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THE MUSIC OF SIR FREDERIC HYMEN COWEN (1852-1935): A CRITICAL STUDY

by

Christopher J. Parker

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D)

Music Department
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Volume 1 of 2

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- 8 AUG 2007

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

ABSTRACT

THE MUSIC OF
SIR FREDERIC HYMEN COWEN
(1852-1935):
A CRITICAL STUDY

by Christopher J. Parker

Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen was one of the principal British composers and conductors of the late Victorian era. He, along with Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie, did much to further the cause of British music during a period in which professional music-making had hitherto been dominated by foreign musicians. Cowen was relatively prolific, both as a composer, and as a conductor, but he experienced an extraordinary fall in his standing long before his death, through the emergence of Edward Elgar during the Edwardian period, and then Ralph Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries. Cowen's demise from popularity was due in large part to the development of the modernist ethic in the period after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and especially the triumph of modernism, through the works of Debussy and Stravinsky. Indeed, Cowen's musical world of grace, elegance and melody was utterly destroyed. His music quickly became neglected, and his very considerable accomplishments were soon entirely forgotten. This thesis aims to re-examine Cowen's principal works: symphonies, orchestral works, choral works and operas, and show that, while there is little dispute as to the reserved and conservative nature of much of that which flowed from his pen, there is more to his output than his current reputation may suggest.

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Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University. If material has been generated through joint work, my independent contribution has been clearly indicated. In all other cases material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my thanks to Professor Jeremy Dibble for his invaluable help, advice and enthusiasm in the writing of this thesis, and for encouraging me to pursue research into a composer whose music and life had, to all intensive purposes, been forgotten, and whose very existence is only recorded in the most comprehensive of current musical publications.

There are many others whom I must mention who have given me advice, guidance and assistance: I am most grateful to Lewis Foreman, who at several key points inspired and pointed me towards materials and sources that I had not found elsewhere; he provided me with a number of recordings that have for many years been unavailable; and he facilitated a performance of Cowen's *The Dream of Endymion* after I had prepared orchestral parts from the MS in the Royal College of Music.

I am grateful to Peter Horton for his help at the Royal College of Music Library; Oliver Davies also of the RCM; Paul Banks, a Research Fellow at the RCM, and Chris Banks, Deputy Head of Music Collections at the British Library, for their suggestions at the beginning of my work on the thesis; Judith Blezzard, a Senior Lecturer (now retired) at the Department of Music, University of Liverpool, for a list of useful contacts; the staff of the Music Reading Room and Manuscript Reading Room of the British Library; the Family Record Office, The Angel, London; The Principal Probate Registry, Holborn, London; the Historical Manuscripts Commission, UK National Register of Archives, London; the staff of the Local Archive, Bromley Central Library, which has archival material relating to the Crystal Palace; Chris Bennett and Melanie Weatherley of the Elgar Birthplace Museum, Worcester; Avis Owen, Angela Downton and the staff of the Worcester County Record Office, Worcester; J. Brynmor Jones of Cardiff Central Library, Cardiff; Andrew George and the staff of the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford; Stuart Robinson of the Hallé Concerts Society, Manchester; Martin Thacker of the Henry Watson Music Library, Central Library, Manchester; the

Royal Philharmonic Society, London; the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Liverpool; Central Library Record Office, Liverpool; J. Rigbie Turner and the staff of the Music Manuscripts and Books Department, and Despina Coutavas and the Photographic Services Department, both of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; Angelina Altobellis of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Peter Ward Jones and Steven Tomlinson of the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Stephanie Green of the Local Studies Library, the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton; Adrian Yardley of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama Library; James Sewell, City Archivist, Corporation of London Records Office, London; Bridget Palmer of the Royal Academy of Music Library, London; John Wells of the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge University Library; Irene Ferguson and Jean Archibald of the Special Collections, Edinburgh University Library; Kenneth Dunn of the Department of Manuscripts, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Alison Lindsay of the National Register of Archives (Scotland), Edinburgh; Margaret McElvenny of the Arts Department, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow; Vivien Cartwright of the Leeds Local Studies Library, Leeds; Sophia Popham, Sarah Edwards and the staff of Birmingham City Archives, and Anne Elliott and the staff of the Music Department, both of the Central Library, Birmingham; Elizabeth Willis and the staff of Museum Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; the Wirral Archive Service, Birkenhead; the Maritime Archives and Library, Liverpool; Theatre Museum, London; Ian Wallace of the Performing Rights Society, London; Stephen Turnbull of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society; Audley Chambers, Associate Professor, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama; Christopher Fifield; Anthony Boden; Stephen Lloyd; Frederic Woodbridge Wilson; Robert Barnett of the British Music Society; Richard Jenkins of The Imperial Society of Knights Batchelor; Music Sales Ltd., Bury St. Edmunds; Stainer and Bell Ltd., London; Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden, Germany; Colin Dunn and James Whitfield of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, London; Cheryl Enever, Garry Humphreys and The Windsor

Sinfonia for rendering a performance of *The Dream of Endymion*; Jean Lane, who conveyed her mother's recollections of working for the Cowens; Krista Wielopolska, Erika Strutz and Margaret Hobbs, for their help in translating some items in German; Michael Broom and James Firth, who provided me with copies of a number of Cowen's songs; Ian Dunning, for providing me with a collection of early vocal recordings; Gordon Sadler, who gave me a huge collection of Victorian and Edwardian scores and sheet music; Richard Lyman, Richard Leveson and Ainsley Henriques, each of whom have been independently researching the Cowen/Cohen family ancestry; Geoffrey and Jean Wyrill, and Richard Powell Williams [Lady Frederica Cowen's niece's, son, daughter-in-law and grandson respectively]; Geraldine Casimir [another relative of Lady Cowen] and Diana Rustam.

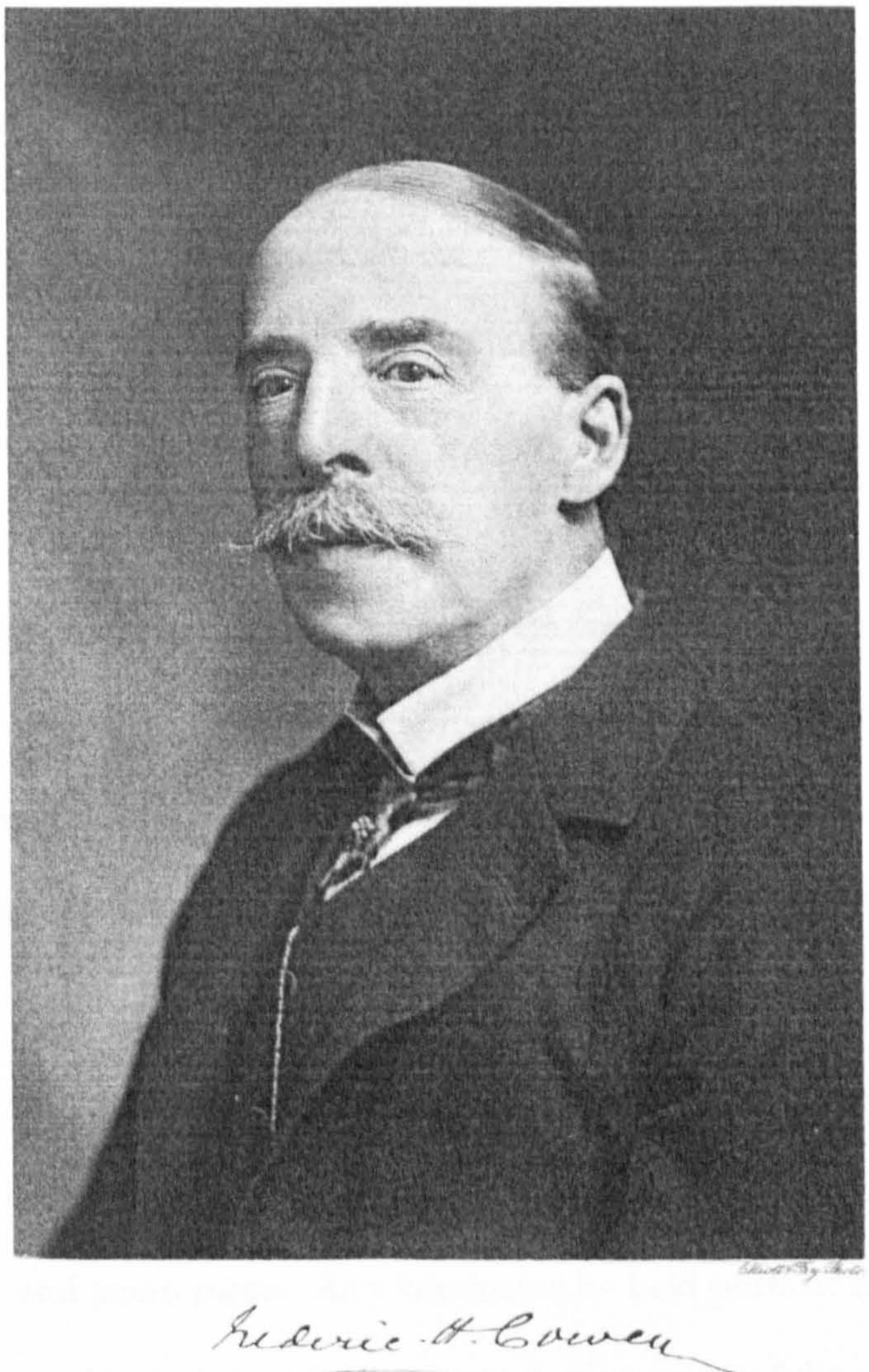
Finally, I must thank those around me who have been a constant source of comfort and support: my parents, Jean and John Parker; my girlfriend, Debbie Jones; Phillip Jones, Chris Kaye and Nick Hughes; and the clergy, choir and congregation of St. Mary the Blessed Virgin, Addington, Surrey.

For my parents,

Jean and John Parker,

for their support,

with love.



Frederic A. Cowen

LONDON EDWARD ARNOLD.

Foreword

> In these times of rapid change it is not uncommon for an artist who is advanced in years to find himself cut off from the world of his art [Cowen's last significant composition was his *The Veil* (1910), some twenty-five years before]...And while he himself had vanished from public affairs, so too had his music—all but a small quantity that flourished in comparative seclusion, and still does...His gift was of a kind that goes with popularity. The fact, not that he did, but that he could, compose 'The Better Land', was significant. It was one link between him and Sullivan, a parallel to which a number of his works aspired. But he was not a Sullivan. It was perhaps the real cause of his ultimate failure that he shrank from the outspokenness of Savoyard speech, that in his more jocund music an excess of delicacy put a restraint upon what should have been unfettered. His refinement and his fancifulness were all to the good, but he lacked gusto, and his idiom needed that kind of reinforcing. He came nearest to it in *St John's Eve*, *John Gilpin*, and the first set of *Four Old English Dances* for orchestra, a suite that once had a vogue but lost ground when 'ye olde style', the bane of English music forty years ago, was superseded.[1]

So wrote the obituarist in the *Musical Times* after the death of Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen (1852-1935), composer, conductor, pianist and educator. Since his death in 1935, not much has been written about this man whose career bridged one of the chief periods in the development of music in Great Britain. Indeed, as the obituarist makes clear above, his name was almost forgotten in his own lifetime. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, he is, at best, consigned to the more obscure references in the footnotes of Victorian and Edwardian musical history. Yet, Cowen was one of the principal British composers and conductors of the late Victorian era. He, along with Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie, did much to further the cause of British music during a period in which professional music-making had hitherto been dominated by foreign musicians. As a composer, Cowen was relatively prolific, producing six symphonies, four operas, a host of choral works, stage works, incidental music, overtures, symphonic poems, chamber music, songs and piano pieces. As a conductor he held posts at different points in his career with most of the major orchestras in Britain, as well as some of the smaller ones: London Philharmonic Society, Hallé Orchestra, Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Scottish Orchestra and Bradford Permanent Orchestra. He also took charge of the Bradford Festival Choral Society for many years, as well as being a frequent guest conductor at festivals, and directed the Handel Festivals at the Crystal Palace for the first two decades of the twentieth century. While his music

[1] Scholes, P. A., *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944*, 2 vols. (London: Novello & Company Limited and Oxford University Press, 1947), I, 104.

was so in keeping with the tastes of his Victorian audiences, he experienced an extraordinary fall in his standing long before his death, through the emergence of Edward Elgar during the Edwardian period, and then Ralph Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries. Cowen's demise from popularity was due in large part to the development of the modernist ethic in the period after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and especially the triumph of modernism, through the works of Debussy and Stravinsky. Indeed, Cowen's musical world of grace, elegance and melody was utterly destroyed by these new innovations, which he freely admitted he neither liked, nor understood. Therefore, his music quickly became neglected, and his very considerable accomplishments were soon entirely forgotten.

Through an examination of his music, this thesis aims to examine Cowen's principal works: symphonies, orchestral works, choral works and operas, to show that, while there is little dispute as to the reserved and conservative nature of much of that which flowed from his pen, there is more to his output than his current reputation may suggest. Indeed, this examination will reveal Cowen's compositional tendencies and preoccupations, and, where possible, identify stylistic precedents from other composers. The first chapter aims to provide a biographical background to Cowen's development as both composer and conductor, and is based upon Cowen's own writings in his autobiography *My Art and My Friends*,[2] Charles Willeby's *Masters of English Music*,[3] an article by Frederick Edwards on Cowen in the November 1898 edition of the *Musical Times*,[4] another by Isidore Harris: 'Mr Frederic Cowen Interviewed' in *Great Thoughts*,[5] one by J. E. Woolacott: 'Interviews with Eminent Musicians – No. 4 – Mr Frederic Cowen' in

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[2] Cowen, F. H., *My Art and My Friends* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913). In subsequent footnotes this work will be referred to by the abbreviation *MAMF*.

[3] Willeby, C., *Masters of English Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 173-256. Hereafter it will be referred to by the abbreviation *MEM*.

[4] Edwards, F., 'Frederic Hymen Cowen' in *Musical Times*, xxxix (1898), 713-8. Hereafter this article will be referred to by the abbreviation *MTC*.

[5] Harris, I., 'Mr Frederic Cowen Interviewed' in *Great Thoughts*, 384-6, probably published on 17 March 1896. It was found as a cutting in Manchester, Manchester Central Library, *Bannister Scrapbook Collection*, Ref: R780.2Sj3, Vol. 29, 225. Hereafter this article will be referred to by the abbreviation *FCI*.

The Strand Musical Magazine,[6] and Jeremy Dibble: 'Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd Edition (2001).[7] The heavy reliance, especially in Chapter 1, on Cowen's autobiography *My Art and My Friends* and on this small number of other sources for much of the biographical source material was unavoidable, because of the lack of any other substantive record of Cowen's life, particularly in the early years (Cowen had no issue, and, therefore, there are few surviving personal effects or papers).[8] Consequently, these recollections of events must be read with an understanding of the biases of their authors, and especially of Cowen himself. Willeby's *Masters of English Music* and Edwards' *Musical Times* articles both show some evidence of having been written either in collaboration with Cowen or of them having previously interviewed him for material to include, although Willeby's contribution in particular demonstrates a quantity of critical assessment of Cowen's music independent of the composer. However, Harris' and Woolacott's articles are little more than recollections of their respective interviews with Cowen, and so must be considered in that light. Even Dibble's modern scholarly assessment in the second edition of the *New Grove*, and that of his predecessor Jennifer Spencer in the 1980 edition, whilst offering new criticism of Cowen's music and career, have not brought forward evidence of untapped source materials of his early life. Regrettably, it has not been possible to include more than a little of the huge amount of biographical material collated by the author, and many incidents from Cowen's life, especially after Cowen's career had been established with his *Scandinavian* symphony, have therefore been omitted. Further biographical material can be found in the later chapters, but only where it is warranted as part of the contextual discussion of each composition.

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[6] Woolacott, J. E., 'Interviews with Eminent Musicians – No. 4 – Mr Frederic Cowen' in *The Strand Musical Magazine* (ed. Hatzfeld, E.)(London: George Newnes Ltd., 1895) Vol. 1, 249-52. Hereafter this article will be referred to by the abbreviation *IEM*.

[7] Dibble, J., 'Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd ed.)(London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001), vol. 6, 630-2. Hereafter this article will be referred to by the abbreviation *NGDMM2C*. Please note that *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., will, elsewhere in this thesis, be abbreviated to *NGDMM2*.

[8] Cowen's estate passed to his wife Frederica on his death, and any personal effects and papers then passed through his wife's family. Whilst members of Cowen's wife's family have been traced, no such effects or papers survive, except for Cowen's Knight's Batchelor badge connected with his knighthood.

In the main body of the thesis, Cowen's music is discussed in separate chapters, each of which deals with a different genre in his output. Rather than producing a strictly chronological survey of his compositions, a generic approach to the music was felt to be preferable, in order to allow parallels to be drawn between similarly constructed works. Indeed, due to the variety of types of pieces within a genre, in some chapters, this process has been taken a stage further, especially in those on the choral works and that on Cowen's orchestral works (concert pieces), to subdivide the genre into smaller groups. Chapter 2: 'Orchestral Works 1 (Symphonies)', deals specifically with Cowen's six symphonies; Chapter 3: 'Orchestral Works 2 (Concert Pieces)', scrutinizes Cowen's large non-symphonic orchestral output; Chapter 4: 'Operas and Stage Works', tackles Cowen's four operas and the other miscellaneous stage music; Chapter 5: 'Choral Works 1 (Cantatas & Oratorios)', examines Cowen's secular and narrative cantatas and his sacred works (both cantata and oratorio); and Chapter 6: 'Choral Works 2 (Other Pieces)', studies his ethical cantatas, odes and *pièces d'occasions.*

Due to the size of Cowen's output, which runs into over 500 pieces, a study of this size cannot be generically exhaustive, and other chapters on Cowen's piano music, songs and chamber music might have been constructively included. Indeed, even though his popularity as a composer has often been attributed to his penning of a veritable deluge of popular ballads and songs (some 300 or so), a discussion of this genre has been avoided here, as an analysis of these works does barely more than confirm Cowen's position as a melodist and miniaturist, revealing to us little about Cowen's style that cannot be learnt from other genres that have been recorded in this thesis. Moreover, a majority of these songs are of that type that we class as royalty ballads, with their formulaic two or more 16-bar strophes, often followed by an 8-bar (or multiple thereof) refrain. Furthermore, I was concerned not to impinge on territory covered by Audley C. Chambers' unpublished Ph.D thesis on Cowen's songs: *Frederic Hymen Cowen: Analysis and Reception History of His Songs for Voice and Piano* (Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1997), especially as my own work on Cowen's songs could not be presented in such an

meticulous fashion, nor would it bring forth any substantial new discoveries, i.e. it would largely only reiterate the conclusions that Chambers reached in 1997 (to the knowledge of this author, Chambers' thesis is, as at 2007, the only other detailed academic study of any of Cowen's music). Cowen's chamber music has been tacitly ignored on the basis that the two piano trios and quartet, the only original works in this genre, were all unpublished, and the whereabouts of the autograph manuscripts are unknown. Therefore, only the most basic of observations could be made. Cowen's piano works, apart from the lost sonata, consist mostly of early character pieces, and, like the songs, do not tell us much about Cowen's style that cannot be learnt from other genres.

In discussing each genre, this author has of necessity had to apply diverse approaches to different chapters, so as to either concentrate on a smaller number of representative works, where a comprehensive account of the historical context and musical idiosyncrasies of each work would be extremely laboured, or to examine each work in turn in more detail, especially where there are not a large number of identifiable common denominators between them.

Since this is the first academic study of Cowen and of his music right across his output, a purely analytical discussion of his music has been avoided, because the scores will, in most cases, be unfamiliar to a majority of musicologists. However, detailed musical analysis does appear in the discussion where this author has felt it necessary to identify models for Cowen's musical style. Chapter 7: 'Cowen: the Man and his Music', brings together the observations from elsewhere and gives an overview of Cowen, his personality and standing, and perceptions of his contribution to musical history.

Three appendices appear at the end of this thesis and serve to complement the main discussion. The first of these is a timeline listing the main events of Cowen's professional and compositional career, tying up the opening biographical chapter with other contextual material later in the thesis. The second appendix gives synopses of the plots of Cowen's principal operas, cantatas and oratorios to supplement the discussion of the said works. The third appendix is a

full catalogue of Cowen's works. An explanation of its compilation is given in the notes section of the appendix. The final two sections of the thesis consist of a 'List of Manuscript Sources' and a 'Select Bibliography'.

1. A Biography

Frederic Hymen Cowen, as he was known throughout his professional musical career, was born at 90 Duke St, Kingston, Jamaica[1] on the 29 January 1852 (his name being registered as Hyman Frederick Cohen),[2] the fifth and last child of Frederick Augustus Cohen (b. *c.* 1819), by his wife (m. March 1842), Emily (b. *c.* 1821), second daughter of James Davis, of Kingston.[3] The surname 'Cohen' suggests that the family were of an illustrious Jewish ancestry, as, in its various different spellings ('Cohen', 'Cohan', 'Cowan', 'Kohen', and 'Kohnen'), it signifies that one 'is a man of priestly lineage'.[4] Indeed, 'Kohanim' priests were 'traditionally regarded as members of a hereditary caste descended from Aaron, brother of Moses'.[5]

The Cohens seem to have got to Jamaica through the actions of Moses Cohen, also known as Mordechai Levie Cohen (*c.*1733-1831),[6] who was born in Amsterdam (a son of Levie Mordechai Cohen).[7] Mordechai moved first to England, probably for economic reasons, i.e. the Dutch Empire was in decline, whilst the British Empire was in the ascendancy, and his son Henry became a partner in the firm Cohen, Isaacs & Co., whose business interests seems to have been mainly between Jamaica and England. One of Henry's sons was Hymen Henry Cohen (1791-1845), who in turn had at least nine children, all born in Jamaica, one of whom was Frederick Augustus Cohen, father of Hyman Frederick Cohen, later Frederic Hymen Cowen, the subject of this thesis. By about the 1780s (or earlier), the Cohens had become a well-established

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[1] Andrade, J. A. P. M., *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Jamaica Times Ltd., 1941), 150. The house number according to Andrade was No. 90 in 1941. I am immensely indebted to Richard Lyman and Richard Leveson for their respective contributions and help in compiling the history of the 'Cohen' family and the interrelated branches of the Levy and Isaacs families. Except where footnotes indicate otherwise, all family details have been obtained from the research records of these two men, in collaboration with the Mormons family record site on the internet.

[2] Handwritten certification of Cowen's birth dd. 9 May 1876, issued by H[yman]. A[braham]. Joseph of the English and German Synagogue, Kingston, Jamaica (In private possession – Geoffrey M Wyrill – Cowen's wife's niece's son).

[3] *Who's Who (1934)*, Issue 86 (London: A. & C. Black Ltd., 1934), 739; Levien, J. M., 'Cowen, Sir Frederic Hymen' in *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 193; *FCI*, 385; *IEM*, 249; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MTC*, 713. His other siblings were: (1) Elizabeth Rose, born 9 January 1843, St. Andrew's Parish, Jamaica; (2) Henrietta Sophia, born 13 May 1845, Brentford, England [Her birth certificate gives her place of birth as: 'Chiswick Lodge, Chiswick, Brentford, Middlesex'.]; (3) Lionel Jonas, born 21 January 1847, Jamaica; (4) Emma Magnay, born 16 April 1849, Kingston.

[4] Kaganoff, B. C., *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 7.

[5] Hanks, P., and Hodges, F., *A Dictionary of Surnames* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 117.

[6] One record says he was born in 1728.

[7] Levie b. 1688, Amsterdam, d. 1739, Amsterdam.

Jamaican Jewish family (with close ties to England) that owned numerous plantations dealing in sugar and coffee in the parishes of Manchester and St. Elizabeth. They were involved with several other families in the mercantile trade with England, Canada, and America,[8] at a time when the West Indies was probably the most important outpost in the British Empire, apart from India, as almost the entire civilised world relied on it to supply their demands for sugar. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century the Cohen family wealth must have been quite substantial, as it seems to have increasingly allowed its family members to branch out into other directions. It appears that Cowen's grandfather Henry[9] and great uncles Hyman and Judah (sons of Moses Cohen) were the last generation to be directly involved in the plantation business that was struck by several mortal blows over the first decades of the nineteenth century,[10] and which led to an ever-declining economic situation in the region. This undoubtedly accelerated the diversification of the Cohen family occupations and interests, such that their dependency on it waned and then ceased from the 1830s onwards.[11] Frederick Augustus Cohen, Cowen's father, joined the diplomatic service,[12] and with his wife Emily and their children came to England in 1856 (arriving on about the 5 March)[13] when Cowen was only four years old. Their departure

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[8] These families included the Isaacs (Hyman Cohen, Cowen's great uncle, was married to Zeporah Isaacs), Cerf, Elliott, Lewis, Myers, Levy, Joseph, and Deby.

[9] Henry Cohen (Frederick's father, and Frederic's grandfather) and his unnamed wife were both born in England according to the entry for their son Alex H. Cowen in the United States Census of 1880.

[10] The first of these was the abolition of the slave trade in 1806, which prevented the sale and movement of the human workforce. This was followed a few years later by the discovery of a new process of making sugar from beet-root (hastened by Napoleon having his West Indian supplies of sugar severed by a blockage), which created a new agricultural industry in Europe and thereby robbed the Caribbean islands of their sugar monopoly for ever. In 1833 a major blow for the plantation owners occurred – the abolition of slavery itself. Emancipation of the slaves began on 1 August 1834, slave owners being given financial compensation for the loss of their workforce. At the same time an apprenticeship system was set up, but was also abolished by the British Parliament exactly four years later to the day. Slaves were then absolutely free of any legal shackles to their enslavement. Finally, a British Act of Parliament in 1846 signed the death knell for the estate system – equalisation of tariffs and the removal of the last protective duties made it difficult for Jamaican sugar to compete with those countries where slavery was still legal (Rayner, R. M., *Nineteenth Century England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), 125; Black, C. V., *The History of Jamaica* (London: Collins Educational Press, 1983), 116-9).

[11] Cowen's uncle Henry Lindo (b. 14 January 1817) joined the Army Medical Corps as an officer, and married Henrietta (b. 1833, Ireland). They moved to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the 1850s where most of their children were born (two sons: Harry and John and three daughters: Alice, Florence and Emily), before retiring to St. Helier, Jersey in the Channel Islands. Another of Cowen's uncles, Alexander H. (b. c. 1826), is found in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1880 United States Census, listed as a 'Com. and broker' along with his wife Maria (b. c. 1831, Ireland); four sons: Edmund, Frank, William and Eustace; three daughters: Mary, Agnes and Flora (all the children were born in the United States); a nephew Edwin; and two servants.

[12] Taylor, S. de B., *Two Centuries of Music in Liverpool* (Liverpool, Rockliff Brothers Ltd., n.d.), 19.

[13] *MAMF*, 2.

was surely hastened by bouts of disease and epidemics that had struck the island (Asiatic cholera was followed by smallpox, another attack of cholera, and then scarlatina).[14]

Cowen's parents settled in London at 11 Warwick Crescent, Paddington, in an area known as 'Little Venice', as it overlooks the Regent's Canal. It was a popular residential district for writers, scientists, actors, and political figures.[15] The Cohens were also conveniently situated amid the growing Jewish community, which had just begun to overcome a major schism among the congregations of London in the 1840s. As Charles Dickens (Jr.) observed in 1879: 'So plentiful are Jewish households in the west district that certain streets and terraces where they have formed colonies are playfully called the "New Jerusalem"'.[16] Curiously, having placed themselves close to the centre of London's wealthy Jewish quarter, they chose to change their surname from 'Cohen' to 'Cowen'. Interestingly, this Anglicisation, or, more accurately, Celticisation[17] of the family name also occurred among Cowen's uncles Henry and Alex, with their families all choosing to make the change from 'Cohen' to 'Cowen' as well, suggesting a family-wide decision to play down their origins and start anew in foreign lands. Moreover, the Levy (later Levison) family, who were linked with the Cohens through the marriage of Hymen Henry Cohen and Rosetta Levison, must have felt the same social pressure to distance themselves from their Jewish pasts, changing their name to Leveson. Whether this was done in order to erase their Jewish roots, or because they wished to distance themselves from the family's connections with the slave trade in Jamaica remains unclear, but there is circumstantial evidence to corroborate both theories. It is clear, however, that the Cohen/Cowen family

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[14] *The Times*, 3 January 1851, 4; Ibid., 8 January 1851, 8; Ibid., 9 January 1851, 5; Ibid., 21 January 1851, 4; Cundall, F., *Chronological Outline of Jamaica History 1492-1926* (Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica Government Printing Office, 1927), 34; Roberts, G. W., *The Population of Jamaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 177-8; Parkin, J., *Statistical Report of the Epidemic Cholera in Jamaica* (London: William H. Allen, 1852); Jacobs, H. P., *Sixty Years of Change, 1806-1866: Progress and Reaction in Kingston and the Countryside* (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1973), 80, 84.

[15] Robert Browning was resident at 17 Warwick Crescent from 1862 to about 1887, and so may have been acquainted with the Cowens. Carl Rosa, the Hamburg-born conductor, violinist, and impresario, with whom Cowen would develop his operatic career, lived at No. 10. Another poet, Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), lived for a time at 2 Warwick Crescent.

[16] Dickens, C. (Jr.), 'Jews' in *Dickens's Dictionary of London*, 1879, at <http://www.victorianlondon.org/population/jewish.htm> [accessed 6 January 2007]

[17] The name 'Cowen' is of Scottish origin, from Ayrshire, where it can be traced back to at least the Eleventh Century.

arrived with wealth and contacts, and was immediately able to mix with the well-heeled in British society, probably owing to Cowen's father's diplomatic connections. Indeed, it appears that Cowen's parents must have spent some time in England prior to their move, as their daughter Henrietta was, unlike their other children, born in England. Frederick Augustus Cowen quickly became treasurer to Her Majesty's Opera[18] in London (under the managements of Messrs. Benjamin Lumley, E. T. Smith and Col. J. H. Mapleson), a position which he held for eleven years. With the destruction of that house by fire in 1867, he undertook an equivalent position at Drury Lane under Messrs. Mapleson & Frederick Gye's management. He was also soon in the employ of Lord William Ward, later first Earl of Dudley,[19] as his private secretary, a great patron of all the Arts, but particularly of music. Witley Court in Worcestershire and especially Dudley House, Park Lane, London, were both the scenes of musical soirees arranged by Dudley, where one could guarantee some of the finest musicians of the time would be in attendance, including Santley, Tietjens, Reeves and Belletti.[20]

Brought up amid such musical and artistic surroundings, Cowen quickly showed a precocious talent for music, and, with the help of his father, he soon made his first musical acquaintance: Henry Russell (a fellow Jew, 1812-1900) a popular baritone singer, composer, and pianist. Under Russell's guidance, Cowen completed his first composition, *The Minna-Waltz*, for piano, aged six, which was published (in 1858) 'with considerable success',[21] with the financial support of his father.[22] He recalls in an article for *The Etude* music magazine that at that time he was not 'tall enough to sit at the piano…[and]…standing, late in the afternoon of one winter's day, at the piano picking out the melody and the accompaniment of it'.[23] This three page *opus* is

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[18] Now called 'Her Majesty's Theatre', there has been a theatre on this site, on Haymarket, in the St. James's area of London's 'West end', since 1705.

[19] William Ward, was the son of William Humble Ward, 10th Baron Ward and Amelia Pillans. He was born 27 March 1817, and inherited his father's title becoming the 11th Baron Ward, and was later created 1st Viscount Ward and then 1st Earl of Dudley in 1860. He inherited some 200 mines in the Black Country from a distant relation called John William Ward, which produced an income of about £100,000 per annum, gaining most of his wealth from the technical innovations of the Industrial Revolution.

[20] *MAMF*, 7; *MEM*, 174-5.

[21] *The Sketch*, 424, xxxiii, 13 March 1901, 301.

[22] *MTC*, 713.

[23] Cowen, F. H., 'How I Turned the Corners' in *The Etude*, Philadelphia, Theodore Presser Co., July 1927, 501.

spirited and energetic; dedicated to his master Henry Russell 'by his little friend six years old, HYMAN FREDERICK COWEN'.[24] In the following year, two further piano pieces came from Cowen's pen: *The Pet Polka* and *The Daisy Waltz*. J. W. Davison, in reviewing the pieces noted that they 'are as simple as a hammer, which is the more easily understood, on learning from the title-page that their composer is only "seven years old". Let Master Cowen wait till he is fourteen before he again ventures into print'.[25] *Punch* humorously wrote:

> TO PERSONS FOND OF PRODIGIES. In the way of Prodigies we beg to introduce to the reader the *Pet Polka* and the *Daisy Waltz*, both of which are composed by a MASTER COWEN, who, we are informed, on the authority of the title-page – and title-pages speak the truth just as much as tombstones – is 'only seven years of age'. This young gentleman must be a prodigy far in advance of his time, and must put old COCKER'S nose[26] completely out of joint; for he notably proves, in spite of all the numbers which that elderly gentleman can bring forward to outvote the fact, that seven can make a score![27]

Cowen, however, also issued his first song: *A Mother's Love*, to a lyric by his cousin Rosalind,[28] and with which Davison was more enamoured: '[It] is really pretty, and gives much more evidence of promise than the Waltz and Polka. Master Cowen may compose another ballad forthwith'.[29] It seems, even at this age, that Cowen was a child prodigy, with an innate talent for music. However, as yet, he was unable to write the music down for himself, as he admitted in the 1920s that 'I knew nothing of theory';[30] he would 'improvise his melodies upon the piano, and...the notation on paper was done by Henry Russell'.[31] Cowen tells us that Henry Russell was 'a man after a child's own heart, and although in later years I had not the same frequent opportunity of meeting him as formerly, the youthful affection I had for him was maintained until his death'.[32]

Cowen was not the only one of his father's children to benefit from the cultured environment within the family home. Cowen's brother Lionel became a successful painter and

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[24] *MTC*, 713.
[25] *Musical World*, 28 May 1859.
[26] Author of *Cocker's Arithmetic* 1678—which gave rise to the saying 'According to Cocker'.
[27] *Punch*, 11 June 1859.
[28] *MEM*, 177.
[29] *Musical World*, 28 May 1859.
[30] Cowen, F. H., 'Then – and Now', *Music Masterpieces* (ed. Pitt, P.), Vol. 10, London, The Amalgamated Press (1922) Ltd., 18 February 1926, 102.
[31] Buffen, F. F., *Musical Celebrities* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1889), 64.
[32] *MAMF*, 5.

was a member of the Royal Society of British Artists.[33] Cowen's sister Henrietta also became a famous reader, elocutionist and actress,[34] taught by Mrs Sterling.[35] Another of Cowen's sister, Emma, became a Ladies' club proprietor.[36]

In 1860, still only eight years old, Cowen conceived an operetta: *Garibaldi, or The rival patriots*, to a libretto by his cousin Rosalind. With the help of the Earl of Dudley, who had heard about Cowen's ambitious operetta, Cowen was placed under the tuition of two music masters: Julius Benedict (1804-85) and John Goss (1800-80). Cowen returned the favour by dedicating his operetta to Dudley. Benedict was a highly regarded German-born, naturalised English, Jewish composer and conductor, with whom Cowen learnt piano. Benedict had studied composition with Hummel and Weber, and with the latter had enjoyed, for three years, a relationship akin to a father and son. Weber introduced Benedict to Beethoven in Vienna on 5 October 1823, and Benedict was, to varying degrees, on good terms with Rossini, Meyerbeer, Verdi, Mendelssohn, Bellini, and Donizetti. Cowen described him as 'an all-round accomplished man, and a very hard worker; indeed, how he ever got through all his multifarious duties – public, private, and social – was always a mystery'.[37] Benedict, however, was 'very austere and forbidding';[38] he had a habit 'of dozing over the lessons…and then waking up suddenly with a sharp reprimand for some wrong note or passage'.[39] However, Cowen later owed many of his early appearances as pianist and composer to Benedict, and was a regular at Benedict's annual concert.[40]

Goss taught Cowen the rudiments of harmony and gave him organ lessons at St Paul's Cathedral (where he was organist). Goss had begun his musical career as a chorister of the Chapel Royal in 1811, where he studied with John Stafford Smith. In 1816, with the breaking of his voice, he became a pupil of Thomas Attwood (who was in turn a pupil of Mozart). Goss'

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[33] Bradshaw, M., *Royal Society of British Artists Members Exhibiting, 1824-1892* (Leigh-on-sea: F. Lewis Publishers Ltd., 1973), 29.
[34] Berger, D., *The Jewish Victorian* (Witney, Oxfordshire: Robert Boyd Publications, 1999), 105; Public Record Office, *Census 1901*, Ref. RG13/199, p. 14.
[35] *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 November 1876.
[36] Public Record Office, *Census 1901*, Ref. RG13/199, p. 14.
[37] *MAMF*, 9.
[38] Ibid., 7.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 8.

position in the London musical world of the time was a prominent one, as a teacher, writer, composer and critic. He also taught Arthur Sullivan. Cowen described Goss, who was the antithesis of Benedict, as

> one of the most genial, good-hearted men imaginable, and always tried to make harmony lessons as interesting and entertaining as he possibly could. He would make all sorts of caricatures and funny remarks on the margin of my exercises, and the letters he used to write me were full of that kind of humour which he knew was just suited to a child's understanding…I looked forward to my lessons with him with boyish delight.[41]

Examples of these annotations and letters from Goss to Cowen, which are preserved in a *Musical Times* article of 1898, make whimsical reading.[42]

Cowen's studies were broadened to take in some violin lessons from John Tiplady Carrodus (1836-95), one of the most sought-after English string players of his day. Cowen's association with Carrodus carried on later in life thorough their work together at the Philharmonic Society.

Cowen's prodigy-like childhood was confirmed by his first appearance in public as accompanist to one of his own early songs sung by Mrs Drayton at a concert in Brighton. However, the exact date of this performance remains uncertain, although it most likely occurred in 1860 or 1861.[43] In 1863 another song appeared from Cowen's pen, *My Beautiful, My Best*, set to words by Charles Mackay, who presented Cowen with the copyright,[44] for which Cowen received the sum of five guineas from its publisher, A. Hammond & Co.[45] He recalls that 'as a matter of fact it was neither "beautiful" nor "my best"', but when Charles Santley, who participated in many of Lord Dudley's private recitals and knew Cowen from an early age, sang it 'he made it sound as if it were both'.[46] Cowen also made the acquaintance of Sigismond Thalberg, the composer and pianist, around this time, of whom Cowen says:

> [He] was not a great classical virtuoso, but he had a delightful touch and immense technique…He was a highly polished, refined, and affable man…he must have given me some good advice, for in one of my mother's letters to me, written while she was away, she

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41 Ibid., 9-10.
42 *MTC*, 714-5.
43 Cowen mentions this event in his autobiography (*MAMF*, 10-11), but does not identify the occasion.
44 *MTC*, 715.
45 Sewell, G. F., *A History of the Bradford Festival Choral Society* (Bradford: G. F. Sewell, 1907), 201.
46 *MAMF*, 17.

> says: 'I hope you remember all Thalberg said to you'. No doubt I did so at the time, but I cannot recall a word of it now.[47]

Thalberg who had heard Cowen play, among other things, his [Thalberg's] own arrangement of 'Home, Sweet Home',[48] expressed himself as 'being very pleased, especially with his [Cowen's] compositions'.[49] Thalberg later said that he was 'enthusiastic over the boy's talents, and predicted a brilliant future for him'.[50]

Cowen's first genuine recital appearance occurred on 17 December 1863,[51] aged 11, in the Bijou Theatre of the old Her Majesty's Opera House,[52] where the *Daily Telegraph* reported:

> A matinee was given...on Thursday for the purpose of introducing to public notice a youthful pianist of remarkable proficiency and of still greater promise. Master Frederic Cowen is a mere child, but his playing betrays none of those fatal peculiarities which we detect in the prodigies who have been taught by rote a few short pieces which they play in mere parrot-like fashion. A pupil of Mr. Benedict, he has learnt in the best schools, and in all his performances he displays musician-like feeling no less than mechanical aptitude. His tone is full, his touch firm and decided, and there is nothing careless or slovenly to be detected in his execution.[53]

By 1864, even Benedict, who was one of the severest critics, noted that Cowen, now aged twelve, 'was able to play Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 106' to his 'complete satisfaction'.[54]

On 15 June 1864, aged twelve, Cowen performed Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto in D minor in a concert at Dudley House, in an event that also featured the violinist Joachim, the singer Santley,[55] Madame Trebelli and her husband, and Madame Enequist.[56] For Benedict's annual concert in the same year Cowen arranged a fantasia for eight hands on Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, played by Benedict, Charles Hallé, Lindsay Sloper and himself, and a two-piano arrangement of Benedict's *Der Freischütz* for Arabella Goddard and himself.[57]

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[47] Ibid., 16.
[48] *MEM*, 178.
[49] *MTC*, 715.
[50] Black, H. C., 'Jewish of Today: Frederic Cowen' in *Young Israel* (2 vols.)(London, September 1898), I, 210.
[51] *MTC*, 715.
[52] Cowen played a Bach prelude and fugue, another by Mendelssohn (E minor), some studies by Adolf Henselt, Thalberg's *Tarantelle* (or perhaps, *Soirée de* Pausilippe), an Irish fantasia entitled *Erin* by Benedict, Stephen Heller's arrangement of Mendelssohn's *Flügeln des Gesanges* and a piece of a nocturnal character, *Lied ohne Worte*, composed by himself) *MTC*, 715; *MAMF*, 11; *FCI*, 385. The alternative Thalberg piece is suggested in *IEM*, 252.
[53] *MEM*, 178-9.
[54] *FCI*, 385.
[55] *MTC*, 715.
[56] *MEM*, 180.
[57] *MAMF*, 8-9; *MTC*, 715.

On 22 June 1865, at Dudley House, Cowen appeared with Joachim and a cellist[58] in his own Pianoforte Trio in A.[59] Cowen recalls in his autobiography that he still looks 'back with pride on the performance of my first trio…at which the great artist [Joachim] condescended to play the violin part – no small honour for a boy only just in his teens…this red-letter day of my youth always remained as an ineffaceable impression on my mind'.[60] Joachim often recalled the performance of this premiere whenever they met in later years.[61]

In the autumn of 1865 Cowen's two illustrious masters indicated that they could do little more to further his education; both recommended that he go to Germany to complete his studies.[62] At that time (1865) the second competition for the Mendelssohn Scholarship (of which Sir Arthur Sullivan was the first scholar) was due to be held, which gave the winner the benefit of three years' tuition at the Leipzig Conservatorium.[63] Cowen attended the examination at the Royal Academy of Music in front of a panel of directors, including Sir George Smart. Cowen won the scholarship, but, before he could be awarded it, his parents intervened, as they were not prepared to give up their control of him as was stipulated by the terms of the award. They

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[58] A majority of recent sources state that Alessandro Pezze was the cellist, including *NGDMM2C*. However, the cellist is named as Alfred Piatti in Pratt, A. T. C., *People of the Period* (London, 1897)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273); in Wyndham, H. S., *Who's who in music* (London, 1913)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche II 1408); and in *MEM*, 180. Indeed, Cowen himself, though not directly mentioning Pezze or Piatti as the third member of the trio at this performance in his autobiography, does imply Piatti was the cellist, referring to him in the same paragraph as Joachim's 'celebrated colleague' (*MAMF*, 19). The issue is further clouded by Buffen's assertion in his *Musical Celebrities* that the Piano Trio 'was introduced at a matinée given by Professor John Ella, and in the performance of which Cowen was joined by the renowned players, Joseph Joachim and Alfred Piatti' (Buffen, 64). Therefore, it is conceivable that there were two performances of the work, one with Piatti and the other with Pezze as the cellist. Yet, surely at least one source would have recorded this. Certainly Cowen himself does not mention a second performance. 'The mists of time' have probably now confined the true facts to obscurity.

[59] *MTC*, 715; *MAMF*, 19; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.

[60] *MAMF*, 19.

[61] *MTC*, 715.

[62] *MAMF*, 18; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; ?, *Men of the Time* (London, 1875)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273). Opportunities for studying music, particularly composition, in Britain were quite limited at this time, as the Royal Academy of Music in London was the only extant musical institution. Also, there were no real prospects for students of composition to hear and evaluate their labours. Indeed, with the possible exception of the Crystal Palace orchestra under Manns, the standard of orchestral performance in Britain left a lot to be desired. Moreover, the conservative tastes of concert-goers left very few opportunities for contemporaneous works to be performed and new works added to the repertoire. Most British musicians and composers since Mozart's day had sought out the opportunity to broaden their musical education in Germany; this was a natural choice for Cowen, as it would still be for Stanford, Ethel Smyth, Frederick Delius and Adrian Boult years later. Indeed, Hughes and Stradling argue that recognition at home was dependant on an 'association with a major German figure and/or graduation in one of the main German conservatoires' (Hughes, M., and Stradling, R., *The English Musical Renaissance* (2nd Ed.)(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 126).

[63] *MAMF*, 18; *MTC*, 715.

decided that he should still go to Germany, but as an ordinary, independent student, and so Swinnerton Heap was awarded the scholarship instead.[64]

Cowen left England for Germany, via Rotterdam and Hanover, at the beginning of October 1865, accompanied by his parents, sisters and brother – a journey that took nearly four days.[65] On arrival, the *entourage* resided in a house on the promenade outside the old town of Leipzig.[66] Cowen entered the Leipzig Conservatorium as student no. 1,225 on 6 October 1865,[67] which was then headed by Ernst Friedrich Eduard Richter. The institution was still held in high regard, partly as a result of the achievements of Felix Mendelssohn, who had founded it in 1843; he was also its first principal. After Mendelssohn's death, Robert Schumann and Ignaz Moscheles did much to maintain the Conservatorium's reputation. Cowen studied the piano with Moscheles (as had Sullivan), harmony and counterpoint with Moritz Hauptmann (as had Sullivan), composition with Carl Heinrich Garstin Reinecke, and ensemble work with Ferdinand David.[68] To this list of eminent musicians, one should also add Salomon Jadassohn (another composition teacher) and Ernst Ferdinand Wenzel as other members of the teaching staff with whom he came into contact.[69] Outside the Conservatorium, Cowen took further private piano lessons with Louis Plaidy (as had Sullivan).[70]

According to Cowen, Moscheles was 'already an elderly man' when he met him, but 'he retained the suppleness of finger, clearness of execution, and other gifts, social and artistic, which had made him a sympathetic companion and a famous musician'.[71] Cowen notes that Hauptmann 'was a great theorist, and what he did not know about chords and counterpoint and fugue was not worth knowing. But the pleasure I had in my lessons with him was rather marred

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[64] *MAMF*, 18; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MTC*, 715.
[65] *MAMF*, 18-19; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MTC*, 715.
[66] *MAMF*, 21.
[67] Leipzig, Hochschule für Musik und Theater 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek/Archiv, Inskriptionseintrag, Nr. 1225.
[68] *MAMF*, 21-23; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MTC*, 715; Levien, 193.
[69] *MAMF*, 23.
[70] Ibid., 23; Levien, 193.
[71] *MAMF*, 21.

by his habit of constantly taking snuff while he corrected my exercises'.[72] Willeby described Hauptmann as 'that classicist of classicists'.[73] Cowen's impression of Reinecke as a composer and composition teacher was that 'he belonged rather to the old school, and did not encourage modern innovations, but on the whole he was an excellent master', who was 'a prolific composer and a good pianist (especially as an interpreter of Mozart's music)'.[74] As the conductor of the Gewandhaus Concerts, Cowen felt that Reinecke was 'very capable', but 'hardly inspiring'.[75] Cowen elaborates: 'He had a peculiar way…of beating time with his head in inverse ratio to his baton, so that when the latter was up his head was down, and *vice versâ*'.[76] Stanford later also studied with Reinecke; he was much less flattering about him:

> He [Reinecke] had not a good word for any contemporary composer, even for those of his own kidney. He loathed Wagner…sneered at Brahms, and had no enthusiasm of any sort. But he enjoyed himself hugely when he was expounding and writing canons, and had a fairly good idea of teaching them. His composition training had no method about it whatever. He occasionally made an astute criticism and that was all. He never gave a pupil a chance of hearing his own work, the only really valuable means of training, and the better the music, the less he inclined to encourage it. He was in fact the embodiment of the typical 'Philister'…Of all the dry musicians I have ever known he was the most desiccated.[77]

Therefore, it would seem that Reinecke was not the ideal compositional mentor for any young student of the latter nineteenth century. Yet, he is often remembered in connection with other more famous composers, mostly as their teacher: Isaac Albeniz, Leos Janácek, Christian Sinding, Frederick Delius, Max Bruch and Edvard Grieg.

Cowen says that Louis Plaidy 'was a popular teacher, chiefly on account of his system of five-finger exercises, which were supposed to give his pupils an unusually clear and pearl-like touch'.[78] Sullivan, who studied with Plaidy at the Conservatorium itself some years before, elaborates:

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[72] Ibid., 22.
[73] *MEM*, 181.
[74] *MAMF*, 22.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Dibble, J., *Hyperion Sleeve Notes – Sir Charles Villiers Stanford – Music for violin and piano*, at <http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/notes/67024.html> [accessed c. 1 June 2006]; Stanford, C.V., *Pages from an Unwritten Diary* (London, 1914), 156.
[78] *MAMF*, 23.

> His class was always thronged, and his instruction eagerly sought by pupils from all parts of the world. This popularity arose from his remarkable gift...of imparting technical power. Were a pupil ever so deficient in execution, under Plaidy's care his faults would disappear, his fingers grow strong, his touch become smooth, singing and equal, and slovenliness be replaced by neatness. Great attention to every detail, unwearying patience, and a genuine enthusiasm for the mechanical part of pianoforte playing were his most striking characteristics.[79]

As can be seen, Cowen had a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw upon from his teachers, many of whom had direct or indirect associations with the greatest composers of the classical and romantic periods. Indeed, beyond the Conservatorium, Leipzig could cater for most of the demands of any young fledgling musician with its comprehensive array of musical experiences, whether it was opera at the Stadttheater, orchestral and choral concerts at the Gewandhaus, or chamber concerts or church music at St. Thomas's. However, like Reinecke, the city itself was still fairly conservative in its musical tastes. But Leipzig was also at the epicentre of the German and European music publishing business, a fact that would be important for Cowen as a composer some years later when he needed a publisher for his *Scandinavian* Symphony.

Cowen's String Quartet in C minor was conceived while in Leipzig and performed at the Conservatorium on 14 January 1866,[80] and he also began a set of piano variations ('Thema und 12 Variationem für das Pianoforte'), his first orchestral work – an overture in D minor, and some songs. Among Cowen's fellow students and companions were Johann Svendsen, Oscar Beringer, Swinnerton Heap and Stephen Adams.[81] In March 1866 Cowen's family returned home;[82] and he was left in the charge of some German friends at Rudolphstrasse No. 1,[83] which also enabled him to gain some proficiency in the German language.[84] Cowen's increasing adeptness at the keyboard allowed him to audition at the Gewandhaus for the Offentliche

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[79] *MEM*, 10.
[80] *MTC*, 716.
[81] *MAMF*, 24.
[82] *MEM*, 181.
[83] Leipzig, Hochschule für Musik und Theater 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek/Archiv, Inskriptionseintrag, Nr. 1225.
[84] *MAMF*, 25.

Prüfund (Public Examination) with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor. In a letter to his parents he said:

> The hall was very full, but I was not in the least nervous; I even played without music, which is not much in fashion in Leipsic. I was very much applauded, and think I made a success…Mr P.[laidy] says I played ever so much better than he expected…I can assure you that it is all owing to Plaidy and his five-finger exercises. You will see the difference in my touch when I come back to England.[85]

Cowen's end of term piano examinations at the Conservatorium followed soon afterwards on the 27 March 1866, where he was the last of fifteen candidates to be examined in the morning session. The principal work he played was Mendelssohn's Rondo brilliant in E flat major, of which the examiners recorded that he had given 'an extremely good performance'.[86] Cowen's principal submission in his composition portfolio was the aforementioned 'Thema und 12 Variationem für das Pianoforte'.[87]

Soon after, Cowen suddenly found himself in a precarious position: since 1864 following the defeat of Denmark by Austria and Prussia, the two victors had been in dispute over the redistribution of power in the region. By early 1866 this began to escalate as Prussia sought the support of Italy and Austria the backing of France. Concerned at the deteriorating situation, Cowen's parents recalled their son back to London in May 1866. Indeed, on 14 June war broke out between the two main protagonists, but only lasted a few weeks, ending with a decisive Austrian defeat at Sadowa on 3 July 1866.[88] Cowen formally left the Conservatorium on 20 May 1866, and the academy issued his final report, a 'Teachers' Certification' nine days later, which read as follows:

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[85] *MEM*, 182-3.

[86] Leipzig, Hochschule für Musik und Theater 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek/Archiv, 'Conservatorium der Musik, Privat-Prüfungen betreffend, Ostern 1863 – Michaelis 1876', 'Prüfung 1866, der Schüler und Schpülerinnen des Conservatoriums der Musik zu Leipzig', 'am 27 März früh 9 Uhr', S. 39b. [transcribed from the source by Frau Erika Strutz (Seniorenwohnsitz, Ratzeburg, Germany) and translated by Mrs Margaret Hobbs (Addington, Surrey, England)].

[87] Ibid., 'Prüfung Ostern 1866, Verzeichnis der eingelieferten schriftlichen Arbeiten', S. 43a.

[88] Kent, G. O., 'Austro-Prussian War (1866)' in *A Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century History* (ed. Belchem, J., and Price, R.), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 2001, 56; Legrand, J. (ed.), *Chronicle of the World*, Harlow, Essex and London, Longman Group UK Ltd. and Chronicle Communications Ltd., 1989, 949.

Conservatoire of Music
Teacher's Report
for

Herrn Frederic Hymann [*sic*] Cowen from London, travelled home 20 May 1866...did not leave on the 20th, but on the 17th May because Herr Wollenstein's record is dated the 18th. – Albrecht...admitted to the Conservatoire on 6 October 1865.

Theory of Music and Composition
Herr Cowen was at all times hard-working and pursued his studies with interest; he has talent and skill. [The signature that follows is indecipherable, but is probably that of Moritz Hauptmann] E.[rnst] Fr.[iedrich] Richter makes a similar assessment, as does Carl Reinecke [both their signatures follow, and they indicate their concurrence with the first statement].

Piano playing
Herr Cowen was a diligent, talented pupil – I[gnaz] Moscheles
Herr Cowen worked hard during his lessons and took his studies very seriously – Papperitz

Violin playing [blank]

Ensemble playing
The opinion of Herr Professor Moscheles I agree with – F.[erdinand] David

Organ playing [blank]

Lectures
In my view, Herr C.[owen] did not attend any lectures [The signature that follows is illegible. It is unlikely Cowen's understanding of German at this time would have been sufficient for him to comprehend the lectures, and so this remark is not in any way derogatory].

Singing
Herr C.[owen] does not attend the choir practices/choral classes – Carl Reinecke

Italian Language [blank]

Leipzig 29th May 1866[89]

Cowen's report shows that, even in his early teens, he was a conscientious and gifted student, with much potential. The Conservatoire's staff were some of the finest teachers available at this time, anywhere in the world; therefore, their comments can be taken as an accurate assessment of Cowen's abilities.

In the following year Cowen participated at Benedict's annual concert where he played Bach's Triple Concerto with Benedict and Lindsay Sloper,[90] and as a soloist Liszt's paraphrase of

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[89] Leipzig, Hochschule für Musik und Theater 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek/Archiv, 'Lehrer-Zeugnis – Frederic Hymann [*sic*] Cowen', 29 May 1866 [transcribed from the source by Frau Erika Strutz (Seniorenwohnsitz, Ratzeburg, Germany) and translated by Mrs Margaret Hobbs (Addington, Surrey, England)].
[90] *MTC*, 716.

Wagner's Tannhäuser March 'with marked success'.[91] He also organised his own concert at Dudley House where he performed Mozart's Duet Sonata in D for two pianos, partnered by Charles Hallé, and Santley sang a new Cowen song, 'The Stars are with the Voyagers'.[92]

In search of further knowledge and experience Cowen returned to Germany in October 1867, but this time to Berlin, where he became a private composition pupil of Friedrich Kiel and Karl Gottfried Wilhelm Taubert, a piano student under Karl Tausig; he also enrolled at Stern's Academy.[93] Founded some eighteen years previously by Julius Stern, Adolph Marx and Theodor Kullak under the title 'Berlin Musikschule'; the Academy was considered the best music school in Berlin.[94] Here Cowen received the benefit of some conducting experience.[95] He tells us that

> the weekly orchestral class formed an important part of the regular studies. I had each week to take home a score, say, a movement of a Haydn or a Mozart Symphony, and be ready the following week to conduct it, with the aid of the very small orchestra at the students' disposal, consisting chiefly of Strings and Piano and an occasional Wind Instrument. Small beginning as this was, it at least made me acquainted with many of the works of the earlier Masters, taught me the use of the baton, and gave me confidence.[96]

Greatly celebrated as a teacher, and with his books on music widely distributed, Kiel magnetised an extensive following, and could boast of an abundant set of pupils, which included Noskowski, Emil Sjögren, Charles Villiers Stanford, George Henschel, Ignacy Paderewski, John Bennett and Arthur Somervell. Cowen simply says that Kiel 'was a composer of considerable reputation, and a first-rate teacher'.[97] Jeremy Dibble concludes from Stanford's and Zimmermann's writings about Kiel that he would have provided his pupils, like Cowen and Stanford, with

> a sense of emancipation after the dry experiences of Leipzig. He was in one sense a theorist in the tradition of Moritz Hauptmann, but his teaching of counterpoint did not conform to the traditional species method of the cantus firmus, but instead was orientated in a Lutheran manner around chorale melodies. He was adverse to the idea of long theoretical expositions…and preferred to allow his pupils to learn through constant practice, by regular exercises which he corrected himself. Student questions were answered…by examples from

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[91] *MEM*, 185.
[92] *MTC*, 716.
[93] Ibid., 716; *MAMF*, 25-26; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.
[94] *MEM*, 185.
[95] *MTC*, 716; *MAMF*, 25-26; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.
[96] Cowen, F. H., 'The Art of Conducting' in *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.), London, Caxton Publishing Co. Ltd., *c.* 1910?, vol. 5, x.
[97] *MAMF*, 25-26.

> the classical repertoire which he invariably played from memory at the keyboard...he encouraged composition in freer forms and was full of approbation for modern developments...[Indeed, he taught his pupils to] develop a greater sense of self-criticism...[and] grasp more fully the principles of organicism, an ideological aesthetic quintessential to the late nineteenth-century Teutonic perception of composition.[98]

However, Cowen was less taken with Taubert, 'as his ideas were old-fashioned, and whenever I wrote a modern phrase or passage that I was particularly sweet on, he would make me alter it according to the conventional way he preferred'.[99] Of Tausig, Cowen says that he only saw him intermittently and that 'I think I really learnt more from hearing him play than from any tuition he gave me. He was a great virtuoso, a little cold, perhaps, but his execution was marvellous'.[100]

Cowen's experiences continued to grow: in late January 1868 he played before the Crown Princess of Prussia, later Empress Frederick of Germany while in Berlin; he would do so again on 16 November the same year at Windsor Castle, where she would request him to compose and dedicate a piece to her.[101] While in Berlin Cowen built up a friendship with Paul Mendelssohn (brother of Felix),[102] and met Georg Henschel.[103] Cowen also wrote a setting of Psalm 130 for contralto and chorus, which was performed in Berlin.[104]

Cowen's student days were now over apart from taking some piano lessons with Charles Hallé.[105] He could now consider embarking on a career, although in which direction his multi-faceted musical skills would take him would not emerge for several years. Like any musician, just starting out, Cowen had to be versatile and flexible in his engagements in order to establish a reputation for himself that would bring in more work and further his career. Undoubtedly his

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[98] Dibble, J., *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 83; Dibble, J., *Hyperion Sleeve Notes – Sir Charles Villiers Stanford – Music for violin and piano*, at <http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/notes/67024.html> [accessed c. 1 June 2006]. (Dibble refers to Stanford, 165, and Zimmermann, H., 'Friedrich Kiels Wirken als Kompositionslehrer' in *Friedrich Kiel Studien, 1* (Cologne, 1993), 13-14).
[99] *MAMF*, 26.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.; 'The Court Circular' in *The Times*, 16 November 1868, 9.
[102] *MAMF*, 27; *MTC*, 716.
[103] Norris, G., *Stanford, The Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980), 189.
[104] *MTC*, 716.
[105] *MAMF*, 27.

father's contacts (and association with the Earl of Dudley) and money played a part in his gradual rise through the ranks, but he also had to graft to prove his worthiness among his peers.

The first landmark in Cowen's professional career was the performance of his Symphony No. 1 in C minor in 1869, where his reputation as a composer was first established. Its performance drew universal acclamation from the critics. The symphony brought Cowen to the attention of August Manns, conductor of the Saturday concerts at the Crystal Palace, whom Cowen says 'was always ready to lend a helping hand to young British musicians…[and] who at one time was the most prominent figure in our orchestral world'.[106] Indeed, Manns was responsible for Cowen's symphony getting its second outing at the Crystal Palace. The symphony's triumph led to John Boosey of Messrs. Boosey & Co obtaining an agreement with Cowen to publish all his compositions for a period of three years.[107] This enabled Cowen to write and have published his first cantata, *The Rose Maiden*, and his first popular song *It was a Dream*,[108] which was made famous by Titiens.

The early 1870s were marked by Cowen's first appearance in a Philharmonic Concert as soloist playing Mendelssohn's Rondo in B minor on 6 June that year.[109] Cowen's performance warranted comment in the following month's issue of the *Musical Times*: 'Mr Cowen's performance of Mendelssohn's pianoforte Rondo in B minor received every mark of encouragement from an audience naturally well disposed to welcome a promising natural artist'.[110] The aforementioned cantata *The Rose Maiden* was premiered at St. James's Hall in November 1870.[111] With its simple, tuneful and refined melody, it was an immediate hit with audiences, and survived in the *repertoire*, much to Cowen's irritation, for many years after several of Cowen's more mature works had long since disappeared.

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106 Ibid., 30.
107 Ibid., 29; *FCI*, 385.
108 *MAMF*, 29; *FCI*, 385.
109 BL, Loan MS 48.2/6, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 6, 1867-71*, f. 85v. (14 May 1870).
110 *Musical Times*, ?(July 1870), ?[Press cutting from BL Loan MS 48.10, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Press Cuttings*].
111 *MEM*, 188.

Cowen's fondness for opera led to his appointment with James Henry Mapleson's Italian Opera Company (directed by Michael Costa) in 1871 (Cowen was now aged 19), as accompanist on Colonel Mapleson's concert tours, and *maestro al piano* during the London and provincial operatic seasons at Her Majesty's Opera, also under Costa.[112] Here Cowen was able to get a huge amount of practical music-making experience, seeing and being involved in orchestras and stage productions at first hand, encounters that without a doubt influenced the course of his whole musical career, as both conductor and composer.

Cowen's Second Symphony followed in 1872, and, while warmly received, it was considered no great advance on its predecessor and it died an early death. In the autumn of 1873, Cowen took the opportunity to seek out an Italian libretto for an opera on the subject of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Lady of Lyons*,[113] but his recce proved fruitless and he returned home empty handed in early 1874, and resumed his duties with the opera. His major new work from this year (1874) was his *One Too Many*, a comedietta for the German Reed Company to a text by Francis Cowley Burnand,[114] which was first performed under the title *Too Many by One* at St George's Hall, London on 24 June.[115] It proved a bit of a hit, with its Savoy-like humour and musical style, and ran nightly for nearly a month, before being withdrawn, only to be revived later in the year.[116]

Cowen's father, Frederick Augustus Cowen, died on 22 February 1876 at 11 Warwick Crescent, Maida Vale, London, aged 57; it is easy to envisage the effect that this would have had on young Cowen, still only 24 years old, as his father had been the guiding hand that had opened many doors for his talented son. Now Cowen would have to seek out opportunities himself, relying on his own skills and contacts. Fortunately, a prospect for foreign travel soon presented

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[112] *MTC*, 716; *MAMF*, 33; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.
[113] *MAMF*, 67, 237; *Jewish World*, 5 December 1873.
[114] Sir Francis Cowley Burnand (1836-1917) was an editor of *Punch*, taking over from Tom Taylor in 1880, until 1906, when he was succeeded by Sir Owen Seaman. Burnand wrote the comic operetta *Cox and Box* in conjunction with Sir Arthur Sullivan ('Francis Burnand' in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., U.S.A.) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Burnand> [accessed c. 25 January 2005]).
[115] *MTC*, 717; Brown, J. D., and Stratton, S. S., *British Musical Biography* (Birmingham, 1897)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273). Gänzl lists the performance date as 29 June (Gänzl, K., *The British Musical Theatre* (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1986), Vol. 1, 85).
[116] Gänzl, Vol. 1, 85-6.

itself: Zélie Trebelli, with whom he had already worked at the Mapleson Company, and one of the most famous contraltos of her time, received an offer to visit Scandinavia in 1876. She approached Cowen to join her as pianist and accompanist, along with Behrens (bass) and Vieuxtemps (cello).[117] The success of this trip led to Trebelli and Cowen returning the following summer (1877). Two compositions dominated Cowen's time in 1876: firstly a cantata *The Corsair*, to a text by Robert E. Francillon adapted from Lord Byron's work of the same name (1814), occupied the earlier part of the year, a commission (facilitated by Michael Costa) for the Birmingham Festival.[118] Despite Cowen pouring much effort into it, it was not a great success. Cowen's second major project of the year was his opera *Pauline*, which, while falling back on the conventions of past English opera with spoken dialogue, he did instil with elements of French and Italian opera that lifted it beyond the commonplace of much of the other English opera of the period. However, after a few London performances and some in the provinces, it fell by the wayside, partly the victim of a public unable to accept a baritone, rather than a tenor, singing the part of the hero or romantic lover.[119]

Cowen's ultimate goal up until now seemed to be that of becoming an operatic conductor. Indeed, he had approached Mapleson seeking opportunities to wield the baton at the Mapleson Opera, but his requests had fallen on deaf ears. As a result, Cowen decided to leave the company in 1877.[120] However, all was not bleak, as Cowen's song, 'The Better Land', written for Antoinette Sterling, was premiered at Messrs. Boosey's Ballad Concert, St. James's Hall, London, on 21 November 1877,[121] and immediately won him new accolades. Indeed, it became his most famous song. However, in later years Cowen described it as 'a Frankenstein monster', as it haunted him wherever he went,

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[117] *MAMF*, 77-89. Marie de Mensiaux's book about Trebelli (Mensiaux, M. de, *Trebelli* (London: Henry Potter and Co., 1890), 34, 36) does slightly contradict Cowen's statement of the details of the itinerary for 1876, and also implies that this trip was not Trebelli's first.
[118] *MAMF*, 239; Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).
[119] *MAMF*, 240.
[120] Ibid., 48-9.
[121] *MTC*, 717.

> cropping up at all sorts of inopportune moments, and in all sorts of unexpected places. When I have wanted to be quiet, a cornet has played it in the street. When I have thought to read a nice eulogium on myself in the papers, it has been the chief topic of the article. When I have made a new acquaintance, feeling perhaps rather proud of some recent composition, I have been introduced as the composer of it! And to add to my injuries, while the fiend was still in his infancy, I parted with his copyright![122]

However, its success began to bring in many commissions for songs from various publishers, a valuable new source of income.

Cowen's oratorio *The Deluge*, written expressly for the Brighton Festival and first performed there on 28 February 1878 was a complete failure. Not only was the first performance a wash-out because of the bad weather, but Cowen's score was proved wanting in many regards. It was to be quickly forgotten and never performed again. With his health failing, Cowen headed off on a pleasure trip for three months to the United States of America,[123] where he visited many places, and met the poet and author Henry Longfellow. On Cowen's return to England he joined the National Training School as conductor of the orchestral class, a post he held until 1881, when Sullivan retired as Director and just before it was subsumed by the Royal College of Music.[124] Of this activity, Cowen makes no comment, evidence that, at least at this time, teaching was not something that he was predisposed towards. Yet another Trebelli tour was organised in 1879, following the pattern of venues encompassed on the previous trips.

If the 1860s represent Cowen's formative years in terms of his education, the 1870s was the seminal decade in which his youthful experiences and schooling were put into use. Cowen's career was by no means mapped out by the end of this decade, but, by its completion, he had had a foretaste of most of the fundamentals of his craft that would provide his future livelihood. He had toured widely, both at home and abroad, as an accompanist and recitalist; had had several choral and orchestral works premiered; and had been given a number of opportunities to conduct. Although he had lost his mentor in his father, this grounding would serve him well in

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[122] *MAMF*, 53.
[123] Ibid., 73; *FCI*, 386; Wyndham (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche II 1408).
[124] *MAMF*, 74-5.

the future. Cowen was fortunate in that he had rather Bohemian tastes, and this allowed him to make contact with kindred spirits in other arts and professions apart from his own.[125]

A significant turning point in the development of Cowen's conducting career came in 1880 with his succession to Sullivan as conductor of the autumn season of Promenade Concerts, managed by Messrs. A. & S. Gatti, held at the Covent Garden Theatre ['Theatre Royal'].[126] These popular concerts, firstly under Louis Jullien's baton, attracted vast and eager audiences, although some of the performances were as much about spectacle, than about the music itself. Ostensibly, as a result of his success with this season, Cowen was invited to become an 'Associate' of the Philharmonic Society on 12 December 1880.[127] Indeed, replete with the vigour and determination of youth, and with attention already focussed upon him as a possible leader of an English revival, Cowen had been determined to establish a concert series in London. Many capable musicians had gone before him with a similar aim, but all had yielded to the inevitable financial morass. Cowen decided to take on the project of organising and personally financing a concert series, in order to satisfy a void in the late Saturday evening London entertainment schedules, presenting high quality orchestral concerts during the winter season. Cowen was triumphant in his endeavours musically, and it permitted him to bring out his *The Language of Flowers*, Suite de ballet. While the series was not a financial success, it was the bearer of Cowen's single most important event in his entire career – the first performance of his Symphony No. 3 in C minor, *Scandinavian*,[128] given at the fourth of these concerts at St James's Hall on 18 December 1880. This work over the next few years would find its way all over Europe and to America, where it was greeted with enthusiasm. It would prove to be Cowen's only major international success as a composer (recognised by his peers, music critics and audiences alike),

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[125] Indeed, Cowen's passage through these circles enabled him to form acquaintances with the likes of Robert Francillon and Robert Buchanan with whom he collaborated on several ventures. Among other early literary associates were Marie Corelli, Edna Lyall, Annie Thomas, Justin McCarthy, Christie Murray, Philip Marston, Arthur O'Shaughnessy and John Payne (Ibid., 156-7).

[126] *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MAMF*, 97.

[127] BL, Loan MS 48.2/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 8, 1879-83*, f. 33r. (12 December 1880).

[128] *NGDMM2C*, 630-2; *MAMF*, 99-100; Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).

but it placed him at the forefront of British music for many years to come. Thus, every new work would be eagerly anticipated, and most of his output would be published without hesitation. It marks the start of his maturity as a composer.

Cowen's career from thereon was a continuous mixture of conducting and composing, with the first activity often perpetuating opportunities for the second through commissions. Indeed, until he gradually moved into semi-retirement around 1914-8, Cowen was able to make a comfortable living through these two actions alone, without the need to fall back on teaching. The first major landmark in this conducting career was Cowen's first tenure of office at the Philharmonic Society (1888-92). It ended rather acrimoniously over Cowen's dispute with the Society over the amount of rehearsal time that he was allowed. However, this was a time of innovation in the *repertoire*, for which Cowen could take much of the credit, although it would appear that Philharmonic audiences were generally fairly conservative in their tastes, and so a balance between the great masters and the novelties of the newer generation had to be found. The performances were, as was the standard of soloists, on the whole, of good quality, going by a survey of a cross-section of reviews, only limited by the amount of rehearsal time available. Indeed, Cowen described the orchestra, with Carrodus (his old violin master) as leader, 'as fine a body of instrumentalists as one could desire. It is true that they were inclined sometimes to be a little lethargic and irresponsive, but this was a habit they had perhaps unconsciously acquired under earlier conductors'.[129] Cowen managed to introduce some much-needed discipline into an orchestra that at times seems to have had a perfunctory attitude toward their performance of the 'classics'. However, in the process, Cowen created some resentment among the players: 'I remember Carrodus once saying, with reference to a Beethoven symphony we were performing, "We can play it in our sleep", to which I rather unkindly replied, "That is exactly what you do, but the effect would be so much better if you played it when you were awake!"'[130] Indeed, whilst most British orchestras played the scores accurately, the concept of a conductor communicating

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[129] *MAMF*, 145.
[130] Ibid., 145-6.

an interpretation of a work to an orchestra had yet to become the norm. But this period of musical history would bring forth the dawning of a new generation of conductors and audiences, led, ostensibly by Hans Richter, who wanted more from their music than a mere rendition of the dots on the page. Indeed, later in Cowen's career, when attitudes were beginning to change, he, on one occasion, 'spent over an hour in rehearsing the "Midsummer Night's Dream Overture" – an unprecedented thing – because I could not get them to play the passages as lightly and softly as I wished'.[131] Despite his ignominious departure from the Philharmonic, Cowen's own statue, both as a conductor and as a composer, was confirmed beyond doubt during these years. He may not have been as gifted as Richter on the concert platform (who was virtually a 'god' in some people's eyes), but he was certainly more than capable. Cowen not only did his part to promote the home-grown music of his contemporaries, but took every opportunity to bolster the popularity and standing of his own compositions. However, several years elapsed before Cowen again graced the Philharmonic Society concerts.

If proof of Cowen's growing stature as a conductor was in doubt, it was soon dispelled by the Victoria Government, Australia, approaching him with an invitation to direct the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, for which he would receive the unprecedented sum of £5,000.[132] Cowen's next major conducting job came with the death of Sir Charles Hallé on Friday, 25 October 1895. Hallé's demise left the Hallé Concerts Society, which he had personally owned, being placed into the hands of guarantors, and the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, which was at that time intrinsically tied up with the Manchester orchestra (as Hallé had conducted them too since 1883), to endure much wrangling over Hallé's successor. The Hallé's sphere of influence was great, giving its conductor a control over most of the major music-making activities in the North of England, and, therefore, it was a very lucrative post. Hans Richter was regarded as the leading candidate, but was unable to extricate himself from his existing contracts in Vienna at the time, and, following Liverpool's enthusiastic lead, the Hallé

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[131] Ibid., 146.
[132] Ibid., 152.

Concerts Society rather less eagerly appointed Cowen. For two years all was well: Cowen conducted the two seasons with much success, but some of the Hallé guarantors were still keen to acquire Richter's services as a long-term solution. Richter eventually indicated that he could come to Manchester, and Cowen in due course got wind of the plotting. Inevitably, an almighty row broke out, which quickly became public. Despite a vigorous defence of his position by himself and many supporters, Cowen lost the support of the Society in preference to Richter. However, the Liverpool Philharmonic Society stood by him, and he remained their conductor for some years to come. To add insult to injury, Cowen had to conduct his third season with the Hallé in the full knowledge of all that had gone on, and that he was not to be reemployed. However, it should be recognised that Cowen had worked enthusiastically to enhance the standard of orchestral playing at the Hallé, which had become slack in Hallé's old age; he was committed to raising the prestige of the concerts as a whole. Indeed, 'the performances had been artistically quite satisfactory, and the profits from the two seasons [before the crisis broke] much larger than any they had had for a long time'.[133] Cowen's work in the North of England had led to him taking on the Bradford Permanent Orchestra for a couple of years during this period, and, with the death of W. H. Garland, he also took on the Bradford Festival Choral Society, with whom he continued into the second decade of the twentieth century. However, Cowen was not long in seeking out another rewarding post, as Mackenzie resigned from the Philharmonic Society in the 1899, seemingly for the same reasons that Cowen had left some years before (issues of the lack of rehearsal time). Keen to heal his wounds with that Society, Cowen was successful in getting probably the most prestigious conducting post in the country back in his portfolio. Within a year he had also added the Scottish Orchestra to this collection, as well as a couple of music festivals. Indeed, William Armstrong, who had interviewed Cowen in the summer of 1902 for the American *Etude* musical magazine,[134] said that Cowen was 'the busiest

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[133] Ibid., 285.

[134] At this time Cowen was simultaneously in charge of the London Philharmonic Society, the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Scottish Orchestra, the Bradford Festival Choral Society, the Cardiff Festival and the Scarborough Festival, as well as numerous smaller concert engagements.

conductor in England'.[135] As a result, Cowen's output as a composer begins to noticeably wane: there is usually one main commission each year, as there had been almost throughout his life, but the yield of smaller works is certainly less than before.

Assessments of Cowen's approach to conducting and his conducting skills vary widely, but during his lifetime, it was as an indefatigable, energetic conductor, rather than as a composer, that he was most acknowledged. Indeed, from about 1887 through to the outbreak of the First World War he was in almost continuous service as an orchestral and choral conductor, and was the first British musician of note that could claim to have conducted major orchestras on a regular basis throughout the United Kingdom; he was equally in demand for his services as a conductor at the numerous festivals around the country. Moreover, it was accepted by many, Elgar included, that he 'kept strictly to the text and avoided interpolations and changes'.[136] However, in later years this was actually seen as a fault, as the time came when people wanted more 'interpretation' rather than a strict rendering of the dots on the page. Nevertheless, along with Mackenzie, Stanford and Corder, he had blossomed into a successful composer-conductor in the 1880s. Dan Godfrey, writing in the 1920s, acknowledged that the subsequent careers of Henry Wood and Landon Ronald had 'been prepared for them by the spadework of musicians like Cowen and Mackenzie'.[137] But, even in the 1930s, Elgar (in an interview given on 4 November 1931 to Herbert Hughes for the *Daily Telegraph* the following day) said that Cowen's contribution as a conductor 'was greatly undervalued by the present generation'.[138] George Bernard Shaw's ruthless criticism certainly did not help his cause:

> Mr Cowen's worst enemies have never accused him of impetuosity or vivacity in conducting; and as to *entrain*, he has cultivated to perfection a habit entirely fatal to it; that is to say, he checks the band in every bar between the first and second beat. I do not say the interval is long enough to eat a sandwich in; but sometimes, when I am in my best critical condition, with my rhythmical sensitiveness highly exalted, it seems to me, even during a

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[135] Armstrong, W, 'Two English Composers of To-day: Frederic H. Cowen – Edwin [*sic*] Elgar' in *The Etude* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., February 1903), 47.
[136] Musgrave, M., *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55.
[137] Godfrey, D., *Memories and Music* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924), 120.
[138] Moore, J. N., *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 442.

> *presto*, that Mr Cowen always allows time somewhere in the bar for all ordinary exigencies of turning over, using one's handkerchief, nodding to an acquaintance, or the like.[139]

Nor the following: 'He [Cowen]...is no more fitted to be a conductor than the majority of brilliant and popular writers are to be editors'.[140] Marie Hallé, who was well placed to know most of the rumours in circulation around the English music scene, said in a letter to Behrens (dd. 2 February 1896): 'I heard yesterday, on pretty good authority, that Cowen got on very badly with the London Philharmonic, and has never got on well with any of the orchestras either here or abroad that he has conducted! But he may have [since] gained tact and experience'.[141] Sir Adrian Boult recalled vivid memories of both Stanford and Cowen "'beating their way" through works like the Brahms *Requiem* with no intention beyond keeping the big forces more or less together'.[142] Of course in those days when the likes of the Crystal Palace were putting on works with massed choirs and orchestras of several hundred, if not a thousand performers, frankly what else could a conductor do? However, more positive appraisals can be found – Havergal Brian described Cowen's pre-eminence as a native musician thus: '[Cowen was] the first English orchestral conductor of any importance'.[143] The singer David Bispham was more to the point: he thought Cowen was a 'brilliant conductor'.[144] In 1904 Ralph Vaughan Williams acknowledged that 'the Scottish Orchestra...is doing splendid work in the north under the conductorship of Dr Cowen'.[145] Inevitably, comparisons between different conductors get made: Adolph Brodsky, one time leader of the Hallé Orchestra and later Principal of the Royal Manchester College of Music said in 1896 that 'of all the English conductors he considered Cowen the best', though within an international context, 'Gericke is, after Richter, the best available conductor in Europe', and 'Gericke [is] greatly superior to Cowen'.[146] Simon Speelman, the principal viola player in the Hallé, when asked by Cowen if Hans Richer was a better conductor replied: 'Well,

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[139] Shaw, G. B., *Music in London 1890-94* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932), Vol. iii, 57.
[140] Ibid., vol. i, 227.
[141] Kennedy, M., *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 107.
[142] Moore, J. N., *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 478.
[143] Brian, H. (ed., MacDonald, M.), *Havergal Brian on Music* (London: Toccata Press, 1986), vol. I, 48.
[144] Bispham, D. S., *A Quaker Singer's Recollections* (Ayer Publishing, 1977), 134.
[145] Vaughan Williams, R. and Holst, G., *Heirs and Rebels* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 36-7.
[146] Kennedy, 106, citing a letter from Behrens, Secretary of the Hallé Concerts Society to Marie Hallé, daughter of Sir Charles Hallé (dd. 31 January 1896).

