the next chapter will reveal the merit in her organ compositions and help encourage the proper recognition of her works.

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<sup>12</sup> For further reference on all her known compositions, including dates of later revisions, instrumentation details, and information on unpublished works, one may consult the works list from Sophie Fuller's entry, "Dame Ethel Smyth" on Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online.

## Chapter 6:

### The Published Organ Works of Ethel Smyth

Novello originally published Smyth's chorale preludes in 1913, and Boosey and Hawkes published her "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air" in 1939. While first edition copies of these organ works are available at some British institutions, the Vivace Press edition of the chorale preludes, edited by Colette Ripley, is the only edition readily available for purchase by American organists today. An electronic version of "Prelude on a Traditional Air" will be available soon, according to Alex Joannides, publishing assistant at Boosey and Hawkes.<sup>1</sup> Despite the limited repertoire – the Vivace edition contains six modest chorale preludes – Smyth demonstrates great variety in regard to chorale texts, musical form, and meter.

The chorales set by Smyth range from liturgical texts depicting the Passion and the triumphant Resurrection, to private devotional texts asking the Lord for health and strength. As a student living in Germany, she would have been able to hear chorales performed in local Lutheran churches. The selection of these texts by Smyth may indicate her preference, her teacher's preferences, or may simply reflect popular chorales of the day. Only two of the chorales exist in an English hymnal by the publication date of 1913: "Erschienen ist der herrlich' Tag" can be found in the 1909 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*,<sup>2</sup> and "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid" was translated in 1863 for the *Chorale Book*

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Joannides, e-mail message to author, April 4, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Hymns Ancient and Modern for Use in the Services of the Church with Accompanying Tunes* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1909), 200.

of England.<sup>3</sup> The other chorales do not exist in the 1800, 1870, or 1909 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, which points to a particularly German influence in Smyth's selection of chorale texts. Since there is no detailed description of her organ compositions in her memoirs, we do not know the circumstances surrounding the conception of these pieces. As mentioned in Chapter 5, they are generally ascribed to the 1882-1884 period, but may have been written sometime during or after her Leipzig studies.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to know that both Smyth and Brahms set the chorale tunes "O Gott, du frommer Gott" and "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid." As mentioned earlier, there also exists an unpublished version of "O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen" by Smyth, which was also set by Brahms.

Putting aside speculation, we can examine what does exist in Smyth's hand. Three of her chorales can be labeled as a melody chorale, which George Stauffer describes as a chorale "in which the chorale tune is set forth in the soprano with very little embellishment."<sup>5</sup> Melody chorales could also be considered a simplified version of the cantus firmus chorale, as described by Russell Stinson:

In a cantus firmus chorale, the entire hymn tune appears in long notes, like a cantus firmus in a Renaissance Mass. The tune usually sounds in the soprano or bass, with little or no ornamentation, and with interludes in between phrases.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Winkworth, *The Chorale Book for England* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1863), under "Christian Classics Ethereal Library: Chorale Book for England," <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/winkworth/chorales.html> (accessed September 30, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 74.

<sup>5</sup> George Stauffer, preface to *J.S. Bach Complete Organ Works: Pedagogical Works* (Colfax: Wayne Leupold Editions, 2010), xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Stinson, *J.S. Bach's Great Eighteen Organ Chorales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

“Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” the first setting of “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” and “Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag” by Smyth are all cantus firmus, or melody, chorales and contain varying degrees of vorimitation and interludes between phrases. Johann Pachelbel was the most prolific composer of cantus firmus chorales for organ and also codified the use of pre-imitation for some or all of the chorale phrases.<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the eighteenth century, this type of chorale was a standard form in Central Germany.<sup>8</sup> Composers such as Friedrich Zachow, Johann Buttstett, Johann Walther, and Johann Christoph Bach cultivated this form and passed it on to future generations, including J.S. Bach and his descendents.

Smyth also wrote in forms other than the cantus firmus chorale, including the short chorale canon<sup>9</sup> (second setting of “O Gott, du frommer Gott”) and the ornamental chorale. Smyth’s ornamental chorale “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott” presents the chorale melody in one voice with extensive ornamentation. Developed primarily by Heinrich Scheidemann and Dieterich Buxtehude, this form presents “the complete hymn melody in one voice, usually the soprano, amid profuse embellishment,” as described by Russell Stinson.<sup>10</sup> J.S. Bach wrote many chorales in this form, including “Schmücke dich, O meine Seele” and “Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland” from the Great Eighteen Leipzig chorales. Brahms “Es ist ein Ros’ entsprungen” is a later example of an ornamental chorale, which favors written-out ornaments over ones indicated by symbol. Smyth

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<sup>7</sup> Stinson, *Great Eighteen*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Stinson, *Great Eighteen*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> George Stauffer and Ernest May, *J.S. Bach as Organist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Stinson, *Great Eighteen*, 8.



constructs her prelude on “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” in a similar manner. She also infuses elements of the chorale motet, where each phrase of the chorale serves as a point of imitation in the accompanying voices, in “Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag” and the fugue on “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid.”

With this variety in forms, Smyth also explores a variety of meters that complement the chorale texts. The seven-stanza text of “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” written by Johann Franck, describes a longing for death. Johann Crüger composed the corresponding chorale melody in 1649. The following are the first two stanzas in the original German with an English translation:

1. Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,  
magst gefallen, wem du willst;  
ist doch deine eitle Freude  
stets mit lauter Angst umhüllt.  
Denen, die den Himmel hassen,  
will ich ihre Weltlust lassen;  
mich verlangt nach dir allein,  
lieber Herr und Heiland mein!

1. Thou, O Fair Creation-Building!  
Let them joy in thee who may;  
All thy light-spun show and gilding  
Cloud with grief their best display.  
Leave to him, the heaven-despiser,  
Bliss that makes the soul no wiser:  
My great wish is but to be,  
Jesu, saving-health, with thee.

2. Müde, die der Arbeit Menge  
und der heiße Strahl beschwert,  
wünschen, daß des Tages Länge  
werde durch die Nacht verzehrt,  
daß sie nach so vielen Lasten  
könnten sanft und süße rasten.  
Mein Wunsch ist, bei dir zu sein,  
lieber Herr und Heiland mein!<sup>11</sup>

2. Weary ones, with serving cumbered,  
Faint with burdens and the sun,  
Wish the hours more swiftly numbered,  
And the day to darkness run;  
That, when many toils had pressed them,  
They might sweetly, softly rest them:  
My great wish is but to be,  
Jesu, my repose, with thee!<sup>12</sup>

Smyth set this solemn text in 4/4 meter. Common time, especially in the Baroque era, was considered a church meter and had connotations of emphasis and gravity.<sup>13</sup> Laukvik

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<sup>11</sup> Johann Franck, “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale140-Eng3.htm> (accessed March 27, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Frothingham, *Metrical Pieces, Translated and Original, Volume 2* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1870), 232, <http://books.google.com/books?id=7I1JAAAAYAAJ> (accessed July 9, 2013).

describes that as a basic rule for the German baroque, meters of greater value are in the church style, “where a heavy and emphatic performance is generally linked to a sedate and slow speed.”<sup>14</sup> Although Smyth wrote these during the Romantic era, the influence of historical and Baroque models justifies this comparison. These influences will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Other chorales in 4/4 time include the first setting of “O Gott, du frommer Gott” and both the prelude and fugue on “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid.” The text of the former chorale asks God for physical, emotional, and spiritual health and strength and is typically used for private devotion or consecration. The German text of “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” below with translation, was written by Johann Heermann in 1630:

1. O Gott, du frommer Gott,  
Du Brunnenquell guter Gaben,  
Ohn' den nichts ist, was ist,  
Von dem wir alles haben:  
Gesunden Leib gib mir,  
Und daß in solchem Leib  
Ein' unverletzte Seel'  
Und rein Gewißen bleib'

1. O god, thou faithful God!  
Thou well-spring of all blessing!  
In whom we all exist,  
From whom we're all possessing!  
Give me a body sound;  
And in it, builded well,  
Let an unblemished soul  
And a good conscience dwell.

2. Gib, daß ich tu' mit Fleiß,  
Was mir zu tun gebühret,  
Wozu mich dein Befehl  
In meinem Stande führet!  
Gib, daß ich's tue bald,  
Zu der Zeit, da ich soll,  
Und wenn ich's tu', so gib,  
Daß es gerate wohl!<sup>15</sup>

2. Afford me will and strength  
To do the work assigned me;  
Whereto, in my true place,  
Thy law may call and find me.  
Let it be timely done,  
With eager readiness;  
And what is done in thee  
Have ever good success!<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 1996), 80.

<sup>14</sup> Laukvik, 78-79. Examples include 3/2, 6/4, cut time, common time, 3/4, 6/8, and 2/4.

<sup>15</sup> Johann Heerman, “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale013-Eng3.htm> (accessed 27 March 2013).

This chorale tune has its origins in the *Meiningen Gesangbuch*.<sup>17</sup> Mendelssohn may have popularized it to English audiences, since the quartet “Wirf dein Angelegen auf den Herrn” (“Cast Thy Burden Upon the Lord”), no. 15 from *Elijah*, contains a hidden chorale quotation based on “O Gott, du frommer Gott.”<sup>18</sup>

The text of “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” was originally found in the *Würzburg Gesangbuch* of 1628 and was translated into English by Catherine Winkworth in the *Chorale Book for England* in 1863. The text depicts the pain and suffering of Christ’s Passion. The first three stanzas in original and translated text are presented here:

1. O Traurigkeit,  
O Herzeleid!  
Ist das nicht zu beklagen?  
Gott des Vaters einig Kind  
Wird ins Grab getragen.

1. O darkest woe!  
Ye tears, forth flow!  
Has earth so sad a wonder?  
God the Father’s only Son  
Now lies buried yonder.

2. O große Not!  
Gott selbst ist tot,  
Am Kreuz ist er gestorben,  
Hat dadurch das Himmelreich  
Uns aus Lieb' erworben.

2. O sorrow dread!  
God’s Son is dead!  
But by His expiation  
Of our guilt upon the cross  
Gained for us salvation.

3. O Menschenkind,  
Nur deine Sünd'  
Hat dieses angerichtet,  
Da du durch die Missetat  
Warest ganz vernichtet.<sup>19</sup>

3. O sinful man,  
it was the ban  
Of death on thee that brought Him  
Down to suffer for thy sins,  
And such woe hath wrought Him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Frothingham, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Eatock, *Mendelssohn and Victorian England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 129.

<sup>18</sup> Friedhelm Krummacher, “Mendelssohn’s Music in Relation to England,” from *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 96.

<sup>19</sup> Johann Rist, “O Traurigkeit,” Musicanet, <http://www.musicanet.org/robokopp/Lieder/otraurig.html> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Winkworth, “O Darkest Woe,” from the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 448.

One final chorale written in a church meter is Smyth's "Erschienen ist der herrlich' Tag." Although the text is a joyful one depicting Christ's triumph over sin and death, the 3/4 meter may serve to highlight the theological grounding of the text. Written by Nicolaus Herman in 1560, the first of fourteen stanzas is listed below with an English translation:

1. Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,  
dran sich niemand gnug freuen mag;  
Christ, unser Herr, heut triumphiert,  
all seine Feind gefangen führt.  
Halleluja!<sup>21</sup>

1. Here shining is the splendid day.  
More joy than we have words to say.  
Christ our Lord has triumphed now,  
and leads in captive every foe.  
Hallelujah!<sup>22</sup>

Contrasting with the serious church meters, Smyth uses lighter chamber meters to complement her more joyful settings. The second setting of "O Gott, du frommer Gott," a canon written in 12/8 time, contains less pathos than her first setting, due in part to the meter. Canons are musical representations of law and order, and in this setting, Smyth chooses to highlight the lighter aspects of God's constancy and faith. "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott," a joyful Easter and private devotional text, also makes use of a chamber meter. Although the piece oscillates between major and minor tonalities and has a contemplative affect, Smyth uses the meter to indicate the underlying message of hope. Paul Gerhardt wrote the original text of seventeen stanzas in 1653. Below are the first two stanzas of his text with an English translation:

1. Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,  
Du betrübte Seele!

1. Raise yourself up to your God,  
you troubled soul!

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<sup>21</sup> Nikolaus Herman, "Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag," Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/CM/Erschienen-ist-der-herrlich-Tag.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Farseth, "Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag Translation," Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale091-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

Warum liegst du, Gott zum Spott,  
In der Schwermuthshöhle?  
Merkst du nicht des Satans List?  
Er will durch sein Kämpfen  
Deinen Trost, den Jesus Christ  
Dir erworben, dämpfen.

Why do you lie, in mockery of God,  
in the slough of melancholy ?  
Are you not aware of Satan's cunning?  
through his opposition he wants  
to lessen your consolation,  
which Jesus Christ gained for you.

2. Schüttele deinen Kopf und sprich:  
"Fleuch, du alte Schlange!  
Was erneurst du deinen Stich,  
Machst mir angst und bange?  
Ist dir doch der Kopf zerknickt,  
Und ich bin durchs Leiden  
Meines Heilands dir entzückt  
In den Saal der Freuden."<sup>23</sup>

2. Shake your head and say:  
flee, you old serpent!  
Why do you renew your sting  
and make me anxious and fearful?  
Now your head is crushed,  
and through the suffering  
of my Saviour I am taken from you  
into the hall of joy.<sup>24</sup>

Meter and musical form are subtle, yet significant, ways that Smyth portrays the chorale text. Her sophisticated treatment of these fundamental elements points to her skills as a thoughtful composer.

When comparing Smyth's choice of musical form and text with the chorale preludes of Brahms, one notices several similarities: both composers wrote cantus firmus chorale settings of "O Gott, du frommer Gott" and a prelude and fugue on "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid." In addition to these direct relationships, there are similarities regarding contrapuntal activity, motivic treatment, and expressive elements. These characteristics highlight the sophisticated compositional skills of Smyth, which are comparable to those of Brahms.

As mentioned earlier, Barbara Owen contends that it is not improbable that Smyth had seen the holograph of Brahms's "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid" chorale prelude that

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Gerhardt, "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott," Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale057-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Francis Browne, "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott Translation," Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale057-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

was treasured by Elisabeth von Herzogenberg.<sup>25</sup> The extent of any other direct influence of Brahms's organ chorales is speculative. Brahms's op. 122 post-dates Smyth's works, but Owen posits that the final versions may have been revisions of earlier drafts:

Brahms had written one known chorale prelude, upon *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid*, in the 1850s. As he seems rarely to have satisfied himself with only one attempt at any genre, did he also write, or at least sketch out, drafts for any others during this early period? Some fairly well-established facts about Brahms's *modus operandi* should be examined here. One is that Brahms is known to have subjected his works to extensive revisions...Brahms could never be accused of being too easily satisfied. Virtually everything he ever published, even some relatively short works, seems to have undergone gestation periods of varying length.<sup>26</sup>

Even with the possibility of earlier drafts and their many similarities, it is unlikely that Brahms's organ chorales, aside from his "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid" setting, served as a direct influence in Smyth's chorales. However, both composers share common inspiration and methods rooted in the Baroque era. Brahms's and Smyth's similarities are most likely attributed to their mutual study of counterpoint and admiration of Bach's music. It is possible that Smyth may have been introduced to some of Bach's significant organ collections through her counterpoint lessons with Herzogenberg or her organ lessons with Sir Walter Parratt. Even nominal exposure to works such as the *Orgelbüchlein*, the partitas, or the Great Eighteen chorales would provide plenty of inspiration and models for her own compositions. Although Smyth did not describe any such instances in her memoirs, one cannot out rule the possibility. Before highlighting the fundamental similarities in Smyth's and Brahms's organ chorales, however, one must have a brief look at Brahms's organ background.

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<sup>25</sup> Owen, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, 41.