Mr Cowen, you are a great, a very great conductor, but Richter is a genius',[147] and in many ways Richter proved to be Cowen's nemesis throughout his life. Dan Godfrey noted that 'there is a good deal of the poet in Cowen and, poet-like, he is inclined to linger on the beautiful while everyone waits'.[148] It is not entirely clear whether this should be taken as a criticism or a compliment. However, Michael Kennedy's evaluation, looking back 25 years after Cowen's death, probably gives the most balanced view: 'He was a musician of competent craftsmanship and thorough ability', but lacked that 'spark of genius'.[149] Nonetheless, the last word on the matter should be left to Cowen's *Musical Times* obituary, which, while it is less than complimentary about his career generally, was kind enough to acknowledge his importance as a conductor: 'Had Cowen never played or written a note, he would deserve to be remembered as one of the most hard-working conductors of his time. It was he alone who stood out against the supremacy of the foreigner'.[150] Indeed, the fact that Cowen was able to succeed as a conductor in a field that had hitherto been dominated by foreigners is a testament to his own ability. Cowen, arguably, did more than anyone else to further the cause of the British conductor; he was vociferous in expressing dissatisfaction when foreigners were chosen over Britons, especially when the latter were musically the better candidates:

> The system that was for so long prevalent of engaging foreign musicians to hold permanent positions in this country is one that cannot be too strongly protested against. Ready and glad as we always have been to welcome to our shores all artists of eminence, no matter of what nationality, and to applaud and appreciate their performances, it is a different matter when they come to occupy those important posts that, speaking quite impersonally, should be reserved for our own native musicians. Nothing of the sort exists in any of the other professions; then why should it in music? It is this, as much as anything else, that has caused the British nation to belittle its own musical offspring; for it is only natural that when it has seen musicians of other countries at the head of our societies and festivals, it should have thought that there could not be anyone at home capable of holding such a position, or it would have been entrusted to him.[151]

Cowen also objected to the 'modern fashion of having different *chefs d'orchestre* for every concert', as he argued:

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147 Ibid., 122.
148 Godfrey, 120.
149 Kennedy, 110.
150 *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.
151 *MAMF*, 286-7.

> Excellent though these [guest conductors] may be and interesting as personalities from the public's point of view, [it] is somewhat of a mistake. Orchestral technique and interpretation have made immense strides within recent years, and consequently a high standard of excellence in the performances has been reached; but, however fine these performances may be under this continual change of conductors, they must surely be still better where the control is in the hands of one permanent chief (provided he be a capable one), whose every movement or slightest gesture is known to the players, and followed by them instinctively.[152]

Holst was among many who disagreed with Cowen on this point.[153] No doubt Cowen would have also concurred with Hervey's observation that in Paris 'every composition is carefully rehearsed before being presented to the public; which is more than can be said here [in Britain]'.[154] This, of course, was not Cowen's fault, but was a situation that had developed over many decades owing to the attitudes of proprietors. It was to some extent caused by the unwillingness of British orchestral musicians to rehearse thoroughly a work that they had played many times before – most British players were freelance musicians who went wherever they could find work and were well-acquainted with the 'classics'. Cowen acknowledges this problem in an 1895 interview:

> Our best instrumentalists are first-rate artists, and the very best readers in the world. One great fault is the want of adequate rehearsal, and in order to remedy the evil, the expenditure of a much larger sum would be necessary, for, naturally, a man cannot afford to give an unlimited number of rehearsals without receiving payment.
> Get together an orchestra of our best men, and I do not think you could beat it in any part of the world. If you were to give me my choice, however, I would rather have a somewhat inferior orchestra. At the Melbourne Exhibition, where the performers were not individually great artists, we had rehearsals every day for a month, and then played together for six months consecutively. The result was that we got the men trained to a pitch that would have been impossible in this country under existing circumstances.[155]

Cowen also complained that the art of conducting was completely neglected in the Colleges and Academies of Music:

> The student is made to go through the mill of much grinding work which may, or may not, be of supreme importance to him in his career; but so important and eminently practical a matter as conducting, as well as that of accompanying, is left to the student to find out and pick up for himself; whereas a regular course of training in both these subjects would be of incalculable benefit to him as a part of his professional equipment.[156]

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[152] Ibid., 295-6.
[153] See Vaughan Williams and Holst, 50.
[154] Hervey, A, 'A Chat About Music In Paris' in *Strand Musical Magazine* (ed., Hatzfeld, E.)(London: George Newnes Ltd., 1895), Vol. I, 243.
[155] *IEM*, 250-1.
[156] Scholes, P.A., *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944* (London: Novello & Co. Ltd and Oxford University Press, 1947), 387.

Vaughan Williams said something similar in 1904: 'An Englishman can become a good conductor if he has the proper opportunities…one cannot help believing that there are many young English musicians who would become very capable conductors if they only had the means of learning the art'.[157] However, whereas Cowen favoured a college approach, Vaughan Williams observed that 'conducting can only be learnt at the conductor's desk. On the continent there are many small posts at opera-houses and in concert-rooms through which a young man can gradually rise to the front rank'.[158] Indeed, it was not until 1919 that the first English class for conductors emerged at the Royal College of Music under Adrian Boult. Moreover, this may have been what motivated Cowen into writing his articles entitled *Hints in Conducting* for the *Musical Times* and 'The Art of Conducting' for *The Musical Educator* in May 1900 and 1910 respectively.

The key points in Cowen's conducting career were: his season at the Covent Garden Promenade Concerts in 1880; his succession to Sullivan at the Philharmonic Society for the 1888 season; his sojourn to Melbourne for the Centennial Exhibition in 1888; his appointment with the Hallé Orchestra in succession to Hallé himself in 1896; his long spells of service with the Liverpool Philharmonic and Scottish Orchestra; and his second term at the Philharmonic Society beginning in 1900. Indeed, with regard to the Philharmonic Society, he conducted 93 concerts in all—only Cusins had directed more in living memory. Like Richter and Beecham, he had a prodigious memory; he preferred not to have the score in front of him. Cowen had many supporters and probably as many detractors, particularly among the younger generation, who saw Henry Wood, Thomas Beecham and Adrian Boult as the prodigies of the future. Yet, at his peak, Cowen was surrounded by, and making music with, many of the finest musicians in the world. Indeed, his reputation as a conductor stands up to scrutiny better than any other aspect

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[157] Vaughan Williams and Holst, 36.
[158] Ibid.

of his career, despite the fact that his significant contribution in this field is much underestimated today.

Cowen received his first honour for his contribution to music on 22 November 1900, when he, along with Elgar, travelled to Cambridge to be granted the degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa*. He also finally fell in love, and on 23 June 1908, now aged 56, he married Frederica Gwendoline Lottie Richardson (b. 21 April 1882, Brixton, London), of 80 Clarence Gate Terrace, London, the 26 year-old only daughter of Frederick Arthur Richardson, a Leather Goods Merchant (son of George Richardson and Sarah Laverack), and Charlotte Elizabeth Barker, at St Marylebone Registry Office, London.[159] Having remained a bachelor for so many years, the very beautiful Frederica must have come as a breath of fresh air into his life. A couple of years later, his departure from the Scottish Orchestra coincided with him being awarded an honorary doctorate by Edinburgh University in 1910. In June 1911 Cowen was notified that he was to be honoured by the nation for his services to music by the conferment of a knighthood, with the ceremony taking place on 6 July at St James's Palace.[160]

With a wife to consider, Cowen gradually gave up his remaining conducting posts during the 1910s, finding a new outlet for his skills and experiences, and a retirement income, in teaching. In conjunction with Landon Ronald, son of his first teacher, Henry Russell, he devoted his abilities and talents to training the younger generation of musicians at the Guildhall School of Music, being appointed (by the Music Committee of the Corporation of London) a Professor of that institution in February 1918. He took on several duties: he was variously Professor of 'Coaching in Oratorio' and 'Light Opera Class', as well as 'Coaching in Grand Opera and Oratorio'.[161] Indeed, from November 1919 until February of the following year, Cowen became

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[159] Certified copy of an Entry of Birth and an Entry of Marriage, General Register Office; Levien, 193-4; Personal Correspondence with Geraldine Casimir, a relative of Frederica Cowen (her cousin's daughter). Frederica had a brother George and a half sister Frances through her mother's previous marriage to Frank Laing.
[160] Records of the Imperial Society of Knights Batchelor.
[161] Andrade, 150; *The Times*, 15 February 1918, 9.

the acting Principal of the Guildhall School of Music on account of a leave of absence granted to Landon Ronald to conduct the winter season of the Scottish Orchestra.[162]

Cowen had a flurry of writings coming into print in 1913, the most important of which was his autobiography, *My Art and My Friends*, in the Autumn [October?] of that year, published by Edward Arnold of London, and initially retailed at 10s. 6d. Cowen dedicates the book: 'To my wife, whose affection and companionship are the happiest incidents of the present, I dedicate these recollections of the past'.[163] Surprisingly, Frederica is not mentioned by name at all, even in the dedication; the sole reference to his marriage to her comes as a passing remark just before his conclusion to the book. His autobiography is in the form of a collection of reminiscences of his life, particularly of those amusing, silly and disastrous moments that would not find a place in a more formal biography. In addition, Cowen became a biographer in this year, contributing four books in a series of sixteen entitled *Masterpieces of Music*, edited by E. Hatzfeld, and published by T. C. & E. C. Jack of London and Edinburgh. His contributions were biographies of Haydn, Mozart, Rossini and Mendelssohn. Cowen returns to his less serious style of writing in his *Music as She is Wrote* (Mills & Boon Ltd, London, 1915), a satirical glossary of musical terms. It is best described as a catechism of humour, tinged with sadness, as it is easy to discern, amongst all the wit, references to the more negative aspects of Cowen's own career, especially his tussles with Richter and the Hallé, and the lack of enthusiasm amongst British audiences for the British musical product, whether it be a conductor, musician, or a piece of music.

Of the remainder of Cowen's life, little is known, apart from anecdotal evidence from his letters to Edward Elgar and occasional outings to conduct concerts. There is some incidental music for plays in the 1920s; a completed, but unperformed comedy opera; and several pleasure trips abroad, including to South America, Algeria, and Jamaica (in February 1929, after an absence of some seventy-three years). In May 1925 the Worshipful Company of Musicians

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[162] *The Times*, 30 May 1919, 10.
[163] *MAMF*, *v.*

bestowed Cowen with the Honorary Freedom of their Company,[164] and a banquet was organised by the Music Club at the Hotel Cecil in honour of Cowen on 14 May 1925.

As has already been mentioned, Cowen's letters to Elgar in the 1920s do give us a few insights into Cowen's life, wealth, health and thoughts on the world in his later years. It is clear that Cowen's outlook was dominated by long spells of ill-health, by a recognition that his time at the forefront of the British musical scene had ended. His remaining investments and income acted as a cushion; it enabled him to pursue his enjoyment of travel, when his health permitted, but as the decade drew to a close, even this was not a certainty. By the late 1920s Cowen's music was no longer in demand at all, having long since gone out of fashion, partly as a result of the popularity of Elgar's music, and the insurgency of the newer generation of composers like Vaughan Williams, Holst and Walton. However, despite all the pessimism, Cowen's sense of humour still manages to burst on to the written page from time to time.

Cowen made a series of radio broadcasts on 'Children's Hour' on the BBC in early 1933, in which he talked about the lives of a number of famous composers. He soon revised these short biographies and George G. Harrup and Co. Ltd. published them as a book entitled *Little Talks About Big Composers* in the same year.

Cowen died of Myocarditis at 105 Maida Vale, London, on 6 October 1935, aged 83.[165] He was buried at Golder's Green Jewish Cemetery, in the Liberal section at Row 48, Grave No. 3. His grave is now in a poor state of repair; the headstone is engraved 'IN LOVING MEMORY OF FREDERIC HYMEN COWEN, K^{T}, MUSDOC, CANTAB, EDIN, BORN KINGSTON, JAMAICA, JAN 29TH 1852, DIED IN LONDON OCTOBER 6TH 1935'.[166]

His memorial service, at which the Reverend Harold Reinhart officiated, was held on 9 October 1935 at the West London Synagogue, Upper Berkeley Street, and was attended by many dignitaries, friends and representatives from the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of

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[164] *Musical Times*, lxvi (1925), 543.
[165] Certified copy of an Entry of Death, dated 7 October 1935, General Register Office; Grant of Probate, dated 22 November 1935, issued by the Principal Probate Registry of His Majesty's High Court of Justice and Administration.
[166] Personal visit made in 2001.

Music, British Broadcasting Corporation, Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Musicians Club, the Royal Society of Musicians and the Trinity College of Music. His funeral, at which the Reverend V. G. D. Simmons officiated, was also attended by many public figures.[167]

[167] *The Times*, 10 October 1935, 17.

2. Orchestral Works 1 (Symphonies)

By the time of Cowen's youth, the genre of the symphony was on the cusp of emerging from a period when it was considered passé. Wagner had declared the symphony's death in *Oper und Drama* (1850-1), and for sometime afterwards his assertion could have seen to be correct, as, following Schumann's Third Symphony (1850), the symphony (especially those deemed absolute as opposed to programme music) was superseded by the Lisztian symphonic poem. However, by 1876, with the first performances of Brahms' First Symphony and the composition of symphonies by Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, Borodin and Dvořák, the genre, as Dahlhaus has suggested, experienced a 'Second Age'[1] which spawned a new and hugely fertile wave of symphonic works and symbolised a level to which many composers aspired as the highest echelon of expression and intellect. However, it is difficult to see what motivated the tender seventeen year old Cowen, fresh from his final training at the Stern Conservatory,[2] and with a blossoming career ahead, to begin to compose his first symphony in 1869,[3] given that Dahlhaus' 'Second Age' had not really begun, and the symphony was largely still out of favour as a musical medium. At this time, Brahms, nineteen years his senior, had yet to write his first symphonic composition, and Bruckner and Tchaikovsky had both only produced their earliest examples a few years before, and they would have surely been unknown to Cowen. Dvořák was also only a fledgling symphonist with his first two such works in existence by the mid-1860s. Of Cowen's native contemporaries, Parry had yet to commit his First Symphony to paper, nor had Stanford,[4] although Sullivan's youthful, but fluent and assured *Irish* Symphony was extant by this date.[5] But, as is clear from several of Cowen's comments made later in his life, he regarded his outpourings in this form as his most significant contribution, and so it is not surprising that he was keen to turn to the genre early in his composing career. Most commentators may today consider this foolhardy, given that a symphonic composition will always prove to be a great test of the mettle

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[1] Dahlhaus, C. (transl. Bradford Robinson, J.), *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 265.

[2] Cowen left Berlin in the summer of 1868.

[3] Willeby suggests that Cowen had begun sketching the ideas for the symphony while still in Berlin (*MEM*, 186).

[4] Stanford's First Symphony dates from 1876 and Parry's First Symphony was not begun until 1880.

[5] Sullivan's symphony was composed between 1864 and 1866.

of a composer, and that Cowen lacked experience in working with bigger musical canvasses, although, as a child prodigy who was a published composer well before his bar-mitzvah, his determination to do so is not utterly unsurprising. Indeed, at this age, his knowledge and contact with the symphonic repertoire must have been quite limited: his conducting career had yet to take off, so he would have had little practical experience of conducting such a work. His two trips to Germany to study (Leipzig and Berlin) would have probably provided him with most of his best experiences of symphonies given in live performance, although he also had had access to the London concert scene throughout his childhood. Apart from these performances, and his studies aboard, he would have had to rely on his own investigations of the scores of the published symphonies that were available to him.

With precisely what symphonic models Cowen came into contact or used in his early years is unclear, but it seems likely that, during his studies in Leipzig and Berlin, he would have been more readily exposed to the Haydnesque, Mozartian, Beethovenian, Mendelssohnian and Schumannesque paradigms rather than British examples of Samuel Wesley, Cipriano Potter, William Sterndale Bennett, George Macfarren, John Ellerton, Henry Leslie, John Barnett and his old master Julius Benedict. The symphonic form of the Classical period had undergone many developments, especially through the pen of Beethoven. The whole ethos that the symphony should be the vehicle chosen by composers into which they should express their deepest and most profound thoughts had gained impetus. Indeed, his legacy of large-scale forms had transformed the symphony into a monumental genre. Of course, within Beethoven's symphonies, there is no one defining scheme, but several distinct models. During the Romantic era, the task of the next generation of composers was to assimilate this inheritance, but at the same time finding an outlet for the lyricism within them. Dahlhaus says that 'Schumann took his bearings' mostly from Beethoven's 'Fourth and Seventh Symphonies',[6] but that he had taken the idea of the ostinato rhythmic motives of the first movements of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, and translated them too literally into the '"thematic" rhythmic pattern' that

[6] Dahlhaus 1989, 153.

'permeates virtually the entire movement' of his First Symphony.[7] He thought that 'Berlioz' had 'primarily' drawn on '*Eroica*, whereas Bruckner's works everywhere reflect the model of the Ninth'.[8] Dahlhaus expressed the view that Mendelssohn, at least in his Scottish and Italian Symphonies, had avoided the overt monumentality, 'stepping well out of the way of Beethoven's shadow', by fusing 'lied melodies, counterpoint, and motivic association'.[9] In the end, the lyricism of the romantics was always in flux with the need to generate that sense of monumentality. The necessary art of the romantic symphonist was to resolve this apparent contradiction. Their experiments, for the most part, resulted in innovative harmonic schemes, and in their pioneering of new structural formulae that were less rigid. Indeed, Berlioz, Schumann and Liszt had begun introducing cyclic elements to their works, to make them more cohesive as a whole, not just within individual movements. In addition, there was the continuing conflict between symphonies that were absolute music and those that were programmatic [see Dahlhaus, C. [transl. Lustig, R.] *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991)]. From these symphonic models, which are quite varied in approach: the classicism of Haydn and Mozart, the monumental architecture of Beethoven, the romanticised classicism of Mendelssohn, through to the fantasy of Berlioz and Schumann, Cowen had to find his own route. However, given his ultimate empathy for melody and his affinity to vocal and choral music, and opera, this symphonic journey would prove more challenging than he may have thought in those first bursts of youth.

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[7] Ibid., 158-9.
[8] Ibid., 153.
[9] Ibid., 157.

Table 1: A list of Cowen's Symphonies

Date	Number	Key	Subtitle	First Performance Location and Date	First Performance Conductor and Orchestra	Notes
1869	1	C minor		St. James's Hall, London, 9.xii.1869	Frederic H. Cowen, Cowen's Orchestra [the band was assembled specially for the performance]	Unpublished
1872	2	F major		Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, 8.x.1872	Frederic H. Cowen, Liverpool Philharmonic Society	Unpublished
1880	3	C minor	*Scandinavian*	St. James's Hall, London, 18.xii.1880	Frederic H. Cowen, Cowen's Orchestra [the band was assembled specially for Cowen's Concert Series]	Published by Albert J. Gutmann, Vienna (1882), and dedicated to 'Francis Hueffer'
1884	4	B flat minor	*The Welsh*	St. James's Hall, London, 28.v.1884	Frederic H. Cowen, Philharmonic Society, London	Published by Novello, Ewer & Co., London (1885?), and dedicated to the 'Philharmonic Society of London'
1887	5	F major		Guildhall, Cambridge, 9.vi.1887	Frederic H. Cowen, Cambridge University Music Society	Published by Novello & Co., London (1906), and dedicated to 'Dr. Hans Richter'
1897	6	E major	*The Idyllic*	St. James's Hall, London, Richter Concert Series, 31.v.1897	Hans Richter, Richter Orchestra	Published by Breitkopf and Härtel, Leipzig (1898)

Cowen's Symphony No. 1 in C minor received its first performance at the St James's Hall, London, on 9 December 1869. Cowen recalled:

> The production of my first symphony, when I was seventeen, at a concert my father gave for me…obtained me an agreement with Messrs. Boosey to publish all my compositions for a period of three years…When this symphony was played at Brighton a few months after its London production the bandmaster of a local regiment, who was present, came to see me in the artists' room, and after expressing himself very pleased with the work, said to me: 'Did you score it yourself?' 'What do you mean?' I answered, really not understanding the remark at first. 'I mean, did you really do all the orchestration?' Being rather proud of this, my first important orchestral work, I felt a little huffed, and said haughtily: 'You may not be aware that the scoring of a big work' (with emphasis on the big) 'is usually one of its chief points'. 'I am very sorry', he explained, 'but I thought that perhaps you only write in the melodies for the clarinet or cornet, as we do, and left someone else to fill up the rest'. I suppose he must have noticed the look of disgust on my face, for he left me at once without venturing any further remarks.[10]

[10] *MAMF*, 29.

Unfortunately, the symphony remained in manuscript and is now believed to be lost, and thus the only surviving evidence of the work's existence is in the programme notes issued at its performances. Nevertheless these do provide a tantalising glimpse of his first attempts as a symphonic composer, detailing a work in four movements. However, whilst the musical examples therein are all too brief to make a detailed assessment of Cowen's influences, one can infer that a sound world and structural scheme akin to that found in the Romantic period, especially of Mendelssohn and Schumann, is at play.

Cowen's reputation as a composer was first established with the premiere of this symphony, at which the first performance of his Piano Concerto in A minor also featured, performances that drew universal acclamation from the critics. The *Musical Times* of January 1870 noted:

> Although we can on a first hearing do little justice to the many beauties contained in these compositions, we have no hesitation in saying that they display the possession of a power which we trust may be healthily fostered and encouraged. The Symphony especially showed not only originality of thought, but intimate knowledge of the resources of instrumentation; and we hope that the applause with which it was received will stimulate the young composer to renewed exertion.[11]

Joseph Bennett, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, was equally encouraging, noting that

> although we have for some years past recognised the phenomenal talent of Mr F. H. Cowen as a child-player, and latterly as a clever writer, we looked forward with considerable apprehension to the alarmingly ambitious character of the programme he put forward on Thursday last. A MS. concerto and a MS. symphony by a youth of seventeen, in addition to some smaller works, formed it must be confessed, a portentous scheme of self-display. But the result justified the boldness of the attempt. The concerto, played of course by Mr Cowen himself, had many features of interest, but it was quite eclipsed by the more ambitious orchestral work. Here there was not only evidence of musical science, remarkable, indeed, in so young a man, but imagination and originality. The instruments were treated as with a master's hand; while in every orchestral effect was manifest the result of delicate fancy and of careful thought…Mr Cowen conducted his own work with decision and tact, and, after he had laid down his baton, he was vehemently recalled. We hope soon to have another opportunity of listening to this really remarkable production. Meanwhile Mr Cowen had better submit his works to the severest self-criticism. He has it in his power to take his place among the foremost of English musicians.[12]

Willeby concluded that the symphony was 'one of very much more than ordinary promise'.[13]

Cowen, however, was dissatisfied with the symphony's finale and rewrote it in time for its

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[11] Scholes, P. A., *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944* (London: Novello & Co. Ltd. and Oxford University Press, 1947), 473.
[12] Ibid., 186-7.
[13] Ibid., 187.

subsequent performances at the Crystal Palace and elsewhere, where it met with similar success.[14] But, like many of Cowen's early works, the score was soon confined to his study's music cabinet to gather dust.

Three years later the Second Symphony was premiered at the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, with Cowen conducting, on 8 October 1872.[15] Indeed, like its predecessor, the Symphony No. 2 in F has disappeared into oblivion; the only proof of its existence is the extant programme notes, which suggests it was also cast, like its forerunner, in a Mendelssohnian mould. Again in four movements, a fairly conventional plan is followed.

The greatest turning point in Cowen's life was to come in 1880, when two events occurred that would place him in the top rank of the musical 'elite'. The first of these was his succession to Sullivan as conductor of the Promenade Concerts, held in the Covent Garden Theatre. To date he had had little regular experience of conducting, but, like most musicians before and since, he was more than willing to try his hand. The second event was the first performance of his Symphony No. 3 in C minor, *Scandinavian*, at St James's Hall on 18 December (at one of a series of Saturday Orchestral Concerts inaugurated by the composer), conducted by Cowen himself. He had begun work on the symphony in November 1879, and it was completed, except for 'some unimportant changes' in April 1880.[16] Inspired by his Nordic trips as tour accompanist with the French contralto Zélia Trebelli over the preceding few years, Cowen appears not merely to have been stimulated by the sound world he found there, but actively absorbed by its characteristics of melody, rhythm, harmony and timbre. In a letter to the critic Joseph Bennett, Cowen describes the 'programme' of the symphony, and states that the principal theme of the *finale* is in fact an adaptation of a Norwegian folk melody:

> The symphony was suggested by my several visits to Scandinavia. The 1st & last movements may be taken to portray my general impressions - & all the themes have more or less a Northern character about them, the principal theme of the Finale being in fact adapted from an old Norwegian 'Folkslied'.
> The Adagio might represent a summer's night (moonlight reverie) on one of those lovely lakes – nights & lakes which can only be seen in the North – the theme for the four horns

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[14] Ibid., 188.

[15] At the same concert Cowen, as soloist [piano], played Mendelssohn's D minor Piano Concerto, Chopin's *Berceuse* and his own Valse Caprice No. 3.

[16] Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, Ref. MFC C8745, B471 (83).

in the middle might be the sounds of a joyful part-song or students' song wafted across the water & breaking in upon the reverie - & again toward the end of the movement.
The Scherzo might represent winter - a ride in a sleigh - the constant movement of the strings (muted)...being the noiseless gallop of the horses on the snow & the triangle the bells. Note, in the first movement the prevailing minor seventh... - the episode (tremolo) after the double bar might represent the wind moving through those immense gloomy pine forests.
Note again the persisting A flat in the horns just before the return to the principal subject.
Note in the *Adagio* the theme repeated twice in canon by the basses (2nd time *pizzicato*) – note also the modulation into G flat & back to G towards the end of the movement. In the *Scherzo*, I think the combining of the *Scherzo* & *Trio* in the *Coda* is rather a novelty. - Note in the *Finale* the recurrence of the 2nd theme of the 1st movement, & of that and the Adagio combined towards the end of the movement just before the trombones come in.[17]

Cowen was also undoubtedly aware of the early published works of Grieg, notably the first set of Lyric Pieces for piano, with their similar evocations of Scandinavian scenes. Indeed, 'local' colour had already begun to flourish in other genres among the works of Gounod, Rubinstein and Chopin, and so its assimilation into the symphony was almost inevitable. Programme symphonies by Raff, Mendelssohn and Liszt, and symphonies displaying a 'local' character, such as those by Dvořák, had come into fashion and Cowen's new symphony responded to this trend. Moreover, Parry and Stanford also reacted to this phenomenon later in the decade with their *English* and *Irish* symphonies respectively. Like Raff's music, Cowen's was highly melodious, with its foundations in the works of Mendelssohn. But both of them developed their own unique voices, Raff influenced by Wagner and Liszt, and Cowen, perhaps, at least in his lighter moments by Sullivan. Before the first performance of the *Scandinavian* Symphony, Cowen could surely have never realised how important his new creation was to be to his career. The premiere under his own baton was enthusiastically received and Manns quickly took up the symphony and conducted it to highly enthusiastic reviews on 2 April 1881 at the Crystal Palace;[18] Hans Richter followed suit at his London Richter Concert series on 19 May 1881, where again it was well received;[19] and on 15 January 1882 the symphony saw its Viennese premiere, again under Richter's baton.[20] Cowen journeyed to Vienna to assist with the preparation for this

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17 Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, Ref. MFC C8745, B471 (83).
18 Programme, *Crystal Palace 20th Saturday Concert 1880-1*, 635-44 (2 April 1881).
19 Fifield, C., *True Artist and True Friend: A Biography of Hans Richter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 160; Programme, *Richter Concert, Third Season, Third Concert, 1881* (19 May 1881).
20 Fifield, 178.

performance, lodging at the Grand Hotel on the Ring Strasse.[21] Indeed, Cowen himself states that 'it was not until [Hans] Richter took it up, and played it at his concerts and afterwards in Vienna, that it was considered of any real worth among native compositions'.[22] Following the Viennese success of the symphony, Cowen left Vienna at the end of March 1882 and went on to Budapest and Stuttgart to conduct it himself with similar success.[23] The critical acclaim that greeted it following these performances, and those in Paris, Brussels and Prague, led to the publication of the full score by Gutmann of Vienna in that year (1882). Indeed, up until this time only Cowen himself and those who could be trusted to perform it, such as Richter, could do so. Now it was available for rendition world-wide, and many further performances took place all over Europe and America. One such performance was that in New York on 11 November 1882,[24] conducted by Theodore Thomas. When Cowen heard about this performance, he was delighted by the fact that an orchestra had taken it up of their own volition, as the following letter to congratulate Theodore Thomas makes clear:

London, Nov 26 1882

My dear Mr Thomas,
I have just heard of the performance of my *Scandinavian* symphony under your direction in New York, and I hasten to send you these few lines to thank you sincerely for your kindness in making the work known to the American public. That you should have taken up the symphony spontaneously is to me sufficient proof that you think well of it, and that is, I assure you, much more gratifying to me than all the applause of the public. I had the pleasure of hearing some of your concerts when I was in the States in '78 (when I was introduced to Mr Hassard), and I feel quite sure that the work received an interpretation at the hands of your orchestra under your guidance, which perhaps could not have been excelled by any other orchestra in the world, not even excepting the Vienna Philharmonic.
Once more pray accept my heartiest thanks, and, in the hope that you may some day feel disposed favorably [*sic*] towards some of my other works (perhaps my sacred cantata, *St. Ursula*, written for the Norwich[25] Festival last year),[26]

believe me, dear sir,
Yours very truly,
Frederic H. Cowen[27]

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[21] *MAMF*, 108; Fifield, 180.
[22] *MAMF*, 104.
[23] Ibid., 118.
[24] Thomas, R. F., *Memoirs of Theodore Thomas* (Kessinger Publishing, [original 1911] 2004, 243-4), the 11 November 1882 is given, whereas in Lahee, H. C., *Annals of Music in America* (Marshall Jones Co., 1922), 211, has 21 November 1882.
[25] R. F. Thomas has incorrectly transcribed 'Munich' from the letter, rather than the correct 'Norwich', and it has been erroneously reproduced in *Memoirs of Theodore Thomas.*
[26] Cowen's wish for a performance of *Saint Ursula* materialised almost exactly a year later when the Oratorio Society of New York gave it a rendition (Lahee, 81).
[27] Thomas, 244.

The American performances continued with the Boston Symphony Orchestra giving it at the sixth concert of their 1883 season.[28] After the Philharmonic Society performance in 1887, the *Musical Times* recorded that his *Scandinavian* Symphony 'has now thoroughly taken its place amongst the best works of our young English composers. Each movement was vigorously applauded and the composer compelled to bow his acknowledgements'.[29] The directors offered their hearty thanks for his time and trouble and also expressed to him their 'sincere pleasure…to have introduced his beautiful "Scandinavian" Symphony to a Philharmonic audience, a work which they feel sure will in the future take its place by the side of those masterpieces which it has been their pride & their privilege to introduce in the past'.[30]

Following the European successes of his *Scandinavian* Symphony, Cowen headed home to Britain, where he spent the early summer in Wales;[31] he stayed at 'a charming little inn at…Tan-y-Bwlch, engaged a sitting-room and a piano (dating from the remote period of the old Welsh Kings [!] and had every intention of working industriously'.[32] However, he says that 'by the time I had tuned the piano, mended the keys and pedals, and cleaned the inside, the weeks had passed and I had to take my departure'.[33] In fact, he spent most of his time 'exploring the neighbourhood, climbing the hills, and acting as a sort of boarding-house keeper to the honeymoon couples', who were his 'only fellow-lodgers', but he did 'get an insight into the natural love of singing that obtains among the Welsh people'.[34] He frequently came 'across small parties of them, seated on the grass slopes, singing in good four-part harmony any pieces they could remember, chiefly hymns'.[35] So began the stimulation for a new symphony. Cowen says little about its composition, but with regards to the symphony's title, *The Welsh*, he notes in his autobiography that 'I do not remember…whether I gave it this title myself, but in any case it had

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[28] 27 June 1883 (Wolfe Howe, M. A. De, *The Boston Symphony Orchestra, an Historical Sketch* (Kessinger Publishing, [original 1914] 2004), 256).
[29] 'Philharmonic Society', *Musical Times*, xxviii (1887), 216
[30] BL Loan MS 48.2/10, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 10, 1887-93*, f. 8v. (2 April 1887).
[31] *MAMF*, 120.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

a certain amount of Celtic flavour about it, and I expect its composition was not unconnected with the recollections of my rambles, my broken-down old piano, the hymn-singing, and the honeymooners'.[36] *The Athenaeum* expressed the following opinion on the matter:

> The composer has affixed no name to the new work; but the annotator of the Philharmonic programme has chosen to call it the Welsh or Cambrian Symphony. Mr Cowen has declined to christen his piece, and the annotator would certainly have done well to follow his example, because any national characteristics which the new symphony possesses are decidedly Scotch rather than Welsh.[37]

Willeby is quick to dismiss this assessment, although he agrees that

> the melody of the first sixteen bars of the trio contained in the scherzo has, by the avoidance of the fourth degree of the scale and the rare use of the seventh, a semblance of being constructed on the old pentatonic series, which we know was the scale of the ancient Scotch music, which the Welsh people would have none of. Their national harp had our complete diatonic scale...Again, the closes used throughout what we may term the characteristic melodic portions also go to justify the critic's remarks. Against this we must put the fact that the ordinary ear is very much more quick to discern the characteristics of Scotch music than those of the Welsh, and that as a matter of fact many would not know a Welsh melody as national music when they heard it.[38]

The published full score is annotated with the 'Welsh' tag, and so this title has stuck. However, the 'Cambrian' label should be treated as an erroneous appendage. Cowen conducted the symphony's first performance at the sixth and last concert of the Philharmonic Society season, 28 May 1884,[39] for whom it was written and dedicated. The *Musical Times* observed: 'The work evidently delighted the audience, and the composer was twice recalled to the platform',[40] and the directors wrote to Cowen accepting the dedication of the symphony.[41] By 11 April 1885 it had found its way to America, where it was performed in New York under Theodore Thomas[42] and in 1887 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the first concert of their season.[43]

At the beginning of 1886, while Cowen was starting to conceive ideas for a large-scale oratorio *Ruth*, Mackenzie, Goring Thomas, and he were approached by Charles Villiers Stanford, who was then the conductor of the Cambridge University Music Society, with the suggestion

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[36] Ibid., 127.
[37] *MEM*, 223.
[38] Ibid., 223-4.
[39] Brown, J. D., & Stratton, S. S., *British Musical Biography* (Birmingham, 1897)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).
[40] 'Philharmonic Society', *Musical Times*, xxv (1884), 335.
[41] BL, Loan MS 48.2/9, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 9, 1883-7*, f. 61r. (31 May 1884).
[42] Lahee, 211.
[43] Wolfe Howe, 256.

that they might wish to write new works for a concert consisting entirely of works by British composers that Stanford would be giving in May 1887, during the Commemoration Week.[44] Cowen decided to put *Ruth* on temporary hold while he set about a new symphony (No. 5 in F), hoping to complete it 'by Easter at latest'.[45] All three men were also privately informed that they were to be conferred with the Honorary Degree, Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*), by the University. On 9 October 1886 the Philharmonic Society agreed to approach Sullivan, Cowen and Randegger to compose new works for their next season.[46] Later in the month, the Society, aware that Cowen was working on the new symphony, approached him with a proposition to permit him to conduct its first performance, but Cowen, who was present at the board meeting, reported that 'his new Symphony would be ready for a Concert in Cambridge' and the meeting resolved to 'wait until this date was fixed before deciding whether that Work or his Scandinavian Symph.[ony] should be performed next season'.[47] In fact, Cowen was being less than candid about his plans for the new symphony as his letter to Berger a couple of days later makes plain (letter dd. 25 October [1886]):

> I will mention to you what I did not like to state at the meeting viz. that the first London performance [of the symphony] belongs to Richter by right as I have long promised him a new one which he has asked me for from year to year & I should not find it honourable, however much I might like to, to have the work done elsewhere in London first [i.e. the 'Phil']. This was my reason for hesitating...but if you think it might be mentioned to the Phil. Directors without ill feeling, please do so. If you would use your private influences to have the Scandinavian [Symphony] performed this next season, I should like it above all things & should be very grateful to you, & you should have a new work in '88 if desired.[48]

From this point on, there is little further direct evidence of the progress of the symphony. The following year, in a long letter reflecting on his forthcoming oratorio *Ruth* (letter to Bennett dd. 7 April [1887]), Cowen felt able to report to Bennett: 'I am glad to say the Symphony is now finished & off my mind'.[49] Soon after Cowen must have sent Bennett the score of the symphony for his perusal so that he could preview it in the *Daily Telegraph*: he wrote to Bennett (letter dd.

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[44] *MAMF*, 140-1.
[45] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(66). Goring Thomas began an orchestral suite, while Mackenzie declined the invitation, and his *Belle dame sans merci* was given in place of a new work.
[46] BL, Loan MS 48.2/9, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 9, 1883-7*, f. 132v. (9 October 1886).
[47] Ibid., f. 134v. (23 October 1886).
[48] Letter dd. 25 October [1886], BL, Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, f. 14r.
[49] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(34).

16 May [1887]): 'Thanks for [the] par.[agraph] in D.[aily] T.[elegraph]. I am very glad you like the new Symphony'.[50] Cowen's new symphony was premiered at the Guildhall, Cambridge, on 9 June 1887 under the composer's baton, together with Bridge's hymn 'Rock of Ages', Mackenzie's Violin Concerto, Op. 32, Stanford's *The Revenge* and Goring Thomas' *Suite de Ballet.* On the day before the Cambridge premiere Cowen wrote to Bennett to invite him to come to the symphony's second outing at one of Richter's concerts:

> I hope you will do me a favor [*sic*] & come to hear my Symphony at Richter's next Monday. I know there is the 1st night of Drury Lane Opera but if necessary you need not come to the Concert until 9 o'c[loc]k. I value your opinion so much that I should not like the work criticised for the first time by any one else & therefore I hope that if you ask any one to deputize for you it will be at the Opera. I hope you will do this for me.[51]

Richter conducted the symphony's first London performance at one of his own concerts on 13 June, preceded by Parry's *Cambridge* on the 6 June, and Stanford's *Irish* on the 27 June,[52] and Cowen dedicated the symphony to Richter. Following the Richter concert performance Hueffer from *The Times* expressed the view that 'among living English composers who have cultivated this highest form of orchestral music [the symphony] Mr Cowen undoubtedly takes first place'.[53]

Cowen wrote to Bennett (letter dd. Friday [June 1887]): 'Many thanks for notice of the Symphony. I hope & think on further hearing that sombre tone will wear off to a great extent'.[54]

Willeby's assessment in the 1890s was thus:

> Its tone is undoubtedly sombre, but the music is greater, the feeling deeper, the whole ring truer than we have had before. Grace and elegance, flowing melody, and variety and charm of orchestral effect: these we have always had, and these we now look for as a matter of course; but the true and earnest pathos of the *adagio* movement…is a surprise to us.[55]

It certainly had several further outings, including one by Theodore Thomas and his orchestra in New York.[56] The programme note from a 1906 performance is useful in that it tells us that Cowen made some revisions to the score after its early performances. Unfortunately, the symphony was never published in its original version, and the whereabouts of the MS remains unknown, and so we cannot establish what changes Cowen made. Indeed, the fact that he did

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[50] Ibid. (5).
[51] Ibid. (46).
[52] Fifield, 239.
[53] *The Times*, 14 June 1887.
[54] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(57).
[55] *MEM*, 229.
[56] 28 February 1888 (Lahee, 211).

not seek publication of the original version and took nearly 20 years before he finally allowed the revised version to be issued, suggests that the changes may have been quite marked. Perhaps, concerns expressed about the symphony's 'sombre tone' had been the driving force for the changes. Unlike its two predecessors, the Fifth Symphony has no subtitle; however, it is sometimes referred to as the 'Cambridge' after the place at which it was premiered and for whose University Music Society it was written. While this is not inappropriate, especially as Parry's symphony for the same event was named his 'Cambridge' Symphony, in light of the lack of such an attribution on the full score, this is technically incorrect. Also, the aforesaid conferment of a Mus.Doc by the University of Cambridge that Cowen had been offered, did not take place. May be this was another reason why the attribution of 'Cambridge' was not given to the work. Cowen says that Mackenzie's, Goring Thomas' and his names were submitted, but 'Macfarren, who as Professor of Music had to be consulted in the matter...raised an unexpected difficulty by adding two or three names to the list – a wholesale order that the Senate did not feel disposed to carry out'.[57]

The first surviving record of the genesis of Cowen's Sixth Symphony is found in mid-June 1896 in a letter from Cowen to Joseph Bennett informing him that the Liverpool Philharmonic Society had secured permission to give the first English performance of Berlioz's *Les Troyens à Carthage* (letter dd. 15 June [1896]): 'I have started on a new "Idyllic" Symphony which I hope to finish this summer unless I get melted down before'.[58] In October of the same year Cowen was approached by the Philharmonic Society, London to write another symphony; Cowen must have now been well underway with the *Idyllic* Symphony, as he responded thus (dd. 2 October [1896]):

> I have already made a sort of half promise about the first performance some months ago & I feel honour bound not to say anything definitely until I have endeavoured to get out of this. Of course I should desire nothing better than to give the first performance...to the Phil. Soc.y with which I was associated for so long & which received my last work so cordially – Your request, which I sincerely appreciate, is, as you say unofficial & places me rather awkwardly, as the other directors might not all be of your way of thinking, but I have

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[57] *MAMF*, 141.

[58] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(14).

> thought it best to be quite candid with you & tell you exactly how I am placed <u>for the moment</u>.[59]

A formal request for the new symphony came from the Directors nearly a week later[60] and Cowen was still unable to give a definitive answer (letter dd. 11 October [1896]).[61] By the end of October, Cowen realised that he could not extricate himself from the pledge he had made, writing to the Society (letter dd. 25 October [1896]):

> I am <u>very</u> sorry to say that I am, after all, unable to get out of my promise with regard to the first performance of any new Symphony – Had I only known of the directors' kind wish three or four months ago, I could have accepted with great pleasure. I trust that both you & the other directors will understand how I have been placed in the matter & will accept the assurance of my sincerest regret at the circumstances which oblige me to deprive myself of the honour of having the work first performed at the Society's Concerts. May I also express a hope that at some future time they may be inclined to renew their kind offer with regard to some other new work of mine…I do not know whether the directors would care for the first performance in England of a new Scena [*The Dream of Endymion*] I am writing for Ben Davies, but if so, it would give me great pleasure to offer it to them on condition of course, that it is sung by Ben Davies.[62]

He clarifies the situation further several days later (letter dd. 30 October 1896): 'The Symphony is to be produced by Richter but not until the next season – As soon as he heard I had <u>begun</u> a new one he asked me to keep it for him but for various reasons of his own, he does not wish it announced until he issues his prospectus'.[63] The Society decided 'not to fix upon including it next year as it was impossible to secure the first perf.[ormance] of it, but to accept offer of the new Scena (first time) if Ben Davies would accept 20 guineas for singing it'.[64] While staying at the Grand Hotel, Manchester on 11 February 1897 Cowen wrote to Bennett thanking him for the arrival of the libretto for *The Dream of Endymion*, but evidently the symphony was far from finished: 'I have to get on with the new Symphony & now the Scena'.[65] *The Idyllic's*

> movements present musical illustrations of various scenes, events, and impressions of country life, but the composer has wisely indicated no detailed 'programme', preferring to trust for the enlightenment of his listeners to the suggestive power of the word 'Idyllic'. He was more justified in this course by the fact that his symphony might very well be listened

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[59] BL Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, ff. 74r-75r.
[60] BL Loan MS 48.2/11, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 11, 1893-8*, f. 172r. (8 October 1896).
[61] BL Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, ff. 78r-79r.
[62] Ibid., ff. 80r-81r.
[63] Ibid., f. 76v.
[64] BL Loan MS 48.2/11, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 11, 1893-8*, f. 89v. (6 November 1896).
[65] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(3).

> to as music pure and simple, involving no 'meaning' other than the emotional message which each individual necessarily receives from all good music sympathetically heard.[66]

The production of Cowen's Symphony No. 6 in E, *The Idyllic*, was left in the capable hands of Hans Richter at the second of his London concerts on 31 May 1897,[67] and Cowen conducted it himself at his second season with the Hallé. By 1900 it had found its way to America, where it was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the first concert of their season.[68] It was also given by Cowen in the 1900/1 Liverpool Philharmonic season, at the fifth concert of the 1901 Philharmonic Society season, by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra on 25 April 1901[69] and again with the same orchestra on 3 March 1910.[70] However, the critical response to the symphony was mixed: Parry was in attendance at the first performance and noted in his diary (31 May 1897) that the symphony was 'very pallid and pointless'.[71] However, Richter's diary entry read: 'Cowen's symphony failed completely, *and it is good.* I will perform it in Vienna. The English just do not want their own people; for eighteen years they have defeated all my attempts to promote English composers'.[72] Ernest Walker noted its 'lack of vitality' as a whole.[73]

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66 Programme, Liverpool Philharmonic Society, 4 December 1900.
67 Fifield, 298-9.
68 Wolfe Howe, 256.
69 According to the records of Stephen Lloyd.
70 Ibid.
71 Fifield, 299.
72 Ibid.
73 Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 1924), 297.

2. Orchestral Works 1 (Symphonies)

In light of the absence of any surviving scores of the first two symphonies, only the briefest of deductions can be made as to their nature, and these can only be drawn from the extant programme notes and critical reviews of the works. However, these secondary sources do provide enough material to give an outline of their character and make some suppositions.

Table 2: Cowen Symphony No. 1 in C minor Overall Structure and Tonal Plan

I	II	III	IV
Largo – Allegro di molto	*Scherzo e trio – Allegro vivace*	*Allegretto con moto*	*Finale – Allegro con fuoco*
Sonata form (with Slow Introduction)	Ternary form	Unknown form, but possibly some sort of double theme and variation form	Sonata form
Tonic minor (C min)	Dominant major (G maj)	Dominant major (G maj)	Tonic minor (C min)
<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant maj <u>Recapitulation</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	1 Tonic maj 2 Submediant maj	1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant maj <u>Recapitulation</u>[74] 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj Coda ends in Tonic major

The First Symphony has a slow introduction in which Cowen strongly anticipates the material that will be exposed once the movement's *allegro* is underway, a model he may have found in Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony or Schumann's *Spring* Symphony. It is organised along the principles of sonata form, with an exposition section that has two subject groups following classical convention, with its first subject in the minor mode and the second in the major (dominant). It seems from, albeit, scant evidence that the recapitulation is an almost exact repetition of the exposition, apart from the necessary modulatory issues, but it does demonstrate Cowen's occasional lack of imagination with regards to his use of sonata form. This may have been what Willeby was thrusting at when he noted that the opening *allegro* was 'a little tedious'.[75] But the *Daily Telegraph's* assertion that 'there was some redundancy in the first movement – an

[74] The programme note does not indicate the key structure of the Recapitulation, but the stated one seems most likely.
[75] *MEM*, 187.

Allegro introduced by a short *Largo* – but the beauty of its second theme may well have tempted the composer to recur to it again and again',[76] suggests something more fundamentally weak in Cowen's approach to composition. Indeed, here we find the first confirmation of two things that would continue to dog Cowen's works — the first was his seeming inability to fashion compelling development of material by the sort of motivic and contrapuntal working out one would find in a great master, often relying just on partial dismemberment, repetition of phrases and modulation — the second was his apparent lack of ability to develop and execute a credible and energizing climax. This can only be attributed to the fact that his musical aptitude was essentially a melodic one, and that he simply did not have the musical gift to accomplish such processes.

Curiously, both the middle movements are set in the dominant key (G major). Even more peculiar is that both of the principal themes of the third movement are in the same key, i.e. G major. Cowen's early scherzo movements tend to follow the conventional three-part Scherzo and Trio *da capo* form (ABA), and the First Symphony displays this admirably, with what would appear to be a rounded binary form A section. Cowen's B section is in strong contrast to the foregoing portion. The A section is repeated exactly as first rendered by the means of a *da capo* marking and then there is a short coda in which the scherzo and trio are interwoven, a device that is repeated in some of the later symphonies. The *Daily Telegraph* comments that the *Scherzo* 'is deliciously instrumented', a response which seems to presage Cowen's later affinity for felicitous orchestration in this particular style-form.[77] Willeby notes Mendelssohn's influence in the *allegretto* movement, but remarks that 'there is ever present an individual refinement quite apart, and...emphatic signs which denote the musician who has something to say, and knows exactly how he wishes to say it. In this dainty and pastoral *allegretto* is struck the key-note of...Cowen's individuality as exemplified in his happiest creations of the present day'.[78] The

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[76] *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1869.
[77] Ibid.
[78] *MEM*, 187.

Daily Telegraph described the same movement as 'still more engaging'.[79] As the above shows, and as becomes apparent throughout all of Cowen's output, he is most happy when writing these shorter orchestral movements in less complex structural forms.

The structure of the slow movement from this lost symphony is uncertain from the programme notes, but some sort of double theme and variation form is possible. These two middle movements are very pastoral in character, and, though not so labelled, may be supposed to represent 'Country Life'. The finale is cast in sonata form, but is less expansive in terms of the amount of material presented during the exposition, and the development section is quite brief. Cowen's tonal plan for this finale is conservative, with the first and second subjects being exposed in the tonic minor and dominant major respectively, with the corresponding recapitulation in the tonic minor and major, as might be expected in a classical period movement. Willeby highlights 'the clever "imitation" in the finale';[80] this is a rarity in Cowen's output. The work ends upbeat in the tonic major in a manner that would be repeated in almost all the later symphonies.

Without access to the missing score, it is impossible to gauge accurately Cowen's use of the instruments at his disposal within his orchestra in this symphony. However, it is clear that Cowen's generally well-regarded understanding of the art of orchestration, which he developed through the practical experiences of music-making, seems to have held back when he was writing this, and most of his later symphonies. Indeed, his more adventurous orchestral experimentations have been put aside in favour of the serious and sombre palette associated with the sound world of the great classical symphonic masters. Also, without the manuscript, it is impossible to discern the extent and variety of Cowen's harmonic language.

As has already been indicated, it is difficult to draw any specific conclusions about the significance of the First Symphony's place in Cowen's output, due to the lack of a surviving full score. But it is apparent from critical reviews following its early performances that this symphony was seen as a significant work by a home-grown musician, despite some deficiencies

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[79] *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1869.
[80] *MEM*, 187.

in its construction and structural development. It would appear that in some ways it seems to embody the sort of romanticised classicism of Mendelssohn, but with tinges of the fantasy of a Schumann symphony. It brought Cowen his first national recognition as a 'serious' composer, opened doors to publishing houses for him as a composer, and brought him to the attention of orchestras as a potential conductor. Therefore, despite its demise from the repertoire, it was important to the development of Cowen's multifaceted career.

Table 3: Cowen Symphony No. 2 in F major Overall Structure and Tonal Plan

I	II	III	IV
Allegro con spirito	*Molto adagio*	*Scherzo – Presto vivace*	*Finale – Allegro con molto fuoco*
Sonata form	Unknown	Ternary (with the A section having 2 main subjects)	Sonata form with additional episodes of reminiscences from other movements
Tonic major (F maj)	Relative minor (D min)	Subdominant major (B flat maj)	Tonic major (F maj)
<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic maj 2 Leading-note maj / Dominant maj <u>Recapitulation</u> 1 Flattened Leading-note maj / Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	1 Tonic min 2 Subdominant maj	1 Tonic maj 2 Subdominant maj	<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj / Dominant maj <u>Recapitulation</u> 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj

The Second Symphony's first movement is organised along the principles of Sonata form, with two subject groups in his exposition section. There is clearly a certain conventionality about Cowen's tonal plans for his expositions and recapitulations. Yet, the second subject is partially rendered in the leading-note major key, before the dominant is finally reached. Another feature, the introduction of a remarkable pedal-like C7 chord in third inversion for some 24 bars just before the recapitulation, is noteworthy. Cowen's recapitulation appears to repeat the exposition material with minimal alteration, apart from the return of the first subject initially in E flat major! (flattened leading-note major), before quickly finding its way back to the tonic. This tonal shift appears to extend Cowen's initial schemata of the exposition where the E major-F major was juxtaposed, for here he drops a further semitone; moreover, this same semitonal relationship is inverted prior to the restatement of the second group, for Cowen moves unexpectedly into F sharp minor just before the arrival of second subject in F major. The structure of the slow movement is indeterminable from the programme notes. However, two interesting features of this movement are the use throughout of the strings divided into eight parts, rather than the normal four-part texture, and the segueing of the movement straight into the *Scherzo* by repetition of the first five bars of the opening *Allegro*. A traditional tripartite

Scherzo and Trio *da capo* form (ABA) seems to be being followed in this symphony, although the A section appears to have two subjects. This symphony's Finale is in sonata form, but with some modifications, especially the appearance of the second subject in the tonic key, before quickly finding its way to the expected dominant (in this way Cowen no doubt learnt his lessons thoroughly from Mozart e.g. the first movement of the String Quintet in G minor). This movement's exposition seems to be relatively brief, but the material is then extensively developed. After the recapitulation of the main themes there is an extensive recapitulation of reminiscences from earlier movements worked into the scheme. These recollections form the beginning of the coda, where Cowen creates a coda to the whole symphony, reviewing and shedding light on the chief ideas of the work. Without the full score, it is impossible to judge how successfully this works, but it sets a trend for a device to be used in the later symphonies, to lesser or greater degrees.

Like in the First Symphony, Cowen's melodic style seems to have presented him with a difficulty when he came to development of his material. But without a full score it is not possible to determine the degree of this problem, nor can we judge Cowen's harmonic language or his gift for orchestration. Like its predecessor in C minor, it was also warmly received and soon taken up by the Crystal Palace concerts, and thus Cowen's career as a symphonist was established before his twenty-first birthday. However, Willeby clearly felt that it was no great advance on the C minor Symphony, commenting that 'the first symphony was in no way ousted from its position by the appearance of the second, and [the former] remained the most remarkable work of the young composer for the time'.[81] Cowen's solitary comment on the symphony in his autobiography is that it 'died an early death',[82] along with some of his other early works. However, in a letter to Willeby, Cowen states that on meeting Liszt in Weimar, he played him his new symphony, with which Liszt was 'very pleased and surprised...he hardly expected as much from an Englishman!'[83] It is clear from the lesser number of performances,

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[81] Ibid., 193.
[82] *MAMF*, 53.
[83] *MEM*, 193.

and Cowen's and Willeby's own comments, that the Second Symphony was less successful than its predecessor, apparently moulded in a style that crossed Mendelssohn with Schumann, and injected something that can only be called 'Cowenesque'. There is nothing to suggest the monumentality of Beethoven or of something more adventurous and forward thinking.

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As Cowen's most popular symphony, and the first of his symphonies to be published and available for full examination, the *Scandinavian* shows a majority of the characteristic traits of his style and his approach to symphonic writing, much of which can be found in all the later symphonies. Therefore, a fuller analysis of this work follows, which highlights the features of his symphonic style. The work is scored for an orchestra not much bigger than that that would have been familiar to Beethoven: double woodwind,[84] brass,[85] timpani and strings, but with the addition of a triangle and harp. The overall structure and tonal plan is as follows:-

Table 4: Cowen Symphony No. 3 in C minor, 'Scandinavian', Overall Structure and Tonal Plan

Movement	I	II	III	IV
Title and Tempo marking	*Allegro moderato ma con moto*	'A Summer Evening on the Fiord' – *Adagio con moto*	Scherzo – *Molto Vivace quasi Presto*	Finale – *Allegro ma non troppo*
Form	modified Sonata form	Ternary form, with coda	Ternary form, with coda	modified Sonata form, with recapitulatory episodes
Movement Key Relationship to Tonic (C min)	Tonic minor (C min)	Dominant major (G maj)	Relative major (E flat maj)	Tonic minor (C min)
Keys of Principal Themes	<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Relative maj <u>Recapitulation</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic min	1 Tonic maj 2 Subdominant min	<u>Exposition</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant min <u>Recapitulation</u> 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic min Coda ends in Tonic major

As can be seen, Cowen has followed a fairly standard four-movement layout, comparable with Beethoven's schemes, and those of Mendelssohn and Schumann, such that there are predominantly fast outer movements, both ostensibly in sonata form, enclosing one slow movement and another that is either a *Scherzo* or of a lighter character.

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[84] The second oboe doubles on cor anglais.
[85] Four horns, two trumpets, two tenor trombones and bass trombone.

The *Scandinavian* Symphony's first movement is in sonata form with the benchmark tripartite structure of exposition,[86] development and recapitulation (with the addition of a coda), with the two principal subjects cast in the tonic minor and relative major and recapitulated in the tonic minor and major respectively. This is exactly the same formula as Beethoven used in his Fifth Symphony, first movement. However, on closer examination, Cowen is fairly free in his interpretation of sonata form, as each subject group has subsidiary themes. Cowen's symphonic recapitulations have thus far (as far as can be deduced) repeated the exposition material with minimal alteration, but in the *Scandinavian* we find some imagination: what appears to be the climax of the development section can also be interpreted as the beginning of the recapitulation![87] His first movement is meticulously worked out, and has well-balanced proportions, despite his modifications to his sonata form plan that includes an extended development of the first and second subject groups during the exposition. Willeby cites the return of the second subject on the flute (in E major, at rehearsal letter H) in the midst of the development as an 'exquisite detail...It is as if the sun burst forth in all its wealth of brightness from out the sombre mass of cloud. Schumann himself could not have been more happy'.[88] Indeed, the second subject certainly comes as a breath of fresh air following the energetic dismemberment of the opening theme. The principal themes follow overleaf.

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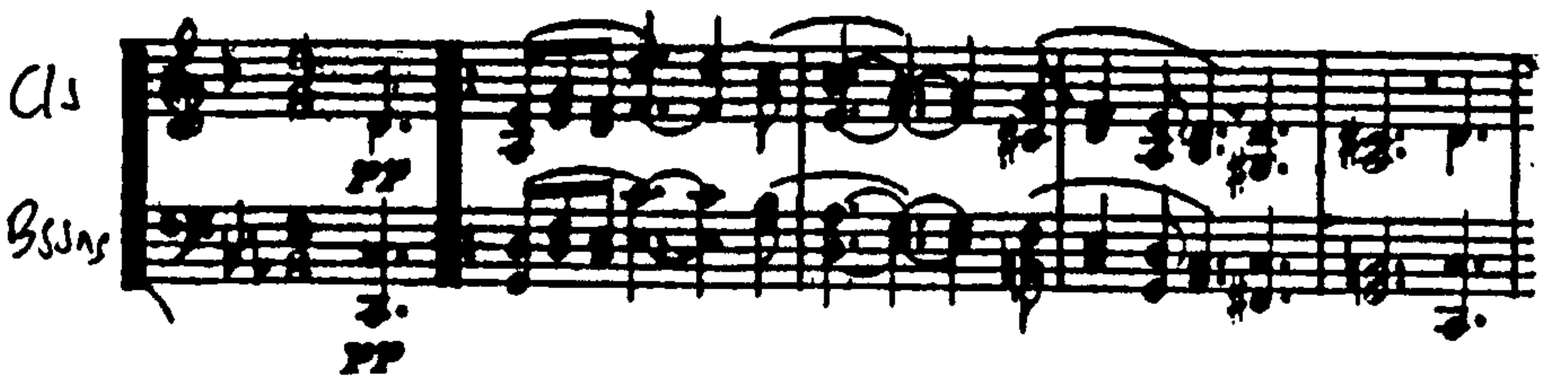
[86] A double bar indicates the option of repeating the whole exposition with an alternative continuation on its completion at E17, a device common in the classical period, but which began to be discontinued in the later romantic period.

[87] Thematically the recapitulation of the opening of the first subject begins at J17/3. However, harmonically there is a strong feeling of the home key from I9/1 onwards (despite a brief diversion into F minor at J1/1, as well as confirmed cadences in C minor at J11 and J14). Indeed, because the section after letter A in the exposition is strongly suggested in this section immediately prior to the recapitulation of the opening of the first subject at J17/3, and the whole of letter A of the exposition is not repeated after the opening material of the recapitulation, it does strengthen the case for the material of letter I and J forming part of a reversed presentation of the first subject group.
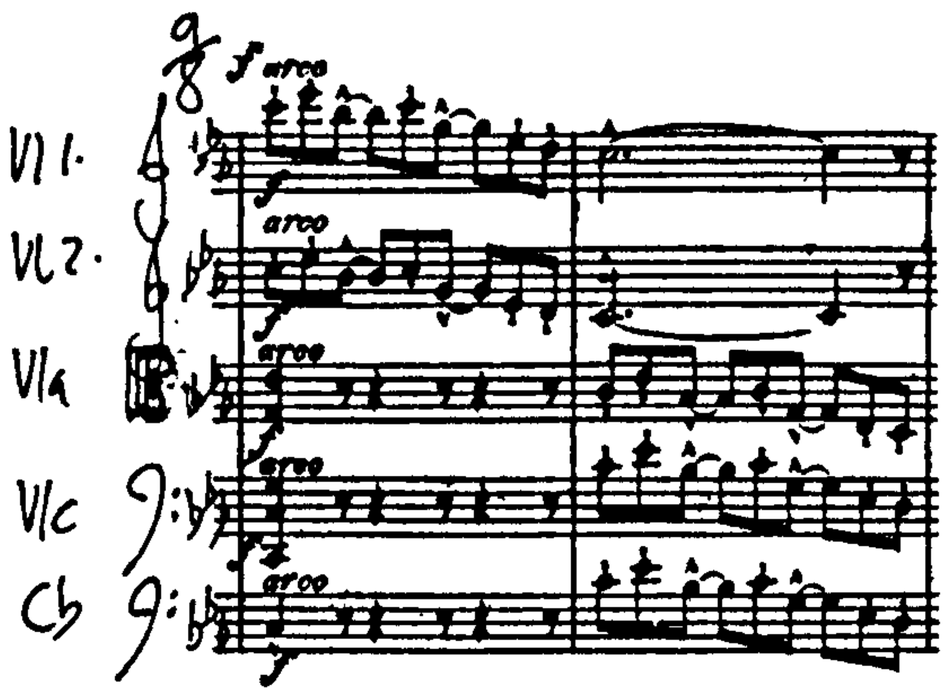
[88] *MEM*, 210.

Example 1: Principal Themes in Symphony No. 3 in C minor, 'Scandinavian', 1st movement
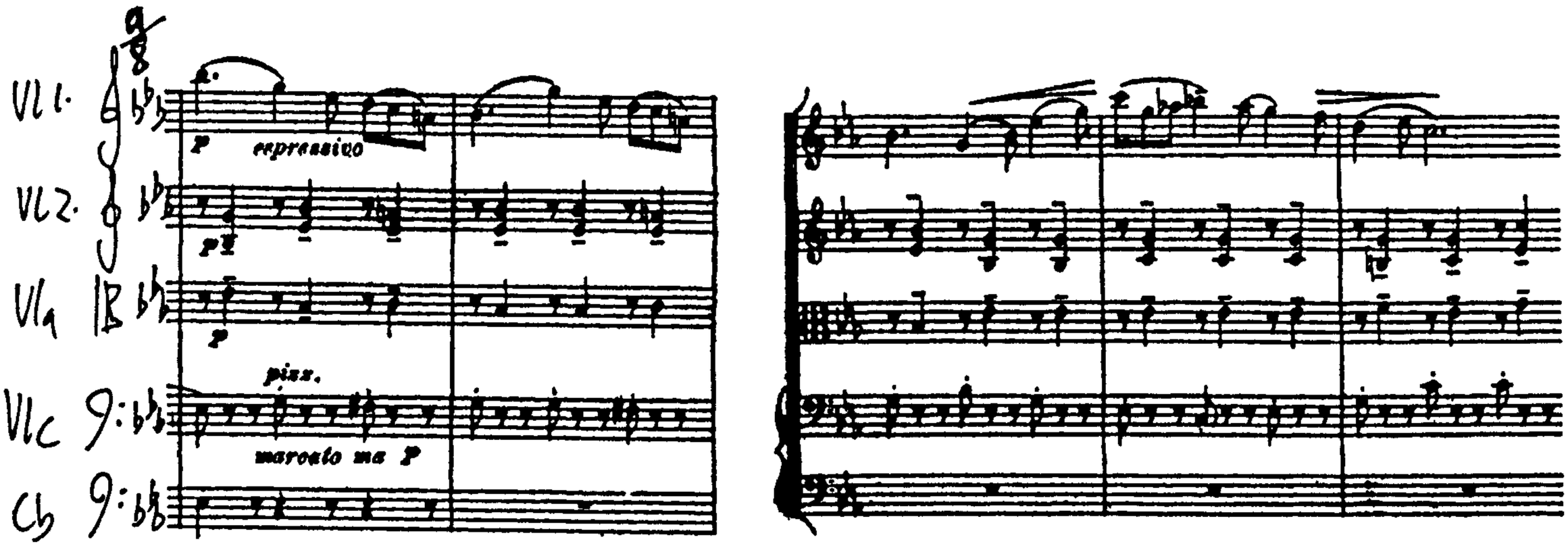
1. Exposition: First Subject, *Allegro moderato ma con moto*, at bar 1



2. Exposition: First Subject, Subsidiary Idea, at bar A1



3. Exposition: Second Subject, at bar B11
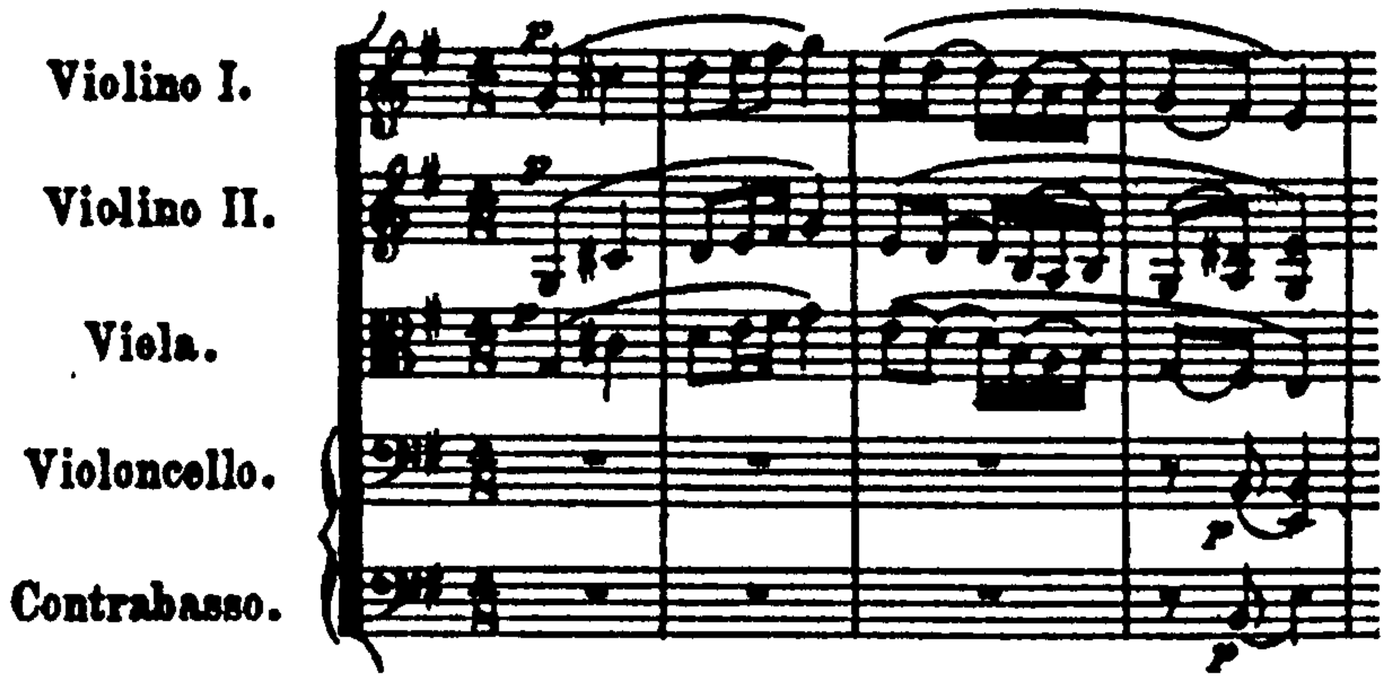


The *Scandinavian's* slow movement entitled 'A Summer Evening on the Fiord' – *Adagio con moto*—is in ternary form, with coda. It shows a characteristic ternary structure, but with the repeat of the A section fully written out and more lavishly orchestrated. Apart from this more sumptuous instrumentation, there is little material difference between the two renditions, apart from the repeat not beginning in the expected home key, creating a sort of false reprise. Indeed, the opening of the A theme is never heard in the original key, but by way of harmonic manipulation, it arrives in the home key about half way through its reprise. Of special interest are, of course, the off-stage horns and the employment of the harp, especially the latter's use of harmonics, Cowen's first really distinctive symphonic use of 'local' colour. This slow movement, with its bleak opening idea, contrasts well with the later one for horns and harp. Indeed, with the former's return in a more opulent manner, in which the gathering of revellers floating down the moonlit water, is plain to see. Yet is this a real depiction of something Cowen saw, or his imagination at work?

Cowen's Scherzo – *Molto Vivace quasi Presto*—is also in ternary form, with coda. The A (Scherzo) is in rounded binary form in keeping with most classical Scherzo/Minuet movements, and, like most of Beethoven's examples, the second half is rather longer than the first. The B (Trio) in a single/simple or unitary form,[89] i.e. monothematic and brief, and in total contrast to the A section, which is repeated exactly as first rendered by the means of a *da capo* marking. Indeed, Cowen uses this formula for the quicker middle movement in most of the other symphonies as well, except the Fifth. The *Scherzo* provides a light, galloping *moto* perpetuo theme, which is only briefly interrupted by a distinctive desolate phrase, with little or no accompaniment. This movement is less about fantasy, and more about the reality of a sleigh ride, with its horses and jingling bells. The principal themes of the middle movements follow overleaf.
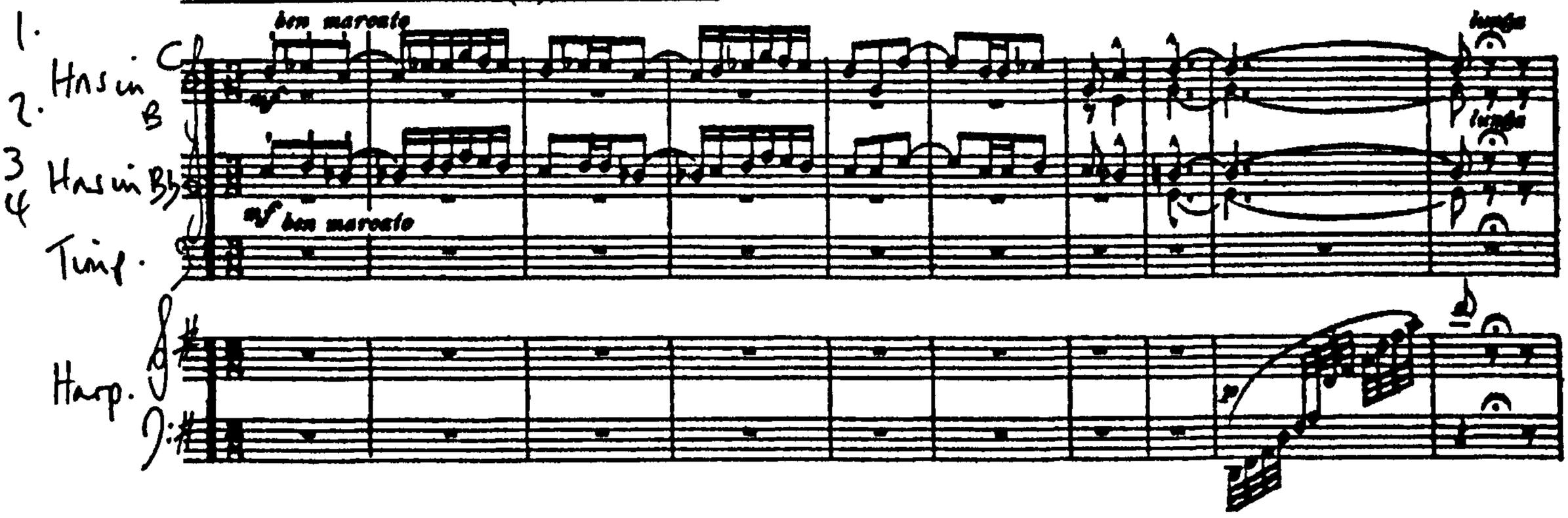
[89] The brief, tonally closed trio section contains a single idea that is not developed, varied or contrasted with any other material, and thus the designation of 'single/simple or unitary form' seems the only appropriate one.

Example 2: Principal Themes from Symphony No. 3 in C minor, 'Scandinavian', 2nd & 3rd movements

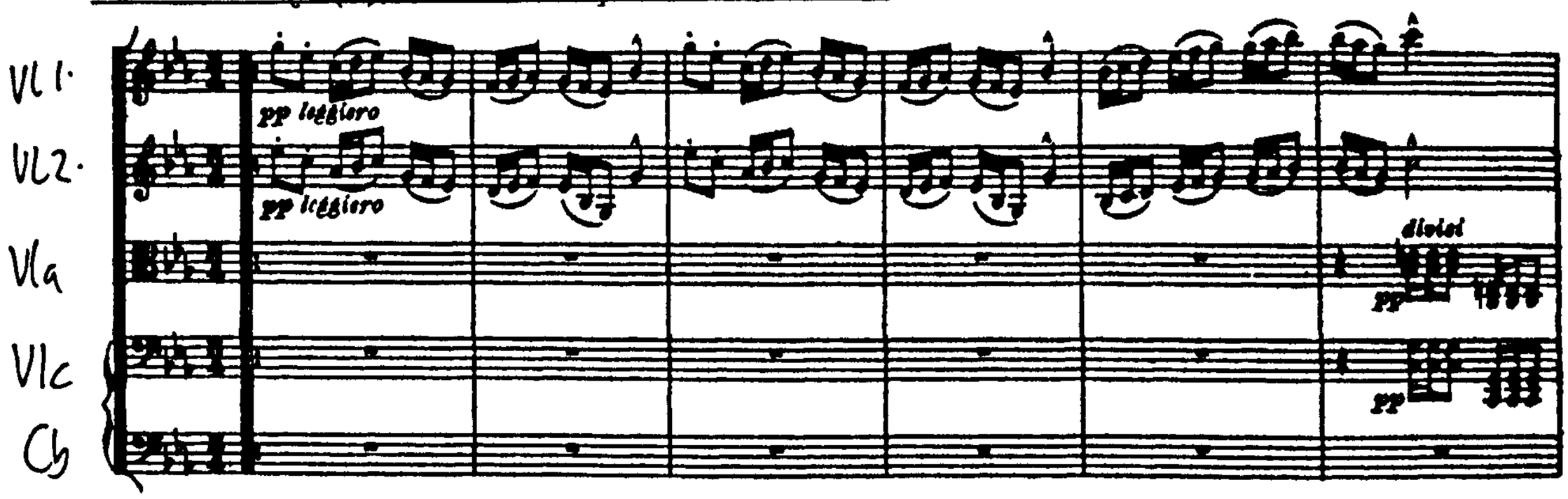
1. II – First Theme (A), *Adagio con moto*, at bar 1



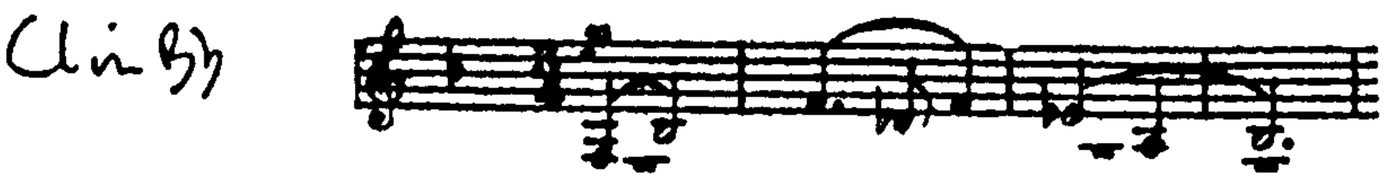
2. II – Second Theme (B), at bar A22



3. III – *Scherzo:* (A), *Molto Vivace quasi Presto*, at bar 1



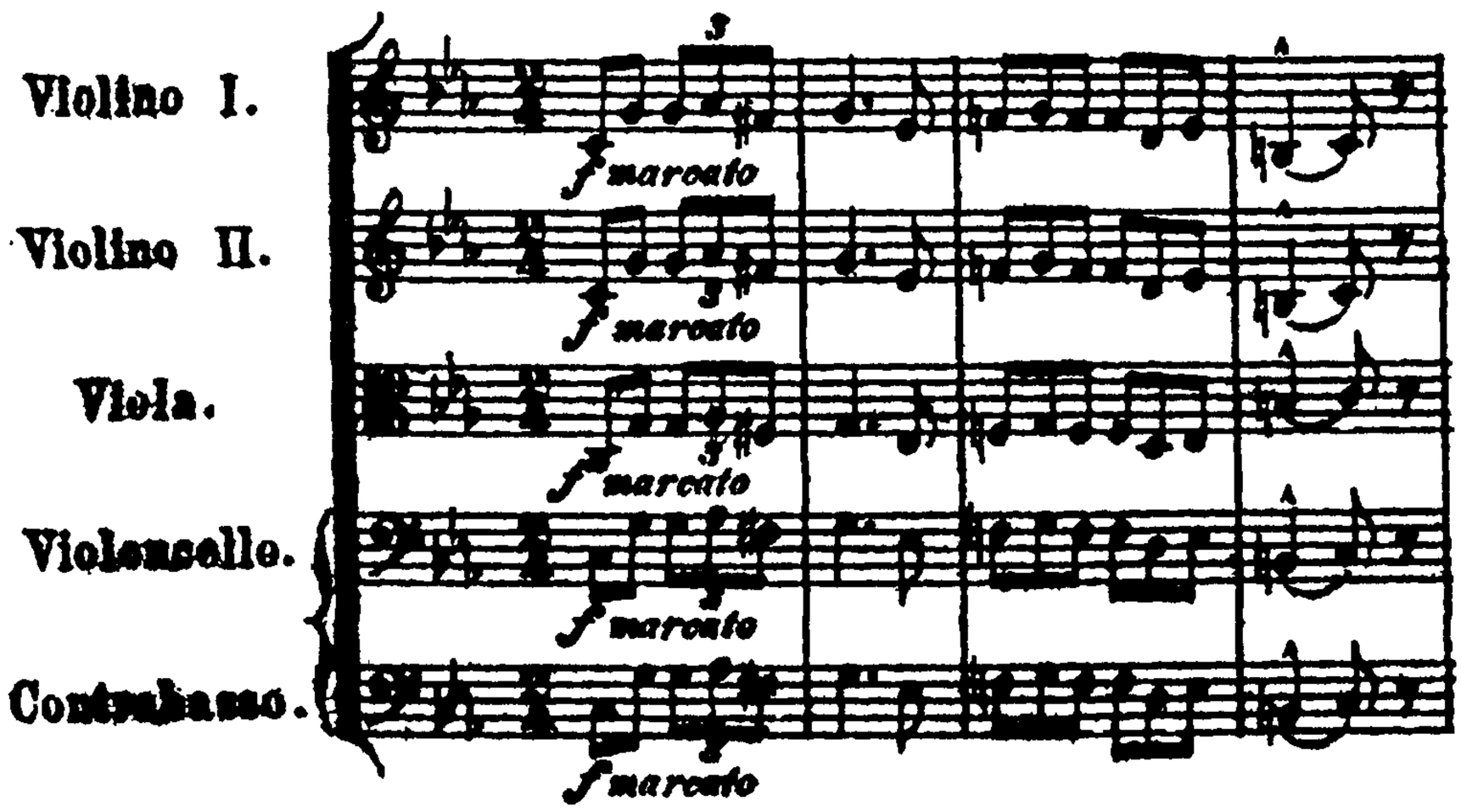
4. III – *Scherzo:* Trio (B), at bar C24



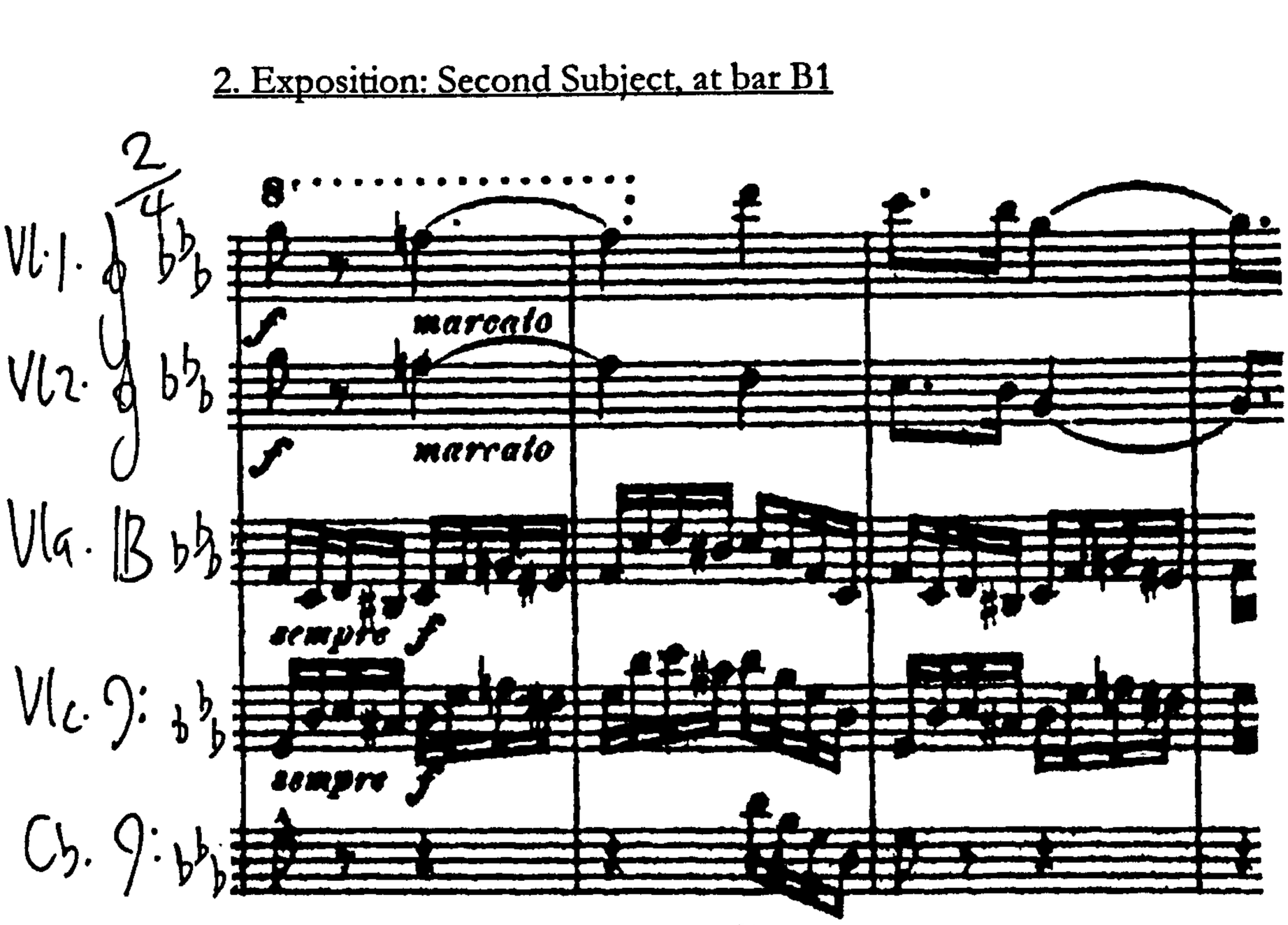
The *Scandinavian's* finale—*Allegro ma non troppo*— is again sculptured in sonata form, but is distinguished by episodes of a cyclic nature, where material from previous movements is recalled. The two subjects, though both vigorous in character and rhythmic drive, lack a degree of contrast, at least in the more conventional classical mould, although Cowen does his best to pit them against each other. But in one sense there is a rationale to his scheme, in that the real contrast occurs with his re-introduction of thematic material from earlier in the symphony into the development, recapitulation and coda. Cowen's experiment here is not totally successful: the movement's episodic nature ultimately disrupts the natural progress of the finale; and yet it is still possible to observe logic to his approach. Indeed, if he had introduced a cyclic approach earlier in the symphony, these reminiscences probably would not have seemed so unattached from the whole concept, but as they stand, they invite one to think that they were inserted because Cowen could not devise any better strategy. He could have created a tautly structured sonata movement, responding to the better balanced configurations of the earlier movements, or alternatively, if he wanted to reminisce in this way, he could have made a much greater effort to integrate the earlier material with the elements of the finale, rather than coming, as he does on at least one occasion, to a complete full stop, before introducing a recollection. Like the earlier C minor symphony (no. 1), Cowen commences his finale in the minor mode, and ends the work in the tonic major; thereby he again ends on an optimistic note. This sense of completeness on the highest architectural level of the symphony – the larger shape and balance of the four movements – is artistically satisfying. However, although Cowen reveals a well developed technique for the reworking of his thematic material in this work (a factor, incidentally, that distinctively weakens in the later symphonies), one still senses that the essential and intrinsic drama necessary for a well-shaped developmental phase of his sonata movements, particularly of the first and last movements, is too prosaic in that he tends to rely on the inherent drama of the 'double return' of the recapitulation for its moment of climax rather than on the natural progress and intensification of the developmental (and indeed *intellectual*) process. The principal themes of the finale follow overleaf.