The composition dates of Brahms's organ chorale works range from the first version of the "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid" prelude, written in 1858, to his op. 122 chorale preludes, composed in 1896 and published posthumously in 1902. From what little evidence exists, William Little asserts "Brahms's interest in the organ appears to have developed relatively late, at a time in the mid-1850s, when his mastery of the piano was already firmly established."<sup>27</sup> Even though he was only in his twenties at the time, Little points out that Brahms was already an accomplished pianist and composer before he considered taking up the organ. In 1855, Brahms studied counterpoint because he thought his theoretical skills were deficient.<sup>28</sup> Brahms exchanged polyphonic compositions and exercises with violinist Joseph Joachim for over a year: Both had hopes of improving their contrapuntal skills.<sup>29</sup> Smyth echoed the same desires when she studied counterpoint in Leipzig. The primary focus of Brahms's studies was on canonic and fugal writing, of which he composed several examples.<sup>30</sup> Little adds, "Simultaneously, and perhaps as a natural corollary of these studies, Brahms experienced a reawakening of interest in the organ."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Smyth's study of counterpoint could have inspired her Baroque-influenced organ chorales and desire to take organ lessons. Only two of Brahms's organ works were published during his lifetime: the Fugue in Ab minor, WoO 8, in 1864 and the Chorale Prelude and Fugue on "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," WoO 7,

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<sup>27</sup> William Little, "Brahms and the Organ – Redivivus" from *The Organist as Scholar: Essays in Memory of Russell Saunders*, ed. Kerala Snyder (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1994), 293.

<sup>28</sup> Little, "Brahms," 281.

<sup>29</sup> Russell Stinson, *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128.

<sup>30</sup> Little, "Brahms," 281.

<sup>31</sup> Little, "Brahms," 281.

in 1882. Despite the lack of documentation regarding Brahms's personal views of the organ, one can see that his musical sensitivity and insight permeated his organ works. Heinrich von Herzogenberg, Smyth's counterpoint teacher, openly proclaimed Brahms as his artistic model and mentor.<sup>32</sup> Herzogenberg's influence as a teacher may have added to Smyth's admiration of Brahms's artistry, even though she was not a fan of his character.

When comparing Brahms's chorales to Smyth's chorales, it is apparent that they utilize similar contrapuntal, motivic, and expressive elements to highlight the text. Aside from their explicit use of counterpoint in their fugal settings of "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," Brahms and Smyth also use more subtle instances of counterpoint. In the vorimitation of "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott," Smyth weaves small motivic cells drawn from the chorale melody. Example 1 shows the triplet motive outlining the chorale melody and decorating important melodic intervals. Brahms's vorimitation in "O Gott, du frommer Gott," shown in Example 2, also highlights opening intervals and introduces the sighing motive, which is used throughout the work.

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<sup>32</sup> Little, "Brahms," 290.



Example 1: Smyth, “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” mm. 1-5

**Andante con moto**

Man. I

Man. II

Ped.

Example 2: Brahms, “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” mm. 1-3.2

f

Brahms also has extensive vorimitation in his setting of “Mein Jesu, der du mich.” In addition to vorimitation techniques, Smyth also incorporates inner voice canonic entries in her “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” prelude to add contrapuntal interest.

Example 3: Smyth, “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid,” m. 1 with brackets indicating canonic entries

**Andante larghetto**

The musical score is for the first measure of the piece. It is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is 'Andante larghetto'. The dynamics are 'mp dolce' in the treble staff and 'mp' in the lower bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody starting on G4, with brackets indicating canonic entries. The bass staff contains a supporting line. The lower bass staff contains a single note on G2.

All these methods reinforce the chorale melody in an understated and sophisticated manner.

Rhythmic motives add another layer of interest to their works. Brahms and Smyth both utilize a triplet against duplet figure in their works: Smyth uses it in the second setting of “O Gott du frommer Gott,” and Brahms uses it in his “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” prelude. They also use the *suspiratio* figure, a rhetorical rhythmic motive, in their settings of “O Gott du frommer Gott.” Dietrich Bartel describes this figure as “a specific use of rests within a composition employed to express sighs, gasps, or affectations of sighing or longing.”<sup>33</sup> As such, these figures may represent our eternal longing and search for truth, as set forth in the chorale text. Example 4 and Example 5 highlight the liberal use of *suspiratio* figures by both composers:

<sup>33</sup> Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 392.

Example 4: Brahms, “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” mm. 54-56



Example 5: Smyth, “O Gott du frommer Gott (setting 1),” mm. 6-8.1, with brackets indicating *suspirans* figures



Along with using rhythmic *suspiratio* figures to express gasps and longing, Smyth also incorporates different sighing motives in “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude.” She uses articulation, rather than rhetorical rests, to group notes together, and adds the pulsating bass line to create a steady accompanimental pattern. Smyth adds a heightened spiritual dimension to the work through these figures that represent both our longing for and the

constancy of God’s love and faith. Brahms uses a similar flowing sixteenth note and pulsating eighth-note pattern in “Herzlich tut mich verlangen.” The similarities between these can be seen in Example 6 and Example 7 below:

Example 6: Smyth, “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” mm. 1-2, accompanying voices only (manual II and pedal)

The score for Example 6 consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Manual II' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Pedal'. Both staves are in a bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The Manual II staff features a complex texture of sixteenth and thirty-second notes, with some notes beamed together and others separated. The Pedal staff features a simpler pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Both parts are marked with a dynamic of *p* (piano).

Example 7: Brahms, “Herzlich tut mich verlangen,” mm. 1-2, manuals only

The score for Example 7 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has two staves, both in a bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 6/4. The top staff of each system features a flowing sixteenth-note pattern, while the bottom staff features a pulsating eighth-note pattern. The first system is marked with a dynamic of *p* and the instruction *molto legato*. The second system continues the same musical material.

Both composers appear to reference the accompanimental pattern in Bach’s “Ich ruf zu dir,” BWV 639, from the *Orgelbüchlein*:

Example 8: J.S. Bach, “Ich ruf’ zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ,” BWV 639, mm. 1-2, accompanying voices only (manual II and pedal)

Although an accompanimental pattern made up of eighth and sixteenth notes may be considered commonplace in music, Brahms and Smyth follow the approach taken by Bach and use simple elements to enhance the contemplative affect.

In addition to contrapuntal techniques and rhythmic motives, Brahms and Smyth use a variety of expressive elements to emphasize the text, including dynamics, chromaticism, and rhetorical figures. Dynamic indications in these works typically represent manual designations or relative registrational schemes, while other markings represent actual dynamic changes in the form of crescendos and decrescendos. Brahms is explicit in the correlation between dynamics and manuals in the second setting of “O Welt, ich muss dich lassen,” where he indicates “Manual II” above the *piano* marking and “Manual III” above the *pianissimo* marking.<sup>34</sup> Other explicit instructions occur in Brahms’s “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” where he indicates manual changes that

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<sup>34</sup> Johannes Brahms, *Complete Organ Works*, ed. George Bozarth (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1983), 54.

complement dynamic changes. This is also the only work where he writes “Choral” above the melody, which travels between the soprano and tenor voices.<sup>35</sup> Although Smyth does not have overt manual changes, she does use dynamic markings to indicate relative dynamic relationships between the manuals. As seen in “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude” and “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” Smyth ensures the prominence of the chorale melody by indicating a louder dynamic marking than the accompanying voices.

As descendants of the Baroque era and products of the Romantic era, Brahms and Smyth make use of restrained, but effective, chromaticism and rhetorical gestures. The *passus duriusculus*, as described by Bartel, “is a ‘hard’ or ‘harsh’ (*duriusculus*) ‘step’ or ‘passage’ (*passus*), musically realized through various uses of the semitone.”<sup>36</sup> The *saltus duriusculus* is a dissonant leap.<sup>37</sup> The non-diatonic leaps and descending tritones (i.e. *saltus duriusculus*) in Brahms’s “Herzliebster Jesu” and the descending chromatic fourths (i.e. descending *passus duriusculus*) in the second setting of “O Welt, ich muss dich lassen,” are two examples of how he uses chromaticism and rhetorical gestures to underscore the severe text. These can be seen in Example 9 and Example 10:

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<sup>35</sup> Brahms, 43-45.

<sup>36</sup> Bartel, 357. For more extensive descriptions of musical-rhetorical gestures, see Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Bartel, 381.

Example 9: Brahms, “Herzliebster Jesu,” mm. 1-4, with brackets indicating occurrences of the *saltus duriusculus*

**Adagio**

The musical score for Example 9 consists of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 1-3, and the second system contains measures 4-6. The music is written for piano in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked 'Adagio'. The first system begins with a forte (f) dynamic. Brackets in the bass clef of both systems indicate occurrences of the *saltus duriusculus*.

Example 10: Brahms, “O Welt, ich muss dich lassen (setting 2),” mm. 20-21, with brackets indicating occurrences of the *passus duriusculus*

The musical score for Example 10 consists of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 20-21, and the second system contains measures 22-23. The music is written for piano in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. Brackets in the bass clef of both systems indicate occurrences of the *passus duriusculus*.

Smyth also uses the *saltus duriusculus* and *passus duriusculus* in several of her works, including “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott.”

Example 11: Smyth, “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” mm. 24-25, accompanying voices only (manual II and pedal), with brackets indicating occurrences of the *passus duriusculus*

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Manual II and Pedal. Both parts are in a 9/16 time signature and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The Manual II part features a complex, chromatic melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The Pedal part provides a harmonic foundation with a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern. Brackets are placed above the Manual II staff and below the Pedal staff to highlight specific chromatic passages identified as the *passus duriusculus*.

These instances of the *passus duriusculus*, combined with the prevalence of chromaticism throughout this section, reference the lines regarding Satan and sin in the chorale text. As mentioned earlier, Brahms and Smyth also use the sighing, or *suspiratio*, figure, both a rhetorical and rhythmic device, in many of their works.<sup>38</sup>

The use of these rhetorical gestures, especially in relation to music inspired by a text, stem from the guiding Baroque philosophy of the “Doctrine of the Affections”:

An affection consists of a rationalized emotional state or passion. The Baroque composer planned the affective content of each work...with all the devices of his craft, and he expected the response of his audience to be based on an equally rational insight into the meaning of his music. All the elements of the music were interpreted affectively.<sup>39</sup>

In oratory, speakers rely on the rules and techniques of the *decoratio* “in order to embellish ideas with rhetorical imagery and to infuse his speech with passionate language,” according to George Buelow.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, musicians in the Baroque era translated these ideas to music. One such theorist was Christoph Bernhard, who published *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* around 1650. He describes certain musical figures,

<sup>39</sup> George Buelow, “Rhetoric and Music,” in Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43166> (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Buelow, “Rhetoric and Music.”



including the *passus duriusculus*, the *saltus duriusculus*, and the *suspiratio*, among dozens of others, which were associated with specific rhetorical styles and affects. Through the use of these rhetorical gestures commonly associated with pathos, gravity, and anguish, both Smyth and Brahms are able to heighten the weariness and anguish of the text. Smyth also uses rhetorical gestures to express joy, as seen in “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott.” Here, the triple meter and syncopation complement the large diatonic leaps in the melody and accompaniment, helping to represent the joyful Easter text. There is no direct evidence that Smyth studied these treatises, but she may have encountered them during her studies in Leipzig. The Leipzig Conservatory had instructors and lectures on the history of music, acoustics, and aesthetics, but it is unclear how these lectures were integrated into the total curriculum.<sup>41</sup> She may have also adopted the rhetoric by studying with Herzogenberg, who deeply admired the works of Bach. Unfortunately, she does not describe these topics in her writings, but the influence of the Baroque rhetorical style, however transmitted, is evident in her organ works.

We have already discussed meter in regard to Smyth’s works earlier in this chapter, but it is worth mentioning that Brahms had a similar approach. The text of “O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen” exalts those who have achieved the glory of Heaven. Appropriately, Brahms uses the chamber meter of 12/8 to express the joyfulness of the chorale. It is also worth noting that this is the only chorale that utilizes a chamber meter: the ten remaining chorales in his op. 122 collection are in common time, 6/4, or cut time, which are all church meters.

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<sup>41</sup> Leonard Phillips, “The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843-1881” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 165-166.

In addition to similar musical devices in their chorale preludes, Smyth and Brahms share a similar point of conception in these works: the influence of counterpoint, Bach, and the Lutheran chorale. Although the documentation for Smyth is not nearly as extensive as it is for Brahms's, her choice of text, musical form, and stylistic elements, as explored earlier, confirms these shared influences.

Even before he started exchanging exercises with Joachim, Brahms acquired three of the major counterpoint treatises available at that time: Johann Kirnberger's *Die Kunst der reinen Satzes*, Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, and Simon Sechter's 1843 edition of Friedrich Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge*.<sup>42</sup> In addition to counterpoint rules and compositional conventions, these treatises also had invaluable information on the style, affect, and performance of Baroque music. Brahms's skills in counterpoint and knowledge of the Baroque style continued to mature, even after his interest in organ waned in the late 1850s.<sup>43</sup> These treatises, which were supplemented by many related ones, remained in his library until his death.<sup>44</sup> Smyth also studied counterpoint thoroughly during her time at the Leipzig Conservatory and with Herzogenberg privately.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that she came across these treatises, although no direct evidence exists.

Complementing his interest in counterpoint, Brahms's fascination with the Baroque style and Bach manifests itself in his concert programs: Brahms often included transcriptions of Bach organ works in his piano recitals and Bach cantatas in his choral

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<sup>42</sup> Owen, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, 35.

<sup>45</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are several extant counterpoint examples in Smyth's hand, four of which are explicitly based on themes from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

programs.<sup>46</sup> He was also a close friend of Robert Schumann, who was one of the founders of the *Bach-Gesellschaft*. This musical society began publishing scholarly editions of Bach's complete works in 1851.<sup>47</sup> One of Clara Schumann's Christmas gifts to Brahms was the first volume of the set, and he became a lifelong subscriber to the series.<sup>48</sup> As described earlier, Smyth's association with the Herzogenbergs and Brahms's circle led her to realize that "Bach occupied the place he has ever since held in my heart as the beginning and end of all music."<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the influence of Bach, Brahms had a love for the Lutheran chorale, which he would have encountered in his early youth.<sup>50</sup> His exposure to the wealth of the chorale was reinforced and expanded by his later study and performance of the choral and organ works of Bach.<sup>51</sup> Like Mendelssohn, whom he admired, Brahms was one of the few "mainstream" composers of the nineteenth century to make any significant use of the chorale in his compositions.<sup>52</sup> His lifelong study of chorales and the Bible has been noted by many of his biographers and is evident in his knowledgeable choice of texts in works such as the *Deutsches Requiem* and *Vier ernste Gesänge*.<sup>53</sup> Anticipating twentieth-

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<sup>46</sup> Owen, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 178. An example of Bach's influence was seen earlier in Musical Examples 6-8, where Brahms and Smyth utilized a similar accompanimental pattern as one of Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* chorales. While the author cannot prove that Bach was the explicit model for Brahms's and Smyth's chorales, the similarity of their figuration is striking and points to Brahms's and Smyth's similar interests, musical style, and points of inspiration.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Owen, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, 37.

century neo-Baroque compositional trends, Brahms and Smyth both wrote historically conceived chorale preludes, rather than embedding the chorale within a larger Romantic form.

Smyth's organ chorale preludes constitute the majority of her published organ works. The only other published organ piece is her "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air" from 1939. Since Smyth does not provide the origin of this theme and attempts to find the source of the original melody have been unsuccessful, I have included the transcribed melody here:

Example 12: Smyth, "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air," extracted melody



Smyth presents this melody, in AA'BB' form, in the soprano voice with interludes. The alternation of these interludes with the melody result in contrasting musical ideas: solo recitative-like lines in one tempo alternate with sections in four-part chorale writing of another tempo. As Smyth describes in a note below the title, "There are two *tempi* in this prelude: where the *tune* comes in (Tempo II) is always a little slower than the preluding

part.”<sup>54</sup> This indicates that she viewed the recitative-like sections as freer and more improvisatory, in contrast to the slower, more regular tempo and beat of the tune sections. Boosey and Hawkes, who published the work in 1939, are true to the autograph score located in the British Library. They preserved all of Smyth’s markings regarding tempo, phrasing, and dynamics, including *ritardando* and dynamic dash markings. One can see operatic influences in this work, but also can be reminded of the free extemporization style of J.S. Bach in some of his early chorales, including “In dulci júbilo,” BWV 729 and “Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr,” BWV 715, from the individually transmitted chorales. Other historical precedents and influences will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>54</sup> Ethel Smyth, “Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air” (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1939), 1.

## Chapter 7:

### Historical Precedents to Smyth's Chorale Preludes

Rather than venturing into emerging twentieth-century styles, Smyth's organ chorales drew from the rich German Lutheran chorale tradition. This tradition began shortly after the Reformation itself, when Martin Luther translated well-known Latin hymns into the vernacular. These early chorales served as the foundation of the large body of chorales used by composers, especially in the Baroque era. George Stauffer and Ernest May describe the early developments of chorale settings:

Dutch Calvinist organist Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck created one of the two earliest forms of the Baroque organ chorale, the chorale variation, by combining the style of the English secular keyboard variation with the sacred chorale melodies. Further development stems from Sweelinck's leading German pupils: Samuel Scheidt, whose monumental *Tabulatura Nova* of 1624 is a major landmark in the repertoire and includes several chorale preludes; and Heinrich Scheidemann, who invented the free chorale fantasia by introducing toccata elements into the other very early form of the Baroque organ chorale, the choral motet.<sup>1</sup>

Dieterich Buxtehude was influenced by both Scheidt and Scheidemann and wrote chorale fantasias and chorale variation sets, among other free works. However, his short chorale preludes represent his principal contribution to the evolution of the genre.<sup>2</sup> Stauffer and May regard each of these thirty short chorales "as the reduction of a set of variations to a single prelude, probably intended to introduce the melody to the congregation."<sup>3</sup> These belong to a tradition that continued well into the next century. Alexander Silbiger considers Buxtehude "a crucial link between Scheidemann and Bach," especially with his

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<sup>1</sup> George Stauffer and Ernest May, *J.S. Bach as Organist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Stauffer and May, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Stauffer and May, 82.

“vocally inspired monodic elaboration of the chorales.”<sup>4</sup> In these shorter chorale settings by Buxtehude, the chorale is usually set in the soprano with expressive vocal embellishments and a modest accompaniment that conveys the affect of the chorale text.<sup>5</sup> Stauffer and May emphasize that “clearly, certain pieces by Buxtehude served as models for similar works by Bach.”<sup>6</sup>

Buxtehude’s vocal style and efficient use of musical material is reflected in many of Bach’s chorale settings, especially in the short preludes of the *Orgelbüchlein*. The *Orgelbüchlein* was first and foremost a composition project in which Bach explored how to develop a chorale “in many diverse ways.”<sup>7</sup> According to George Stauffer, “He carried out this exploration by creating a special type of highly concise, highly integrated organ chorale, one that featured the full hymn tune with no or very little space between phrases, real part-writing, obbligato pedal, and bold, expressive musical language.”<sup>8</sup> One can see the roots of the *Orgelbüchlein* settings in the ornamented melody chorales of Buxtehude, and also in the concise partita variations of Pachelbel and Georg Böhm.<sup>9</sup> Stauffer infers Bach’s formula:

Bach poured his ideas into three formal molds. The most common was the melody chorale, in which the chorale tune is set forth in the soprano with very little embellishment...Thirty-two settings in the [*Orgelbüchlein*] fall into this category. The second-most common type was the canonic chorale, in which the chorale tune is presented in canon with a very short interval between the *dux* (leader) and

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Silbiger, ed., *Keyboard Music Before 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 200.

<sup>5</sup> Stauffer and May, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Stauffer and May, 82.

<sup>7</sup> George Stauffer, preface to *J.S. Bach Complete Organ Works: Pedagogical Works* (Colfax: Wayne Leupold Editions, 2010), xxi.

<sup>8</sup> Stauffer, xxi.

<sup>9</sup> Stauffer, xxi.

*comes* (the follower). Bach composed eight canonic chorales for the collection. The third type of setting was the ornamental chorale, in which the chorale melody, greatly embellished with coloratura flourishes and embellishments, sounds on one keyboard against simple accompanimental parts on another... There are three ornamental chorales in the [*Orgelbüchlein*].<sup>10</sup>

In Smyth's chorale settings, she incorporates the three most common chorale types found in the *Orgelbüchlein*. While there is no documentation to explain why, it may point to her familiarity with the *Orgelbüchlein* and similar works. It may also reflect the *Orgelbüchlein*'s lasting influence on the standard ways to set a chorale, even in the Romantic era. Stauffer goes on further to state that "by focusing on these chorale types and eliminating all extraneous material (that is, interludes and structural digressions), Bach was able to concentrate fully on accompanimental motives, canonic elaboration, melodic embellishment, and the creation of compelling harmonic schemes."<sup>11</sup> Bach's use of rhythmic cells serves to unify his compositions, while his use of chromaticism and rhetorical gestures enhances the text.<sup>12</sup> By eliminating more extensive formal considerations and limiting themselves to a smaller scope, Bach, Brahms, and Smyth are all able to focus more on compositional details.

Although chorale preludes are generally associated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century composers, the use of the chorale as thematic material continued throughout the nineteenth century in Germany.<sup>13</sup> While many chorale preludes and other chorale-based organ works continued to be written, Barbara Owen points out that they

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<sup>10</sup> Stauffer, xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Stauffer, xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Stauffer, xxii.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.



were primarily done in quantity by relatively minor composers: “Among the better known were the Darmstadt organist Johann Rinck, author of a popular organ tutor; the theorist Johann Töpfer of Weimar, composer of one of the earliest chorale fantasias; and Adolph Hesse, who, along with many recital pieces, produced several sets of chorale preludes and other chorale-based works.”<sup>14</sup>

Among the major nineteenth-century symphonic composers, Franz Schubert, Josef Rheinberger, Franz Liszt, and Anton Bruckner wrote organ music, but left the chorale largely alone, perhaps due to their Catholic backgrounds.<sup>15</sup> Liszt does, however, base a major organ fantasia on the B-A-C-H theme and includes an allusion to “Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan” in his organ fantasia *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Sagen*.<sup>16</sup> Mendelssohn never wrote an actual chorale prelude, despite having incorporated chorales into several of his symphonic, choral, and organ works. Among his lesser-known youthful organ works, however, is a set of variations on the chorale “Wie gross ist des Allmächt’gen Güte,” and organ sonatas 1, 3, 5, and 6 all contain a chorale-based movement.<sup>17</sup> Owen suggests that these sonata movements “can easily stand alone as chorale fantasias and were perhaps even originally intended as such.”<sup>18</sup> Ironically, Schumann did not follow Mendelssohn’s example in utilizing chorales, despite having a vast library with chorale-related music from the Baroque.<sup>19</sup> Owen concludes that

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<sup>14</sup> Owen, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Owen, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Owen, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Owen, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Owen, 40.

“Brahms was the most prominent nineteenth-century composer to pick up where Mendelssohn left off in his creative use of chorale material, and he went one step further by writing classic chorale preludes for the organ.”<sup>20</sup>

Bach’s cumulative development of the chorale prelude genre, from a practical seventeenth-century introductory piece to an independent musical art form, influenced Brahms, who in turn influenced Herzogenberg, Smyth’s teacher. Herzogenberg primarily wrote chorale preludes and chorale fantasies, and his self-proclaimed artistic model and mentor was Brahms.<sup>21</sup> William Little comments that these works “show skill in their handling of the instrument but his [Herzogenberg’s] works tend to be academic in orientation.”<sup>22</sup> This was not the case with Smyth: she created works not as a second-rate composer, but as an educated, first-rate composer whose major influences, like Brahms, were Bach, counterpoint, and the Lutheran chorale tradition. While these organ works do not contribute significant quantities to the organ repertoire as a whole, they do contribute to the limited quantities of Romantic-era chorale preludes and works by female composers. More importantly than fulfilling an abstract political quota, however, these works should be elevated in status in the organ repertoire due to their quality of construction, acknowledgement and use of historical models, and artistic merit.

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<sup>20</sup> Owen, 40.

<sup>21</sup> William Little, “Brahms and the Organ – Redivivus: Some Thoughts and Conjectures” from *The Organist as Scholar: Essays in Memory of Russell Saunders*, ed. Kerala Snyder (Stuyvesant, Pedragon Press, 1994), 290.

<sup>22</sup> Little, “Brahms,” 290.

## Chapter 8:

### Aspects of Performance Practice in Smyth's Published Organ Works

Before using the performance guide to Smyth's published organ works, one must acknowledge her general background regarding organ technique, organs she may have known, and briefly explore contemporary trends in organ building. One must also consider the information she provides in her music regarding dynamics, registration, phrasing, articulation, touch, ornamentation, and tempo.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Smyth's organ teacher was Sir Walter Parratt, organist of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, who later became the first Professor of Organ at the Royal College of Music. According to the recollections of Harold Darke, also an organ student of Parratt, Parratt's pedagogical style and teaching philosophy emphasized clean phrasing and part-playing, accuracy of notes, and attention to the details of technique.<sup>1</sup> However, Darke points out that Parratt gave his students latitude regarding interpretation and registration, even in the works of Bach.<sup>2</sup> Other teachers include Sir Frederick Ouseley, organist and professor of music at Oxford University, and an unnamed organ teacher during her time in Leipzig. Despite her renowned instructors, which also included Louis Maas for piano at the Leipzig Conservatory, Smyth describes her own technique as flawed:

[Professor] Maas was a conscientious but dull teacher, and if Frau Schumann, when I came to know her later, used to say she didn't mind *hearing*, but couldn't

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<sup>1</sup> Walford Davies and Harold E. Darke, "Sir Walter Parratt," Royal College of Music Center for Performance History, <http://www.cph.rcm.ac.uk/Tour/Pages.Parratt.htm> (accessed Feb. 28, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Davies and Darke, "Sir Walter Parratt."

bear to *look* at me playing, owing to the way I managed my hands, it was probably more my fault than his.<sup>3</sup>

Despite her admitted shortcomings, Smyth's confession provides the modern performer insight into her organ works: rather than virtuosic showpieces written by a technically brilliant organist, Smyth's works are accessible to organists with merely proficient technique and may be approached in such a manner. This does not exclude the advanced organist from pursuing these works, but rather it encourages all organists with a basic technique to perform them.

Although Smyth paints colorful portraits of musical figures in her memoirs, she left surprisingly little in regard to organs she knew or encountered. She also never explicitly states where her organ lessons with Parratt or Ouseley took place. Because of this, it is difficult to know what type or types of instruments influenced her organ technique and organ works. Smyth only mentions "a decent little organ at Frimley Church."<sup>4</sup> Christopher St. John also writes that Smyth's "greatest joy...was to gaze at the Thomas Kirche [sic] where Bach had played the organ, and at the Thomas Schule [sic] where he was Cantor."<sup>5</sup>

Despite the lack of direct evidence, it is likely that she was familiar with or had access to St. George's Chapel, where Parratt worked. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, Gray and Davison reconstructed the organ at St. George's Chapel in 1843.<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>3</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987), 71-72.

<sup>4</sup> Smyth, *Memoirs*, 348.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1959), 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

reconstruction included innovations in the Swell box design, extension of the keyboard compass, and the addition of more principals, mutation stops, and reeds, all of which allowed a more effective means of expression for the performer.<sup>7</sup> These changes also reflect the continental influences on English organs during the nineteenth century. In contrast to the reconstructed instrument in St. George's Chapel and other organs in London, the ones closer to the family home in Frimley would have been more modest parish organs used to accompany church services. The continental influences would reach these smaller towns more slowly than the larger, more affluent parts of England.

Organs in England were undergoing changes initiated by continental influences beginning in 1829, due in part to Felix Mendelssohn's visits. Before these changes, however, the main shortcomings of the average British organ, according to Cecil Clutton and Austin Niland, were threefold: 1) the lack of two complete and balanced manual choruses; 2) the lack of independent pedal organs of well-defined quality; and 3) the lack of bold and colorful solo effects, particularly those derived from solo mutations.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, the growing awareness of foreign organs and music coincided with good economic conditions, which in turn produced new attitudes towards organs.<sup>9</sup> Major organ builders of nineteenth-century England include William Hill, Edmund Schulze, and Henry Willis. These builders made the Swell division the second most important after the great division and increased the pedal division.<sup>10</sup> Peter Williams explains, "Much of the development of the British organ before Henry Willis's famous instrument for the Great

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<sup>7</sup> Thistlethwaite, 116.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil Clutton and Austin Niland, *The British Organ* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982), 123.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Williams, *A New History of the Organ* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 173.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, 173-174.

Exhibition of 1851 has been attributed to the collaboration between composer Henry Gauntlett and organ builder William Hill.”<sup>11</sup> Gauntlett knew enough German organ music to see that C-compass was the most useful for both manuals and pedals, and the Bach revival influence also advanced this change.<sup>12</sup>

During this time in Central Germany, where Leipzig is located, organs were also undergoing change. Historically, Central German organs were distinct from North German organs because of their function: Central German organs were used primarily for congregational singing and service music in the church, whereas North German instruments were not only used for church, but also for concerts and as a means to display a city’s wealth. As a result, Central German instruments had different tonal characteristics, which included a wealth of foundational tones, string sounds, and a unifying concept of the instrument through the *Manualprinzip*.<sup>13</sup> Brahms’s use of the *Manualprinzip* can be seen most clearly in his chorale prelude, “O Welt, ich muss dich lassen,” in which subsequent phrases are repeated on different manuals indicated with different dynamics.<sup>14</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth-century, Central German instruments were expanding to accommodate large-scale Romantic organ works (e.g. works by Franz Liszt, Julius Reubke, and Max Reger). A clear example of these expansions and changes in aesthetic can be seen in Friedrich Ladegast instrument in Merseburg Cathedral from 1855.

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<sup>11</sup> Williams, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, 174.

<sup>13</sup> The *Manualprinzip* is a concept where each manual is a successive dynamic level, in comparison to the *Werkprinzip*, where each division of the organ can function as an independent chorus.

<sup>14</sup> Johannes Brahms, *Complete Organ Works*, ed. George Bozarth (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1983), 54.

Despite the major changes in organs occurring in England and Central Germany at this time, Smyth's works were likely composed with a more modest instrument in mind. Due to her limited exposure on larger instruments, in addition to the modesty of the compositions themselves, it is pragmatic to view these pieces in the context of a smaller organ.

Since William Hill was a well-known and prolific builder in nineteenth-century England, his instruments can be used as a framework to understand Smyth's organ compositions. Hill's large Liverpool organ was a compromise between old English and new European styles, with a twenty-stop Swell, a Choir organ of flutes and the traditional Cremona reed, a high-pressure tuba, six couplers, five composition pedals (pedals that draw a fixed arrangement of stops), and a complete continental compass (C-d'-f''').<sup>15</sup> Table 4 shows the specification of Hill's smaller instrument at St. Cross Church, Oxford, from 1876, which combines old English and continental influences:

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, 175.

**Table 4: Hill Organ, St. Cross Church, Oxford, 1876:**<sup>16</sup>

<u>Great:</u> Open diapason           8' Stopped diapason       8' Viol d'Amour           8' Principal                4' Wald Flute               4' Fifteenth                2' Clarionet                8'	<u>Swell:</u> Open diapason           8' Gedact                   8' Pierced Gamba          8' Gemshorn                4' Flautina                 2' Oboe                     8' [Cornopean             8']
<u>Pedal:</u> Bourdon                 16' Bass flute               8'	Couplers: Great/Pedal, Swell/Pedal, Swell/Gt  Compass: Manuals C-g''''; Pedals C-f'

<sup>16</sup> Robert Pacey and Michael Popkin, *The Organs of Oxford* (Oxford: Positif Press, 1997), 91.



This instrument was first built in 1861, when Joseph W. Walker installed a new one-manual organ with four stops and ‘German Pedals.’<sup>17</sup> William Hill and Son built the present instrument in 1876, but incorporated Walker’s pipework. Although subsequent repairs and restorations have been carried out by Martin (1880s), George Jackson (1938), Nicholson (1972), and J.W. Walker and Sons (1997), the organ still remains essentially as Hill built it in 1876, apart from the installation of an electric blower in 1937 and the addition of the Cornopean.<sup>18</sup> Smyth likely would have encountered more modest instruments like this in Frimley, which was a town even smaller than Oxford.

The following instrument in Table 5, located in Etzelsbach, Germany (about 125 miles west of Leipzig in Central Germany) and built by E. Schulze in 1869, is an example of a modest Central German instrument Smyth may have encountered in and around Leipzig:

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<sup>17</sup> Pacey and Popkin, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Pacey and Popkin, 91.