Example 3: Principal Themes from Symphony No. 3 in C minor, 'Scandinavian', 4th movement

1. Exposition: First Subject, *Allegro ma non troppo*, at bar 1



2. Exposition: Second Subject, at bar B1



Cowen conjures up some local colour in the *Scandinavian* by the prominent use of the flattened seventh degree, giving a modal feel to the thematic ideas. Modality, of course, was already forming part of Stanford's stylistic parlance largely through his assimilation of folk elements from the Irish traditional repertory, but Cowen's source for this harmonic and melodic colour was apparently a Nordic one, probably a result of his exposure to the ethnic Scandinavian folk repertoire. A further possibility, however, is that he may have also desired to assimilate Grieg's colourful works that were by this time a new feature of English orchestral concert programmes. With the *Scandinavian*, it can be seen that Cowen's use of harmony is essentially diatonic with some chromatic extensions. He shows a fondness for the augmented sixth chord, notably the German sixth, as a means of modulation, although he rarely spells such chords with the correct enharmonic notation. But, he is also content to plunge into new keys without preparation, particularly in the *finale*. Furthermore, he creates a feeling of 'local' colour by using many pedal points, including double pedals, throughout the symphony, and he gives us a rare display of his skill in the art of counterpoint, combining disparate themes together in several places in the symphony.

The strings are the mainstay of the symphony, particularly in the outer movements, but the woodwind are given many opportunities to shine. The brass tend to fulfil their traditional 'classical' role of sustaining pedal points and reinforcing *tuttis*, but the horns, generously reflecting their romantic pastoral symbolism, have their moment of glory in the *adagio*. The harp adds a few splashes of colour in the same movement. The much maligned triangle, like Liszt's in his first piano concerto, makes a significant contribution to Cowen's *Scherzo*. However, one significant weakness in Cowen's writing in this symphony is his construction of the *tutti* passages: in the *finale* and to a lesser extent in the opening *allegro*, he resorts to an incessant homophonic hammering of block chords on the full orchestra, with little independence of rhythm between the top and bottom of the texture, which is texturally intractable and uncharacteristically lacking in felicitousness. One can only suggest that such scoring was

intended to be deliberately primitive, to reflect the desolate, indeed 'oriental' Nordic landscape. It is, however, unconvincing and unimaginative, and its effect is one of a textural solecism.

Cowen's orchestral style and palette in this symphony is largely conservative and traditional, with the trombones (and no tuba) introduced for extra weight at the most significant point at the end. Indeed, his orchestra is not much bigger than that used by Mendelssohn and Schumann. Apart from the distance horn effects and the starring role for the triangle in the *Scherzo*, there is not much sign of searching for new effects or expanding the instrumental range. The harp is Cowen's sole intruder into this traditional symphonic texture. While there are short solos for the woodwind and brass, they are seldom given longer impassioned statements as one might find for example in Brahms or Tchaikovsky. Instruments are generally used in their characteristic registers and in a vocal rather than virtuoso style. The horns and trumpets are scored for crooked instruments, as though Cowen still expected them all to be valveless (though whether they were performed on 'natural' instruments is debatable). Close examination of the parts indeed shows that many notes would be impossible or very difficult to reproduce on valveless instruments, even with a fluent 'hand' technique. This is all the more surprising when one considers that brass instruments with valves were by then in fairly common usage, at least on the continent.

Cowen's Germanic musical education, his own unique attributes as a melodist, and the sheer inspiration as a result of his travelling among the mountains, countryside and cities of the Northern lands of Europe, seem to have come together very successfully in the 'Scandinavian' Symphony. The title is perfectly apt and it anticipates the Nordic sound world that Stenhammer and Sibelius would soon investigate. Without the benefit of recordings, and more importantly the full scores of its two predecessors, it is impossible to gauge today how much of an advance it was on those previous works. The two earlier symphonies were (as far as we know) both 'exercises' in absolute music with no significant narrative, programme or extraneous influence, whereas the *Scandinavian* explored new territory, undoubtedly influenced by the works of Raff, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt. Indeed, the *Scandinavian* Symphony marks a watershed in

2. Orchestral Works 1 (Symphonies)

Cowen's output, as is apparent from the critical acclaim that it received following its initial performances, and from the sheer number of outings the work received all over Europe and America. Willeby concluded that the symphony 'is well able to hold its own with any of its foreign rivals, and is, without doubt, one of the strongest specimens of English orchestral art extant'.[90] Indeed, it gave Cowen his first and, perhaps, only truly international recognition as a composer. According to Willeby, the *Scandinavian* took 'its place in Europe as one of the greatest orchestral works of modern times', an indication of the extent to which it was promulgated in Britain, Europe, North America and Australasia and the impact which it clearly had on a wide variety of national audiences.[91] Moreover, Cowen would for the next decade or so be one of the most important living English composers. Every new work would be eagerly anticipated, and most of his output would be published without hesitation, much as Elgar's would be in the early years of the twentieth century. Cowen dedicated the *Scandinavian* Symphony to Francis Hueffer, chief music critic of *The Times*. Hueffer's newspaper had hailed the new work as 'the most important English symphony for many years',[92] although there is no evidence that the dedication and the newspaper's enthusiasm for the work are linked (later, in 1885, Hueffer, an influential Wagnerian, would provide Cowen with the text for his cantata *Sleeping Beauty*). Cowen had also established himself as a more than average conductor, and, with his new-found fame, began to be offered lucrative conducting work by the leading orchestras of Britain.

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[90] Ibid., 207.
[91] Ibid. It is also surely significant that Elgar, who performed this work in Worcester as a violinist, chose to single out the date of 1880 as a time when he perceived a serious change in English musical fortunes.
[92] *NGDMM2C*, 631

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The table below schematically shows the overall plan for each of Cowen's symphonies:

Table 5: Structural Plan of Cowen's symphonies

	Symphony No. 1 in C minor	**Symphony No. 2 in F major**	**Symphony No. 3 in C minor *Scandinavian***	**Symphony No. 4 in B flat minor *The Welsh***	**Symphony No. 5 in F major**	**Symphony No. 6 in E major *The Idyllic***
I	Slow intro then **Fast** Sonata form	**Fast** Sonata form	**Fast** Modified Sonata form	**Fast** Modified Sonata form	Slow intro then **Fast** Modified Sonata form with three subjects	**Fast** Modified Sonata form with a distinctive subsidiary theme between the first and second subjects
II	**Fast** Ternary	**Slow** Unknown	**Slow** Ternary	**Slow** Modified Ternary	**Fast** Modified Sonata form with subjects presented in reverse order in recapitulation	**Fast** Ternary
III	**Moderate** Unknown	**Fast** Ternary	**Fast** Ternary	**Fast** Ternary	**Slow** Ternary	**Slow** Rhapsodic, perhaps with an underlining Sonata form element
IV	**Fast** Sonata form	**Fast** Sonata form with reminiscences of material from earlier in the work in the coda	**Fast** Sonata form with reminiscences of material from earlier in the work during the development, recapitulation and coda	**Fast** Sonata form with reminiscences of material from earlier in the work in the coda	**Fast** Modified Sonata form with a distinctive *fugato* subsidiary theme between the first and second subjects, and with reminiscences of material from earlier in the work in the coda	**Fast** Modified Sonata form with reminiscences of material from earlier in the work in the recapitulation and coda

As can be seen from the table above, all of Cowen's symphonies are in what was at that time still a fairly conventional plan of four movements. On three occasions the scherzo is placed second, and, in the other three, it is placed third. In all cases, the other middle movement is of a slow or moderate pace and characterised by slow, self-developing melodic material.

Both the First and Fifth Symphonies have slow introductions, in which Cowen strongly anticipates the material that will be exposed once the movement's *allegro* is underway, a device, as identified earlier, that he would have observed in some of the Beethovenian, Mendelssohnian

and Schumannesque examples that he would have studied in Leipzig and Berlin, and from scores on his return home. Indeed, a programme note from some years after the premiere of the Fifth Symphony acknowledges the influence of Beethoven.[93] Moreover, comparisons of Cowen's opening movement with that of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony are justifiable. Both works begin with slow *sostenuto* introductions in simple quadruple time, their sonata-form *allegros* are in compound duple time, and they also share a similar sextuplet semiquaver idea. Like the first movement of Beethoven's symphony, Cowen's first movement is put together with consummate skill, the relationship between the introduction and the exposition being carefully considered and calculated, the former anticipating the latter brilliantly. Conversely, the opening movements of *The Welsh* and *The Idyllic* plummet straight into their opening themes, without any preamble whatsoever. The first and last movements of all six symphonies are organised using sonata principles, although Cowen's use of the form is by no means prescriptive, in that he brings an imaginative interpretation of tonal treatment and thematic integration to his structural thinking. *The Welsh* Symphony perhaps has the most unadventurous, not to say, predictable structure. But here, as elsewhere, the exposition sections all have at least two subject groups, often containing an excess of ideas, with subsidiary themes within each group. The transition passages of both the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies, the latter with its momentary pentatonicism, are practically subject groups in their own right and thereby assume an important thematic role (in the same manner as Beethoven) in the matrix of thematic ideas. Similarly, in the Fifth Symphony, it can be argued that one of the subsidiary ideas is significant enough to be classed as a third subject where Cowen seems to ape the tripartite tonal and thematic methods of Schubert's later sonata schemes. *The Welsh* Symphony's lively first subject, pastoral second subject and subsidiary material are worked out with characteristically assured, but formulaic skill. Indeed, as with the *Scandinavian*, the development section seems rather too mechanical, and the working-out lacks imagination, direction and a sense of truly passionate drama, a feature all too prevalent in this phase of Cowen's sonata movements. The Fifth Symphony's development section is equally

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[93] Programme, Liverpool Philharmonic Society, 6 March 1906.

carefully worked out, but lacks true fire and depth. However, it is not unduly prolonged, as a counterbalance to the large exposition that preceded it. Cowen's development of his Sixth Symphony's first movement material begins with wholesale repetition of ideas in remoter keys, but he eventually breaks the music apart into smaller fragments for more decisive argument, but that elusive satisfactory climax before the return of the opening material is still missing. As with the *Scandinavian*, Cowen's Fourth's (first movement) recapitulation repeats the expositional material with minimal alteration, apart from a slight abbreviation of the first subject material. The second subject, apart from the necessary key change, is materially and even instrumentally almost identical to its initial exposure. Similarly, the Fifth's recapitulation undergoes only mild alteration from initial presentation, as does the Sixth's, apart from the first subject emerging in the rather remote key of D flat (compared with the exposition, beginning from the 15th bar), but E major is soon reached. Here we are particularly aware of Cowen's lack of 'developing variation' in his symphonic movements, a factor which sets his simpler style of symphonic thinking apart from those such as Dvořák, Parry, Stanford and Cliffe, who assimilated Brahms' *intellectual* and *processual* style with true thoroughness.

Without an in-depth knowledge of the background to the composition of the Fifth Symphony, which has no title unlike its two immediate predecessors, it would be easy to conclude that it has no apparent programme, nothing national, and no imagery; it is absolute music. However, one important detail not revealed in any of the programme notes, is that the subject matter of the first movement was not in fact entirely new material, but a reworking of themes Cowen had written for his Characteristic Overture in C, *Niagara* in 1881. Unfortunately, the *Niagara* Overture was not published and the MS is thought to be lost, and so the only comparison that can be made is with the aid of the details found in the programme note from its premiere on 22 October 1881 by Manns at the Crystal Palace. *Niagara*, as its title suggests, was inspired by Cowen's trip to the Niagara Falls on his American holiday in 1878.[94] Although the symphony's first movement has been constructed following all the 'conventions' of sonata form,

[94] Programme, *Crystal Palace Concerts 1881-2*, 39 (22 October 1881).

preceded by an elaborate introduction and a coda, it is immediately apparent how close thematically much of its music is to that of *Niagara* Overture. Indeed, while Cowen has done a good deal to redraft the ideas in a new way, the contours of the original ideas remain. Moreover, the symphony's introduction opens with a direct quote of the first subject from *Niagara*, albeit transposed down a fifth from its original key of C major to F. The original theme is also transformed from *alla breve* (2/2) to simple quadruple time (4/4). There is not enough detail in the *Niagara* programme note to determine the differences in orchestration, but the fast semiquaver movement from *Niagara* has been dropped leaving only the solemn, majestic chords in the symphony. The clarinet theme at A1, which prequels the theme of the slow movement of the symphony, is new material, the third bar of which is important in the lead up to the first climax of the introduction. But the flute countermelody, which enters at A4/1 and passes round the woodwind, is a near-quote from the second subject of *Niagara.* Indeed, the second bar of this fragment at A5/1 is an important motive, both in the 'development' of this section of the introduction towards its climax, and in anticipating its further role in the second subject of the *Allegro* proper. The third theme of the introduction appears to be new to the symphony, and is also a precursor to the third subject of the *Allegro.* The first subject of the *Allegro* of the symphony is an adaptation of the first theme from the introduction of the symphony, and, therefore, was originally the first subject of *Niagara.* The theme, as given in *Niagara*, is in *alla breve* time (2/2), but it is now metamorphosed into compound duple time (6/8), giving it a whole new lilt. At D1 Cowen takes his second subject from *Niagara*, again in *alla breve* time, and rephrases it into compound duple time for his second subject of the symphony, the new version showing notable syncopations in its rhythm absent from the original. Again, it appears that Cowen has completely revised his orchestration, accompaniment and harmony, but kept the shape of the original idea, including the sequence of descending fifths. The sextuplet semiquaver figuration at E15 is remarkably like the quadruple semiquaver figuration that accompanies the opening first subject in *Niagara.* The symphony's third subject does appear to be completely new material, however. While the premiere of *Niagara* appears to have been its only outing, suggesting that it

did not achieve any real success, Cowen must have thought the ideas worthy of a further exposure, as he has recycled the principal motives from the overture into a symphonic format almost in their entirety. So perhaps the symphony should be subtitled 'Niagara Revisited!' Indeed, the fact that the first movement owes its origins to *Niagara* throws an entirely different light on the symphony. Does the fact that Cowen seems to have deliberately concealed this information devalue it? Is there a sub-text to the first movement, and, indeed, the rest of the symphony, which Cowen chose not to disclose? Or like many an art or music critic, are we trying to read far too much into the apparent programmatic elements that came from *Niagara*, which, after all, itself was a musical impression rather than a musically descriptive story piece (as will be discussed in chapter 3). The writer of the Richter concert programme note tells us that the symphony was written 'during the gloomiest part of the gloomiest winter on record, expresses disgust at the long continuance of the foulest weather, and a vigorous determination to withstand it'.[95] Perhaps, this is a clue to answering these questions. It seems probable that the worst elements of the British winter conspired to reawaken Cowen's interest in his watery music for *Niagara*, and in so doing brought together a cascade of ideas that reflect the darker days of that season. Indeed, the symphony is rather bleak and more sober in character than its predecessors. Cynics may argue that the only reason for borrowing from *Niagara*, was that Cowen was short on time and ideas for the new symphony (which was a commission with a specific cut-off date), and that as *Niagara* had had very little exposure, few people would have been aware that he had borrowed the material. This, of course, is possible, but Cowen spent most of his career producing operas, cantatas and oratorios to deadlines, and there is not much evidence of borrowings elsewhere in his output. So, why did he not acknowledge the source of the music for the opening movement? Perhaps he felt that the substantial reworking of the *Niagara* themes into his new scheme justified his lack of attention to this matter. Indeed, it would seem that by not declaring the relationship, he simply felt that the *Niagara* material was too good to remain unperformed, and the symphony would be an outlet for its re-exposure. A
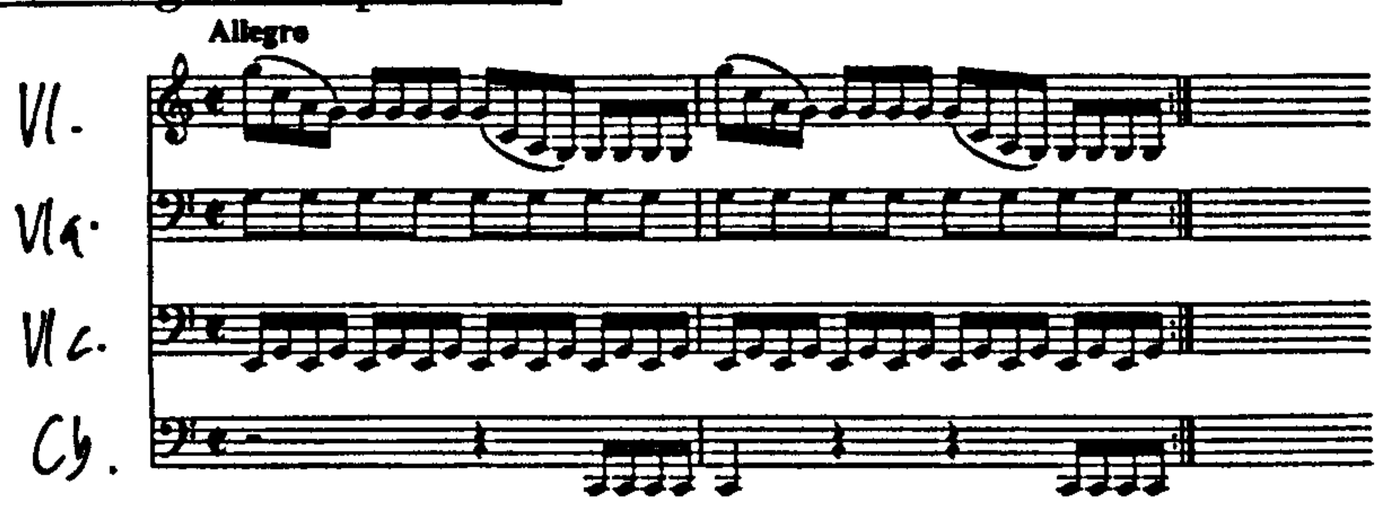
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[95] *MEM*, 229.
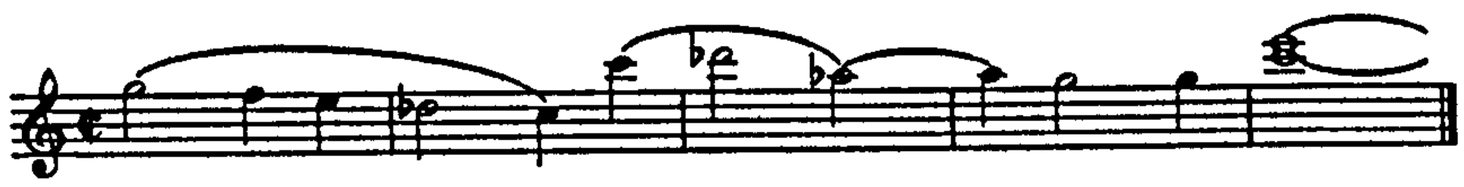
comparison of the *Niagara* themes with those of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony follows:-

Example 4: Principal Themes from Characteristic Overture in C, 'Niagara'
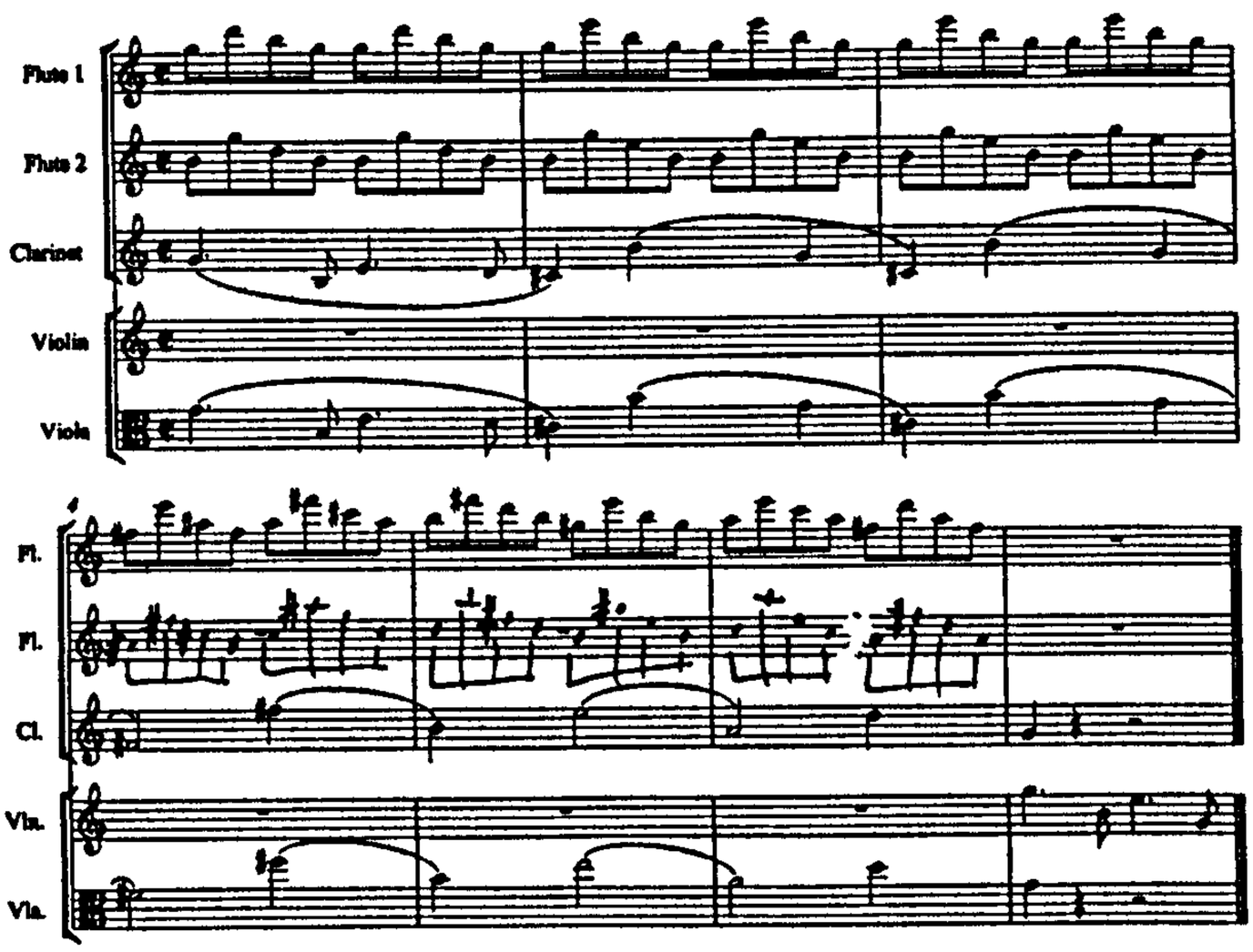
1. Introduction: String Accompaniment
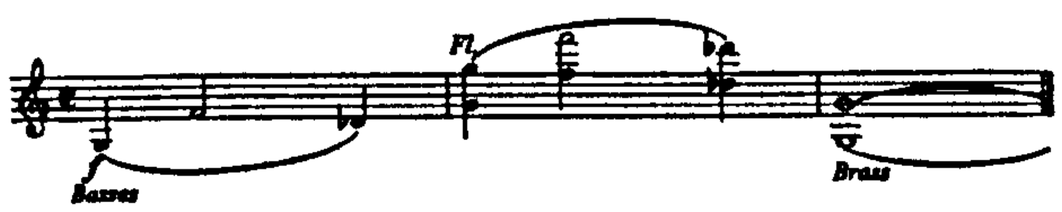


2. First Subject
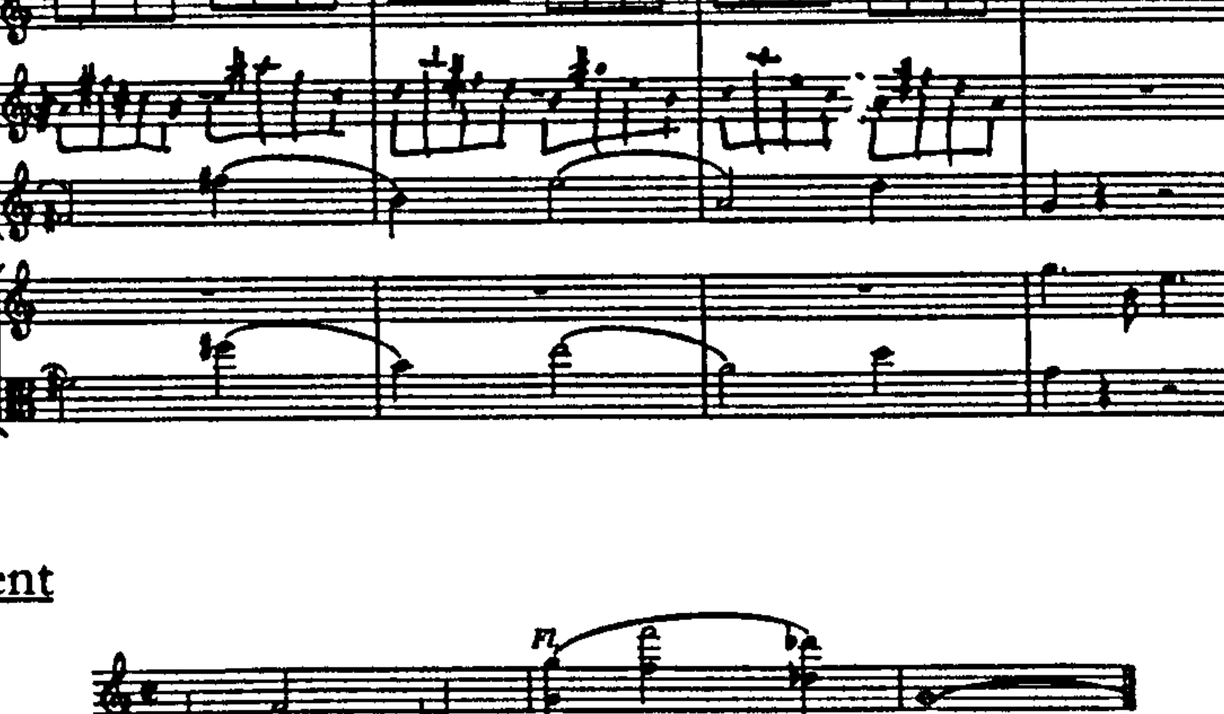


3. Second Subject



4. Important Fragment
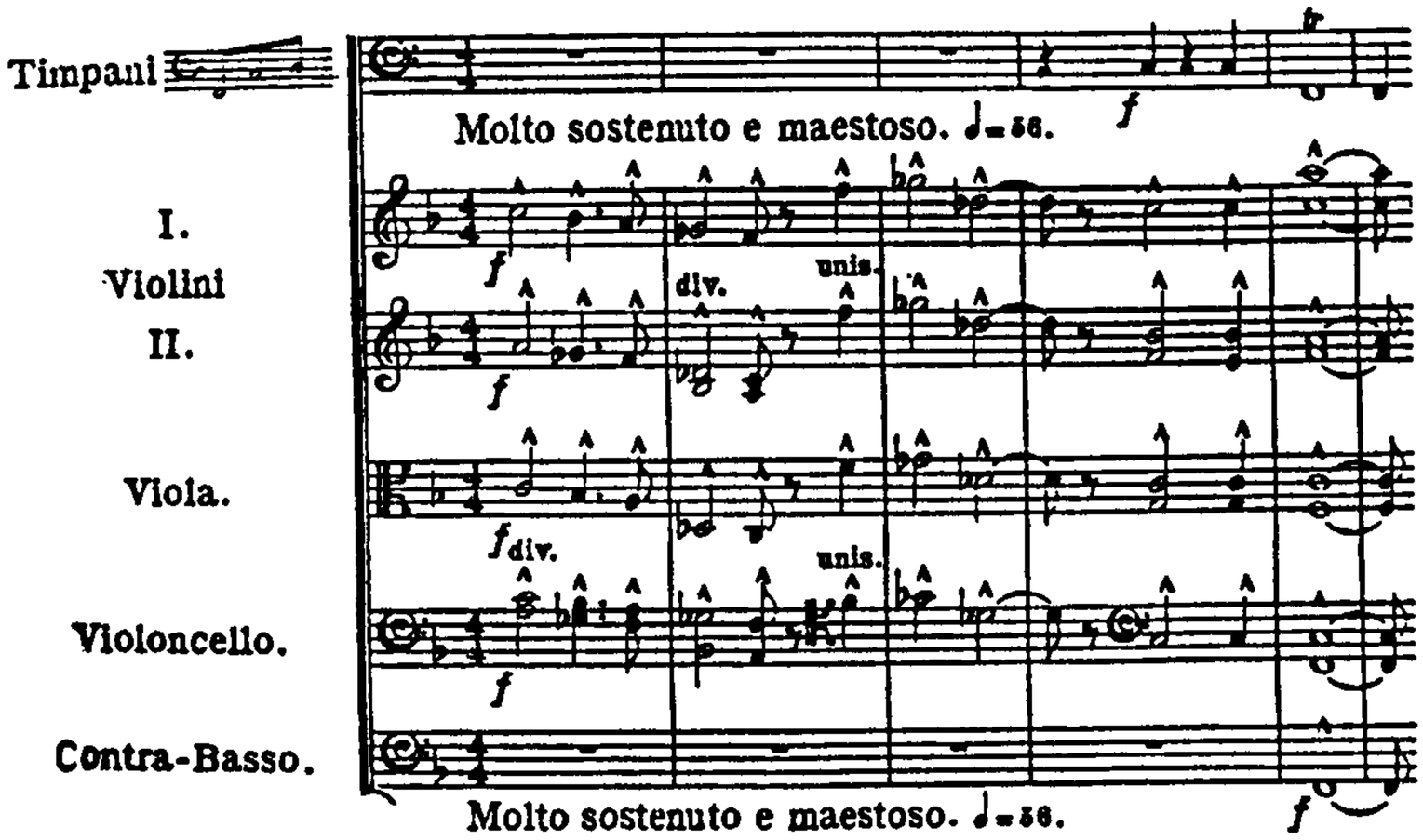


5. *Fugato*



Example 5: Principal Themes from Symphony No. 5 in F major, 1st movement

1. Introduction: First Theme, *Molto sostenuto e maestoso*, at bar 1



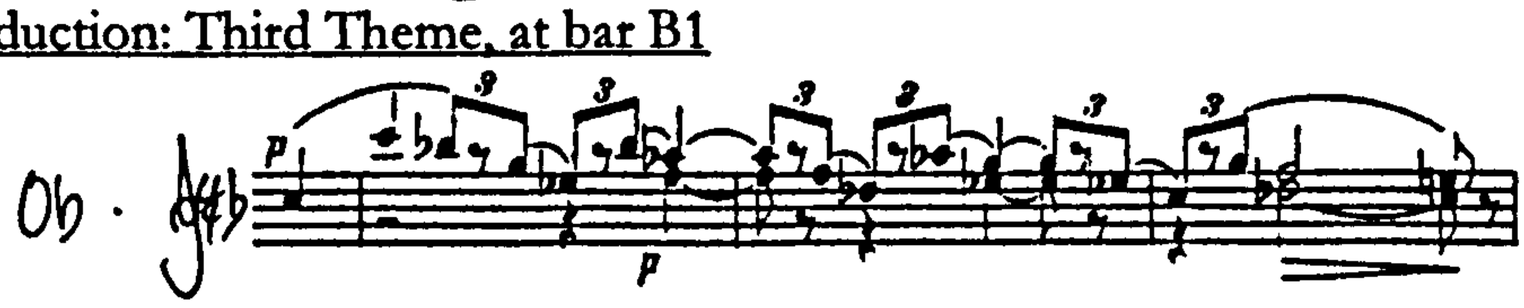
2. Introduction: Second Theme, at bar A1
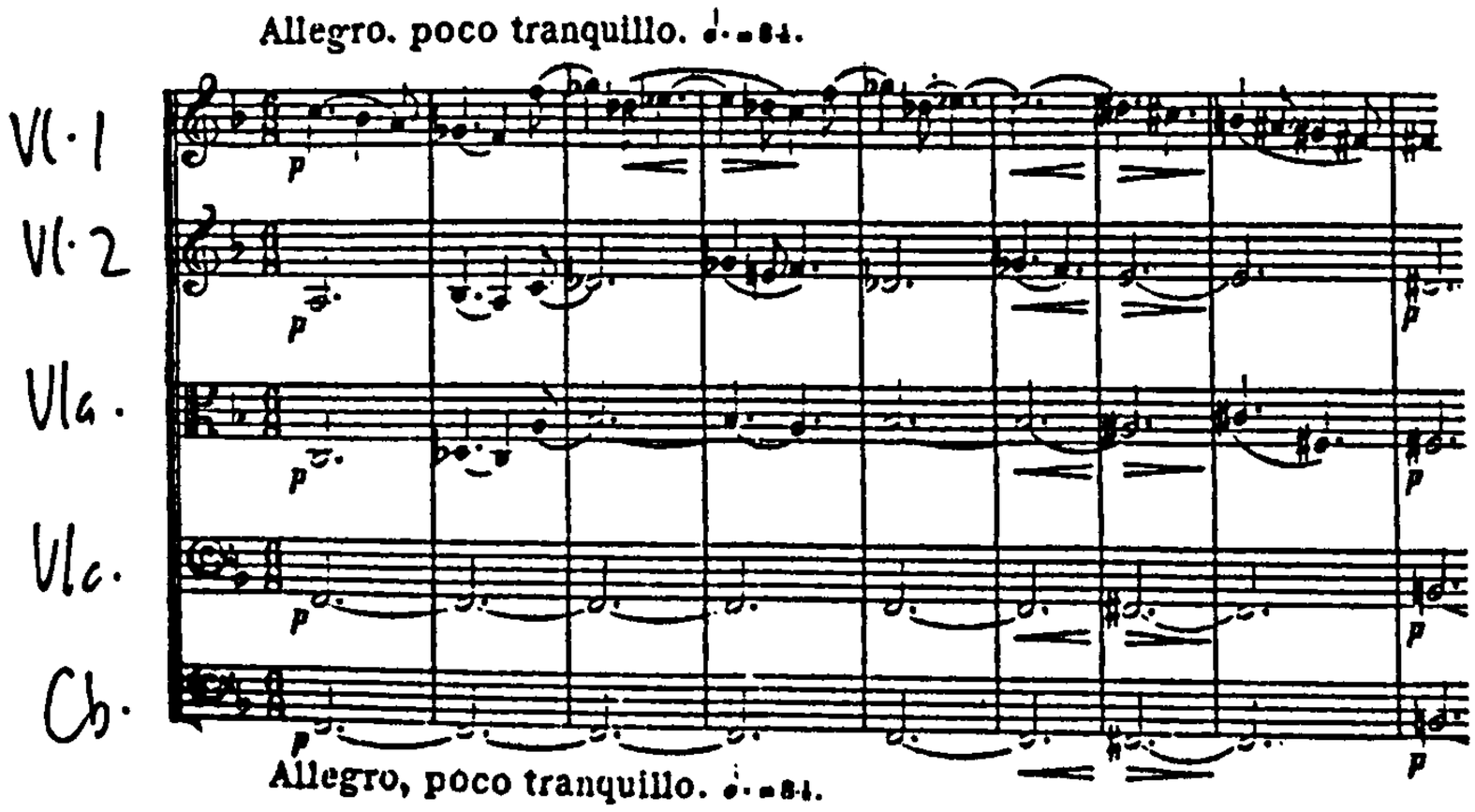


3. Introduction: Important Fragment, at bar A4



4. Introduction: Third Theme, at bar B1
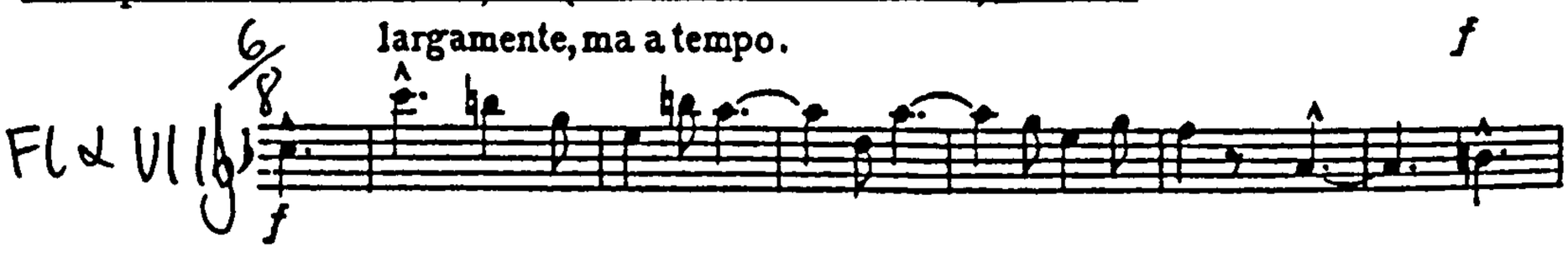


5. Exposition: First Subject, *Allegro, poco tranquillo*, at bar B13



6. Exposition: Second Subject, at bar D1



7. Exposition: Third Subject ('Scandinavian Theme'), at E23



The structures of the slow movements from the first two lost symphonies are uncertain from the programme notes, but the remaining symphonies show ternary structures (which is not untypical for the Romantic period), apart from the Sixth. However, Cowen often extends the repetition of the A section, either by some reworking or some genuine development of material, before a clear restatement of some or the entire A material in the home key. Indeed, *The Welsh* shows this most clearly: after the B section, Cowen introduces an extension and development of the A material (A'), before a clear restatement of the A material in the home key, thus creating a much more expansive repeat than in its original presentation. Indeed, the return of the first theme in a more opulent manner, with florid string arpeggios, is not unlike Cowen's treatment of the return of his main theme in the slow movement of the *Scandinavian* symphony. Therefore, the resultant movement is more rhapsodic than the ternary classification would suggest. While the Fifth's slow movement has been classed as ternary, it might equally correctly be classified ABA'B'A", as the return of the modified A section is briefly interrupted by murmurings of the B idea. The coda is notable for the very unexpected reminiscence of the main theme from the first movement. Of this *Adagio espressivo*, Willeby was most impressed:

> It opens with five preludial bars given to violins, violas, and bassoons, followed by a phrase which is positively Chopinesque. Dismiss it as I may, it brings to my mind Chopin as he reveals himself to us in his 13th Prelude in F sharp. I do not mean to say there is either textual or actual similitude. It is in the spirit rather than the letter.[96]

Willeby's analogy with the Chopin F sharp Prelude should not be dismissed out of hand, but this is very much his personal feeling, which should be left to the listener to decide. This rather nocturnal *Adagio* movement is structured in a fairly loose form that is not easy to pin down precisely. However, there seem to be sonata form elements, as suggested in the table above. Ernest Walker noted the 'cleverness'[97] in this movement, which, although he chose not to elaborate on in his description, could be attributed to the skilful way in which Cowen knits his three ideas together in the development. Cowen rarely lets go of his emotions in his music: the Victorian stiff upper lip, British nineteenth-century etiquette, and a portcullis of self-discipline

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[96] *MEM*, 229-30.
[97] Walker, 297.

nearly always falls just before he gets too carried away with himself. Here though, just for a moment, between bar D12 and letter E, his inhibitions escape in a truly commanding climax. If only he had felt able or been skilled to do this more often, perhaps his music would have survived the onslaught of the new generation.

Cowen's *Scherzos* or quicker middle movements tend to adhere to the three-part Scherzo and Trio *da capo* form (ABA), except in the Fifth. The A sections of these *Scherzos* are mostly in a rounded binary form, in keeping with the majority of classical Scherzo/Minuet movements. Cowen's B sections are generally monothematic and brief. In the first four symphonies the A section is repeated exactly as first rendered by the means of a *da capo* marking. Willeby suggests that portions of *The Welsh's Scherzo* movement are 'quite reminiscent of Schubert in its delicacy'.[98] However, in the Sixth Cowen writes out a new extended and developed A section. The form of Cowen's Fifth Symphony *allegretto* is unexpectedly a modified sonata form, with the two principal subjects presented in reverse order on their recapitulation. Indeed, the movement's structure could almost be mistaken for 'double-ternary' form, i.e., a main theme with two intervening trios. But the harmonic plan and the clearly defined development section rule out this interpretation. Here, Cowen discards his normally vigorous 3/4 time scheme in favour of a charming, refined, but playful one in 2/4 time, which is as dainty and attractive as anything elfin or fairylike from elsewhere in his output. Indeed, Willeby notes that the 'eminently Cowenesque *allegretto*...The picturesqueness, the delicacy, the musical *savoir faire* are all his own'.[99] Interestingly, the comparisons between Cowen's Fifth and Beethoven's Seventh continue in this movement: Beethoven's Symphony's second movement is also an *allegretto*, and in simple duple time. However, while Cowen's is a delicate, happy piece, Beethoven's is sombre. Also, whereas Beethoven's movement is the slow one of the symphony (it is followed by a *Scherzo*), Cowen's is a substitute for a *Scherzo*, with it preceding an *adagio*. Like in the Fifth Symphony, the Sixth's playful middle movement is not actually marked as a *Scherzo*, but rather as an *Allegro scherzando*. This is apt, as there is nothing of the normal Beethovenesque vigour that is found in the earlier

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[98] *MEM*, 224.
[99] Ibid., 229.

symphonies. Cowen returns to a ternary form, where he first presents us a shepherd's pipe tune on cor anglais. The A section is again in a sort of rounded binary form, in keeping with most classical Scherzo/Minuet movements, but with a reprise of some of the opening material in the second 'half'. Cowen's B section, as with most of his 'trios', is relatively brief and monothematic. Cowen now chooses to write out a new extended and elaborated A section in which there is something of a short development section, and some sophisticated reorchestration. Willeby would have no doubt called this movement 'eminently Cowenesque',[100] had he written his *Masters of English Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894) after the symphony's publication, as it epitomises all that is characteristic of Cowen's graceful, charming and, at times, playful style, and brings to mind his suites of English dances and *The Language of Flowers* suites.

The finales of all six symphonies are, at first glance, cast in a straightforward, cautiously assembled, classical sonata form, with little or no modifications, apart from introducing reminiscences from earlier in the work (this will be discussed shortly). Indeed, the exposition, development and recapitulation are all quite to the point, i.e. less expansive in terms of the amount of material presented during the exposition, compared with Cowen's first movement sonata forms, i.e. fewer subsidiary ideas in each subject group. However, the Fifth Symphony is probably an exception: the first subject has two distinct themes, and it could be argued that the second *fugato* one is a complete subject in itself. But it does not return in its original form in the recapitulation. The true second subject appears in the surprising key of the flattened leading-note major, although it does after nine bars find its way to the dominant major. An augmented version of the *fugato* theme then serves as the climax of the opening section.

The whole process of development and working up to a convincing and invigorating climax, at times, seems quite alien to Cowen, even in the much later more mature works. His love of melody and the vocal line so exemplified in his songs, choral works and operas inevitably transferred itself into his approach to symphonic music. This presented him with a major problem as a symphonic composer, especially in his sonata form outer movements, where his

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[100] Ibid.

material is barely suitable, by the standards of Beethoven at any rate, for instituting a symphonic movement traversing hundreds of bars: dismemberment, and motivic and contrapuntal working out is what is expected in such movements, whereas his thoughts seem to have been melodically driven. Of course, Tchaikovsky, who was essentially an operatic and ballet composer, despite the current popularity of his symphonies, also found the concept of symphonic development a challenge, as many of the development sections of his sonata form movements will testify to, especially the first movement of his Fourth Symphony in F minor, Op. 36 (1878). However, he still had a mastery of the art of the symphonic climax to fall back on. Cowen, however, seems to have relied on a sort of self-developing melody to carry through his ideas, or, as observed with regard to the First Symphony, a reliance on the limited mutilation of phrases, repetition and modulation.

From the Second Symphony onwards, there are always passages of reminiscence from earlier movements worked into the scheme. The bringing back of material from earlier movements, especially in the finale, harks back to a device used by Berlioz in *Harold en Italie*, and prompted by Beethoven's experiments, most noticeably, in his Ninth Symphony. In Cowen's Second, Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, these recollections occur in the coda, where he, like with Vaughan Williams' later idea of the epilogue, creates a coda to the whole symphony, summarising and illuminating the chief ideas of the work, and bringing them to a focus. In the Fourth Symphony he brings back the opening fragment of the first movement and thus brings it full-circle. However, in the development section of the finale of the Fifth Symphony Cowen displays all of his skills as a contrapuntalist, a rare treat (by his standards) for those that want real depth and genuine ingenuity in a symphony. Almost every theme of the finale, and some from elsewhere in the symphony, appear in combination or alternation. This is a veritable *tour de force* of Cowen's skills as a composer, and probably his highest achievement in the symphonic genre, worthy of someone whose work was to be premiered in one of the British centres of academia, and where he was, he thought at that time, to be honoured for his services to music with an honorary doctorate. The Fifth Symphony does seem to have fired in Cowen a tauter, more

academic approach to its composition, compared with its predecessors, inspiring a concerted effort on his part, modelling it, almost certainly, on Beethoven's symphonies, and in particular his Seventh. In the Sixth Symphony, he begins this process of reminiscence during the recapitulation and through into the coda. Indeed, *The Idyllic's* finale in many ways tries to achieve too much: Cowen not only gives us a sonata form movement in which he extensively works out his main march-like idea, to the detriment of the beautiful second subject (that he almost completely ignores until the recapitulation), but he then attempts to bring the whole symphony full-circle, by, after what turns out to be a false coda, giving us his 'epilogue' of reflections from previous movements, before we get the real coda based on the main theme of the first movement! Furthermore, while there are underlying intervallic connections between the middle movements of *The Idyllic*, especially that of the major and minor third, it is less integrated than the Fifth Symphony, taken as a whole, despite the substantial reminiscences in the final movement. As the final movement in his symphonic output, the finale of the Sixth it is perhaps disappointing: Cowen just seems to have tried to be too clever. And yet the second subject, which he chose not to explore at all in the development section, could have almost been written by Elgar, as could a rather chromatic descending passage at B9-13. Therefore, from the evidence above, it can be concluded that it is only in Cowen's finales that he generally tries to bring the symphony full-circle by reminiscences from earlier in the work. Thus, Cowen's attempts at unifying the movements of each symphony into an interrelated whole by some idea of cyclic form are minimal. Cowen comes closest to this objective in his Fifth Symphony, by providing some loose thematic connections between movements. But not even this approach could be called cyclic form, as there is not a cohesive thread binding the whole symphony together, as one might find in some of the works of Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt and Franck.

In the following table we see Cowen's tonal plan for each symphony:

Table 6: Tonal Plan for Cowen's symphonies

	Symphony No. 1 in C minor	Symphony No. 2 in F major	Symphony No. 3 in C minor *Scandinavian*	Symphony No. 4 in B flat minor *The Welsh*	Symphony No. 5 in F major	Symphony No. 6 in E major *The Idyllic*
I	**Tonic Minor (C min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Major (F maj)** Exposition 1 Tonic maj 2 Leading-note maj / Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Flattened Leading-note maj / Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Minor (C min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Relative maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Minor (B flat min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Relative maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Major (F maj)** Exposition 1 Tonic maj 2 Flattened Leading-note maj 3 Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic maj 2 Flattened Submediant maj 3 Tonic maj	**Tonic Major (E maj)** Exposition 1 Tonic maj Sub. Flattened Submediant maj 2 Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Enharmonic Submediant maj / Tonic maj Sub. Flattened Submediant maj 2 Tonic maj
II	**Dominant Major (G maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Submediant maj	**Relative Minor (D min)** 1 Tonic min 2 Subdominant maj	**Dominant Major (G maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic min	**Subdominant Major (E flat maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Dominant maj	**Subdominant Major (B flat maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Dominant maj	**Subdominant Minor (A min)** 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj
III	**Dominant Major (G maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	**Subdominant major (B flat maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Subdominant maj	**Relative Major (E flat maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Subdominant min	**Sharpened Submediant Major (G maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	**Submediant Major (D maj)** 1 Tonic maj 2 Flattened Mediant maj / Tonic min	**Flattened Submediant Major (C maj)** 1 Tonic maj[101]
IV	**Tonic Minor (C min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant maj Recapitulation[102] 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Major (F maj)** Exposition 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj / Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic maj	**Tonic Minor (C min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant min Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic min **Coda ends in Tonic major**	**Tonic Major (B flat maj)** Exposition 1 Tonic maj 2 Dominant min Recapitulation 1 Tonic maj 2 Tonic min **Coda ends in Tonic major**	**Tonic Minor (F min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Flattened Leading-note maj / Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Relative maj / Tonic maj **Coda ends in Tonic major**	**Tonic Minor (E min)** Exposition 1 Tonic min 2 Dominant maj Recapitulation 1 Tonic min 2 Tonic maj **Coda ends in Tonic major**

In the above table it is interesting to note that Cowen's symphonies are equally balanced as to his use of mode, three beginning in the minor, and three in the major. C minor and F major both appear twice. In the symphonies that begin their first movement first subjects in the minor

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[101] The structure of this movement is quite rhapsodic, and therefore defining a clear secondary tonal centre is difficult.

[102] The programme note does not indicate the key structure of the Recapitulation, but the stated one seems most likely.

mode, the second subjects are always in the major (dominant or relative). In all the symphonies, the second subjects (third in the case of the Fifth) appear in the exposition either in the relative major or dominant major. However, in the case of the Second Symphony the second subject is partially rendered in the leading-note major key, before the dominant is finally reached. Cowen's recapitulations normally repeat the exposition material with minimal alteration, perhaps showing a lack of imagination on Cowen's part (although there is often some truncation of material that prevents monotony creeping in). Thus there is a certain conventionality about Cowen's tonal plans for his expositions and recapitulations; yet, the Second and Sixth symphonies begin their first subject recapitulations in unanticipated keys, the former in the flattened leading-note major, and the latter in the enharmonic submediant major. However, both move into the tonic key shortly afterwards.

The middle movements of symphonies by classical period composers were generally set in the dominant, subdominant and relative keys. However, as we move into the Romantic period, we find a wider choice of alternative keys – keys a third away from the tonic being common. Cowen's second movements all adhere to the first of the two options, but his later third movements tend towards more exotic keys, notably that of the submediant. The internal structures of the middle movements also follow this trend, with the second subject or trio mostly in classically related keys (i.e. dominant, subdominant or relative).

The tonal plans for Cowen's sonata form finales are, on the surface, fairly conservative. Of the symphonies that began their first movements in the minor, two (both the C minor works) commence their finales in the minor mode. However, the B flat minor Symphony (*The Welsh*) begins its finale in the tonic major. All the symphonies have their second subjects in the dominant major or minor, and they are all heard in the same mode in the recapitulation, but in the tonic. Significantly, regardless of the mode of the first movement, or the beginning of the last, all the works end in the tonic major key; therefore, there are no pessimistic endings to any of Cowen's symphonies.

From the two tables above, it can be concluded that Cowen's overall approach to harmonic schemes and structural formulae was quite traditional for his time. His method with regard to sonata form in the early symphonies was, for the most part, to follow the conventional two subject exposition, relatively succinct development and a recapitulation with the minimum of major changes from the exposition. From the *Scandinavian* onwards, however, sometimes his material grows in quantity to the extent that each subject group has two or more themes, especially in the first movements. However, this makes little change to his overall harmonic scheme: there is still a tonic dominant or tonic minor relative major formula in the exposition. His recapitulations, similarly, are harmonically very tonic centred, apart from occasionally conducting experiments with false reprises and a return to the first subject material in an unexpected key for a brief period. Of course, due to the nature of his approach to reminiscence in many of his final movements, his use of sonata form has modifications to fit his needs. But, in general, these adaptations are less than convincing. Therefore, despite experimentation in the detail of his sonata form structures, his overall schemes are traditional.

His methodology in his middle movements is equally time-honoured, mostly choosing closely related keys to the key centre of the whole symphony, as are his choices within movements, where the second theme or middle section is invariably closely related to the tonal centre of the movement. However, in the last two symphonies he displays a penchant for the submediant relationship in this regard. Cowen's approach to other forms, such as ternary and the *da capo* forms, also fall back on existing models. His *Scherzos* are mostly beholden to the *da capo* minuet and trio form that Beethoven showed a proclivity for. Only in the last two symphonies do we find evidence of more rhapsodic experiments.

Without a full score of the first two symphonies, it is impossible to discern the extent and variety of Cowen's harmonic language. But from the *Scandinavian* onwards, it can be seen that his use of harmony is fundamentally diatonic with some chromatic extensions, especially dominant ninths and other dominant chords with flattened or sharpened fifths. He demonstrates affection for the augmented sixth chord, notably the German sixth, as a method of modulation

(even if he seldom signifies such chords with the proper enharmonic notation), and the French sixth; he is happy to thrust into new keys without preparation; and he creates a feeling of 'local' colour or an underlining a pastoral feel, especially in the Fourth, by using lots of pedal points, including double pedals, a device common to many composers who wish to give such an ambience to their works. In the Fifth Symphony Cowen shows a liking for the dominant diminished fifth chord, but his use of tonic and dominant pedals are less blatant than in the earlier symphonies. By the time of the last symphony, *The Idyllic*, it is notable that he avoids perfect cadences, thereby preventing confirmation of a particular key centre, and perhaps subconsciously removing the feeling of regular periodicity that is indicative of many of his smaller pieces, especially his songs and ballads. In this sense he seems to have more fully assimilated those processes common to Brahms where the platitude of the cadence is studiously avoided often until the emergence of the coda. The augmented sixth chord, a prominent feature in earlier symphonies, is a less frequent visitor in this work. The pastoral/idyllic atmosphere is summoned by the presence of the characteristic pedals, in particular the double pedal, in common with *The Welsh* Symphony. Therefore, from the first to the last symphonies, there is no dramatic change in Cowen's harmonic language, with similar characteristics common to them all. Examples of harmonic eccentricity can be found in his writing, especially strange-sounding progressions and unexpected inversions of chords, but, all told, he is in full command of his harmonic faculties.

Cowen studied counterpoint in Germany, exactly as most other students would have done. However, it is rare for Cowen to give us a full-blooded display of his skill in this aspect of his art. There are moments of contrapuntal demonstration in most of his symphonies, particularly in the *Scandinavian*, but we have to wait until the finale of his 'academic' Fifth Symphony for a vigorous *fugato* idea, and briefly in the development section of the Sixth's finale. Cowen was primarily a composer of harmonic rather than contrapuntal textures.

Table 7: Instrumentation Used in Cowen's Published Symphonies

Symphony No. 3 in C minor *Scandinavian*:	**Symphony No. 4 in B flat minor *The Welsh*:**	**Symphony No. 5 in F major:**	**Symphony No. 6 in E major *The Idyllic*:**
2 Flutes	2 Flutes	2 Flutes	3 Flutes (III db Picc)
2 Oboes (II db Cor anglais)	2 Oboes	2 Oboes	2 Oboes (II db Cor anglais)
2 Clarinets (in B flat, A)	2 Clarinets (in B flat, A)	2 Clarinets (in B flat, A)	2 Clarinets (in A, B flat)
			Bass Clarinet (in A)
2 Bassoons	2 Bassoons	2 Bassoons	2 Bassoons
4 Horns (in C, A flat, B bass, B flat bass, E flat, G)	4 Horns (in F, E flat, G)	4 Horns (in F, A)	4 Horns (in E, F)
2 Trumpets (in C, E flat)	2 Trumpets (in B flat, E flat, C)	2 Trumpets (in C, D, F)	2 Trumpets (in E, C)
3 Trombones (2 tenor, 1 bass)	3 Trombones (2 tenor, 1 bass)	3 Trombones (2 tenor, 1 bass)	3 Trombones (2 tenor, 1 bass)
		Tuba	Tuba
Timpani	Timpani	Timpani	Timpani
Triangle			Triangle
			Cymbals
Harp	Harp	Harp	
Strings	Strings	Strings	Strings

One of the most consistent features of Cowen's music is his mastery of orchestration. It is the trait most often commented upon by reviewers of his works. With his symphonies, however, he seems to have held back from his more adventurous orchestral experimentations found in the *Indian Rhapsody* etc., in favour of the more serious and sombre palette associated with the sound world of the great classical masters, especially in the outer movements of his works. Indeed, his orchestra is not much bigger than that used by Mendelssohn and Schumann. Without access to

the missing scores, it is impossible to gauge Cowen's use of the instruments at his disposal in the first two symphonies, but from the *Scandinavian* onwards, the strings are the mainstay of most of his symphonies, particularly in the outer movements, with the woodwind given occasions to stand out. In the earlier symphonies the brass tends to fulfil their traditional 'classical' role of sustaining pedal points and reinforcing *tuttis*. Indeed, as was noted in the *Scandinavian* Symphony, the horns and trumpets are scored in various keys, as though Cowen still expected them to be valveless instruments, which is all the more surprising, when one considers that brass instruments with valves were by then in fairly common usage. But, by the Fifth Symphony Cowen has begun to exploit the potentialities of the woodwind and the brass and they are given many opportunities to shine for a few bars. The orchestration of the Sixth Symphony is dexterously handled, with the woodwind section, for the first time in a symphony, nearly on an equal par with the strings. Cowen makes wonderful use of the horn and woodwind sections in the *adagio*, as well as displaying lucid scoring throughout the *scherzando* movement, especially in the pairing of cor anglais and bass clarinet on the return of the A section. In spite of this, on the whole, neither the woodwind nor the brass instruments are given chances for longer impassioned solos (with the exception of the cor anglais in the Sixth Symphony) in any of Cowen's symphonies, as one may find in Brahms or Tchaikovsky. Cowen finally adds the tuba to his ensemble for the first time in the Fifth Symphony, where it gives extra depth to his *tuttis*, something that many of his works, but especially the symphonies, seem to lack. In the *Scandinavian* Symphony, the trombones almost appear like an afterthought in the finale (their first appearance), but in *The Welsh* they are very much part of the scheme. The harp is Cowen's sole intruder into the pitched sections of the regular mid-nineteenth century symphony orchestra, adding some splashes of colour in a few of the symphonies. In *The Welsh* Cowen gives it an important role in the finale, but it is perhaps surprisingly omitted elsewhere, particularly from the *lento*. Likewise in the Fifth, it inserts a dash of character into the *allegretto*, but once more is not used anywhere else. Then again, if he had used it in other movements, commentators, then and now, would probably have accused him of its overuse, as many did when its timbre was heard

with monotonous regularity in his opera *Pauline*. Apart from the distance horn effects in the *Scandinavian*, there is not much sign of searching for new effects: instruments are generally used in their characteristic registers and in a vocal rather than virtuoso style. The weaknesses in some of Cowen's *tuttis* have already been explored. The percussion section is almost ignored in the symphonies, apart for the starring role for the triangle in the *Scherzo* of the *Scandinavian* (while elsewhere in his orchestral output, such as *The Butterfly's Ball* and the *Indian Rhapsody*, it would be difficult to imagine either without them). Willeby claims that the *The Welsh*, especially its finale, contains 'some of the finest instrumental writing that its composer has ever given us'.[103] Willeby's assessment may hold true with the second subject theme, but the first subject has all the hallmarks of a Schumann symphony *tutti*, with most of the part-writing safely doubled instrumentally and rather featureless. This is an exception though, as Cowen seems to have written much of his symphonic music immediately in orchestral terms: there is very little pianism in his orchestral textures, his ideas conceived with instruments and specific colours in mind. This is especially true in his symphonic middle movements, where his proven skills as a miniaturist are best displayed.

Cowen wished to be recorded in the annals of history first and foremost as a symphonist, and it was his two C minor works that did much to launch his career, the first symphony bringing him to the nation's attention in 1869, and his third earning him a world-wide reputation following its premiere in 1880. The Third symphony remained the most popular[104] and was his only work to maintain an international reputation for many years after its initial performance. Indeed, when George Upton published his book *The Standard Symphonies: Their History, Their Music, and Their Composers* (Chicago, A. C. McClurg and Co., 1890) in the United States at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century, Cowen was considered worthy of inclusion. Moreover, he received almost the same space in the book as Dvořák.[105]

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[103] Ibid.

[104] *IEM*, 249.

[105] This book provides an interesting snapshot of American symphonic tastes in 1890. The 'Viennese square' of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert are naturally included with much detail, as are Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Saint-Saëns. Some of Berlioz's and Liszt's programme symphonies are also mentioned. However, along

However, despite the fact that the fourth and fifth symphonies were extant by this date, only the third symphony was well thought of enough for a detailed examination, Upton remarking that it 'is unquestionably his best and most finished work, and is particularly noticeable for its local colour and scholarly treatment. It has frequently been heard in this country, and has always been received with enthusiasm'.[106]

Cowen's *The Welsh* Symphony follows on from the *Scandinavian* in the sense that it has a programmatic title. However, the narrative of *The Welsh* is not indicated, and we have to conclude that the work is an assimilation of Cowen's impressions of the country and its people. Indeed, there is nothing specifically Welsh about the music, and there are no obvious attempts to borrow from Welsh sources. It is no great advance on the *Scandinavian*; in fact, in many ways, it is less daring than its predecessor. Although gracefully fashioned, assured, unassuming and attractive, it is confined by its mastery of form, and by Cowen shaping material lacking any real depth or substance, and unable to project a strongly resolute argument or defining musical personality expected of a great composer. Frank Howes clearly has a point when states that Cowen 'reverts to a Haydnesque view of the symphony's function. *The Welsh* Symphony...is light in the hand, without Victorian seriousness and with a jolly *scherzo*, conventionally written but intended and able to carry a little more weight than the entr'actes and things like *The Butterfly's Ball*.[107] It is possibly these reasons that led to its fairly quick demise from the repertoire. Cowen's own lack of detailed remarks about it in his autobiography, or in any other interviews, suggest that he saw its inadequacies too. After the rather more studious and gritty Fifth Symphony, clearly an attempt to impress the academic world in anticipation of the award of his doctorate from Cambridge (which did not materialise at that time), Cowen's Sixth rather falls back into the mode of *The Welsh*—happy, melodious and elegant. When it was first heard it was championed for having 'nothing in common with the ultra-modern and sensational school

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with Cowen, Sullivan and Stanford (Parry is not included), there are some now almost forgotten symphonists: Gade, Goetz, Goldmark, Hofmann, Paine, Raff, Rheinberger, Rubinstein, Spohr and Volkmann.

[106] Upton, G. P., *The Standard Symphonies* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co.), 1890, 124.

[107] Howes, F., *The English Musical Renaissance* (London, 1966), 64-5.

of composition'[108] [meaning Richard Strauss]. Yet, Cowen does get passionately fired up in the *Adagio* and at a few points in the finale, something that his Victorian reserve normally prevented him from doing. The fourth, fifth and sixth symphonies seem to have done little to bolster Cowen's standing further, although he regarded the fifth as his masterpiece in this genre.[109] Indeed, his *Musical Times* obituary says of the symphonies: 'One's curiosity to know what they were like stops short at search and discovery'.[110] This injudicious remark seems to have 'put the nails in their respective coffins' for any future revival. Indeed, until the Marco Polo label's release of the *Scandinavian* Symphony on CD (8.223273) in 1990, they had remained completely buried since Cowen's death. Unfortunately, the poor quality of this recording (the product of some suspect intonation, especially among the brass section,[111] and the closeness of the microphones to the orchestra, which leave the texture lacking in depth and tone) does little to promote the finer qualities of Cowen's music. However, the recent release of *The Idyllic* Symphony on the Classico label does give us a better idea of the merits or otherwise of his last contribution to the symphonic repertoire.

Although Cowen's symphonies owe much to Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schumann, mixed with his own lighter brand of Sullivanesque fancy, they are a unique contribution, like much of the rest of his output: they sound like no one else. Indeed, in this respect one thinks of the Scandinavian composer Franz Berwald, whose music is equally fresh and distinctive. Those of Cowen's symphonies with titles: *Scandinavian*, *The Welsh* and *The Idyllic*, parallel similar titled works by Mendelssohn: *Scotch*, *Italian* and *Reformation*, Schumann's *Spring* and *Rhenish*, and Sullivan's *Irish*. Moreover, like their predecessors, Cowen's titled symphonies, and perhaps some of the untitled ones (particularly the Fifth), although in some senses programmatic, are mostly about moods and impressions (much as Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony was intended to

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[108] Foreman, L., programme notes to *The British Symphonic Collection Vol. 15 – Frederic Cowen Symphony No. 6 in E major 'The Idyllic' – Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Symphony in A minor*, CD, Classico, CLASSCD 684, 2006.

[109] *IEM*, 249. Cowen had not written his Sixth Symphony at the time of this interview, so it is possible that his attitude may have changed at a later date.

[110] *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.

[111] The horns in this recording bring to mind Cowen's humorous definition of this instrument: '[One] that keeps the audience in a constant state of anxiety lest it should "crack" in the middle of a phrase' (Cowen, F. H., *Music as She is Wrote*, London, Mills and Boon Ltd, 1915, 33).

have a deeply subjective underlying programme that would remain an enigma to all), rather than telling a specific narrative. Indeed, Cowen may have agreed with Mahler when referring to the *Marcia Funèbre* of his First Symphony: 'The thing to be depicted is irrelevant—only the mood that is supposed to be expressed is relevant...the listeners are supplied with some [programmatic] signposts and milestones...but such a representation cannot offer more than that'.[112] And yet there is little doubt as to the imagery of the *Adagio* of Cowen's *Scandinavian*, with its summer's night scene (a moonlight reverie), with its boat of revellers traversing a lake; the same work's *Scherzo*, with its sleigh ride and gallop of the horses on the snow and jingling bells; or the fluttering flutes that accompany the second subject of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony, which almost certainly personify 'the feathered songsters of the wood'. So while their description as programme symphonies may be inaccurate, maybe they should be called pictorial symphonies, symphonic tone poems or something of that ilk. However, despite the suggestiveness of their titles, it is not out of the question to judge most of them from the point of view of absolute music, at least in the sense that they are largely constructed without consideration for any specific programmatic element, mostly following forms that can be classified in conventional classical symphonic terms.

The composition of a symphony was an unprofitable exercise for a composer in Britain during the Victorian era, as there were few opportunities for regular performances, and even less chances of a publisher paying a fee for a work that would be expensive to publish, and only issued in small quantities. Cowen himself jokingly noted this in his *Music as She is Wrote* definition for the symphony: 'An orchestral work, the length of which is often in inverse ratio to the number of ideas it contains. Symphonies of British manufacture are seldom published. Hence the proverb "The composer proposes, but the publisher disposes" (of copies) – when he can'.[113] So the fact that Cowen turned his pen to this form some six times in his lifetime shows that he regarded the symphony as an important genre, as there was little financial reward for doing so.

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[112] Mahler, G. (ed. Mahler, A.), *Briefe* (Berlin, 1924), 185, 188 [reproduced in Dahlhaus, C. (transl. Lustig, R.) *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 138-9.]
[113] Cowen 1915, 54.

2. Orchestral Works 1 (Symphonies)

Looking back at the reception history of Cowen's six symphonies and their current standing in the repertoire, one could easily conclude that they were all failures, as even the very popular *Scandinavian* did not survive Cowen's own lifetime. Only recent research and recordings of the *Scandinavian* and *The Idyllic* have shed some light on why this may be. First and foremost, while Cowen was undoubtedly one of the most talented British composers on the Victorian circuit, his facility as a composer was not really suited to writing in the larger-scale forms. While his graceful, melodic style was well-suited to writing miniatures, such as the song or the suites for orchestra, as soon as he needed to express genuine passion, he seemed not to have the ability to convey it in musical terms, nor did he ever really grasp how to pace out his longer symphonic structures convincingly. This was probably either a product of his upbringing (or his own persona) or the environment in which he worked. As was pointed out earlier with regard the *Adagio* of *The Idyllic*, self-restraint nearly always held him back before he got too carried away with himself. Whether this was the shyness within him, or he felt constrained by the social environment of the time or the expectations of his audience, it is not clear. But it did mean that as a Romantic composer he lacked what most people would regard as a vital ingredient for a great master—real passion and depth. Probably more to the point is that Cowen was not an 'intellectual' composer in the same way that his compatriots Parry and Stanford were when it came to the cerebrally interpreted canvas of the symphony. Cowen, at least in one sense, seems to have tried to take the Mendelssohnian approach to the symphony (as the Dahlhausian assessment noted earlier saw it) of shunning blatant monumentality, but he was unable to master Mendelssohn's aptitude for integrating song-like melodies contrapuntally and motivically. Indeed, Cowen seems to have resisted the desire to absorb the principles of developing variation and its consequences of an intensified, contrapuntal thematicism, instead opting for a more one-dimensional process dominated by attractive thematic material. As a result, what we find in the symphonies is that the middle movements, where he can afford to be simply charming and graceful, and sometimes playful, tend to be the most successful, and so Howes was probably correct in his 'Haydnesque' view of Cowen's symphonic idiom cited earlier. Indeed, as soon as

Cowen has to work up a substantial climax in his outer movements, he enters anxiously into unsafe territory. His symphonies and other works stood a chance of survival (despite some of their structural weaknesses) while his approach was still in keeping with a Victorian audience receptive to his brand of symphonic treatment. But once the Edwardian age arrived, and with it the new generation of British composers such as Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bridge *et al*, a Victorian reserve (or at least a sensibility nervous of extremes) gave way to a less cautious environment to which these men were more suited and Cowen was not. Thus his music's demise was rapid as it failed thereafter to speak to his audiences with the same clarity or immediacy. Indeed, when Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 4 in F minor was first performed on 10 April 1935 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Boult at the Queen's Hall,[114] Cowen was absolutely scathing about its dissonances and sheer dramatic energy; he found it unbearable, and in an outburst to the press wrote that it was not music.[115] Hamilton Harty remarked to E. J. Moeran in a letter dated 19 April 1935: 'Poor old Cowen – it is impossible that he should feel otherwise than he does, considering his musical history and his own facile and melodious works'.[116] Yet, Cowen was very much in a minority; after its rehearsals, William Walton told colleagues that they were about to hear 'the greatest symphony of modern times'.[117] Moreover, on 20 April 1935 Cowen's last orchestral piece, Miniature Variations (Humoresque), was premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Studios conducted by Lewis for broadcast live on radio,[118] only ten days after Vaughan Williams' discordant *tour de force.* The dichotomy between the older generation, represented by Cowen, Parry and Stanford, and the future of British music in a man only twenty years younger than Cowen, could not have been more marked. It would have been interesting to see a twentieth-century symphony by Cowen in the mould of the rather exotic pseudo-bitonalities of his last oratorio *The Veil.* Yet, it would seem that Cowen was not convinced about his experimentations in this new idiom, and he did

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114 Kenyon, N., *The BBC Symphony Orchestra* (BBC, 1981), 453.
115 Foreman, L., *Parry to Britten* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1987), 187.
116 Ibid., 186.
117 Burn, A., programme note to CD, *Vaughan Williams A Pastoral Symphony (No. 3) and Symphony No. 4*, EMI Eminence, CD-EMX 2192 (EMI Records Ltd., 1992).
118 Kenyon, 453.

not return to it again. It is clear that Cowen's music was born of his response to his perceived notions of taste, culture, and the musical etiquette of nineteenth-century Britain, and that he was rarely open to new ideas, his trials with *The Veil* being an exception. Hence his symphonies speak to us in a language that sounds very much of its time—modest and controlled, devoid of the sort of passion and vigour that would appeal to modern ears. Alongside Parry's and Stanford's, Cowen's symphonies represent a small, but significant, part in the history of the growth of a British symphonic tradition, soon to be dominated by Elgar, Walton and Vaughan Williams. Yet, his symphonies were not essential to the success of this new tradition.

3. Orchestral Works 2 (Concert Pieces)

Cowen's concert pieces span almost all of his creative life, from the first Overture in D minor (1866), written whilst still a juvenile of fourteen, through to his last two miniatures, *The Magic Goblet – The Luck of Edenhall* and his Miniature Variations (Humoresque), both penned in the penultimate year of his eighty-three years of life. Cowen's pieces can be grouped into a variety of sub-genres: overture, suite, concerto and single movement pieces (march, rhapsody, character piece, symphonic poem, mood picture, and variations), and the works vary in length from just a few minutes through to over half an hour. Most were commissions written for particular occasions, while others were written for a specific musician, e.g. Concertstück for Paderewski, and the remainder were personal whims of the composer. The sheer number and diversity of pieces makes the task of bringing together a coherent discussion difficult. The works have be arranged into five groups thus: **overtures** (Overture in D minor; Festival Overture; *Niagara*, Characteristic Overture; Overture in D major; and *The Butterfly's Ball*, Concert Overture), **suites** (*The Language of Flowers*, Suite de ballet, Set No. 1; Sinfonietta; *In the Olden Time*, Suite; Deux Morceaux; *In Fairyland*, Suite de ballet; Four English Dances in the Olden Style, Set No. 1; Two Pieces, A Suite of Old English Dances, Set No. 2; *The Months*; and *The Language of Flowers*, Suite de ballet, Set No. 2), **concertos** (Piano Concerto in A minor; and Concerstück), **character pieces/rhapsodies/symphonic poems** (*A Phantasy of Life and Love*; and Indian Rhapsody, *Reverie*; *The Magic Goblet – The Luck of Edenhall*; and Miniature Variations – Humoresque), and **marches** (Barbaric March; March [Folkestone Exhibition]; and Coronation March).

Table 1: A list of Cowen's Other Orchestral Works

Date	Title	Genre	First Performance Location and Date	First Performance Conductor and Orchestra	Notes
1866	**Overture** [in D minor]	Overture	Alfred Mellon's Promenade Concerts, Covent Garden Theatre, London, 8.ix.1866		Unpub.
1869	**Piano Concerto in A minor**	Concerto (3 mvmnts)	St James's Hall, London, 9.xii.1869	Benedict, Cowen's Orchestra [specially for the Concert Series], Cowen (pf)	Unpub.
1872	**Festival Overture**	Overture	Norwich Festival, 17.ix.1872	Benedict	Unpub.
1880	**Language of Flowers, The, Suite de ballet, Set No.1**	Suite	St. James's Hall, London, 27.xi.1880	Cowen, Cowen's Orchestra [specially for the Concert Series]	Pub.: Metzler & Co, London (1881)
1881	**Sinfonietta** [in A major]	Sinfonietta	St. James's Hall, London, 12.v.1881	W. G. Cusins, Philharmonic Society	Unpub.
1881	**Niagara, Characteristic Overture** [in C major]	Overture	Crystal Palace, London, 22.x.1881	Manns, Crystal Palace Orchestra	Unpub. The main theme of this work was reused in the first movement of Cowen's Fifth Symphony.
1882	**In the Olden Time, Suite** [for string orchestra, in D major]	Suite	Crystal Palace, London, 17.iii.1883	?Cowen/ ?Manns, Crystal Palace Orchestra	Unpub. Dedic.: Crystal Palace Orchestra
1883	**Barbaric March**	Piece (March)	[Royal] Albert Hall, London, 1883	?Cowen	Unpub. A piece written for a fancy-dress ball held by the Savage Club, of which Cowen was a member. It is mentioned in Cowen's autobiography *My Art and My Friends* [p. 123], but it is not listed in *NGDMM2*, nor in any other extant works-lists.
1883	**Deux Morceaux**	2 Pieces/Suite	? Crystal Palace, London, 10.xi.1883	?Manns, ?Crystal Palace Orchestra	Pub.: Gutmann, Vienna (1901)
1885	**Orchestral Interludes, from 'Sleeping Beauty'**	Suite (Extracts)			Pub.: Novello & Co, London (?)
1885	**Waltz, from 'Sleeping Beauty'**	Piece (Waltz/Extract)			Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1900)
1886	**March**	Piece (March)	Folkestone Exhibition, Folkestone, Kent, [?20].v.1886	Cowen	Unpub. This March was commissioned for an Exhibition in Folkestone. It is mentioned in Cowen's autobiography *My Art and My Friends* [p. 137], but it is not listed in *NGDMM2*, or in any other extant works-lists.
1886	**Overture** [in D major]	Overture	Liverpool Exhibition, Liverpool, 11.v.1886	Cowen	Unpub. It was written for the opening of the Liverpool Exhibition by Queen Victoria, but due to the orchestra being badly sited for the premiere, the first performance was abandoned part way through. Its first complete performance was probably by Richter in London, [2?].vi.1886.
1896	**In Fairyland, Suite de ballet**	Suite	London, 6.v.1896	Cowen, Philharmonic Society	Pub.: Metzler & Co, London (1896) Dedic.: Sir William Robinson

Date	Title	Genre	First Performance Location and Date	First Performance Conductor and Orchestra	Notes
1896	**Four English Dances in the Olden Style, Set No. I**	Suite	unknown	?Cowen	Pub.: Novello, Ewer & Co, London & New York (1896)
1900	**Concertstück**	Concerto (Rhapsody in 1 mvmnt)	London, 28.vi.1900	Cowen, Philharmonic Society, Paderewski (pf)	Pub.: Joseph Williams, London (1900)
1901	**Butterfly's Ball, The, Concert Overture**	Overture	Queen's Hall, London, 2.iii.1901	Cowen, Robert Newman's Queen's Hall Orchestra	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1901) Dedic.: Robert Newman's Queen's Hall Orchestra
1901	**Phantasy of Life and Love, A**	[Mood Picture]	Gloucester Festival, ix.1901	?Cowen	Pub.: Joseph Williams, London (1902)
1902	**Coronation March**	Piece (March)	London, 29.v.1902	Cowen, Philharmonic Society,	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1902) Written for King Edward VII's Coronation on 9.viii.1902, it was performed as part of the processional music before the service.
1903	**Indian Rhapsody**	Rhapsody	Hereford Festival, 9.ix.1903		Pub.: Boosey & Co, London & New York (1903) Dedic.: Scottish Orchestra
1903	**Two pieces** [for small orchestra]	2 Pieces/Suite	?1903	unknown	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1903)
1903	**Reverie**	Piece	?1903	unknown	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1903) This concert piece has been incorrectly listed as a work for violin and orchestra in all additions of the *Grove Dictionary* and the *NGDMM2*. Most other publications have duplicated this error. However, there is a version for violin and piano: **Reverie** (1903)
1905	**Suite of Old English Dances, A, Set No. II**	Suite	?1905	unknown	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1906)
1912	**Months, The**	Suite	unknown	unknown	Pub.: Novello & Co, London (1914, inc. ?) The *NGDMM2* makes no mention of this suite of pieces, nor is there a complete published score in the British Library (although there are selections from the suite).
1914	**Language of Flowers, The, Suite de ballet, Set No.2**	Suite	Promenade Concert, Queen's Hall, London, 19.ix.1914		Pub.: Boosey & Co, London (1914?)
1918	**Cupid's Conspiracy** (Selection from Comedy Ballet)	Suite (Extracts)	unknown	unknown	Pub.: ?1918 The *NGDMM2* makes no mention of this suite of pieces for Clarinet, Cornet, Percussion and Strings.
?1922	**Enchanted Cottage, The** (Suite from Incidental Music) [unfinished ?]	Suite (Extracts)	unknown	unknown	Unpub. It is not clear if Cowen extracted a complete suite from his incidental music or not. The *NGDMM2* makes no mention of this suite of pieces.
1934	**Magic Goblet, The - The Luck of Edenhall**	Piece	BBC Studio, London, 9.vi.1934	Cowen, BBCSO	Pub.: ? Boosey & Co, London (1934?) This bacchanale/ballad for orchestra was inspired by Longfellow's 'The Luck of Edenhall'. The *NGDMM2* makes no mention of this piece, nor is there a complete published score in the British Library.
1934	**Miniature Variations (Humoresque)**	Piece (set of variations)	BBC Studio, London, 20.iv.1935	Lewis, BBCSO	Pub.: ? Boosey & Co, London (1935?) The *NGDMM2* makes no mention of this piece, nor is there a complete published score in the British Library.

3. Orchestral Works 2 (Concert Pieces)

In the nineteenth century, the independent concert overture emerged as a vehicle that could i) mark a musical preamble to a drama (e.g. Beethoven's *Coriolan*), ii) commemorate a specific occasion (e.g. Beethoven's *Coronation of the House*), iii) be a single movement piece of absolute music (e.g. Mendelssohn's Overture, op. 101), or iv) be a single movement work with a generalised programme of a literary, historical or picturesque nature (e.g. Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Hebrides*). However, as the century proceeded, the genre was partially absorbed by that of the symphonic poem.[1] Between the first (1866) and last (1901) of his overtures, Cowen gives us at least one example every decade, except in the 1890s. Of Cowen's juvenile effort in D minor we know very little other than it was given at Alfred Mellon's promenade concerts on 8 September 1866 at the Covent Garden Theatre, London, having been completed on 17 June 1866.[2] The score was never published and no manuscript has survived and, therefore, we can only rely on the appraisals of others. Willeby wrote:

> Of fancy in scoring there is decided evidence; of indulgence in the use of the 'brass' a welcome absence; while of musicianly feeling and sense of colour there is no lack. Of the musical thought contained in it, one cannot reasonably expect originality in any marked degree, for at fourteen years of age the mind of the afterwards creative artist is occupied in gathering to itself that which it admires and is in sympathy with in the works of various masters.[3]

It seems to fit the third type of overture identified above, i.e. one that is absolute music, as there is no suggestion of a programme, nor of any commemorative function. Unfortunately, we cannot determine what formal structure the work had. But, as Willeby does not comment on it, we can probably assume that Cowen has done nothing out of the ordinary. While it is clear that Cowen had yet to find his own voice, Willeby offers a degree of praise for his efforts. Based on the above, it is perhaps not surprising that it does not appear to have had any further outings.

With his earliest symphony under his belt and his second one due for its first performance, 1872 must have seen a promising year for Cowen. Indeed, his Festival Overture,

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[1] Wolf, E. K., 'Overture' in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (ed. Randel, D. M.)(Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 602-3.
[2] *MEM*, 184.
[3] Ibid.

written for the Norwich Festival, was also due to be produced under Benedict's baton, but with Cowen's supervision. Unfortunately, as *The Eastern Daily Press* reporter makes clear, things were not at all well with his new composition:

> Mr Cowen, as a pupil of Sir Julius Benedict, has been reared in the correct school for orchestration, but we must confess that the present work has not reached the expected standard. It commences with a *moderato* movement in G, which is followed by an *andante* leading to an *allegro vivace* in three-four time. To our mind the work is disjointed and incomplete in its working out. As may be readily be imagined there are striking points in the composition, the best portion being the *allegro vivace*, which is of a very graceful and fanciful nature.[4]

Again, this overture was not published, nor has the manuscript survived, so we are dependent on reviewers for a fair assessment. Willeby thought that the work was 'light in structure, and although attractive by its extreme delicacy, shows no serious advance upon its companion efforts'.[5] The fact that it was not performed again suggests that the newspaper critic and Willeby had been reasonable. Like its predecessor, it seems to be of the third type acknowledged above, i.e. absolute music, but with an underlying commemorative purpose to mark the Norwich Festival. The tripartite ABC form is interesting, as it harks back to the eighteenth-century Italian overture.

Almost another decade elapsed before Cowen turned his hand to the overture form again. However, his new work marked a change in his attitude to the overture form, in that he introduced a programmatic element. Inspired by his American holiday in 1878, the Characteristic Overture in C, *Niagara*, was a record of Cowen's *impressions de voyage*, and was intended to illustrate musically the impressions conveyed to the composer's mind on first visiting the great Falls of Niagara.[6] It was premiered at the Crystal Palace by Manns, and the programme note for the concert is headed with a quotation from L. H. Sigourney's *Niagara*. However, it is not clear whether this literary source had a direct influence over the composition; but I quote it herewith:

> Flow on for ever, in thy glorious robe
> Of terror and of beauty. Yea, flow on
> Unfathomed and resistless...thy strong tide

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[4] *The Eastern Daily Press* [Norwich], 18 September 1872.
[5] *MEM*, 193.
[6] Programme, *Crystal Palace Concerts 1881-2*, 39 (22 October 1881).

Fails not, nor e'er with fainting heart forgets
Its everlasting lesson, night or day.[7]

Like its predecessors, *Niagara* only had the one performance (suggesting that there were problems with the music); it was never published and the manuscript has not survived. However, Cowen must have thought the ideas worthy of a further exposure, as its principal motives were recycled for use in the first movement of his fifth symphony several years later. It can be deduced from the programme notes and reviews that the work followed a sonata form plan, and it can be placed in the fourth category of overtures listed above.

Another five years past before Cowen found an opportunity to write an overture. This came in the form of a request for a piece for the opening of the Liverpool Exhibition by Queen Victoria. The original manuscript of the Overture in D major has now been lost, but was dated 4 May 1886, which means Cowen completed it with only a week to spare. The Exhibition was to be on a grand scale in the presence of Queen Victoria. Indeed, it was the first time that she had visited that city for many years. Cowen recalls:

> It was a very wet day, but rather than disappoint the large crowds that had assembled to catch a glimpse of her [Queen Victoria], she drove through the streets in an open carriage with an umbrella over her head. The musical portion of the opening ceremony was under my direction. We had a good choir and orchestra, and the programme consisted of some choruses from Mendelssohn's 'Hymn of Praise', another choral piece, I think, and part of my new overture. I say part, because the work was never played through to its conclusion. Our platform had been erected by the civic authorities, who knew little, and cared less, about music, somewhere in a corner of the building, quite away from the dais on which Her Majesty was seated. Neither she nor any of the officials round her could see or hear anything we were doing, and consequently, from what I was told, the situation after a few minutes became very awkward and embarrassing. I had hardly got half through the overture when a card from the Mayor was handed up to me with just two words written on it – 'Please Stop!' I could not imagine what had happened, but of course I had to obey orders and allow the rest of the ceremony to be proceeded with.[8]

The *Manchester Guardian*, however, was able to explain the difficulties that faced Cowen, the assembled orchestra and choir, the dignitaries, and the crowds thus:

> It appeared...that no efficient means of communication with the conductor had been established; and it was not until after a vast amount of signalling that the choir were made to comprehend that the time for the performance of the work had arrived. The fact must be stated that the performance was a failure. The crowd was excited and noisy. Those behind

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[7] Programme, *Crystal Palace Concerts 1881-2*, 39 (22 October 1881).
[8] *MAMF*, 137-8.

> had a bitter grievance against the more favoured ones in front, who would persist in standing up, and shouts of 'sit down' and the noise of the shuffling of feet completely drowned all the softer passages of the music. Mr Cowen's work may have been of the most meritorious character, but its beauties were utterly lost…The Queen looked once or twice at the orchestra and then at the crowd in a manner not totally devoid of significance. With her immense experience of public ceremonies Her Majesty must have quickly realised the fact that much was wanting in the management of the ceremony to ensure its absolute success.[9]

Cowen said that afterwards he

> received a very apologetic letter from the Mayor, and as it was no use crying over spilt milk, I did the next best thing, and accepted the apology and the situation with the best grace I could muster. But I was very disappointed, for I had taken a good deal of trouble over the work, and, in compliment to Her Majesty, had interpolated a chorale composed by the Prince Consort, which she herself had given me permission to use.[10]

The work was given a proper first performance by Hans Richter in London at the start of [2?] June 1886. The *Daily News* described it as 'an effective orchestral piece, which received a worthy rendering…that it failed to obtain in Liverpool'.[11] Willeby agreed, writing that 'it received an excellent rendering and much commendation'.[12] The *News of the World* noted that the work was 'remarkable for freedom and breadth, the themes being excellently developed, and the orchestration well balanced and ornate'.[13] In the absence of a published score, the reviews and programme notes indicate that the overture took the form of a slow introduction, followed by a quick movement in a rather unorthodox sonata form.[14] Indeed, there were three main subjects, the last of which concluded with the exclamation of a chorale, composed by H.R.H., the Prince Albert, Consort to Queen Victoria, which Cowen had reharmonised. However, Willeby thought it was 'in the stereotyped pattern of overtures in general…[and] is an admirable work in its way'.[15] With is commemorative element, this overture falls into the second type mentioned above.

The culmination of Cowen's career as a writer of overtures came in 1901 with his *The Butterfly's Ball.* It was premiered at the Queen's Hall on 2 March 1901 by Robert Newman's

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[9] *Manchester Guardian*, 19 June 1886, 9.
[10] *MAMF*, 138.
[11] *Daily News*, 3 June 1886, 6.
[12] *MEM*, 227.
[13] *News of the World*, 6 June 1886, 2.
[14] Programme, Crystal Palace Fifth Saturday Concert 1886-7 [undated, but probably November 1886].
[15] *MEM*, 227.

Queen's Hall Orchestra to whom it was dedicated, with Cowen conducting. Inspired by William Roscoe's poem entitled *The Butterfly's Ball, and the Grasshopper's Feast*, the overture is a well-crafted, colourful and light-hearted work, and it shows Cowen's flair and delicacy in coping with a large orchestra, and his talent for pleasant melody, owing something to the sound world of Dvořák. The work is evocative of the ephemeral Cinderella-like existence of the butterfly, destined to have not more than one day of life. A sample of Roscoe's poem [the first four verses] follows:

Come take up your Hats, and away let us haste
To the *Butterfly's* Ball, and the *Grasshopper's* Feast.
The Trumpeter, *Gad-fly*, has summon'd the Crew,
And the Revels are now only waiting for you.

So said little Robert, and pacing along,
His merry Companions came forth in a Throng.
And on the smooth Grass, by the side of a Wood,
Beneath a broad Oak that for Ages had stood,

Saw the Children of Earth, and the Tenants of Air,
For an Evening's Amusement together repair.
And there came the *Beetle*, so blind and so black,
Who carried the *Emmet* [ant], his Friend, on his Back.

And there was the *Gnat* and the *Dragon-fly* too,
With all their Relations, Green, Orange, and Blue.
And there came the *Moth*, with his Plumage of Down,
And the *Hornet* in Jacket of Yellow and Brown. [16]

The overture's quick waltz/scherzo may even subconsciously allude to the flowing dactylic metre of Roscoe's verse. Indeed, it could appropriately be termed a scherzo more than an overture, but the title of the work is determined by its form, which is in the fourth category of those listed above. *The Times* preview said that it was a work of 'the kind in which the composer has so often won success…and…that have made so many of his works in the same genre so widely popular',[17] a sentiment that is impossible to disagree with. Within the framework of this sonata form overture there are about six motivic elements that represent the butterflies, grasshoppers, and other ephemeral members of the insect world in Roscoe's poem. Cowen also introduces a slightly altered version of Haynes Bayly's once well-known song 'I'd be a

[16] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 5 November 1901.
[17] 'Queen's Hall Symphony Concerts' in *The Times*, 4 March 1901, 10.

Butterfly'.[18] *The Times* tells us that the premiere performance was 'excellently played and warmly received',[19] and it remained one of his most popular pieces for many years afterwards, especially at Bournemouth, where it was heard a total of nine times over the next thirty years.[20] Indeed, Cuthbert Hawley, in the programme notes for one of Cowen's visits there, declared: 'We do not think we are exaggerating when we say that no single concert work of late years has been written equal to it in originality or spontaneity'.[21] Modern audiences also should have had a rare chance to hear Cowen at his near best on Marco Polo label's release of *The Butterfly's Ball* on CD (8.223273) in 1990. Indeed, this recording ought to have given it a fresh lease of life. But, as with the *Scandinavian* Symphony and *Indian Rhapsody* on the same CD, the mediocre quality of the recording does little to promote the finer qualities of Cowen's music. This overture deserves a first-rate performance by a leading orchestra.

Reviewing the overtures as a whole, it can be seen that Cowen used the overture form in several different ways during his life: i) as an outlet for pieces of absolute music, ii) as a vehicle for commemoration, and iii) as a conduit for a loosely programmatic work. While the earlier works fell by the wayside, mostly due to inadequacies in their music and structures, *The Butterfly's Ball* stands head and shoulders above the rest, a testament to the muse of a gifted composer of lighter music.

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The orchestral suites of the nineteenth century tended to consist of two main types, those that assembled coherent excerpts from larger works such as ballets, operas or stage works (e.g. Grieg's suites from the incidental music from *Peer Gynt*, and Tchaikovsky's suite from *The*

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[18] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 5 November 1901.
[19] 'Queen's Hall Symphony Concerts' in *The Times*, 31 March 1901, 10.
[20] According to the records of Stephen Lloyd.
[21] Miller, G., *The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra* (Sherborne: Dorset Publishing Co., 1970), 44.

Nutcracker), and those that were a set of themed character pieces or multi-movement tone poems.

Cowen first dabbled in this genre in 1880 with his *The Language of Flowers*, Suite de ballet, [Set No. 1] six short pieces for orchestra. In Victorian times, the gift of a flower or a bouquet carried more messages than such a gift might today. Indeed, there was a whole etiquette about the correct flower to give or send on the right occasion, not just for the obvious matters of births, marriages and deaths. Cowen took this as the theme of his suite, with each movement entitled with the name of a flower and associated with a mood or emotion, and also accompanied by a quotation chosen by Joseph Bennett:[22]

> No. 1 – Innocence – Daisy – 'Wee, modest, crimson-tippit flower' – (Burns) – *Allegretto scherzando* (G major – 6/8 time)
>
> No. 2 – First Emotions of Love – Lilac – 'I dreamed that love, Should steal upon the heart like summer dawn, On the awakening world, soft, gradual' – (M. C. Hume) – *Andante* (F major – 3/4 time)
>
> No. 3 – Fascination – Fern – 'She's outwardly…all that entices; Nor is it in our virtue to uncharm it' – (Beaumont) – *Moderato* (B flat major – C time)
>
> No. 4 – Folly – Columbine – 'Yet folly ever has…a trifling air' – (Cowper) – *Scherzo, Presto* (C major – 3/4 time)
>
> No. 5 – Elegance and Grace – Yellow Jasmine – 'We were charmed…for the beautiful was there, Triumphant'. – (Talfourd) – *Tempo di Gavotte*
>
> No. 6 – Gaiety – Lily – 'What more than mirth would mortals have? The cheerful man's a king'. – (Bickerstaff) – *Allegro* (E flat major – 3/4 time)[23]

These elegant and dainty pieces, which really epitomise Cowen's lighter graceful side, were originally written as respite from the severity of the other more serious works performed at his Saturday Concerts' Series at St. James's Hall, London, in late 1880. This music is simplicity itself, sweetness and light, beauty purely for beauty's sake. *The Illustrated London News* critic at the premiere wrote that 'every number pleased and was loudly applauded. No. 5 ["Yellow Jasmine"] having been encored'.[24] Even the acidic George Bernard Shaw, a critic with a reputation for not

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[22] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745.B471.(26).
[23] Programme, *Crystal Palace Special Saturday Concert*, (7 May 1881).
[24] *The Illustrated London News*, lxxvii/2163, 4 December 1880, 543.

mincing his words, was caused to write that 'the orchestra played...[the suite] very prettily'.[25]

The *Musical Times* wrote a few months after the first performance:

> It was a happy thought that led Mr Cowen, in view of a series of orchestral concerts, to compose this work for the purpose of relief from the gravity of more serious things. In his most sanguine moments, it may be, he did not expect for the Suite de Ballet such success as it met with. The little pieces were presented as trifles, but the public saw in them very much more than trifling talent. Charmed with their grace and fancy, amateurs became enthusiastic about them, and the results was not only a repetition performance, but two arrangements, one for pianoforte solo, and another for pianoforte à quatre mains.[26]

They quickly entered the *repertoire* and were exceedingly fashionable in their day, sometimes being heard as a complete set, but more often, as individual pieces, especially the aforementioned 'Yellow Jasmine'. Indeed, they probably gave Cowen encouragement to dip into the genre again, which he did on many occasions.

The next non-symphonic work to appear from Cowen's pen was a Sinfonietta in A major. Indeed, the London Philharmonic Society had commissioned him to write an overture, possibly in response to the growing success of his *Scandinavian* Symphony, but Cowen offered this Sinfonietta instead.[27] Despite the fact that it was premiered by that society, it has proved rather an enigmatic work to research, as a detailed programme note has not come to light, which is important given that it was not published, and the original manuscript is now lost.[28]

Cowen's next suite is rather better documented, even though it was not published and Cowen says that the manuscript was lost in his own lifetime.[29] *In the Olden Time*, Suite in D [for strings only], was performed at the Crystal Palace by the Crystal Palace Orchestra, to whom it was dedicated, on 17 March 1883.[30] The music was made up of old-fashioned dances, recalling his own experience of the old-and-new gavotte in Leipzig, where he studied, but it is of a decidedly old English idiom of expression. It is in five movements: 1. Air with Variations, 2. The

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[25] Shaw, G. B., *Music in London, 1890-94* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932), vol. ii, 70-1
[26] 'The Language of Flowers' in *Musical Times*, xxii (1881), 199.
[27] BL, Loan MS 48.2/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 8, 1879-83*, f. 31v. (11 December 1880).
[28] The title implies a short multi-movement symphonic work, possibly for small orchestra, hence its classification here among the multi-movement suites. However, it may deserve to be included in the symphony section, but until more data is available it will remain here.
[29] *MAMF*, 119.
[30] Ibid.

Lute, 3. The Chase, 4. Lullaby, and 5. The Dance (*Tempo di Minuetto*).[31] An interesting feature of the work is the novel idea of dividing the strings into two orchestras, which, in the Air with Variations continually answer each other from different sides of the platform. This design pre-empts similar ideas by Vaughan Williams in his Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis and Tippett in his Concerto for Double String Orchestra by some years! August Manns observed: 'Musicians will, we think, agree when hearing this little Suite for Strings, that the composer of the *Scandinavian* Symphony has advanced his rare productive gifts another step towards maturity; and the general lovers of instrumental music will, we feel sure, derive unalloyed enjoyment in listening to these dainty strains, and thus having a peep into the Olden Time'.[32]

The next 'suite' in Cowen's output is a small-scale two movement piece for small orchestra (classical symphony orchestra – double woodwind, 2 horns, 2 trumpets and strings, with the addition of a harp) entitled *Deux morceaux*. This is an unusual structural plan for a work, but clearly Cowen thought good of it, as he tried it again some years later – Two Pieces (1903). The two contrasting movements are fairly self-explanatory: 'Mélodie' (*Andante* in D major) and 'À l'espagne' (*Andante quasi allegretto* in A major).[33] Although first performed in 1883, they were not published until 1901 in Vienna after being given a performance in that city.

Cowen returned to a more conventional approach with his next suite, a commission for the London Philharmonic Society, his Suite de ballet, *In Fairyland*, which he himself conducted on 6 May 1896. The six movements are entitled: Wood Nymphs, March of the Giants, Flower Fairies, Dance of Gnomes, Moonbeam Fairies, and Dance of Witches. Cowen requested that, because the suite was of 'a light character', it would be best placed as the 'first piece in the 2nd part.'[34] The work was well received by the audience, with the *Musical Times* noting that

> the title teems with suggestions of a kind having such affinity with the most individual characteristics of Mr Cowen's musical genius that, from the moment of its announcement, everyone competent to form an opinion felt sure of a successful result. And expectations

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31 Manns, A., Programme, *Crystal Palace 16th Saturday Concert 1882-3*, 513 (17 March 1883).
32 Ibid.
33 Programme, *Crystal Palace 5th Saturday Concert 1883-4* (10 November 1883).
34 BL, Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, f. 71r.

> were fully realised…The applause at the close was so hearty and continuous that Mr Cowen repeated the 'Witches Dance'. Full justice was done to the charming little pieces by the orchestra, which carried out the intentions of its former chief with commendable zeal.[35]

Cowen suggested that the work 'may be destined for something more than a mere ephemeral existence & may eventually prove worthy of the circumstances which gave it birth'.[36] He is clearly suggesting that he conceived it in his mind as a ballet, and had aspirations to develop it into a full-scale ballet. While this idea was not realised, the work went on to receive many further performances. A full symphony orchestra is required for this work, and the music is beautifully and colourfully orchestrated. Here Cowen demonstrates his mastery of delicate and selective instrumentation, where despite the large forces available to him, *fortissimo tuttis* are reserved for the few really dramatic climaxes. Examples of his subtlety can be found in the use of two piccolo players in 'Dance of Gnomes', with the first part permanently played by a piccolo player throughout the suite, and the second part being doubling by the second flautist. In the same movement the side drum is played without snares, and with very soft, felt drumsticks. Cowen has chosen two cornets throughout the work, rather than the normal trumpets, presumably requiring their mellower tone. He also shows a marked interest in his percussion section, which includes timpani, cymbals (in the last movement it is struck with a drumstick throughout), side drum, triangle and glockenspiel.

Having given us a display of his most modern skills as a composer, his next suite from the same year looks back to the past. Entitled Four English Dances in the Olden Style, Set 1, for orchestra, the four movements are: 1. 'Stately Dance', 2. 'Rustic Dance', 3. 'Graceful Dance', and 4. 'Country Dance'. It is scored for double woodwind, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. However, most of the movements are not new pieces, rather they are extracts orchestrated from other pieces, something that does not seem to have been acknowledged in any source. Indeed, his 'Stately Dance' is extracted from *Village Scenes* (1893); the 'Rustic Dance' is taken from his 'Hear the Sounds of Jocund Music' from

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[35] 'Philharmonic Society' in *Musical Times*, xxxvii (1896), 383-4.
[36] BL Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, ff. 72r-73r.

Summer on the River (1893); and the Graceful Dance is taken from 'Christmas Festivities' from *Christmas Scenes* (1894). The dances are charming, but it is difficult to identify what is specifically English about them. Indeed, the 'Country Dance' is practically a Polish mazurka. However, they may have influenced Edward German and Eric Coates to write their respective dances and suites. These pieces were also issued in a version for small orchestra.

1903 sees Cowen return to another 'suite' in two movements. Entitled simply Two Pieces for small orchestra (double woodwind, two trumpets, harp and strings), with the two movements called 'Childhood' (Lullaby) and 'Girlhood'. The first movement (in an ABABA form) is scored simply for strings (without double basses), flutes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns. The strings are muted throughout the movement, which is only seventy-five bars long. In the second movement, oboes, harp, and basses are added to the orchestra. This movement, which is considerably longer than the first, is based on two chief themes, with an intermediate section, giving something of an ABACBA structure.[37]

Following his success of his Four English Dances in an Olden Style, Cowen wrote a second set, A Suite of Old English Dances [Set II]. The four movements were called: 1. Maypole Dance, 2. Peasant's Dance, 3. Minuet d'amour (Lover's Minuet) and 4. Old Dance, with Variations. They rather follow the conventions of the first set.

More interesting, although evidently less popular, was Cowen's next and penultimate suite. Called *The Months* (Twelve Sketches for Orchestra), and published both in a piano version as four books of three pieces, and orchestrated for performance by a symphony orchestra, these pieces are akin to Mendelssohn's 'Song without Words' style. They are not especially complex, but typically Cowenesque, sometimes graceful and fairy-like, and at others, ballad-like. Harmonically, they are not overly complicated, but with the inevitable one or two unusual progressions, and a notable use of the German sixth chord as a pivotal chord for modulation purposes (a favourite Cowen device). Each piece lasts not more than two or three minutes, and

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[37] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 24 January 1905.

is an entity in its own right that can be played separately (divorced from the set of three to which it belongs or the whole twelve), although they were probably intended to be performed as sets of three or twelve. As books of three pieces (in the piano version), each either has two slow movements and one faster one, or one slow movement and two faster ones, underlying a three-movement plan for each. But, there is no apparent cross-fertilisation of ideas between pieces. All the pieces are tonally closed, except for those that close in the relative major or the tonic major (as indicated below). There are no obvious key relationships between pieces, except that none of them have a key signature with more than four sharps or flats. What is not clear is whether they were conceived as piano pieces and then orchestrated, or originally written for orchestra and soon after arranged for piano. I would suggest the former is more likely, as the piano versions are innately pianistic. Most of Cowen's other reductions from orchestra down to piano, tend to be less so. The twelve movements are:

Movement	Month	Title	Sub-title	Key	*Tempo*	Form
1.	January	Lullaby	For the New Year	B flat major		monothematic
2.	February	St. Valentine	Flirtations	G major	*Allegretto scherzando*	
3.	March			D minor	*Molto vivace*	ternary form?
4.	April	In Springtime		G major	(Slow Waltz)	ternary (modified)
5.	May	Italian Serenade		A major	*Poco lento*	unitary with short episodes
6.	June	Birds		C major	*Vivacissimo*	
7.	July	Butterflies		A flat major	*Allegro non troppo*	unitary[38]
8.	August	Midday Reverie		F major	*Molto lento*	Tripartite (ABA')[39]
9.	September	Harvest Home	Old English Dance	E minor (Closes in E major)	*Molto allegro quasi presto*	ternary?
10.	October	Autumn Evening Song		B flat major		ternary
11.	November	Civic Procession in the Olden Time		D minor (Closes in F major)	*In modo d'una marche militaria*	ternary
12.	December	Christmas Morn		E flat major	*Adagio religioso*	

'November' is notable for its strident march theme, and for its middle section based on an 'old English air': *O London is a fine town*, presumably a tune familiar to Cowen's audiences. The religious undertone of 'December', with its broad majestic chords and bell-like qualities, gives a certain Debussyan feel to this music – one thinks particularly of 'The Sunken Cathedral' Prelude.

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[38] This movement could be considered to of a tripartite structure, if the so-called middle section (which is little more than a transition passage) is regarded as a theme in its own right.
[39] During the A' of this ABA' structure, while the opening returns, but with modifications, it does not re-establish the tonic of F major until the final chord of the piece.

This substantial suite of pieces appears never to have been heard in their entirety, at least in the orchestral version. Indeed, there is some confusion as to whether Novellos published them as a complete set, as the British Library only has selected movements. However, the complete full score manuscript in the Royal College of Music [RCM, MS 5058j] could facilitate such a performance.

Cowen closes his suite account with his second Suite de ballet, *The Language of Flowers*, premiered at the Promenade Concerts, London on 19 September 1914, it following the same plan of its predecessor of 34 years before.

Cowen's suites, as we have seen, are very varied, from the two bipartite works through to the twelve movement *The Months*, although a majority are sets of four to six movements. Almost all of them fall into the second category of themed character pieces or multi-movement tone poems. However, the Four English Dances in the Olden Style, Set 1, with three of its four movements extracted from earlier works falls into the first group of assembled coherent excerpts from larger works. This is perhaps the genre in which Cowen is most at home, i.e. where the depth of musical argument does not need to be rigorous, where the innermost passions of characters and their characterisation need not be exposed, as is necessary in say a symphony; as is a requirement of opera; and where large-scale structures need not be planned and carried out. Cowen was, first and foremost, a miniaturist, much as Grieg was, and most comfortable when being graceful and delicate. Beyond their pretty melodies and attractive orchestrations, these suites demand little profundity on the part of the composer, or his audience, i.e. they are easy listening. Here, Cowen was in his element.

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Cowen's two works for piano and orchestra were written 39 years apart, and are very different works. As concertos often do, they reflect in their pianism, for whom they were written. The early work Cowen wrote in those first bursts of youth for himself to play on 9

December 1869 at St James's Hall, London, under the baton of his old master Julius Benedict, was his Piano Concerto in A minor. Unfortunately, like much of his early music, it was not published and the manuscript has subsequently been lost. Even more inconveniently, it was rather overshadowed by Cowen's other major work at the same concert, namely his Symphony No. 1 in C minor, which most of the critics raved about. As a consequence of this, the said critics devoted rather less space for comment on the concerto – Joseph Bennett of the *Daily Telegraph* said that the 'concerto, played of course by Mr Cowen himself, had many features of interest, but it was quite eclipsed by the more ambitious orchestral work'.[40] Likewise, Willeby was less taken with the Piano Concerto: 'I do not consider [the concerto] worthy of comparison with…[the symphony] in any respect. It suffers from a superabundance of "pianism", a blemish to be found not infrequently in the *Concerti* of older and more experienced composers than this young artist, and one from which to judge from results it seems impossible to altogether get away'.[41] The *Musical Times*, writing many years later surmised that the concerto was a mixture 'of Sydney Smith and pseudo-Liszt'.[42] The reviews suggests that it was worthy of a rendition, but that it lacked anything that an audience could respond to. Given Cowen's immaturity as a composer, this is perhaps to be expected. This author has assumed that the concerto was in the customary three-movement form, as surely one of the reviewers would have made a point of it, if it was not. But, frankly, there is very little other data to go on.

The Concertstück of 1900, however, is a very different work, cast in one continuous movement, written specially for the Polish virtuoso pianist Paderewski. The choice of the German title for this concert piece is perhaps a curious one, especially given Cowen's not so distance turbulent experiences with the 'German' element of the Hallé Concerts Society. Yet, the title is apt for the work and follows in the tradition of Weber's Konzertstück for piano and orchestra in F minor (1821) and Schumann's Concertstück for four horns in F major, op. 86

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[40] *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1869.
[41] *MEM*, 187-8.
[42] *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.

(1849). The task of bringing this work to fruition proved a difficult one, as Paderewski, at times, seemed to be less than keen to cooperate with Cowen on the project. Whether Paderewski disliked Cowen or his music, or whether he just could not fit it into his busy schedule, is not clear, but it seems that Cowen had the work near ready in 1897.[43] However, Cowen was still in negotiations with Paderewski in the Spring of 1900, as a letter from Cowen to Berger at the Philharmonic Society makes clear (Berger had evidently asked Cowen if he could play it himself):

> I am naturally as much annoyed as you are – but I feel that I must give Paderewski still another chance later on of producing the work as it was written for him & besides this, I should simply not dare to appear in public now as a pianist…it is very difficult & not fit for one who has not practised for ten years or more.[44]

The 'Paderewski' piece was eventually premiered by the Polish pianist at the Philharmonic Society on 28 June 1900. Cowen had gone over to Paris just prior to its performance so as 'to work up the music with him and to make sundry revisions and elaborate certain of the passages to suit his immense technique'.[45] *The Times* reported that 'the piece abounds in difficulties of every kind, and more particularly in passages in which the strong individuality of the player is given fine opportunities. But it is more than a mere vehicle for display, for it is throughout interesting and original, and it deserves a high place among the composer's works'.[46] The *Daily News* followed a similar line:

> Although entitled a Concertstück, the piece is more or less of the nature of a Rhapsody, while much of the thematic material is quite characteristic of the composer, and the pianoforte part, which is more important than the orchestral, is most brilliant, and often very difficult. It is about half a dozen short movements linked together without a break, the last section recalling some of the themes already heard. This, indeed, and the last movement but one, which may almost remind the hearer of some of the Rhapsodies of Liszt, are most effective portions of the work. Time after time the audience recalled the pianist, who came on hand in hand with the composer.[47]

Cowen said that 'its performance at the Philharmonic, through his fine interpretation, proved very brilliant and effective'.[48] The rhapsodic structure observed above is evident in the works

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[43] BL, Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, f. 82v.
[44] Ibid., ff. 99r-100r.
[45] *MAMF*, 291-2.
[46] 'Philharmonic Society' in *The Times*, 30 June 1900, 4.
[47] *Daily News*, 29 June 1900, 5.
[48] *MAMF*, 292.

analysis, which, although perfectly symmetrical and logical, is somewhat uncommon. From the broadest perspective, it is in three sections: (i) a slow movement, (ii) a quick movement, and (iii) a return to the slow movement, with a short *coda* (Presto). But on closer examination, it can be seen that the quick portion itself consists of four sections, of which the third and fourth are modifications of the first and second. As each of the sections has two themes this *Allegro* may be described roughly as 'a Rondo with a Rondo'.[49]

The music, while displaying many familiar Cowenesque features of melody and harmony, the antiphonal interplay between piano and orchestra before letter E is rather Tchaikovskyan. Indeed, the shadows of Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Chopin and Grieg all loom large in the pianism, although this perhaps owes to the interventions of Paderewski, crafting the music to his formidable technique. Moreover, the first main theme in B flat minor has a definite bravura Chopinesque quality, perhaps a patriotic gift from Cowen to his Polish soloist. The programme note writer at a performance in Liverpool wrote that the Concertstück 'exhibits its creator's gifts in an unfamiliar aspect, and which will decidedly not lessen them in the opinion of competent judges'.[50] Indeed, the work was taken up by Cowen's friend Teresa Carreño and included in her *repertoire*,[51] as well as by Frederic Lamond and Julian Clifford (who played it at least four times).[52]

Beyond that which has already been observed above, there is little else to say about Cowen's approach to the concerto, other than that it is perhaps rather surprising that he did not write more in this genre, especially for his own first instrument. The answer to this question probably rests with the practicalities of the man. He rarely wrote anything substantial unless there was a purpose or a commission that would lead to its performance. Having withdrawn himself from public performance as a pianist in his early twenties, he no longer needed the piano concerto as a vehicle to further his career by putting on concerts, as Mozart needed to do, and, therefore, his production ceased. Indeed, if the opportunity to write a concert piece for

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[49] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 8 January 1901.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Milinowski, M., *Teresa Carreño: 'By the Grace of God'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, n.d.), 302.
[52] According to the records of Stephen Lloyd.

Paderewski to be performed by the Philharmonic Society had not come along, the chances are that it would not have been written.

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The writing of more extended character pieces, in the form symphonic poems, tone poems or mood pictures, was a logical extension of Cowen's art of suite and overture writing. However, with it, went the greater challenges of form and cohesion that seem to have dogged many of his larger-scale works. *A Phantasy of Life and Love* was his first venture into this field in 1901, when it was produced at the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester.[53] It is in no sense 'programme music', as Cowen illustrates no story or series of events, it is simply a mood picture, i.e. a piece giving musical expression to phrases of feeling and emotion that, more or less, incline towards dramatic characterisation. As regards its form, the main divisions of the work are four in number:

i) *Poco allegro – Più mosso – Più sostenuto, come prima – Più mosso, come prima*

ii) *Molto andante e tranquillo – Pochissimo più mosso, ma senza vero cambiamento di tempo – Quasi andante, come prima – Allegro appassionato – Moderato – Molto più lento*

iii) Scherzo: *Vivacissimo – Ancora più mosso – Molto lento*

iv) Finale: *Allegro tranquillo – Molto lento – Allegro tranquillo – Più sostenuto – Più mosso – Molto andante e tranquillo – Quasi andante, come prima – Allegro appassionato – Vivacissimo – Molto lento*

It would seem that the four sections, which all segue into the next, form a sort of miniature symphony, with a fast first movement, slow second movement, scherzo third movement and a finale. There is certainly no other significant work thus far that follows a similar scheme, although perhaps his Concertstück anticipates the approach. However, there is a small attempt at cyclic transformation, in that some of the figuration that is developed in the scherzo parodies the opening theme of the work. This piece is notable for the conspicuous use of syncopation

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[53] Shaw, W., *The Three Choirs Festival* (Worcester and London: Ebenezer Baylis and Sons Ltd.), 1954, 139; Williams, C. Lee; Chance, H. Godwin; and Hannam-Clark, T.; *Annals of the Three Choirs of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester 1895 to 1930* (Gloucester: Minchin and Gibbs, [?1931/2]), 30.

throughout. Indeed, by Cowen's 1880s and 90s standards, this music is rather freer in both rhythm and *tempo* – something that he may have learnt from Elgar. This is evident from the number of major *tempo* changes indicated above in the four sections. Indeed, examination of the score will reveal many more subtleties in the *tempo* markings. E. F. Jacques, no doubt under Cowen's guidance, attributes moods to each of the four sections thus: i) passionate, strenuous, and full of suggestions of strife and endeavour, ii) 'Love', iii) humorously depicts the grim, ironic features of 'Life', and iv) various features are reviewed as by the mind of a master who has outlived them all.[54] Jacques concludes that 'this fine work...exhibits Dr Cowen's gifts as a composer in their highest and strongest manifestation',[55] and it may have inspired one of Bax's lost works, *Songs of Life and Love.*[56] It was certainly performed several more times by Cowen and others, and is perhaps overdue a new rendering and recording.

Cowen's next attempt in this form was rather more exotic, in that he turned his thoughts towards the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire, namely India. After appropriate digestion, the result was a work entitled Indian Rhapsody, which, although it was given its first performance at the Hereford Festival in 1903, it was dedicated to the Scottish Orchestra (which he had taken over as conductor a couple of years before). Cowen has woven together about a dozen supposedly authentic Indian melodies of varying character, serious and humorous, some measured, others not, and has orchestrated the whole with his well-known skill and perfection of touch. Indeed, it is interestingly and colourfully orchestrated to imply its aura of exoticism, which it instantly conjures up. The first theme is given out by the clarinets with a double pedal timpani accompaniment, and intermittent *pizzicato* of all the strings, except the double basses, whilst a solo viola announces the plaintive second theme. The third theme, sounded by the cor anglais, is rather irregular in metre, mostly with seven crotchets to the bar. Intriguingly, rather than compose it in 7/4 time, Cowen chooses to write a bar of common time, followed by one of

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[54] Jacques, E. F., Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 18 March 1902.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Foreman, L., *Bax: A Composer and His Times* (London: Scolar Press, 1983), 39, 387.

3/4 time, and hence he has to rewrite the time signature every bar! Effective use is made of the harp, exploiting both its *arpeggio* effects and that of its *glissando.* At another point in the score the clicking of the drumsticks like claves against each other produces an unusual effect. The work 'met with immediate success',[57] it being considered 'clever and interesting' by the press, but also 'rather gaudy'.[58] However, Keith Anderson comments that although 'the work makes use of a number of themes suggesting something of India...the opening pentatonic material might now imply music from further East...The Rhapsody shows a certain superficial kinship with Russian exoticism of the same period in its use of melodies of oriental flavour'.[59] Anderson's allusion to Russian exoticism is not without foundation, as it is quite possible to hear echoes of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* at certain points. Raymond J. Walker is rather more scathing of Cowen's themes, describing them as 'more Oriental than Indian and it might have been better entitled "A Chinese Market"'.[60] Anderson's and Walker's assessments are a fair appraisal of the work, as Cowen's 'authentic' Indian melodies are of dubious authenticity (the first theme is pentatonic, the second based on a minor scale with a sharpened fourth, and the remainder is mostly of European influence). Even if they are genuine, his treatment of them places the music outside India, perhaps at times more in the Far East, and at other times in the Middle East. Cowen's geographical musical metaphors are clearly a little mixed up here, and the work tells us more about Victorian/Edwardian England than the Raj. But, if one discards the programme, one is still left with an intriguing work, with some energetic, romping music at its close, unlike almost anything else in Cowen's output. The Indian Rhapsody was released on Marco Polo CD (8.223273) in 1990, along with the *Scandinavian* Symphony and *The Butterfly's Ball*, Overture. However, the poor quality of this recording accomplishes little in marketing the finer qualities of

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[57] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 9 February 1904.
[58] 'Promenade Concerts' in *The Times*, 2 October 1903, 2; *The Times*, 18 June 1904, 11.
[59] Anderson, K, programme note to CD, *Frederic Hymen Cowen 'Scandinavian' Symphony, Indian Rhapsody, and Butterfly's Ball Overture*, Marco Polo, 8.223273 (HNH International Ltd., 1990).
[60] Walker, R. J., 'Frederic Hymen Cowen: *The Butterfly's Ball*, Overture; *Indian Rhapsody*; Symphony No. 3 in C minor, *Scandinavian*', *Classical Music Web*, at <http://www.musicweb.uk.net/classrev/2002/Feb02/Cowen.htm> [accessed c. 1 September 2003].

Cowen's music. Like *The Butterfly's Ball*, concert overture, the Indian Rhapsody needs a truly first-rate performance in order for us to see all the beauties and intricacies that it contains.

After the exertions and scale of the Indian Rhapsody, Cowen's next foray into character pieces was rather a smaller undertaking, both in its length and in the scale of its orchestra. *Reverie*, which was possibly conceived at the same time as the Indian Rhapsody, in its mere 18 pages of full score and 89 bars of music, expresses Cowen's love of melody. Technically it is in ternary form, with the B section providing the material for the nine-bar coda, but the small symphony orchestra, minus the tuba, and with the option of missing out the trombones as well (they only play in two bars!), gives us one continuous daydreaming melody that remains in the first violins for almost the whole work's entirety. It has been listed incorrectly in most extant catalogues, including the *NGDMM2*, as a work for violin and orchestra, although the confusion may have arisen since it was also published in a version for violin and piano.

The last two works in this group are 1930s pieces, written when Cowen was in his eighties in his closing years of life. They were both premiered on BBC radio broadcasts, a new innovation for Cowen, and the only two pieces of his to be given their first performance in this way. However, they remain somewhat elusive having apparently been published by Boosey & Co, but not being found in any major collection, including the British Library.[61] They are also both missing from most extant works-lists, including the *NGDMM2*. The first of the two was entitled *The Magic Goblet – The Luck of Edenhall*, completed on New Year's Day, 1934,[62] and first performed by the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, and conducted by Cowen himself, on 9 June of the same year.[63] The fact that Cowen had endured many bouts of ill-health over the preceding decade, as his correspondence with Edward Elgar testifies, this must have taken quite some effort on his part to take the baton. It would appear that the work was quite short, of no more

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[61] Despite strenuous efforts on the part of this author, Boosey and Hawkes Publishers was unable to find a copy of this work, and, in the absence of any other copies coming to light, it has proved difficult to advance any substantial observations.

[62] Andrade, J. A. P. M., *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Jamaica Times Ltd., 1941), 151.

[63] Kenyon, N., *The BBC Symphony Orchestra* (BBC, 1981), 452; Mitchell, A., and Poulton, A (ed.), *A Chronicle of First Broadcast Performances of Musical Works in the United Kingdom, 1923-1996* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2001), 42.

than 10-15 minutes, combining elements of the bacchanale and the ballad. 'The Luck of Edenhall' was an old goblet associated with the Musgrave family of Edenhall, near Penrith in Cumbria,[64] to which a legend had become attached that the continued wealth of their family depended on it being kept intact. Indeed, the legend seems to first become a printed account in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in August 1791, by Sir William Musgrave. This was developed into the poem by Johan Ludwig Uhland (1834), and translated by Henry W. Longfellow. According to the legend, the goblet was acquired by a butler, who, going to fetch water from a St. Cuthbert's Well in the grounds of Edenhall, surprised a group of fairies dancing on the green near the spring. The glass was made by the well and the butler made off with it. When he would not return it, the fairies uttered the curse which is in the famous couplet:

> If this glass doth fall,
> Farewell then, O Luck of Edenhall![65]

This sort of fairy subject-matter, of course, would easily have appealed to Cowen's consciousness, and a month after the premiere, the *Musical Times* wrote:

> It is a rare enough thing for a composer to reach the age of eighty-three. It is still rarer to find that that respectable age has not impaired in the least his creative faculty. Sir Frederic Cowen's latest composition – a symphonic poem which was broadcast in a reading conducted by the composer – has most of the features which endeared his music thirty years ago to musicians and to amateurs. It has an easy melodic line, swinging rhythm; it shows also in orchestration the very happy touches which delighted us in the two works preceding in the broadcast, the novelty – *The Butterflies'* [sic] Ball and *Fantasy of Love and Life.* Sir Frederic must be congratulated on his achievement and activity. May he long continue to show us how life can be long and happy if we steer clear of pentatonic or Tessarakaidekaphonic systems.[66]

Like its predecessor, Cowen's last orchestral piece, the Miniature Variations (Humoresque) of 1934 was given its premiere on B.B.C. Radio by the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra on 20 April

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[64] The goblet is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. It is believed to be a thirteenth-century Syrian glass goblet ('Making History' in *B.B.C. Education* (B.B.C., U.K.), at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/beyond/factsheets/makhist/makhist4_prog8a.shtml> [accessed c. 15 December 2006]; 'The Luck of Edenhall: History and Myths' in *V&A Museum* at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/glass/stories/edenhall>) [accessed c. 15 December 2006].

[65] 'Making History' in *B.B.C. Education* (B.B.C., U.K.), at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/beyond/factsheets/makhist/makhist4_prog8a.shtml> [accessed c. 15 December 2006]; 'The Luck of Edenhall: History and Myths' in *V&A Museum* at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/glass/stories/edenhall> [accessed c. 15 December 2006].

[66] *Musical Times*, lxxv (1934), 649.

1935, conducted by Lewis.[67] This work is not mentioned in any of the editions of the *Grove* Dictionary, and, like *The Magic Goblet*, there seems to be some confusion as to whether Boosey & Co actually published the work, as none of the major U.K. music collections have a copy, nor could Boosey & Hawkes find one for this author.

These works are an extension of Cowen's approach to the suites. Like the suites, they show Cowen at his near-best, where fancy and ingenuity are not overly hindered by form. However, by their nature, Cowen does have to consider their structure, and *A Phantasy of Life and Love* is quite innovative in this regard, and the Indian Rhapsody follows models derived from Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies. The other pieces are rather smaller in scale, and therefore the issue is not quite as pronounced. As a group, they again show Cowen as a musician in control of his orchestration skills, with a varied and colourful brush and palette.

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Of the three marches that Cowen wrote for orchestra as independent pieces, only one made it into print, namely his Coronation March, and the manuscripts for the other two are thought to be lost. Indeed, the unpublished ones are not listed amongst any of the major extant works-lists, including the *NGDMM2*, and almost nothing is known about either of them. The first unpublished one, Barbaric March (1883), which Cowen describes as 'the wildest and most uncouth music I have ever perpetrated', was written for a fancy-dress ball at the [Royal] Albert Hall given by the Savage Club, of which he was a member.[68] The second march was commissioned for the opening ceremony of an Art Treasures Exhibition in mid[20?]-May 1886 at Folkestone[, Kent, England], at which Cowen presided as conductor; on the opening day he simply conducted the National Anthem and his March.[69]

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[67] Kenyon, 453. Curiously, Mitchell and Poulton does not list this performance in its chronology.
[68] *MAMF*, 123.
[69] Ibid., 137.

The Coronation March, however, was a more substantial work, written to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902. The London Philharmonic Society had sought a new work from Cowen in commemoration of the event,[70] but the King had already approached him to compose a coronation march for the Coronation itself, to have taken place at Westminster Abbey on 26 June 1902, and a choral work for the State concerts in honour of the King's enthronement (Coronation Ode). However, Cowen, ever conscious of maximising his own promotion, offered the Society the Coronation March stating (letter dd. 10 October [1901]): '[If] it should not be included in the musical ceremonies – may I leave it this way, that you should have the first performance in Concert Room immediately afterwards (if it is done at the Coronation) or, if not included, then you could have the actual first performance'.[71] On this occasion, Cowen's self-publicity worked, as it was given on 29 May at the Philharmonic Society, and also formed part of the musical programme selected for use at the Coronation Ceremony on 9 August 1902, after the King's ill-health had led to the postponement of the event. It was used during the progress of the first Royal procession into the Abbey.[72]

The Coronation March is in the usual march-form (march-trio-march-coda), and employs a typical orchestra of double woodwind and piccolo, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. Without preliminary of any kind, Cowen introduces, in full orchestral pomp, a brilliant theme, falling to the violins, flutes, oboes and clarinets, in which a semiquaver passage plays an important part. The second section is lighter in character, with the strings announcing a short phrase which is answered by a tripping figure for woodwind, an effective antiphony, which, through sequential treatment, is carried high by the strings (*cresc.*), and leads triumphantly to the opening subject, which lacks nothing of its initial stateliness. A brief, but tumultuous codetta then brings this part to an end. The middle episode, or Trio, in E flat major (the conventional subdominant key), which is heralded by two bars of

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[70] BL Loan MS 48.2/12, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings, Vol. 12, 1898-1908*, f. 103v. (30 September 1901).
[71] BL Loan MS 48.13/8, *Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, Letters, Vol. 8, COW*, ff. 107r-108r.
[72] *Musical Times*, xliii (1902), 578.

unison brass, has its theme of great melodic charm stated by first trumpet, accompanied by sustained harmonies for clarinets and bassoons, and broken chords given to the strings. Later, this broad strain is taken up by strings in unison, with addition of a marked rhythm for brass, and triplet figures for woodwind. After the theme has undergone further development (with brilliant ascending scale passages for strings), and been richly embellished, the march is repeated, the whole culminating in a fresh statement of the episode (now heard from both trumpets and third trombone (*ff. marcato*). A *coda*, (*accel. e crescendo*) based upon the opening semiquaver figure, works up, with all desirable energy, to a pompous close.[73] This work certainly has the vitality of a Elgar Pomp and Circumstance March,[74] and, yet, there is something curiously Tchaikovskyan in Cowen's handling of the antiphony between the woodwind and strings, and in his handling of the orchestration as a whole, especially the woodwind and brass.

In conclusion, the non-symphonic orchestral music, as a whole, probably shows off Cowen's music to his best advantage, where his gift for orchestration is centre stage. In the lighter pieces, especially the suites, he can be frankly pretty, without having to concern himself with the musical language of the profundities of passionate characterisation of emotional love and turmoil. However, he is sometimes capable of taking a commonplace melody or idea and instilling an unexpected colouring to it to give it an unforeseen interest. The Indian Rhapsody and *The Butterfly's Ball* overture demonstrate this admirably. For those interested in finding a way into Cowen's music, these works probably represent the most sensible place to start.

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[73] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 6 October 1903; and *Concert Programme, Norwich Musical Festival, 1902*, 18-9.

[74] Whether Cowen heard the early performances of Elgar's first two Pomp and Circumstance marches in late 1901, either in Liverpool or at the London Promenade Concert given by Henry Wood, is not clear. However, Cowen would have certainly heard Elgar's Imperial March (1897) and the Triumphal March from *Caractacus* (1898) by this time.

4. Operas and Stage Works

Although Cowen spent much of his career as a jobbing conductor, both in the orchestral and choral repertories, and composing works for them, he secured his first permanent job with the James Henry Mapleson's Italian Opera Company directed by Michael Costa, because, as he informs us, he had aspirations in that direction.[1] Cowen joined the company in 1871 (aged 19), as accompanist on Colonel Mapleson's concert tours, and *maestro al piano* during the London and provincial operatic seasons at Her Majesty's Opera, also under Costa,[2] where, as Cowen notes in his autobiography: 'My duties were manifold, for, as well as accompanying, I had to rehearse with the chorus, coach the artists, play the organ behind the scenes, and sometimes even the bells and suchlike instruments in the orchestra'.[3] Cowen claims that at this time he 'had the reputation of being the best accompanist in England'.[4] Interestingly, Cowen's musical experiences parallel Sullivan's, who had worked in a similar capacity as organist under Costa at the Covent Garden Theatre in the mid-1860s, largely for the same reasons of experiencing opera at first hand. Cowen describes Mapleson, or Colonel Mapleson as he was generally referred to, as

> one of those pleasant-mannered, plausible men, with at the same time strong business instincts, who usually manage to make their way in the world, and become popular. He had a way of what is called embroidering his statements, but as everyone who knew him took these at a large discount, there was not much harm done; and in spite of this little failing all his artists and *entourage* were very fond of him, and worked for him hopefully and trustfully, even though their salaries might occasionally be two or three weeks overdue. He was also not above joining in our fun and amusements.[5]

Cowen reminisces fondly and at some length in his autobiography (pp. 33-45) about his time on these concert tours (particularly to Dublin) and at the London and provincial operatic seasons, where frivolity and practical jokes, it seems, were more important than the actual performances. However, he met and worked with many fine musicians and personalities.[6] Not only did he

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[1] *MAMF*, 33.
[2] *MTC*, 716; *MAMF*, 33; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.
[3] *MAMF*, 33.
[4] Cowen, F. H., 'How I Turned the Corners' in *The Etude*, Philadelphia, Theodore Presser Co., July 1927, 501.
[5] *MAMF*, 33-34.
[6] These included Titiens, Adelina Patti, Zelie Trebelli, Sinico, Marie Roze, Ilma di Murzka, Campanini, Mongini, Jean de Reszke, Roberto Nicolini, Christine Nilsson, Luigi Agnesi, Foli, Marie Marimon, Sofia Scalchi, Giuseppé Fancelli, Valleria, Justine Macvitz, Antonio Aramburo, Del Puente, Madame Ristori, Tommaso Salvini, Galassi,

encounter a vast repertoire of music, from the lightest of comic concert items through to the highest moments of grand opera,[7] but it provided him with an enormous understanding of the stage, voices and the orchestra, which would thereafter prove vital to his development as an all-round musician, and especially in his operas, choral works, and pieces for the stage. The 'Mapleson' years may have been an insouciant time in Cowen's life, but as Cowen says, while in London for the operatic season, Michael Costa brought a more serious side to bear on the company: '[Costa]…ruled everyone with a rod, or rather, bâton of iron. He was scarcely what one would call a genial man, but he was very just, and of a not unkindly nature at heart, though he usually hid it under an abrupt and far from prepossessing manner, which made us all very frightened of him'.[8] Cowen, however, asserts that Costa was 'not entirely without sentiment or humour'.[9] Costa was later very influential in Cowen getting his first important choral festival commission at Birmingham in 1876 (*The Corsair*).

Cowen's professional debut as an operatic composer could have been as early as his twentieth year, as Mapleson approached him with a request to undertake the composition of an Italian operetta for the company in 1872.[10] However, Cowen having began the work in which 'the chief character…was an artist who fell in love with the picture of a young girl he was painting, which damsel, while he slept, became suddenly animated, walked out of the canvas, and began dancing',[11] soon lost interest in the idea, having realised its similarity to a plot in another story, and he put it aside having conceived only one or two numbers.[12]

While the Mapleson Opera Company undoubtedly did much to foster Cowen's life-long interest in the voice and the stage, one needs to turn back the clock even further to two events in his childhood, both of which mark out an opera and stage composer in the making. The first

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Mademoiselle Chapuy, Jean-Baptiste Faure, and Emma Abbot (Mapleson, J. H., *The Mapleson Memoirs*, 2nd Ed. (London: Remington and Co, 1888), Vol. II, 151-190; *MAMF*, 33-45).

[7] Mapleson, Vol. II, 151-190; *MAMF*, 33-45.

[8] *MAMF*, 47.

[9] Ibid., 48.

[10] Ibid., 68.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

of these was his first musical impression, noted in his autobiography, aged five, of him 'seated in a stage box at a Liverpool theatre, listening intently to the strains of Verdi's [*La*] *Traviata*; then, taken the next day to call on the *prima donna* [Marietta Piccolomini], lifted up in her arms, and embraced affectionately'.[13] Whether or not Cowen, writing fifty-six years later, was using a little artist licence here or not, this quaint story does set a marker for his future career. The second event was rather more remarkable and significant: in 1860, still only eight years old, Cowen conceived an operetta: *Garibaldi, or The rival patriots*, to a libretto by his cousin Rosalind.[14] Described as 'a Drawing Room Operetta…by H. Frederick Cowen',[15] it was in two acts of five scenes each, with characters Garibaldi (the Italian General), Pietro (his Aide-de-camp), Leopold (the Austrian Commander), Carlo (an Italian Officer), Theresa (an Austrian Lady), and Catherine (her companion and attendant), with a chorus of peasants and soldiers. Garibaldi's heroic actions on behalf of the Italian people had become almost legendary by this time and Cowen was clearly fascinated by him. Indeed, Garibaldi's fame was such that he was invited to Britain by the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland in 1864, where several events were held in his honour. However, as Cowen says in his autobiography: 'The plot had really little or nothing to do with his [Garibaldi's] life or career'.[16] Indeed, the score notes that 'the authoress [Rosalind Cowen] is well aware that Garibaldi is married, and has only made use of his name to give more interest to the plot'.[17] It was duly performed at the 'Juvenile Opera House', according to the programme, on 4 February 1860.[18] In reality this was a private gathering of Cowen's family and friends, his brother and sisters among the performers, and he seated at the piano, in the back drawing-room of his parent's house, 11 Warwick Crescent, Maida Hill, London.[19] Indeed, Cowen's cousin Rosalind was the oldest on the 'stage' aged seventeen.[20] Henry Russell, Cowen's childhood music teacher,

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[13] Ibid., 1.
[14] *MTC*, 714; *NGDMM2C*, 630-2.
[15] The title page of the published score.
[16] *MAMF*, 6.
[17] Note in the published score.
[18] *MTC*, 714.
[19] Cowen 1927, 501.
[20] Note in the published score.

was in attendance and presented Cowen with a silver cup inscribed 'H. FRED$^{K.}$ COWEN A souvenir of the performance of his clever opera Garibaldi from his affectionate friend HENRY RUSSELL Feby. 4th, 1860'.[21] Cowen recalls in his autobiography that this cup 'still remains one of my most cherished possessions'.[22] Cowen's father then paid Boosey & Sons to publish the score. During the aforementioned Garibaldi tour (1864), Garibaldi went to Her Majesty's Theatre for a gala performance of *Lucrezia Borgia*, at which Titiens, Guiglini, Bettelhem and Gassier sang the principal roles.[23] Cowen, still only twelve years old, asked his father (he being connected with the opera-house) whether he might be given the opportunity to give Garibaldi a copy of his operetta in person. His father sought the necessary permission, and on the evening of the concert Cowen was presented to Garibaldi. Cowen recalls:

> I was shown into the hero's box, made my best bow, and handed him an elegant bound copy of my *chef d'oeuvre*. His appearance was very striking...but I cannot now remember whether he wore the celebrated red shirt or was in evening dress. He did not speak English, and I did not understand Italian in those days, so naturally our conversation was limited; but he graciously accepted the book, shook hands with me, and seemed doubtful whether to be the more pleased at seeing his name in large letters on the title-page or amused at a boy's audacity in putting it there.[24]

With the help of the Earl of Dudley, who had heard about Cowen's ambitious operetta, Cowen was placed under the tuition of Julius Benedict (1804-85) and John Goss (1800-80), with whom his future musical career was in safe hands. Cowen returned the favour by dedicating his operetta to Dudley. If fate had not already dealt Cowen a good hand, a further remarkable coincidence should have left no doubt as to the direction that would fascinate him throughout his life: the Cowen residence was, as was observed above, at No. 11 Warwick Crescent at this time, and their next-door-neighbour, at No. 10, was none other than Carl Rosa, the Hamburg-born conductor, violinist, and impresario, with whom Cowen would develop his operatic career!

Cowen's first operatic venture *Garibaldi* tells us little about Cowen the professional composer to come, especially as it was undoubtedly written under the strict supervision of

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[21] *MTC*, 714.
[22] *MAMF*, 5.
[23] Arditi, L., *My Reminiscences* (London: Sheffington and Sons, 1896), 132-3.
[24] *MAMF*, 6.

Henry Russell, and Cowen was too young to have found any voice of his own. Each scene, for the most part, consists of a single aria, duet or chorus, and is in the tradition of the English ballad operas or the German *Singspiel* with spoken dialogue in between each musical number. The music is strongly diatonic with few genuine modulations within a movement.[25] Cowen's arias and duets are little more than English ballads, with perhaps just a touch of the influence of Italian opera, especially in his very occasional melismatic cadenzas for the voices. Further analysis is, frankly, unnecessary, but it does demonstrate the precocious talent and determination of one so young to conceive such a work. However, the realities of professional British opera that Cowen would face having come of age would prove more challenging.

British opera, or, perhaps more correctly, opera in English, had been in a fairly depressing, archaic state almost from the inception of the opera genre in Britain. Indeed, through-composed operas in English had always been uncommon up until about the 1830s/40s.[26] In the eighteenth century, operas were usually based on Italian models,[27] thanks largely to Handel's appearance, which heralded a near complete suppression of pre-existing British operatic taste and the coercing of it into his way of thinking. Indeed, the Purcellian type of semi-opera virtually came to an end with the growth in Handel's Italianate operas, such that by the Victorian era in Britain, through-composed opera was routinely associated with Italian opera. Moreover, opera given without spoken dialogue was habitually done so in Italian.[28] Remarkably, such was the peculiar state of opera in Britain at the time, that many of the non-Italian operas were translated into Italian, and the recitatives were adapted.[29] Even more bizarrely, Balfe was forced to turn his own works into Italian ones.[30] It was not until the 1830s that the first chink in this Italianophilia began to be broken with the first important British

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[25] The overall scheme of the work is tonally closed in the key of C major with a preference for the flat side of the circle of fifths, apart from two movements in the dominant of G major.
[26] Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* is his only manuscript in this form, as is Blow's masque *Venus and Adonis.*
[27] Arne's *Artaxerxes* is an example.
[28] Works by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Auber, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Verdi and Meyerbeer were most common.
[29] Michael Balfe took Beethoven's *Fidelio* and reworked it into Italian in 1851, Michael Costa similarly took Weber's *Der Freischütz* and redrafted it as *Il Franco Arciere* and Julius Benedict did the same to *Oberon.*
[30] Therefore, *Les Quatre Fils Hymon* became *I Quattro Fratelli*, and his *Bohemian Girl*, when given recitatives, became *La Zingara.* Vincent Wallace's *Maritania* was likewise treated by Mattei.

romantic opera, *The Mountain Sylph*, by Barnett. Appearing in 1834, it was practically the first through-composed opera since *Artaxerxes*.[31] By the 1870s, the influence of Gounod, Verdi and Wagner had still yet to seriously cross the Channel. Indeed, the outmoded approaches mentioned above were carried through within the opera-houses themselves. As Gerald Abraham put it: 'Covent Garden was putting on the operas of half a century earlier to the almost complete neglect of contemporary art'.[32] George Bernard Shaw protested vehemently against these antiquated practices: 'I have to sit in our vulgar diamond show at Covent Garden, listening to scratch performances of *Faust* and *Les Huguenots*, whilst Mottl is producing *Les Troyens* in Carlsruhe, Levi conducting *Siegfried* at Munich, and Richter using his left hand at Vienna to conduct *Carmen*, because his right is fatigued with perpetual Wagner'.[33] Even worse, almost all English language operas written before 1880 contained spoken dialogue, a tradition that stretched back to Restoration period.[34] Indeed, when one hears Arthur Hervey's evaluation of 'English' opera at the time, it is a wonder that anyone felt any inclination to even try: 'Opera flourishes amongst us [in "England"] only in the nature of the exotic. It is a delicately nurtured plant which has to be carefully tended, and is only kept alive through artificial means'.[35] E. D. Mackerness observed that in Britain at that time there was a vociferous minority who 'identified opera with idolatry and likened theatrical pleasures to deadly nightshade'.[36] Eduard Hanslick, the music critic, writing in 1886, paints an equally depressing picture of opera in 'England' – Of the Italian opera at Covent Garden he said: 'The repetition of the most hackneyed operas of Bellini, Rossini, and Donizetti, all of which we have heard sung by the finest artists and which are almost exclusively identified with these artists, is absolutely superfluous unless they are

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[31] Balfe followed it four years later with *Falstaff* and six years later again *The Daughter of Saint Mark* (Goddard, C., 'Ivanhoe: Music in the Victorian Theatre before Ivanhoe' in *Webrarian.co.uk* at <http://www.webrarian.co.uk/ivanhoe/ivan02.html> [accessed c. 1 December 2005]).

[32] Abraham, G., *A Hundred Years of Music* (London: Duckworth, n.d.), 194.

[33] Shaw, G. B., cited in Abraham, 194.

[34] This was not unconnected with Elizabethan plays that featured songs and dances; Jacobean masques at Court, which were lavishly produced plays; and Purcell's semi-operas that were plays, but with a substantial musical contribution.

[35] Hervey, A, 'A Chat About Music In Paris' in *Strand Musical Magazine* (ed., Hatzfeld, E.)(London: George Newnes Ltd., 1895), Vol. I, 245.

[36] Mackerness, E. D., *A Social History of English Music* (London, 1964), 187.

performed by brilliant voices and brilliant talents'.[37] Between 1750 and 1830 Arne, Arnold, Dibdin, Storace and Bishop had kept the English ballad opera alive in their light operas, and it was largely maintained by the next generation of Balfe, Benedict and Wallace, through *Bohemian Girl*, *The Lily of Killarney*, and *Maritana*.[38] But Hanslick felt that

> English opera composers have always been small, both in number and talent. English opera itself seemed almost to have become a myth, when, towards the middle of the century, some individual specimens turned up, among which the most successful were Wallace's *Maritana* and Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*. I heard them both in Vienna (with Staudigl) and found them less specifically English than generally trivial.[39]

However, he does acknowledge the attempts to cultivate an 'English' tradition thus:

> In the past few years [1880s] England's national pride in respect to musical creativeness has experienced a reawakening. No longer isolated, but rather in compact groups, English composers are now appearing who have studied in Germany and developed a taste for German music (in contrast to the half-French, half-Italian influences at work in Wallace, Hatton, and Balfe). They have stimulated at home a systematic cultivation of English opera and found in the capable Carl Rosa, a Hamburger by birth, a skilful and energetic impresario.[40]

Cowen was among those trying to do so. He largely turned his back on the antiquated practices of the existing British product as he matured as an opera composer in his own right, directing his attention to continental ways, especially those of Germany, Italy and France, with the intent of formulating a new style of British opera, fusing elements from all three of their respective traditions.

On the continent in the 1820s a new kind of *grand opéra* had emerged,[41] instigated by Rossini and Auber, but attaining its climax in France around the 1830s and 40s through Giacomo Meyerbeer.[42] Taking its lead from the operas of Lully, it took advantage of every potential opportunity for ballets, choruses, and crowd scenes, forsaking stories from ancient history and mythology, in support of plots taken from 'romantic' history, deriving their power from large-scale struggles between people, nations and religious groups. Alongside French *grand*

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[37] Hanslick, E. (transl. & ed. Pleasants, H.), *Music Criticisms (1846-99)*(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), 249.
[38] Goddard, C., 'Ivanhoe: Music in the Victorian Theatre before Ivanhoe' in *Webrarian.co.uk* at <http://www.webrarian.co.uk/ivanhoe/ivan02.html> [accessed c. 1 December 2005].
[39] Hanslick, 254.
[40] Ibid.
[41] This was as a result of the growth of an ever more influential middle class after 1820.
[42] He worked in collaboration with the librettist, Eugène Scribe; the scene designer, Duponchel; and the director of the Académie Royale de Musique, Louis Véron.

opéra ran *opéra comique*, which ultimately differed little from the former, apart from its use of spoken dialogue instead of recitative, its generally less ostentatious intent, and its smaller scale.[43] O*péra bouffe*, which emphasised the clever, humorous, and sardonic elements of comic opera, appeared in the 1860s in Paris, with Jacques Offenbach its central character.[44] There can be little doubt that Cowen's self-declared humorous nature made this form of opera tempting to his musical psyche. As opera in Europe progressed beyond the 1860s, Gounod headed the French operatic movement, established around the *drame lyrique*, and was joined by Ambroise Thomas, and Jules Massenet. They developed a romantic type of comic opera, predominantly melodious, with its subject matter a romantic drama or fantasy. This again made a very palatable formula for Cowen's muse. Georges Bizet followed on the back of these advances, and did much to further the cause of 'operatic realism', especially in his *Carmen*. Other Frenchmen worthy of mention are Camille Saint-Saëns, best now remembered operatically for his *Samson et Dalila*, and Hector Berlioz, whose grand dramas and operas often defy conventional classifications.[45] In Italy, Gioacchino Rossini, with his distinctive talent for melody and a gift for stage effect, was at the forefront of that nation's operatic activity at the start of the nineteenth century, followed by Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini, developing i) new character stereotypes (the heroic tenor and the villainous, fatherly or rivalry baritone), ii) an increasing propensity toward tragic endings, and iii) arias with introductory *scenas* becoming longer and with more action. After them came Verdi, who rejected the increasing German influences of romanticised nature and mythological symbolism, in preference to simple, direct, vocal solo melody. He remoulded Italian opera, taking the tradition of Rossini and making it less formal, with more elaborate moments of dramatic action (that he learnt from French opera), and a greater degree of motivic

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[43] *Opéra comique* can be subdivided into romantic and comic sub-genres, the former relying on romantic plot, and melodious, graceful, and sentimental music, whilst the latter type was rather more sarcastic in its humour. The English ballad opera and German Singspiel shared many similarities with *opéra comique*, including their use of the language of the audience, their commerciality (in the sense that they were supported by a largely anonymous audience, not a patron), and in their use of the spoken word between numbers.

[44] His work influenced both Arthur Sullivan in England and the Strauss family in Vienna.

[45] Grout, D. J. and Palisca, C. V., *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), 725-31; Dahlhaus, C. (transl. Bradford Robinson, J.), *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 124-5, 226-36, 276-83; Greenspan, C., 'Opera' in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (ed. Randel, D. M.)(Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 565-6.

development, unifying recitative and aria in order to discard the well-defined dichotomy between them. He achieved a near total musico-dramatic continuity within an act, accomplished by cunning transitions, a flexible flow of melody, and the conjunctive faculty of the orchestra. However, he never totally escaped the concept of the Italian 'number' or 'singers' opera'. He favoured *libretti* that dealt with fights against individual or state oppression, giving preference to confrontational duets over arias. Yet, his music retained the overriding importance of melody – an essential Italian characteristic.[46] For Cowen, with his confessed liking for melody, these Italian approaches no doubt appealed.

German opera at the beginning of the nineteenth century was, for the most part, in the form of Singspiel, with librettos that showed an interest in folk, nature and the supernatural. At its head were Beethoven, Louis Spohr, E. T. A. Hoffman, Carl Maria von Weber, and Heinrich August Marschner. Weber attempted to forge a new form of grand opera from the Singspiel tradition in his *Euryanthe*, although he was not wholly successful. It was left to Richard Wagner to solve the remaining challenges. Wagner was, as Nietzsche remarked, a 'theatromaniac', fanatical in his pursuit of a revolution of aesthetic values in opera, transforming it into music drama, where all the elements of the work: music, libretto, drama, stage presentation and costumes, come together to form a total work of art. His charisma exercised an immense fascination over European musicians in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, causing both the veneration and loathing of musicians and audiences alike. Some composers knowingly strived not to mimic him. However, no musician seems to have been completely free of his spell, drawn towards his approach to operatic drama, his technique of leitmotives, and his avoidance of small musical units – ends of phrases were concealed by avoiding predictable cadences, and arias and ensembles were fused into the run of the action or substituted by expressive arioso.[47] As will be seen, these powerful Germanic forces were an irresistible temptation for Cowen.

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[46] Grout and Palisca, 731-40; Dahlhaus, 206-16; Greenspan, 'Opera', 566.
[47] Grout and Palisca, 741-8; Dahlhaus, 195-206; Greenspan, 'Opera', 566.

4. Operas and Stage Works

In Britain, while serious opera may have been in a poor state of affairs, the ever-expanding Victorian entertainment industry provided an explosion in the theatre, music hall, comic opera, ballet, pantomime, the pageant and the circus. Arthur Sullivan's Savoy operas, which were to bring him much fame, were born of this upsurge.[48] As will be shown, Cowen also dabbled into these lighter forms of entertainment several times during his career, although one suspects that he would have regarded them as diversions from his more serious work, whilst allowing him to indulge in his own self-professed sense of humour. The established philosophy of the Victorian age was sensible and pragmatic, with the arts regarded, at best, as a luxury, at worst, contaminated with eighteen-century profligacy and aristocratic overindulgence. Art was perceived as having, for the most part, a decorative and functional role. Indeed, Art music, and especially opera, was more and more seen as alien—foreigners composed music, and had a monopoly of its performance. This was further underlined with the arrival of Hans Richter in England in 1879, who treated his audiences to significant doses of Beethoven, Weber and Wagner. A lot of German opera was subsequently done at Drury Lane. Moreover, whereas an opera production on the continent bestowed a positive standing on a composer, a comparable production in Britain would never confer such a status. The rich and aristocratic kept their musical culture closeted for the most part, except for occasional outings to the Philharmonic Society Concerts and the Italian opera in London; the middle-classes indulged in domestic music-making; and the masses had their music-halls. However, as Lewis Foreman exalts:

> This was the time during which British music as a recognisable entity grew in stature and depth of repertoire, and even [in the 1880s]...appear works that we are now beginning to know again in performance. At this time we can see a self-consciously national art slowly emerging – largely in the work of a small number of composers – and with it the capability of a later generation to mature into the many highly individual musical voices of a growing tradition.[49]

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[48] His deftness of orchestration, combined with a mastery of pastiche and parody of composers from Handel through to Verdi, Donizetti and Wagner, found an outlet and created a style that is uniquely British. But, while Sullivan cornered a particular market, there was another group of listeners that demanded something more substantive and taxing. Indeed, from Queen Victoria downwards, people urged him to concentrate his efforts in more 'serious' music, but when he did, the results were rarely totally satisfactory; Sullivan was not the man to provide the spark of the British operatic renaissance.

[49] Foreman, L., *Music in England: 1885-1920* (London: Thames Publishing, 1994), 24.

Indeed, without the exploits of the impresario Carl Rosa and his Opera Company, British opera would have practically not have existed. Before his death in 1889, Rosa and his organisation were pivotal in promoting British composers and performers, producing specially commissioned works by Goring Thomas, Mackenzie, Stanford, Corder and Cowen, as well as giving foreign operas in the vernacular. After his death, Rosa's successor Augustus Harris and his descendants continued to commission new British works in the 1890s, including from Cowen and MacCunn, but with perhaps not as much conviction as in Rosa's time. However, even in Rosa's day, the company packed the bulk of its performances with continental works. Indeed, by whetting the appetites of his audiences for continental repertory in translation, Rosa inadvertently quenched their taste for the new home-grown music. On the other hand, his ethos of touring regularly in the provinces did much good to forward the operatic cause outside the nation's capital.

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 (Choral Works 1), composers often found themselves pressured or coerced into collaborating with the leading music critics of the day to provide the *libretti* for their cantatas and oratorios, Francis Hueffer and Joseph Bennett being the principal protagonists. Unfortunately, Britain was equally devoid of opera librettists, and so the same men found themselves in the advantageous position of being able to monopolise the *libretti* of most of the British operas penned during this period. Mackenzie decried this state of affairs, but found himself virtually powerless to buck the system, ending up with Hueffer for his two largest early projects (*Colomba* [1883] and *The Troubadour* [1886]), until the 1890s. Cowen was equally contemptuous of the situation, but managed to avoid the likes of Bennett and Hueffer, except for his collaboration with the former on *Thorgrim*.

Whilst the environment for the composition of music in British theatre land, especially in the lighter forms, seemed favourable enough for an up and coming native composer in the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century, the milieu for the serious British opera composer was anything but promising. As we have seen, lacking a serious 'modern' operatic tradition in Britain was Cowen's first stumbling block: British works had, almost throughout

their history, been old-fashioned, and audiences were too conservative to explore many of the new innovations on the continent. However, Cowen, apparently undaunted, took up these challenges producing works small and large, from incidental music to plays, ballets, comedy operas, operettas, up to full-scale four act operas.

Table 1: A list of Cowen's Operas and Other Stage Works

Date	Title	Cowen's genre title	Librettist(s)	First Performance	Principal Soloist(s) at First Performance	Notes
1860	*Garibaldi, or The Rival Patriots*	Operetta (2 Acts)	Rosalind Cowen	4.ii.1860, 'Juvenile Opera House', 11 Warwick Crescent, Maida Hill, London [Cowen's childhood home		dedic: Earl of Dudley, pub. Boosey & Sons, London (1860)
1871	*The Maid of Orleans* ['Joan of Arc']	Incidental Music	(after Schiller)	ii.1871, Brighton Festival		unpub.
1874	*One Too Many*	Comedietta	Francis Cowley Burnand	24.vi.1874, St George's Hall, London	Alfred Reed, R. Corney Grain, Leonora Braham, Arthur Law, and MrsGerman Reed	pub. Joseph Williams, London (1898)
1876	*Pauline*	Opera (4 Acts)	Henry Hersee, after Bulwer Lytton 'The Lady of Lyons'	22.xi.1876, Lyceum, London	Julia Gaylord, Josephine Yorke, and Charles Santley	pub. London (1876)
1890	*Thorgrim*	Opera (4 Acts)	Joseph Bennett, after the Icelandic 'Viglund the Fair'	22.iv.1890, Drury Lane, London	Zelie De Lussan, Tremelli, Kate Drew, Barton McGluckin Leslie Crotty, Celli, Max Euguene, Somers	dedic: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (son of Queen Victoria, later King Edward VII), pub. Novello, Ewer & Co, London & New York (1890)
1893	*Signa*	Opera (composed in 4 Acts, reduced to 3 Acts for f.p., later 2 Acts at Covent Garden, London, 30.vi.1894)	Gilbert A A'Beckett, HA Rudall, Fred. E. Weatherly, after Ouida (Ital. transl. GA Mazzucato)	12.xi.1893, Teatro dal Verme, Milan	Unknown	dedic: H.M. Queen Victoria, pub. E Ascherberg & Co, London (1894, 2 Act vers. only)
1895	*Harold, or The Norman Conquest*	Opera (4 Acts)	Sir Edward Malet, Fred. E. Weatherly, Germ. adaption by LA Caumont	8.vi.1895, Covent Garden, London	Albani, Meisslinger, Brozel, David Bispham, Devers, Jacques Bars, and Richard Green	pub. Joseph Williams, London (1895)
1917	*Monica's Blue Boy*	Pantomime - 'A musical playlet without words'	synopsis by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero	1917, New Theatre, London		incomplete autog. MS: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS.Mus.b.45
1918	*Cupid's Conspiracy* [orig. entitled 'The Dancing Lesson']	Comedy Ballet		31.xii.1917, Coliseum, London	Lydia Kyasirt	autog. MS: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS.Mus.b.45
1918?	*The Spirit of Carnival*	Operetta [unfinished?]	Unknown			autog. MS: Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS.Mus.b.45
1921	*Comedy-Opera*	Opera (3 Acts)	Unknown			autog. MS: BL Add. MS 52426
1922	*The Enchanted Cottage*	Incidental Music	Sir Arthur Wing Pinero	1922, Duke of York's, London		autog. MS [complete?]: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS.Mus.b.45

February 1871 saw the production of Cowen's first Festival commission – *The Maid of Orleans*, incidental music on the subject of St. Joan of Arc, as conceived by Schiller (consisting of an overture, two entre'actes and a march) at Wilhelm Kuhe's Brighton Festival.[50] Not only was it Cowen's first Festival commission, it was the first commission made by Kuhe at Brighton. Kuhe says that Cowen's *The Maid of Orleans* was a work in which 'every page…was marked by grace, the facility of expression, and the beauty of orchestral effect which has distinguished every composition with which he has since enriched our musical art. The work, which he conducted himself, met with the greatest possible success'.[51] Indeed, it was good enough to warrant the publication of the 'Grand March' and 'Serenade' movements as piano solos, but unfortunately the suite of orchestral movements was never published. *The Eastern Daily Press* at the Norwich Festival on 21 September 1875, when Cowen conducted a performance of the 'Serenade in F' and the 'Triumphal March in A' wrote that 'the…Serenade…, which is gracefully conceived and very pretty…[and]…the other [which] was…vigorous…, was brilliantly played and much applauded'.[52] Whilst described as incidental music, it is not actually clear whether the score was ever intended to accompany a play on the theme, like Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or merely as an orchestral suite, meant to portray musically the events in the life of the saint. If the latter is the case, then the classification among the stage works, recorded by successive editions of the *Grove Dictionary* and elsewhere, would be incorrect, and it should be included among the orchestral works.

Cowen's *One Too Many* of 1874, a comedietta for the German Reed Company, which was first performed at St George's Hall, London on 24 June 1874,[53] was actually for a theatre production entitled *Too Many By One*. With the following cast: Alfred Reed, 'Mr Hazelagh'; R.

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[50] Brown, J. D., and Stratton, S. S., *British Musical Biography* (Birmingham, 1897)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273); *MEM*, 190.
[51] Kuhe, W., *My Musical Recollections* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1896), 344.
[52] *The Eastern Daily Press* [Norwich], 22 September 1875; Legge, R. H., and Hansell, W. E., *Annals of the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festivals 1824 to 1893* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1896), 209.
[53] *MTC*, 717; Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273). Gänzl lists the performance date as 29 June (Gänzl, K., *The British Musical Theatre* (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1986), Vol. 1, 85).

Corney Grain, 'Ferdinand Browne' and 'Edgar Poldoddle'; Leonora Braham, 'Bertha Florinda'; Arthur Law, 'Dr Gell, M.D.'; and Mrs German Reed, 'Florinda Paulena Prior',[54] it ran as part of a nightly triptych together with *He's coming* and *A Day in Town* until it was withdrawn on 18 July 1874, but was later revived on 26 December 1874 alongside productions of *The Three Tenants* and *The Enchanted Piano*, before being withdrawn again on 23 January 1875.[55] Only a selection of items from the work was published in vocal score. This consisted of an introduction, trio – 'O lovely maiden' (for Ferdinand, Bertha and Hazeleigh), song – 'I sing of thee' (for Poldodle), duet – 'I hope you understand' (for Miss Prior and Poldodle), song – 'Love's words are softly spoken' (for Bertha), and the finale – 'If whist I quite forget' (for Bertha, Miss Prior, Ferdinand and Mr Hazeleigh). Another song, a serenade: 'Wake in all thy beauty', was published separately. The librettist Francis Cowley Burnand (1836-1917) was very much of the Savoy school having collaborated with Sullivan at the start of his career on *Cox and Box* and *The Contrabandista.* However, Selwyn Tillett said that Burnand's plots mostly 'creaked' and that his lyric verses were 'complex, over-clever, and frequently unsettable'.[56] Whilst the details of Burnand's play seem to have been lost and the vocal score provides no idea of the plot, the involvement of Burnand, the 'comedietta' inscription, and the music therein, all point towards a short comedy opera/operetta akin to Sullivan's Savoy operas, with light numbers separated by spoken dialogue. Indeed, Spencer and Burton said that *One Too Many* demonstrated 'a felicitous, light, sure touch';[57] Dibble agreed stating that 'the diminutive canvas…has a charm and subtlety that befits Cowen's natural sense of wit'.[58] From the evidence of the published numbers, if Cowen had found his own regular Gilbert, to match these Sullivanesque exploits, he could have made a career in this field. Unfortunately, despite his well-recognised sense of humour, it was as a serious composer that he wanted to be remembered and to which he concentrated most of his efforts. Indeed, it is

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[54] Gänzl, 85-6.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Tillett, S., '"His Majesty" or, the Dead End of Comic Opera', in *Mirette and His Majesty: A Study of Two Savoy Operas* (Coventry: The Sir Arthur Sullivan Society, 1996), 29.
[57] Spencer, J., and Burton, N., 'Cowen, Sir Frederick [*sic*] Hymen' in *Grove Music Online* (ed. Macy, L.) at <http://www.grovemusic.com> [accessed 6 January 2007].
[58] *NGDMM2C*, 631.

apparent that he was already well-advanced in his plans, prior to the production of *One Too Many*, to move from the Savoy to the serious.