**Table 5: Schulze Organ, Etzelsbach, 1869<sup>19</sup>**

<u>Manual I:</u> 16' 8' 8' 8' 4' Mixture III	<u>Manual II:</u> 8' 8' 8' 4'
<u>Pedal:</u> 16' 16' 8'	<u>Couplers</u> Manual II/Manual I, Manual I/Pedal  *no reeds on any manual

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, 178.

The specification list does not detail stop names, but we do know that all stops were flue stops and there were no reeds or mutations on any division. Peter Williams highlights:

For such organs was a good deal of German organ music composed between the periods of Schumann and Reger, organs with no particular splendour or colour. Even if the organ were bigger, the German builders often seem puzzled as to what the third or fourth manuals ought to be: They are not Cavaillé-Coll's Bombardes nor Henry Willis's Swells but merely alternative manuals relying on location or variety of voicing.<sup>20</sup>

The simplicity in this Central German organ parallels the simplicity in Mendelssohn's prefatory remarks on organ registration a generation earlier:

Much depends in these Sonatas on the right choice of the Stops; however, as every Organ with which I am acquainted has its own peculiar mode of treatment in this respect, and as the same nominal combination does not produce exactly the same effect in different Instruments, I have given only a general indication of the kind of effect intended to be produced, without giving a precise list of the particular stops to be used.<sup>21</sup>

Mendelssohn goes on to explain what he means by various dynamic levels:

By "Fortissimo," I intend to designate the Full Organ; by "Pianissimo," I generally mean a soft 8 feet [sic] Stop alone; by "Forte," the Great Organ, but without some of the most powerful Stops; by "Piano," some of the soft 8 feet Stops combined; and so forth. In the Pedal part, I should prefer throughout, even in the Pianissimo passages, the 8 feet and the 16 feet Stops united; except when the contrary is expressly specified; (see the 6<sup>th</sup> Sonata). It is therefore left to the judgment of the Performer, to mix the different Stops appropriately to the style of the various Pieces; advising him, however, to be careful that in combining the Stops belonging to two different sets of keys, the kind of tone in the one, should be distinguished from that in the other; but without forming too violent a contrast between the two distinct qualities of tone.<sup>22</sup>

After taking into account these prefatory remarks from the organ sonatas and also from

Mendelssohn's edition of Bach's chorale preludes, William Little concludes that

Mendelssohn's views on registration were essentially conservative: "He was intent upon

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, *Complete Organ Works*, ed. William Little (London: Novello, 1987-88), ix.

<sup>22</sup> Mendelssohn, ix.

maintaining the clarity of individual voices and avoiding cluttered or muddled sounds, particularly in contrapuntal works...In this respect he seems to have developed a less-is-more viewpoint, and while far from being a minimalist, he tended to err, if anything, on the side of restraint.”<sup>23</sup>

Because of Mendelssohn’s influence on organ performance, especially in England and Germany where Smyth studied, his general guidelines and philosophy will serve as the basis for the registration suggestions in the following chapter. The vagueness in his instructions acknowledges the wide variety of organs: instead of giving specific registration suggestions for various types of instruments, Mendelssohn empowers the performer to create registrational schemes based on the instrument available, while also encouraging an understanding of registration in terms of dynamic relationships. This information, coupled with Sir Walter Parratt’s known flexibility regarding artistic choices, allows the performer more freedom than restriction in Smyth’s organ chorales. Only one of Smyth’s chorales, “Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag,” contains specific registration markings: This could be attributed to the fact that Smyth wrote a version of this chorale for brass ensemble. In the brass version, she writes for two trumpets, plus tenor trombone and bass trombone or four horns in unison.<sup>24</sup> In the organ version, Smyth suggests a 4’ trumpet for the *cantus firmus* in the pedal and 8’ stops for the manuals. All other chorale works use dynamic markings to indicate registrational relationships. The performer must rely on these dynamic relationships, texture, and balance to create an effective registrational scheme.

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<sup>23</sup> Little, *Mendelssohn*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, ff. 17-18b, British Library Manuscripts.

Another point regarding registration is Smyth's use of crescendo and decrescendo markings. These may refer to the use of the Swell box or the use of registration changes to create dynamic shadings. She uses these markings in three of her published works: "Du, o schönes Weltgebäude," the fugue of "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," and "Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air." In the first work, the crescendos and decrescendos occur over short amounts of time with no other dynamic indications (which points to Swell box usage), while in the latter two examples, they are followed by contrasting dynamic markings. This may suggest gradual registral changes, Swell box activity followed by a manual change, or both. Arguments can certainly be made for registral changes in Smyth's works, especially since Mendelssohn explicitly calls for a registral crescendo in one of his sonatas: written above measure 58 from his *Sonata No. 3*, Mendelssohn writes "da questa parte fino al Maggiore poco a poco più animato e più forte," which roughly translates to "from this part up to the [A] major section little by little more animated [faster] and more strong [loud]."<sup>25</sup> Even though Smyth does not leave detailed instructions on how to accomplish dynamic changes, modern performers should feel free to be creative and use both options. Even if Smyth were not able to practice or perform extensively on larger Romantic instruments, she would have been aware of the Swell box's expressive capabilities through her teacher, Sir Walter Parratt and the instrument at St. George's Chapel. In the remainder of her works, however, Smyth has left only dynamic indications to show relative volumes between the voices.

Even though John Stainer's pedagogical work, *The Organ: A Manual of the True Principles of Organ Playing for Beginners*, was published in 1910 and post-dates the

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<sup>25</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, *New Edition of the Complete Organ Works*, ed. Christoph Albrecht (New York: Bärenreiter, 2005), 27.

conjectured composition dates of Smyth's chorales, it is contemporary with the chorales' publication date of 1913. The performer, therefore, can use Stainer's method to gather additional information regarding phrasing and articulation during this time period. While these ideas may not all apply directly to Smyth's works, it allows the performer to understand the state of pedagogy and the approaches to expression at the time of the chorales' publishing. In regard to the general challenges of phrasing, Stainer states:

To phrase properly, a player must possess not only knowledge but taste; the intentions and meaning of a composer must first be duly appreciated intellectually, and then practically brought out, care always being taken to avoid on the one hand a *weak* performance, caused by an insufficiently broad *outline*, and on the other hand an *exaggerated* reading, caused by bringing the peculiarities of the composer into undue prominence. In the former case, the attentive hearer traces too little of the spirit of the author; in the latter, too much of the egotism of the player.<sup>26</sup>

He goes on to describe the appropriate use of the Swell pedal:

In slow movements of an expressive character it is of the utmost importance that the student should aim at something higher than correctness. It will be found that the Swell pedal (if rightly treated) will add largely to the power of phrasing when used in conjunction with the other modes of expression; but, on the other hand, the wisest efforts of the fingers to "round a sentence" will be completely frustrated by carelessness in this respect.<sup>27</sup>

Since Smyth did not leave many details regarding performance practice in her works, the modern performer should keep Stainer's thoughtful advice toward phrasing in mind, especially his remarks on the Swell pedal.

Despite the lack of specific registrations, the modest specifications of the St. Cross Church and the Etzelsbach organ and Smyth's dynamic markings give modern performers insight into her registrational practices. Although we will explore Smyth's

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<sup>26</sup> John Stainer, *The Organ: A Manual of the True Principles of Organ Playing for Beginners* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1910), 93.

<sup>27</sup> Stainer, 93.

organ works in the context of smaller instruments, her exposure to the late-Romantic idiom in multiple genres of music can shed light on other aspects of performance, including phrasing and articulation. Since little is known about her style of organ playing or instruction, we are left to interpret her organ music with several factors in mind. These include her admiration of Bach, Mendelssohn, and Brahms and the reconciliation of their disparate performance styles. Smyth's slurs, for example, could indicate articulation or phrasing, but the performer must determine if they indicate one, the other, or both. For example, in "Du, o schönes Weltgebäude," Smyth's pairs of slurred sixteenth notes highlight the rhetorical sighing motive, but may also indicate an articulation. In other instances, Smyth uses more extensive slurs in her music, which point to a more Romantic idiom of legato touch. Jon Laukvik explains the multi-functioning nature and inherent ambiguity of slur markings:

... The slur has three basic functions in the music of the early and high romantic periods, namely to indicate 1) legato (a group of notes within a slur are to be played legato), 2) accent (the first note under the slur is accented), 3) grouping or phrasing (the notes under a slur comprise a unified structural entity). Points 1 and 2 are the older functions of the slur marking, whereas point 3 indicates a more recent usage. (The use of a slur as a tie, merely to lengthen a note, does not of course belong in this context). Likewise, we should recognize as misleading, at least in most cases, the common assertion that composers like Mendelssohn and Schumann notated slurs recklessly, inconsistently, or even incorrectly. In Mendelssohn's and Schumann's music slurs may be applied to a motif or theme in different ways throughout a movement, a situation that might seem inconsistent. We may also encounter situations in which the slur's end does not correspond to the supposed end of the phrase, continuing beyond what apparently would or should have been the break. This looks wrong to our modern eyes. Finally, slurs may appear over entire bars for longer passages, breaking only at the bar lines, an arrangement which may appear especially nonsensical in music based upbeat patterns.<sup>28</sup>

In regard to Romantic phrasing, Laukvik goes on to describe:

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<sup>28</sup> Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance in Organ Playing: Part 2* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2010), 232.

Slurs in the early and high romantic periods, for instance in the music of Mendelssohn and Schumann, usually indicate articulation and accent only. However, in certain isolated cases slurs can also denote the phrase, something like a corollary of the notation, namely when an entire phrase is to be treated legato.<sup>29</sup>

One can see a variety of slur lengths in the “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” fugue. Some shorter slurs correspond to motivic and imitative fugal activity, while longer slurs highlight entire phrases of the chorale melody. Since there are many points of imitation and a variety of textures throughout the fugue, slur markings may seem ‘inconsistent,’ but as Laukvik assures us, that does not mean we should lose confidence in the markings provided.<sup>30</sup> The prevalence of slurs points to an overall legato, but performers may incorporate subtle articulations and breaths within the longer slurred phrases for a more nuanced approach.

The romantic era was a time of shifting aesthetics. In addition to the evolving function of slurs in organ music, the rise and influence of the piano altered approaches toward touch. Sandra Soderlund writes:

Between the time of Bach and Franck there are relatively few works for the organ. The piano was the main instrument of the time, and those composers who wrote for the organ were, in most cases, primarily pianists. There were organ method books published, but it is doubtful that they influenced composers such as Mendelssohn, Liszt and Brahms very much. More influential were the great piano methods, particularly those of Clementi (1752-1832), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837), and Czerny (1791-1857). In fact, most of the pianists of the period were taught using Clementi’s works. It may be assumed that a similar technique was used by these men when they played the organ.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Laukvik, 233.

<sup>30</sup> Laukvik, 232.

<sup>31</sup> Sandra Soderlund, *Organ Technique: An Historical Approach* (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 1980), quoted in Russell Saunders, “Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy’s Organ Works” (compilation prepared for Oklahoma City Chapter AGO and Oklahoma City University, November 1984).



She continues to describe various aspects of the piano's influence on organists' technique and composition:

When the other instrument played by organists became the piano rather than the harpsichord or clavichord, their performance was influenced by an entirely new aesthetic. As its name implies, the new "soft-loud" placed the emphasis in keyboard playing upon the manipulation of dynamics rather than on articulation. Later, as the piano became more heavily strung, the use of arm weight became more and more necessary in keyboard touch. Most important, the development of a true legato became the goal of most keyboard fingering.<sup>32</sup>

When considering touch, Soderlund asserts that the most important statement in Clementi's *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* from 1803 is the following: "When the composer leaves the Legato and Staccato to the performer's taste, the best rule is, to adhere chiefly to the Legato, reserving the Staccato to give Spirit occasionally to certain passages, and to set off the Higher Beauties of the Legato."<sup>33</sup> Carl Czerny also writes in 1839 that "*legato* is the rule in music, and all the other procedures are merely exceptions."<sup>34</sup> As Laukvik describes,

Whereas eighteenth century music can dance, sing, or even speak, the emphasis in the nineteenth century came to rest on singing. In organ methods, one is repeatedly advised to sing at the organ, which for romanticism implies legato. Of course, it is hardly possible to define *bel canto*, a way of singing that served as a model for romantic interpretation, but one of its aspects is certainly an extreme legato.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sandra Soderlund, *Organ Technique: An Historical Approach* (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw, 1986), 147.

<sup>33</sup> Muzio Clementi, *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* (London: Clementi, Banger, Hyde, Collard and Davis, 1803), 9.  
[http://imslp.org/wiki/Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Art\\_of\\_Playing\\_the\\_Pianoforte,\\_Op.42\\_\(Clementi,\\_Muzio\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Introduction_to_the_Art_of_Playing_the_Pianoforte,_Op.42_(Clementi,_Muzio)) (accessed October 14, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Carl Czerny, *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule*, op. 500 (Vienna: 1839), 16, as quoted in Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2010), 56.

<sup>35</sup> Laukvik, 13.

Although the prevalent touch was evolving toward an ‘extreme’ legato, Laukvik reminds the performer not to limit themselves to a single touch:

If we want to characterize romantic music as an art, developing out of harmony, then this is another reason for legato touch: harmony does not have to be articulated as it is the case with a melody. On the other hand, a differentiated non-legato was an important element of professional organ playing, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, and also with Karl Straube at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup>

Soderlund is also quick point out that “Legato playing was becoming more and more prevalent, but was not yet the studied legato of the later Belgian-French school.”<sup>37</sup>

With this in mind, performers should aim for a more legato touch, but should not limit themselves to only a single touch in Smyth’s chorale preludes. Rather, they should employ varying degrees of legato and non-legato touch in order to accommodate the nuances of her compositions.<sup>38</sup> This approach to touch is used in the works of Brahms and, by association, can be used in the works of Smyth. More detailed suggestions regarding touch can be found in Chapter 9.

In regard to ornamentation, the only explicit ornament symbols occur in “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” with trills in the melody and accompanimental voices. This reflects the decreasing significance of graphic ornaments in the nineteenth century, as observed by Howard Ferguson when he notes that the use of ornament signs decreased in

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<sup>36</sup> Laukvik, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Soderlund, 151.

<sup>38</sup> The works of Tobias Matthay (1858-1945), a British piano pedagogue and contemporary of Smyth, might be helpful when considering the various touches available on the keyboard (e.g. *leggiero*, bright legato, vibrated legato, over legato, etc). Although his method applies primarily to piano technique, his book *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947) might be useful to the performer. There is no scholarship, however, to prove that Smyth was a follower or practitioner of Matthay’s theories.

the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Laukvik also comments on the decreasing role of graphic ornamentation in the nineteenth century:

Ornamentation played no role in Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens' *Orgelschule*. The subject does not appear at all in the text part, and in all the musical examples composed by Lemmens, only a few short grace notes appear. Certainly, the increasing number of musical amateurs, largely unfamiliar with the traditional notation of ornaments, was responsible for the gradual repression of that notation. For such players, the composer had to supply precise indications as written-out notes. In the case of organ music the desire for seriousness and religious dignity likewise played a part. . . . Moreover, confusion resulted from the fact that traditional signs had different meanings from composer to composer. The piano methods around 1800 and later attempt to clarify the situation at the time, but they often give rise to marked confusion with contradictory explanations.<sup>40</sup>

Clementi, whose method book was highly influential to Mendelssohn and the Brahms circle, recommends the upper auxiliary for most turns and trills.<sup>41</sup> However, the Pianoforte Schools of Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1828) and Carl Czerny (1839) recommend shakes beginning with the main note instead of the upper auxiliary, in contrast to eighteenth-century practice.<sup>42</sup> Ferguson also mentions though that some shakes in the nineteenth century need to start with the auxiliary note: "So the player should make his choice according to the context."<sup>43</sup> Laukvik confirms Ferguson's observations regarding long trills:

During the eighteenth century in European countries north of the Alps the trill was begun with the upper note, whereas in Italy it was begun with the main note. Gradually the original form of the trill, the version beginning with the main note, asserted itself universally. However, the two forms existed side-by-side well into

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<sup>39</sup> Ferguson, *Keyboard Interpretation from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 123.

<sup>40</sup> Laukvik, 316-317.

<sup>41</sup> Clementi, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ferguson, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Ferguson, 123.

the nineteenth century. According to Justin Heinrich Knecht, the trill begins sometimes with the upper note, and sometimes with the main note. The pedal trill however begins with the main note. Other nineteenth-century sources also give differing advice about the note that should initiate trills. In the end, it remains unclear which nineteenth century composers wish the trill to begin with the upper note and which ones wish it to begin with the main note.<sup>44</sup>

Laukvik also describes the execution of grace notes, short trills, and the mordent. By the time of Schumann, “[A]ll grace figures, no matter how many notes they comprise, are to be performed before the beat.”<sup>45</sup> The short trill in the nineteenth century – derived from the *Schneller*, or inverted mordent, and the *Pralltriller*, a short trill initiated by a tied upper auxiliary note – should also be performed before the beat, according to Laukvik.<sup>46</sup> The only ornament that definitively remains on the beat during the nineteenth century is the mordent.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from these common ornaments notated with symbols, it became increasingly customary to write out ornaments in full: either in normal-sized notes as an integral part of the rhythmic scheme, in small notes extra-rhythmically, or in a mixture of the two.<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that among Brahms’s organ works, ornamentation occurs significantly only in the “Prelude and Fugue in A Minor” from 1856.<sup>49</sup> A single cadential trill appears at the end of both the prelude and the fugue, and, except where it occurs in the pedal, the fugue subject contains a trill at the end of the second measure. There is no

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<sup>44</sup> Laukvik, 320.

<sup>45</sup> Laukvik, 318.

<sup>46</sup> Laukvik, 318.

<sup>47</sup> Laukvik, 322.

<sup>48</sup> Ferguson, 123.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, 67.

consensus as to whether this trill begins on the upper or main note; therefore the player must determine this on their own.<sup>50</sup> In Smyth’s organ works, she uses written-out ornaments in normal-sized notes most frequently and rarely uses small-note ornaments. “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude” is the only chorale that uses ornaments in small notes: she writes out three slides, or *Schleifers*, toward the final cadences, as seen in Example 13:

Example 13: Smyth, “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” mm. 17-18

Specific suggestions regarding the execution of ornaments can be found in Chapter 9.

In addition to clues regarding dynamics, phrasing, articulation, touch, and ornamentation, Smyth also provides tempo markings in each of the chorale preludes. While she does not provide specific metronome suggestions, the modern performer can determine an appropriate tempo by considering Smyth’s tempo markings, the texture and figuration of the piece, the text, and the overall affect.<sup>51</sup> She never describes her views on the use of rubato in her organ works, but instances of rubato might also coincide with phrasing and dynamic indications. Owen reminds us that it is important to understand that

<sup>50</sup> Owen, 67.

<sup>51</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Chorale Preludes for Organ*, ed. Colette Ripley (Pullman: Vivace Press, 1994), 7. Modern performers may consult this edition, where the editor has provided suggested metronome markings for each chorale prelude.

Smyth, like Brahms, “was likely a child of her times regarding tempo, legato, and phrasing.”<sup>52</sup> Joseph Bloch, a contemporary of Brahms and Smyth’s, stated in 1903: “The main point of phrasing was to make the work more understandable to the listeners.”<sup>53</sup> Excessive rubato can destroy the continuity of the rhythm, but, as the noted piano teacher Tobias Matthay wrote in 1913, the object is “to *bend* the time, but not break it.”<sup>54</sup> Modern performers should proceed with caution, but are free to exercise rubato when musically appropriate in their judgment.

Overall, Smyth’s published organ works do not have many phrasing, articulation, or registration indications. Several factors determine the style of performance practice, including the choice of instrument, the function or occasion for performance, and the performer’s preferences within stylistic conventions. In this way, Smyth is more similar to a Baroque composer than a Romantic one by ceding artistic freedoms to the performer. The performer must also keep in mind that Smyth’s only known organ teacher, Sir Walter Parratt, has been described as “rarely play[ing] a piece twice in the same way, or with the same registration. He delighted to seek new ways of interpretation.”<sup>55</sup>

My purpose is not to give one definitive interpretation of the works, but rather give the performer the necessary information to make those decisions on his/her own. The following chapter, formatted as a guide in list format, is meant to assist performers who are approaching Smyth’s organ music for the first time. Although integrated into this

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, 135.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, 135.

<sup>55</sup> Davies and Darke, “Sir Walter Parratt.”

document as Chapter 9, the guide is also meant to function as an independent pamphlet that complements the musical score. While it is my hope that performers read the entire document for a more comprehensive understanding of Smyth's organ chorales, I wanted to provide something portable that could be utilized easily in the practice room.

## Chapter 9:

### Performance Guide to Smyth's Published Organ Works

The following guide presents information on each of Smyth's organ chorales individually, with theoretical information, performance suggestions, and interpretative considerations in list format.<sup>1</sup> The unadorned chorale melodies provided are meant to aid the performer in identifying key melodic notes within the chorale preludes.<sup>2</sup>

#### “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude”

1) **Text and tune:** While we don't know exactly which stanza she had in mind, all the stanzas discuss difficulty, struggle, and the desire for death. The first two stanzas, with original text by Johann Franck (1618-1677) and translation, are presented below.<sup>3</sup>

1. Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,  
magst gefallen, wem du willst;  
ist doch deine eitle Freude  
stets mit lauter Angst umhüllt.  
Denen, die den Himmel hassen,  
will ich ihre Weltlust lassen;  
mich verlangt nach dir allein,  
lieber Herr und Heiland mein!

1. Thou, O Fair Creation-Building!  
Let them joy in thee who may;  
All thy light-spun show and gilding  
Cloud with grief their best display.  
Leave to him, the heaven-despiser,  
Bliss that makes the soul no wiser:  
My great wish is but to be,  
Jesu, saving-health, with thee.

2. Müde, die der Arbeit Menge  
und der heiße Strahl beschwert,  
wünschen, daß des Tages Länge  
werde durch die Nacht verzehrt,  
daß sie nach so vielen Lasten  
könnten sanft und süße rasten.  
Mein Wunsch ist, bei dir zu sein,  
lieber Herr und Heiland mein!<sup>4</sup>

2. Weary ones, with serving cumbered,  
Faint with burdens and the sun,  
Wish the hours more swiftly numbered,  
And the day to darkness run;  
That, when many toils had pressed them,  
They might sweetly, softly rest them:  
My great wish is but to be,  
Jesu, my repose, with thee!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Musical Form names and descriptions are taken in part from Russell Stinson's *J.S. Bach: The Great 18 Organ Chorales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and tempo definitions are abbreviated from the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Willi Apel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). The abbreviation “LH” stands for “left hand” and “RH” stands for “right hand.”

<sup>2</sup> Some chorale melodies' time and key signatures have been altered to match Smyth's settings as a convenience to the performer.

<sup>3</sup> An original source could not be found for Johann Crüger's tune, so the melody has been extracted from Smyth's chorale prelude.



Example 14: Johann Crüger, “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” extracted melody



2) **Liturgical function:** Lent, repentance, weariness, longing for death

3) **Musical Form:** cantus firmus chorale, no interludes; AA'BB'

4) **Texture:** 3 accompanying voices (LH, pedal), unadorned c.f. melody in RH

5) **Meter:** 4/4

6) **Settings by other composers:** J.S. Bach (BWV 56 and BWV 301)

7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** subtle imitative figures based on chorale melody (e.g. in m. 1, the perfect fourth leaps in the accompaniment mimic the perfect fourth leap in the melody)

8) **Motivic ideas:** sighing motives, predominance of 3rds and 6ths, melodic intervals incorporated into accompanying motives

9) **Text painting:** chromaticism; sighing motives depict longing; high range of the LH may express yearning; RH's simplicity could symbolize resignation, graveness, certainty of death; use of *passus duriusculus* (descending tetrachord; e.g. mm. 4-5 in pedal) and

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<sup>4</sup> Johann Franck, “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale140-Eng3.htm> (accessed March 27, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Frothingham, *Metrical Pieces, Translated and Original, Volume 2* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1870), 232, <http://books.google.com/books?id=7I1JAAAAYAAJ> (accessed July 9, 2013).

tritones (e.g. m. 13, outlined in pedal line) to express weariness, anguish; constant pedal is unrelenting; Picardy third (musical release of tension = metaphorical release of life)

10) **Tempo:** marked *Adagio* (slow tempo, between *Andante* and *Largo*); ♩ = 63 (suggested by Colette Ripley)

11) **Registration ideas:** Since there are no dynamic changes in Manual I, Manual II should be the one under expression if possible. If a secondary enclosed division is available, the performer may incorporate dynamic shaping in the melody (on Manual I). Crescendo and decrescendo signs over small spans suggest use of the Swell box over registral crescendos/decrescendos.

Manual I (melody; *mp*): Combination of gentle 8' and 4' principals and flutes;  
gentle 8' reed (like an oboe) and lighter 4' principal; gentle 8' reed only  
Manual II (accompaniment; *p*): Combination of quieter 8' stops  
Pedal: 16' and 8' flutes

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** Keep a gentle legato as the primary touch, but incorporate subtle breaths in the melody to highlight new chorale phrases. Breaths or agogic accents can also be used to bring out key harmonic moments (e.g. diminished seventh harmony in m. 12) and the sighing gesture, which appears primarily in the accompanying voices; sharing the accompanying line between the hands when melody drops out at mm. 6–7 will help maintain a legato touch more comfortably; repeated notes in the pedal should be played steadily, but with nuanced shading to shape this line as much as possible.

13) **Other notes:** It is interesting to note her use of an antiquarian key signature (2 flats for c minor), which was common in pre-classical music and sometimes known as a partial key signature.

#### 14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

Consult the chorale tune above and incorporate the phrase marks (indicated by apostrophes when rests are not present) into this prelude.

Performers may use a range of articulations, from a brief lift or short breath (similar to a comma in a sentence), to a definitive break (like a period in a sentence) in order to bring out phrases of the chorale melody, breaks in the chorale text, interesting musical lines, and harmonic moments. While articulations are not married to the text itself, since Smyth did not specify the stanza she set, the performer may decide to select a specific stanza to guide their performance. Other performers might decide to treat the text's themes abstractly and follow the phrasing of the chorale melody more closely. Each performer must determine these factors on their own.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This advice may be applied to all of Smyth's chorale preludes.

Navigating the pedal line while manipulating the Swell box, especially at mm. 6, 7, 11–19, can be challenging. Work out the pedal line and designate when foot substitutions will take place in order to leave a foot free to manipulate the Swell box.

Bring out the suspensions, especially in mm. 9–10, by breaking slightly before the suspensions, or spending a little more time on them.

Use agogic accents and slight ritardandos to bring out surprise harmonies (e.g. m. 12, lean on the seventh in beat 2 between the pedal and left hand before approaching the *forte* on beat 3); think of “squeezing” the tense harmonies.

The small note slides in mm. 17–18 should be performed before the beat.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing: Part 2* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2010), 323.

## “O Gott du frommer Gott” setting 1

1) **Text and tune:** The text depicts one who is asking God for physical, emotional, and spiritual health to do what the Lord wants. The first two stanzas are listed below, with original text by Johann Heermann (1585-1647) from 1630 and an English translation:

1. O Gott, du frommer Gott,  
Du Brunnquell guter Gaben,  
Ohn' den nichts ist, was ist,  
Von dem wir alles haben:  
Gesunden Leib gib mir,  
Und daß in solchem Leib  
Ein' unverletzte Seel'  
Und rein Gewißen bleib'

1. O God, thou faithful God!  
Thou well-spring of all blessing!  
In whom we all exist,  
From whom we're all possessing!  
Give me a body sound;  
And in it, builded well,  
Let an unblemished soul  
And a good conscience dwell.

2. Gib, daß ich tu' mit Fleiß,  
Was mir zu tun gebühret,  
Wozu mich dein Befehl  
In meinem Stande führet!  
Gib, daß ich's tue bald,  
Zu der Zeit, da ich soll,  
Und wenn ich's tu', so gib,  
Daß es gerate wohl!<sup>8</sup>

2. Afford me will and strength  
To do the work assigned me;  
Whereto, in my true place,  
Thy law may call and find me.  
Let it be timely done,  
With eager readiness;  
And what is done in thee  
Have ever good success!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Johann Heerman, “O Gott, du frommer Gott,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale013-Eng3.htm> (accessed March 27, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Frothingham, 217.

Example 15: Anonymous, “O Gott du frommer Gott,” extracted



2) **Liturgical function:** Consecration; private devotion

3) **Musical Form:** cantus firmus chorale, no interludes; AA'B

4) **Texture:** 4 voices, unadorned melody in soprano

5) **Meter:** 4/4

6) **Settings by other composers:** J.S. Bach (BWV 24, 71, 399, 45), Brahms, Dupré, Muffat, Töpfer,<sup>10</sup> Mendelssohn's *Elijah* ("Cast Thy Burden Upon the Lord" contains a hidden chorale quotation)<sup>11</sup>

7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** imitative rhythmic figures – *suspirans*, triplets against duplets (similar to Brahms's "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid" chorale prelude)

8) **Motivic ideas:** angular *suspirans* figure, imitative half steps

9) **Text painting:** Consistency in motivic treatment could be evoking God's constant love and faithfulness, and/or our never-ending search for truth

10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante larghetto* (andante and somewhat faster than *Largo*); ♩ = 40 (suggested by Colette Ripley)

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Slater Edson, *Organ-Preludes: An Index to Compositions on Hymn Tunes, Chorales, Plainsong Melodies, Gregorian Tunes and Carols* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1970), 962.

<sup>11</sup> Friedhelm Krummacher, "Mendelssohn's Music in Relation to England," from *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 96.

11) **Registration ideas:** The following suggestions contrast with the advice Ripley provides in her edition: “Two contrasting plenum sounds comprised of 8’ and 4’ stops with a 16’ in the pedal would be an appropriate sound.”<sup>12</sup> The warmer registration I suggest below complements the chorale text and *mp* indications more adequately:

Manual I (*mp*): Combination of warm 8’ and 4’ principals and flutes; gentle 8’ stops and gentle 8’ reed (oboe) to provide contrast with Manual II  
Manual II (*p*): Combination of quieter 8’ stops  
Pedal (*mp*): 16’ and 8’ flutes

This registration also utilizes terraced dynamics, which highlights the dynamic contrast between mm. 1–4 (*mp*) and mm. 4–8 (*p*). The performer should check the balance between the pedal stops and both manuals. Depending on the instrument, some pedal stops might need to be removed to balance with the quieter Manual II registration.

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** In this piece, Smyth indicates ties, not slurs. As has been established earlier in this document, music of this period is understood to be played legato in absence of markings to the contrary. The rich harmonies and suspensions (mm. 2, 3, 11, 12, 14) lend itself to an even greater degree of legato (less fast attack and release than bright legato) touch.<sup>13</sup> Much of the pedal line can be done with alternating toes, but the performer should use the heels to accomplish a legato line.

13) **Other notes:** original key of the chorale is A minor, but Smyth writes it in C minor: possibly done for pedal range reasons; indicates different dynamic markings for the different manuals, but no use of Swell box.

#### 14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

The performer should distinguish the repeat of the *Stollen* from what came before. In addition to the manual change, the performer could incorporate rubato to vary this repeated musical material (e.g. pushing forward during the melodic ascent of mm. 5–6, then relaxing the tempo during the melodic descent in m. 7). The original *Affekt* of the beginning could return when the piece moves back to Manual I at m. 8.

To point out the motivic construction, especially at the beginning of this work, the performer might consider in (complete) bar 2, beat one, pedal line, to place an articulative space between the first note and the remaining three sixteenth notes, thereby projecting the *suspirans* gesture. The same could be done on beat 2 in the tenor voice. Example 16 below includes these suggested articulations:

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<sup>12</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Chorale Preludes for Organ*, ed. Colette Ripley (St. Louis: Vivace Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Andrews, “The Many Variations of Touch (based on the principles found in *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique* by Tobias Matthay)” (lecture handout presented during Indiana University’s Organ Pedagogy Course, Bloomington, Indiana, November 2009).