In the autumn of 1873, with two or three months free from his duties at the Mapleson opera, Cowen took the opportunity to fulfil his wish to see Italy, accompanied by his father,[59] ostensibly to seek out an Italian libretto for an opera on the subject of Bulwer Lytton's *Lady of Lyons.*[60] Lytton's play *The Lady of Lyons or Love and Pride* of 1838 is about ethical principles that are unobjectionable (love overcomes pride, and nobility the weakness of temptation). It was a perennial favourite in Victorian theatres, prized by all the great actresses of the age—Laura Keene, Ellen Terry, Mary Andereson and Lily Langtry. Set in Lyons and its neighbourhood between 1795-8, it is a romantic comedy of courtship that tells the story of the proud Pauline Deschappelles, daughter of a merchant of Lyons, and her rival suitors, the post-revolution marquis, Beauseant, and the self-educated gardener's son, Claude Melnotte.[61] Lytton says in his preface that the play is 'an indistinct recollection of the very pretty little tale, called *The Bellows-Mender*...The incidents are, however, greatly altered from those in the tale, and the characters entirely re-cast'.[62] The play was first performed on 15 February 1838 at the Covent Garden

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[59] *Jewish World*, 24 October 1873.

[60] *MAMF*, 67, 237; *Jewish World*, 5 December 1873. Born Edward Bulwer in 1803, he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and began writing to finance an extravagant lifestyle as a man of fashion. He was Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1858. For forty years he was known as Bulwer, for twenty-two as Bulwer-Lytton (having added his mother's surname on inheriting Knebworth), and the last seven as Lord Lytton, after he was elevated to the peerage in 1866 for his achievements as novelist, playwright and statesman. He died in 1873. His work expresses some of the most significant intellectual themes of his day: good and evil, freedom and despotism, egoism and altruism, life affirmation and the power of will. He was influenced both by Schiller and Goethe. His novel of thirteenth-century Italy, *Rienzi*, inspired Wagner's opera (Moore, J. S., 'Bulwer-Lytton' in *John S. Moore's Web-site* at <http://www.mith.demon.co.uk/Bulwer.htm> [accessed c. 15 September 2006]).

[61] The original characters in the play are: 'Beauseant', a rich gentleman of Lyons, in love with, and refused by, Pauline Deschappelles; 'Glavis', his friend, also a rejected suitor to Pauline; 'Colonel (later General) Damas', cousin to Madame Deschappelles, and an officer in the French army; 'Monsieur Deschappelles', a Lyonnese merchant, father to Pauline; 'Gaspar'; 'Claude Melnotte'; 'Madame Deschappelles', 'Pauline', her daughter; 'The Widow Melnotte', mother to Claude; 'Janet', the innkeeper's daughter; 'Marian', maid to Pauline; three officers (Captain Gervais, Captain Dupont and Major Desmoulines), servants and a notary.

[62] 'The Lady of Lyons, Edward Bulwer Lytton' in *Project Gutenberg: online book catalogue*, at <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext01/ladyl11.txt> [accessed c. 15 September 2006]. He added: Having long had a wish to illustrate certain periods of the French history, so, in selection of the date in which the scenes of this play are laid, I saw that the era of the Republic was that in which the incidents were rendered most probable, in which the probationary career of the hero could well be made sufficiently rapid for dramatic effect, and in which the character of the time itself was depicted by the agencies necessary to the conduct of the narrative. For during the early years of the first and most brilliant successes of the French Republic, in the general ferment of society, and the brief equalization of ranks, Claude's high-placed love; his ardent feelings, his unsettled principles (the struggle

Theatre, London. Cowen's idea to compose an opera on this theme seems to date back to at least 1869: he had written to the author himself seeking permission to use his story, but Lytton replied: 'Nothing can induce me to consent to your turning the "Lady of Lyons" into an opera'.[63] However, following Lytton's death and just before going to Italy, Cowen obtained permission from Lytton's son, then Ambassador in Paris, to proceed with the project.[64] He was eventually recommended an Italian poet to write the libretto by the editor of *Il Trovatore*,[65] and they set to work on the opera straightway. Cowen writes shortly afterwards that 'the more I look over the *Lady of Lyons*, the more I feel what a splendid subject it is, and if I can only write music to it according to my feelings, the opera *must* be successful'.[66] But the librettist's final product was 'absolutely useless: the plot was badly put together, turned into a comedy-opera, and the language bore about the same resemblance to poetry that Dr Watts does to Shakespeare. Of course, I had to take and pay him the amount stipulated for (fortunately, not an exorbitant one)'.[67] Returning back to Britain empty-handed, and after some further time, Cowen turned to Henry Hersee to set about the task of writing the libretto.[68] Hersee pruned back the *dramatis personae* to the central characters of Pauline Deschappelles (sop), Madame Deschappelles (sop), Widow Melnotte (cont), Claude Melnotte (bar), Beauseant (bar), Glavis (ten) and Monsieur Deschapelles (bass), dividing the story up into 20 scenes spread over four acts (see appendices). The production of *Pauline* was instigated at the behest of Carl Rosa who wished to promote English opera, and for whom it was his first British opera commission. He had formed the Carl Rosa Opera Company the previous year with the intention of resurrecting some of the well-known works of Balfe, Wallace and Benedict, and commissioning new works from the younger generation of British composers, as well as performing the standard Italian, German and French

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between which makes the passion of this drama), his ambition, and his career, were phenomena that characterized the age, and in which the spirit of the nation went along with the extravagance of the individual (Ibid.).

[63] *MAMF*, 67, 238.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *MEM*, 200.

[66] Ibid., 201.

[67] *MAMF*, 67, 233-9.

[68] Ibid., 239, 241.

operas in English translations.[69] Cowen completed the entire work for Rosa, in four acts, in a little over two months and it was first staged at the Lyceum Theatre, London on 22 November 1876, with Rosa conducting,[70] and with the principal roles allocated thus: 'Pauline Deschapelles' (soprano) – Julia Gaylord, 'Widow Melnotte' (contralto) – Josephine Yorke, and 'Claude Melnotte' (baritone) – Santley, who, Cowen says 'expressed a strong wish to sing the part'.[71]

The *Jewish Chronicle* was glowing in its praise, stating that it had been 'an unqualified success. Mr Cowen was called before the curtain at the close of each act, and twice summoned to appear in the final call of the curtain. The audience was numerous, and comprised many celebrities of the literary and musical worlds'.[72] The *Musical Times* was equally complimentary in its admiration:

> Should Mr Cowen estimate his success by the applause with which his Opera was greeted throughout, he will indeed be proud of his position as an English composer, for the delight of the auditors knew no bounds. After every act he was called on and literally overwhelmed with applause. All the vocalists, too, the author of the *libretto*, and the conductor (Mr Carl Rosa), came in for a share of the honours of the evening, and bouquets were thrown upon the stage in such profusion that the singers at last began to look upon them with utter indifference, and scarcely deigned to pick them up.[73]

Clarke in the *Athenaeum* said that Cowen was 'the coming composer, the most able representative of our native talent'.[74] However, once the first night storm had died down, a more critical assessment would take place. Cowen says that

> it did not meet with the success I had so ardently hoped for, and after a few performances in London, and later in some of the provincial towns, it ceased to hold a place in the company's repertoire. This was through no fault of Rosa's. The work had been carefully prepared and rehearsed (he conducted it for me himself); the *mise en scène*, orchestra, and chorus were as good as one could wish for; and the cast included some of the best singers in his company.[75]

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[69] Scholes, P. A., *The Mirror of Music: 1844-1944*, 2 vols. (London: Novello & Company Limited and Oxford University Press, 1947), I, 233.
[70] Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).
[71] *MAMF*, 240.
[72] *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 November 1876.
[73] Scholes, I, 270.
[74] *Athenaeum*, 25 November 1876.
[75] *MAMF*, 239-40.

Overleaf is a table that summarises Cowen's structural plan for his opera *Pauline*, identifying the overall structure in terms of acts and movements; their type, i.e. recitatives, arias, solos, scenas, choruses, duets, trios or quartets; and the overall harmonic scheme:

Table 2: Cowen's Plan for 'Pauline'

Act No.	Scene No.	Type of scene	Characters involved in singing	Title	Key Structure
I					**D flat/B flat to a**
	1	Introduction			D flat/B flat to B flat
	2	Chorus	Chorus of Villagers SATB	Claude is our Prince	D to G
	3	Song	Claude	One Kind Glance	D to D
	4	Recit. and Duo	Widow Melnotte & Claude	The love a tender mother	e to D flat D flat to D flat
	5	Trio	Glavis, Beauseant & Claude	Revenge, Revenge	a to a
II					**E flat to B flat**
	6	Chorus and Ballet	Chorus SATB	How bright are the blossoms	E flat to B flat
	7	Sestett	Pauline, Mme. Desch., Beauseant, Glavis, Claude & Mons. Desch.	Dear Prince, thy ring shall ever be	G to G
	8	Song	Claude	Inez was beautiful	a to A
	9	Duo	Claude & Pauline	A Palace lifting to eternal summer	B flat to A
	10	Song	Glavis	Love has wings	G to G
	11	Chorus	Chorus of Guests SATB, Pauline, Mme. Desch., Glavis, Beauseant, Claude & Mons. Desch.	Health and long life	F to B flat
III					**e to B**
	12	Introduction and Song	Widow Melnotte	From its mother's nest	e to e e to E
	13	Dialogue (accomp.)			A to A flat
	14	Duo	Claude & Pauline	Now, lady, hear me	A flat to F
	15	Duo	Pauline & Beauseant	Beauty like thine	g to g
	16	Finale	Pauline, Mme. Desch., Widow Melnotte, Glavis, Beauseant, Claude, Mons. Desch. & Chorus SATB		g to B
IV					**F to G flat**
	17	Entr'acte			F to F
	18	Recit. And Air	Pauline	Bright dreams too swiftly vanished	b flat to e flat E flat to E flat
	19	Chorus	Chorus of Bridesmaids SA, Chorus of Guests SATB & Pauline	Blooming and bright	G flat to G flat
	20	Finale	Claude, Pauline, Mme. Desch., Mons. Desch., Chorus of Bridesmaids SA & Chorus of Guests SATB		B flat to G flat

Cowen's first venture into full-scale opera was not going to break entirely the mould of a long-standing tradition of English opera, and so *Pauline* was formulated along lines linking it back to the English ballad opera tradition, following the method of his predecessors: Balfe, Wallace, Macfarren, and his own master Benedict, with set piece numbers (often written in simple strophic ballad style) divided by spoken dialogue. Indeed, Cowen underlines his acknowledgement of its connection with this tradition by choosing to call most of his solo arias

'songs'. However, the music itself, whilst not devoid of English balladry: No.3 'One Kind Glance' resembles many of that species of song that twenty-first century audiences and musicologists condemn in equal numbers, the style of melody and accompaniment in many other places shows the influence of Italian opera, as does the presence of sung recitatives (in addition to the spoken dialogue). However, here, as with the rest of his vocal output, Cowen is not prone to melismatic setting of texts. Each act has at least one chorus, a set piece song or aria for one of the principals, and a movement involving multiple solo voices (indeed, there are duets, trios and a sextet). Cowen's duets here, as elsewhere, typically involve a quantity of solo work for each voice, before some antiphonal interplay between the voices and then their final singing together. Cowen does not seem to have conceived a specific tonal plan for the opera,[76] but the work is highly melodic with plenty of Italianate *cantabile* singing, using, for the most part, uncomplicated simple time signatures in preference to compound ones. Apart from the clearly defined orchestral set pieces, the instrumental role is primarily one of accompaniment, often of repeated figurations (there are many arpeggiated figurations suggestive of the harp), sometimes with doubling of the vocal line or introducing countermelodies, but more often than not without. Elsewhere, the orchestra provides tremolo effects and chordal accompaniments in the recitative-like passages. Indeed, there are very few moments where the voices seem to be superimposed upon the orchestral texture, excepting a few bars in 'Health and long life'. The chorus, while not given a great deal to do, more or less fulfil a *turba* function as a chorus of villagers in act one, interacting with Claude, but they are there more to set the scene than advance the plot. In act two their 'How bright are their blossoms' is an accompaniment to the ballet, and they have no plot advancing function. As 'guests' in 'Health and long life' and in acts three and four, they again appear to have a *turba* role, but there is little interaction between them and the principal characters, and ultimately they just provide background comment and atmosphere to the scene. Compared with some of Cowen's later operas and many of his

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[76] The two middle acts rise a fifth from their opening to their closing keys, and the first and last acts resolve a semitone away from their starting point.

picturesque choral works, the plot demanded rather less musical opportunities for large-scale set-piece scenes with armies of extras. Indeed, the work is about the love and trust between two people and those around them, played out on a personal level, without the weight of whole nations and peoples resting on their shoulders; thus the mainstay of the work's drama is carried by the principals, most of whom have significant solo work. Therefore, the French grand opera influence is fairly minimal, apart from the inclusion of a short ballet scene. However, if there is any French stimulus in *Pauline*, it may come from the *drame lyrique*, with its predominantly melodious romantic type of comic opera. This may explain Nigel Burton's assertion that *Pauline* was written under the 'influence of Gounod and Ambrose Thomas'.[77] The title-role of Pauline is interesting in that she does not feature in a singing capacity until the act two, nor does she have a significant aria of her own until the final act, whereas the leading man, Claude, is rarely off the stage for long. Indeed, the opera could have equally been called 'Claude'. This opera is, at the last, a love story. In fact, as will be shown, all of Cowen's operas are ultimately love stories (tragic or triumphant), a trend that will also be observed in Cowen's secular cantatas in the chapter 5 (Choral Works 1). Indeed, it is a consistent strand of his secular story-telling, regardless of the plot's historical, mythological or *verismo* foundations, that the emphasis of the *libretti* and Cowen's music is on the relationship between the two principal protagonists. For *Pauline*, the *anagnorisis* of the story is at that point at which Pauline Deschapelles realises that having married Claude Melnotte and fallen in love with him, he has won her hand under the pretence of being a nobleman, when in reality he is a poor peasant. The *peripeteia* of the plot is perhaps that, despite her high social status and beauty, and the fact that she has already evaded the desires of several more eligible suitors, Pauline refuses to desert him when the truth is revealed. Claude redeems himself by his military bravery, and, with his honour thus restored, a *catharsis* is achieved.

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[77] Burton, N., 'Opera: 1865-1914' in *The Romantic Era: 1800-1914* (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 344.

Cowen is probably correct in citing *Pauline's* downfall to unwillingness of the public to accept a baritone rather than a tenor singing the part of the hero or romantic lover,[78] as these stereotypical ideas had now become fairly entrenched. Indeed, Cowen followed this convention in practically every other choral or stage work that he wrote. Santley, the aforementioned baritone in the original production, accepted some of the blame for his part in the opera's failure:

> When Cowen first imparted to me the subject he proposed to adopt for his opera, I advised him against it, and, if it were intended that I should take part in it, to choose rather *Daddy Hardacre* (another of Fred Robson's great impersonations), adapted from 'La fille de l'avare'. In this I could see my way to be of great assistance to him, which I could not in 'The Lady of Lyons', unless he could make a good part of *Colonel Damas*. But the *Colonel* was to be eliminated, and consequently I also.
>
> Before Cowen had proceeded far with his work, a difficulty arose about who could be entrusted with the part of *Claude Melnotte*. I, in an unlucky moment, stepped into the breach and offered to undertake the part, if the composer felt prepared to suit the music to my means; my offer was accepted. If I had been stirred by ambition my subsequent regret would have been on my own account; as it was not ambition, but pure desire to be of service to one whom I had known from a baby, almost, and for whom I always entertained sincere regard and admiration, my sole regret was that my service was so indifferently rendered...I imagined that, with my experience on the stage [since his success at Covent Garden in 1860 playing 'Clifford' in Balfe's *The Puritan's Daughter*] I should not meet with any difficulty in portraying a presentable 'Claude'. I made the mistake of 'counting my chickens before they were hatched' in this instance...a decided failure my impersonation proved.[79]

However, Santley felt that he was 'hampered by the compiler of the libretto, who tried to improve Bulwer Lytton, without success; and my *Pauline*, who was not fitted for the melodramatic heroine. I was perfectly satisfied with my musical part, it fitted me "like a glove"; I was totally dissatisfied with my dramatic part, I felt like "a bull in a china shop", and quite believed I looked like one'.[80] Cowen, like Santley, found fault with Hersee's libretto in that he 'had mixed up a good deal of the author's poetical, if sometimes stilted, language with his own rather commonplace verses...the mixture of the two styles was in many places very incongruous, and it would probably have been better if the librettist had kept entirely to his own poetry,

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[78] *MAMF*, 240.
[79] Santley, C., *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: Pitman and Sons Ltd., 1909), 130-1.
[80] Ibid.

however feeble, and left Bulwer Lytton's alone'.[81] A leading London newspaper took a similar, if more satirical, stance:

> Mr Hersee, with superfluous precaution, hides himself as much as possible under Lord Lytton's theatrical cloak; even to the extent of taking 'less than a fourth' of his book from the play. The result is a curiously laminated structure resembling those products of the confectioner's art from which Masters Sandford and Merton receive a lesson in geological strata while impairing their digestion. Now, Lytton flashes upon us with a splendour equal, at least, to that of Dutch metal; above him rests the more solid and less pretentious mass of Hersee, in turn surmounted by a layer of Lytton, and so on, till the apex – all Hersee – is attained.[82]

It is difficult to disagree with Willeby's contention that Cowen's composition of *Pauline* in a little less than two months was at the root cause of its downfall.[83] Indeed, he felt that many of the good thoughts therein were 'rudely, crudely, even indelicately' expressed.[84] Cowen acknowledges that there were some 'defects' in his music, but adds that 'at least...it was spontaneous and melodious'.[85] Cowen does not elaborate on what he thought the flaws in his score were, but, like much of the rest of his beautifully crafted music, genuinely impassioned moments are too infrequent and rarely satisfactorily brought off. R. A. Streatfeild concluded that *Pauline* had 'failed completely',[86] and this view has prevailed in most assessments since. However, Nigel Burton thought *Pauline* was a 'sentimental and unproblematic opera'.[87] He added that 'there is a youthful freshness about *Pauline* which...touches it with distinction...a credible heroine, whose love for her husband really does shine through her music, making her archetypal of Victorian womanhood'.[88]

Pauline, therefore, represents Cowen's first tentative steps into the precarious world of opera, relying on the English ballad opera tradition as his starting point, but imbuing his creation with elements that he had learnt for his time with the Mapleson Opera Company, and from his study of Italian and French opera. Indeed, while the seriousness of the subject-matter is

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[81] *MAMF*, 241.
[82] Ibid.
[83] *MEM*, 204.
[84] Ibid.
[85] *MAMF*, 241-2.
[86] Streatfeild, R. A., *The Opera* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1897), 320.
[87] Burton 1981, 344.
[88] Ibid.

justifiable enough reason for Cowen's designation of 'opera', it is also clear, as Burton observes, that '*Pauline* exemplifies Cowen's lightest stylistic vein, in which mild French chromaticisms support Italianate melodic lines'.[89] Therefore, the nature of much of the music is more akin to the label 'operetta'. When one bears in mind that Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was given its first cyclic performance at Bayreuth (conducted by Hans Richter and under Wagner's supervision) on 13-17 August of the same year [1876], the dichotomy between Cowen's work and the new approaches from Germany could not be more marked. But, for a still young composer of twenty-four it was a more than respectable first outing in the genre. As Burton said: 'Although only partially successful during its initial run it merits revival as an exquisite period piece'.[90] Rosa did approach Cowen to revise the opera and rewrite the part of Claude for tenor, but after a short time Cowen abandoned the idea as 'it would have been almost as easy to write an entirely new work'.[91] Rosa was most unhappy with Cowen's decision not to continue with the reworking, as an agreement had been signed to that effect. Rosa instituted legal proceedings against Cowen, and only after Cowen agreed to give him the copyright of a couple of songs was the matter dropped, although their relationship remained strained for some years.[92] Cowen himself thought that if the opera had been cast in a 'more modern shape – that is, without dialogue – it might have had a fair chance of holding its own among the lighter operatic works of that period'.[93] However, despite its various faults, five items from the opera were issued as songs: 'Bright Dreams too swiftly vanished', 'From his Mother's Nest', 'Inez was Beautiful', 'Love has Wings', and 'One Kind Glance'.

The fact that Cowen did not return to the opera genre for over a decade may suggest that his dissatisfaction with *Pauline* and its reception was rather more humbling than his own writings suggest. However, having fallen out with Rosa, Cowen had few other immediate

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[89] Burton, N., 'Pauline' in *Grove Music Online* (ed. Macy, L.) at <http://www.grovemusic.com> [accessed 6 January 2007].
[90] Ibid.
[91] *MAMF*, 242.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 241-2.

opportunities for the production of such a work. Indeed, even when chances did arrive in the 1890s, the process of putting on an opera proved barely easier than it had been in the 1870s. While Cowen's three operas from the 1890s – *Thorgrim* (1890), *Signa* (1893) and *Harold* (1895) are based on very different types of themes: mythical, *verismo* and historical respectively, they possess many common denominators, and so they shall be examined together, preceded by a brief history of each to place them in context. Reference will then be made to Cowen's *The Dream of Endymion*, a Scena for tenor and orchestra, a work that, while it is not operatic, exemplifies Cowen's approach to the writing of scenas within his operatic and choral output. Finally, a brief synopsis of Cowen's later stage pieces will be given.

* * * * *

Cowen wrote to Joseph Bennett on 4 November 1887 hoping that the latter would search out a new idea for a collaboration together: 'Do not forget to look up a subject for me very soon. I am really anxious to begin on something new, & now is the time as you have not much work of the sort on hand'.[94] By the end of November[95] it seems that, at Rosa's behest, the subject of the ancient Icelandic tale 'Viglund the Fair' was under discussion, although it would be delayed by a year through unforeseen circumstances. Cowen wrote to Bennett to confirm that he had signed a contract with the Carl Rosa Company on 16 May 1889.[96] Cowen says that he was 'a little in doubt as to the advisability of putting ancient Jarls and Vikings on the stage, and feared that such remote people and doings would not be of interest to the public. But Rosa himself was keen on the subject'.[97] Cowen continues: 'A stage success is often made out of unpromising materials, and being, moreover, very anxious to show myself again as an operatic composer, I smothered my doubts, hoped for the best, and set to work enthusiastically on the new opera'.[98] Their

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[94] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(32).
[95] Ibid. (81).
[96] Ibid. (59).
[97] *MAMF*, 243.
[98] Ibid.

collaboration was announced in the *Athenaeum* later in the month.[99] However, shortly afterwards, Carl Rosa died, and it looked as if the Carl Rosa Company would cease to continue. Fortunately, Augustus Harris took over the Company, and many of the ongoing commitments were honoured by Harris, including Cowen's.[100] Many of Cowen's letters to Bennett survive from this period, so it is possible to build up a picture of *Thorgrim's* creation. As was often the case, as cited elsewhere, Joseph Bennett was not always easy to work with, and it appears that Cowen on this occasion did encounter more difficulties than he had in the past.[101] Indeed, at the start of November Cowen received a letter from Harris wishing sight of the score of *Thorgrim* so far completed, which seems to have sent him into blind panic.[102] Things went from bad to worse over the next few months. Cowen was not happy with Harris' rehearsal schedule for the Rosa Company,[103] and then he thought that Harris was not going to produce it![104]

Despite all the heartache that Cowen had endured, his new opera *Thorgrim* made it to Drury Lane, London on 22 April 1890. With its libretto by Joseph Bennett, based upon an episode in the ancient Icelandic tale 'Viglund the Fair', the opera is set in Norway during the tenth century. It was dedicated to the Prince of Wales, son of Queen Victoria (and later King Edward VII).[105] The principal characters are as follows: 'Harald, King of Norway' (bass), 'Eric, a Jarl' (baritone), 'Helgi, legitimate son of Eric' (baritone), 'Thorgrim, illegitimate son of Eric'

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[99] Stanford, who had been working on his *The Miner of Falun*, based on Hoffmann's tale, for Carl Rosa since the summer of 1887, straight away wrote to Bennett to ascertain the details, as it was also based on a 'Scandinavian' plot, the libretto of which was complete and the music 'half done'. To Stanford's relief, Bennett's reply revealed that their respective subjects where quite different (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC S785.B4716.(6)).

[100] *MAMF*, 243. Stanford, however, was less lucky, and his project came to an end (Dibble, J., *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 198).

[101] Letter dd. 29 October [1889]: 'I know you think me a nuisance but I have been a whole week unable to do anything & at this rate there would be no chance of my getting the Opera ready by Easter if required – Do please have compassion on me I am sure you do not want my part of the work to be done in a slip shod way &, as you know, I have promised the first two Acts by Xmas. Do also oblige me by seeing Harris & settling matters'. (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(55)).

[102] Letter dd. 6 November [1889]: 'I have just had a letter from Harris saying that they are anxious to produce the Opera at Easter but cannot do anything until they get the work. I am writing [to] him to say that he shall [have] the first two Acts by Xmas – if you could oblige me by seeing him soon & having a talk I am sure it would much simplify matters & we could then get a positive answer from him' (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(44)).

[103] Ibid. (71).

[104] Ibid. (64).

[105] Champlin, J. D., *Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians* (New York, 1890)(*British Biographical Archive*, K.G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).

(tenor), 'Thorir, a Jarl' (tenor), 'Sweyn, a head-man of Eric' (tenor), 'A Skald' (tenor), 'A Herald' (tenor or baritone), 'Arnora, wife of Eric' (contralto), 'Nanna' (mezzo-soprano), and 'Olof Sunbeam, daughter of Thorir' (soprano). The full plot of the opera is in four acts with one or two Tristanesque touches (see appendices). The lead roles were played by Zelie De Lussan, 'Olof Sunbeam' (Soprano); Tremelli, 'Arnora' (Contralto); Kate Drew, 'Nanna' (Mezzo-soprano); Barton McGluckin, 'Thorgrim' (Tenor); Leslie Crotty, 'Helgi' (Baritone); Celli, 'Harald, King of Norway' (Bass); Max Euguene, 'Eric' (Baritone); and Somers, 'Thorir' (Tenor).

Barely had Cowen brought *Thorgrim* to realization before he was approached by D'Oyly Carte with a commission to write another new opera to follow Sullivan's grand opera *Ivanhoe* that was being composed for the opening of a new National Theatre. D'Oyly Carte's intention was to make the new theatre into a permanent home for English operatic works of a more serious description. Cowen set about the task with pleasure and selected Ouida's *Signa* and approached Gilbert A'Beckett to write the *libretto*.[106] Carte's project was dependent on enticing the theatrical public by costly, extravagant staging, hoping to recover his profligate preliminary expenditure by many repetitions.[107] *Ivanhoe* ran for 153 nights,[108] which in itself could be described as a success, with two full casts singing alternate performances. However, by this stage Cowen's *Signa* was nowhere near ready, and part way through 1891 he realised that he was not going to be able to complete *Signa* in time for its premiere with the D'Oyly Carte, and so he withdrew its production. Indeed, in his autobiography, Cowen implies that he did not really begin the work until April 1891, well after the new English Opera House opened.[109] Carte had envisaged *Ivanhoe* having a much longer run, and having no other English work ready, he was compelled to resort to a French light opera [Messager's *La Basoche*] as a temporary solution, which ran for two and a

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[106] *MAMF*, 246-7.
[107] Jacob, A., *Arthur Sullivan* (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1992), 314.
[108] Different sources state the *Ivanhoe* run as 153 or 155 performances. Klein, H., *The Golden Age of Opera* (London: Routledge, 1933), states with authority 153, 155 according to White, E. W., *A History of English Opera* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1983), 325.
[109] *MAMF*, 228.

half months;[110] but 'by this time', as Cowen comments, 'his [Carte's] pockets had been considerably depleted, and...he abandoned his scheme and gave up the theatre'.[111] Cowen was now left with a half completed score, which he had devoted much time to composing, but with no obvious means of it being produced. He was of the mind that the work was worth continuing with and completed it in January 1892.[112] Unfortunately, his contract with D'Oyly Carte forbade him taking the work elsewhere in London and so he began to look for alternatives elsewhere. So in late Autumn 1892 Cowen went off to Italy, where, after some hesitancy from impresarios and his own desire to find the right opera house, he entered into an agreement with Signor Corti[113] and the Carlo Felice Theatre, at Genoa.[114] But, unhappy with the artists, Cowen withdrew it and moved on to Milan where he obtained an introduction to a Signor Sonzogno,[115] who proved less than enthusiastic about meeting Cowen to discuss his opera, and he put him off for several weeks. Cowen resorted to some help from 'some influential English friends',[116] among them Bennett, who obliged by writing a paragraph in the *Daily Telegraph* about the matter, which focused Sonzogno's mind.[117] Sonzogno now seems to have capitulated to Cowen's demands, and he finally set a production date for the opera in the next autumn season, on the one condition that Cowen reduce the four act scheme to three acts.[118] Sonzogno's promise, was little more than that, at this stage, and the fleshing out of the details would run on until at least June, but Cowen felt satisfied enough at that time to return home [in April] and begin the revisions.[119]

On 12 November 1893, the first of three scheduled performances of Cowen's much-awaited new opera *Signa* finally made its way onto the stage at the Teatro dal Verme, Milan, after its many delays.[120] It was the first work by a living English composer ever given in Italy, and 'the

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[110] Ibid., 249; Ffinch, M., *Gilbert and Sullivan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993), 210-1.
[111] *MAMF*, 249.
[112] Ibid., 248.
[113] Ibid., 229.
[114] *MEM*, 251.
[115] *MAMF*, 251.
[116] Ibid.
[117] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(72).
[118] *MAMF*, 252.
[119] Ibid., 257.
[120] Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K.G. Saur, Fiche I 273).

first English opera...that had been produced in Italy for over thirty years', according to Cowen.[121] It attracted much attention and a critical audience. *Signa*, as finally produced by Sonzogno, founded on one of Ouida's well-known novels, was developed by Gilbert A'Beckett (one of the most well known librettists in London), but he died before its completion and the task was taken over by H. A. Rudall and Fred Weatherly. The text was then translated into Italian by Signor Muzzucato and then Cowen himself made certain refinements (see appendices for the plot). The principal characters are as follows: 'Gemma' (soprano), 'Signa' (tenor), 'Bruno' (baritone), 'Sartorio' (bass), and 'The Duke' (baritone). *The Manchester Guardian* reported that the 'performance was a most successful one. The audience from the first listened with profound attention and at the end of the first act Mr Cowen was called before the curtain six times'.[122] Cowen himself recorded that there 'was a large audience, and the work was received with every outward sign of success, if applause and countless recalls can be accepted as a criterion of this'.[123] A second performance was given the following evening. But, Cowen's lack of success with opera would continue, as preparations for the third performance were halted at the last moment. However, this time, his opera's fate was not determined by any inadequacies in the music or libretto – Italian politics would be his enemy: 'Signor Sonzogno...chagrined at the unfavourable comments of some of the London newspapers on Leoncavallo's *Medici*, accused Mr Cowen of being engaged in a conspiracy with the English journalists to decry the Italian composer's work – Apparently the withdrawal of *Signa* is intended as reprisals for this alleged international insult'.[124] So wrote the *Manchester Courier*. Reflecting on the incident many years later, Cowen came to the conclusion that Sonzogno probably had no intention of giving more than the two representative performances:

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[121] *MAMF*, 257.
[122] *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1893.
[123] *MAMF*, 257.
[124] *Manchester Courier*, 16 November 1893. Julian Budden says that Sonzogno decided to cancel the second and third performances, but when Cowen held him to the terms of their contract, Sonzogno 'doubled the prices of admission for the second performance and adduced the meagre takings as his reason for cancelling the third' (Budden, J., *Verdi* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 138).

> On the first night notices were posted up in the theatre to the effect that the entire troupe would leave Milan on the next day but one; in other words, on the day before that announced for the third performance…His treatment of my work was not as fair and just as it might have been. He produced it on Sunday – a night on which such a thing as a *première* in Italy was practically unknown. Then he selected for the second performance an even worse night than this – a Monday. It is notorious to all who know anything of operatic affairs in Italy that this day used to be a *dies non*, as after Saturday and Sunday no one had any money to spend on theatres on Monday.[125]

There followed a good deal of correspondence in the English and Italian papers, and in early December Cowen even received a sympathetic letter from Boito in Italy concerning the saga:

> I have been following the battle for 'Signa' in the columns of the English papers. I am very sorry that you should have taken away with you from Italy unpleasant impressions through Signor Sonzogno's fault. Please believe that this gentleman does not represent our country neither from the point of view of courtesy, of intellectuality, nor of good faith. Many of my compatriots & colleagues who have known the manner in which you have been treated are most indignant at it. For the rest 'Signa' will make its way & thus 'De Cigne qui signa' 'Signa' will be able to sing 'There is no evil without its attendant good'.[126]

Unbeknown to Boito, Cowen wrote to Bennett asking him if he would be kind enough to quote some of it in the *Daily Telegraph* (letter dd. 5 December [1893]): 'If you care to make use of any part of this especially the last (which contains no libel on Sonzogno) you are quite welcome to do so & I think it will be a stronger point in my favour than anything that has yet been said on the matter'.[127] Bennett obliged and Cowen alleges that Sonzogno said that if he ever met Cowen again, he would put a bullet through him.[128] Sonzogno took Boito's support for Cowen even more to heart, and their quarrel led to Sonzogno challenging Boito to a duel. The pugnacious Sonzogno demanded satisfaction of Boito in Naples, and both made preparations, engaged their seconds and started out for that city; but by the time that they met at the appointed place, the impresario's anger had cooled, and so they shook hands and returned home as amicable toward each other as before the incident began.[129] Cowen was understandably shocked that he 'should

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[125] *MAMF*, 258.
[126] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(8).
[127] Ibid.
[128] *MAMF*, 259.
[129] Ibid. Julian Budden says that it was Boito who initiated the duel and demanded satisfaction from Sonzogno, after the latter, having read Boito's comments in the *Daily Telegraph*, retorted by calling Boito a coward in print. Boito sent a pair of seconds to call on the offending editor, and Sonzogno took up the challenge (Budden, 139).

have been the innocent means of implicating a colleague and friend in this unfortunate business',[130] and he wrote to Boito and told him so, and Boito replied a few weeks later:

> Here I am, if a little late, quite ready to answer your kind letter. I beg you not to worry any more, but to forget completely this untoward affair. As for myself, I have forgotten it long since, and I assure you that I bear you no malice whatever. Life passes so quickly that the happenings of a month ago seem already to belong to the past. There is no need for you to prove to me the perfect innocence of your conduct; I have never doubted it. Accept my sincerest regards, Arrigo Boito.[131]

Sir Augustus Harris had been in Milan for the world premiere of *Signa* and had offered to perform it at the Covent Garden Theatre, but with the stipulation that it should be further bowdlerised to two acts, 'in order to make the work...hang together better'.[132] Cowen, therefore, spent most of the rest of his spare time in 1894 further mutilating *Signa.* It was given its British premiere at the Covent Garden Theatre on 30 June 1894, again in Italian, with de Nuovina, Ben Davies, Mario Ancona and Armand Castelmary in the lead roles. Melba had offered to sing a leading role, but had been incapacitated by a nervous illness, and Cowen says that de Nuovina, 'though a capable artist, was neither in appearance nor voice an ideal representative of the character'.[133] The opera had been dedicated to 'Her Majesty the Queen' [Victoria], and Cowen, knowing that the Queen had often visited Signa, the town from which the opera's hero had taken his name, thought that the Queen 'might perhaps be sufficiently interested to accord the work a hearing' at a command performance at Windsor.[134] Harris was less enthused by the idea, and so Cowen took it upon himself to write directly to the Queen. She acceded to the request, much to Harris' surprise, asking that the opera be given in the form of a recital without stage accessories; the opera was sung in almost its entirety in front of the Queen and a legion of invited guests. Cowen tells us that the Queen talked to him at length, both about his music, and the city of Florence (with which Cowen was fortunately well acquainted). This was the only time

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130 *MAMF*, 259.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., 260.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 261.

Cowen actually met Queen Victoria.[135] However, the Royal performance did little to bolster the opera's success. However, it did have a provincial outing to Glasgow shortly afterwards.[136]

Of the creation of Cowen's *Harold*, we know rather less. The bulk of it must have been written in 1894, and, under its full title *Harold, or The Norman Conquest*, it was premiered at Covent Garden on 8 June 1895.[137] Set in the years 1065-6, it tells the story of the struggle for the English throne between Harold Godwin and William, Duke of Normandy, culminating at the Battle of Hastings with William's victory over Harold and the latter's death. Sir Edward Malet's libretto, however, uses the history as background, and concentrates on the romantic relationships between Harold, Edith (daughter of Alfnoth, a Saxon Earl), and Princess Adela (daughter of William, Duke of Normandy). Acts 1, 3 and 4 are set in England, and Act 2 in Normandy (see appendices for the plot). The story's principal characters are: 'Harold, son of Earl Godwin, afterwards King of England' (tenor), 'William, Duke of Normandy' (baritone), 'William Malet' (baritone), 'Alfnoth, a Saxon Earl' (bass-baritone), 'Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury' (bass-baritone), 'A Pursuivant' (baritone), 'Siward, an Officer of King Edward' (baritone), 'One of Alfnoth's men' (tenor or baritone), 'Edith, Daughter of Alfnoth' (soprano), and 'Princess Adela, Daughter of Duke William' (mezzo-soprano). The principal roles were taken by Madame Albani ('Edith'), Miss Meisslinger ('Princess Adela'), Monsieur Brozel ('Harold'), David Bispham ('Duke William'), Devers, Jacques Bars and Richard Green. Cowen was 'pleased' with the plot: 'It was heroic, and at the same time human in its interest: moreover, it was purely English, and was to be performed in that language'.[138] Indeed, this synthesis of heroism and humanity seems to have been a trend among British composers at the time, as we find Elgar's *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1894-6) and *Caractacus* (1898), and Stanford's *Christopher Patch* (The Barber of Bath, *c.*, 1897). In a letter dated 10 June 1895 to Joseph Bennett, Cowen explains that he had disagreed with Malet and Harris about the opera's ending. He had

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135 Ibid., 261-2.
136 Farmer, H. G., *A History of Music in Scotland* (London: Hinrichsen Edition Ltd., n.d.), 418.
137 Brown and Stratton (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273); *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1895, 736.
138 *MAMF*, 263.

wanted it to end downbeat with Edith lying prostrate over Harold's body, whereas Malet and Harris wanted an upbeat epilogue to this scene in which Malet and William honour Harold's bravery for dying as a 'hero'; afterwhich William proclaims himself King of England.[139] This explains the presence of an appendix in the published score with an alternative ending to the opera.

[139] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(9).

Table 3: Cowen's Plan for 'Thorgrim'

Act No.	Scene No.	Type of scene	Characters involved in singing	Title	Key Structure
I					**a to G**
	1a	Introduction and Chorus	Chorus	From his nest in the North	a to a
	1b	Recitative	Eric and Harald	Hail to thee	g to G
	1c	Dance of Warriors			E flat to E flat
	2	The Skald's Song	The Skald, Chorus	Bathed in blood our Norseland lay	B flat to g
	3	The King's Song	Harald and Chorus	The Viking's ship sails o'er the main	G, D to B
	4a	Drinking Chorus	Chorus	What's best in peace	A to A
	4b	Scena	Helgi, Thorgrim, Chorus, Harald, Eric, Arnora and Sweyn	No longer play I	F to A
	5a	Scena	Arnora, Chorus and Harald	Where are your weapons	A to E
	5b	Air	Thorgrim	Pride of the North	G to G
	6	Finale	Harald, Eric, Chorus, Sweyn, Arnora, Helgi and Thorgrim	Eric, Arnora, loyal and worthy	C to G
II					**B flat to C**
	7	March, Recit. and Duet	Chorus, a Herald, Harald, Thorgrim and Olof	Oh! fair the summer journey	B flat to B flat
	8a	Scena	Arnora and Helgi	Saw'st thou the act	Hiatus
	8b	Duet	Helgi and Arnora	Always the shadow of Thorgrim	E to A
	9a	Recit. and Chorus	Harald, Thorgrim and Chorus	To-morrow, solemn council	F, E flat to F
	9b	Ballad	Thorgrim and Chorus	Why wanders Thorvald?	b flat to B flat
	10a	Recitative	Thorgrim, Arnora, Helgi, Thorir and Chorus	Jarl Thorir, behold in me	F to G
	10b	Finale	Thorgrim, Olof, Helgi, Eric, Arnora, Thorir, Chorus and Harald	My King and Master	G to C
III					**A flat to E**
	11	Introduction, Recit., Solo and Chorus	Nanna, Olof and Chorus	Through the forest Ivar goes	A flat to F
	12	Scena	Olof and Chorus	Once more the sun	B flat to B
	13	Duet	Olof and Thorgrim	Thorgrim, O my belovèd	B to E
IV					**d to G**
	14a	Introduction and Scena	Arnora and Helgi	Should the heart of a bridegroom	d to b flat
	14b	Solo	Helgi	In their dark and secret place	E flat to E flat
	15	Chorus	Chorus	In robes as white	C to C
	16	Finale	Thorgrim,, Thorir, Chorus, Arnora, Helgi, Olof and Eric	Why start at my coming	f sharp to G

Table 4: Cowen's Plan for 'Signa' (The Final Revised Two-Act Published Version)[140]

Act No.	Scene No.	Type of scene	Characters involved in singing	Title	Key Structure
I					**c to G**
	1a	*Preludio & Scena* Prelude and Scena	Signa and Gemma	*Dal tenebror toglietemi* – Let not the darkness conquer me	c to C
	1b	*Arietta* Arietta	Gemma	*Or che vent'un* – And now that you are twenty-one	a to E
	2	*Coro* Chorus	Chorus	*Viva, Viva* – Viva, Master!	a, E flat to E flat
	3a	*Scena* Scena	Sartorio, Signa, Gemma and Chorus	*Dell'arte universal* – Of universal art	A to c, G
	3b	*Canzone di Libertà* Song of Liberty	Signa and Chorus	*Mesto assiso a piè dún faggio* – Seated once on the mountain sighing	c to C
	4a	*Scena* Scena	Sartorio, Bruno, Gemma, Signa and Chorus	*Quest' è un capolavor!* – A perfect masterpiece	C, G to G, D
	4b	*Aria* Aria	Bruno	*Più dè tuoi serti d'or* – Better than wealth or gold	e to B flat
	5a	*Scena & Duetto* Scena and Duet	Bruno and Signa	*Signa, aveva l'intenzion* – I had it in my mind	Hiatus, f sharp to hiatus
	5b	*Aria* Aria	Signa	*O padreil so ch'a te para* – I know to thee I seem to fail	E to b
	6	*Recit. & Aria* Recit. and Aria	Bruno	*Cosi non può durar!* – No, this cannot bel	E, A flat to A flat
	7a	*Duetto* Duet	Gemma and Signa	*Partir mi lasci* – And thou would'st let me go	C, F to F
	7b	*Arietta* Arietta	Gemma	*Presso al mare* – 'Neath the myrtles	E to E
	7c	*Duetto* Duet	Gemma and Signa	*O Gemma, non mi tentar!* – O Gemma, tempt me not!	E to hiatus
	7d	*Finale* Finale	Gemma, Signa, Sartorio, Bruno and Chorus	*No mi scacciar* – Send me not away in anger	Hiatus, G to G
	8	*Entr'acte* Entr'acte			G to G
II					**E flat to c**
	9	*Coro & Ballabile* Chorus and Dance	Chorus	*Danza! Fin che vien l'aurora* – Onward! 'Tis the hour of pleasure!	E flat to E flat, F
	10a	*Duetto* Duet	Gemma and Signa	*Ebben, che cosa c'è?* – Well, what is it now?	f, A flat to E
	10b	*Duetto* Duet (cont'd)	Gemma and Signa	*È la vita sol'un ora breve* – Life is but an hour so quickly flying	A to A
	11a	*Scena*	Signa and Chorus	*Sempre in preda a fantasie?* – Still thy phantasy pursuing	Hiatus
	11b	*Coro di Studenti* Chorus of Students	Chorus and Signa	*Perchè giovinottin cosi t'accori* – Ah, tell me why, fond youth, you sigh for ever	G to G
	11c	*Arietta* Arietta	Gemma, Chorus and Signa	*La Rosa e il Giglio* – Stood the two fairest flowers	d to A flat
	12a	*Scena* Scena	Signa and Bruno	*Eterno durerà lo strazio mio!* – And must this cruel pain go on for ever!	Hiatus
	12b	*Arietta* Arietta	Bruno	*Solingo, vecchio* – So lonely, worn with years	D flat to D
	12c	*Duetto* Duet	Signa, Bruno and Chorus	*Oh, Padre, Io l'amo* – O, Father, I love her	B to A flat
	12d	*Finale* Finale	Gemma, Signa and Bruno	*Una parola* – A word	Hiatus, d to c

[140] As the score was only ever issued in the final two act version (vocal score only) and the current whereabouts of the original unabridged MS remains unknown, a modern assessment of Cowen's first conception of the opera, and the changes made for the British performance is now impossible.

Table 5: Cowen's Plan for 'Harold'

Act No.	Scene No.[141]	Type of scene	Characters involved in singing	Title	Key Structure
I					**e to B**
	[1]	[Chorus]	Chorus	Come, mount with speed each gallant steed	e to E
	[2]	[Scena]	Edith, Alfnoth, Harold, Pursuivant and Chorus	Edith, my love!	D flat to E flat
	[3]	[Duet]	Edith and Harold	Harold! why has thou returned?	A flat to A flat
	[4]	[Scena]	William, Alfnoth, Chorus, Edith, Malet and Harold	Great Earl, I ask an hour of rest	E to F
	[5]	[Scena]	Edith, Chorus and Harold	The flow'rs are gleaming	B flat to B flat
	[6]	[Recit. and Aria]	William and Chorus	Thanks for thy song, fair lady	D flat, a to a
	[7]	[Finale]	Siward, Chorus, Harold, Edith, Malet, Alfnoth and William	Earl Harold! Son of Godwin!	Hiatus to B
II					**A to C**
	1 [8]	[Arietta]	Adela and Chorus	The morn is light on leaf and flow'r	A to A
	[9]	[Duet]	Adela and Harold	Harold! Now to keep the promise	C to C
	[10]	[Scena]	Malet, William, Harold and Adela	Thy plan has work'd	C to G
	2 [11]	[Chorus]	Chorus	Shadows darken, earth reposeth	G to B flat
	[12]	[Recit. and Aria]	William	England shall be mine!	B flat, D to D
	[13]	[Finale]	William, Harold, Malet, Adela and Chorus	Earl Harold, in this holy pile	D to C
III					**b to D**
	[14]	[Chorus]	Chorus	Mourning thro' England calls	b to B, G
	[15]	[Recit. and Aria]	Edith and Chorus	Harold hath returned	G, G flat to G flat
	[16]	[Chorus]	Chorus	Hush! Keep back! They come!	b to B
	[17]	[Scena]	Harold, Stigand and Chorus	Halt there!	b, C to b
	[18]	[Recit. and Aria]	Harold	Lured by a lie	Hiatus, D flat to D flat
	[19]	[Duet]	Edith and Harold	I do not come to chide thee	A to c
	[20]	[Finale]	Stigand, Chorus, Malet, Harold and Edith	My son, hast thou decided?	c to D
IV					**e to A**
	1 [21]	[Introduction, Recit. and Aria]	Edith and Chorus	No rest, no sleep!	e-B flat-B, B, E to G
	[22]	[Scena and] The Battle	Harold, Chorus and Edith	Fill the cup	e to E flat
	2 [23]	[Finale]	Chorus, Edith, Malet and William	Requiem aeternam	G flat to A
		Alternative ending			
	2 [23]	*[Finale]*	*Chorus and Edith*	*Requiem aeternam*	*G flat to A*

With the benefit of increasing maturity as a composer, it is no surprise to find that the three operas from the 1890s show a marked increase in complexity over their youthful sister

[141] All scene numbers are editorial, as Cowen has written the music of each act as one continuous movement. However, it is clear that, despite Cowen's sometimes careful dovetailing, there are definable sections within, and, to this end, the work has been divided up accordingly, and appellations have been applied to the scenes.

Pauline in their aims and objectives. The Icelandic Norse mythological subject of *Thorgrim* immediately draws one to make comparisons with Wagner's mythical operas, especially *Tristan und Isolde* and *Siegfried*, and perhaps this was Joseph Bennett's intent when writing the libretto. Cowen, of course, had a track record in writing music of a Nordic character with his very popular *Scandinavian* Symphony, and this was undoubtedly why Carl Rosa approached him with the commission. With *Signa*, the trials and tribulations of its birth and its constant molestation (it was originally planned in four acts for the English D'Oyly Carte, translated into Italian and condensed into three acts for Milan and premiered, and then further assaulted for Harris at Covent Garden by compression into two acts) mean that what we find in the final published *verismo* two-act version tells us very little of Cowen's original objectives. Indeed, frankly, after such treatment, it perhaps deserves our sympathy, rather than our criticism. However, Harris' request was in response to a growing trend among opera-houses to put on shorter operas: the early 1890s had seen Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, with their tendencies toward *verismo*, start a new movement in opera. It seems that Harris thought that Cowen's *Signa*, with appropriate modifications, could benefit from this association. In contrast, Cowen's *Harold* had all the potentialities to become a significant nationalist opera, if Cowen had had the inclination or the foresight. Its historical theme, with its portrayal of Harold Godwin's shaky path, through the deceptions of William, Duke of Normandy, to the English throne, and his subsequent hero's death at the Battle of Hastings, as the opera sees it, should have been a sure-fire winner. But, despite the fact that Cowen was in favour of British music and its propagation, he was no nationalist. While Cowen possibly set out with grand intentions for all three operas, especially in trying to emulate Wagner's idea of continuous melody, the resultant works were compromises between the 'number' opera tradition and the Wagnerian school. In *Thorgrim*, despite obvious efforts to segue different movements together within an act, Cowen has presented a series of predominantly melodic set-piece numbers, interspersed with recitatives and transitional passages. The final version of *Signa* has undergone the same approach, but with

a freer hand. The aria-like passages are, in general, rather shorter than in *Thorgrim*. Indeed, everything seems condensed and to the point, confirmation of Harris' concision.[142] The *scena* approach to sectioning acts in operas (that, as will be seen later, he also adopted in some of his choral cantatas), is, not unexpectedly, manifest in these mature operas, a natural response to the sort of musico-dramaturgy that he was attempting. In *Thorgrim* nearly a quarter of all the movements there have such a designation. In the final version of *Signa* a similar proportion is found. *Harold* probably comes closest to achieving what Cowen set out to do in the sense that he has done away with individual numbers. The first and third acts are in one continuous movement, with the second and fourth each divided into two scenes. In effect, each act or scene within an act is a *scena*; thus Cowen's *scena* system has reached its final apotheosis. Although it is clear that *Harold* is much more free-flowing than its predecessors, Cowen's seemingly numberless opera, is, on closer examination, a bit of a fraud, as it is still possible to discern recitatives, arias, duets, choruses and scenas (as has been demonstrated in the table above). This is not to play down Cowen's achievement, as it is undoubtedly his best opera and exhibits a cohesiveness and line of thought he had hitherto not accomplished.

Opera throughout its history has tended to have stereotypical moments, which demand characteristic genre pieces. Cowen seems to have done his homework in rummaging through different opera traditions in search of them. In *Thorgrim* we have a characteristic drinking chorus 'What's best in peace', a war dance 'Dance of Warriors', a march 'Oh! Fair the summer journey', and the ubiquitous ballad 'Why wanders Thorvald?' *Signa's* Italian theme and setting has naturally drawn Cowen more towards that country's terminology and forms. Indeed, the movement headings are all in Italian and there is a specific example of a *canzone* 'Mesto assiso a piè dún faggio' ('Seated once on the mountain sighing'), and a *ballabile*, a nineteenth-century piece suitable for dancing, Cowen perhaps taking his lead for the latter from Meyerbeer (*Robert le diable*

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[142] The best evidence for this is to turn to the vocal score and look at a particular pair of pages and then turn over to the next two. In a majority of cases it will be found that the texture of the music has changed. This is all the more surprising when one considers the large size font that the score is printed in!

or *Les Huguenots*) or Verdi (*Ernani*, *Macbeth* or *Aida*). By Cowen's sleight of hand, *Harold* is ostensibly lacking any named character pieces, but there is much that is idiosyncratic of military music, fanfares and trumpet signals, and the music that accompanies William's greeting at Alfnoth's Castle is reminiscent of a drinking song. The graceful dance that follows it and 'The morn is light on leaf and flow'r' is like many a flower song penned from one of Cowen's pastoral scenes of his cantatas. Similarly, the depiction of the bower in the garden at Bayeux is equally Cowenesque. The dramatic oath scene in the interior of Bayeux Cathedral, the funeral scene at Westminster Hall, and the final battle scene no doubt have a dozen precedents, especially in the French grand opera tradition. Cowen's penchant for local colour is immediately in evidence in *Thorgrim* in the introduction of the opera with some quasi-Griegisms, and in the joyous chorus of welcome 'Hail to thee', a piece bursting with vitality and piquantly shaded with Scandinavian colour. *Signa* equally has some of the shades of Italy about it, especially in the aforementioned *canzone* 'Mesto assiso a piè dún faggio' ('Seated once on the mountain sighing') and *ballabile*. However, *Signa* does lack characteristic Italian melismas. What would be defined as local colour in *Harold* is probably open to question, but Cowen's own brand of English pastoralism would surely be a component.

Whether Cowen was ultimately trying to emulate Wagner or not in these three opera, neither he, nor his librettists, could resist the need for set-piece solo numbers and duets, and he owes much to the Italian school in this regard. Each act of *Thorgrim* contains at least one set-piece aria or *scena* for one of the principals, and there is more than a smattering of duets, with the most passionate one between Thorgrim and Olof, 'Thorgrim, O my belovèd', given significant attention and duration. Cowen and Bennett also seem to have taken time to draw out the tense relationship between the weak-willed Helgi and his domineering mother Arnora, especially in their scena and duet 'Saw'st thou the act'. Yet, even with many fervent outpourings, Cowen's style remains surprisingly free of melismas. The set-piece arias and duets in *Signa* are a significant part of the opera, which relies rather less on crowd scenes and pageant, and more on the

relationships between the characters. *Harold*, despite its supposedly continuous form, still contains prominent solo passages for William, Edith and Harold, and duets, especially those for Harold and Edith in acts 1 and 3, and that for Harold and Adela in act 2.

In *Thorgrim*, as was seen in *Pauline* and in many of Cowen's other choral works, he seems to place little importance on a logical tonal scheme. There is no tonal closure within acts, or from the beginning to the end of the work. Indeed, there seems to be no system of tonal relationships or key centres at all across the opera. *Harold* rather confirms this assumption: there seems to be absolutely no strategy to his key signature choices. However, in *Signa*, whether consciously planned or not, the opera is tonally closed as a whole. The first act opens in C minor and closes in G major, i.e. the dominant, whilst the second act opens in E flat (relative major of C minor) and closes back in the opera's tonic of C minor. Curiously, the key notes of these three tonalities form the chord C, E flat, G, i.e. the C minor chord, the work's apparent tonal centre!

Whereas in *Pauline* the orchestra, for the most part, fulfilled an accompanying role, in *Thorgrim* the band has a more integrated responsibility for carrying the musical argument. In common with some of the later choral works, it is almost as though Cowen has superimposed vocal parts on top of an orchestral texture, especially in the construction of some of the choral writing. In *Signa* the orchestra has a variety of functions, from providing textures that are little more than accompaniments similar to *Pauline*, giving the stage to the voice, right through to vigorous *tuttis*. Yet in *Signa* there is a much greater sophistication, with subtle countermelodies and decorative devices that provide much interest for the scholar and listener alike. In other passages there is plenty of proof to the contention that voices have been superimposed over the orchestral textures, mimicking a technique used by Wagner. A most interesting aspect of the orchestration in *Signa* is Cowen's use of the saxophone, an instrument not commonly associated with the orchestra of this period.[143] Unfortunately, in the absence of a published full score or the location of the autograph manuscript, we do not know how or where he used it. However, his

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[143] Laubach, F., 'The Orchestra' in *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.)(London: Caxton Publishing Co., Ltd.), vol. iv, 104.

inspiration may have come from Ambrose Thomas' *Hamlet*. The drama of *Harold* demands the more full-blooded textures of *Thorgrim*, and Cowen obliges, but his style integrates the more refined approaches found in *Signa*.

The chorus in *Thorgrim* is rather more incorporated into the scenes than in the early opera *Pauline* (where it sometimes seems like an afterthought, or there purely to give some additional colour to the scene). In *Thorgrim*, the chorus has a clearly defined *turba* function (as guests, warriors or bondmen), interacting with the principal characters as the story unfolds. Perhaps the chorus 'In robes as white' is not strictly *turba*, but window-dressing for the marriage procession of Olof and Helgi. Equally, the women's chorus with Nanna 'Through the forest Ivar goes' is mere decoration, arguably adding to the spectacle, but not fulfilling a *turba* function within the ongoing plot. *Harold's* chorus equally takes on the role of knights, nobles, ladies, monks, nuns and soldiers, almost always in a *turba* capacity. While the chorus in *Signa* does interact with the principals (representing variously peasants, flower girls, students and fishermen), overall it forms a background to the scene. Only in the *scena* 'Sempre in preda a fantasie?' ('Still thy phantasy pursuing') does it have an interactive dialogue with Signa.

A recurring theme of many of the reviews of Cowen's operas is the poor quality of the libretto. In essence, what they say is that however good the music, if the libretto is poor, then the opera will fail. Nigel Burton is more specific: 'An inherent theatrical instinct is, of course, a *sine qua non* ["thing without which" – an indispensable condition] for all would-be opera composers, and miracles can be accomplished in this respect *providing* the libretto contains at least one overriding or powerful idea, no matter how commonplace'.[144] While these axioms are not by any means full-proof, as some operas, such as Beethoven's *Fidelio*, are carried by the brilliance of the music, for the most part, they are true. Willeby thought that the essence of serious opera depended on the 'human-emotional element'.[145] Indeed, it needs to be present both in the soul of the libretto and in the heart of the composer setting it. Without the pull of

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144 Burton 1981, 342-3.
145 *MEM*, 249.

the sentiments of the characters, what else is there to latch on to? In commenting on *Thorgrim*, Willeby thought that Bennett had 'acted wisely' when he had chosen the episode in the ancient Icelandic Saga *Viglund the Fair* 'as his foundation'.[146] Indeed, he thought that Bennett 'was justified in assuming these grim legends of the North to have absorbing interest' for Cowen as a composer, and that his handling of it had 'power, and interest, and poetic beauty'.[147] The critic of the *Manchester Guardian* was quick to identify that 'Mr Bennett's story is undeniably picturesque, and the scene and period give opportunity for a stage setting full of romantic colour',[148] but 'whatever shortcomings may exist in the dramatic construction of the new opera…the strength of the plot and situations…the "book" of "Thorgrim" stands far above the ordinary level of operatic libretti'.[149] Immediately, the critic sets doubt in his readers' minds. The *Manchester Courier* columnist is more to the point: 'Mr Bennett has not succeeded in making the theme either very clear or interesting, although he has managed in several scenes and incidents to recall *Lohengrin.* It, however, lacks the significance and portray of Wagner's legend'.[150] However, George Bernard Shaw criticised Joseph Bennett (he was never a fan of his) 'for failing to see that he was not born a poet or dramatist; and let us forgive Mr Cowen for not having had the courage to tell him so'.[151] Shaw further denounced Bennett in *The Hawk* as a writer of 'doggerel' verse, who was only commissioned to write libretti because of his 'enormous power' in the *Telegraph*, which would 'secure such a backing of press bluff and press butter as would push and slide anything into good repute for a season at least'.[152] Nigel Burton, writing more recently, was highly critical of Bennett's 'appalling libretto',[153] and continued: '*Thorgrim* is neither a romantic, nor a lyric, nor a grand opera; there are elements of all three about it, but they are at war with each other. To be fair to Cowen, many of the *ersatz* Wagnerisms were forced on him by Bennett, who intended the

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146 Ibid., 248-9.
147 Ibid., 249.
148 *Manchester Guardian*, 21 April 1890.
149 Ibid., 23 April 1890.
150 *Manchester Courier*, 24 April 1890.
151 White, 369.
152 *The Hawk*, 6 May 1890.
153 Burton 1981, 342.

hero to justify himself as a second Siegfried, glorying in the magnificence of his will'.[154] Even Cowen himself reflects on this matter:

> Bennett's inexperience as a dramatic writer was without doubt one of the primary causes for the opera's premature demise. The words of his libretto, though not so poetical as 'St. John's Eve', were well written, and thoroughly fitted for setting to music, and the purely lyrical scenes were admirable; but the subject required careful treatment to turn those legendary warlike heroes, with their fierce passions, sudden quarrels, crude lovemaking, and superstitious belief in Fate, into living creatures of real flesh and blood, and in this he failed. Had he possessed greater knowledge of stage requirements, he might have made, even out of this barbaric material, a human and stirring drama.[155]

Therefore, Bennett's libretto does seem to have seriously damaged any success that *Thorgrim* as an opera may have had, regardless of Cowen's own musical contribution.

Turning to *Signa*, the situation with the libretto was worse because of all the meddling that it had undergone. Cowen said: 'I much regretted that I had not left the work in its original state [of four acts], or even as a three-act opera, for at least in this latter shape it gave indications of proving an eventual success, if only Sonzogno had helped it through the early stage of its career'.[156] But having suffered the indignity of being further molested, it

> did not improve it. It was like taking away someone's body, and then trying to join the head and legs together – it was impossible not to notice that something was missing. In fact, the whole thing was so curtailed, so concentrated, that nearly all the essence was squeezed out of it. The plot move so fast that the motives of the characters, like the milestones in the American's story, became a stone wall impossible to see through.[157]

R. A. Streatfeild thought that 'the *libretto*' was 'ill-constructed, and [that] the action often halts and flags'.[158] While the changes 'were for the most part improvements...the alterations introduced into the music seriously affected the success of the revival'.[159] Therefore, it seems that in its three-act version, the libretto was more than adequate, and given a better run in Italy in could have been a success. But, once the scissors had been applied for the London premiere, the libretto had lost much of its heart.

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[154] Ibid., 343.
[155] *MAMF*, 246.
[156] Ibid., 262.
[157] Ibid., 260-1.
[158] Streatfeild, 321.
[159] Ibid.

Cowen's luck did not improve with the libretto by Sir Edward Malet for *Harold*, as Cowen notes that it

> would have taken a week to perform, and much of its blank verse was unsuitable for music, but with the aid of another *collaborateur*, F. E. Weatherley, [*sic*] we revised it, reduced it within reasonable limits, and put it into requisite shape for operatic treatment without materially altering the dramatic nature of its chief scenes. I will not say that even in its revised from it was an absolutely first-rate libretto, but it was at least up to, if not beyond, the average of English works of this description, and far superior to any of those I had already set to music.[160]

Working with Harris also added complications – as Cowen composed each scene he took them to show Harris who

> did not know very much about music, but he had a natural instinct for dramatic effect, and was quick at finding out the weak spots, and making suggestions which were often to the advantage of the work. Sometimes, though, he got a little out of his element. For instance, he would say to me during the stage rehearsals, 'Look hear, my dear fellow, this is too long, it spoils the action; you must cut'. 'I don't see how I can', I would reply. 'Oh, yes, it is quite easy', he would continue, putting his finger on some place in the score, 'cut out these twenty bars'. 'Cutting out these twenty bars' meant perhaps leaving off in the key of E flat, and beginning again in D. A man may have false relations in his domestic surroundings, and still not recognize them when they appear on music paper; but nothing of this sort mattered much to him as long as some particular stage entry or procession was not kept waiting. He certainly knew what he wanted, even if he did not know the connection of one key with another, and, although at the rehearsals of 'Harold' he was continually being called away on other and equally important business matters, he managed to bestow as much care and attention to detail on its preparation as he did on everything else he undertook.[161]

Thus it is not surprising to find that reviews of the libretto for the opera were generally negative: Klein described it as 'weak';[162] Hughes was equally unimpressed calling it 'uninspiring'.[163] *The Illustrated London News* wrote that Malet had 'produced a book which...contains a simple, coherent, and intelligible plot',[164] nor had he 'surrounded his intention...with any cumbersome and impossible details...He tells his story plainly and straightforwardly'.[165] However, 'his vocabulary is limited, and that, outside the somewhat obvious list of flowers, birds, vegetables, and the planets, he has practically no sense of imagery at all...Nor is the mere narrative portion of this book more interestingly written than the lyrical; it has a very curious quality of baldness

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160 *MAMF*, 263.
161 Ibid., 263-4.
162 Klein, H., *Thirty Years of Musical Life in London 1870 to 1900* (London, [?1900]), 414.
163 Hughes, G., *Sidelights on a Century of Music* (London: Macdonald, 1969), 184.
164 *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1895, 736.
165 Ibid.

and unreality'.[166] Cowen thought the final 'libretto, if a little sombre in one or two of the scenes, was...for the most part quite effective'.[167] He wrote:

> The British composer who writes an opera under present conditions is doomed beforehand to failure...The chief fault lies in the lack of good librettists. One cannot make bricks without straw, and if the literary straw is nothing but limp and unripe stalks, the musical bricks will not cohere, but will crumble to pieces. In other words, the best music that ever was written has no chance if the libretto is badly put together and uninteresting...On the other hand, it is quite within the range of possibility that a really strong book might carry an opera through, even though the music were of an inferior character. The men who have hitherto written our librettos – I am speaking, of course, of serious opera – have always been wanting in some, at least, of the qualities essential to this kind of work. Our poets know little or nothing about the stage; our dramatists are seldom writers of good poetry, or even if they are, they are not disposed to waste the time that might be more profitably employed in their own sphere; those who may perhaps combine in themselves both the poet and the dramatist do not understand the other important requirements of opera. Therefore, we are obliged to content ourselves with the ordinary *litterateur* of more or less inexperience, who may or may not possess one or two of these qualities (it is a matter of chance), but never all, and who, for this reason, is rarely if ever able to imbue even the most promising subject with that animation and interest which, in opera, transform the characters from mere puppets into live human creatures.
> Libretto-writing is an art of itself, requiring not alone the poetic, dramatic, or musical instinct, but a combination of all three, as well as a knowledge of other special attributes that belong exclusively to the operatic stage. This art has never been properly cultivated in England, for the reason perhaps that the opportunity for pecuniary reward, contrary to the custom of other countries, has been of the slightest. The primary cause, however, is of the librettist's own making, as up to now efforts have seldom entitled him to be placed on the same footing with the composer.[168]

Cowen's opera's, like most of his British contemporaries' works, nearly all failed because their *libretti* lacked Burton's 'overriding or powerful idea'. Burton concluded: 'Far too many British librettists of the period failed because, in trying to found a national school where none had previously existed, they sought refuge in complexity and ignored the rudimentary facts of operatic life'.[169] Streatfeild, despite being rather negative towards Cowen's attempts at Grand Opera, noted in 1897: 'Cowen's talent is so eminently that of a writer for the stage, that thoroughly good work may be expected of him if he can secure a suitable *libretto*'.[170] Unfortunately, he never did.

Willeby observed that 'to reach in music the highest emotional effect, has been possible to few musicians, and to do this, something more than a great ambition, a perfect scholarship,

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166 Ibid.
167 *MAMF*, 263, 265.
168 Ibid., 2, 237, 267-8.
169 Burton 1981, 342-3.
170 Streatfeild, 322.

and wide experience is necessary'.[171] He felt that 'in grand opera we demand that this result be achieved. It can and has been effected by both simplicity and complexity of means – generally the former method has been productive of the greater results. Beyond all else it is necessary that the composer be in complete sympathy with his libretto'.[172] While few critics ever accused Cowen of being anything other than empathetic to his texts, reviews of Cowen's music for these operas varied considerably. The *Manchester Guardian* writer, reporting on *Thorgrim*, thought that Cowen had 'written throughout with loving care and masterly command of resource'.[173] However, the *Manchester Courier* critic was not as enthused by the first performance as his compatriot:

> It cannot be said that it realised expectations, and yet it certainly did not exactly disappoint especially those who were already acquainted with Mr Cowen's music. A thorough and conscientious student, Mr Cowen's knowledge of his art was evident throughout, at times only too much so, destroying all sense of spontaneity...however, [the music] lacks the significance and portray of Wagner's legend...It is well orchestrated, admirably harmonised, and appropriate, only it has no fire and no originality. The spark of genius is wanting, and the audience soon became wearied by the exceeding monotony of the greater part of the work...The third act is distinctly the best...and the fourth act is in parts tedious.[174]

J. A. Fuller Maitland, successor to Hueffer of *The Times* was equally dismissive of Cowen's music, which had 'neither dramatic force nor breadth of treatment to enable him to import vitality to the characters [and] in situations demanding any depth of passion his music seems wanting in grip and dramatic significance'.[175] But, Meirion Hughes notes that Fuller Maitland was often harsh in his criticism of Cowen's works, and cites an underlying anti-Semitism as the root cause of his negative reviews.[176] Cowen, in his autobiography, cites one review that says with regard to the finale of the second act: 'Mr Cowen has never written anything finer than this exquisite mass of harmonic colour, which, with its beautiful transitions and exciting climax, will unhesitatingly

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[171] *MEM*, 248.
[172] Ibid.
[173] *Manchester Guardian*, 23 April 1890.
[174] *Manchester Courier*, 24 April 1890.
[175] *The Times*, 23 April 1890.
[176] Hughes, M., *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002), 32.

be picked out as the gem of the opera'.[177] Another newspaper highlighted the third act as the centrepiece of the work:

> Mr Cowen's shining gifts as an instrumental composer and writer for the orchestra are displayed to the greatest advantage. But for the graceful interpolation of a sprightly part song for female voices, most delicately and fancifully introduced by the strings, this act might pass for a movement of a romantic symphony...Olaf's grand scena and the ensuing duet are both beautiful numbers; but their effectiveness, about which there is not the shadow of a doubt, is at least as directly attributable to the symmetrical splendour of the orchestration as to melodic significance of the vocal parts, with the exception of the episode in E major, an outburst of passionate and dramatic tunefulness, the power and impressiveness of which have not been excelled by Verdi or Wagner even in their happiest love inspirations.[178]

Following the second performance, the *Daily Telegraph* concluded:

> The second performance...confirmed the opinion we had formed of that work on the occasion of its production. In setting Mr Bennett's stately poem, Mr F. H. Cowen has enriched the repertoire of English opera with a score of great importance and value, the musical merits of which would be difficult to exaggerate...The influence of Gounod reveals itself from time to time in Mr Cowen's phrases; that of Wagner in his employment of 'continuous' instead of 'organic' melody...It has a thousand fine qualities and only one or two weaknesses, namely, a lack of spontaneity, and its corollary, a too manifest laboriousness; a tendency to subordinate the vocal line to the instrumental element; and, lastly, an orchestral restlessness that is apt to overstrain the nerves, as well as the attention, of the average musical audience.[179]

John Francis Barnett was more taken with it, describing it as 'romantic and effective'.[180] However, George Bernard Shaw gave the opera a typically uncomplimentary appraisal, which besmirched its reputation terminally, noting that it would not provide as much wear 'as I shall get out of my second best pair of boots before they descend into the blind cave of eternal night'.[181] Willeby, writing in 1893, is characteristically more encouraging and diplomatic in his assessment of the opera, but at the same time shows similar reservations to his colleagues. On the positive side he acknowledges that

> if we look for originality in 'Thorgrim', we find it. Scholarship, refinement, melodic and harmonic power, dramatic ability, all of these in a greater or lesser degree we have. 'Thorgrim' is in more senses than one a masterly work. Those temptations which beset the composer of lyric drama to write down to the level of the so-called popular taste, have been strenuously and well withstood, although sometimes, perhaps, at a sacrifice of beauty. Those

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177 *MAMF*, 245.
178 Ibid., 244-5.
179 *Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1890.
180 Barnett, J. F., *Musical Reminiscences and Impressions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 307.
181 Norris, G., *Stanford, The Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980), 59.

> who look for reminiscences of other operas will find but few, while the finale of the first act astonishes those who know the composer well.[182]

However, he felt that the task facing Cowen in dealing 'musically with such a subject [as *Thorgrim*], in a spirit such as shall be in sympathy with our modern opera', was

> of vast difficulty, involving a somewhat different procedure than that adopted in the symphonic expression of mere impressions. For its successful achievement, the composer must combine a fine impressibility with a vigorous dramatic faculty. The resultant of this combination then requires an artistic restraint no less fully developed than either of its component parts.[183]

He thought that 'the temptation in *Thorgrim* to allow the descriptive element and the element of *colour* to predominate was no light one', and which led to 'fatal results',[184] and in so doing implies that it is the 'human element' that is missing from *Thorgrim*.[185] Indeed, despite all the passion and blood-shed of the plot, neither Bennett nor Cowen has been able to communicate the characters' emotions to the audience. Writing in 1897, R. A. Streatfeild seems to have been of the same opinion: 'There is much charm in Mr Cowen's music, and some of the lighter scenes in the opera are gracefully treated, but his talent is essentially delicate rather than powerful, and the fierce passions of the Vikings scarcely come within its scope'.[186] This view also seems to be shared by Ernest Walker, who describes *Thorgrim* in similar terms as his comments about Cowen's *Ruth*: 'rather obvious...containing a good deal of suave picturesqueness'.[187] Nigel Burton wrote that '*Thorgrim* is not a *bad* work but a negative, colourless, and insipid one...in harmonic terms (like [Sullivan's] *Ivanhoe*) it does not advance beyond the Wagner of 1848'.[188] In light of his observations, Willeby concluded that it was

> impossible to accurately gauge the position of Frederic Cowen as a composer of Grand Opera...until we have further opportunity of and a wider field for search. Nevertheless, the interest caused by this important effort in the field of English Opera has raised to a very high degree, hopes for the future success of, and absolute achievement by, its composer in this form of art.[189]

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[182] *MEM*, 248.
[183] Ibid., 249.
[184] Ibid., 250.
[185] Ibid., 249.
[186] Streatfeild, 320.
[187] Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 1924), 297.
[188] Burton 1981, 343.
[189] *MEM*, 250.

Despite some complimentary remarks, the opera's deficiencies outweighed its strengths, and the opera's life was short-lived. With hindsight many commentators shared the views of Klein who remarked that *Thorgrim* 'failed to hit the mark, and the effect of its many beauties was lost because of a story too unattractive and too undramatic to appeal to popular taste'.[190] Cowen himself commented that 'the artistic efforts of a composer, are all of no use without that indefinable *something* which attracts the public and holds it in sympathetic interest throughout a performance'.[191] In the case of *Thorgrim*, this *something* was the profundity, intensity and passion that Wagner and Gounod had, that Cowen never really found.

Cowen's music for *Signa* likewise shared mixed reviews, especially after its condensation. R. A. Streatfeild said that much of the music 'is delightfully gay and genial, and even in the more serious scenes the note of passion is not wanting...the music is certainly the best thing Mr Cowen has written for the stage'.[192] In its final form Cowen tells us that the 'music, instead of hanging together as Harris expected, betrayed, at least to my own ears, strong symptoms of the disease known as "paste and scissors"', to the extent that 'the original picturesqueness of the story was gone, and there was little left to rouse the interest of the opera-going public'.[193] Cowen concludes:

> The fable of the man and his donkey was never more applicable than in the case of 'Signa'. I had striven to please everyone, and in the end had succeeded in pleasing no one, not even myself. I much regretted that I had not left the work in its original state, or even as a three-act opera, for at least in this latter shape it gave indications of proving an eventual success, if only Sonzogno had helped it through the early stage of its career.[194]

On balance, it would be unfair to blame Cowen's music for any real part in its lack of success.

Cowen's music for *Harold* faired little better. *The Illustrated London News* wrote:

> Mr Cowen stands among the few acknowledged representations of that mysterious entity known by the title of 'English music'...[His] music [for *Harold*] is...quite unlike the Cowen of 'The Better Land', and of many another ballad for domestic consumption. The music...is all austerity; its composer runs away from the slightest obviousness of melody as though it were sinful to look upon its charms. He never takes you into his confidence, and he indulges in a passionate delight for bewildering his hearers. 'Ah', they say, at the beginning of some

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190 Klein 1900, 286.
191 *MAMF*, 245.
192 Streatfeild, 321.
193 *MAMF*, 260-2.
194 Ibid., 262.

> melodious phrase, 'this sounds comfortable'. And in a trice Mr Cowen has whipped away the poor thing with its little life unfulfilled, killed by some remarkable 'musicianly' figuration, leaving his audience gasping and confounded.[195]

Of course, this last criticism can be levelled at many of Cowen's compositions: it is one of his intrinsic weaknesses as a composer. The article continues:

> The score is really clever: it is full of ingenuity and attractive device; it abounds in qualities which are particularly infrequent among 'English musicians' – a fullness of orchestration, and a determined tendency towards emphasising the dramatic moment. Its one fault is as we have described it. Mr Cowen refuses to be attractive; he will be clever, ingenious, delicate, what you will – he will not try to please.[196]

It seems that in *Harold* Cowen has done his best to avoid all that he knows best, i.e. characteristic pretty melodies, in favour of originality. However, if the *Illustrated London News* is correct, this creativity was at the expense of enjoyment for his audience – a fatal flaw in any romantic composition. Hughes considered *Harold* 'uninspired, very noticeably so in Act IV, for which the choristers had hurriedly to change their costumes to become nuns and monks and indulge in some hymn-like strains that accorded with the worst traditions of Victorian church music'.[197] Streatfeild was even more dismissive: 'Mr Cowen again gave way to his besetting sin of attempting to work upon too large a scale. The tale of the conquest of England is ill suited to his delicate muse'.[198] All things considered, Streatfeild is correct: Cowen's facile style was not really compatible with the sort of music that such an opera demanded. No doubt Gounod or Elgar could have instilled the subject matter with the necessary depth and religious fervour. Unfortunately, Cowen could not. However, Klein was probably correct in saying that it 'deserved [a] more enduring success'.[199]

In assessing Cowen's operas one also has to take into account the quality of the productions, which will often make or break an opera's success. According to the *Manchester Guardian* writer, the first performance of *Thorgrim* was

> in all respects excellent...The first act went splendidly. The second ended amid a prolonged round of applause, the imposing *ensemble*...narrowly escaping an encore. The love music of

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[195] *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1895, 736.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Hughes 1969, 184.
[198] Streatfeild, 321-2.
[199] Klein 1900, 414.

> the third act was sung with superb effect by Miss De Lussan and Mr Barton McGluckin, whose impersonations of Thorgrim and Olof evoked the warmest admiration. Both artists were in capital voice, and they did full justice to the many fine passages that Mr Cowen has allotted to his hero and heroine. Mr Leslie Crotty sung the part of Helgi with admirable dramatic significance...Madame Tremelli was seen to great advantage as Arnora...Mr Celli made a dignified representative of Harold [*sic*], but was extremely nervous in his song in the first act. Mr Max Euguene was excellent as Eric, and Mr Somers efficient as Thorir. Miss Kate Drew gave with good effect the small solo part [Nanna] in the female chorus of the third act. For the chorus and orchestra no praise would be excessive...The *mise en scène* is characterised by artistic taste as well as splendour. It is picturesque in the extreme, the costumes and scenery being alike in perfect keeping with subject...Mr Cowen conducted, and he had to respond at the termination of the opera to one of the heartiest greetings that has been heard inside the walls of old Drury for many a night. He may be congratulated on a triumphant success.[200]

The *Manchester Courier* critic was not so enthused: 'The interpretation was mainly excellent, and the opera was extremely well mounted', however, although 'the applause was frequent', it was 'not hearty'.[201] Cowen, who had by now become used to disparaging criticism, drew much satisfaction from the fact that 'the opera obtained a very gratifying reception from a crowded audience'.[202] Cowen's letters to Bennett strongly suggest that the opera's production was hampered by the death of Carl Rosa, who had commissioned the work. Although Augustus Harris, in taking control of the Carl Rosa Company had duly honoured Rosa's commitments, his devotion to them was not as all-embracing as it probably should have been. Indeed, Gervase Hughes suggests that the main problem was that Harris was also pursuing 'ambitious schemes for international opera at Covent Garden'.[203] *Thorgrim* was probably further damaged by the Rosa Company's production at Liverpool on 2 February 1891 where, as Cowen's letter to Bennett to makes clear, things did not run smoothly at all (letter dd. 3 February [1891]):

> Fortunately for yourself you did not come to Liverpool yesterday or I think even you with your equable nature would have lost your temper. The stage management was <u>abominable</u> – in fact there was none – the prompts having to do duty for both. The whole arrangements went worse than ever – there was a <u>long</u> stage wait in the middle of 2nd Act where Helgi & Arnora ought to come on & the final scene of the Opera was absolute chaos; I waited to hear the voices behind but none came & there was I with my baton in the air in the midst of absolute silence for five minutes until the audience began to laugh & the whole thing was turned to ridicule! I really do not think such an insult to a man who takes the trouble to go & conduct his own work ought to be allowed to pass unnoticed & it is in your power, if you will, to give the Co a timely warning & save them from going rapidly to the dogs. They have never given the work a fair chance, as you too admit & even now they allow the whole week

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200 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 April 1890.
201 *Manchester Courier*, 24 April 1890.
202 *MAMF*, 244.
203 Hughes 1969, 183.

> to pass until Satʸ morning without a 2nd performance. The House was very full & the audience very appreciative until the end which naturally fell more than flat. In no city have they even given more than one performance & as it has always been well received I cannot but think there must be some one working against the Opera & preventing its having its fair chance of success. For my own part, the Cº has seen the last of me! The Artists are not to blame. They all sang well…The new song for Olof is very effective.[204]

From the history of *Signa's* production in Italy, it is evident that the impresario Sonzogno was not overly taken with Cowen's opera, and put on the production, as much to curb the press rumours that Bennett had stirred up, than with any genuine passion for it. Therefore, he seems to only half-heartedly staged the production on the less profitable days of the week, and thereby giving him ample justification for not continuing with it. The London production was almost doomed to failure once the score was further disfigured. *Signa*, therefore, never succeeded. Only a resurrection of it in its original four-act version, or a modern professional production in its three-act version, would give it another chance. But as these scores were never published and the MSS assumed lost, this is never likely to happen. *Harold* seems to not been given the production it truly deserved either. Klein wrote: 'There was a lack of distinction (and distinctiveness) about the general rendering that was scarcely calculated to engender in aristocratic auditors any particular love of opera in the vernacular'.[205] But *The Illustrated London News* thought that the mounting of the opera was 'superb': Madame Albani was 'at her best'; Bispham was a 'vigorous' Duke William; and Green and Miss Meisslinger were 'adequate'.[206] However, Brozel was 'suffering from stage-fright', which it considered 'a pity', seeing that he was cast in the title role![207] *The Illustrated London News* also noted the 'absurd outcry'[208] that had occurred over the use of an electric light to illuminate the reliquary containing a saint's bones in Act II:

> Critics have been gravely informing Sir Augustus Harris that electric light was not discovered in the year 1066. The thing is a stage illusion, of course. The light is supposed to be miraculous, and must be produced in the most interesting and convenient manner. You might just as fairly argue that the stage illusion of the evening star in 'Tannhäuser', or the yet more important stage illusion of the Grail in 'Parsifal', is an anachronism because electric light was not known several hundred years ago; or, to put it more obviously, you might

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[204] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(27).
[205] Klein 1900, 414.
[206] *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1895, 736.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.

> object to Albani acting the part of Edith because she was not born at the date of the Norman Conquest.[209]

Overall, Cowen thought that 'some of the scenes were very effective, notably, the whole of the first act, the swearing of Harold's oath in Bayeux Cathedral, and the finding of his dead body by Edith…The artists were as good as I could possibly wish for…the orchestra, scenery, and costumes, were excellent'.[210] Significant to *Harold's* future, however, was a letter Harris received from one of his influential lady patrons to the effect that 'she and her friends did not go to Covent Garden to hear English opera, and that if he intended to continue that sort of thing, they would have to give up subscribing. "I am afraid this is the general opinion…I am very sorry, but I cannot go on, or I may get myself into trouble"'.[211] Cowen develops this theme further:

> There is no doubt that the disbelief in the possibility of a British musician to rival his foreign compeers in writing for the stage (a disbelief that is still not entirely confined to this branch of music) causes the public to assume an attitude towards native opera that is far from encouraging. They may listen to a new production of this class with curiosity and tolerance; they may even applaud it at the outset; but the preconceived prejudice is there all the time, and usually makes itself felt after one or two performances.
> The constant weakness of the librettos (which in some cases may possibly react on the composer's music) has, no doubt, something to do with this, but certainly not everything. English opera – not only native works, but *all* opera in the English language – is looked down upon as an inferior article, very praiseworthy in its proper place, but not entitled to rank for a moment with performances in other languages. Consequently our composers have to accept the situation as they find it, avail themselves of the only opportunities afforded them, and place their works before a public tribunal of prejudice and comparative indifference. This state of things is naturally very detrimental to the aspirant to operatic honours, and discounts to a large extent any chances he may have of success.
> British patriotism plays a very significant part in our politics, our institutions, our sports, even in our literature and painting; but in music, speaking generally, it is conspicuous by its absence, and nowhere more conspicuous than in the realm of serious operatic works.
> What we require in order to place English opera on its proper level is, firstly, a genuine poet who is willing to write, and capable of writing, good librettos; secondly, a condition that may enable a manager to adequately reward the librettist for his services; and lastly, a public whose patronage is not grudgingly bestowed, but whose national pride may induce it to look upon English opera and English operatic works with the same unbiased feelings and in the same light in which it is accustomed to regard the works of other nationalities. There is no reason why our composers should not be able to hold their own on the stage (orchestral and choral music are not the only branches in which they have already proved their capabilities); but until other and more favourable circumstances prevail, such as I have mentioned, they will remain with an irksome chain around their limbs that will, I am afraid, continue to lead them to failure…I…hope that the time will come before long when English operatic art will not only be recognized as worthy of attention, but will, through the ideal combination of librettist and composer, deserve and command it.[212]

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[209] Ibid.
[210] *MAMF*, 263, 265.
[211] Ibid., 266.
[212] Ibid., 2, 237, 267-8.

Of course, there had been various attempts to get truly British opera produced and a permanent venue for its proliferation established. Carl Rosa and his opera company had tried over many years to promote British works, but needed to concentrate the bulk of his money and time in foreign ones to make his seasons viable. While Harris attempted to carry on Rosa's endeavours after the latter's death, not much came of it. D'Oyly Carte's aforementioned project in 1892 had come to nothing, as had two attempts initiated by Stanford with the London Corporation in 1888/9 and the London County Council in 1898/9.

The indifference of British opera-goers and music-lovers generally to performances of music in their mother tongue is difficult to understand in the twenty-first century, but in the nineteenth century matters were different; Forsyth hypothesised in 1911:

> The ordinary opera-goer 'on pleasure bent' may not know enough about French, German, or Italian to be able to say whether they are being sung properly or not, but his knowledge of his own language teaches him that there is something radically wrong when that language is unintelligible. He obtains a certain amount of sensuous pleasure for hearing fine vocalists singing, say, in Italian; and therefore he says outright that he prefers that language to English for operatic purposes.[213]

Eduard Hanslick said that 'English opera in London deserves the more encouragement in that it is beset with formidable difficulties';[214] he explained these problems thus:

> The Italian opera, favoured by high admission prices to begin with, has the further advantage of being fashionable, which means everything in London society. How could Carl Rosa pay fine singers as brilliant and demanding as the Italians, even if he could find them among the natives? It is difficult for an Englishman to commit himself to the theatre. [Edward] Lloyd, the tenor, and [Charles] Santley, the baritone, earn three times as much from concerts and oratorio as Carl Rosa can offer them.[215]

Throughout much of Cowen's lifetime, control over most artistic production in Victorian Britain still lay in the hands of the nobility and the rich. These individuals, most of whom had a smattering of foreign languages, saw some latent power in preserving the arts in a form that only they could understand and afford, and in so doing, safeguarded their status from challenges by those below them. Indeed, the Reverend Haweis wrote: 'Amongst the upper classes...it has been

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[213] Forsyth, C., *Music and Nationalism* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1911), 188.
[214] Hanslick, 254.
[215] Ibid., 255.

too much the fashion to regard the musician [and presumably the music itself] as a kind of servile appendage to polite society'.[216] Moreover, Forsyth takes up the same theme:

> English operatic activity...was stunted and twisted into other forms by a foreign culture introduced and maintained for social reasons...this [English] Culture has never penetrated downwards very far...whatever form the English Opera may take in the future, it must claim its legitimacy, not as an expression of the acquired tastes of the aristocracy, but of the dramatic instincts of the people.[217]

The only analogy that comes to mind is that of the Roman Catholic Church's attempts over many centuries to preserve the Holy Scriptures in Latin, fearing that if the common people were to grasp the texts in the vernacular, the mysteries and powers within would be released from the Church's control, and their position undermined.

From the above observations, it is apparent that while Cowen, for the most part, had probably the best musicians and singers at his disposal, British opera was itself in quite a poor state, running on limited budgets, lack of rehearsal time, and a lack of enthusiasm for opera in English among its audiences. Indeed, the Carl Rosa Company, which was the mainstay of the attempts to give Britain a national operatic tradition, due to the confinement to a four-week season, was handicapped by the monetary necessity to put on opera productions with the minimum of rehearsal time (often just three sessions). Cowen was critical of this, as his comments recorded elsewhere confirm; Hanslick was equally scathing of this policy.[218] Inevitably, under such conditions, Cowen operas, as well as most others, were doomed to failure. The first nights were often highly praised, but the cold light of day found his works wanting in one respect or another, although often it was his librettist that was more at fault, or simply a bit of ill-luck with the production. Reflecting on his operas Cowen says: 'Of the four I composed I certainly consider that *Thorgrim* and *Harold* were the best, the latter especially; but all of them might have succeeded better had they not been the victims of adverse circumstances, or not suffered from the many disadvantages that surround the path of the British operatic

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[216] Haweis, H. R., *Music and Morals* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 485.
[217] Forsyth, 238.
[218] Hanslick, 255.

composer on every side'.[219] Despite Cowen's protestations, all of which contain perfectly valid arguments, when all is said and done, he himself must take some of the blame for the failure of his operas. *Pauline*, while assimilating contemporary French and Italian models, harkened back to the British operas of Wallace and Balfe with spoken dialogue not unlike the earlier English ballad operas or the German *singspiel*. Spencer and Burton felt that *Pauline* was Cowen's 'finest opera', marking 'an advance on the operas of Balfe and Wallace in its sophisticated lyricism and dramatic directness...Although the opera was only partially successful, Cowen responded positively to the libretto'.[220] However, this was a dead end for Cowen and British opera, as this form of opera had already been displaced by the more sophisticated operatic movements in Italy, France and Germany. Thereafter, when Cowen turned to the stage, he seemed unable to decide whether to attempt to assimilate the methods adopted by Wagner or Verdi.

Remarkably, even after all these failures, Cowen had not given up on the idea of writing further operas, as a letter to Bennett (dd. 10 June [1895]) makes clear: 'I shall come up one morning soon to see you & talk over the next Opera which I want to start on in the Autumn'.[221] This opera, *Evangeline*, after Longfellow, unfortunately, never came to fruition. Around the same time he said in an interview:

> Opera in England...is very restricted indeed. We have only Sir Augustus Harris and the Carl Rosa Company in the whole country. The production of an opera is quite a lottery with us. If it is performed ten times in the season, it is considered an enormous success. On the other hand, if it is a financial loss, the loss may not be due to any lack of artistic merit in the work. A great deal depends on the subject, and on the interpretation; and, unless both are good, the music, though it may be divine, will never carry it through. If a composer is dependent on his art, and has to live on it, his best chance is with comic opera, or with songs. There is no other way open to him. If a comic opera is successful, of course, the composer may derive a large income, because the work may be played for a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred nights.[222]

Cowen was enthusiastic about founding a 'National Opera', stating in 1895: 'I believe if one great National Institution – comprising an Opera, a School of Music, subsidised by the

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[219] *MAMF*, 266.
[220] Spencer and Burton, at <http://www.grovemusic.com> [accessed 6 January 2007].
[221] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(9).
[222] *IEM*, 250.

State, and under State control – were established, the result would be eminently satisfactory'.[223]

Hanslick puts the argument more starkly:

> England will never achieve equality with other musical nations as long as London has no stable, permanent National Opera throughout the year. I do not mean, of course, merely a theatre for original operas of English composers, but rather a theatre which also offers the best of the classic and modern German, French, and Italian repertoires. Such a resident theatre should be accessible not alone to the rich aristocracy; the emphasis, moreover, should be rather on well-rounded ensemble than on a few expensive stars. It would exercise the most beneficial influence on the musical cultivation of the English public, which now knows the best foreign operas either fleetingly or not at all. It would also offer the best, and indeed, the only really effective encouragement for English composers, who, as things now stand, are understandably hesitant about setting to work on the composition of an opera which can expect, at best, not more than five or six performances.[224]

Therefore, it can be seen that the task facing Cowen's generation was almost an impossible one. For a truly national opera to take hold in Britain, a sense of national pride in performing in the vernacular of the people needed to set it. Unfortunately, this time had not quite yet come. Perhaps if Britain had been through the political upheavals that the rest of Europe had endured during the nineteenth century, the minds of folk may have been more focused on their own national identity. This is not to say that the Victorians were not patriot, far from it – the Empire was at its height: the British were in control of almost a quarter of the world. But, as a result, Britain was one of the safest places to be; it was flooded with trade, culture and philosophy from all around the planet and absorbed all that was thrown at it.

Cowen appears to have been a passionate admirer of Wagner, as he conducted his music regularly, and he was a paid-up member of the Wagner Society.[225] He would have, therefore, been naturally drawn towards Wagner's approach to opera and his technique of leitmotives. In discussion of Cowen's works, many reviews make mention of his use of *leitmotiven*, representative themes, leading-themes, reminiscence motives and character themes. Before proceeding with an examination of his approach, it is necessary to clarify some of the terminology used. The Wagnerian *leitmotiven* process found in that composer's approach to some of his operas required a fusion of two central nineteenth-century compositional techniques—thematic recollection (or

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[223] Ibid., 251.
[224] Hanslick, 255.
[225] Letter in Private Collection – Christopher J. Parker, dd. 16 July, n.y.

reminiscence) and thematic transformation. Thematic recollection had been common in the recurring themes found in French, Italian and German operas for at least a generation before Wagner. Indeed, this method of reminiscence motives seems to have originated in French revolutionary opera; the system found its way to Wagner through Weber, with Wagner using the technique in most of his operas up until *Lohengrin*. Thematic transformation, modifications of a motive by development as a mechanism of unifying especially instrumental music, had been extant for some years in the works of Berlioz and Liszt. Each leitmotive is connected with a particular person, thing, or idea, and the relationship is instituted by the sounding of the leitmotive at the first manifestation or revelation of the object, and by its repetition, sometimes having been varied, developed or transformed in accordance with the advancement of the plot. True leitmotive must either highlight acoustically what is witnessed on stage, or evoke to the listener something concealed, thus showing the associations between the present and past, or between action and motivation.[226] Thus they underline musically the work's form and dramaturgy. Under this influence, works began to be written with longer, continuous scenes, with less separate numbers, with the distinctions (in choral and vocal music) between recitative, aria and chorus becoming more blurred. Moreover, the 'four-squareness' or regular periodicity of works tend to dissolve into free-flowing and less regular phrases. While analysis of any composers' approach to *leitmotiven* and reminiscence themes can reveal characteristics of their style and method of construction, the musical coherence of any work cannot depend on these processes alone. Even Wagner had to organise his music into recognisable musical patterns, writing his acts in sections, mostly with some internal tripartite structure, primarily either AAB (bar form) or ABA (arch form).[227]

Cowen uses forms of *leitmotiven*, representative themes, leading-themes, reminiscence motives and character themes, both in his operas and in some of his cantatas and oratorios.

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[226] Greenspan, C., 'Leitmotif, Leitmotiv' in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (ed. Randel, D. Michael)(Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 445-6; Dahlhaus, 199-201; Grout and Palisca, 748.

[227] Grout and Palisca, 751.

Moreover, in this latter context, which will be examined in more detail in the chapters 5 and 6, we have an example of him adapting an operatic technique, encapsulating characters and ideas in musical terms, and applying it to traditionally non-operatic genres. However, when searching through reviews and articles from this period, it is clear that there is no unanimity on the meanings of the above-mentioned labels used by different critics and programme-note writers.[228] Indeed, in some cases it is apparent that authors have applied the term *leitmotiven*, misunderstanding its true meaning, and grouping any theme that appears to be linked to a character under that heading, when in many circumstances these motives are more accurately called leading-themes or reminiscence themes. However, as will be shown, this is perfectly understandable given that Cowen's own approach and methodology varies widely from one work to another, from motives that are always heard in a similar fashion (falling short of the Wagnerian ideal), and that should be classed as leading-themes, to those that experience some development and transformation, and are nearer the Wagnerian model. Indeed, it is not clear whether Cowen himself fully understood the difference between *leitmotiven* and reminiscence/leading themes. Moreover, if the reviews of Cowen's *Thorgrim*, *Signa* and *Harold* were to be believed, it may be concluded that Wagner's influence rang strongly through them, especially in his adoption of Wagnerian principles of *leitmotiven* and to his method of continuous melody. But as has already been suggested above, the reality is rather different. There is practically no pre-existing scholarship on Cowen's use of reminiscence themes and *leitmotiven*, nor has any review of the operas handed down detailed accounts of the different motives and what they represent. One letter from Cowen to Bennett concerning *Thorgrim* does mention a list of principal motives, but it no longer accompanies the letter.[229] Therefore, the whole process becomes one of supposition and guesswork:

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[228] For instance, it would seem that Charles Willeby regarded *leitmotiven* and character themes as the same thing.
[229] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(76).

Thorgrim leitmotiven:

1) One key motive emerges in No. 8 'Saw'st thou the Act', at the 7th bar of letter H, and may be considered a 'love motive', as it underlines a mention of this emotion by Helgi. It recurs again in the introduction to the marriage scene between Olof and Helgi, at the beginning of act four (bar 23), in an augmented form, and at the close of movement No. 14 as Helgi sings 'O Powers, ye hold the issue of my life'.

2) Movement No. 8 also begins with a distinctive motive that has similar rhythmic qualities to that of the 'love motive', and perhaps is a reference to the 'shadow of Thorgrim' that seems to haunt Helgi wherever he goes. It also returns at the beginning of movement No. 14 (the start of act four) in augmentation (troubling Helgi before the wedding); in movement No. 16 soon after the *alla breve* time change (as Thorgrim harries Helgi); and in the finale of the opera at letter M, again augmented and well marked (as Thorgrim's men hassles and then fights Helgi's men).

3) At the 16th bar of letter N (movement No. 10) a motive relating to Thorgrim's 'request' is heard. This compound duple time motive is heard again in an augmented variation in *alla breve* time in the *con molto fuoco* section of the finale of the opera, as Thorgrim's request gradually comes true. It is then heard (in compound duple time) as the lover's are born seaward on Thorgrim's warship, and the request is honoured. An extension of this motive is also heard in the 14th bar of letter O in compound duple time, and in a simple triple variant at 'Thine through all the future years' in the closing section of the opera's finale. Other motives are clearly discernible, but less obvious in their subsequent incarnations.

Signa leitmotiven

The abridged version of *Signa* rather continues in the vain of *Thorgrim*, with several clear motives that have some significance.

1) The first of these is heard at the very beginning of the opera and relates to the violin-playing Signa. This motive reappears throughout the work, most noticeably at Signa's first words 'Let not the darkness conquer me!'; in the reprise of the same words in movement No. 3; at the 9th bar of letter O in the orchestra as Signa finishes pleading with his father Bruno over his love for Gemma; and at the conclusion of the opera after Gemma has died and Signa has stabbed himself.

2) The 3rd bar of the *allegro vivace*, 4 bars before letter C, presents a motive that is associated with Gemma. Here it marks her first entrance on stage in the opera. It also persists throughout the opera, occurring after the words 'Yes, unless thou follow me!' as Gemma stamps her authority over Sartorio; as Sartorio addresses Gemma, 11 bars after letter Y; in an augmented form as Gemma announces 'I'm coming!', at the close of movement No. 9; and in an inverted form soon after Bruno has stabbed Gemma at letter R.

3) Bruno also has a motive that relates to his character, although it is not heard until his second solo aria, movement No. 6, from the 3rd bar. This motive naturally closes the same movement, and then the finale of act one, as Bruno tenderly embraces Signa. In act two Bruno's motive returns in the entr'acte; at the Bruno's words 'Signa! my Signa!', at letter M, as they encounter each other; after the words 'Yes, 'tis I!' as Bruno reveals himself to Gemma; and finally as Bruno argues with Gemma after letter Q in the final scene, and finally stabs her.

Harold leitmotiven

The freer flowing *Harold* has a plethora of motives, many of which are impossible to identify with a particular character, object or mood. The following observations are, therefore, little more than impressions.

1) A motive 8 bars before letter C appears to refer to Duke William, and is heard again when he enters the stage 27 bars after letter D. However, this theme does not return again.

2) A motive associated with Edith appears around 60 bars after letter A, and reoccurs at the words in reference to her uttered by Duke William 'Thy daughter, this?' It is also heard near the beginning of act three as she enters on the scene at Westminster Hall, just before letter C; and as she enters onto the field of Hastings after the battle.

3) A motive that is perhaps connected with Harold is found at Alfnoth's words 'So bold a bowman must not go', after letter B. It recurs just after letter C and letter E, the latter in a shortened form, while Harold is the topic of discussion between Alfnoth, Duke William and Malet. It is used in a similar curtailed manner as Duke William secures Harold's departure from Alfnoth's castle by force, and at the beginning of act four as the plains of Hastings and the day of Harold's death approaches.

4) The opening of act two presents the opera's love motive, initially in a simple triple time, as Harold and Princess Adela profess false love to each other, he so he can use her to escape, and she to please her father Duke William. As the love dialogue continues it is heard again in a simple quadruple time variant at the 10th bar of letter C, and in a further variant form, back in the simple triple metre just before E. It is then resurrected for the real love duet between Harold and Edith before letter M; in diminution from the 15th bar of 'The Battle', and in a similar fashion underpinning the final scene of the opera.

5) Another motive at letter V seems to refer to the throwing down of the 'gauntlet'. It come backs regularly in the closing pages of the opera.

Therefore, Cowen's approach to the utilisation of the *leitmotiven* process involves strategic placing of reiterations of his motives, with some variation, primarily of a rhythmic nature. While this goes beyond what most scholars would regard as reminiscence themes, it is not quite the wholesale *leitmotiven* method that one would find in Wagner's scores. As is apparent from many of the observations about his music, Cowen was essentially a melodist, and the Wagnerian method, therefore, was not particularly conducive to his style. Thus, the Italian approach, with its overriding importance of melody, especially under the influence of Verdi, may have aesthetically appealed to Cowen more (particularly in light of his involvement with James Henry Mapleson's Italian Opera Company from the age of nineteen). However, faced with these two quite separate approaches, after *Pauline* Cowen seems to have tried to do the impossible and find a compromise between the two, seeking a Wagnerian approach to aspects of their compositional technique, whilst trying to spin memorable melodies with a fairly regular periodicity, the product of his predisposition towards ballad-mongery. Hence, the two idioms were always going to be in conflict with each other, and this led to unsatisfactory compromises. To quote Spencer and Burton, Cowen's operas 'inhabit a no-man's-land between lyrical number opera and quasi-Wagnerian synthesis', especially *Thorgrim* and *Harold*.[230] Indeed, when Cowen's love of melody and his lack of whole-hearted commitment to the leifmotive process are combined with his apparent inability to create and truly express intense emotional outpourings through music, and his seeming incapacity to build a convincing musical climax, the significant reasons for his operas' failures from a musical point of view become clear. If this was not enough, he was further limited by the often one-dimensional characterisations of his librettists.

While there is little doubt that the later three operas were written under the shadow of Cowen's experience of Wagner's music, he was unable to translate what he had heard in the German's music into something that he could work into his own rather more facile idiom. Indeed, there is little in Cowen's harmonic language that has the least resemblance to Wagner,

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[230] Spencer and Burton, at <http://www.grovemusic.com> [accessed 6 January 2007].

none of the post-*Tristan* complex chromaticism and tonal ambiguity that led towards new systems of harmony in the 1890s and onwards. Wagner had few equals as a master of orchestral colour; whilst Cowen was a highly capable orchestrator, his best work tends to be at the lighter and brighter end of the spectrum, whereas the darker colours and hues needed for his mythological and historical operas seem to have evaded him. There is no better testament to his lighter side than in his early comedietta *One Too Many*. However, Frank Howes thought that in *Harold* 'daintiness' emerged 'at the smallest excuse...Indeed, this score shows almost at a glance how music that is essentially commonplace is commonplace and nothing more in the heavier passages of drama, but becomes distinctive as soon as the touch is lightened for the female characters to become lyrical. What he aimed at was to please'.[231] However, this observation could equally be applied to parts of *Pauline*, *Thorgrim* or *Signa*. Streatfeild is clear in which direction he would have liked Cowen to proceed: 'His tender vein of melody and happy knack of orchestration should serve him admirably in the *genre* of Opéra Comique; but Grand Opera is beyond him, and he cannot be too strongly warned against forcing his talent into a groove to which it is ill adapted'.[232] Streatfeild probably has a good point here, as Cowen's muse manifestly suited this lighter form of entertainment, as his experiments with *One Too Many* demonstrate. And, maybe he felt the same, as he began, and apparently completed, another unnamed three act Comedy Opera in 1921. Unfortunately, whereas Sullivan found his Gilbert with which to pen such works, Cowen did not.

While there is not much doubt that the Norse mythology of *Thorgrim* would have appealed to Wagner, his distinctive and strange use of mythology and symbolism was difficult to successfully imitate. Indeed, it appears that Bennett, Cowen's librettist, was drawn to the subject of 'Thorgrim' with the intent of them making their own *Siegfried*. If that was their objective, it is clear that they did not succeed. Although Cowen did involve himself to a certain degree in the non-musical aspects of the production of his operas, as his correspondence with Joseph Bennett

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[231] Howes, F., *The English Musical Renaissance* (London, 1966), 64.
[232] Streatfeild, 322.

demonstrates, 'grand' opera subjects and Wagner's idea of an all-embracing art-form were beyond Cowen's abilities as a musician and a dramatist. In truth, Cowen probably did not have the weight of personality to take on such an overseeing role. Indeed, whereas musicologists have extracted hundreds of pages of scholarship on Wagner's operatic preoccupations with eroticism, sexuality and gender, and politics, as well as his attitude toward Jews, with Cowen there is a complete void of information. Moreover, a cursory scout through the pages of most current opera dictionaries and encyclopaedias will reveal not one word of mention of Cowen or his operas.

Eduard Hanslick, who was uniformly dismissive of the efforts of all the extant British composers of his time, and said of Mackenzie's *The Troubadour* that it was 'one of the dullest and most disagreeable affairs I have ever encountered in the form of music in costume',[233] concluded: 'Opera...requires melodic invention, strong sensuality, and a fresh, consistent style – all characteristics with which the English are not notably endowed. Those opera composers who think that all can be saved by imitation of the ultimate Wagnerian style [of which he was not a great admirer] will soon learn how great was the delusion'.[234] The future of British Opera and its salvation was, however, not to be found in the direction that Cowen had ventured, but in national inspiration. Ironically, Cowen's *Harold* had sounded a nationalistic note, recounting the history of the Norman Conquest. But by using foreign models of construction and style, *Harold* should be dismissed of having any nationalistic credentials. As Streatfeild postulated in 1897: 'Let the inspiration be English, Irish, Scotch, or Welsh, it matters little, so that the music smell of the soil. By turning to his native hills and the music of his fatherland, Weber founded German Opera, and if we are ever to have a school of British Opera we must lay the foundations on the same lines'.[235] Indeed, to an extent, Streatfeild's suggestion was taken up by the next generation of British Opera composers. And yet, Philip Rodden's assertion that 'Opera, when produced on

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[233] Hanslick, 258.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Streatfeild, 322-3.

a grand scale, has never really been a paying business anywhere, there have been exceptions, but so ephemeral as to be almost surely accidents',[236] was as true in the 1800s, as it was in the 1960s when he wrote it, and even today.

Cowen did return to the operatic forms a year or so after *Harold* with his *The Dream of Endymion.* This Scena for tenor, whilst not a operatic work, is a standalone piece that is a testament to much that Cowen learnt from composing the scenas in his operas and secular cantatas, especially as it post-dates all of them. Composed expressly for the voice of the Welsh tenor, Ben Davies (1858-1943), again to a libretto by Joseph Bennett, it was written during the autumn and winter of 1896/7, coming to realisation at the Philharmonic Society on the 17 June in a 'Special Commemoration Programme' to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's accession, which occurred five days later. *The Dream of Endymion* was never published in full score, although a reduction for piano and voice was issued, and the original manuscript is now deposited in the Royal College of Music. A rendition of it was given recently at Slough Parish Church on 28 September 2002.[237]

In Greek mythology, Endymion was a huntsman, a shepherd, or a king of Elis, who is said to have asked of Zeus, or to have received as a punishment, eternal sleep. Others relate that Selene or Artemis conveyed him to Mount Latmos in Caria, and threw him into a perpetual sleep in order that she might enjoy his society whenever she pleased. Endymion is also supposed to be a personification of the sun, or of the plunge of the setting sun into the sea, as in Keats' *Endymion.* Indeed, Cowen's score is prefaced by a quotation from Keats' *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* (1818): 'O, my love, My breath of life, where art thou?...Hither most gentle sleep!', and so this was probably the source of the emotional stimulus for Bennett's and Cowen's

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[236] Rodden, P., 'The Operatic Scene' in *Who's Who in Music* (ed., Townend, P., & Simmons, D.)(London: Burke's Peerage Ltd., 1962), xxxi.

[237] This production of *The Dream of Endymion* was at the behest of Lewis Foreman and made possible by the extraction and the making of orchestral parts from the MS in the Royal College of Music, which was undertaken by myself.

inspiration.[238] Indeed, Cowen's emotions seem to have been truly fired-up by the subject matter. It is in one continuous movement divided into three sections, of which the dream music is the middle one. There is an introduction of twenty-seven bars, opening with a passage for lone cor anglais (*Moderato tranquillo*); its opening phrase is of special significance, since it is repeated, both before and after Endymion's question: 'What art thou?' and may therefore be taken as representative of the mysterious being thus addressed. The recitative-like opening reaches a climax with the words 'Whom passion calls to ecstasy', before dying away quickly to nothingness. The onset of the dream is heralded by a solo horn, whose proclamation is immediately echoed in the distance. Gradually the vocal part becomes more lyrical, encouraged by delicate sweeping strings and the words 'Ravishing music floats around', as Endymion is swamped by the fervent passions of his dream until a climax is inevitably reached. Predictably the dream must come to an end, and Endymion awakens. A recollection of the delight of the vision provokes Endymion to declaim 'Celestial vision! O supreme delight!' and calls forth a reiteration of the opening phrase of the dream music on the clarinet. A little further on there is a reference to the theme representative of the vision, which reappears, as does the dream music, in the accompaniment, when the music again becomes more measured and song-like, with the words 'Now would I dream again'. The work draws to a close in a state of elation, the orchestra having the final say interrupting Endymion with a further climatic outburst of the horn's dream motive.

Here we have compacted into less than fifteen minutes of music Cowen's most passionate expression: a scena that encapsulates the almost total integration of declamatory and song-like styles that he had assimilated through the composition of his operas and secular cantatas. Cowen is genuinely inspired: nothing is contrived; he is in full command of his resources, and it received a number of outings under Cowen's baton, including at the

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[238] Alice Mary Smith had written an overture in 1864 (rev. 1871 for the Crystal Palace) enthused by Keats' work, and it would later motivate Samuel Coleridge-Taylor to compose his opera *Endymion's Dream* (1910) and parts of Holst's First Choral Symphony (1925).

Birmingham Festival, at the Hallé in Manchester, Norwich and Liverpool.[239] Indeed, if only the operas could have maintained this level of musical inspiration throughout, they may have remained in the repertoire for rather longer.

In defining the word 'Opera' in his ironic book of musical terms, Cowen said that it was

> a stage play, with a more or less unintelligible plot, set to music for a very large orchestra. There are also a certain number of singers who impersonate the characters in the piece as ably as their age and size will permit. These are, however, somewhat superfluous, as their words are always inaudible and their music usually unsingable. The 1st Act of an Opera is often omitted – by the audience.[240]

While we know Cowen is joking here, one does sense that his life experiences had shaped his judgement and that he was tacitly admitting that all was not well in British opera! Indeed, within a year or two of this article Cowen was winding down his career as a serious composer. However, he did not lay down his pen entirely, as he took up many smaller commissions in his semi-retirement, rather picking up where he left off with *One Too Many* many years before. Indeed, in 1917 Cowen found himself working on two projects, the first of which was 'a musical playlet without words', in effect, an unspoken pantomime with music, to a synopsis by Sir Arthur Pinero entitled *Monica's Blue Boy*, which was staged at the New Theatre, London;[241] a work in which war was part of the web and woof, not mere decoration. The other project of the year was a comedy ballet for the Coliseum, London, entitled *Cupid's Conspiracy*,[242] that was originally to be called *The Dancing Lesson*; it was probably inspired by George Cruikshank's cartoons of the same name from the 1820s, which Cowen is known to have collected.[243] It was first performed at the London Coliseum on 31 December of that year,[244] but it ran for several weeks into 1918, with Cowen conducting the orchestra at all the performances, and with the lead role danced by Mlle. Lydia Kyasirt.[245] The four selected published movements from the original score consist of 'Polka gracieuse', 'Danse serenade', 'Petite gavotte' and 'Valse'. These exist in

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239 Ben Davies gave all the performances listed here except that at Liverpool, where it was sung by John Harrison.
240 Cowen, F. H., *Music as She is Wrote*, London, Mills and Boon Ltd., 1915, 41-2.
241 Hull, A. E., *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* (London and Toronto, 1924)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche II 1408).
242 Hull (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche II 1408).
243 *MTC*, 718; *FCI*, 384.
244 *The Times*, 1 January 1918, 9.
245 *The Stage Yearbook* (Carston and Comerford Ltd., [1918?]), 35.

Piano score and a version for Clarinet, Cornet, Percussion and Strings. Around 1918 Cowen seems to have started work on an operetta entitled *The Spirit of Carnival*, although it is not clear that he finished it, with part of the autograph MS in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.[246] Around 1921 Cowen was working on another substantial work entitled 'Comedy-Opera'. It is not clear whether this was to be its final title, but that is all that is written on the unpublished manuscript in the British Library.[247] However, from a brief examination of the score, there is little evidence of any radical changes of style or thought on Cowen's part. Therefore, with this in mind, and in the absence of any evidence of a performance, for what purpose it was written, or who supplied the libretto, an analysis has been avoided. In 1922 Cowen again collaborated with Sir Arthur Pinero who invited him to write some incidental music for a stage production at the Duke of York's Theatre, entitled *The Enchanted Cottage*.[248] None of these later stage works demonstrate anything fundamentally new in Cowen's approach. Perhaps he has allowed himself a little more sophistication in his chromatic harmony, but in many respects the music harks back to the simplicity of his earlier works.

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246 MSS.Mus.b.45, ff.1-43. It consists of 13 separate numbers in vocal or piano score.

247 BL Add. MS 52426, i+205ff. (MS dd. 4.vii.1921). It was presented to British Library by Dr CB Oldham, and formerly owned by Harold Reeves.

248 Hull (*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche II 1408). Pinero's *The Enchanted Cottage* was made into a notable 1945 romantic film starring Robert Young, Dorothy McGuire, and Mildred Natwick, which attempted to change attitudes to facial disfigurement, at a time when many war wounded servicemen were returning to the USA after World War II. 'The Enchanted Cottage (1945 Film) in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., U.S.A.) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Enchanted_Cottage_%281945_movie%29> [accessed c. 15 December 2006].

5. Choral Works 1 (Cantatas & Oratorios)

Cowen wrote over twenty choral works, covering both secular and sacred subjects, from full-scale oratorios such as *Ruth*, to choral pieces that were little more than orchestrated part-songs (such as 'All Hail the Glorious Reign'), with many different gradations in between. Indeed, they span most of his active life as a composer and show how his approach to choral writing progressively changed during his lifetime. Although Cowen's choral works show a diversity of character and form, it is possible to arrange them into six groups thus: **the secular cantatas** (*The Rose Maiden*, *The Corsair*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Saint John's Eve*, and *The Water-Lily*), **the shorter secular cantatas** for female voices and piano accompaniment (*The Fairies' Spring*, *Village Scenes*, *Summer on the River*, *Christmas Scenes*, *The Rose of Life*, and *A Daughter of the Sea*), **the narrative cantata** (*John Gilpin*), **the sacred works** (*The Deluge*, *Saint Ursula*, *Ruth*, and *The Transfiguration*), **the ethical cantata** (*The Veil*), and **the Odes and *pièces d'occasions*** (*A Song of Thanksgiving*, *In Memoriam Ode to Carl Rosa*, *All Hail the Glorious Reign*, *Ode to the Passions*, *Coronation Ode*, *He Giveth His Belovèd Sleep*, and *What shall we Dance?*). The first four of these categories will be dealt with in this chapter [5. Choral Works 1 (Cantatas & Oratorios)], along with an assessment of Cowen's approach to *leitmotiven* in some of these works, a technique he had borrowed from German opera. The last two categories will be covered in the following chapter [6. Choral Works 2 (Other Pieces)]. Although these classifications are rather subjective, and other approaches could be found, they enable an impression of Cowen's methodology toward the choral work to be determined. Of the above categorizations, most are self-explanatory. In accordance with nineteenth-century practice, the cantata is primarily distinguished from the oratorio by the former's shorter duration. During that century, the boundaries between the sacred and secular became blurred, such that religion and history were often merged in musical art. Therefore, the designations of Cowen's choral works have been determined from his original descriptions, but challenged when they have proved not to be authentic. The term 'ethical cantata' has been chosen to represent works that explore

philosophical, spiritual or at least heterodoxical issues, but which are not in themselves expressions of religious dogma that can be found in the doctrine of a mainstream organised religion such as Christianity, Judaism or Islam. The need to give the shorter secular cantatas with female voices and piano a separate group, was thought expedient as a means of underlining their smaller scale and simplicity of approach compared with Cowen's large-scale secular cantatas. Indeed, Cowen cannot have thought much of them, as he does not mention any of the six works in his autobiography *My Art and My Friends.* While it will be shown that each group has specific features that are more prominent in some sub-genres than others, Cowen did have the ability to cross-fertilize an approach from one to another.

In this chapter a brief summary of the nineteenth-century choral scene in Britain will be followed by Cowen's attitude to the libretto and his librettists. Then his approach to his secular cantatas will be addressed in detail, as these show most of the principal features of his compositional technique in the choral genre. Brief mention will be made of Cowen's shorter female voice cantatas, before turning to his narrative cantatas and sacred works. Finally, Cowen's application of operatic *leitmotiven* to his choral works will be examined.

* * * * *

A substantial part of Cowen's choral output was written to commissions from the ever-growing plethora of musical festivals that were held in Victorian Britain. Indeed, for many nineteenth-century Britons the oratorio form had become the supreme form of musical art:[1] it appealed to the innate pious attitudes and values of that country's people.[2] This was primarily the

[1] Hervey, A, 'A Chat About Music In Paris' in *Strand Musical Magazine* (ed., Hatzfeld, E.)(London: George Newnes Ltd., 1895), vol. I, 245.
[2] Dibdin, J. C., 'Nationality in Music', *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.)(London: Caxton Publishing Co. Ltd., *c.* 1910?), vol. 5., 171.

product of the dominating influences of Handel's *Messiah*[3] and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which were not only the staple diet of the Victorian music festival but, as effectively 'native' works written for Protestant England, were also the paradigm for admirers and imitators. For many during this period, these were the works that composers should aspire to.[4] Indeed, whereas it might be expected that continental composers would put utmost value on their works for the orchestra or the opera-house, in Britain composers sought their greatest esteem through their choral works. However, music from abroad did filter its way into the British music festival, and gave Victorian audiences new sound worlds that they had hitherto not encountered.[5] Their inclusion in these festivals also demonstrate changing Victorian attitudes towards religion that began to allow works that were secular to emerge, or that addressed a sacred subject from a philosophical rather than theological point of view. Yet, even under these new stimuli, Pisani wrote recently that the later British oratorios and cantatas were in 'a peculiarly monochromatic style…modelled on Mendelssohn and Gounod'.[6]

Into this environment Cowen, therefore, dipped his pen in 1870. At first, as would be expected, he would simply assimilate the extant choral tradition that he had already heard. But, with his involvement with the Mapleson Opera Company and his blossoming career as a conductor, he would soon digest new music, sounds and approaches that would shape the rest of his career as a composer. Cowen quickly learnt to respond to the insatiable appetite of the public of his time. While the British nation had viewed Handel's, Haydn's and Mendelssohn's works as the pinnacle of achievement in the choral form thus far, the new generation of composers, with Cowen among them, sought a different direction that would encompass the high-romanticism

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[3] Hughes and Stradling argue that after Handel's death, his music became increasingly anglicised and absorbed into the British psyche, to the extent that the mid-Victorians presented him and his compositions as archetypically Victorian and British—socially and charitably conscious, morally upright, and Christian to the fore. (Hughes, M., and Stradling, R., *The English Musical Renaissance* (2nd Ed.)(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 7.).

[4] William Crotch's *Palestine* (1811), Clarke-Whitfield's *Crucifixion* (1822) and *Resurrection* (1825), Ouseley's *St Polycarp* (1855), Costa's *Eli* (1855) and *Naaman* (1864), Sterndale Bennett's *Woman of Samaria* (1867), Macfarren's *St John the Baptist*, and Sullivan's *The Prodigal Son* (1869) and *The Light of the World* (1873) are a testament to this.

[5] Among these were Spohr's *The Last Judgment*, Schumann's *Paradise and the Peri*, Liszt's *Christus*, Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*, Franck's *Beatitudes*, Charles Gounod's *Redemption* and *Mors et Vita*, and excerpts from the operas of Wagner.

[6] Pisani, M. V., *Imaginary Native American Music* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), 149.

that was already sweeping the continent, combined with the tastes and requirements of the music festivals. Unfortunately, the conservative natures of these festivals meant that little of this new music was 'born of intuition and artistic necessity…[it was] born of fashion and the invitations of festival committees…stand[ing] not for the artist, but for the English musical worthy and his duty to society'.[7] When asked about the value of musical festivals in 1895, Cowen replied:

> I think musical festivals are undoubtedly productive of much good. The only fault of the festivals of the present day is that they are too strenuous in searching after novelty. A new work is always demanded, and in consequence there is an accumulation of works, some of which die a premature death. But, I suppose, here as elsewhere, the rule of the 'survival of the fittest' comes into operation. Mind you, I think that the demand for new works is good up to a certain point; but it is carried too far. I do not approve of writing on commission at all, but on these things you can hardly help yourself. I believe in taking time over a work, and then offering it to anyone who cares to buy it. It is not satisfactory for a man to go on year after year producing works without intermission, but he is practically bound to do it. If you stand aside someone else is only too willing to take your place, and you are left out in the cold.[8]

Indeed, Cowen humorously remarked: 'When commissions come in at the door, Art flies out of the window',[9] and defined a music festival as 'a lying-in hospital for still-born works by British composers'.[10] Moreover, Charles Reid, writing in 1963, concludes: 'English choralism is to be congratulated on having freed itself from such conventions and obligations in our own day'.[11] In reality, the need for novelty often gave rise to composers presenting their audiences with banality, as the demand for 'new' works exceeded their facility to produce innovative compositions. This system also meant that second performances of works were a rarity, even when the music was deemed more than satisfactory. Cowen did offer, perhaps humorously, a solution to the problem of this system:

> It would be well if every composer had a thousand [pounds or may be guineas] a year independent of his profession. Of course, it may be urged that a man with a thousand a year would not produce any work at all; but this would not be the case with a true artist. Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, for example, were quite independent of their profession, but they worked hard nevertheless. Mendelssohn, indeed, worked quite as hard as if he had to rely entirely upon his compositions.[12]

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[7] *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.
[8] *IEM*, 250.
[9] Cowen, F. H., *Music as She is Wrote*, London, Mills and Boon Ltd, 1915, 63.
[10] Ibid., 29.
[11] Reid, C., 'Britain from Stanford to Vaughan Williams' in *Choral Music* (ed. Jacobs, A.)(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), 270.
[12] *IEM*, 250.

He clearly acknowledged the downside of the real system, but he had no alternative but to work within its constraints. This is not to dismiss his contribution to this genre out of hand, as will be seen, within their many pages can be found much fine music worthy of a resurrection from a hundred or so years of sleep. Indeed, his *Ruth*, *The Transfiguration*, *Ode to the Passions*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Saint John's Eve*, *John Gilpin*, and *The Veil*, all compare well with any contemporaneous works in circulation at the time. However, in 1903 Cowen was uncertain of the future of oratorio:

> The days of absolute oratorio are numbered. People want the dramatic form on scriptural or sacred subjects. Now modern oratorio, but oratorio as we know it, ended with [Mendelssohn's] 'Elijah'. I never look on that work as an oratorio, but a biblical opera. There is nothing sacred in the strict sense in the subject, it is simply the history of a prophet and the pagans. The public of to-day want a human story. They want human interest on the concert platform the same as on the stage.[13]

This may explain why Cowen had shied away from writing sacred cantatas and oratorios by this time. But he also observed:

> In the repetition of subjects for oratorio there is one great exception. No matter how often the story of the Saviour [Jesus Christ] has been written, it will always be acceptable to the world at large if it is well done. It is difficult to follow Handel's 'Messiah'; but if some one would set it again in modern oratorio as we know it, and ably fulfil his task, its acceptance would be assured.[14]

Cowen, however, did not take up his own challenge.

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[13] Armstrong, W, 'Two English Composers of To-day: Frederic H. Cowen – Edwin [*sic*] Elgar' in *The Etude* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., February 1903), 47.
[14] Ibid.

Table 1: A list of Cowen's Cantatas and Oratorios

Date	Title	Cowen's genre title	Librettist(s)	First Performance	Soloist(s)	Notes
1870	*The Rose Maiden*	Cantata	Robert E. Francillon, after the German	St. James's Hall, London	Titiens, Patey, Nordbloom, Stockhausen,	Dedicated to the Countess of Dudley. St. Thomas' Choral Society provided the chorus
1876	*The Corsair*	Dramatic Cantata	Robert E. Francillon, after Lord Byron	Birmingham Festival, 29.viii.1876	Unknown	
1878	*The Deluge*	[Oratorio]	Arranged from the Bible (*Genesis*)	Brighton Festival, 28.ii.1878	Osgood, Sterling, Shakespeare, and Beale	Unpublished, MS assumed lost, except for some fragments
1881	*Saint Ursula*	Sacred Cantata	Robert E. Francillon	Norwich Festival, 13.x.1881	Albani, Patey, Lloyd, and King	
1885	*Sleeping Beauty*	Cantata	Francis Hueffer	Birmingham Festival, 25.viii.1885	Hutchinson, Trebelli, Lloyd, and King	Dedicated to Emily Cowen Also performed in a Fr. transl. *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, at Société Concordia, Paris, late 1885, Fr. transl. by Augusta Holmès
1887	*Ruth*	Dramatic Oratorio	Joseph Bennett, arranged from the Bible (*Ruth*)	Worcester Festival, ix.1887	Albani, Williams, Glenn, Lloyd, and Mills	
1889	*Saint John's Eve*	Old English Idyll	Joseph Bennett	Crystal Palace, London, 14.xii.1889	Unknown	Dedicated to the People of Melbourne
1891	*The Fairies' Spring*	Cantata	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1892	*The Water-Lily*	Romantic Legend	Joseph Bennett, after William Wordsworth's *The Egyptian Maid or Romance of the Water-Lily*	Norwich Festival, 6.x.1893	Albani, Mckenzie, Lloyd, Salmond, and Pierpoint	It was intended for Leeds in 1892, but withdrawn.
1893	*Village Scenes*	Cantata	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1893	*Summer on the River*	Cantata	Shapcott Wensley	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1894	*Christmas Scenes*	Cantata	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1895	*The Transfiguration*	Church Cantata	Joseph Bennett, after the Bible	Gloucester Festival, 15.ix.1895	Henson, Wilson, Lloyd, and Bispham	
1895	*The Rose of Life*	Cantata	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1896	*A Daughter of the Sea*	Cantata	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	Unknown	For females vv and pno accomp
1900	Jephthah	[Proposed oratorio or cantata]	Joseph Bennett, after the Bible (*Judges*)	never performed	N/A	This work is mentioned in one letter dd. 8.vi.1900 to Bennett. It appears to have got little beyond the sketch stage
1904	*John Gilpin*	Ballad	William Cowper	Cardiff Festival, 23.ix.1904	None	

Before any composer can embark upon a choral work, he must first have a clear idea of his objective and subject, and then create or obtain his libretto. Cowen, despite his witty writings later in life, did not have Wagner's disposition towards prose, and, as he observed himself, if one 'was not able to write or compile his own libretto, or did not just fancy any of the standard poet's work', he 'was glad to find' a librettist that would write 'something that at least bore a resemblance to poetry fitted for musical treatment'.[15] He, for the most part, at least with his cantatas and oratorios, favoured this method, as it released him from the worry of crafting satisfactory poetry himself: he could concentrate purely on the music. Working with a librettist also meant that the collaborators could exchange ideas and adapt to each others requirements as the work progressed, although it could also be a source of tension when they did not agree on a matter. Unfortunately, as Cowen remarked: '[There was a] dearth of really good librettists, it was Hobson's choice'.[16] Indeed, from the table 1 it is immediately clear that when an original libretto was required, certain names kept reoccurring: Robert E. Francillon, Joseph Bennett, and G. Clifton Bingham. Another significant figure was Francis Hueffer, with whom Cowen liaised for his *Sleeping Beauty.*

Cowen's early *libretti* were supplied by Robert Edward Francillon (1841-1919), a novelist and journalist. He was born at Gloucester in 1841 (the eldest son of James Francillon, a County Court Judge); educated at the Cheltenham College and Trinity College, Cambridge; called to the Bar (he was a barrister at Gray's Inn in 1864); and was on the staff of the *Globe* newspaper from 1872-94.[17] Cowen simply refers to him as 'my literary friend',[18] who along with his wife Rosamond (a daughter of the composer John Barnett) 'gave weekly receptions throughout the winter [at their house], which were attended by many well-known people in various walks of life, and more especially by the rising generation of poets and *litterati* of the time'.[19] One can only

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15 *MAMF*, 133.
16 Ibid.
17 *Who was Who: 1916-28* (London: A & C Black, 1992), 290.
18 *MAMF*, 55.
19 Ibid., 156.

speculate as to how Cowen and Francillon met; it is possible that they were first acquainted through Cowen's membership of the Savage and Green Room Clubs, but equally it may have been through Cowen's father's connections, or that of the Cowens' early 'patron', the Earl of Dudley. Likewise, it is only possible to conjecture why, after three relatively successful collaborations, they ceased to work together. The most likely explanation here is that Cowen's success meant that he could now approach the leading players, i.e. the Bennetts and the Hueffers, who could, not only offer him a decent libretto, but through their contacts, could promote the work in ways that Francillon could not. However, it is equally possible that they fell out, but Cowen does not mention this.

Graham Clifton Bingham (1859-1913) was a professional lyricist from Bristol (the son of a bookseller), who penned the words to stories, children's books, and lyric verses to over 1600 songs. Of Cowen's and Bingham's relationship we know nothing at all: there is no mention of Bingham anywhere in Cowen's writings. Therefore, we can only speculate as to their working relationship, whether they liaised fully together on a project, or whether Bingham merely supplied the text to whoever would set it. Bingham supplied Cowen with many of the words to his songs as well. Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) was the music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, and in so being, was a very influential figure in the musical world. This was also true of Francis Hueffer (1843-88), the successor to Davison as music critic at *The Times*. Indeed, these two men were professional adversaries, both in the journalistic sense by working on competing newspapers, but also in their attitude to the machinations of the growing influence of Richard Wagner on the whole musical world. Bennett was an anti-Wagnerian, disapproving strongly of his approach to opera, whereas Hueffer, himself German-born, was passionately pro-Wagner.[20] Cowen says that both Hueffer and Joseph Bennett 'did a good deal of this sort of work [libretto writing], and being the critics of two most important newspapers, it was a delicate matter to object to collaborate with them, or to

[20] Like Wagner, Hueffer was an ardent disciple of Schopanhauer, and his purely literary works show a good deal of philosophical spirit. He had no particular qualifications to be a music critic, but he was successful, and exerted much influence on the musical world of his time.

suggest alterations in the book when once they had delivered it'.[21] Of Cowen's relationship with Hueffer on their one enterprise together, the *Sleeping Beauty*, we have nothing from Cowen. We know that he was not totally enamoured with Hueffer's libretto — he wrote that it 'could not be called high-class poetry, but it was dramatically constructed; the verses, if they were not exactly inspiring, at least did not hamper one's ideas'.[22] Indeed, he remarked that when *Sleeping Beauty* was given by the Société Concordia in French under the title *La Belle au Bois Dormant* in a translation by Augusta Holmès, it was 'far superior in its language and poetic expression to the original'.[23] Cowen did have a disagreement with Hueffer over the latter's inclusion of 'Through dangers surrounding our path' from the love duet of *Sleeping Beauty* [No. 10 after letter B], word for word in the love duet of Mackenzie's opera *The Troubadour* [Act III, 'The Feast', after letter C], on the basis that Cowen technically owned the copyright to the text. Hueffer had felt that Cowen 'would not mind', as he was 'anxious to see what Mackenzie would make of them'.[24] Cowen was equally annoyed with Hueffer when he lent the journalist a copy of Mérimée's *Colomba* with the intention of dramatizing it, only to find that Hueffer had utilised it for Mackenzie's opera *Colomba* (1883).[25]

Apart from Bennett's column in the *Daily Telegraph*, he also wrote for the *Musical Times*, which was a publication of the publishers Novellos, who, of course, also published most of Cowen's choral works. Cynics may suspect that this arrangement was almost too incestuous: a composer could write a work to a libretto by a man who happened to be in a position of getting it appropriately advertised before its launch, critically acclaimed after its premiere and with the same publishing house conveniently primed to print the commended work following the positive critique! Cowen was undoubtedly astute enough to realise the benefits of this arrangement too. The following letter (dd. 19 July [1887]) rather underlines the point:

> Littleton tells me he is going to ask you to write a preliminary analysis of 'Ruth' for the 'Musical Times' & is sending you an advanced proof as I believe it has to be done at once for

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[21] *MAMF*, 133.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 136.
[24] Ibid., 133-4.
[25] Ibid., 134.

> next month's no. – I hope you will be able to do it as the paper has much weight with musical societies in the country & naturally I am very anxious to see what I think will turn out [to be] my best work performed as much as possible – especially this year, as there is no other Festival (English) work of importance. At the same time if you can do the preliminary analysis for the Daily Tel.[egraph] as you kindly say you will, it might be advantageous to have it next week before people leave town, or what do you think.[26]

However, as is clear from Cowen's letters to Bennett, the process of collaborating with Bennett was at best difficult, exacerbated by the latter's somewhat haphazard approach to writing the libretto:

> Bennett…according to his usual habit, sent me the text in short instalments, so that I never knew beforehand what the next part was going to be like, and I often had to wait for days with no material to work upon, until by dint of numerous letters and telegrams from me he would at last be persuaded to send me another number or scene.[27]

Indeed, the following two letters relating to *Ruth* show this clearly—Cowen to Bennett—(dd. 16 May [1887]): 'Kindly let me have a line by return as I am waiting for this & for the alternative sentence, if necessary'.[28] Having not received a response, Cowen writes again three days later (letter dd. 19 May [1887]):

> Did you get my letter?...I am absolutely waiting at this moment for the words, and if you did not answer by return, I would know that I might use one of the above – if not, please do send me something else by return of post. I shall be quite ready for last Scene next week & want to finish the work as soon as possible or else the Scoring will never be done in time.[29]

Cowen was not alone in experiencing difficulties with Bennett: Mackenzie wrote to his friend Samuel Aitken (letter dd. 20 May 1892) about his collaboration with Bennett on his *Bethlehem*: 'Bennett has dribbled out my book in homeopathic globules to me, in spite of my repeated requests to let me have the whole of it. This has been going on for two years'.[30] George Bernard Shaw was no fan of Bennett as a librettist; reflecting on the state of British choral music in the 1890s he observed: 'No Englishman, you think, has a Meistersinger in him. Pinchbeck Handel and secondhand Mendelssohn, with words by Mr Joseph Bennett: that, according to your

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[26] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(49).
[27] *MAMF*, 142.
[28] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745, B471.(5).
[29] Ibid. (24).
[30] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC M156, A3115.(1).

experience, is English music'.[31] Shaw's dislike for Bennett's *libretti* also meant that he rarely had much that was positive to say about Cowen's and Bennett's collaborations:

> No doubt plenty of simple people who have never heard these original compositions will be charmed with [them]...The same people will, as likely as not, find Mr Bennett's verses as poetic as Mr Stopford Brooke[32] finds Wordsworth's. I do not quarrel with their opinion. I simply record my own...[All these] works which have been manufactured by the same process altogether fail to please me. I do not say they are bad; I do not attempt to prove that they are 'wrong'; I do not deny that choral societies sing them, and that audiences pay at least once to hear them sung; I do not question the genius of the composers or the impartiality of the librettist-analyst-critic; I do not assert, suggest, imply, or hint anything about anybody but myself; and of myself I only say—fully admitting that the fact may be entirely discreditable to me—that, if the whole collection of these works were in my power, I would unhesitatingly commit them to the nearest County Council 'destructor'.[33]

However, Shaw's frequently egotistical appraisals were rarely supported by the other commentators, and on their own, whilst potentially injurious to Cowen's and Bennett's *opera*, were not in themselves fatal to the reception history of the works written by their partnership.

Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties that Cowen encountered in working with Bennett, and the negative press that he received from the likes of Shaw, he clearly felt that the arrangement with Bennett was ultimately the best course of action. Having access to one of the leading critics who could promote his works, backed up by a press-machine that was bound to give him fairly positive publicity, as it was in its own interests to sell copies of the book, vocal scores, and excerpted sheet music of the most popular numbers—this made a formidable 'package' for an artist. However, in 1902 Cowen concluded: 'As to the words for cantata setting, they appear all to have been exhausted. Very few can write them, for there is lack of musical inspiration. The writer of a book [the libretto or text] for either cantata or opera must have intuition of what is required in music; many have not got that at all'.[34] This is an interesting remark, as it shows that Cowen's love-affair with the librettist system had ended. Indeed, it will be observed that Cowen effectively ceased using librettists and writing cantatas or oratorios a few years before this: his choral works from this point on, all set original poetry and literature.

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[31] Shaw, G. B., 'An English Meistersinger?' in *The Star,* 2 May 1890.
[32] The Rev. Stopford Brooke was an Irish-born cleric who wrote several studies of English literature.
[33] Shaw, G. B., 'A Sulphurous Sublimity' in *The World*, 8 November 1893.
[34] Armstrong, 47.

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In 1870, fresh from the success of his First Symphony and Piano Concerto and with a lucrative contract from John Boosey of Messrs. Boosey & Co (in which Boosey agreed to publish all Cowen's compositions for a period of three years),[35] Cowen set about tackling his first choral work, at the still tender age of eighteen, *The Rose Maiden*. Despite Cowen's training in Leipzig and later Berlin, and any Germanization that may have occurred there, he seems to have plunged into his early choral works with a comprehensive understanding of what was expected by him as a British choral composer, and of his audiences, even at his youthful age. In essence his juvenile work, the secular cantata *The Rose Maiden*, is little more than the personal fancy of a young composer who is trying his hand for the first time in a new genre; according to Cowen it 'was the easiest and the most melodious'[36] thing he had thus far written. Indeed, Buffen described it as 'an exceedingly able production, the melodies refined and tuneful, the instrumental portion scored with considerable skill'.[37] Yet, its subsequent popularity with amateur societies, for whom, as Cowen states himself, 'it was really composed',[38] became a matter of much annoyance to him: 'I am naturally not very proud to claim the authorship [of it]...and feel almost like disowning [it]'.[39] However, its durability at festivals and on the concert stage means that it cannot be ignored out of hand.

At once Cowen took on a subject that appealed to his sensibilities as a composer, and for which his light deftness of touch was most ably suited. The story of the queen of the flower fairies and her search for love, the warnings of the risks that she may endure by her pursuit, and her finding of true love only for her to die broken-hearted, drew on Victorian susceptibilities, a

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[35] *MAMF*, 29; *FCI*, 385.
[36] *IEM*, 249.
[37] Buffen, F. F., *Musical Celebrities* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1889), 65.
[38] *MAMF*, 30.
[39] *FCI*, 385.

form of escapism from the realities of the world. Francillon's libretto presented Cowen with several opportunities for dramatic moments. The queen's awakening from sleep after her transformation into Roseblossom is marked by a dramatic modulation by means of a German sixth in G major. The gardener's daughter has an impassioned recitative and aria as she explains the loss of her lover—'Ask of Yon Ruined Castle'. Here we find the first evidence of the influence of opera in Cowen's use of the designation 'scena' for this section, a subdivision of a scene, either for a single character or sometimes more (occasionally with choral interjections)—a more or less self-contained section that potentially could be sung as a standalone work at a concert. It tends to encompass the function of a recitative in moving the plot on, but in a dramatic rather than narrative fashion and with the full involvement of the whole orchestra (not just a baroque-like *basso continuo*). He gives us a pulsating lovers' duet 'I Know a Rosebud Shining' as Roseblossom and the forester announce their love to each other, which could have been taken straight from an Italian opera, followed by a characteristic wedding chorus not too far removed from Wagner's Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*. The following baritone solo paints a picture of the forest, and the recitative for tenor narrates the death of the forester and that of Roseblossom. The closing material reflects on love and death and praises God for life. There is certainly a potential to pull the audience on an emotional roller-coaster here: the queen first ignores the warnings of the dangers of love from Spring and then from the gardener's daughter. With the reversal of her situation (*peripeteia*) when she loses her own love, she realises that what she has been forewarned about has come true (*anagnorisis*). Her death brings *catharsis* to the audience as they are drawn to the pathos of the tale.

One cannot look through this score without somehow being reminded of the incidental music for Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: the sound worlds are similar, intentionally or otherwise; the 'feel' of the score is instinctively that of the same 'Muse'. Indeed, comparing Mendelssohn's 'Scherzo' with Cowen's 'Introduction', both melodies begin on the fifth degree of the scale, fall to the fourth and then third! Mendelssohn's 'You spotted snakes, with double

tongue' is surely echoed in Cowen's 'Green Vale and Vine-clad Mountain' and in much of the chorus work elsewhere. Furthermore, Cowen has his 'Chorus of Elves' for female voices prior to the finale, which shows a marked resemblance to Mendelssohn's 'Chorus of Fairies' [or Elves] at the conclusion of his work. The scurrying quaver and semi-quaver passages, presumably for strings and/or woodwind,[40] throughout much of the Cowen score also point to the Mendelssohnian influence.

Despite his youth, Cowen wrote much satisfying material for his soloists, and like most of his later secular cantatas employed four: one each of high and low voice, male and female. Cowen's chorus fulfil the function of setting the scene for the drama and contemplating the scenario that the soloists have just played out. Only at the end of the work do they really become part of the action in the 'Chorus of Elves', although this is as much deliberation on what has gone before, as being actual elves in the scene. However, Cowen had not yet conquered the art of vocal writing for chorus. Indeed, much of the chorus-work is rather straightforward and predictable, lacking any genuine polyphony. Willeby thought that Cowen was 'hampered by his voices; he is conscious of the restraint put upon him by their limitations; he is within four walls from which he cannot emerge'.[41] But, this simplicity was also the key to its success: amateur choral societies could tackle it with ease; its lack of sophistication appealed to the least demanding of audiences. Moreover, it was popular enough to be given many subsequent outings, most recently in the late 1920s and early 30s.[42] Willeby said of Cowen's orchestration: '[The] purely instrumental portions of the work…changes from [the] confinement [of the choral writing] to freedom'.[43] In terms of its construction, Cowen also relied on a pre-existing sacred oratorio format, despite its secular subject: a linear textual narrative, with independent movements, introduced by recitatives. Indeed, much of the work lacks real drama and interaction between the principal characters: a good deal

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[40] The autograph full score in the University of Toronto, Canada proved uneconomical to examine and so I have had to rely on the vocal score with its few orchestral markings.
[41] *MEM*, 189.
[42] The University Temple Chancel Choir, Seattle, USA, performed *The Rose Maiden* in 1929, and remarkably the work was given again in the same city by the College Choir of Seattle Pacific University in 1932.
[43] Ibid.

of the action and narration is confined to recitatives and solos, with the more substantial arias reflections on what has already been explained. Moreover, the principal arias ('Bloom on, my Roses' and 'Where Gloomy Pine-Trees Rustle') and duet ('The Rose of Love') still have an underlying tripartite 'da capo' structure, harking back to the arias of the eighteenth-century. Despite its popularity, Willeby's and Buffen's evaluations of the work, and Cowen's own dismissive comments in later years, tell us much about *The Rose Maiden*: it was Cowen's first major choral work, and at once shows us a composer still coming to terms with his art.

After six years, and with his rather less successful Second Symphony and a Festival Overture under his belt, Cowen received a commission (facilitated by Michael Costa) for the Birmingham Festival.[44] The subject he chose was Lord [George Gordon Noël] Byron's *The Corsair* (1814).[45] Again he turned to Robert Francillon to adapt it into a libretto; while condensing the story, Francillon kept very much to the essence of Byron's original poem, only once changing the plot to add to the dramatic effect, when instead of finding Medora dead on Conrad's return home, she remains alive so that she may pass away in his arms.[46] Cowen's composition of the music occupied the earlier part of 1876. The work certainly contains what Willeby called 'an abundance of..."local colour"'.[47] This musical exoticism was a characteristic trend of the nineteenth century, an 'attempt to add a musical dimension to a depiction...of a remote and alien milieu'.[48] Willeby says that the 'work as a whole shows abundant fancy and a forcible grasp of subject which is a distinct advance upon the *Rose Maiden*'.[49] Willeby's 'advances' can be identified

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[44] *MAMF*, 239; Brown, J. D. and Stratton, S. D., *British Musical Biography* (Birmingham, 1897)(*British Biographical Archive*, K. G. Saur Publishing, Fiche I 273).

[45] Byron's work had been tackled by a number of musicians prior to Cowen, notably Adolphe Adam's ballet *Le Corsaire* (1855), Luigi Arditi's opera *Il Corsaro*, Berlioz's overture *Le Corsaire* (1855), Verdi's opera *Il Corsaro* and an unfinished opera *Der Corsar* by Schumann (1844), such was the popularity of the subject matter.

[46] *MEM*, 203.

[47] Ibid., 203-4.

[48] Dahlhaus, C. (transl. Bradford Robinson, J.), *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 302. During this period it would most often take the form of creating the effect of European gipsy or folk music, or fashioning music that was symptomatic of the rhythms, melodies and colours of the orient, whether Arabic, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, or, in the case of Verdi's *Aïda*, Egyptian. However, as Dahlhaus notes: 'Regardless of the milieu being depicted, exoticism and folklorism almost invariably make do with the same technical devices: pentatonicism, the Dorian sixth and Mixolydian seventh, the raised second and augmented fourth, non-functional chromatic coloration, and finally bass drones, ostinatos, and pedal points' (Dahlhaus, 306).

[49] *MEM*, 203-4.

in several aspects of its composition. Firstly, Cowen takes a rather more operatic approach to shaping the work, dividing its thirteen movements into six scenes,[50] with the individual numbers more cohesively segued. Indeed, the defining lines between recitative and aria are becoming more blurred, as Cowen focuses his attention on the dramatic flow of the story. Opportunities for the audience to applaud after every movement have been curtailed, perhaps to sub-consciously move their attention away from wallowing in the singers' opportunities for prima donna-like gratification, toward the philosophical and emotional intentions of the work as a whole. Another notable feature of this secular cantata, which we normally regard as a characteristic of opera, is the footnoted scene descriptions, which indicate what is happening: a sort of subsidiary narrative, acting as an aid to the conductor, performers and listeners. Indeed, we find the Chorus of Pirates 'approaching the Island' and the Chorus of Women 'watching from the Island'; later Conrad 'rushes away'; and in the Duo, No. 7, Conrad enters 'disguised as a Dervish'. The influence of the opera and ballet can also be found in Cowen's inclusion of two entr'actes for orchestra and in the orchestral 'Dance of Almas'. The chorus fulfil a *turba* role—they are nearly always the crowd: the men are pirates and soldiers and the women slaves (although in the choral introduction in Scene IV they take on a scene setting role). There are three key dramatic points in the plot: the first is Medora's heartfelt prayer to heaven for the return of Conrad with dramatic 'miserere, domine' interjections from the chorus. The second is when Gulnare (Seyd's favourite slave), having been saved by Conrad from the flaming palace (but now incarcerated in a dungeon), having offered him the means to kill Seyd, and having fallen passionately in love with him, realises that he loves another (Medora). She in turn kills Seyd and sacrifices herself to save Conrad. Here there is a moment of *peripeteia* for Conrad and Gulnare: he is offered a means of escape and an opportunity to kill Seyd; she realises that Conrad does not love her despite her advances. Cowen expresses this through a fervent aria for Gulnare 'Fly hence and loathe and leave me'. The second key dramatic

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[50] 1) Conrad and the Pirates prepare to set sail, he saying his good-byes to Medora, 2) Conrad and the Pirates attack Seyd's Palace, but he is captured, 3) Conrad is loved by Gulnare (she wishes him to kill Seyd), 4) Medora pines for Conrad, 5) Gulnare kills Seyd but dies of her love for Conrad, and 6) Conrad returns to the island to find Medora dying.

point is in the final scene: Medora, already dying of a broken heart because Conrad has not returned, dies of the shook of her jubilation of his homecoming. This is the final *anagnorisis*: Conrad discovers that Medora is grief-stricken by his non-return, such that she is at death's door, and Medora is overcome by the discovery that Conrad is alive. This is also the *catharsis* of the cantata; Cowen gives us a brief duet between the lovers before Medora's death. With this, Conrad departs to other lands never to return. The audience is naturally drawn to the pathos of commiseration on Conrad's loss, and sorrow for the deaths of Medora and Gulnare. Apart from these scenes, Cowen had plenty of dramatic action to musically paint, from the dancing and singing in the palace of Seyd, to the fight scenes at the end of scene II.

The critics were rather contradictory of their evaluations of *The Corsair*: Davison in the *Musical World* after the concert said of Cowen: 'Young as he is, this gentleman has earned an enviable place in the rank of English composers whose progress is watched with interest among us'.[51] Buffen wrote: 'His partiality for the orchestra was distinctly shown'.[52] Campbell Clarke in the *Athenaeum* said that *The Corsair* was given a cool reception, but was of 'considerable charm'.[53] Henry Lunn in the *Musical Times* similarly highlighted the mute reaction, but noted that the work was of 'merit' and of 'popular taste',[54] and in conclusion remarked: 'Mr Cowen may have a brilliant future before him if only he can take to heart what Mendelssohn said: "The People indeed shout and applaud: but that quickly passes away, without leaving a vestige behind"'.[55] Indeed, Mendelssohn's observation rang true here, as, apart from its London performance in early May 1880, when 'the whole of the musically critical world was there, and many persons of celebrity',[56] the work was rarely heard again. However, the popular 'Dance of Almas' from the cantata was issued as a piano solo. Davison's acknowledgement of Cowen's 'progress' in *The Corsair* was well-founded: while the work was not in itself a great success, Cowen's approach now

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51 *Musical World*, 9 September 1876.
52 Buffen, 65.
53 *Athenaeum*, 2 September 1876.
54 'The Birmingham and Hereford Musical Festivals' in *Musical Times*, xvii (1876), 615-21.
55 Ibid.
56 *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 May 1880.

took the sacred oratorio form and blended it with elements both from the opera and ballet giving us something resembling an opera *manqué*. Indeed, this would be the path that he would follow in all his remaining secular cantatas.

In the nine years between Cowen's *The Corsair* and his next secular cantata *Sleeping Beauty*, the mature Cowen, now in his thirties, had emerged. Indeed, his first opera *Pauline* had been produced; his most important orchestral work, the *Scandinavian* Symphony, had brought him international recognition; and he had learnt much from his not always successful forays into sacred choral writing in the form of *The Deluge* and *Saint Ursula*. His predilection for all things fanciful and elfin again finds a perfect match in the tale of the sleeping beauty, a fairy-tale classic, which needs little recollection here:[57] its enduring popularity and subsequent reincarnations in Tchaikovsky's ballet of the same name (1890) and the Walt Disney animated film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) are proof of this. Much of Cowen's score was written while he 'was staying at a little place on the Thames'[58] [The Croft, Wargrave, near Henley on Thames],[59] where he exercised his fondness for boating.[60] Indeed, the waltz-like 'At Dawn of Day', such a vital component in the work's structure, is immediately suggestive of such nautical pleasures. All that was less successful in his sacred works *The Deluge* and *Saint Ursula*, and in the secular works *The Rose Maiden* and *The Corsair*, seems to have been filtered out by Cowen in *Sleeping Beauty*, in favour of a much more coherent overall structure. While there are passages that could be described as recitative, Cowen is now writing solo-work that is a mixture of both recitative-like declamation and aria, composing more refined monologues and dialogues. Indeed, he has fallen further under the spell of Wagner's operas in this regard, and of the influence of opera in his use of the label 'scena'. Moreover, the resultant score tends to be freer flowing with fewer movements and less musical full stops.

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[57] The *Sleeping Beauty* (*La Belle au Bois dormant*) is the first in a set published in 1697 by Charles Perrault from *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* ('Mother Goose Tales'). Elements of the story are contained in Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone* (published 1634), in the tale *Sun, Moon and Talia* (ch. 39).
[58] *MAMF*, 132.
[59] Letter to Joseph Bennett, dd. 31 July [1885], New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MFC C8745.B471.(63).
[60] *MAMF*, 132.

Another product of the Wagnerian influence is Cowen's intensive use of *leitmotiven* and leading-themes in this work (their use will be examined in detail later).

The function of Cowen's chorus in *Sleeping Beauty* varies widely: in the Prologue it is primarily narrative in purpose, although it later cogitates on the character of the Wicked Fay. However, in Scene I the chorus becomes a *turba*—'a gay throng of ladies, lords and knights' in the hall of the King's Palace', but, it again becomes more reflective when it echoes the King's words to the Princess in 'Pure as thy heart'. In Scene II, with the 'Incantation', the Chorus simply echoes and ponders the nature of the Wicked Fay. The Choral Interlude that follows is also a reflection on that scene. In Scene IV the chorus again becomes a *turba* of 'ladies, lords and knights' as the princess awakens from her sleep. This awakening is the climax of the work, its *catharsis* of joy when the princess fulfils her right of passage and the curse is lifted; Cowen gives us a characteristic love duet. Prior to this Cowen and Hueffer present us with a prologue that sets the scene for the pronouncement of the curse, a scene of merriment as the royal household celebrate the impending demise of the curse after its twenty-year time limit, the scene of the entrapment of the Princess by the wicked Fay, and the final scene of the arrival of the prince who will undo the curse. Even more so than *The Corsair*, each scene is carefully described: 'Scene I—A Hall in the King's Palace. A gay throng ladies, lords and knights, some dancing, others looking on', which is shortly afterwards followed by the marking: 'Enter the King and the Princess' and later 'During the following, she [The Princess] wanders dreamily from the Banqueting Hall and enters a large gallery, at the further end of which is a flight of narrow steps'. Again the stimulus of the opera has been brought to bear on a cantata in a way that is suggestive of opera *manqué*. Indeed, Cowen invokes a clever device in *Sleeping Beauty* by the use of a choral waltz 'At Dawn of Day' as a time-link between normal time with the dream time—from the moment that the Princess ascends the stairs into the turret and quickly falls under the curse of the wicked Fay to the moment when the Prince releases her from it. Cowen convincingly portrays the motion of spinning wheels in music,

as well as an extensive orchestral interlude describing 'Maidenhood' and 'Dreams of Love', another allusion to the world of opera and ballet.

Cowen says that at the premiere 'the work was successfully launched, though the orchestra and chorus were perhaps a little too ponderous for the light character of the fairy legend'.[61] Walker thought the best parts of *Sleeping Beauty*

> very polished and delicate work, not more, it is true, than ballet-music, but touched with an exceptionally light hand, and in that slender way sometimes very charming. It is, so to speak, water-colour work like Bennett's, but is far more piquant than serenely classical...nor is it exactly French or Mendelssohnian – it is, in its slight evanescent style, something that may be fairly be called Cowen's own.[62]

Willeby was equally quite positive in his appraisal: 'I do not think Cowen has written anything more melodic, elegant, or of more sustained musical interest, especially in the accompaniments, than this fairy cantata. It lends itself fully to his graceful fancy; it makes no great demand upon the dramatic faculty, and is altogether a subject thoroughly calculated to bring out his strong points'.[63] Willeby does find a couple of faults with *Sleeping Beauty*: 'It is not without its blemishes; for instance, a certain sacrifice of vocal niceties to orchestral effect, or ineffective anti-climaxes – as, for example, in the soprano solo, "Whither away, my heart?"'[64] Indeed, Cowen's fondness for orchestral effect in preference to more sophisticated vocal and especially choral writing is a common thread throughout his choral output—it is one of his characteristic weaknesses. Moreover, Cowen's inability to write effectual climaxes is another distinctive flaw in his compositional style. Despite these shortcomings, *Sleeping Beauty* became one of Cowen's most popular choral works. Under the French title *La Belle au Bois Dormant* it was given in Paris by the Société Concordia,[65] where the resources for the performance were limited to an accompaniment of two pianos, double string quartet, and harp. But Willeby says 'that it was, even under such disadvantage, successful, is sufficient proof of the quality of the music'.[66] Such was its triumph

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[61] Ibid., 134.
[62] Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 1924), 296-7.
[63] *MEM*, 226.
[64] Ibid.
[65] *MAMF*, 136.
[66] *MEM*, 227.

that Cowen dedicated the work to his mother Emily.[67] Again, its melodiousness appealed to Victorian choral societies, who seem to have taken it on with enthusiasm, and to the Victorian receptivity to such fairy-tales. No doubt it received many small-scale productions.[68]

Four years after the success of *Sleeping Beauty* and with his large-scale oratorio *Ruth*, Fifth Symphony, and his sojourn to Australia to conduct the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition behind him, Cowen again turned his hand to the secular cantata form. Inspired by the very positive and encouraging response of the Australian people, he set about a new work dedicated thus: 'To the People of Melbourne, Victoria, this work is cordially inscribed'. The subject Cowen chose, however, had absolutely nothing to do with his Antipodean adventure: it was 'quite a pretty one...founded on the legends and customs connected with Saint John's Eve...an evening in summer dedicated to the saint which used to be devoted in rural districts to quaint superstitions and ceremonies of anything but a religious character'.[69] Indeed, Cowen subtitled it 'An Old English Idyll'; he said in his autobiography that '*Saint John's Eve*, like my much earlier cantata, *The Rose Maiden*, if more mature, had no pretensions to be anything else than a simple, melodious little work'.[70] *Saint John's Eve* follows a not dissimilar plot to that of *Sleeping Beauty*, in the sense that our heroine (Nancy), like the princess, is again ensnared, but then released by her hero (young squire). In this case the entrapment is by another suitor (Robert), and here the relationship between the lovers has already been initiated platonically in the garden scene. The three scenes by Cowen and Bennett are divided thus: 1) the festivities of St. John's Eve, 2) the garden scene, and 3) the Christmas scene of entrapment and final resolution. As the story unravels and the young squire

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[67] He gave it again in September 1886 at the Three Choirs' Festival at Gloucester, where it 'proved a powerful attraction', (*News of the World*, 12 September 1886, 2), as 'there was not a seat to spare' (Williams, C. Lee, and Chance, H. Godwin, *Origin and Progress of the Meeting of the Three Choirs of Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford* (Gloucester: Chance and Bland, 1895), 288), at the Crystal Palace in December 1886; at Cheltenham around 17 February 1888; two performances at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition; and at Adelaide, Australian in 1889.

[68] One such performance was given by the Wincanton Choral Society, with the assistance of the Bruton Choral Society and Orchestra at the Wincanton Town Hall on 12 February 1896, where the work was performed by an orchestra of one flute, one oboe, seven violins, two violas, two cellos, a double bass, harmonium and two pianists (Programme note to Wincanton Choral Society, 'Grand Evening Concert', Town Hall, Wincanton, 12 February 1896).

[69] *MAMF*, 225-6.

[70] Ibid., 226.

and Nancy sing their love duet, we reach the climax of the work: Nancy's fortunes have been reversed, the *peripeteia*; a *catharsis* is reached as the audience realises that the right outcome has been attained. It is also Nancy's *anagnorisis* as she discovers the identity of the mysterious voice of the garden. Once more Cowen gives his audience a similar emotional journey to *The Rose Maiden*, *The Corsair* and *Sleeping Beauty*, but with the latter's happy ending. Cowen does little that is new in *Saint John's Eve*, as he has found his niche in this sub-genre: blending oratorio, opera and ballet elements together. Indeed, he wrote: 'I have often thought since of adapting it for the lyric stage, for which, in its own simple way, it seems to me very suitable; and, indeed, there was an idea at one time of the work being given in this form, but it was never carried out'[71]— once more we have a work indicative of opera *manqué*. The use of the scena as a form, is perhaps not quite so prevalent in this work, although *Saint John's Eve's* climax is played out in the extensive scena 'A lover if bold doth the Fates compel'. The chorus is primarily used as a *turba*, where they represent the villagers, and we find the same type of footnoted scene descriptions as in the earlier works: 'Villagers are decorating their houses for the Feast of Saint John', 'The church clock strikes twelve' and 'The Villagers take brands from the burning pile and disperse, singing as they go', to name but three. Cowen also gives us a considerable orchestral dance movement as part of 'Ho! Good Saint John'/'Whirl Round the Torch' [fourth movement], another now well-established operatic/balletic device.

George Bernard Shaw was in attendance at the performance, and was characteristically downbeat about much of the affair:

> When I went down to the Crystal Palace last Saturday I knew that I was not going to have a treat. Mr Manns was over the hills and far away; and Mr Cowen was installed instead with a cantata. Still, it might have been worse. It might have been an oratorio. So, though straitened, I was not utterly cast down...Just as a considerate dentist warms his forceps in hot water, and hides it behind his back as he approaches you, so Mr Cowen disguised his cantata as 'an old English idyll'. But he could not conceal the ominous fact that the libretto is by Mr Joseph Bennett, who also supplies an 'analysis' of the music, said analysis being about as difficult as an experienced chemist would find that of a cup of tea...As it is, Mr Cowen has all the praise; and Mr Bennett has to be content with a slice of the pudding...The reflections suggested to me by Mr Cowen's simple and simply melodious melodies ran upon the irony of

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[71] Ibid., 226-7.

> the arrangements of that musical Providence which ordains that blunt English professors shall be set to write about Judith and Jael and Deborah, whilst subtle descendants of the race of these heroines are imitating old English ballad music. *Saint John's Eve* is just as like *The Vicar of Bray* or *Down Among the Dead Men* as Mr Goschen is like Lord Brassey or Mr W. H. Smith. It is the drawing-room music of Maida Vale in an 'old English' fancy costume...The opening St John theme set me thinking about a stave of David's in *Die Meistersinger.*[72]

But his views were rarely representative of the other critics. Indeed, *Saint John's Eve* remained in the repertory of British choral societies for many years, much for the same reasons that *The Rose Maiden* and *Sleeping Beauty* had survived—simplicity of its subject matter, straightforward melody, and its allure to Victorian sentiment.