Example 16: Smyth, “O Gott du frommer Gott,” setting 1, m. 2, with suggested articulations

The image shows a musical score for Example 16, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is for measure 2, indicated by a '2' above the first staff. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Small vertical lines (breaths) are placed above the notes in the first and second beats of the measure, indicating suggested articulations. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

These small breaths in beats 1 and 2 would point out the layers of motivic construction and activity, thus becoming more apparent to the listener.

Instances of duplets vs. triplets could be an opportunity for rubato: the performer could take more time with this figure during its initial occurrence (m. 1), then could perform them with more forward-driving momentum during the second occurrence (m. 5) as a way to vary the *Stollen*. Subdividing the duplets vs. triplets into smaller beats can help the performer with execution.

Bring out the interesting harmonies and suspensions (e.g. mm. 2, 3, 11, 12, 14).

Perform m. 9, beat 3 (g) using the principle of *notes communes*.<sup>14</sup>

Take note of the voice crossing at m. 12, beat 4: share voices between the hands for ease of playing.

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<sup>14</sup> *Notes communes*, or “common notes” in English, refers to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century practice of tying a note in one voice that occurs in the next chord in a different voice to maintain a legato touch. As Laukvik describes, “Situations arise in which the same note appears in succession in two different voices. According to the practice of *notes communes*, i.e. common or tied notes, the key is not restruck. Instead, the first note is tied into the second voice, even when a tie is not notated....On the other hand, if the note is repeated in the same voice, the key should be restruck. We have no conclusive knowledge of when the phenomenon of *notes communes* arose” (Laukvik, 311).

## “O Gott du frommer Gott” setting 2

- 1) **Text and tune:** see previous entry
- 2) **Liturgical function:** Consecration; private devotion
- 3) **Musical Form:** essentially a cantus firmus chorale with mini-interludes in the upper voices (as the bass finishes the canon); AB (no explicit repeat of *Stollen*, although the canon could be considered the repeat)
- 4) **Texture:** canon at the octave between soprano and bass; slight decorations in the B section; syncopated inner voices
- 5) **Meter:** 12/8
- 6) **Settings by other composers:** see previous entry
- 7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** canon
- 8) **Motivic ideas:** syncopated inner voices
- 9) **Text painting:** canons typically represent law and order; evokes God’s constancy
- 10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante con moto* (moderate walking tempo “with motion”);  
♩ . = 50 (suggested by Colette Ripley)
- 11) **Registration ideas:**
  - Manual (*mp*): Combination of gentle 8’ and 4’ principals and flutes
  - Pedal (*mp*): 16’ and 8’ flutes

Another option that features more sound variation and color to complement the energized rhythms:

  - Manual (*mp*): 8’ Gamba and 2’ Flautina or 8’ Gamba and 4’ Gemshorn
  - Pedal (*mp*): Couple in an 8’ reed from the Great or Swell
- 12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** Maintaining a “bright legato” touch (fast attack and fast release, which results in a clear, articulate, but still legato, touch<sup>15</sup>) throughout will energize the piece. The entrances, syncopations, and motivic activity can be highlighted with articulation and/or timing; match the articulation of the pedal line to the soprano line

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Andrews, “The Many Variations of Touch (based on the principles found in *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique* by Tobias Matthay)” (lecture handout presented during Indiana University’s Organ Pedagogy Course, Bloomington, Indiana, November 2009).



to bring out the canon. Perform m. 2, beat 3 (e-flat) using the principles of *note communes*.<sup>16</sup>

13) **Other notes:** original key of the chorale is A minor, but Smyth writes it in C minor: possibly done for pedal range reasons; only one dynamic marking used throughout, indicated at beginning (*mp*)

14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

Since the piece is very chromatic, care should be taken to mark the accidentals, which can hard to notice amidst the interwoven lines.

Be mindful of the rhythm, especially in the soprano, where the rests tend to be obscured by inner voices.

Share voices between the right hand and left hand to maintain a legato touch more easily (e.g. mm. 1–3).

At m. 7, the A natural in the soprano should have a slow release, followed by a fast attack on the repeated A natural in the alto voice; this will lessen the naturally occurring accent on the repeated note (also known as a ‘close’ repeat). A similar situation occurs in m. 14, beat 3 with the C natural.

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<sup>16</sup> See “O Gott du frommer Gott” setting 1, ‘Performance Challenges and Interpretive Questions’ for further discussion on *notes communes*.

## “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott”

1) **Text and tune:** The text depicts Christ’s triumph over sin and death. The first two stanzas are listed below, with original text by Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676) from 1653 and an English translation:

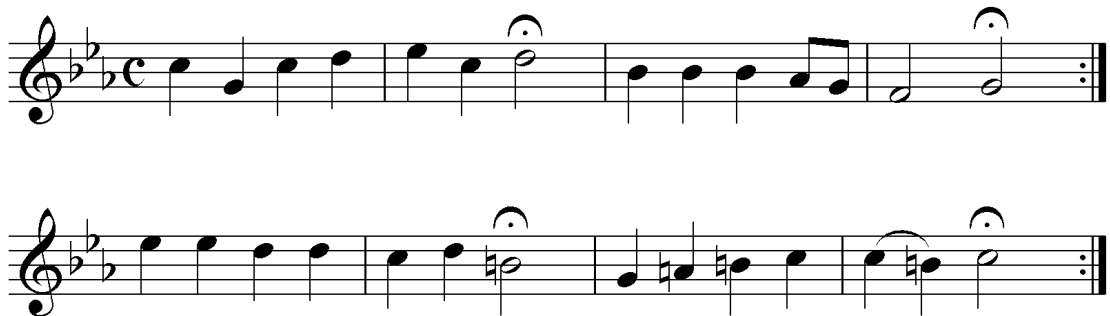
1. Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,  
Du betrübte Seele!  
Warum liegst du, Gott zum Spott,  
In der Schwermuthshöhle?  
Merkst du nicht des Satans List?  
Er will durch sein Kämpfen  
Deinen Trost, den Jesus Christ  
Dir erworben, dämpfen.

1. Raise yourself up to your God,  
you troubled soul!  
Why do you lie, in mockery of God,  
in the slough of melancholy ?  
Are you not aware of Satan’s cunning?  
through his opposition he wants  
to lessen your consolation,  
which Jesus Christ gained for you.

2. Schüttele deinen Kopf und sprich:  
"Fleuch, du alte Schlange!  
Was erneurst du deinen Stich,  
Machst mir angst und bange?  
Ist dir doch der Kopf zerknickt,  
Und ich bin durchs Leiden  
Meines Heilands dir entzückt  
In den Saal der Freuden.<sup>17</sup>

2. Shake your head and say:  
flee, you old serpent!  
Why do you renew your sting  
and make me anxious and fearful?  
Now your head is crushed,  
and through the suffering  
of my Saviour I am taken from you  
into the hall of joy.<sup>18</sup>

Example 17: Friedrich Funcke, “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” melody only



<sup>17</sup> Paul Gerhardt, “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale057-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Francis Browne, “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott Translation,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale057-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

2) **Liturgical function:** Easter; Jesus's battle for our salvation; private devotion to help reflect on our struggles with sin and the fleeting nature of life

3) **Musical Form:** ornamented chorale with independently structured accompanimental interludes

4) **Texture:** 3 accompanying voices (LH, pedal), adorned c.f. melody in RH (mostly Italianate/written-out ornamentation, but some French style trill symbols too)

5) **Meter:** 9/16, triple meter, chamber meter; according to Jon Laukvik, chamber meters imply a lighter affect: "Apart from this church style there is the nimble chamber style," which he goes on to describe as "light, frivolous; lively, fleeting."<sup>19</sup>

6) **Settings by other composers:** J.S. Bach (BWV 40)

7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** extensive vorimitation/accompanimental activity; the opening motive is used throughout the piece, often intact, but occasionally in augmentation (mm. 22, 28, 31, 52).

8) **Motivic ideas:** melodic motives (leap + stepwise motion) are borrowed and foreshadowed extensively in the interludes/accompanying voices

9) **Text painting:** the prevalence of leaps throughout this piece could be a manifestation of the opening line of the text, which states, "Raise yourself up to your God;" it also could depict Christ's triumph over death and ascension into Heaven; the triple meter, syncopations, and leaps evoke movement, activity, and a refreshing affect; the oscillation between c minor and Eb major also suggests the struggle between life and death and our personal struggles with sin. These struggles continue until the very end of the piece. Mm. 52–53 are rife with chromaticism and tritones before finally resolving to C major.

10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante con moto* (moderate walking tempo "with motion"); ♩. = 58-60 (suggested by Colette Ripley)

11) **Registration ideas:** The dynamics indicate a quiet registration, but the text, meter, and affect suggest a bolder registration. Two contrasting options are given below:

Manual I (melody, *mp*): 8' principal and 4' flute; 8' oboe and 4' flute; 8' open diapason and 4' principal; combination of gentle 8' reeds and principals

Manual II (accompaniment, *p*): Combination of quieter 8' stops

Pedal (*p*): 16' and 8' flutes

or

Manual I (melody): 8', 4', and 2' principals; or 8' oboe, 4' flute, 2' flute

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<sup>19</sup> Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing* (Stuttgart: Carus, 1996), 80.

Manual II (accompaniment): bold 8' stops; or 8' and 4' stops  
Pedal: 16' and 8' flutes

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** The performer should aim for a bright legato (fast attack and fast release)<sup>20</sup> which will complement the energy of the writing. Maintaining a bright legato can be difficult in the left hand accompaniment. This may be approached in two ways: substitution may be employed, and the right hand could thumb down when possible (mm. 34–35); alternately, this might be a place where one can lean toward a slightly non-legato touch.

13) **Other notes:** originally in d minor, Smyth writes in c minor; no use of Swell box, but dynamics are suggested; realization of ornaments is discussed below. Smyth makes use of dashes, which indicate where the line moves between staves (mm. 3, 4, 41, 42). This explicitly indicates that even though the musical line moves to the upper staff, the performer should remain on the original manual (and not move up to the solo manual).

14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

Certain harmonic moments should be brought out using touch and/or rubato, such as the extremely chromatic harmonies of mm. 24–25 and the tritones at m. 52.

Smyth employs melodic expansion, often found in César Franck's music, at m. 38:

Example 18: Smyth, "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott," m. 38

The image shows a musical score for Example 18, measures 38 and 39. The score is in 9/16 time and c minor. Measure 38 features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes in both hands. Measure 39 shows a melodic expansion with a long note in the bass line.

Since this measure leads back to the opening material, two approaches to rubato can be employed: melodic (using rubato throughout the individual interval expansions in the upper voice), or structural (having a longer ritardando throughout the entire measure that leads to the return of opening material and final chorale phrase in m. 39).

<sup>20</sup> Colin Andrews, "The Many Variations of Touch (based on the principles found in *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique* by Tobias Matthay)" (lecture handout presented during Indiana University's Organ Pedagogy Course, Bloomington, Indiana, November 2009).

Perform m. 46, beat 1 (g) using the principle of *notes communes*.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the ornaments:

As mentioned in Chapter 8, Howard Ferguson points out, “In contrast to eighteenth-century practice, shakes now begin with the main note instead of the upper auxiliary, as can be seen from the Pianoforte Schools of Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1828) and Carl Czerny (1839).”<sup>22</sup> He goes on to say, however, that some need to start with the auxiliary note, “So the player should make his choice according to the context.”<sup>23</sup>

With this in mind, the trills in this piece warrant further exploration:

M. 12: this trill should begin with the upper auxiliary since the main note has already been stated in the preceding anticipation notes. The anticipatory 32<sup>nd</sup> notes should be played as written, but should be treated as a bridge to the trill figure. The trill figure, beginning on beat 3, should be in the same tempo as the preceding “bridge” gesture, thus linking the second and third beats without changing the rhythmic value of the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes.

M. 20: this is similar to the trill in m. 12, with the exception that the trill on beat 3 should begin with the main note since the upper auxiliary precedes it.

M. 31: the presence of the upper auxiliary immediately preceding the ornament supports a main note start.

M. 46: The trill figure, beginning on beat 3, should be in the same tempo as the preceding 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, thus unifying this entire ornamental passage. Since the note that precedes is not the upper auxiliary, the trill could logically and successfully begin on the upper auxiliary note. I prefer, however, to start on the main note to create a tritone relationship in the manuals (F-natural and B-natural). This would add to the tension already created through the chromaticism and suspensions, and would highlight the text depicting Christ’s battle with evil. Regarding the termination, written in 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, since it lines up with the final sixteenth triplet of the left hand, the performer could play these 32<sup>nd</sup> notes directly with its complementary left hand note, or could play it immediately after the left hand note, thus anticipating the final note (“C”) in the right hand. Since the performer has two opportunities to play this trill, it could be realized in different manners. I would suggest a quick termination the first time, then a literal and rhythmic reading the second time. A rhythmic reading of the termination will make it slower and more emphatic, which is appropriate since the termination precedes the final melody note.

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<sup>21</sup> See “O Gott du frommer Gott” setting 1, ‘Performance Challenges and Interpretive Questions’ for further discussion on *notes communes*.

<sup>22</sup> Howard Ferguson, *Keyboard Interpretation from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 123.

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, 123.

M. 54: This is a simple trill used to highlight the downbeat of the final measure, and may be performed starting with the upper note, despite the presence of the upper auxiliary immediately preceding the trill. Using the upper note adds to the poignancy of the final cadence by highlighting the dissonance between the G and A-flat.

## “Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag”

1) **Text and tune:** The text depicts Christ’s triumph over sin and death. The first stanza is listed below, with original text by Nicolaus Herman (c. 1480-1561) from 1560 and an English translation. The original tune by Herman has been transposed to match the key of Smyth’s setting.

1. Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,  
dran sich niemand gnug freuen mag;  
Christ, unser Herr, heut triumphiert,  
all seine Feind gefangen führt.  
Halleluja!<sup>24</sup>

1. Here shining is the splendid day.  
More joy than we have words to say.  
Christ our Lord has triumphed now,  
and leads in captive every foe.  
Hallelujah!<sup>25</sup>

Example 19: Nicolaus Herman, “Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag,” melody only, transposed to F# Dorian to match Smyth’s setting



2) **Liturgical function:** Easter

3) **Musical Form:** cantus firmus chorale; 5 phrases with brief interludes and vorimitation; potentially inspired by the chorale motet, where each phrase of the chorale serves as the point of imitation (vorimitation in this case) in the accompanying voices. Smyth precedes each segment of the pedal melody by vorimitation in different voices: the

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<sup>24</sup> Nikolaus Herman, “Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/CM/Erschienen-ist-der-herrlich-Tag.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Farseth, “Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag Translation,” Bach Cantatas Website, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale091-Eng3.htm> (accessed July 9, 2013).

vorimitation begins in the soprano at m. 1, then the alto at m. 16, soprano at mm. 31 and 47, then tenor at m. 61. There are other imitative effects in the other voices as well (tenor at m. 17; alto at mm. 48 and 62).

4) **Texture:** cantus firmus in pedal, 3 upper voices accompanimental

5) **Meter:** 3/4

6) **Settings by other composers:** J.S. Bach (BWV 67, BWV 145, BWV 629), Buxtehude, Dupré, Frescobaldi, Herzogenberg, Karg-Elert, Pepping, Reger, Rinck, Telemann, Walther<sup>26</sup>

7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** vorimitation, hints of melody in accompaniment

8) **Motivic ideas:** vorimitation uses diminutions of the chorale melody; use of leaps, open 5ths in imitation between voices

9) **Text painting:** use of leaps, large intervals, primarily open positions, 3rds and 6ths evoke heralding trumpets

10) **Tempo:** marked *Allegro moderato* (moderately fast); ♩ = 120 (suggested by Colette Ripley)

11) **Registration ideas:** This piece is the only instance where Smyth indicates registrations. This might prove her exposure to German instruments, because a 4' Trumpet on an English organ at this time would be very difficult to find. In addition, the extreme range of the pedal line (extending to F-sharp") clearly indicates that it should be performed down an octave with the 4' trumpet.<sup>27</sup>

Manual (*f*): 8' (principal or combination of principals and flutes)

Pedal: 4' Trumpet (played down an octave)

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** The touch should be more detached and buoyant, rather than legato. This will enhance the energy of the joyful text and will reference the piece's original instrumentation for brass ensemble. A more detached touch will also assist the performer in musically managing the large leaps (especially at m. 41).