Cowen's last venture into the secular cantata form began in 1892 with the composition of his *The Water-Lily* for the Leeds Festival. Indeed, the manuscript, which survives in the British Library, is dated 2 November 1892. Unfortunately, Cowen disagreed with the festival committee with regards to their choice of soloists, and, having received no satisfaction, he decided to withdraw it.[73] Therefore, when the Norwich Festival committee approached Cowen for a new work (and due to his preoccupation with his opera *Signa*), he offered them the as yet unperformed cantata, which they agreed to take on.[74] The text of *The Water-Lily*, referred to by Cowen as 'A Romantic Legend', was adapted by Joseph Bennett to a theme from William Wordsworth's *Egyptian Maid or The Romance of the Water-Lily* published in *Yarrow Revisted [etc.]* (1835). Bennett's version differs little to the original save matters of detail. *The Water-Lily* followed hot on the heels of Cowen's opera *Thorgrim*, and while they are both tied up in quixotic folklore and chivalry, the former is a far cry from the bloodthirsty Nordic tale. Cowen and Bennett present a love story with a similar plot to both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Saint John's Eve*, with a knight in shining armour

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[72] Shaw, G. B., 'Saint John's Eve' in *The Star,* 20 December 1889.
[73] Legge, R. H., and Hansell, W. E., *Annals of the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festivals 1824 to 1893* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1896), 258. On this matter Cowen said: 'I asked the festival authorities to let me know who were the artists they suggested for the principal parts. On receiving the names of these, I found that two of them would be quite unsuitable for my music, the one possessing a light soprano voice where I wanted a dramatic singer, and the other being a high baritone, whereas the part was written for a bass. I wrote explaining this, and begged the committee to reconsider the matter, to which they replied that they did not see their way to make the desired changes, and that they were of the opinion that the artists they had selected would be quite adequate to sing the work. As I knew my own music and they had never heard a note of it, I thought this rather peremptory on their part...being unable to persuade them into altering their decision, and fearing to jeopardize in this way any chance of success I might have, I took the only other course open to me and withdrew the work' (*MAMF*, 228-9).
[74] Legge and Hansell, 258.

literally coming to the rescue.[75] Bennett divides the plot up into a prologue and four scenes,[76] providing Cowen with many musically descriptive incidents and settings guaranteed to excite his imagination. Again we have a final love duet as the lovers unite, which is the climax and *peripeteia* for Ina as she is revived and *anagnorisis* for Galahad as he discovers the woman in his dreams. It is the *catharsis* of the work for the audience as the right outcome is reached.

While Cowen's music for *The Water-Lily* relies heavily on his gift for delicious orchestration and effect, as is apparent from the critical reviews, it is clear that the work represents his final apotheosis of his concept of the secular cantata. Each of the four scenes and the prologue are conceived as continuous scenes, like acts in an opera, with no breaks. The scena is shown in its most refined form too: declamation and aria are blended together freely as dictated by the words and actions. Indeed, scenes one to three are constructed entirely from scenas. Moreover, this freer approach to recitation and song often results in more flexibility of metre, rhythm and *tempo*, which is unquestionably the case here. The chorus functions mostly as a *turba* where they play 'Spirits of the Air', 'Voices of the Invisible Crew', 'Spirits of Storm' and the 'People of Caerleon'. Here, there is some contemplation and narrative in their words, but they are very much an integral part of each scene. Like its immediate predecessors, *The Water-Lily* is marked with numerous quasi-operatic instructions: 'Sir Galahad alone in the Forest' and 'In a dream, Sir Galahad sees a ship in full sail, at her prow the figure of a goddess emerging from a lily. On the deck, Ina is speaking to her maidens' etc. Cowen also gives us a brief, but vivid, orchestral and choral portrayal of a storm in the first scene. Again we have an opera in all but name—opera *manqué*.

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[75] Here our hero is Sir Galahad; his lover, who he first sees in a dream, is the Egyptian Princess Ina; Norna, a kindly sorceress; and Merlin, the magician. After Galahad is induced to sleep by Norna, he receives a further dream that Ina is aboard a ship. Subsequent to her being shipwrecked while journeying to the British Court (where she believes she will find her intended) by Merlin, she is rescued by him at Norna's instigation, although now in a deep sleep. He conveys her to a tournament at Caerleon where she is delivered apparently dead. But Merlin asks the Knights of the Round Table to see if they can revive her. After several knights have failed Sir Galahad succeeds, Ina is revived and they all apparently live happily ever after!

[76] Prologue) A forest near Caerleon—Galahad's vision, 1) Ina's is shipwrecked by Merlin's magic, 2) Ina alone on a Scilly Islet falls asleep, 3) Norna and Merlin, and 4) At Caerleon—Merlin delivers the sleeping Ina; Galahad awakens her.

It would seem that Cowen was blessed by a hitch-free premiere at Norwich, with a cast, chorus and orchestra that responded positively to his music.[77] Cowen was equally delighted with his cast and says that they were 'in every way suited to the music',[78] and thereby justifying his decision to withdraw it from Leeds the previous year. With regard the music itself *The Norfolk News* thought the instrumentation was 'the chief feature of the cantata, but at the same time it is not deficient of vocal charm, and some of the parts given to the chorus are of a highly attractive character, while not a few of the solos are passionate and eloquent, and of real beauty'.[79] The Festival *Annals* recorded that *The Water-Lily* was 'highly praised by the press. "A series of brilliant musical pictures is submitted to the hearer...a work which undoubtedly deserves success if only on account of the variety and beauty of the orchestration...There can be no doubt of the effectiveness of *The Water-Lily*".[80] However, the *Annals* signalled a note of caution:

> It may be doubted if all the skill of so practised a composer as Mr Cowen can atone for the want of depth of real musical feeing. The libretto furnishes no little food for reflection. Since it is based upon Wordsworth's *Egyptian Maid*, there is some show of authority for what may be called the aspersions on Galahad's character – the 'maiden knight'...The new views held by the author of Mr Cowen's libretto of the characters of both Merlin and Galahad are 'not likely to command themselves to reverent students of Arthurian romance'.[81]

George Bernard Shaw was much less enamoured with the work's libretto, and it caused him to write one of his most scathing attacks on Bennett in *The World* on 8 November 1893:

> My great difficulty in describing this cantata is to find a point of view sufficiently remote from common sense to enable me to keep my countenance during the process. If I am ever paid to write a libretto in this style I will simply buy a bushel of Christmas-cards, and fall to with scissors and paste. But then I have not the true poetic gift.[82]

Walker's assessment of the best parts of *The Water-Lily* was that it was a 'very polished and delicate work'.[83] It was given again by Cowen at the sixth concert of the Bradford Subscription Concerts series, held on 3 March 1899, but he does not seem to have conducted it another time, nor does it appear to have found a permanent place in the repertoire. One may speculate that this

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[77] *The Norfolk News*, 14 October 1893.
[78] *MAMF*, 229.
[79] *The Norfolk News*, 14 October 1893.
[80] Legge and Hansell, 265-6.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Layton, R. (transl., Baake, F.), 'Cowen, Hymen Frederick' in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 2 (Kassel and Basel: Im Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1952), 1761.
[83] Walker, 296-7.

was due to its greater complexity in performance, through its more elastic use of metre, rhythm and *tempo*. Bennett's 'cut and paste' libretto [according to Shaw] may have been another factor.

With this work Cowen closed his secular cantata account, largely, as I have already identified, because he was dissatisfied with the *libretti* he was being provided with. May be he privately shared Shaw's rather more extreme view of Bennett's efforts as a librettist, and *The Water-Lily* text was the last straw. However, in 1895, Cowen considered *The Water Lily* his best work in this genre thus far,[84] and he collaborated again with Bennett in his *The Dream of Endymion*, a Scena for tenor and orchestra, a few years later. Victorian and Edwardian etiquette seems to have prevented Cowen from ever expressing publicly any more than mild dissatisfaction with Bennett's efforts. The secular cantatas represent a significant part of his contribution to the choral repertoire of the period. While they are undervalued, if not completely ignored, by current scholarship, let alone choral societies, orchestras, conductors and recording companies, they show the development of a composer from his first youthful expressions in *The Rose Maiden*, to a fully-fledged one in his *Sleeping Beauty*, *Saint John's Eve* and *The Water-Lily*. Structurally, there is a progression from the quasi-Handelian recitative and aria layout of *The Rose Maiden*, towards a more sophisticated, freer and unbroken movement construction, the adoption of the scena and its final summation in the continuous scenes of *The Water-Lily*, more and more under the influence of opera. The impact of opera and ballet can also be found in the footnoted scene descriptions and the inclusion of entr'actes and dance movements for orchestra. The role of Cowen's chorus can vary from setting the scene, being reflective on what has occurred, or being a *turba* within the action. Indeed, the chorus can perform all three functions in the course of a work. Cowen does, however, have certain reoccurring formulae in use throughout the genre: in all the works there is some form of orchestral introduction and they all end with a final chorus. Most of these works tend to make use of four soloists, one of each high and low voice, male and female. It is as though they had to fit into a preconceived mould, with the type-casting of a heroic

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[84] *IEM*, 249.

tenor and a soprano who would finally become lovers. The contralto could either be evil, as in the *Sleeping Beauty*, or more benevolent as in *The Rose Maiden*, *The Corsair*, *Saint John's Eve* and *The Water-Lily*. The bass can be noble as in *The Rose Maiden* and *Sleeping Beauty* or rather more malevolent as in *The Corsair*, *Saint John's Eve* and *The Water-Lily*. Whether the tale is joyful or tragic, Cowen firstly sets his initial scene or prologue (even in *Rose Maiden*, which has no scenes, and the same overall plan is used) in which he does little more than give us the background, location and timeline. Indeed, there is often an orchestral introduction/prelude followed by a chorus which achieves this. He then presents his hero, heroine or both. One of them is then entrapped by a spell or a villain(s) and finally the other one comes to the rescue. It is then only a matter of whether they live happily ever after (*Sleeping Beauty*, *Saint John's Eve*, and *The Water-Lily*), or one or more of them die! (*The Rose Maiden* and *The Corsair*). Either way, Cowen invariably gives the lovers a duet before their demise or triumph; the prevailing mood is then summed up by the chorus in conclusion. As can be seen, all these secular cantatas are, at the last, love stories (tragic or triumphant).

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Written over a five-year period, the six cantatas for female voices and piano represent an interesting diversion for Cowen from the large-scale works. The fact that these short cantatas were only written for piano suggests that they were meant for mass market appeal in the drawing-rooms of Britain, as entertainment among the ladies around the piano in the evening, or perhaps as more serious ventures for choral societies where resources were limited, especially with regards to a shortage of men or orchestral accompaniment. Another possibility is that Cowen was asked to write them for some hitherto unknown educational purpose, much as Holst wrote music for St. Paul's Girls' School. Whatever their ultimate purpose, they demonstrate Cowen in his lighter vein (although he blows up quite a storm in *A Daughter of the Sea*) writing beautiful melodies for

the delight of the 'fairer' sex. The piano accompaniments are not too demanding; even on the rare occasions that they do command a more substantial technique, there is usually a simplified alternative. The stories tend to be mostly child-like, sometimes under the influence of fairyland; *The Fairies' Spring* demonstrates the genre admirably:

> The Elves having fallen in love with a Child of Earth, steal him away, and bring him to their world below, the beauties and treasures of which they show him. But, in spite of their care and devotion, the Child pines away, and, to their everlasting sorrow, dies. They bury him in a hidden glen, where, according to legend, their tears of remorse and sorrow are welled up to earth in a fairy spring for ever.[85]

Cowen evidently felt that the relatively short length of these cantatas made a scene-based structure unnecessary, despite the fact that he had moved away from the linear textual narrative of self-contained movements in his other larger works of a comparable period (only in *Christmas Scenes* did he think it essential to divide it into two parts). However, in *The Rose of Life* each movement is marked to segue into the next; this is not generally the case elsewhere. Like with the large-scale secular cantatas, the chorus sometimes takes on a *turba* function, as in *The Rose of Life* (where they are maidens) and *The Fairies' Spring* (where they are elves and fays), but more often than not, they are more reflective in function. As with the other secular works, these shorter pieces show the influence of the world of the ballet and the opera house: *The Rose of Life* has an intermezzo 'The Quest of the Roses'; *Summer on the River* has its 'Rustic Dance'; *Village Scenes* has its 'Stately Dance'; and *Christmas Scenes* has its '"Christmas Festivities" Dance'. Indeed, Cowen does go a stage further with *A Daughter of the Sea*, giving us an operatic scena for soprano and contralto (The Sea Maid and the Witch) 'I know the boon'. In *The Fairies' Spring* we find clear evidence of the possibility of dramatic presentation—an opera writ small: a set of costume and scene directions are given in the score. There is also an untitled interlude for piano in the finale—perhaps time for a quick costume change?

Cowen extracted and orchestrated the dance movements from some of these cantatas and published them as his Four English Dances in the Olden Style, Set 1, for orchestra. The 'Stately

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[85] Synopsis in the front of Cowen, F. H., *The Fairies' Spring* (vocal score), London, Robert Cocks & Co, 1891.

Dance' is extracted from *Village Scenes* (1893); the 'Rustic Dance' is taken from his 'Hear the Sounds of Jocund Music' from *Summer on the River* (1893); and the Graceful Dance is from 'Christmas Festivities' from *Christmas Scenes* (1894).

It was noted in the introduction that Cowen does not seem to have talked or written about any of these cantatas, nor does it appear has any other critic or writer, and so their purpose and significance cannot be accurately gauged. Indeed, the dearth of information concerning them suggests that they were not particularly important to Cowen: they were just a diversion, like many of his songs and ballads, from more important work.

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The term 'narrative cantata' may at first seem a misnomer, since most secular and sacred cantatas ultimately recount a story. However, the label is especially applicable to Cowen's *John Gilpin*, as it is a continuous choral narrative without soloists that relates the story of its principal character. The libretto is taken directly from William Cowper's original poem[86] *The Diverting History of John Gilpin* (1782); John Gilpin (18th century) was a real-life character, a wealthy draper from Cheapside in London, who owned land at Olney in Buckinghamshire, near where Cowper lived. Gilpin's exploits became legendary and Cowper had heard the story from a friend.[87] The subject-matter no doubt appealed to Cowen's well-documented sense of fun, and this is apparent in the way he treats the whole work in an amusing way. Indeed, the vocal score states: 'This work

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[86] William Cowper (pronounced Cooper) (1731– 1800) was an English poet, letter-writer and hymnodist. He suffered from periods of severe depression, and although he found refuge in a fervent evangelical Christianity, the source of his much-loved hymns, he often experienced doubt and fears that he was doomed to eternal damnation. However, his religious motivations and association with John Newton (who wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace') led to much of the poetry for which he is best remembered in the popular mind. Cowper changed the direction of 18th century nature poetry by writing of everyday life and scenes of the English countryside. With his sensibility to natural beauty, freshness of feeling and exquisite appreciation of trifles, he cast an enchantment over the conventional measures of his poetry ('William Cowper' in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., U.S.A.) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Cowper> [accessed c. 22 July 2006]; Hobling, R. M., 'Cowper, William', in *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of World Literature* (ed., Buchanan-Brown, J.)(London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1973), Vol. 2, 341).

[87] 'John Gilpin' in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., U.S.A.) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gilpin> [accessed c. 22 July 2006].

should be sung throughout in a humorous manner. A few points where special exaggerated effects are intended have been indicated by the composer...but he would suggest that the entire work be interpreted more or less in the same extravagant spirit, according to the meaning of the verses'.[88] The normally restrained romanticism of Cowen is given a day off, in favour of a comical romp, especially in the horse trot (9 bars before letter F), then the gallop (at the 13th bar of letter F) with the excitement and tension generated by the cross-rhythms (the orchestra is sometimes in 6/8 when the chorus is in 2/4). He gives us the effect of a braying ass (just before letter S) and soon afterwards we have his second *vivacissimo* gallop. The suave orchestral colouration of his relatively new *The Butterfly's Ball*, Concert Overture is combined in *John Gilpin* with the even more recent exoticism of his *Indian* Rhapsody, which also ends in a romp, albeit an oriental one! Cowen implements a single continuous movement form, dictated in part by the nature of the 46 verses of the poetry; it is, therefore, to some extent, through-composed. However, the unity of the work is maintained by three themes: the first is the opening melody (the 'John Gilpin' theme), the second is that for reference to the 'wedding day' (at letter A), and the third is the *Allegro pomposo* theme (after letter B). The 'John Gilpin' theme recurs at 'The Callender' (after letter L), and near the conclusion (at letters X and Z). The 'Wedding Day' theme returns with a further reference to Gilpin's wedding (at letter Q), and the *Allegro pomposo* acts as the 'big tune' that closes the work. The chorus functions as a collective narrator right through; anything that John Gilpin actually says, for the most part, is given to the men to sing and similarly references to his wife tend to be given to the ladies.

Cowen seems to have completed *John Gilpin* with plenty of time to spare as the manuscript is dated 18 April 1904: it was not given until 23 September 1904 at Cardiff. Its witty nature seems to have endeared itself to its audiences, as it was later given by Cowen in the 1904/5 Liverpool Philharmonic Society season, and at the Bradford Festival Choral Society's second concert on 3 February 1905, where it was 'highly successful' according to

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[88] Cowen, F. H., *John Gilpin* (vocal score), London, Novello and Co. Ltd., 1904, ii.

George Sewell: it was 'the first composition of the Doctor's in a lighter vein…the musical setting of Cowper's familiar old ballad, with its picturesque and humorous orchestration, at once rendered it a favourite with both band and chorus'.[89] Like the more complicated secular cantatas of the late 1880s and early 90s, it would appear that its orchestral complexities probably limited its production among the smaller choral societies, as no lesser performances have been found. Unfortunately, Cowen never ventured into this sub-genre again, although his quasi-through-composed approach lived on in his odes and *pièces d'occasions.*

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As was established in the introduction, sacred choral music in nineteenth-century conservative and moralistic Britain had long lived under the spell of Handel, especially in the form of his *Messiah*, with its linear textual narrative of scriptural extracts and reflective verses. The established musical style of the eighteenth century permitted plenty of contemplation and celebration, but little true drama. Haydn's *The Creation* became a favourite in Britain in the earlier part of the nineteenth century; however, it was structurally no great advance on the *Messiah*, although its success was in part due to a more dramatic and effective orchestral accompaniment. But it took another dominating figure—Mendelssohn (who still by and large met the requirements of the early nineteenth-century ideal of oratorio) to infuse real drama and Romanticism into the form. His *Saint Paul* premiered at the Liverpool Festival in 1836—with its influence of Handel and Bach, its graceful melody, its classical approach with tinges of romanticism, and its Protestant Christian piety—immediately appealed to his British audience. Mendelssohn's conversion to Christianity and his missionary statement expressed through *Saint*

[89] Sewell, G. F., *A History of the Bradford Festival Choral Society* (Bradford: G. F. Sewell, 1907), 220. It was given again at the December subscription concert 1905, Bradford Festival Choral Society concert; at the Norwich Festival on 27 October 1905; at the 1905/6 Glasgow Choral Union season final concert; and Dan Godfrey also conducted it at Bournemouth during 1914 (but Cowen does not appear to have been present).

Paul matched the evangelical renewal in the Church of England,[90] and allowed him to follow it with his *Elijah*. This further strengthened his position, establishing a model for the subsequent generation of British sacred music composers to aspire to. Indeed, it gave impetus to a strongly German-based choral tradition in Britain. Another curiosity of this period is the concentration by composers on Old Testament subjects, Mendelssohn's *Saint Paul* being an exception. It would seem that there was a certain feeling among the people that Christ himself was too sacred to personify in musical terms, a view not held on the continent, as Macfarren confirms: 'The English idea of the sanctity of scriptural characters is different from that of every continental nation, and the representation of the personality of the Saviour, which abroad is regarded with solemn reverence, would here be revolting to religious minds'.[91] Indeed, even in those works in which Christ does feature, he is rarely portrayed in a solo role, nor are his own words directly quoted. The most common solution was to allot a disciple, usually John, to give Jesus' words in indirect speech, or transform his words into a descriptive and reflective commentary. In 1870, we find in Julius Benedict's *Saint Peter*, which Cowen helped Benedict orchestrate, Jesus' words were still always assigned to a narrator. It is only with Arthur Sullivan's *The Light of the World* (1873) that we find attitudes changing. But even here, whereas the other characters are named in the score, the baritone that is allotted the part of Jesus is simply designated 'baritone'![92]

Into this world of many 'conventions' Cowen entered in 1878, two years after his second secular cantata *The Corsair* and his first opera *Pauline*, with a commission from the Brighton Festival entitled *The Deluge*, based on the Biblical story of the Flood or Deluge in Genesis 6 to 9. It tells how God saw the wickedness of man, was sorry that he had ever made him, and decided to blot out man and every living creature from the face of the earth. The oratorio's librettist is unspecified, although it appears much of the text is drawn directly from Bible sources. The work

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90 Hughes and Stradling, 9-13.

91 *Birmingham Triennial Festival, Programmes and books of the words 1855* (Birmingham, 1855), *The Mount of Olives*, iv.

92 For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Mohn, B., '"Personifying the Saviour?": English Oratorio and the Representation of the Words of Christ' in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies, Volume 1* (ed. Zon, B.)(Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 227-41.

was never published and the original full score manuscript is now assumed to be lost. However, manuscript vocal scores of two movements in Cowen's hand are extant at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Since there are no surviving vocal scores of *The Deluge*, nor has a copy of the programme come to light, we merely have the newspaper reports of the event to go on, from which we can draw only the vaguest outline. It would appear from this information that this work, like his earliest secular cantata, *The Rose Maiden*, had a linear textual narrative of scriptural extracts and reflective verses—a series of numbered movements, with the story told in recitatives assigned to each of the four soloists in turn and passages of scripture were then introduced as comment on the text in the form of choruses and arias.[93] But it is not clear whether the work was divided into parts or scenes. This is little different in form to the Handelian tradition of the *Messiah*. It is also immediately apparent from the surviving critiques and Cowen's own words that *The Deluge* was probably one of his least successful works, which was to be quickly forgotten and never performed again. A reporter from the *Brighton Gazette* seems to sum up the impressions of the work noting that its first performance had

> raised much expectation, which we are sorry to say it does not come up to. For there is a general dryness, a lack of interesting melody, and a timidity about the harmony which belongs to bygone days. It would seem as if the watery subject had quenched the Promethean spark…Certainly *The Deluge* will not add to Mr Cowen's reputation, unless it is much altered before it is printed. Into the commonplace the music seldom falls; a noteworthy exception is the passage 'The Lord revengeth and is furious', which is trivial in the extreme. There are many theatrical effects (sudden pauses in the midst of a *fortissimo* (for instance), which are out of place in sacred music.[94]

However, the same reporter did acknowledge that it had 'really artistic instrumentation, chosen with a thorough knowledge of the resources of the modern orchestra' and that the 'libretto has been well put together, and offers many favourable opportunities'.[95] The *Musical Times* wrote: 'It will surprise us indeed if our conviction that *The Deluge* shows loftiness of purpose carried out in a striking and effective manner has ever to be changed'.[96] But Percy Scholes rather dismissed the

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[93] *Brighton Gazette*, 28 February 1878.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Scholes, P. A., *The Mirror of Music: 1844-1944*, 2 vols. (London: Novello & Company Limited and Oxford University Press, 1947), I, 104.

Musical Times review out-of-hand: 'It hardly needed to be changed, for *The Deluge* was pretty quickly itself submerged'.[97] However, Wilhelm Kuhe, who was among the audience, 'lavished unstinted praise on a score that teemed with melodic and orchestral beauties'.[98] Cowen notes that its 'production…was accompanied by such a real deluge from the heavens that it made me think that Providence was as angry at my daring as He was supposed to be on the great occasion which I was trying to imitate'.[99] Kuhe further enlightens us on the scene:

> From early morn till late at night the rain came down 'in buckets full', as the saying goes, and the dismay wrought by the meteorological clerk caused many music-lovers to resist the temptation of sampling the orchestral 'deluge' prepared by the gifted young composer. Those, however, who were not drowned on their way to the concert-room reserved their abuse for the aforesaid official.[100]

Cowen concludes that *The Deluge* was 'somewhat feeble from the beginning, was unable to withstand the untoward circumstances of its birth, and the ark (*i.e.*, the Concert Hall) where it first saw the light, being, contrary to history, powerless to protect it from those other overwhelming waters of criticism, it was then and there swamped and drowned – a fate not wholly undeserved'.[101] Cowen certainly seems to have misjudged his conservative audience and exaggerated the 'theatrical effects' beyond that deemed acceptable for the time. Unfortunately, in the absence of any actual music, we will probably never know whether the critics and Cowen's own assessment of the work was deserved, or whether it was clouded by the events of the premiere.

With the failure of *The Deluge*, it is perhaps surprising that Cowen felt inclined to return to sacred music again. But after three years he was commissioned by Norwich for a new sacred cantata *Saint Ursula*, with its libretto supplied by R. E. Francillon; it recounts the fourth century legend of Saint Ursula and her eleven thousand virgin companions who were massacred at

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97 Ibid.
98 Kuhe, W., *My Musical Recollections* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1896), 352.
99 *MAMF*, 71-2.
100 Kuhe, 351-2.
101 *MAMF*, 72.

Cologne.[102] Francillon condensed the legend to concentrate on three aspects of the story: (i) the decision of Ursula, (ii) the departure of the fleet, and (iii) the massacre. While Cowen continues to follow the principles of a Handelian linear textual narrative, he carves the work up into three scenes, as the influence of opera, identified with regard to his secular cantatas, seeps into his psyche. In *Saint Ursula*, the chorus generally acts as a *turba* of sailors, people or Huns, but at other times, they simply add support and meditation to the ongoing scenes. Cowen seems to have rendered his art successfully here, giving us in musical and dramatic terms the pious religious zeal of Ursula; the gentleness and adoration of Conan for Ursula, especially in the tender song 'Any lady and my love'; the elegant stateliness of Dionotus; the merriment of the sailors, particularly in the melodious chorus 'Sea winds are blowing'; and the barbaric violence and cruelty of the Huns and their chorus 'By rivers red'. The primary interest in the action is centred upon the heavenly message sent to Ursula in the 'Vision of Ursula'. But the *peripeteia* of the work occurs when the Chief of the Huns realises that Ursula will not submit to his request to share his throne. Her *anagnorisis* is that her Christian faith and love of God outweighs the value of her own life, becoming a bride of heaven in exchange for earthly love and glory. It is a moment of great *catharsis* for the audience, as they come to terms with the pathos of Ursula's martyrdom and appreciate the value of their own lives. Albani, who sang the title role, remarked that it was 'a lovely cantata…[which I] sang…with sincere delight in its fine and touching melody'.[103] *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* reported that 'no better cast could be made. In fact we might imagine that the composer had the artists in his mind while the pen was in his hand'.[104] With regards to the music the same paper said that it was 'of the first order, Mr Cowen has evidently set up a high standard for himself, beneath which he does not care to go, and his success has

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[102] The legend, with its myriad of variants, runs into over one hundred pages, but it is almost entirely apocryphal. The only recognised true historical documents that corroborate the story is the Clematius ten line stone carving in Latin found in the choir of the Church of Saint Ursula at Cologne and some details furnished by ancient liturgical books. From these beginnings many myths grew with increasingly elaborate and fabulous incidents. (*Dictionary of Saints* (London: Brockhampton Press [Geddes and Brosset Ltd.], 1996), 181; Poncelet, A., 'Saint Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XV (Robert Appleton Co., 1912) at <www.newadvent.org/cathen/15225d.htm> [accessed c. 22 July 2006]).

[103] Albani, E., *Forty Years of Song* (London: Mills and Boon Ltd., 1911), 127.

[104] *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, Supplement to 15 October 1881.

been commensurate with the earnestness of his effort...the instrumentation is of the most effective character'.[105] *The Eastern Daily Press* reported: 'Little doubt can exist that in *Saint Ursula* Mr Cowen has presented the musical world with a valuable and lasting work'.[106] But, the *Annals of the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festivals* recognised that opinions of the work differed: 'Though Saint Ursula was generally acknowledged to be able and effective, it suffered from a libretto that was not above reproach'.[107] Cowen was also 'attacked for his pronounced leaning towards the modern school of musical thought',[108] a reference to Cowen's adoption of leading-themes and *leitmotiven*. With such comments, the work did not have any lasting success. Willeby, with the advantage of 13 years digestion, concludes:

> If it [the plot] has weaknesses, [it] contains situations which are not without suggestiveness to the musician...The music itself...is in many respects remarkable. Its spirit is lofty, its purpose definite, and its *genre* eminently modern. There is a use of...[local] 'colour' which has been obtained in various instances more by detail of technique – such as unorthodox harmonic treatment and melodic eccentricity – than by absolute definiteness of conception. Parts of the work are conventional; parts of it are also highly original; and here, as in all else from the same pen, the handling of the orchestra is always good, and at times masterly.[109]

Cowen cites other reasons for *Saint Ursula's* failure: he thought that the

> choice of the subject was largely to blame. I was rather fond of saints in those days...because of the dramatic element in their lives, and the scope this afforded for musical treatment; but I found out when it was too late that the public did not care for them, nor for Huns, nor for eleven thousand virgins...Still, notwithstanding the lack of interest in the poem, the music contained...some of my best writing. The orchestration was more advanced than anything I had yet done, and some of the effects were very bizarre; in fact, the whole was perhaps, if anything, rather too daring for the work of an Englishman at that time. But I still think that if I were to revive the cantata...[which he did not], and leave out the Huns and Martyrs, or turn them into Sicilian cut-throats and passionate peasant maidens, it might stand a better chance of success than it did then.[110]

As with *The Deluge*, Cowen seems to have been trying to push the boundaries of the British sacred work quicker than his traditionalist audience was prepared to go. Indeed, he himself actually acknowledges this above. But we cannot blame him for trying. *Saint Ursula* gives us real drama, much as the secular cantatas do; this is opera in all but name, but without the costumes, the stage

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105 Ibid.
106 *The Eastern Daily Press* [Norwich], 11 October 1881.
107 Legge and Hansell, 231.
108 Ibid.
109 *MEM*, 218-9.
110 *MAMF*, 107-8.

scenery and the acting. However, both it and *The Deluge* laid the foundations for perhaps his single biggest project of his career, the mighty *Ruth.*

The creation of Cowen's *Ruth* progressed with some difficulties, exacerbated by Bennett's somewhat haphazard approach to writing the libretto outlined earlier. It recounts the Old Testament tale of Ruth in the book of *Ruth.* For this much larger scale work, Cowen innovated his structural process a stage further: there is not only five scenes, but these are, of necessity, broken up into two parts in order to accommodate an audience interval, as the work was to fill an entire concert, like a *Messiah* performance. However, Cowen was not writing a conventional oratorio along existing narrative lines; it was to be dramatic. Bennett obliged Cowen with a libretto that would appeal to this desire, in which the sacred element was relegated to a secondary place. For instance, in the first scene, the musical representation of the caravan winding its way from the land of Moab to Israel, to a measured march accompanying the chorus ('Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place') is superb. Indeed, the chorus mostly fulfils a *turba* role—where they characterize Hebrews, Moabites, Reapers, Gleaners and the Elders. Cowen's exploration of the scena in his secular cantatas now bears fruit here, where there are several fine examples. Indeed, he seems to be inspired in Ruth's arias: especially the powerful but nonetheless gentle aria 'Be of good comfort' and the outstanding 'Intreat me not to leave thee', the melody of which plainly conveys her commitment and faithfulness. Inevitably, Cowen has to give us a love duet between Ruth and Boaz, preluding their marriage declaration, which is both the climax to the fourth scene, and the *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* of the story. We find precise operatic scene descriptions in a work that is, on the face of it, a sacred oratorio: 'Scene 1—Before the house of Naomi, in the Land of Moab. A Hebrew caravan approaches, on its way to the Land of Israel', and shortly afterwards the score instructs: 'At a sign from Naomi the Caravan stops'. We also find an opera and ballet influence in the Orchestral Prelude entitled 'Thanksgiving at Harvest Time', as well as the chorally accompanied 'Dances of Gleaners and Reapers'. Here then we have a sacred oratorio that has all the elements of an opera, save the stage presentation. Indeed, as Cowen explains: 'The character

of the work was not quite what the [cathedral] clergy of the city [of Worcester] had expected. The simple Biblical story had taken my fancy, and the different scenes...gave me plenty of scope for varied musical treatment, pastoral and devotional, as well as some massive choral writing at times'; however, 'the work had little in common...with real oratorio, in the sense of fugues, chorales, and detached airs'.[111] The dances especially caused much consternation at Worcester Cathedral when they were performed; Cowen elaborates:

> I had introduced a dance of reapers into the harvest scene which shocked their [the clergy's] feelings of religious propriety beyond forgiveness. A 'pastoral idyll' in a cathedral might be allowed at an emergency, but a dance – never! Yet I cannot understand to this day why they should have objected. Dancing and religion constantly went hand in hand in early times, and the former was as natural an expression of devout rejoicing among the people as were their songs of thanks and praise. What, therefore, was there unfitting in the portrayal of this within the precincts of a sacred building? In this particular instance, too, one of the themes of my dance was founded on what was supposed to be an authentic old Hebrew melody, so the local colour was as appropriate as I could make it. It availed nothing. Pious Worcester never recovered from the mental vision of my poor reapers' innocent revelry after their day's labour, and my name has never since appeared in any festival programme of that city.[112]

But the *Musical Times* thought that the dances

> were heard in the Cathedral without the slightest risk. A bare proposition to introduce dance themes into the church would excite as much consternation as a lion among ladies, but the dance movements in 'Ruth' so grow out of, and so naturally belong to, a situation in which gratitude to Divine Providence is the predominant feeling that even fastidious tastes, if honest ones, are not shocked. The objectors, if any there be, should clear their minds of cant. They go to church, and devoutly sing 'Praise Him with the timbrel and dance'. They must imply by this, if anything, that the ancient Hebrew exercise was not profane. In 'Ruth' we have the ancient Hebrew exercise, neither more nor less, and it is not profane, but distinctly religious.[113]

Joseph Bennett, *Ruth's* librettist, added facetiously: 'I wonder why they have not called a meeting, and passed a vote of censure upon King David for dancing before the Lord in Gilgal'.[114] Willeby thought that Cowen and Bennett had a 'weighty and ample precedent' for the inclusion of the 'Dance of Gleaners' and 'Chorus of Reapers', and dismissed the critics who objected for the same reasons as the *Musical Times*.[115] Interestingly, Cowen's main theme from 'Dance of Reapers (with Chorus of Gleaners)' was based on an 'ancient Hebrew melody'. Curiously, he admitted in 1932

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111 Ibid., 142.
112 Ibid., 142-3.
113 Scholes, I., 105.
114 Bennett, J., *Forty Years of Music* (London: Methuen and Co., 1908), 385-6.
115 *MEM*, 233.

that this theme was sent to him and he did not know whether it was 'authentic'.[116] However, it was based on a melody of the Spanish-Jewish tradition – Ibn Gabirol's hymn 'Sha'ar Asher Nisgar'.[117] This seems to have been the only occasion that Cowen ever used musical material associated with his Jewish background.

The pronouncement that Cowen had been commissioned to compose an oratorio for Three Choirs' Festival at Worcester had energised extensive curiosity, and generated an immense demand for tickets, such that Worcester Cathedral was packed out with an audience of 2,600, inducing the *Musical Times* to remark: '*Ruth*, therefore, appeared in the light of a good investment on the part of the committee, and the fact may have an important influence on future policy'.[118] Hueffer in *The Times* said that *Ruth* was a 'work of distinguished merit'; Cowen was the 'musical hero of the hour'.[119] Willeby thought that

> if we demand for the perfect oratorio a plentiful indulgence in and use of counterpoint, fugue, and polyphonic imitation, such as is exemplified in the greatest oratorios, we shall assuredly be obliged to confess that from them 'Ruth' is a thing apart. Time alone can decide its ultimate position...While it must be admitted that light music prevails in 'Ruth' to a somewhat unusual extent, it must not be forgotten that in this the composer is consistent with the requirements of the story...The only question I would hazard is that whether, seeing that 'Ruth', although based on a Scriptural subject, is not strictly speaking religious, it would not have been more in justice to the work itself to have discarded the term 'dramatic oratorio', and substituted that of 'a Biblical cantata'.[120]

Ernest Walker described it as a 'rather obvious work...containing a good deal of suave picturesqueness of a kind, but...singularly little that is at all solidly satisfying'[121] and Joseph Barnett described it as 'charming and ideal pastoral music'.[122] The vocal score was published by

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[116] *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 October 1935, 10.
[117] Deutsch, G. and Cohen, F. L., 'Marcello, Benedetto', *Jewish Encyclopedia.com*, 2002, at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_friendly.jsp?artid=175&letter=M&search=marcello%20benedetto> [accessed c. 14 May 2006].
[118] *Musical Times*, xxviii (1887), 601.
[119] *The Times*, 9 September 1887; *Musical World*, 17 September 1887.
[120] *MEM*, 231-4.
[121] Walker, 297.
[122] Barnett, J. F., *Musical Reminiscences and Impressions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 302.

Novellos soon afterwards and quickly graced the *repertoire* of many choral societies, even with its requirement of five or six soloists: the two baritone solos could be sung by a single voice.[123]

As we have seen, *Ruth* was rather a different work to that which the Victorian oratorio-going public expected, and yet it is totally consistent with the sort of music and drama that Cowen had been exploring in the preceding few years. Willeby was probably correct in his assertion that the 'dramatic oratorio' tag was inappropriate: this work is as much a love story as any of Cowen's secular cantatas or his operas, albeit with a biblical foundation. Therefore, Willeby's 'biblical cantata' label or Cowen's 'biblical opera' tag [a description he used for Mendelssohn's *Elijah*] does seem more fitting. However, the fact that *Ruth* received a number of further outings under Cowen's baton, and elsewhere, suggests that despite its apparent lack of piety and religious fervour, there was a market for such works.

Cowen's last venture into sacred choral writing came in 1895 with his *The Transfiguration*, again commissioned for the Three Choirs' Festival, but this time at Gloucester. As the title suggests, it tells the biblical story of the Transfiguration of Christ, a miraculous event in the Synoptic Gospel accounts of Jesus (Matthew 17:1–6, Mark 9:1–8, Luke 9:28–36). Cowen, although Jewish, seems to have been immediately aware that the subject matter had to be treated with due reverence; there was no room here for the dramatic and poetic license of *Saint Ursula* and *Ruth*. Indeed, as was made clear earlier, audiences were only just becoming used to sacred music that allowed Christ to be personified in musical terms. Moreover, the subject-matter itself does not lend itself to the sort of dramatic or romantic scenario that Cowen was used to. There are only four speaking characters: God, Jesus, Peter and John [not counting Moses and Elias (Elijah)!] and there are no crowd scenes. Therefore, there are issues of the distribution of solo roles and the use of a chorus (where there is no potential for a *turba*). Due to the nature of the texts, the main event, the Transfiguration itself, happens within the first verse or so of each

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[123] Cowen's *Ruth* was given five performances at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition 1888/9, but it was rejected by the Norwich Festival in 1890. It was given at Berlin under Hollaendez [?] at the end of November 1897, at the Hallé concert on 26 January 1899 and at the Cardiff Triennial Musical Festival held at the Park Hall on 8 October 1902.

Gospel account, and the whole story only takes 6-8 verses. Therefore, Bennett and Cowen had to set the libretto in such a fashion that took into account these perceived difficulties. They solved the problem of the location of the main musical climax by drawing the audience from the event of the Transfiguration itself, toward its theological meaning, that of the three Apostles' recognition of Christ as the Messiah: the fulfilment of the Law of Moses and the prophecy of Elijah, by expanding the libretto to encompass much spiritual reflection on the event. Rather than have an all-male cast of soloists, they assigned four solos (soprano, contralto, tenor and baritone) to share the narration, reflection and characterization, much as seems to be the case in Cowen's earliest oratorio *The Deluge*. Within the process of recounting the story itself, the contralto is primarily the narrator, the baritone firstly takes the part of Peter and later that of Jesus. The tenor sings the role of John. All four soloists contribute to the singing of the more meditative texts, and this is also the only real function for the chorus, except when the ladies alone sing God's words: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him'. One almost feels that Cowen had his hands tied by these restrictions. Indeed, Bennett and he largely revert back to a 'traditional' linear textual narrative of separate movements, with recitatives, arias and choruses, although different sections are carefully segued together, and each movement progresses from its predecessor without a break. Moreover, the air for tenor (3.d.), chorus (4.) and hymn (6.d.), three of the more substantial movements, all show a tripartite 'da capo' structure, perhaps a compromise to the oratorio and cantata writing of the previous hundred years. It is often observed that Cowen's works lack any true contrapuntal writing – here, again, one finds little to disprove this theory, although the last chorus certainly has some fugal and canonic elements. The only concession to the drama of opera is the Orchestral Interlude 'The Transfiguration', a musical tone picture of the event itself. This 'Church Cantata' is in many ways in keeping with the Bach tradition of the church cantata in terms of scale, but one can only imagine Cowen ever conceiving it within a concert performance context, the same as Mendelssohn's *Saint Paul* and *Elijah*, and Handel's *Messiah*. However, its small-scale, compared to the three above-mentioned works, does

mean that the *NGDMM2*'s designation of 'oratorio' is in fact incorrect: Cowen's own description is accurate—'a Church Cantata'. Reaction to its production was very mixed: Fuller Maitland was characteristically unimpressed with the work, calling it 'unconvincing', 'unequal' and 'unimpressive',[124] whereas Henry Frost at the *Athenaeum* thought that it was 'brilliant and devotional', at once transcending 'all his efforts in strength and virility of style'.[125] Indeed, it was successful enough to have several further outings.[126]

It would appear that this second venture with the Three Choirs' Festival, produced a rather more restrained and pious work than Cowen's first offering, *Ruth*. It is not clear whether he felt that he had to appease the festival committee, audience, clergy and critics from his previous misdemeanours with *Ruth*. However, the subject-matter did generate a ceiling which constrained his operatic muse in favour of a devotional style that we have hitherto not really seen.

The *Musical Times*, in its comment on the first performance of *The Transfiguration* notes that Cowen 'was of Jewish descent and of the Jewish religion', and goes on to consider:

> It has been urged that as an adherent of the Jewish faith, he was not competent to deal with a Christian subject. Surely that is pushing objection too far. Must a composer be a Mohammedan before he can put music to a Moslem theme? Was Mendelssohn any the less qualified to illustrate 'Antigone' because [he was] not a Pagan?...To my mind, Mr Cowen has dealt very finely with his subject.[127]

As can be seen, Cowen's devotional style in *The Transfiguration* presents us with an interesting religious conundrum. Here we have a composer who is an adherent of the Jewish faith writing music on a subject which is one of the central pinnacles of Christian belief. How could he have reconciled such an action? Yet, throughout his life he demonstrated a striking propensity to lay down compositions that challenge the religion of his birth. Cowen noted in his autobiography a youthful fascination with the lives of the Christian saints.[128] In truth, apart from the aforementioned *The Transfiguration*, several of his other important works owe their religious

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[124] *The Times*, 13 September 1895.
[125] *Athenaeum*, 21 September 1895.
[126] Cowen conducted it on 28 March 1896 at the Crystal Palace, again at the first season with the Hallé Concerts Society and Liverpool Philharmonic Society (1896/7), and on 5 November 1897 at St George's Hall, Bradford, with the Festival Choral Society and Permanent Orchestra.
[127] Scholes, I, 105.
[128] *MAMF*, 107.

inspiration to Christian sources: *The Maid of Orleans* (Incidental music to a stage play about St. Joan of Arc, 1871) *Saint Ursula* (Sacred Cantata, 1881), and *Christmas Scenes* (Cantata for Female Voices, 1894).[129] Moreover, he contributed six hymn tunes to *The Westminster Hymn-Book* (1897) and many of his 300 songs have references to Christian subjects. One could argue that in a country where the predominant religion was Christianity, Cowen found it expedient to write works that would appeal to the widest audience, and so provide him with a greater income, even though he may not have shared the sentiments of the material. However, it is difficult to see how he could have so passionately conceived a work like *The Transfiguration* without having some Christian sympathies.

In conclusion, because of the conservative nature of Britons toward the British sacred choral work, Cowen faced some interesting challenges as a composer of such works. In the beginning with *The Deluge* he seems to have bowed to their conservative tastes, at least as far as form was concerned, but he tried to instil more dramatic elements into the work than his audience was ready for. *Saint Ursula* took this a stage further, introducing a rather more dramatic operatic style. Indeed, there is little difference between it and his secular works of the time; it just happens to be on a religious theme. The large-scale *Ruth* was a further extension of this dramatic method, and, by the standards of the contemporary oratorio tradition of the time, hardly a sacred oratorio at all. Finally, with *The Transfiguration* Cowen largely turned his back on the operatic approach in favour of a more traditional devotional one.

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[129] *Saint John's Eve* is omitted from this list on the grounds that, although inspired by Saint John the Baptist, the work is primarily a pagan rite of dedication in honour of the saint.

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As was indicated earlier in his operas, Cowen tended to cross-fertilise ideas from the opera genre to that of the choral works. Indeed, in his choral works he gradually adopted a system of recurring themes based on the process of *leitmotiven* developed by Wagner in his operas. An exhaustive analysis of Cowen's processes in each work is not possible, especially as there is no way independently verifying that all of the principal motives have been identified. However, this basic investigation hopes to show Cowen's thoroughness or otherwise in his approach to the method.

A detailed analysis of *The Deluge* was not possible (due to the absence of any surviving score), as was the case with *Saint Ursula* (due to the unavailability of a purchasable score). However, some examination was made of the score of the latter in the British Library to get an overview and corroborate critics' observations). In *The Corsair* Willeby says of Cowen that 'in the use of character themes, or *leit-motiven*, he...indulges freely'.[130] There are three main motives which have been labelled as follows: 'Affection'—a theme used throughout as representative of the affection of Medora and Conrad; 'Medora'—a theme which is associated with Medora herself; and 'Conrad'—a theme which is linked with Conrad. All three motives are musically in keeping with their respective characters. There is a fourth motive, which I have entitled 'Pirates'—a bugle-like fragment that tends to precede the entry of the pirates. A more detailed examination of *The Corsair* shows Cowen's approach:[131]

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[130] *MEM*, 203-4.

[131] Please note in the following and subsequent tables of representative themes/*leitmotiven*, the letters and numbers represent the rehearsal letter and bar number within that rehearsal letter, e.g. A1 would be the first bar of rehearsal letter A. In addition, where a motive does not appear on the first beat of a bar, a '/' and a number follow that indicate a more precise location, e.g. A1/3 would represent an appearance of a motive in the first bar of letter A on the third beat of that bar.

Table 2: Leitmotiven/ leading-theme reminiscences and transformations in 'The Corsair'

Movement No.	'Affection' Motive	'Medora' Motive	'Conrad' Motive	'Pirates' Motive
1.			D49 D53 D64	1 B30
2.	A4	B1 C1		
3.	35 D9	4	A38	27 C33 D18
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				D11 E1
8.				
8b.				
9.	A27			
10.				
11.		1 8		23
12.				
12b.	H27			
13.	B7	1		A38 D6 7 before the *Fine*

From the above table it can be seen that Cowen's approach in *The Corsair* is hardly all-encompassing, the principal motives only recurring at significant points. The 'Affection' motive is prominent when Medora and Conrad express their fondness for each other in No. 2 and in their duet together in No. 3. Indeed, here the motive is developed and extended into the main melody of the movement. In No. 9 it recurs at the point that Conrad recalls broken-heartedly the far away Medora. In No. 12b a variation of the motive is sung by Gulnare as she acknowledges Conrad's love for Medora. In the final movement it is heard as Medora and Conrad are passionately, but tragically, reunited.

The 'Medora' motive is used in a similar fashion and the 'Pirates' motive recurs mostly at significant moments for the pirates. The 'Conrad' motive only appears on two key entries of Conrad early in the work, so perhaps this one should be dismissed from the table above. However, the German sixth to tonic harmonic element of the motive does live on in other passages. What the table cannot tell us is whether the motives reappear as originally stated or

transformed. Apart from the transformation of the 'Affection' motive in No. 12b already noted, and the rhythmical variants applied to the 'Pirates' motive, there is very little true transformation of these motives: they mostly appear as initially presented with little or no diminution, augmentation, or pitch and rhythm variation. Cowen's adherence to the Wagnerian principles of the *leitmotiven* procedure is, therefore, at best, slight. Indeed, it could be argued that these motives are not true *leitmotiven*, but simply character or representative themes that Cowen has used to mark key points in the cantata. Moreover, it seems that Cowen's proven love of flowing melody is in conflict with his desire to implement such a Wagnerian compositional method, as is apparent from the movements that show no influence of these motives at all.

Reporting on the premiere of *Saint Ursula*, the *Annals of the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festivals* was clear that Cowen had tried the *Leitmotiven* system again: 'Mr Cowen was of course attacked for his pronounced leaning towards the modern school of musical thought',[132] which the *Musical Times* special correspondent developed thus:

> Representative themes are displayed from first to last in even an exaggerated style, so that the ear becomes weary of the continual iteration and reiteration of a few phrases. There is an obvious sacrifice of melody for the sake of mere chords, and the leading themes are, in many cases, as angular as the attitudes of an aesthete. These remarks do not, of course, apply in the same measure to every number, for there are instances in which Mr Cowen has not been able to shake off his old love. They do apply, however, in the main. I am sorry for it – sorry to see a composer of ability yielding to the temptation of a false and unworthy art.[133]

Indeed, Cowen's approach again presented motives that were repeated with little or no transformation. But, here they appear in greater abundance, with tedious regularity to the listener. And yet it would also seem that the struggle between fluid melody and the *leitmotiven* formula continued. Either Cowen did not whole-heartedly commit himself to the process because of his liking for flowing melody, or he simply did not have Wagner's skill as a composer to carry through the method. Indeed, it may be that both arguments apply.

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[132] Legge and Hansell, 231.
[133] Ibid.

While Cowen's approach to the Wagnerian *leitmotiven* in *The Corsair* and *Saint Ursula* is wholly unconvincing, it is immediately apparent that he has learnt his lesson with his next choral work *Sleeping Beauty*, as Willeby's appraisal makes clear:

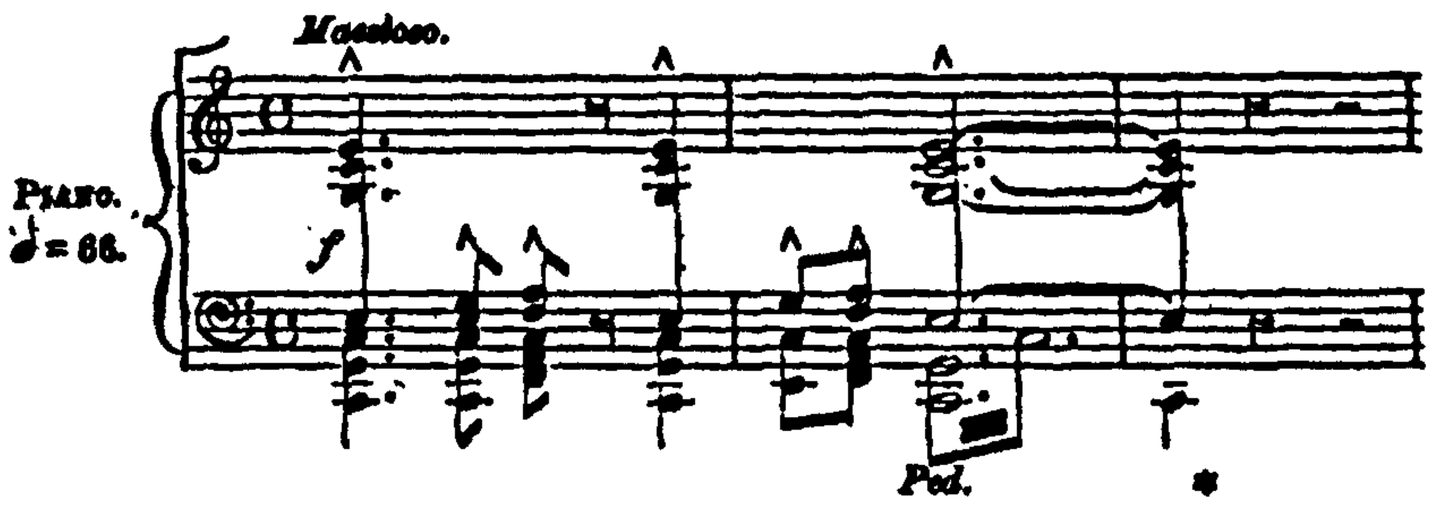
> The composer throughout has adopted very thoroughly the method of representative themes; in fact, this work is more than any other remarkable on that score. In the course of the Prologue he announces four principal motives: firstly, one which is typical of the feast given by the King; this followed by the 'blessing' theme, when we have a very typical 'love-motive', and finally the 'maledictory' theme. This will be sufficient to show the composer's strict adherence to the system. Throughout the work he shows consummate skill in handling this thematic material. The typical phrases are not used merely as a means of announcement of the characters, nor are they labels; they thoroughly carry out Wagner's theory of developing themes according to their respective tendencies, by which we get the principal mental moods in definite thematic shapes before us.[134]

A detailed examination of *Sleeping Beauty* shows Cowen's technique thoroughly—I have identified two elements to the Willeby's 'Blessing', and so the four principal motives are 'Feast' (1), ['Arpeggio'] 'Blessing' (2a), 'Blessing' (2b), 'Love' (3), and 'Malediction' (4)[see Example 1]:

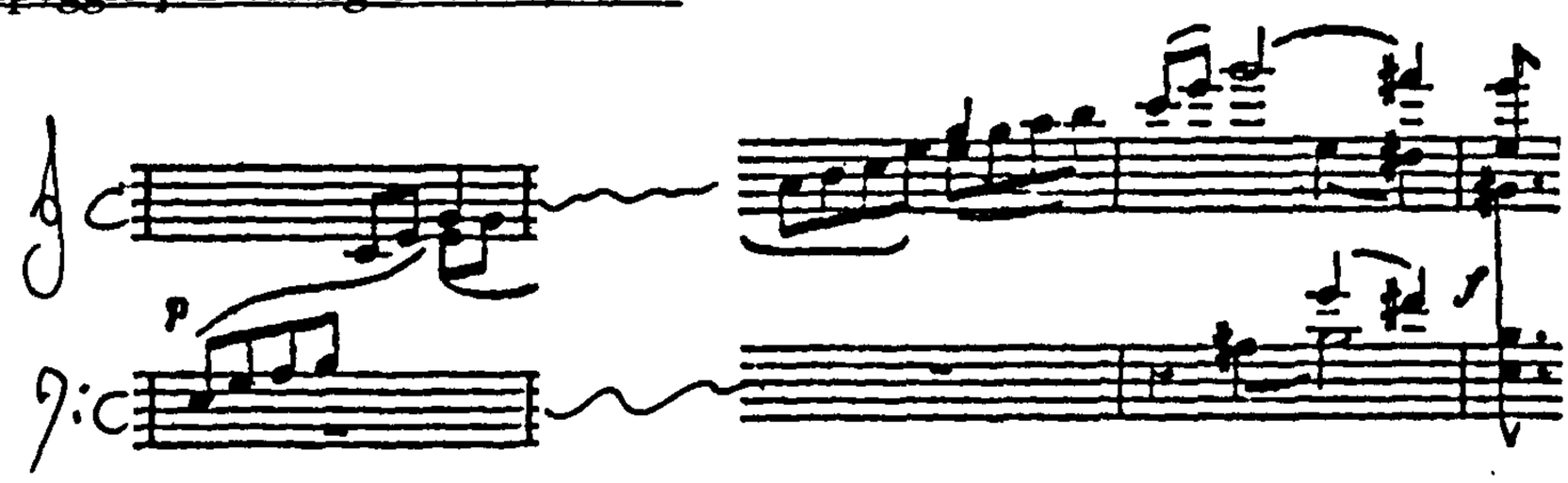
[134] *MEM*, 225-6.

Example 1: Principal Leitmotiven in 'Sleeping Beauty'
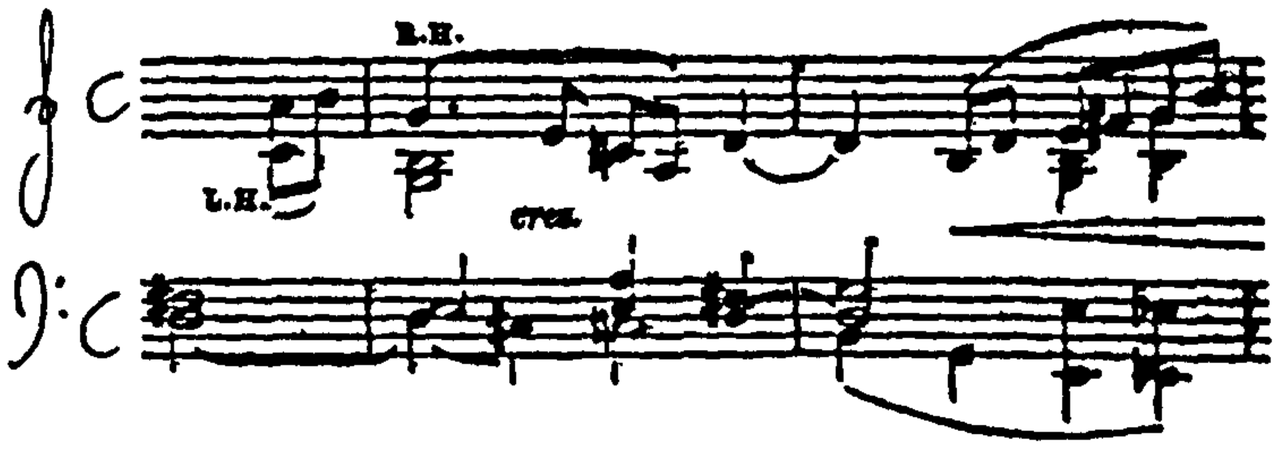
1. 'Feast' Motive, at 1.1



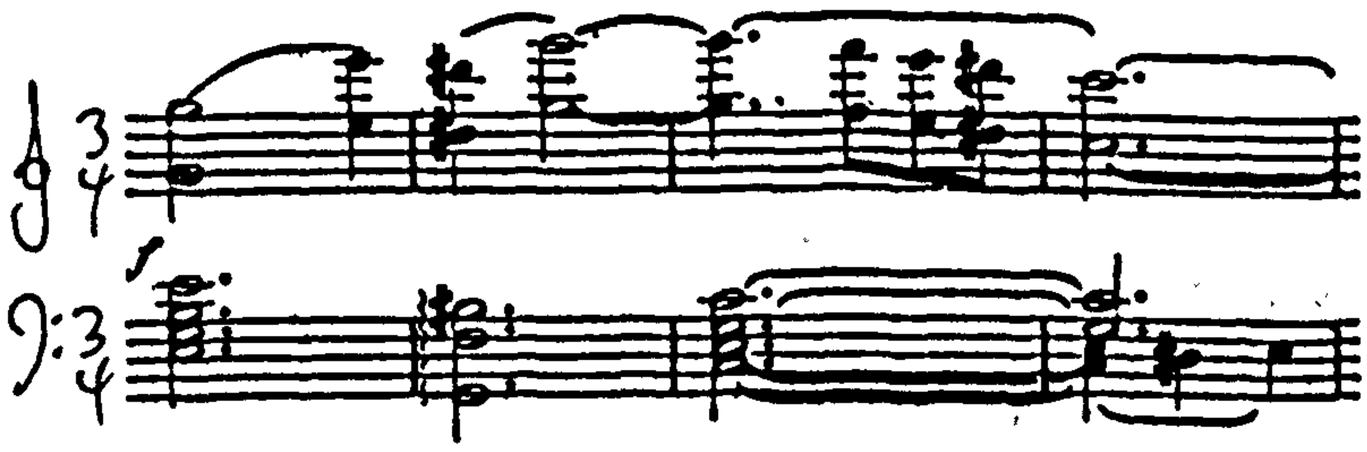
2a. ['Arpeggio'] 'Blessing' Motive, at 1.4



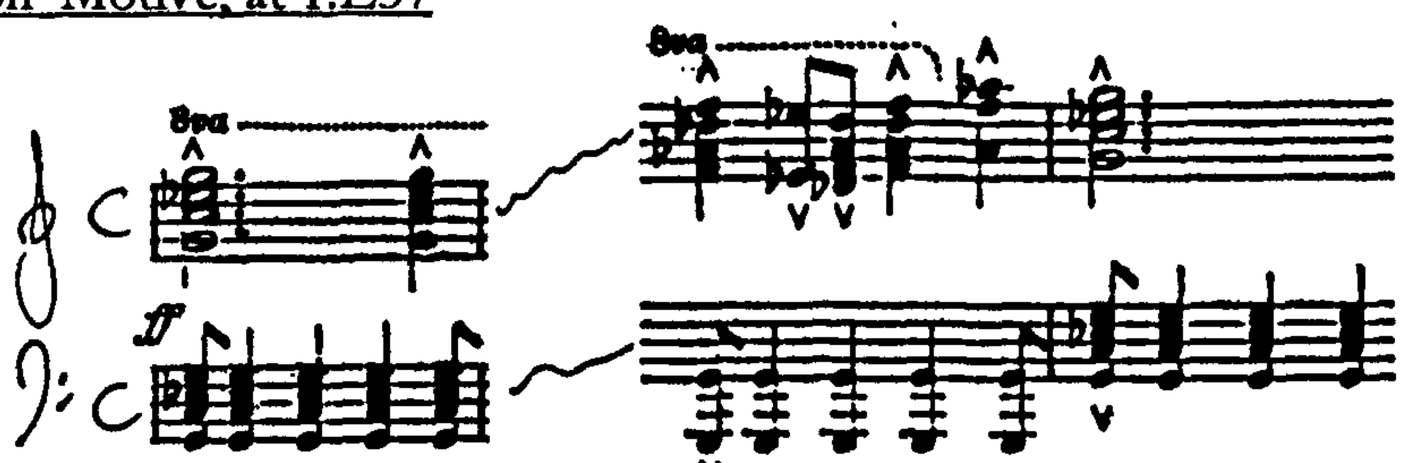
2b. 'Blessing' Motive, at 1.19



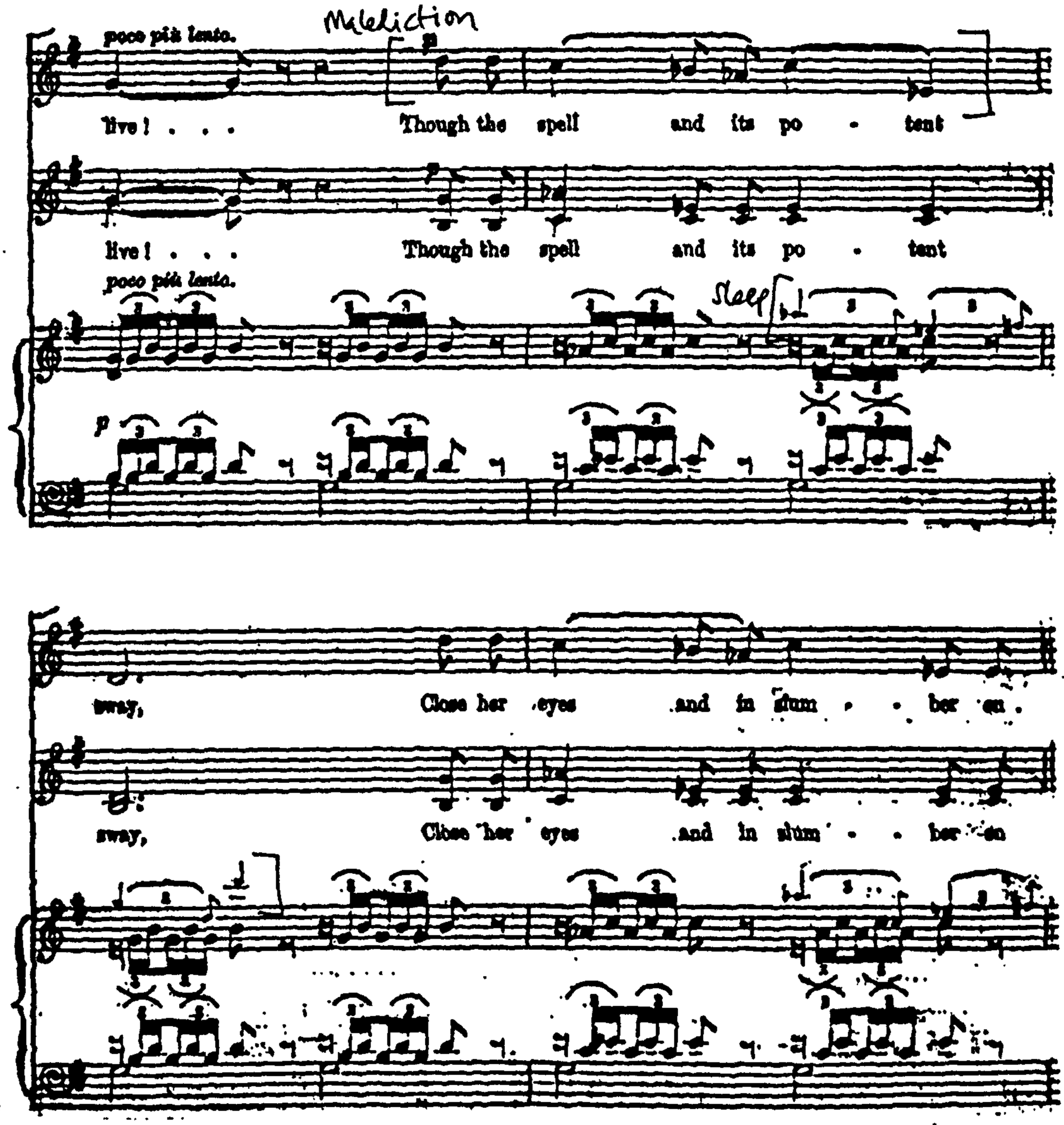
3. 'Love' Motive, at 1.D43



4. 'Malediction' Motive, at 1.E37



5. 'Sleep' Motive (combined with the 'Malediction'), at 1.G20



6. 'Princess' Motive, at 5.1
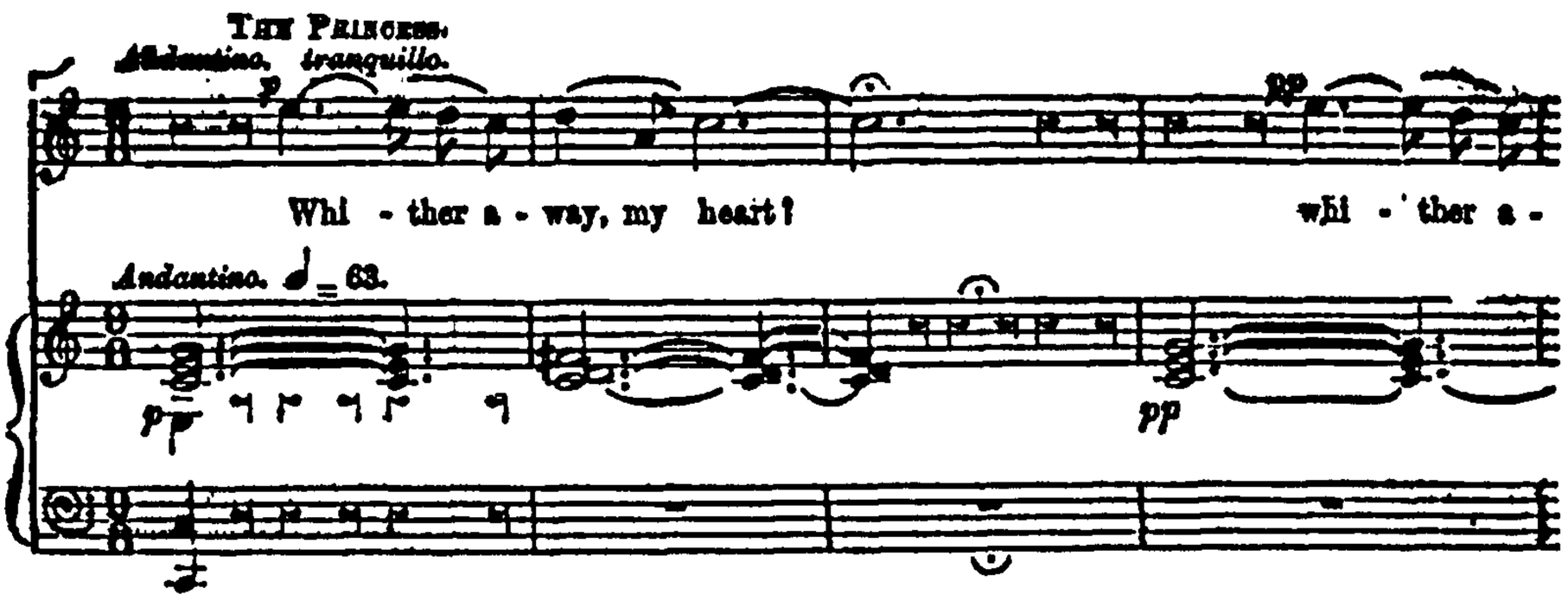


Table 3: Leitmotiven/ leading-theme reminiscences and transformations in 'Sleeping Beauty'

Movement No.	'Feast' Motive (1)	['Arpeggio'] 'Blessing' Motive (2a)	'Blessing' Motive (2b)	'Love' Motive (3)	'Malediction' Motive (4)
1.	1/1 7/1 13/1 A10/1 C9/3 I28/1 I37/1 J7/3	4/1 10/1 17/4 B9/1 C35/1 G24/3 H26/1 I35/3 J5/1	19/4 A6/3 B6/1 C31/1 D2/1 D21/1 E3/1 F1/3 F24/1 G18/2 H13/1	D43/1	E37/1 F31/2 G1/3 G11/1 G20/4 J1/3
2.			H23/2	16/1 C25/1 E1/1 H15/1	
3.	1/2 B1/2 B9/2				
4.	1/1 8/2			C12/1	9/1 10/1 11/3
5.					1/2 D65/3
6.	F10/2 F18/2			6/4	C1/4 C3/4 E1/4 E3/4 E12/3 E14/4
7.					C1/4 C3/4
8.			24/1 26/1	E7/1	
9[a].			7/1 9/1 11/1 13/1 15/1 A13/1 A23/2 C8/1 C12/1 C16/1	1-6 7/1 9/1 11/1 13/1 A1/1 A3/1 A9/1 A11/1 A19/1 B20/1 C10/1 C14/1 C18/1 C22/1	
9[b].	C26/1			D25/2 G1/2 G5/2	
10.	E21/2		I11/1	A39/2 A43/2 B8-B16 B18/1 B30/2 H17-I10	
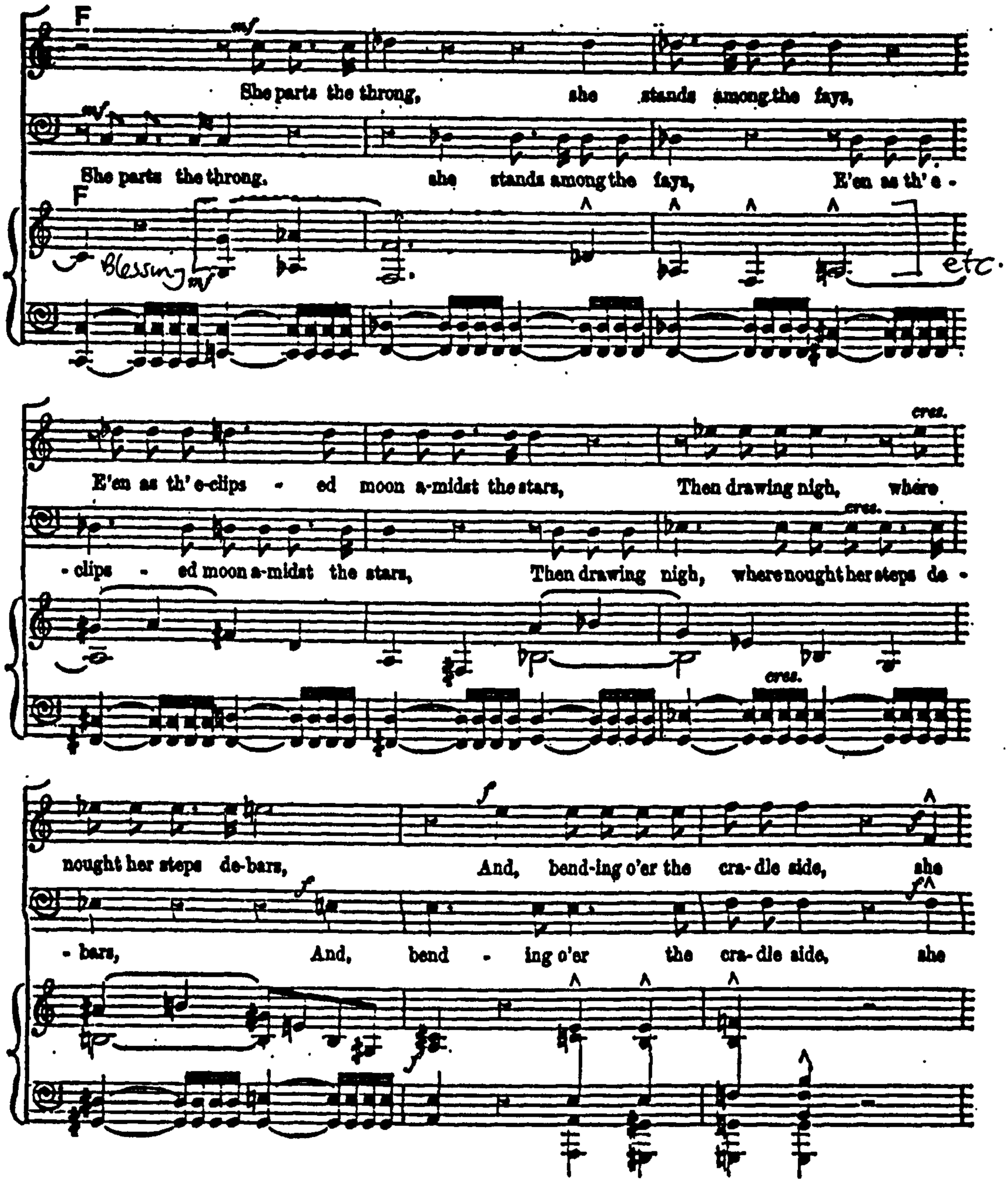
From the above table it can be seen that the 'Love' motive (3) is the most often reoccurring idea, appearing in various guises in almost every movement except nos. 3 and 7. The

'Blessing' (2b) and 'Feast' (1) motives occur a little less, and the 'Malediction' motive (4), except for its appearance in the opening, only then returns between movements 4 and 7, when the Wicked Fay is centre stage, with the intent of cursing the Princess. The ['Arpeggio'] 'Blessing' motive (2a) is rarely heard after the first movement, but its influence lives on under the surface in the many upward ascending phrases that are scattered throughout the work (see overleaf). The most effective part of *Sleeping Beauty* is that moment when the 'Blessing' and 'Love' motives are combined together at the beginning of movement 9[a]. Cowen is here in inspired mood. Apart from the above mentioned motives, there are two others that should be referred to. The first of these is the 'Sleep' motive. It is arguably a distant derivative of the 'Feast' motive, but it is important in its own right as it emerges at all the chief incidents of references to 'sleep' in the libretto: Movement No. 1, G21/3; No. 8, 20/1 and 31/1-D13/3; and No. 9[a], B7/2 and B12/2. The other motive is the so-called 'Princess' motive, which occurs in movement no. 5 only at 1/2, 4/2, A8/2, A10/2, D14/2, and D16/2.

The music to *Sleeping Beauty* has not only been fairly thoroughly worked out along Wagnerian principles, but some of the motives have undergone genuine transformation through augmentation, diminution, rhythmic and pitch alteration. More importantly, the process has not detracted from the beauty of the score, nor does it sound contrived. Indeed, Cowen has successfully combined separate motives together at several points in the score. This is Cowen's *leitmotiven* apotheosis, at least among the choral works [see Example 2].

Example 2: Development of Principal Leitmotiven in 'Sleeping Beauty'
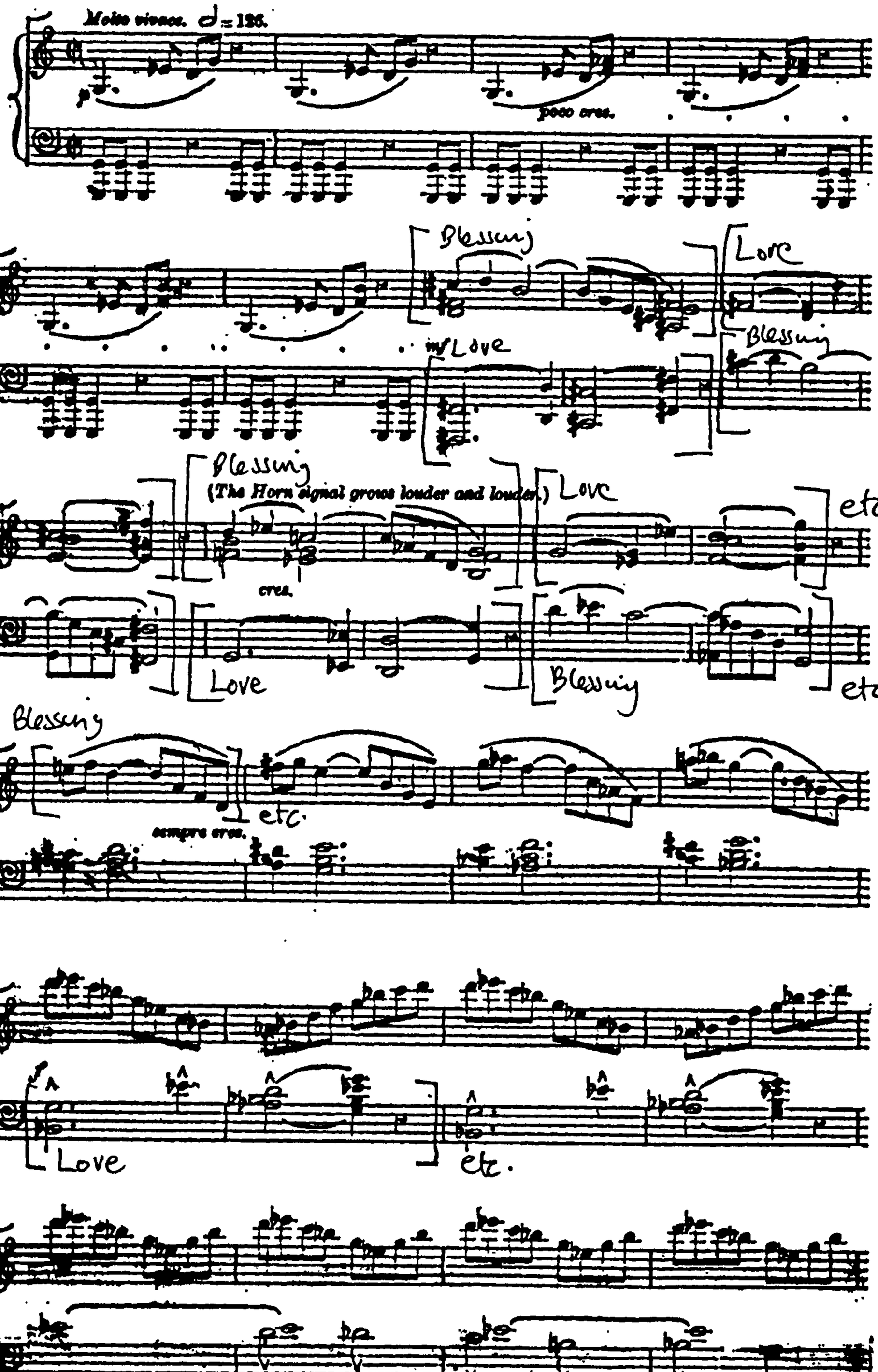
1. Development of 'Blessing' Motive in augmentation, at 1.F1
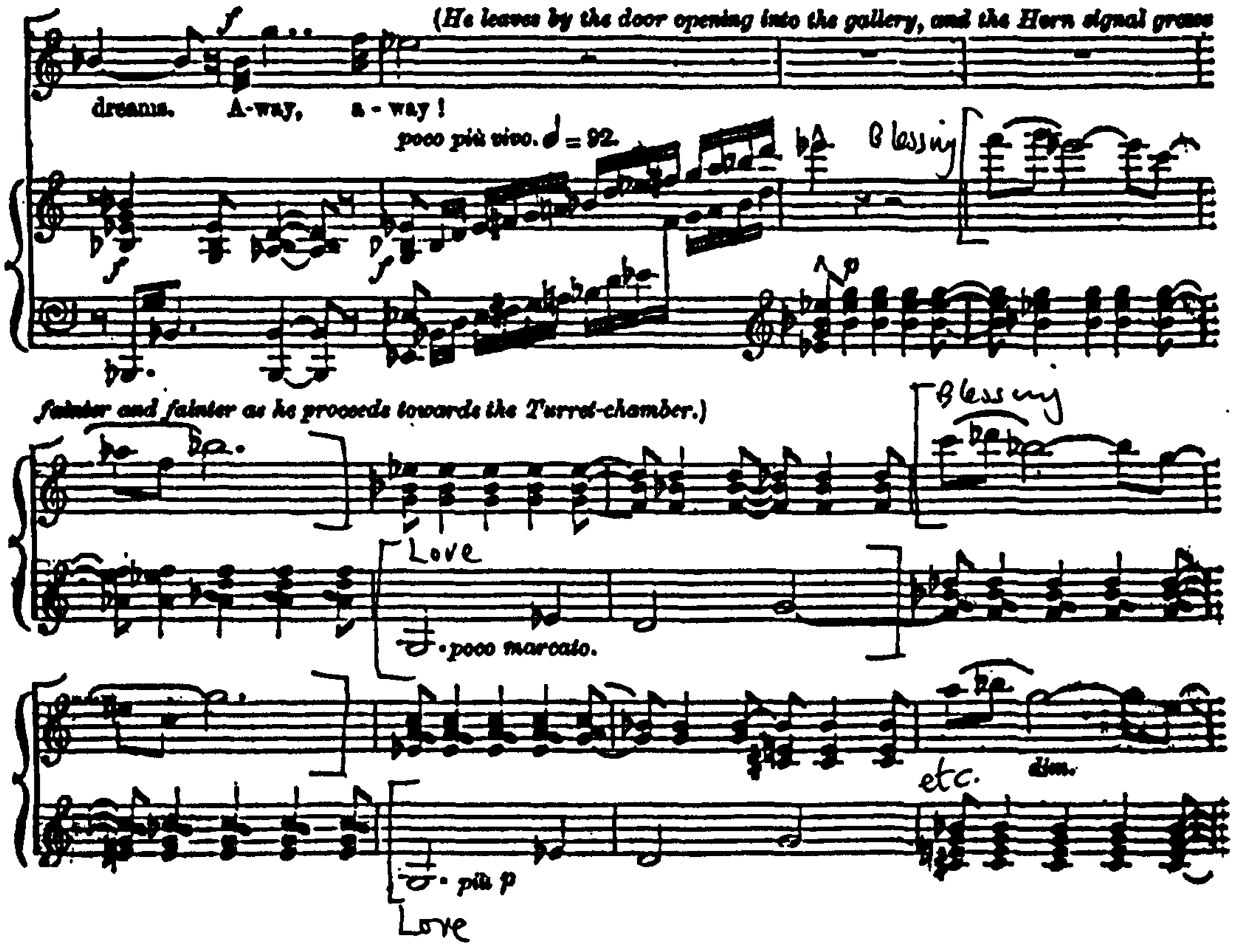


2. Development of 'Blessing' and 'Love' Motives, at 9.1

SCENE III.—*Hall of the Castle as in Scene I. The King and his Courtiers asleep.*
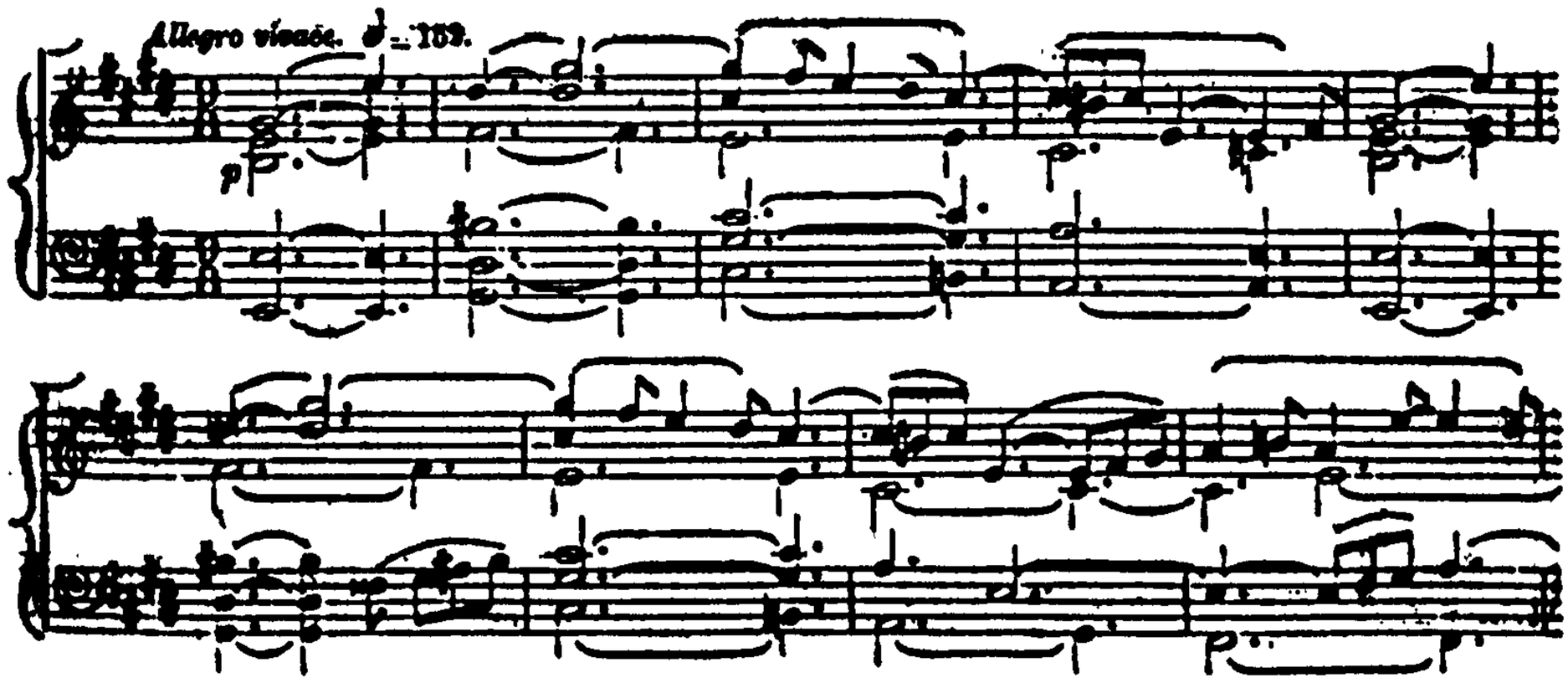
No. 9. SCENA (THE PRINCE).—"LIGHT, LIGHT AT LAST."