13) **Other notes:** original key d/D, Smyth uses F# minor; dynamic markings indicate registration/relative sound ("sempre *f*" = loud throughout on the pedal); no use of swell box; pedal range points to playing the pedal line down an octave (see 'Registration

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<sup>26</sup> Edson, 747.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Willis's organ for Liverpool, built between 1923-1926, is the largest instrument in the United Kingdom, and has a pedal compass from C to f". Smyth's indication for an F-sharp" in the pedal line must be understood as not referring to an actual F-sharp" pedal note, but rather a sounding F-sharp". Playing the pedal line down an octave is a familiar manipulation of the organ: the same must be done for BWV 600, especially since Bach's instrument would have lacked the f".



ideas’). It is also worth noting that Smyth adjusts some notes and rhythms of the melody to accommodate the counterpoint in her setting.

#### **14) Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

The large range in the manuals can be difficult for the performer. Some options for those who do not have the required hand span (especially at mm. 6 and 41) are to have a registrant assist you with some notes or to adjust the octave of an inner voice in order for the notes to be played with one hand. Since the pedal is sounding at mm. 6 and 41, coupling the manual down to the pedal is not a viable option.

Keeping the piece buoyant can be challenging, especially with the wide range in the manuals. The performer can achieve their desired affect by keeping a more detached or open touch, being deliberate about fingerings, and sharing inner voices between the hands whenever possible: thinking of brass tonguing and the breath support needed by brass players might help achieve this nuanced articulation at the organ.

Another challenge is shaping the pedal line, which is difficult since the lines are long and sustained. It may be helpful to write the text of the chorale in the pedal part to maintain a sense of the vocal line.

## “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” prelude

1) **Text and tune:** The text depicts the pain and suffering of Christ’s Passion. The first three stanzas, with original text by Johann Rist (1607-1667) from 1628 are listed below:

1. O Traurigkeit,  
O Herzeleid!  
Ist das nicht zu beklagen?  
Gott des Vaters einig Kind  
Wird ins Grab getragen.

1. O darkest woe!  
Ye tears, forth flow!  
Has earth so sad a wonder?  
God the Father’s only Son  
Now lies buried yonder.

2. O große Not!  
Gott selbst ist tot,  
Am Kreuz ist er gestorben,  
Hat dadurch das Himmelreich  
Uns aus Lieb' erworben.

2. O sorrow dread!  
God’s Son is dead!  
But by His expiation  
Of our guilt upon the cross  
Gained for us salvation.

3. O Menschenkind,  
Nur deine Sünd'  
Hat dieses angerichtet,  
Da du durch die Missetat  
Warest ganz vernichtet.<sup>28</sup>

3. O sinful man,  
it was the ban  
Of death on thee that brought Him  
Down to suffer for thy sins,  
And such woe hath wrought Him.<sup>29</sup>

Example 20: Anonymous, “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid,” melody only



For a standard four-voice version of the chorale, the performer can refer to the *The Lutheran Service Book*, which is in the same key as Smyth’s setting.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Johann Rist, “O Traurigkeit,” Musicanet,  
<http://www.musicanet.org/robokopp/Lieder/otraurig.html> (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Winkworth, “O Darkest Woe,” from the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 448.

<sup>30</sup> Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 448.

- 2) **Liturgical function:** Good Friday
- 3) **Musical Form:** embellished melody, no vorimitation or interludes, not in AA'B form
- 4) **Texture:** ornamented melody, 3 accompanimental voices, often in imitation
- 5) **Meter:** 4/4
- 6) **Settings by other composers:** Brahms, Pachelbel, Pepping, Rinck, Schroeder, Töpfer<sup>31</sup>
- 7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** canonic entries in inner voices (e.g. mm. 1 and 5)
- 8) **Motivic ideas:** dactyl figure, triplet rhythms
- 9) **Text painting:** anguish, pain, and suffering represented by chromaticism, rhythmic shifts, duplets against triplet figures, juxtaposed augmented intervals, leaps, syncopations, Kreuz motifs (e.g. m. 1), and *passus diriusculus* figures (e.g. m. 7).
- 10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante larghetto* (moderate walking tempo and somewhat faster than *Largo*); ♩ = 69-72 (suggested by Colette Ripley)
- 11) **Registration ideas:**
  - Manual (*mp*): 8' principal and 4' flute; 8' oboe and 4' flute; 8' open diapason and 4' principal; combination of gentle 8' reeds and/or principals
  - Pedal: 16' and 8' flutes

Another registrational scheme would be to isolate the soprano voice on a separate manual. This would allow the performer to bring out the ornamented melody on a solo or colorful stop:

Manual I: 8' oboe and 8' or 4' flute, tremulant  
 Manual II: 8' flute and/or quiet 8' principal  
 Pedal: 16' and 8' flutes

It is worth noting that in the autograph score from the British Library, she indicates "a duo Clav. E Ped.,"<sup>32</sup> but this indication has been crossed out in the autograph copy held in the Royal College of Music.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Smyth crossed out

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<sup>31</sup> Edson, 980.

<sup>32</sup> "O Traurigkeit (Prelude)," Smyth Manuscripts, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XIV, XXI-XXII, British Library, London, England.

<sup>33</sup> "O Traurigkeit (Prelude)," Smyth Chorale Prelude Autographs, Royal College of Music Autographs No. 4469, London, England.

the two manual indication to facilitate a legato touch more easily, or because she simply preferred it on a single manual.

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** The decorative writing contains primarily stepwise motion, which suggests a more legato touch, as does the “dolce” instruction. However, the performer can bring out the chromaticism, angularity, and embedded melody notes with a nuanced range of touches without resorting to an aggressively articulate touch. Example 21 is the original by Smyth, and Example 22 shows articulation markings added by the author. These are provided below to give the performer ideas regarding a nuanced approach to articulation:

Example 21: Smyth, Prelude on “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid,” mm. 7–8

Example 22: Smyth, Prelude on “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid,” mm. 7–8, with suggested articulation markings

The breath notated in m. 7, beat 1 helps unify the release of the pedal with the left hand, while the breath in m. 7, beat 3 highlights the chromatic activity. The breath and slur in

m. 7, beat 4 help differentiate the converging lines in the left hand accompaniment. The hairpins in m. 8 are meant to highlight the build-up and release of tension, rather than dynamic markings. The arrow above m. 8, beat 2 shows the goal of the *suspirans* figure. The tenuto markings in m. 8, beats 3 and 4 highlight the melodic expansion and complements a *ritardando* leading into m. 9. These suggestions are some ways that the performer can approach articulation in this piece. The goal of these technical suggestions is to bring out the poignancy of the harmonic and melodic devices Smyth uses to express the bitter anguish of the text.

13) **Other notes:** chorale usually in A minor, Smyth writes both prelude and fugue in E minor; dynamic marking only at beginning; no Swell box indications or registration changes.

14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

Using the chorale melody given, the performer should identify (by circling or highlighting) the fundamental notes of the melody embedded within the decorated line: this will help shape the piece overall. By understanding how the melody has been treated, the performer will be able to highlight important notes, harmonic moments, and shape the melismatic gestures.

If the performance of the manual parts occurs on a single manual, the performer should take advantage of instances where the hands can share inner voices (particularly in mm. 3, 5, 8–10).

Take note of the voice crossing in m. 2 and be sure to sustain the correct notes.

Maintain a sense of movement in measures that seem conspicuously static (such as m. 4) by thinking of the sixteenth-note triplet motive. Overall, the nature of this melismatic setting suggests a tempo that embraces a sense of freedom while remaining faithful to a larger pulse, especially with its heightened emotion expressed through chromaticism and rhetorical gestures. The following are some thoughts on rubato from Laukvik:

The basic questions about rubato center on its degree and intensity, not where it should be employed. The goal here must not be an arbitrary one, but instead a diverse rhythmic treatment arising from the content of each phrase, and from the structure of the whole.... But the distinction between an intelligent rubato and unrhythmic playing is paper thin. Moreover, a gentle, sensitive implication is always superior to crass exaggeration. And finally, we are reminded of Czerny's observation: "To unite this occasional departure with the strict maintenance of the pulse in a tasteful and intelligible way – this is the great art of the good player, and it can be acquired only by a finely formed feeling, extremely attentive practice, and listening to good artists on all instruments, and particularly to great singers." Of course, in the end each player should strike a personal note in this respect.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Laukvik, 307.

## “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” fugue

- 1) **Text and tune:** see previous entry
- 2) **Liturgical function:** Good Friday
- 3) **Musical Form:** non-strict fugue/chorale motet: a chorale motet has fugal development of successive chorale phrases, rather than the development of a single cantus firmus motive. Russell Stinson describes, “Conceived along the lines of the Renaissance vocal motet, the chorale motet emerged at the turn of the seventeenth century and quickly became a favorite form of the central-German organ school. Its *modus operandi* is merely to establish each phrase of the chorale as a point of imitation, always using the same basic rhythms for each imitative statement (as opposed to a concluding segment in augmentation).”<sup>35</sup> In Smyth’s work, the five segments of the chorale melody are each treated imitatively. Smyth finishes the work with a final *Adagio*, which presents the entire chorale melody in the soprano with minor alterations (m. 58, 63).
- 4) **Texture:** 4 voices, fugal texture
- 5) **Meter:** 4/4
- 6) **Settings by other composers:** see previous entry
- 7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** fugal entrances, real and tonal answers, but not a strict fugue; canonic elements between the voices (e.g. the soprano and tenor in mm. 1 and 8)
- 8) **Motivic ideas:** sighing motive in m. 16, derived from tail of countersubject (eighth notes with upbeat); triplet motive during the third segment of the fugue (mm. 24-38); contrary motion in soprano line at mm. 30 and 33-34
- 9) **Text painting:** tritones, chromaticism; the fugal texture could represent unrelenting anguish
- 10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante non troppo* (moderate walking speed, between *Allegretto* and *Adagio*, but “not too much”); ♩ = 66-69 (suggested by Colette Ripley)
- 11) **Registration ideas:** This piece is the only instance where a registral crescendo and decrescendo, in addition to the use of the Swell box, seems appropriate. The generic registration suggestions are for a three-manual instrument (Swell, Great, Choir) with two divisions under expression, modeled after the English Victorian sound. Despite the fact that Smyth does not provide explicit registration instructions, the texture, length, and content of the piece can be served well with an English Romantic registration. Her exposure to the English romantic tradition, through Sir Walter Parratt, bolsters this argument.

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<sup>35</sup> Russell Stinson, *J.S. Bach’s Great Eighteen Organ Chorales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

Overview of the sound quality called for in English Romantic music:

The English Victorian sound is built upon dark foundational tones, many of which are on their English romantic organs. The British would use First, Second, and Third Diapasons, whereas in the U.S. we would say/use Principal 8', Bourdon or Flute 8', Gamba 8', and Salicional 8'. Organists must be cautious when registering British works on American organs, especially with American organs' powerful upper work and pedal mixtures and reeds. The organist must thoughtfully use their ear to manipulate the American organ for a broader sound, built from foundational tones ranging from 32'-4' in the Pedal (or just 32'-8'), 16'-4' in the Great, and 16'-4' in the Swell and Choir (crescendos typically begin with the Swell, then the Choir). Using a 2', the Swell Bourdon 16', or a gentle non-neo-Baroque mixture on the Swell would be the last addition of sound on this broad registrational model.

The following extended quotations are taken from Dr. Jeffrey Smith's handout, "Choral Accompaniment on the Organ: A Few Suggestions." Although the characteristics described are of an accompanying organ in the English cathedral tradition, the same principles can be applied to English romantic repertoire due to the correlation between English romantic choral repertoire and English romantic organ music. The following passage describes characteristics of an ideal organ for choral accompaniment:

An ideal accompaniment organ is not necessarily large; in fact, there are quite a few mammoth machines which are actually very poor accompaniment instruments.... The specification of the organ need not necessarily include stops required in the organ literature, for example Cornets, high pitched mixtures, half-length reeds, Voix Humaine, etc. These stops are not often used in choral accompaniment. Complete flue and reed choruses are nonetheless essential on at least two divisions. A three manual organ with two enclosed divisions would be adequate, a fourth enclosed manual still better. The Swell boxes should be fast-moving, silent in operation, and provide adequate dynamic contrast....

The Pedal division should have many borrows from the enclosed manual divisions, as this greatly eases manual/pedal balancing....

The Swell division should probably be the largest division, as it is the workhorse of accompaniment....

On an accompanimental organ, the unenclosed Great might be considered – radically – an extension of the Swell, designed to provide more weight and brilliance.

The enclosed Choir and Solo divisions house specialty colors, which contrast the constant use of the Swell division.

The chorus work of a Willis, Harrison and Harrison, E.M. Skinner, or early G. Donald Harrison are perhaps less extreme in personality than German or French styles, forming a better backdrop to the choral sound.<sup>36</sup>

Smith's handout also provides advice on preparing graded divisional pistons. This will assist the performer in determining an appropriate order of stops for the registral crescendo in Smyth's fugue, and serves as the basis of the suggested registration scheme provided:

1. Generally, Célestes should not be included on the Swell divisionals.
2. Swell No. 1 should be soft flute(s), subsequent piston add Gambas and Diapasons at 8', a soft Oboe, then other reeds or soft, low-pitched mixtures
3. If possible use the first divisional (particularly on the Great) as a zero/canceller to that divisions. This allows flexibility of playing continuously on the coupled Great, but without the unenclosed Great stops in the way.
4. Pedal No. 1 might be zero/canceller to provide for moments where no 16' should be heard, but the hands need help. Many accompaniments alternate 16' and 8' sound in the pedal; use a pedal divisional (in a convenient location) for this.
5. For the Solo division, set up the solo colors in the same way for every piece, allowing for your instant reaction. The choir division will have both chorus and solo colors; use the last few numbers for the solo colors like Clarinet, Cornet, Tuba, etc.
6. The most useful combinations set on pedal divisionals are: no stops; 32'/16' flutes; Softest 16'/8' flutes; Principals 16'/8'; Chorus + 16' reed; Full pedal including 32' reed.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to registration suggestions, Smith also provides general tips on how to prepare and achieve a seamless crescendo and decrescendo:

1. When adding stops, often it is necessary to close the Swell box of that division in advance of the addition, in order to mask the change. Make sure that you anticipate the amount of time your Swell mechanism will react.
2. When you are crescendo-ing, add 4' stops at points where the melodic line dips downward; conversely, when decrescendo-ing, retire the 4' when the line jumps up.
3. Play mostly on the division, but if needed, use soft Great and Choir stops to mask the registration changes on the Swell. However, the Swell to Choir coupler can create complications if you intend to use solo colors on the Choir division.
4. Don't neglect that the Pedal division must travel dynamically with the manuals. A Swell to Pedal tab consistently on is often not enough. The Schoenstein "Range-Feature" or the English "Pedal to Swell Combons" knob

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<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey Smith, "Choral Accompaniment on the Organ: A Few Suggestions," (lecture handout presented during Indiana University's Sacred Music Practicum, Bloomington, Indiana, September 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Smith, "Choral Accompaniment."



make this easy to manage. Most American organs will require some use of Pedal divisionals or extra general pistons to achieve this.

5. Most factory-set Crescendo Pedal settings are useless in accompaniment because they cannot be controlled with complete nuance to match a given score. Custom arranged settings are better, but take as much or more time to devise than conventional use of pistons.
6. Avoid “All Swells to Swell” unless absolutely necessary. It prohibits you from covering or ‘masking’ changes on one manual with the covering sound of another. Swell boxes are best used in opposition, rather than in tandem.<sup>38</sup>

With these suggestions in mind, the following is a registration scheme for Smyth’s “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” fugue. Specific measures and beats recommended for registration changes occur in logical breaths in the music, which allow for minimal disruption. The manipulation of the boxes will also allow for subtle gradations in dynamics. Variations on these recommendations are expected in order to accommodate the performer’s own instrument:

Suggested Registration:

Manual: Begin on the Choir with a principals and flutes 8’ and 4’.

Prepare principals and flutes 8’ and 4’ on the Swell and couple to both the Great and Choir. Prepare 8’ principals and flutes on the Great.

Pedal Principals and flutes 16’ 8’, some or all manuals coupled down to pedal to allow for maximum control over dynamics.

Swell box shut, Choir box open.

m. 19, beats 1-3: gradually shut Choir box

m. 19, beat 4: add moderate reed 8’ to Swell (coupled to Choir) and an additional foundation stop in the Pedal

m. 20: open Choir box

m. 21-22: gradually open Swell box

m. 23, beat 4: move from Choir to Great (maintaining legato/seamless phrasing)

m. 26, beats 1-2: shut Swell box

m. 26, beat 4: add Swell 4’ and 2’ to increase volume

m. 27-28: open Swell box

m. 29: shut Swell box

m. 30, beat 1: add gentle Swell mixture

m. 30, beat 2: open Swell box (both boxes open at this point)

m. 32, between beats 1 and 2: add Pedal reed and/or 32’ and Choir 2’

m. 36, beat 1: remove Pedal reed and/or 32’

m. 37, beat 1: remove Choir 2’

m. 38, beat 1: remove Swell mixture, gradually close Swell box

m. 40, beat 1: move from Great to Choir

m. 40, beat 4: remove Swell 4’ and 2’ (originally added in m. 26)

m. 41-43: gradually close Choir box

m. 44, beat 2: remove Swell reed 8’ and additional foundation stop in Pedal

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, “Choral Accompaniment.”

(originally added in m. 19, beat 4)

m. 46, beat 1: remove principal sounds and/or 4' stops on Choir

m. 49, beat 3: remove principal sounds and/or 4' stops on Swell

m. 52: remove all principal 8' stops on Swell and Choir

m. 53, beat 1: both boxes should be shut

m. 53, beat 4: the only stops sounding should be 8' flutes in the manuals and soft 16' and 8' flutes in the pedal. (This final section could be performed on whichever manual has the most preferable 8' sounds; coupling of manuals and manuals/pedal should be determined in regard to each individual instrument).

m. 57, beat 4: add an 8' sound

m. 62: remove previously added 8' sound

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** Smyth's longer slur markings tend to indicate entire phrases (e.g. mm. 5–7, 50–53), whereas shorter slurs correspond with short, imitative motives (e.g. mm. 2–3, 4–5, 16–17, 28–29). Some performers may decide to play all the slurred phrases legato, but the longer slurs can be interpreted as generic reminders of overarching phrases. For instance, at mm. 50–51, small breaths or articulations within the slurred phrase could serve to highlight the syncopations. Touch should also be used to transmit the powerful emotive content of the harmony (e.g. Neapolitan chord at m. 62) and rhetorical gestures (e.g. *suspiratio* figures at m. 17).

13) **Other notes:** chorale usually in A minor, Smyth writes both prelude and fugue in E minor; uses triplets like Brahms; Romantic elements include use of the Swell box, dynamic changes (“più f,” “sempre decrescendo,” “crescendo” indications), chromaticism, and extended slur markings.

#### 14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

The performer should consider tempo rubato throughout this work, especially during the opening passage and its return in octaves at m. 53 (preceded by a fermata). Smyth does not provide any rubato indications, but the highly romantic nature of the piece – gradual build-up in texture, rhythm, and dynamics – suggests a Romantic performance practice approach, of which rubato is an essential part.<sup>39</sup>

During the suspensions (e.g. mm. 10 and 45), think like a string player and add miniature crescendos and decrescendos to heighten the level of tension and release.

Be sure to maintain the tempo, especially when the triplet activity begins at m. 23.

Substituting and sharing voices between the manuals will help maintain control over the desired touch.

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<sup>39</sup> Please refer to the guidelines for the “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” prelude for a discussion of rubato in Romantic performance practice.

## “Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air”

1) **Text and tune:** text n/a

Example 23: Smyth, “Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air,” extracted melody

The musical score is presented in four staves. The first staff shows the beginning of the melody in 3/4 time, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, Bb4, and C5. The second staff continues the melody, ending with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third staff begins with a repeat sign and continues the melody. The fourth staff concludes the melody with a double bar line and repeat dots.

2) **Liturgical function:** n/a

3) **Musical Form:** Essentially AA'BB', with recitative-like interludes between statements of the harmonized melody

4) **Texture:** Alternates between recitative-like solo to four-part harmony with pedal

5) **Meter:** 3/4

6) **Settings by other composers:** n/a

7) **Contrapuntal Activity:** n/a

8) **Motivic ideas:** triplet idea in the solo recitative return throughout the sections

9) **Text painting:** n/a

10) **Tempo:** marked *Andante* (“Tempo I”) and *Meno mosso* (“Tempo II”), with a note from Ethel Smyth in the score: “N.B. There are two *tempi* in this prelude: where the *tune* comes in (“Tempo II”) is always a little slower than the prelude part.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Organ Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1939), 2.

11) **Registration ideas:** Since this work was composed much later than her other works, modern performers may have more freedom in terms of registration. Arguments can be made for the use of the Swell box and/or a graded registrational crescendo. Given her limited experience with organ performance, however, a few basic suggestions are given below favoring the Swell box:

Option 1 (Swell box only):

Tempo I (*p*): 8' flute and soft principal; other combination of quieter 8' stops

Tempo I (*pp*): 8' flute or soft 8' principal only

Tempo II (*mf*): add 4' flute and/or principal 8'

Option 2 (Swell box and manual changes):

Tempo I (*p*): 8' flute and soft principal; other combination of quieter 8' stops

Tempo II (*pp*): 8' flute or soft 8' principal only

Set up a second manual for *mf* sections: 8' and 4' flutes, 8' principal

12) **Touch/articulation ideas:** Over-legato (“Finger is much less active. Fingers are more set and weight is passed on from finger to finger”)<sup>41</sup> would be appropriate in the “Tempo I” sections, which are written like recitatives and often have a single slur over the entire phrase. The “Tempo II” sections should be played primarily legato.

13) **Other notes:** Of all her published organ pieces, Smyth includes the most performance markings in this piece. These reflect the fluid and expressive nature of the work, in regard to tempo, dynamics, and overall affect. With permission from the publisher, I was able to make a copy for study purposes, which serves as the basis of my performance suggestions. The score is available at academic libraries in England, but unfortunately is not available in the United States yet. Alex Joannides, publishing assistant at Boosey and Hawkes, has stated that an online version will be available soon.

#### 14) **Performance challenges and interpretative questions:**

Smyth employs melodic expansion at mm. 12–13 and mm. 58–59, used also in “Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott.” These occur during the recitative-like “Tempo I” sections with a *ritardandos* marking leading into the “Tempo II” sections. These should be performed very freely, rhetorically, and with the vocal idiom in mind.

The trills at m. 54 and m. 77 should begin with the main note.

The trills at m. 55 and m. 78 should begin with the upper auxiliary.

The small-note slides at m. 64 and m. 87 should be performed before the beat.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Colin Andrews, “The Many Variations of Touch (based on the principles found in *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique* by Tobias Matthay)” (lecture handout presented during Indiana University’s Organ Pedagogy Course, Bloomington, Indiana, November 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Laukvik, 323.

The performer should bring out the harmonies at mm. 61–64 (repeated at mm. 84–87) using rubato and/or articulation. The progression during these measures is very unconventional:  $F^7$  -  $C^{\sharp 04/2}$  - D minor -  $E^{6/5}$  -  $A^{6/4-5/4}$  - D minor (i.e. d minor: III<sup>7</sup> - vii<sup>04/2</sup> - i - II<sup>6/5</sup> - V<sup>6/4-5/4</sup> - i).

## Chapter 10:

### Legacy and Conclusion

Smyth's organ works show her skills as a thoughtful and serious composer. These works are comparable in construction and inspiration to the chorale preludes of Brahms and solidify her involvement in the nineteenth-century Bach revival. Through the use of stylistic elements, historical chorale texts, counterpoint, and a conservative harmonic structure, Smyth's organ works continue the lineage of Baroque composers' chorale preludes and help elevate the status of English instrumental music.

Louise Collis, author of the biography *Impetuous Heart*, comments on Smyth's musical and literary contributions:

Some declared she wrote better than she composed. Did not her music tend to the Germanic, the old-fashioned, whereas her books were remarkable for their unselfconscious style and a modern outlook on life and morals? With all the fury of a dedicated artist, Ethel repudiated this view as a stupidity, a heresy, an abomination; and she was right. Though lively and sufficiently out of the ordinary to arouse the enthusiasm of many critics besides Virginia Woolf, her books cannot be said to have added to the stock of English literature. The case is otherwise with her music. There she has a definitive place...Her failing, if such it should be called, was not lack of power or sincerity, but rather of purpose which led to uneven quality. Original themes peter out. The influences of the great masters Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner were strangely entangled in this divided soul with those of a lighter kind, such as Sullivan and the composers for the military bands with which she had been familiar since childhood. This dichotomy prevented the expression of a truly personal style, supreme individualist as she was in all other aspects of life. Yet, at her best, she could produce an impression of grandeur on the one hand and, on the other, effects of surpassing tenderness and beauty. She has been unjustly neglected these past forty years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Collis, Louise, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber and Company, 1984), 206.

In addition to her many musical and literary contributions, Smyth also leaves an influential and powerful philosophy of life. As a persevering female musician, Smyth pays homage to the women who came before her, like Clara Schumann, and also to the women who have come after her. Early in life she chose never to marry, as evidenced in a letter dated 1877 at the age of 23:

Every day I become more and more convinced of the truth of my old axiom, that why no women have become composers is because they have married, and then, very properly, made their husbands and children the first consideration. So even if I were to fall desperately in love with Brahms and he were to propose to me, I should say no!<sup>2</sup>

Rather than achieve social status or opportunities through a husband, Smyth was singular in her cultivation of beneficial friendships throughout her life, and she relied on these friendships to sustain her emotionally, intellectually, and professionally. Her dismissal of the traditional role of women, especially in the Victorian era, is a testament to the conviction of her artistic and professional pursuits. By unapologetically pursuing her goals, Smyth is a model for conviction, perseverance, and tenacity to both males and females.

Smyth's fascinating life story survives in her published memoirs, but her organ music remains in relative obscurity. My hope through this document is that Ethel Smyth's works will be more highly regarded and performed more frequently. Too often, works by female composers have been overlooked not only in their own lifetime, but also in the present day due to societal restraints rather than artistic merit. Smyth summarizes her professional experiences with great clarity:

Ah! It's a queer business! Because I have conducted my own operas and love sheepdogs; because I generally dress in tweeds, and sometimes, at winter

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<sup>2</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 190-91.

afternoon concerts, have even conducted in them; because I was a militant Suffragette and seized a chance of beating time to *The March of the Women* from the window of my cell in Holloway Prison with a toothbrush; because I have written books, spoken speeches, broadcast, and don't always make sure that my hat is on straight; for these and other equally pertinent reasons, in a certain sense I am well known. If I buy a pair of boots in London, and not having any money enough produce an envelope with my name, the parcel is pressed into my hand: 'We want no reference in *your* case, madam!'

This is celebrity indeed! – or shall we say notoriety? – but it does not alter the fact that after having been on the job, so to speak, for over forty years, I have never yet succeeded in becoming even a tiny wheel in the English music machine....

If you ask me 'What *is* the machine?' I can only answer, 'I don't know,' but apparently it is a complex construction, made up, say, of units from every section of our music life: heads of Musical Colleges, leading publishers, dominant members of music committees throughout the country, the Press, and so on. Of course this is the wildest guesswork, but though the motions of its spirit are so veiled and mysterious that to try and follow them makes you giddy, once you are up against it there is no doubting its existence....

...Life has taught me one thing: when people fail to get over (or round) obstacles, it is never wholly the fault of other people. True, what with the terrible tenacity of the English combined with our less admirable tendency to nurse our own prejudices; what with my sex and my foreign education, I do think the odds against winning through were overwhelming. Still I could doubtless have played my cards better....

So it is with most lives, I believe; so it has been anyhow with mine. Blessed with friends, with health, spared the most wearing, the most disheartening form of the inevitable struggle for existence, whatever has or has not been achieved the days have been gloriously spent in the open... I do not pretend there have not been times of sadness, of frustration, even of despair. But as Harry Brewster writes in one of his letters, "I walked all the way back, sad and happy. Never mind the sadness, *it is always about the perishable self and therefore does not exist*'...<sup>3</sup>

Whether her success was impeded by circumstance or her own multiple interests and actions, the modern world can benefit from looking back and realizing the accomplishments of this multi-faceted woman. By highlighting aspects of her life and music, my hope is that people will recognize the integrity and vitality of her contributions. Having provided historical, theoretical, and practical performance

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<sup>3</sup> Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987), 355-362.



information in this document, I hope I have introduced the reader to a new body of works and have inspired the reader to explore the vast offerings of other female composers in the organ repertory.

Appendix A:  
Pronunciation of “Smyth”

In regard to pronunciation of Ethel’s surname, English scholar Peter Avis suggests the “y” to be pronounced as a long “i” and the *th* to be pronounced as the *th* in “Smith,” rather than the long version in “scythe.”<sup>1</sup> Basil Cottle explains that the replacement of the “i” with a “y” in “Smyth” may have been used “for clarity next to the minim letter ‘m,’” where “Smith” might look like “Snuth” or “Simth.”<sup>2</sup> Avis also provides an anecdote from Piers Burton-Page, an ex-BBC producer and broadcaster, who “remembered that some relation of Dame Ethel’s had once told *him* that the name should rhyme with Forsyth.”<sup>3</sup> With Avis’s permission, I have included the full text of his original correspondence regarding this matter below:

**Notes on Dame Ethel Smyth for Sarah M. Moon**

(adapted from a talk given by Peter Avis to various branches of the Elgar Society and to several recorded music societies.)

When I started to be interested in Dame Ethel I, along with many others, thought that her surname was pronounced Smythe - especially as I had come across more than one book in which her name had been spelt with an ‘e’ at the end, notably in the index.

But then I came across a section in one of her many volumes of autobiography that put doubt in my mind.

She called the third volume (which came out in 1921) *Streaks of Life* and in that one we find her describing a visit to a choral conductor and his wife - she calls him James

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Avis, e-mail message to author, June 27, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Basil Cottle, *Penguin Dictionary of Surnames* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), 262.

<sup>3</sup> Avis, e-mail message to author, June 27, 2013.

Harvey, although that apparently was not his name. She had gone to persuade this fellow to perform one of her choral works.

This is how she described the occasion:

My appointment was at 9.15 A.M., and for an hour the house rocked and rang, as houses do when composers are playing their own works, after which James and I sat together for a while discussing possibilities.

Suddenly the door burst open and Mrs. Harvey appeared, clad in a flowing purple garment mitigated with white *chiffon* and lace that must have hampered her morning excursions in the basement. For the Harveys lived in a small way, and I had heard that this fatal Helen was a first-rate housekeeper.

Pausing in admirable confusion on the threshold, she remarked with rallying coyness: 'Ow James!...I didn't know you were still closeted with Miss Smeithe'. (She pronounced the name - said Ethel - to rhyme with *scythe*.)

#### **Streaks of Life** (Longmans, Green, and Co – London 1921) - Page 94

When I read that for the first time I was quite bemused because I couldn't think how else one should pronounce the name, other than to rhyme with *scythe*.

But after a considerable amount of research I eventually found the solution in the BBC pronunciation guide, which came to the rescue with the TH in SmyTH being pronounced as the TH in SmiTH.

This guide did allow the pronunciation Smythe when the 'e' was missing but not for Dame Ethel who was quoted as being a 'special case' – and so she is, in more ways than one!

By then, I had also been listening to various broadcasts made by Sir Thomas Beecham, who was a friend of both Ethel and her music, in the hope that he would give the definitive version of her surname but he never seemed to use it, referring to her always as either 'Ethel' or 'Dame Ethel'.

Back in 2009 there was a short correspondence in *International Record Review* about this topic for someone who had heard BBC announcers calling her Smythe had wondered, in the January edition, if the good lady's name should actually be pronounced Smith.

I immediately penned a response quoting the story above and also referring to the entry in the BBC dictionary.

This letter was duly published and I was pleased to see that my ‘theory’ was re-inforced by Piers Burton-Page (ex-BBC producer and broadcaster) who, in that same letters’ column, was remembering that some relation of Dame Ethel's had once told *him* that the name should rhyme with Forsyth.

I rest my case - but I have to admit that it took me a long time to get used to saying Smyth and not Smythe.

© Peter Graham Avis  
June 2013

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