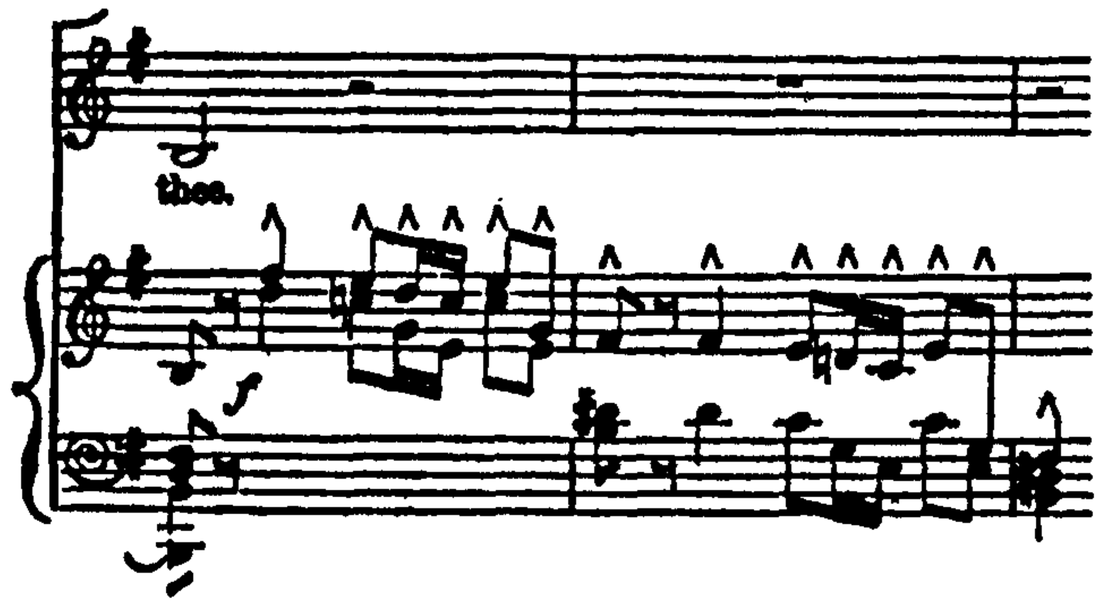
3. Development of 'Blessing' and 'Love' motives, at 9.C5



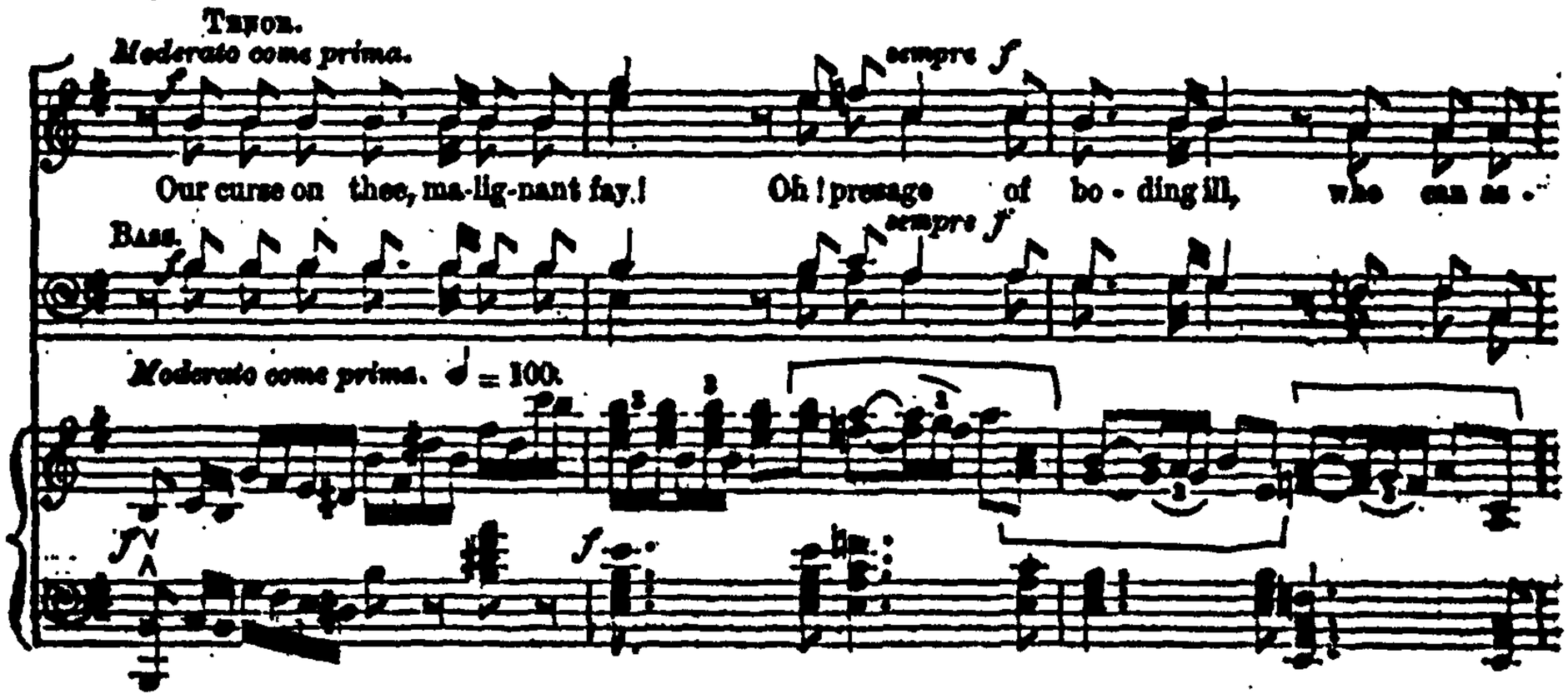
4. Development of 'Love' Motive, the beginning of 'Maidenhood and Dreams of Love', at 2.16



5. Development of 'Malediction' in diminution, at 1.F31



6. Development of 'Malediction' Motive in diminution, at 1.G10
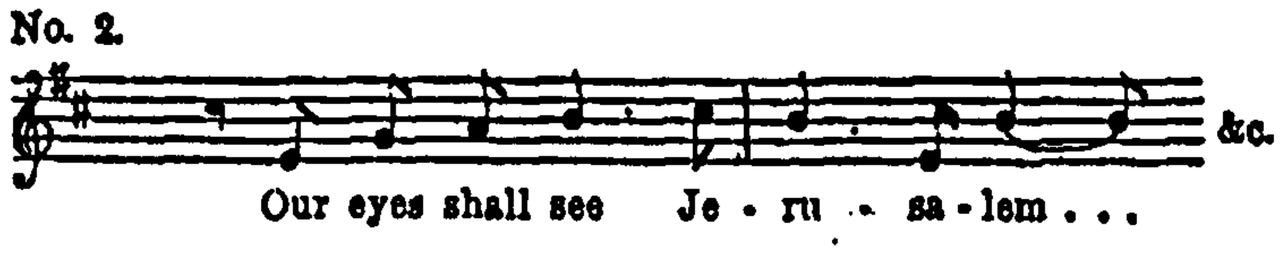


Having nearly perfected his approach to the *leitmotiven* process in *Sleeping Beauty*, one might have expected him to continue in the same vein with *Ruth*, but somehow the intensity of the process has not been worked through. There are four clearly defined motives: 'Travel' (1), which appears at the outset of the work; 'Home' (2), which is presented a little further on at the first entry of the altos; 'Harvest' (3), which forms the basis of the Orchestral Introduction to Scene 3; and 'Boaz' (4), which stands for the character of that name. There is also another motive that appears to be associated with 'Evening'. It is first heard in the concluding bars of No. 7 in the orchestra as 'evening comes on', and then on the words 'until the evening' in No. 8 [see Example 3].

Example 3: Principal Leitmotiven in 'Ruth'

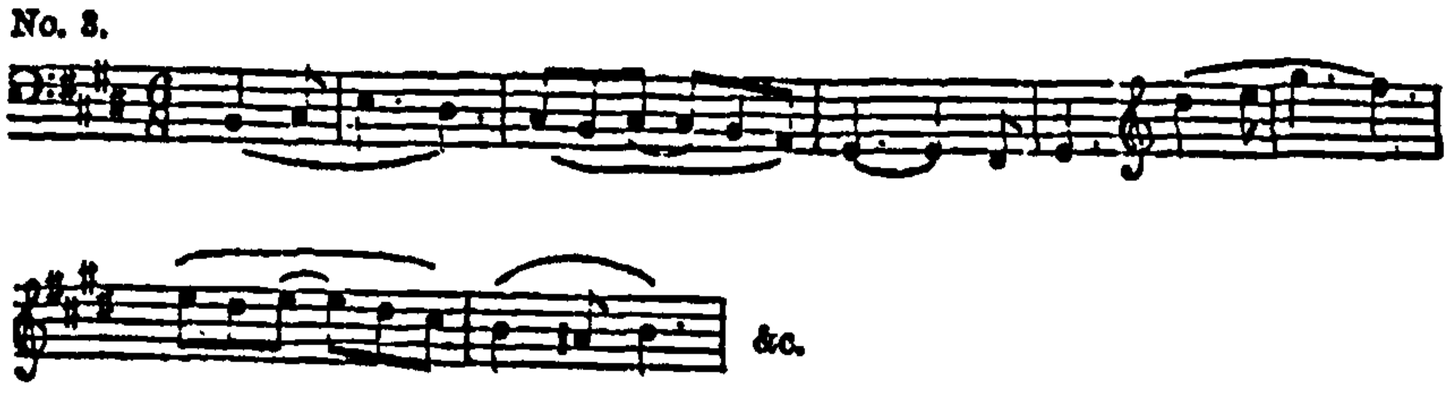
'Motive of Travel' (1), which appears at the outset of the work (at 1.1):-



'Motive of Home' (2), which is presented a little further on at the first entry of the altos (at 1.B1):-



'Motive of Harvest' (3), which forms the basis of the Orchestral Introduction to Scene 3 (at 7.1):-



'Motive of Boaz' (4), which stands for the character of that name (at 7b.E25):-



Table 4: Leitmotiven/leading-theme reminiscences and transformations in 'Ruth'

Movement No.	'Travel' Motive (1)	'Home' Motive (2)	'Harvest' Motive (3)	'Boaz' Motive (4)
PART I.				
Scene I				
1. CHORUS – 'Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place	1-4 8-10 14-18 A3-A33 B12 B15 B18-C2 C5 C7-C8 C11-D4 D22-E2 E5 E7-E8 E11-F12	B1-B12 D7-D8 D12-D16 D19-D21		
2[a]. AIR – 'Like as a father'	H35	F13-F16 H36-H37		
[2b.] SCENA AND CHORUS – 'I will arise'		I1 I36-I37 I40-I41		
3. AIR AND CHORUS – 'Be of good comfort'		M39		
Scene II				
4. CHORUS – 'God shall help us'		B1		
5. SCENA AND CHORUS – 'Go, return each to her mother's house'		D53-D54 F33-F36		
6. CHORUS – 'The Lord hath done great things'	M30-M37	I3-I4		
Scene III				
7[a]. SOLO AND CHORUS – 'Fear not, O land'			1-10 18-19 26-27 A29-A30 A33-A34 A62 C8-C9 C12-C13 D16-D17	
[7b.] SCENA – 'The Lord be with you'			E50-E51 E53-E54 F17-F18 H39	E25-E30 E30-E35 F29-F31 H29-H34
8. CHORUS AND RECIT. – 'Man goeth forth unto his labour'			I39-I40 J4-J5	

Movement No.	'Travel' Motive (1)	'Home' Motive (2)	'Harvest' Motive (3)	'Boaz' Motive (4)
PART II.				
9. ORCHESTRAL INTRODUCTION / PRELUDE - 'Thanksgiving at Harvest-Time'				
Scene I (Scene IV)				
10. AIR AND CHORUS – 'How excellent is Thy loving-kindness'			3-12	
11[a]. RECIT. – 'Thus saith the Lord'				
[11b]. *Dance of Gleaners, with Chorus of Reapers.*				
[11c]. *Dance of Reapers, with Chorus of Gleaners.*				
[11d]. [*Dances and Choruses of Reapers and Gleaners*].				
12. CHORUS – 'The Lord said, I will send a famine'				
13[a]. SOLO – 'My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth'				
[13b]. DUET – 'Who art thou?'				
Scene II (Scene V)				
14[a]. RECIT. AND CHORUS – 'Ye are witnesses'				1-11
[14b]. QUARTET AND CHORUS (Male Voices) – 'The Lord is my strength'				
15[a]. SOLO – 'Behold, new things do I declare'				
[15b]. QUARTET AND CHORUS – 'O generation'				

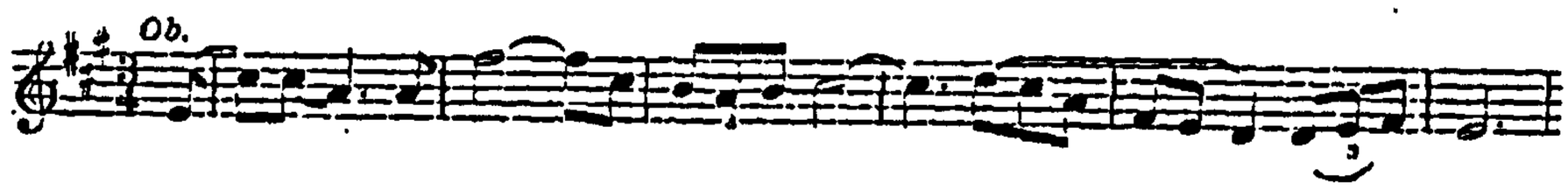
From the above table it can be seen that Cowen's use of *leitmotiven* principles is irregular, and at times sparing in *Ruth*. Indeed, in Part II he seems to have all but given up on it. While examination of the score reveals careful working out of motives and fragments specific to a particular movement, there is not the all-encompassing process of development of motives/representative themes that traverse the whole oratorio. Indeed, compared with *Sleeping Beauty*, which dates from a couple of years before, it seems that Cowen has been much less

interested in the process with *Ruth*. However, he does maintain the flow and segueing of movements as he did with *Sleeping Beauty*. The same is even truer of *The Transfiguration*. Its smaller scale and devotional nature (and thereby less operatic approach) eradicated any real necessity to develop a complex motivic scheme. *The Water-Lily* has a veritable deluge of representative themes and *Leitmotiven* [see Example 4]. But, despite all the cleverness of construction and transformation, a majority of these only really appear in one or two movements; Cowen's all-embracing scheme in *Sleeping Beauty* is not repeated. And rarely does Cowen actually combine two together at the same time. Only the 'Spring's Flower', 'Come from glade', 'Water-Lily', 'Love's Guardianship', the two sailing motives, and perhaps the 'Swans', could be said to occur with any regularity.

Example 4. Principal Leitmotiven found in 'The Water-Lily'
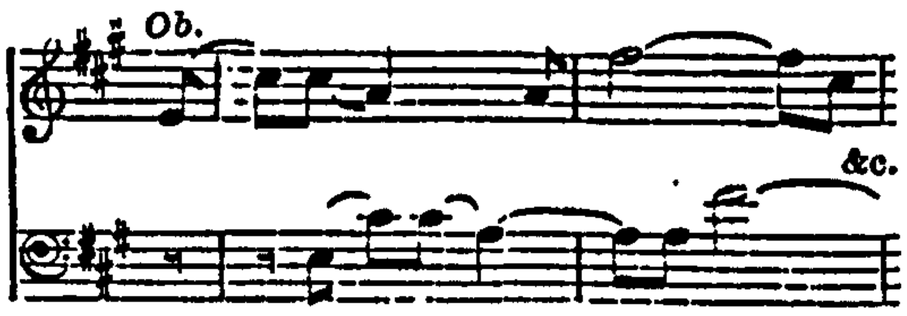
1. Motive of 'Spring's Flower' (at 1.2)

No. 1.



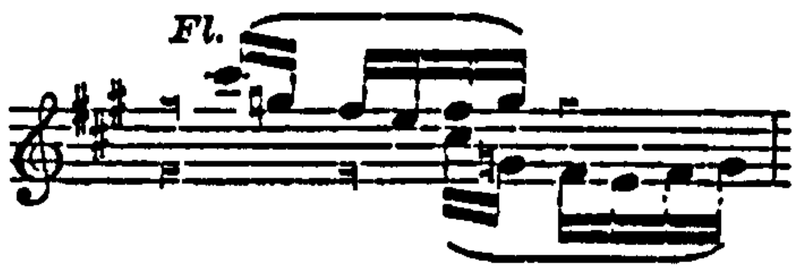
2. 'Spring's Flower' in a canon at the octave (at 1.21)

No. 2.



3. Transformation of 'Spring's Flower' (at 1.A23)

No. 3.
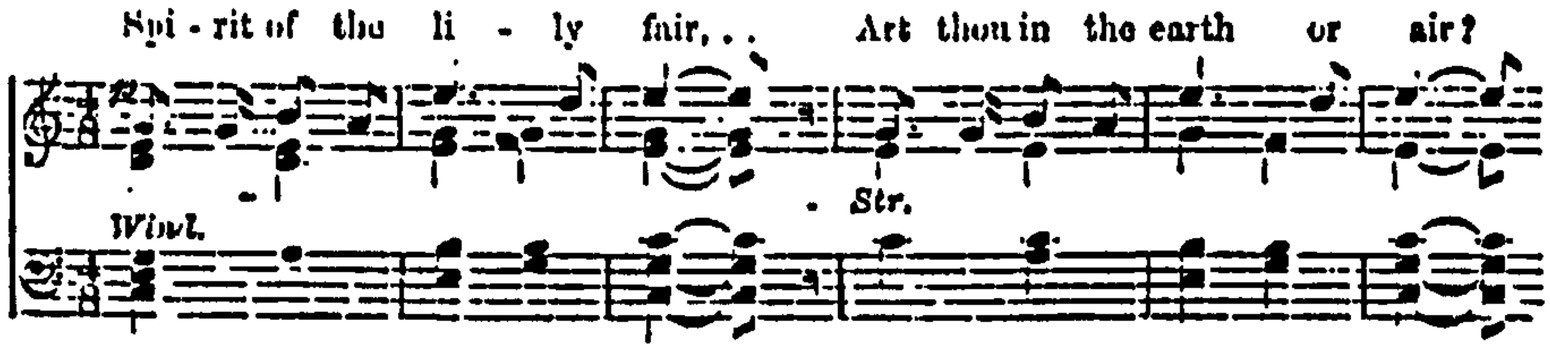


4. Motive of 'Sir Galahad' (at 1.40)

No. 4.



5. Invocation: 'Spirit of the lily fair' (at 1.E46)

No. 5.



6. Use of a Neapolitan Sixth [a favourite Cowen device] (at 1.E77)

No. 6.



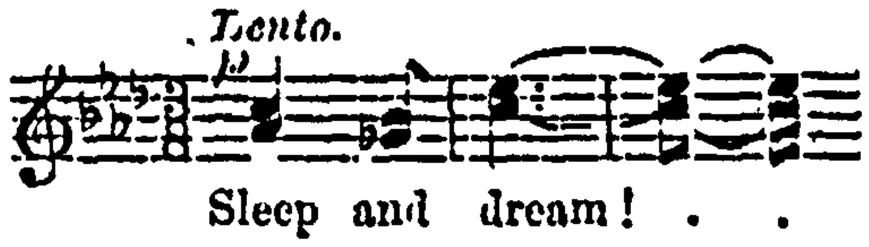
7. Motive of 'Come from glade' (at 1.F23)

No. 7.



8. Motive of 'Sleep and dream' (at 2.G10)

No. 8.



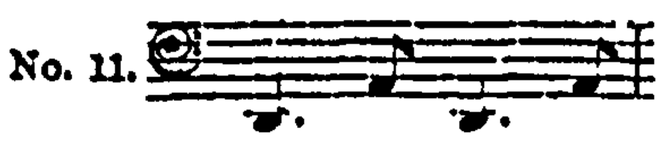
9. Motive of 'Sailing' at (at 3.H54)



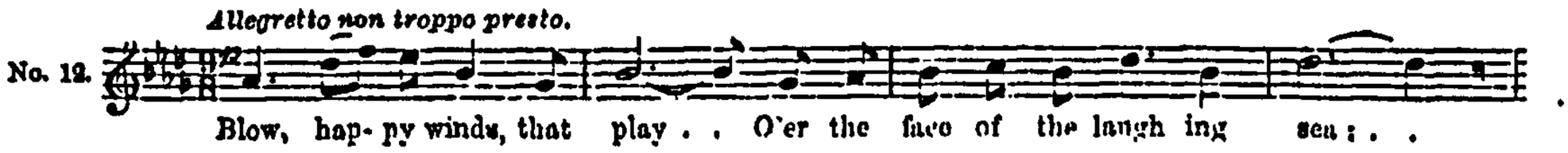
10. Motive of 'Water Lily' (at 3.H62)
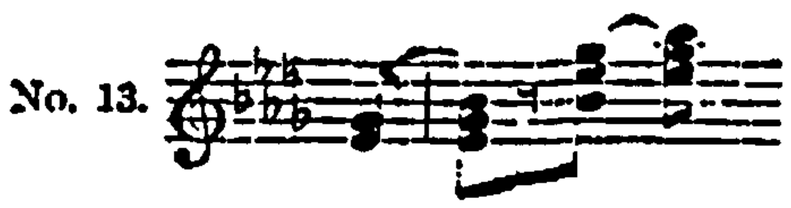


11. a frequent bass figure (at 3.H80)



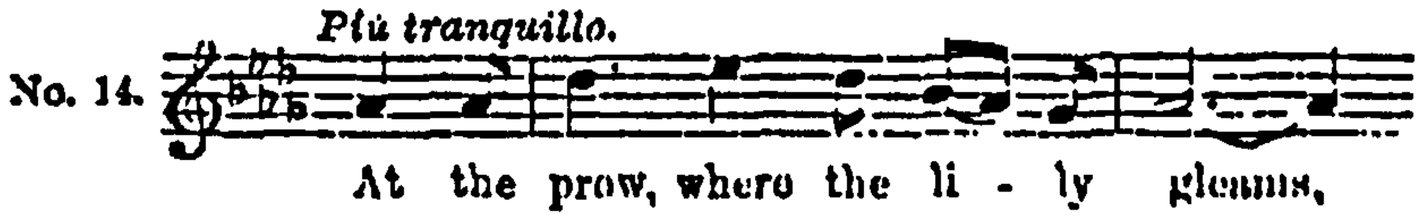
12. 'Blow, happy winds' (at 3.J6)



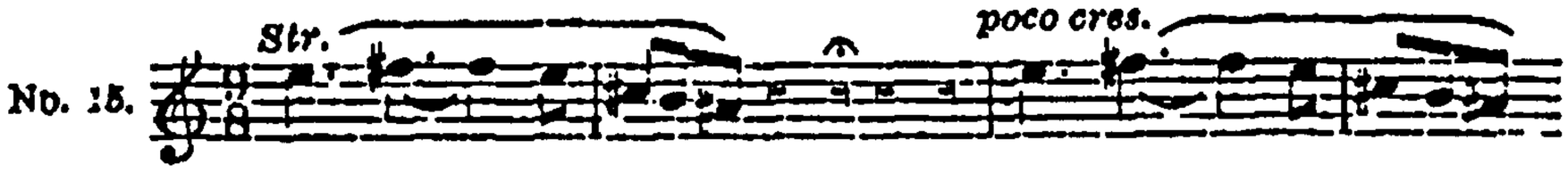
13. a rhythmic figure for flutes (at 3.J6)



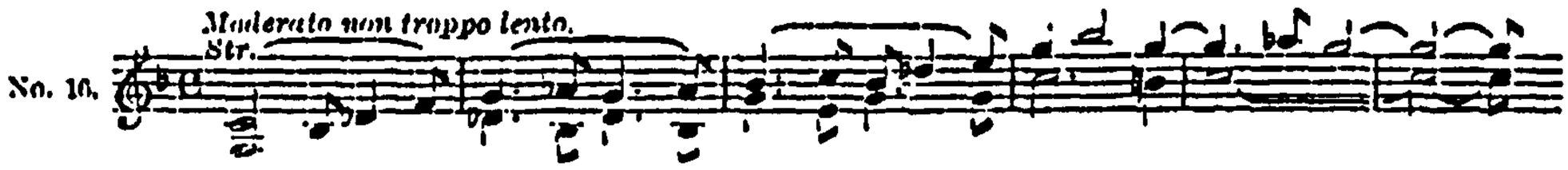
14. Motive of 'Love's Guardianship' (at 3.J45)



15. Variant of 'Love's Guardianship' (at 3.L35)



16. Motive of 'Morning' (at 4.M65)



17. Transformation of 'Sailing' (at 4.N11)



18. Motive of 'Storm' (at 4.N30)



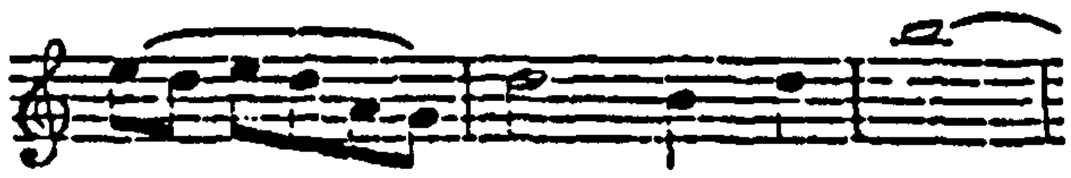
19. an important bass-line in the 'Storm' at (4.N39)

No. 19.



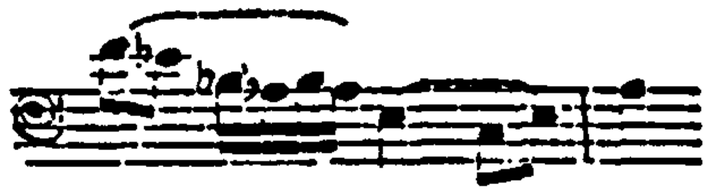
20. Fragment of 'Water Lily' No.10 that is transformed below (21)

No. 20.



21. Transformation of the Variant of 'Water Lily' (at 5.P1)

No. 21.



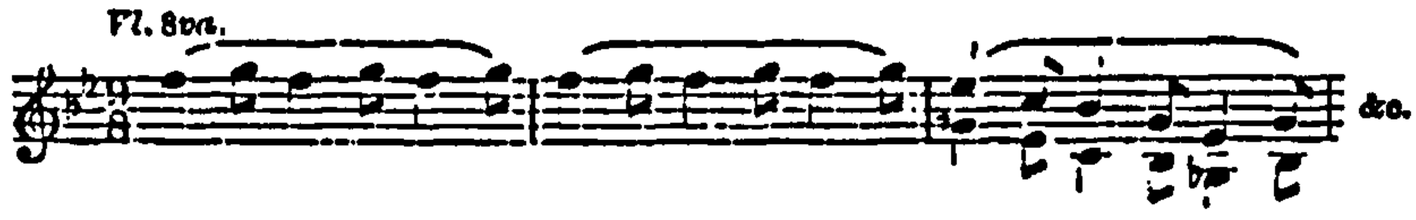
22. Motive of 'Boat' (at 5.P40)

No. 22.
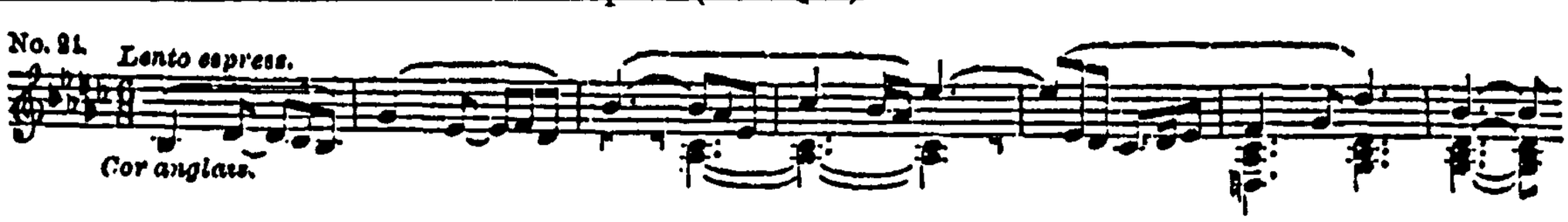


23. Motive of 'Undulating Boat' (at 5.P50)

No. 23.



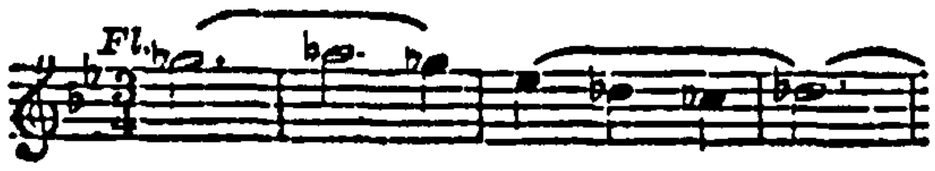
24. Motive of 'Ina's Solitude and Despair' (at 6.Q46)

No. 24.



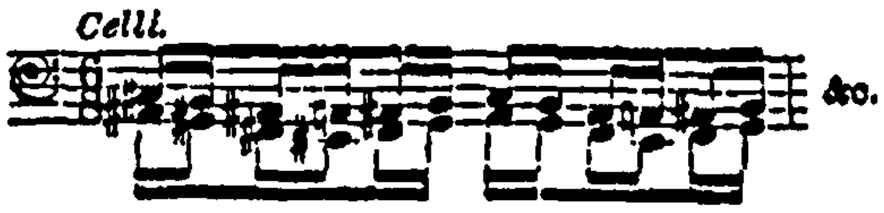
25. Variant of 'Love's Guardianship' (at 6.S37)

No. 25.



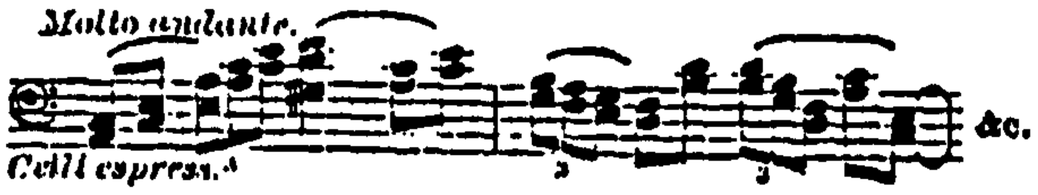
26. Transformation of 'Boat' (at 7.S54)

No. 26.



27. Invocation of 'Sleep' (at 7.T41)

No. 27.

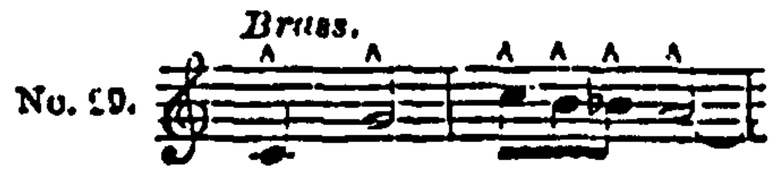


28. Motive of 'Swans' (at 7.U15)

No. 28.



29. an important brass figure – 'Swiftest Birds' (at 7.V29)



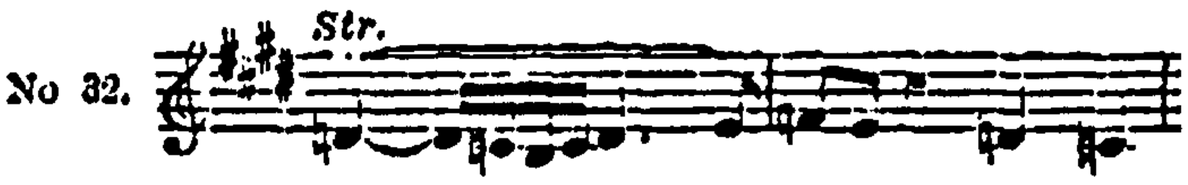
30. a subject for polyphonic development – 'People of Caerleon' (at 8.V90)



31. Motive of 'King Arthur' (at 8.X13)



32. Motive of 'Arthur, Guinevere and Sir Lancelot' (at 8.X31)



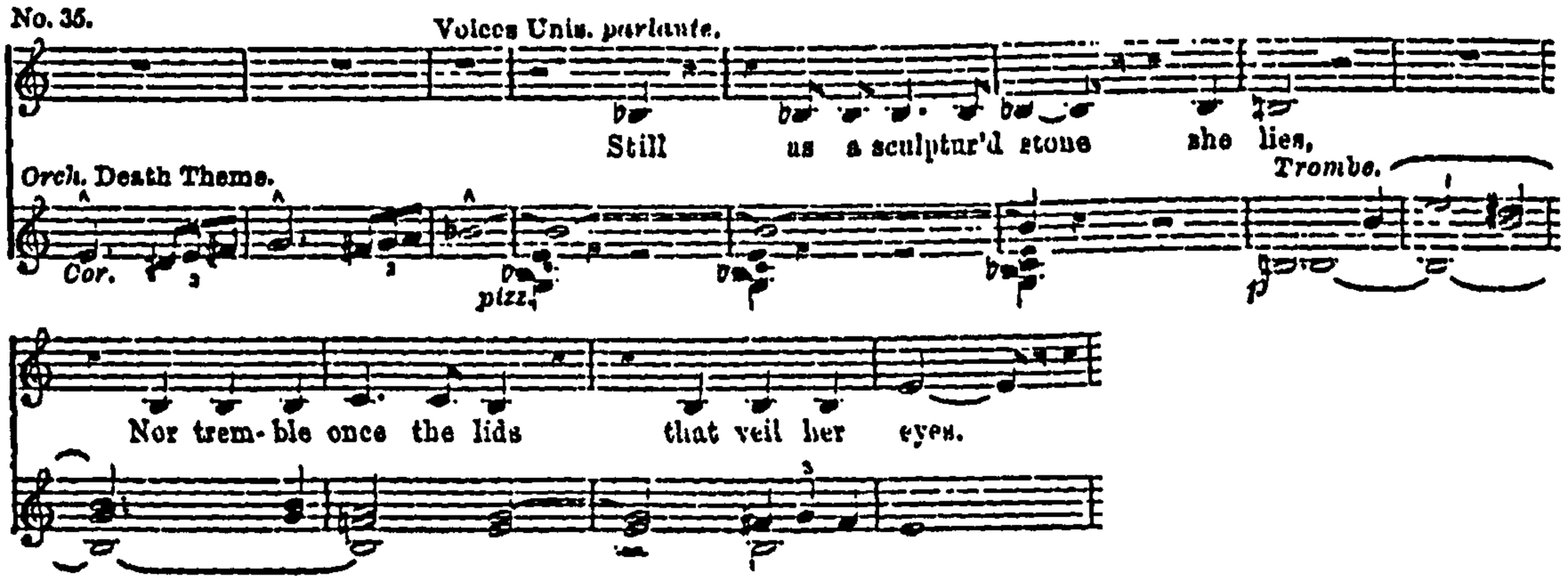
33. 'I dreamed another fate' – a transformation of 'King Arthur' (at 8.Y60)



34. Motive of 'Death' (at 8.Y98)



35. Sequence depicting 'failure' (at 9.Z47)



After *The Water-Lily*, his last secular cantata, as Cowen concentrated more on composing odes and *pièces d'occasions*, he moved entirely away from the *leitmotiven* line of attack, in favour of a through-composed method.

In conclusion, in looking at most of the larger scale choral works it is clear that after *The Rose Maiden*, Cowen quickly developed an interest in Wagnerian *Leitmotiven*, a product of his interest in Wagner's operas, excerpts of which he regularly conducted and he seems to have admired, despite Wagner's professed anti-Semitism. In *The Deluge* and *Saint Ursula* we see Cowen's first experiments with the process, with less than convincing results: in *The Corsair*, while his use of the technique could not be called all-embracing, he has three clear motives that recur at significant points in the story; in *Sleeping Beauty* he shows his technique more thoroughly, with four principal motives, which have been meticulously worked out; in *Ruth*, while there are clearly defined motives, the *leitmotiven* method has not been systematically executed; and in *The Water-Lily* there is a cascade of motives, but a majority of these only really appear in one or two movements and are rarely transformed.

Therefore, Cowen's approach to *leitmotiven* across his choral output was inconsistent, sometimes taking only the vaguest interest in the method, producing motives that, while having some symbolic significance, were only restated, without alteration, at important moments in the plot. Therefore, these motives are not *leitmotiven* as is understood in the context of Wagner, but reminiscence motives or representative themes. Yet, at other times, he clearly takes the process nearer to the extent of Wagner's approach in his operas, not only recapitulating the motives, but transforming and combining them in a more than satisfying fashion, especially in *Sleeping Beauty*.

6. Choral Works 2 (Other Pieces)

As was indicated in the previous chapter, Cowen gradually lost interest in the secular and sacred cantata as the nineteenth century drew to an end, partly because he felt that the public wanted 'human interest on the concert platform, the same as on the stage',[1] and because of his dissatisfaction with the available librettists and their work. This chapter will examine the remaining choral works beginning with Cowen's ethical cantata *The Veil*, and then moving on to his odes and shorter *pièces d'occasions*. *The Veil* demonstrates many unique features, and is, therefore, worthy of a more thorough discussion. The odes and *pièces d'occasions* were, for the most part, all written for specific occasions and/or to commemorate particular events, and, as a result, tended to be through-composed. Therefore, analytical comparisons between works, on the whole, prove a fairly fruitless exercise, and thus a chronological approach to the ordering within the chapter has been adopted.

[1] Armstrong, W, 'Two English Composers of To-day: Frederic H. Cowen – Edwin [*sic*] Elgar' in *The Etude* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., February 1903), 47.

Table 1: A list of Cowen's Other Choral Works

Date	Title	Cowen's genre title	Librettist(s)	First Performance	Soloist(s)	Notes
1888	*A Song of Thanksgiving*	[Unspecified]	Arranged from the Bible (*Psalms*)	Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, 1.viii.1888	None	Dedicated to Sir Henry Loch [Governor of New South Wales]
1890	*In Memoriam Ode to Carl Rosa*	Unknown	unknown	Liverpool, Carl Rosa Opera Company, xi.1890	Unknown	Unpublished, MS is assumed lost. It is not mentioned in NGDMM2, but Cowen does refer to it in his autobiography, *My Art and My Friends*, p. 227
1897	*All Hail the Glorious Reign*	Commemoration Ode	G. Clifton Bingham	unknown	None	For Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, for ch & orch or unaccomp ch. It was latter arranged as *His Majesty the King* by G. Clifton Bingham to celebrate the coronation of king Edward VII
1898	*Ode to the Passions*	[Unspecified]	Williams Collins	Leeds Festival, 8.x.1898	None	
1902	*Coronation Ode*	[Unspecified]	Lewis Morris	Norwich Festival, 22.x.1902	Blauvelt	Originally written for the State concerts in honour of King Edward VII enthronement, but his ill-health led to their cancellation
1907	*He Giveth His Beloved Sleep*	[Unspecified]	Elizabeth B. Browning	Cardiff Festival, 27.ix.1907	Lunn	
1910	*The Veil*	[Unspecified]	Robert Buchanan	Cardiff Festival, 20.ix.1910	Nicholls, Lunn, Hyde, Brown, Jones, and Carston	
1914	*What shall we Dance?*	[Unspecified]	Thomas Moore	Unknown	None	It was unpublished and no performance has been recorded. Neither is it mentioned in NGDMM2

In addition to the above, the *NGDMM2* lists a work entitled *Nights of Music* for 2-part chorus and orchestra, 1900. Despite vigorous investigations in search of such a work, little has come to light.

However, a duet entitled 'Nights of Music' for either contralto and baritone or soprano and tenor, from the same year, and with words by Thomas Moore is extant. It is possible that this was issued as a part-song for two parts and Cowen then orchestrated it for orchestra. Similarly, Havergal Brian mentions a work for chorus by Cowen called *The Seasons* that he heard at Leeds Festival in March 1907.[2] Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify this. However, there was a song of the same year with the title 'The Seasons' for low voice, which perhaps Cowen arranged chorally for the festival.

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Before the conclusion of the last section on Cowen's sacred choral music, the subject of Cowen's religion, and the way he seemed to be able to ignore his own faith and write music that expressed the views of another (Christianity), was brought into focus. His ethical cantata, his last large-scale work in 1910, *The Veil*, for the Cardiff Festival, introduces a new avenue of discussion in this regard, because it is neither Jewish nor Christian, but mystical, based on a book by Robert Williams Buchanan (1841-1901) entitled *The Book of Orm: A Prelude to the Epic*, which appeared in 1870.[3] Buchanan's general method and style throughout his work is described by Archibald Stodart-Walker as 'Mystic Realism'.[4] Within the poem Buchanan explores his developing fascination with the study of mysticism, a belief system that focuses on a direct experience of a union with a divinity, God, or ultimate reality; or the conviction that such an encounter is a genuine and important source of knowledge. Indeed, the proem [or preamble] at the beginning of the work makes it clear that when Buchanan speaks of God, he is not referring to the God of any

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[2] Brian, H., *Musical Opinion*, June 1934, 765.

[3] Buchanan was a British poet, novelist and dramatist, the son of Robert Buchanan (1813-1866), Owenite lecturer and journalist, and was born at Caverswall, Staffordshire. He displayed a faculty for vigorous and poetic narrative, and a sympathetic insight into the humbler conditions of life.

[4] Stodart-Walker, A., *Robert Buchanan – The Poet of Modern Revolt* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), 1-25, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/walker.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].

particular religion,[5] but to a higher deity, beyond human imagination; the source of all earthly Gods.[6] Moreover, it is clear that Buchanan had a real theological dilemma, and through this poetry he tried to address it. Stodart-Walker said of Buchanan that with regards to the Christian Church, he had 'no pity, little sympathy, and often much contempt; [but] for the Christ he has ever human love and brotherly sympathy for "his dream of the world's salvation"'.[7] In a prose note attached to the *Drama of Kings* Buchanan said himself:

> In the present work, and in the works which have preceded it from the same pen ('Undertones', 'Inverburn', 'London Poems', and 'The Book of Orm'), an attempt is made to combine two qualities which the modern mind is accustomed to regard apart—reality and mystery, earthliness and spirituality...The Mystic is occupied hopelessly with what immediately surrounds him. Minuter examination only leads to extreme joy and wonder. To him this ever-present reality is the only mystery, and in its mystery lies its sublime fascination and beauty. Only what is most real and visible and certain is marvellous, and only that which is marvellous has the least fascination. What he sees may be seen by every soul under the sun, for it is the soul's own reflection in the river of life glassed to a mirror by its own speed.[8]

Buchanan's *The Book of Orm* (1870) is an extended and ambitious poem that, according to Frederick Hackwood, 'is the outcome of the state of mind expressed in the lines':[9]

A hunger for the wherefore of my being;
A wonder from what regions I had fallen;
I gladdened to the glad things of the world:
Yet crying always: Wherefore and oh wherefore?
What am I? Wherefore doth the world seem happy?[10]

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[5] 'When in these songs I name the Name of God, I mean not Him who ruled with brazen rod, The rulers of the Jew; nor Him who calm, Sat reigning on Olympus; nay, nor Brahm, Osiris, Allah, Odin, Balder, Thor, (Though these I honour, with a hundred more); Menu I mean not, nor the Man Divine, The pallid Rainbow lighting Palestine; Nor any lesser of the gods which Man Hath conjured out of Night since Time began'. (Buchanan, R. W., *The Book of Orm* (London: Strahan & Co. Publishers, 1870), 1.)

[6] Primal Mystery and Light, The most Unfathomable, Infinite, The Higher Law, Impersonal, Supreme, The Life in Life, the Dream within the Dream, The Fountain which in silent melody, Feeds the dumb waters of Eternity, The Source whence every god hath flown and flows, And whither each departs to find repose. (Buchanan, 1.)

[7] Stodart-Walker, 1-25, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/walker.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].

[8] Stodart-Walker, 62-88, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/walker.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006]. Dr. Japp wrote that within Buchanan's writing 'is wedded the grace and witchery of delicate phantasy with the directest and boldest realism. Nature and man stand between the two, as it were, and the force of his sympathies unites them, and brings them into accord...He is alive to every thrill of the intellectual, social, and moral atmosphere, and translates, as his genius dictates, the impression into art...He is in touch with all that makes men feel, that makes men suffer, and that makes men lonely, dissatisfied, and despair and doubt'. (Cited in Stodart-Walker, 299ff., at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/swalker10.html#chaptwelve> [accessed c. 20 July 2006]).

[9] Hackwood, F. W., 'Chapter XXVI – "A Stormy Petrel of Letters"' from 'Staffordshire Worthies' in *Staffordshire Chronicle* (Stafford, Chronicle Press, 1910/1) reproduced in 'A Stormy Petrel of Letters' in *The Victorian Web*, at <www.victorianweb.org/authors/buchanan/hackwood.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].

[10] Buchanan, 103 [V 'Songs of Seeking' – V "World's Mystery", stanzas 2:2-3:3].

Hackwood says: 'The poet takes the name "Orm" as signifying the human race, and the poem is animated by the belief in a personal immortality that filled Buchanan at that time; and it carries out his ideas that an eternal happiness hereafter should reward man for the sufferings he undergoes in this world'.[11] Stodart-Walker wrote:

> Here, in the character of Orm the Celt, the poet brings himself face to face with the mysteries of life and death; here he attempts to grapple with the unseen; dreams of an uplifted veil; has visions of man's birth, rise, and fall; and sees with the eye of the poet the lonely God who neither can nor will help the human sufferer in his desire for knowledge, peace, rest, and, perhaps, forgetfulness.[12]

The title itself is intriguing, who was Orm?[13] Buchanan specifically refers to his 'Orm' as 'the Celt'. In Gaelic 'Orm' is a preposition meaning 'on me'. So may be the *Book of Orm* should be taken literally as a 'Book on Me' by Robert Buchanan, his thoughts and beliefs! While stating that it does not speak of the god of any particular religion, the book clearly uses language, imagery and analogies that those of the Christian faith could, if not totally understand, at least have some empathy with. It represents a journey in search for knowledge, much as the Gnostic movement sought in the early Christian church. Indeed, Buchanan was writing at a time when many of the

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[11] He adds: 'In the eerie style usual to him, it tells of the fate of him who denies and resists God; but who, cast into the outside gloom, can be won to grace again by the love of the woman who bore him and of the woman who bore his children. Thus the *Book of Orm* ends with the spirit of human love more fully vindicated than anything else, and the many other great questions left unsolved'. (Hackwood, reproduced in 'A Stormy Petrel of Letters' in *The Victorian Web*, at <www.victorianweb.org/authors/buchanan/hackwood.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006]).

[12] Stodart-Walker, 62-88, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/swalker3.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006]. He adds: 'He translates us to a world of dream, yet a world in which the grand realities of life stand out bold, like vast mountains whose lofty heads are lost in mist, yet faintly outlined. You are moved to a sense of some vast, vague, shadowy presence, which, felt or unfelt, is weird, fateful, and inevitable, hovering over all life, and touching it with awe and wonder. The manner in which Mr. Buchanan traces out and justifies, in a poetic sense, the bliss of gradual dissolution is at once elevated and powerful. The picture of the void left on the sense and the imagination by the sudden disappearance of all trace, even of the poor body, as the dewdrop melts in the sun, the horror, as of some awful fate for ever hovering above and around, is suffused with the sense of mystery and awe, and the recovery, as if from some nightmare, is equally fine'. (Stodart-Walker, 299ff., at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/swalker10.html#chaptwelve> [accessed c. 20 July 2006]).

[13] There was certainly a fictious 'Orm' in a Norwegian tale called *The Dwarf's Banquet* from an oral recitation by Dr Grimm and inserted into Hauff's *Märchenalmanach* (1827). Orm is a handsome, brave and noble youth, who is loved by Aslog. Orm, unfortunately, is poor and is in the employ of Aslog's father. They choose to run off together and the tale develops from there. There was also a member of an Augustine monastery in the North-East Midlands of England called 'Orm' who wrote a theological commentary entitled *Ormulum* in the thirteenth century. Another suggestion is that it is a shortened form of 'Ormus', a reference to one of the pseudonyms of the Order, later Priory, of Sion, associated with the Knights Templar. Incidently, 'Orme' is the French for elm. In light of the context, a more plausible explanation is that 'Orm' is the 'Ormus' of Zoroastrian and Gnostic thought where it is synonymous with the principle of light. Elsewhere, in some Masonic teachings 'Ormus' was the name of an Egyptian sage and mystic, a 'Gnostic "adept" of Alexandria...who amalgamated pagan and Christian mysteries and founded the Rose-Croix'. (Baigent, M., Leigh, R., and Lincoln, H., *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail* (London: Arrow Books, 1996), 123-124, 192-3.)

conventional views of the universe, particularly those that were a matter of Christian doctrine and faith had in numerous people's eyes been blown apart by the Darwinian hypothesis proposed in his *Origin of Species* of 1859. Moreover, many movements and ideas that were hitherto dangerously heretical to the church were now coming forth. Atheism, Humanism and various forms of mysticism, which had been taboo, were now able to express themselves more openly. Thomas Hardy, an atheist, through his writings suggested possible ways to redemption, other than those espoused by the church. The humanist Walt Whitman wrote about searching for truth and morality through human endeavour and experience. Along with Nietzsche's philosophical values and morality, and his hatred of the Christianity that he believed St. Paul had perverted to suit his own ends (Nietzsche was not actually particularly anti-Christ, just against the way that he believed Jesus' words had been corrupted by the church), they paved the way for the next generation of writers such as Henry Williamson, allowing them to explore natural and social history in a way that previously would have been difficult for religious reasons. The environment was therefore favourable for Buchanan to write such a book, and it received much critical acclaim and commercial success for its mystical statement. Stodart-Walker called it a 'splendid piece of spiritual eloquence'.[14] Indeed, Alexander Strahan, owner of the publishing firm, agreed to pay Buchanan a regular sum for further poetry and essays that he would contribute to Strahan's periodicals.[15] However, it was not universally admired: *The Nation* in the United States said:

> Mr. Buchanan goes out of the field in which he has had success, and makes exhibition of all his faults and of no one of his merits. A more laborious and ambitious attempt at doing something beyond one's strength—or rather entirely foreign to one's nature—and a more decided failure, is not often made. The author's intention in *The Book of Orm*—which is styled 'A Prelude to the Epic'—would seem to be to state in a poetical manner his notion of the old, old problem of man's relations to God.[16]

For Cowen then, Buchanan's words are a new, quite radical, departure from almost anything else in his output. It seems to have excited his imagination in hitherto unseen ways,

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[14] Stodart-Walker, 62-88, at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/swalker3.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].
[15] Nash, A., 'Robert Williams Buchanan' in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 24 November 2001 (The Literary Dictionary Co., 9 February 2006), at <www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=627> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].
[16] 'Abstract' to article: 'Mr Robert Buchanan's New Book', *The Nation*, Vol. No. 11, Issue No. 266 (4 August 1870) in *The Nation Digital Archive* at <www.nationarchive.com/Summaries/v011i0266_09.htm> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].

especially his approach to harmony, which had rarely been revolutionary. Indeed, while Wagner's voluptuous harmonies had already begun to drag the world towards atonality, prior to *The Veil*, Cowen had always employed a tonally-centred brush to all his musical pictures. Mild chromaticims, with chords of the augmented sixth, diminished and dominant extensions (mostly ninths), and pedals (of tonic, dominant and double varieties), were most characteristic of his style, occasionally tinged with subtle modality. However, in *The Veil* we find Cowen dabbling in sound worlds that he had not studied in his youth. The perceptions of tonal centres are not so strongly defined, primarily because the confirmation of a modulation by a perfect cadence is less common than in earlier works, and also because he is utilising many more chromatic progressions throughout. Without a doubt, he is beginning to explore a new musical idiom in which one is struck by illusions to a harmonic palette not far removed from that of Debussy (he had by now conducted several of that composer's orchestral works) or perhaps Puccini, with short chains of homophonic chords. Indeed, there are also brief sensations of pseudo-bitonality. He would have no doubt by this time have been aware of Vaughan Williams' interest in these techniques. In addition, there are incidences of the major triad with sharpened fifth, giving a gentle suggestion of the whole-note scale. Indeed, there are several points where his harmonic progressions consist of parallel chords ascending or descending in whole-tones. Elsewhere, there is an example of an octatonic descending scale in the bass (3 bars before fig. 2.), and an astonishing ascent of parallel homophonic chords upwards by thirds at fig. 71. Furthermore, he has a particular fondness for the chord of tonic, major third, augmented fourth/diminished fifth and minor seventh (as a French augmented sixth chord and as a dominant seventh with diminished fifth), which can be found fairly prominently in earlier works, but here he uses it in a variety of non-traditional ways. These nebulous harmonies echo similar experiments found in Parry's more mystical choral works; there is little of Cowen's 'Ye Olde English' style here! Also, in the 'Earth the Mother', there are signs of Cowen having fallen under the influence of a characteristically Elgarian three-part texture.

The Veil has the proportions of a larger-scale sacred cantata, divided into an introduction and three parts. Curiously, each of these parts is then subdivided into two movements, and they, in turn, consist of segued recitatives, solos and choruses; there are no operatic scenas. And yet there is a certain theatricalism in *The Veil's* delivery that reminds one of Richard Strauss [whose music Cowen had now conducted on a number of occasions], combined with a 'musical spirituality' that is indebted to Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and, especially in the love duet, Delius' *Mass of Life*. Cowen, with or without help,[17] has made his own sense out of Buchanan's poem, creating a sort of narrative, in which the soloists and chorus share responsibilities for transmitting it to us. The dramatic climax, when the veil is lifted [9 bars before fig. 73a], with the words spoken by the altos and basses 'in a low mysterious [indefinitely pitched] voice', is unique in Cowen's output. As with most of Cowen's choral works, the orchestra is more than a mere accompaniment – it is an integral part of the texture. Indeed, in some places here one wonders if the vocal and choral parts were superimposed on the score after the main accompaniment ideas were conceived. It is often a criticism of Cowen that the vocal and choral writing does not always match up to his skills as an orchestrator; even here, despite the more complex harmonies, whilst the soloists are pushed to their limit technically in places, the chorus (although given plenty to do) is rarely given anything really demanding or difficult.

Trying to pigeon-hole this work into a specific category or genre is quite difficult. It has little of the popular elements of ballet and dance that we often associate with Cowen's choral works. Indeed, the role of the chorus is rather less clear, as there are none of the normal opportunities for *turba*. However, Cowen's much freer use of metre, *tempo* and rhythm, identified in the later secular cantatas such as *The Water-Lily*, is even more obvious in this work. Indeed, one might conclude that Cowen had absorbed some of Elgar's liking for flexibility in such matters. Moreover, this work, like most of its predecessors, lacks any true contrapuntal writing.

Due to *The Veil's* quasi-cantata form, one might expect to find some residual evidence of

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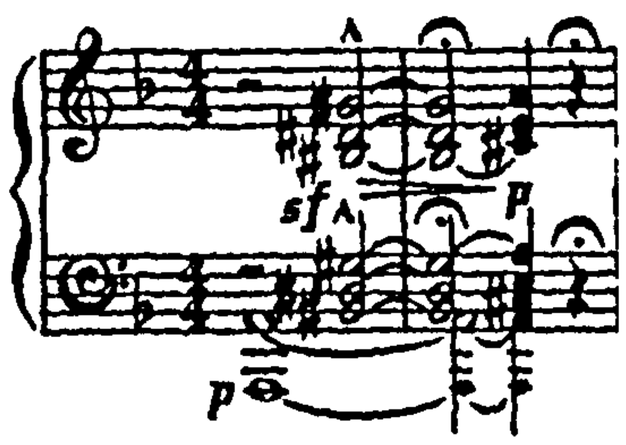
[17] It is unknown whether Cowen selected and arranged the text himself, or was aided in his endeavours.

leitmotiven, harking back to Cowen's earlier sacred works. Indeed, there are characters and themes that could be so treated. Moreover, there are some reoccurring themes/motives that may be loosely *leitmotiven.* But apart from a few obvious restatements and re-workings of them, the process could hardly be called thorough, at least compared with *Sleeping Beauty* earlier in his career. Clearly, the opening grinding minor second fragment of the introduction is motivic (1);[18] as are the five solemn chords at the beginning of Part I (2); the phrase at bars 8-11 of the same section (3); the opening phrase of Section 2, 'Earth the Mother' (4); as is the first fragment of Part II (5); and the fragment at the 8th bar of fig. 33 (6) [see Example 1].

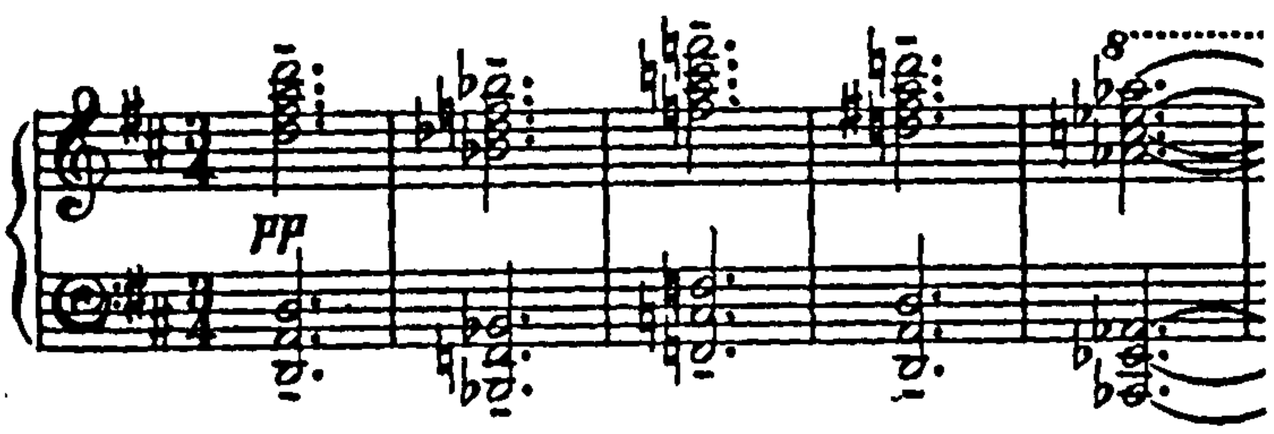
[18] Unfortunately, I currently have no programme note available to confirm whether Cowen officially identified any motives by specific names.

Example 1: Principal motives in 'The Veil'
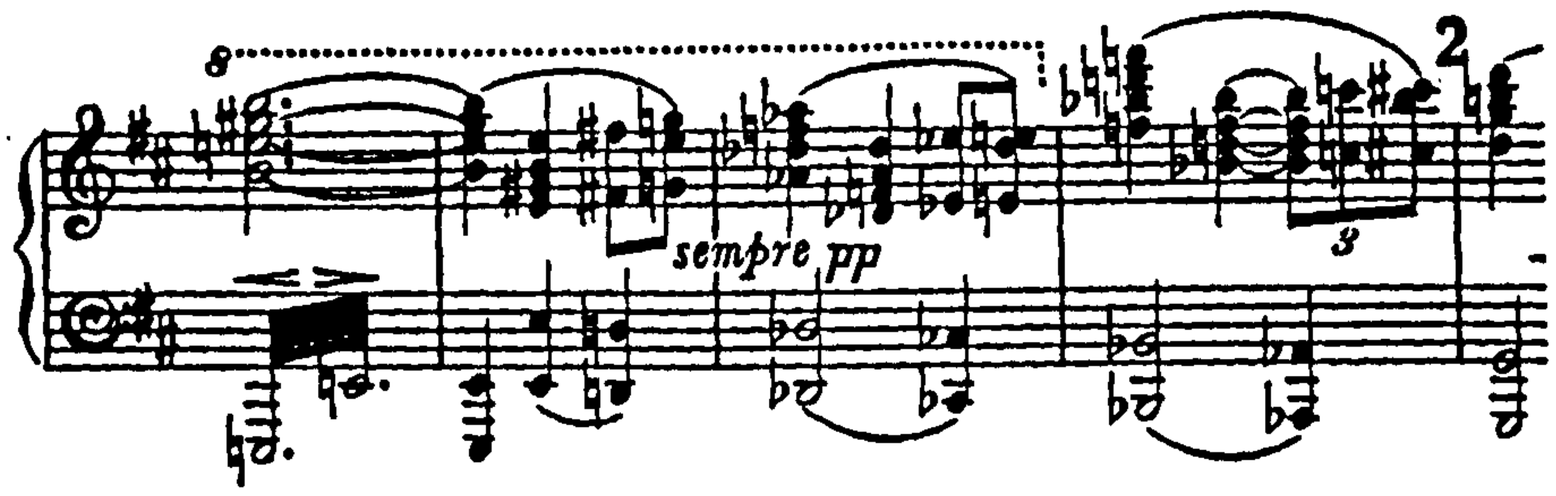
Clearly, the opening grinding minor second fragment of the introduction is motivic (1):[1]



as are the five solemn chords at the beginning of Part I (2):
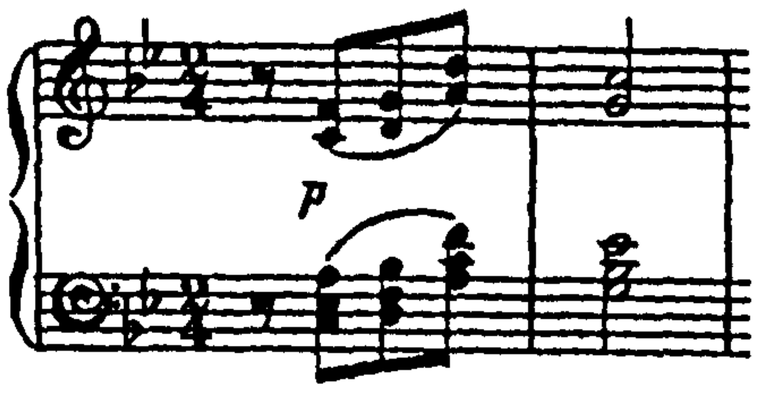


the phrase at bars 8-11 of the same section (3):

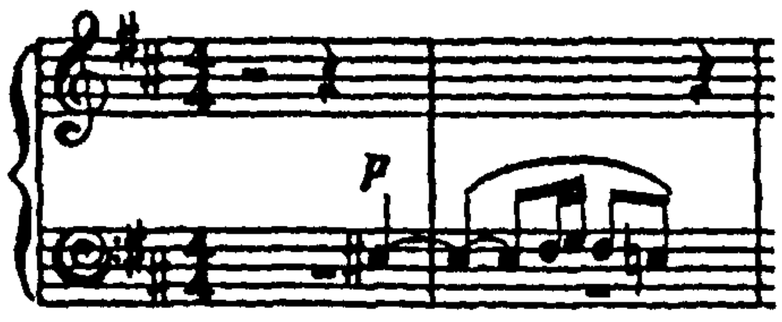


[1] Unfortunately, I currently have no programme note available to confirm whether Cowen officially identified any motives by specific names.
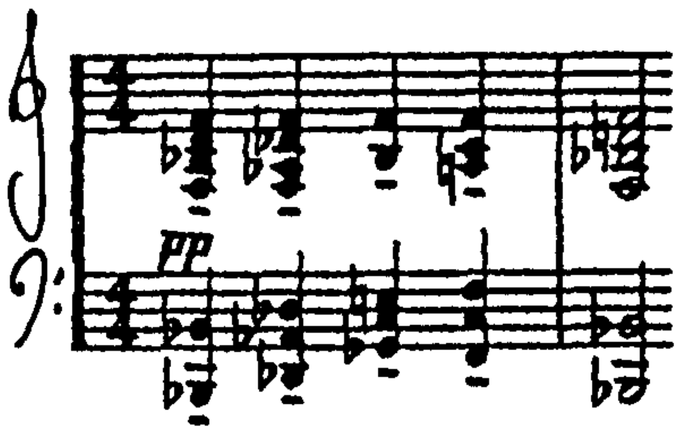
The opening phrase of Section 2, 'Earth the Mother', is similarly motivic (4):



as is the first fragment of Part II (5):



and the fragment at the 8th bar of fig. 33 (6):



The Veil shows that Cowen had not forgotten his earlier experiments with *leitmotiven* and representative themes, but his approach here is much more towards the latter than the former. Indeed, there is almost no attempt to develop the motives significantly by augmentation, diminution, rhythmic alteration, pitch modification, or by combination of motives. Through reiteration, they simply mark noteworthy moments in the score.

As has already been shown, *The Veil* is neither a secular nor a sacred work in the recognised sense of the words. Cowen simply calls it: '*The Veil*, Poem by Robert Buchanan set to music for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra'. Here, Cowen is trying to do something different: it is a solemn reflection on a serious subject. But, of course, so is *The Transfiguration*. Indeed, while we do not know how this commission for Cardiff came about, whether Cowen personally chose the subject, or whether he put the libretto together himself, he is quite faithful to the language of original poetry. He does cut and paste passages from different poems to suit his own chain of thought, and with very occasional adaptation of individual words to make it flow better from a musical point of view. But, his choice of setting extracts from *The Book of Orm* opens up many questions about Cowen's own beliefs and why he chose to set it in the first place. Of course, as has already been observed, interests in mysticism and philosophical ideas, particularly ones that questioned the hitherto all-pervading dominance of Christian orthodoxy, were on a sharp rise, ever since Darwinism had come to the fore. This, in itself, may have motivated Cowen to jump on the bandwagon and tackle such a subject. Parry, Delius and Vaughan Williams had already, to varying degrees, thrown off any inhibitions of being regarded as Christians, and their extant works of the time and those to come clearly reflect this. Parry's ethical choral works,[19] while not musically successful for the most part, with their strange rhetorical devices, probably provided Cowen with a model. While we know that Cowen was born a Jew, was a member of the West London Synagogue (at least in the latter part of his life), and was given a Jewish burial,

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[19] Written between 1898 and 1908, they include *A Song of Darkness and Light*, *The Love that Casteth Out Fear*, *The Soul's Ransom*, *Beyond These Voices there is Peace* and especially *The Vision of Life*. Parry further explores his mysticism in the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the symphonic poem *From Death to Life* and the *Songs of Farewell*.

throughout his life he showed are marked tendency to set works that contradict the religion of his birth. Moreover, *The Book of Orm* clearly states that it is dealing with a subject that directly challenges his own faith. Was Cowen just enthralled with *The Book of Orm* for its literary worth, or did he have a more deep-seated interest in mysticism himself? As a Jew, Cowen would have no doubt made analogies of Buchanan's 'veil' with Jewish references to the veil that Moses wore over his face, except in the presence of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34: 33-35), and the sacred veil or curtain that screened the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 26: 31-33 and 40: 3). A similar veil or curtain separated the people from the 'Holy of Holies' in Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 3: 14). Cowen may have also been conscious of the Christian reference to the tearing of the curtain or veil in the Temple on Christ's death (Matthew: 27: 51) and its symbolism of revealing the 'new and living way that Christ opened through the curtain' by his death and resurrection (Hebrews 10: 19-22). As a Jew, Cowen may have been aware and interested in Jewish mysticism, as Mysticism and mystical encounters have been a component of Judaism from the earliest of times. The *Torah* chronicles numerous tales of mystical occurrences, from angelic visitations to prophetic dreams and visions, and gave rise in certain strands of Judaism to a doctrine of esoteric knowledge and interpretation through the process of exegesis and hermeneutics, claiming an insight into the divine nature of God. Indeed, the existence of the soul and the process whereby it becomes attached to the body is considered in the *Talmud.* And Jewish tradition recounts that the souls of all Jews were in existence and present at the time of the 'Giving of the Torah' and consented to the Covenant. There are many stories of places similar to Christian heaven and purgatory, of wandering souls and reincarnation. The *Talmud* embraces indefinite allusions of a mystical school of philosophy that was only taught to the most advanced students and was not committed to writing. Like most of the themes of the Jewish faith, the field of mysticism is open to individual interpretation, being taken very seriously and an integral part of Chasidic Judaism, with passages from Kabbalistic sources routinely included in traditional prayer books. Yet, other Jews take

mysticism with a pinch of salt.[20] However, on matters of his beliefs and faith system, Cowen remained tight-lipped, and there is really no evidence to support or deny this line of enquiry. One can only speculate that, while he kept his rabbi and synagogue content by adhering to the Law and observing Judaic ritual, as far as we know, on matters of personal belief and faith, he had his own ideas.

Having completed *The Veil*, Cowen dedicated it to Frederica, his wife (of less than two years): 'To my dear wife' in the manuscript ('My wife' in the published score), perhaps as a means of pleasing his relatively new and much younger spouse and proving to her that he could write something comparatively modern. Indeed, may be it was Frederica that had the mystical interests, and pointed her husband towards the text. However, significantly, with the death of his mother (Emily Cowen, née Davis, died on 29 March 1910 at 17 Aubrey House, Maida Hill West, aged 89),[21] Cowen never again completed a large-scale work (apart from an unperformed comedy opera score in the 1920s), and therefore this mysterious and mystical work is in many ways Cowen's final apotheosis, a personal statement, his highest development: that everlasting joy should be the prize for those that have borne pain (Cowen had borne several painful and embarrassing experiences during his career); that one could triumph once more to receive grace *by the woman that gave birth to him* (his mother had, of course, recently died) and the woman that brought into being his children (Cowen had been married less than two years, so he may have still hoped for children); and that it would come to an end with the life-force of human love more totally justified.

At the premiere *The Times* thought the performance, 'considering the difficulties of the work, was exceedingly good',[22] and that 'it was quite clear that the work made a deep impression

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[20] Rich, T. R., ' Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism' in *Judaism 101* at <http://www.jewfaq.org/kabbalah.htm> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].
; 'Kabbalah' in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., U.S.A.) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Jewish_mysticism> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].
[21] Certified copy of an Entry of Death, dated 29 March 1910, General Register Office.
[22] *The Times*, 21 September 1910.

upon the audience'.[23] The *Morning Leader* wrote that *The Veil* 'proved to be essentially modern in conception, and its qualities in this respect were heightened by the absence of any traces of foreign as distinct from British influence. It belongs to the same school as [Elgar's] the *Dream of Gerontius*, and it can claim a high place among the recent output of choral work of a distinctively national type'.[24] The *Morning Post* commended Cowen for his 'grasp of the potentialities of modern methods of expression', stating that *The Veil* demonstrated 'a striking testimony to his powers. But there are other proofs of his inspiration, of his constructive ability, and of his general musicianship to be found in the course of the work'.[25] The *Daily Mail* was even more positive: 'It is the greatest work Dr Cowen has yet produced';[26] the *Daily News* added that it 'places him, late though it be in his career, among the big composers this country has produced'.[27] However, a rather more pessimistic view came from the *Birmingham Post*:

> The music as a whole suffers from the lack of a really continuous or personal style. There are many pages in *The Veil* of real profundity and sublimity, and intellectually the best of it is far ahead of anything else he (Dr Cowen) has written. The trouble is that these moments of high inspiration are not sufficiently sustained, and the weaker moments fall as much below the general level of Buchanan's poem as the better moments rise above it.[28]

The Times also found the work 'uneven', but felt that there were 'points of genuine beauty in every number, and the earnestness of the whole conception and the skill with which it has been carried out place the composer in a stronger light than anything which he has yet written'.[29] Hackwood agreed, writing that '*The Veil*...is undoubtedly...[Cowen's] masterpiece...and would no doubt have delighted Buchanan's heart could he have lived to hear it'.[30] However, despite many generous and complimentary reviews of *The Veil* at the premiere and several subsequent high-profile performances, the work did not hold its own. Maybe the synthesis of philosophy with spirituality in the poem was to blame for the indecisiveness in the work taken as a whole. Perhaps

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[23] *The Times* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[24] *Morning Leader* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[25] *Morning Post* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[26] *Daily Mail* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[27] *Daily News* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[28] *Birmingham Post* cited in *South Wales Echo*, 21 September 1910.
[29] *The Times*, 21 September 1910.
[30] Hackwood, reproduced in 'A Stormy Petrel of Letters' in *The Victorian Web*, at <www.victorianweb.org/authors/buchanan/hackwood.html> [accessed c. 20 July 2006].

this in turn led to certain inconsistencies of approach in the music. Indeed, it is conceivable that the musical idiom itself was at fault, as there is an unmistakable lack of continuity in many sections of the work, which allowed *The Times* to write: 'It is less easy to feel convinced of its complete spontaneity'.[31] Hence, from the work's beginning, it was perceived as 'uneven'. There is also an underlying feeling of unease, probably generated by the liberality of Cowen's use of discords and chromatic progressions, the natural consequence of a composer working outside his normal harmonic safety zone. However, all things considered, it seems probable that the work's failure was due to the ethical and intellectual character of the work, like Parry's similar creations, just being too unconventional for the average concert-goer. Nonetheless, in *The Veil* Cowen found something new and in advance of the often commonplace music of many of his other works. Here there is genuine passion and a deeper cerebral argument, in which he attempts to challenge his listeners' emotional responses, and in the process manages to fire his own. Unfortunately, by this time, Cowen was already thought outmoded by many, and perhaps this work did not get the proper consideration that it deserved, as the voice of Elgar and the new generation of British composers had now transcended Cowen's efforts in almost every genre. Indeed, few commentaries on the Edwardian period of British music even consider Cowen, let alone The *Veil* itself, worthy of mention. Moreover, despite *The Veil's* impressionistic allusions, it is clear from examination of most of Cowen's post-1910 music that he was dissatisfied with these experiments, reverting back to his nineteenth-century style and thinking, never again to seriously explore his newly acquired twentieth-century language.

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[31] 'The Past Year' in *The Times*, 31 January 1911.

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The last group of works within Cowen's choral output are the odes and *pièces d'occasions*, a diverse collection of pieces both large and small. Cowen did not venture into this field until the late 1880s with his *A Song of Thanksgiving*, and even then it was the late 1890s before he really diverted his efforts from secular and sacred cantatas toward these types of pieces. As we have already seen, Cowen's dissatisfaction with the *libretti* supplied for his cantatas and oratorios was a driving force into his eventual permanent reliance on published poetry and literature. However, there was a period when he adopted both approaches. With the exception of *A Song of Thanksgiving*, most of them show a composer in full command of his faculties, and there is little obvious development stylistically between them.

Cowen had agreed to compose a new work for the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, where he was to take up the baton for the six month event, and set about a new work entitled *A Song of Thanksgiving* for chorus and orchestra, an Ode of Praise and Thanksgiving. The words were selected from the Holy Bible from the *Psalms*,[32] for chorus only (without any soloists or recitatives), and there is no narrative beyond the reflections therein on the birth and growth of the nation of Israel (an analogy of the people of Israel with those of Australia). In three segued movements, with the middle one for unaccompanied chorus, each of the movements has a very loose underlying ABA 'da capo' plan, at least in the sense that there are two main ideas and the first recurs, albeit highly modified, about two thirds or three quarters of the way through the movement. In the case of the first movement, the A theme comes back in the supertonic major/

The *NGDMM2*, therefore, is incorrect in its designation of 'oratorio' for this work—'an ode in three movements' would perhaps be more accurate. Indeed, there is no other work quite like it in Cowen's output. Here Cowen is trying to write in an idiom which puts a new slant on the sort of subject material that would have not been out of place in a Handelian oratorio, attempting to

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[32] 1st Movement: Ps 107:1, 35-37; Ps 147:14; Ps 107:38; and Ps 35:27b. 2nd Movement: Ps 127:1. 3rd Movement: Ps 79:13 and Ps 72:19.

provide a little contrapuntal interest, at least compared with his other works. But there is nothing resembling the sort of counterpoint familiar in the fugal and canonic writings of the Baroque and Classical periods; the result is a work that seems rather bland and uninspiring, despite the compliments on Cowen's 'use of orchestra', which showed 'not only complete mastery over technical detail, but distinct individuality'.[33] Parry, who was in attendance, at its British premiere at the Third Choirs Festival at Hereford (13 September 1888), however, was totally unimpressed with it, recording in his diary: 'Much of Cowen's "Thanksgiving Ode" utterly vulgar and vile';[34] it was rarely, if ever, heard again. It was dedicated to His Excellency Sir Henry Loch, Governor of New South Wales.

Of the *In Memoriam Ode to Carl Rosa*, we know very little, apart from that recorded in Cowen's autobiography, as it was never published and the MS is believed to be lost. Carl Rosa had been a near-neighbour to Cowen in North-West London and had produced and conducted the premiere of Cowen's opera *Pauline* with his opera company. Although they did fall out with each other over a possible revival of *Pauline*, Cowen signed a contract with Rosa and his company to produce his proposed second opera *Thorgrim*. Unfortunately, during the early stages of its composition Carl Rosa died. Despite their contretemps over *Pauline*, Cowen was enormously indebted to Rosa for providing him with the opportunity to fulfil his operatic ambitions, and it is fitting that Cowen honoured Rosa in such a fashion. Cowen's 'In Memoriam Ode' in Rosa's memory, which was performed by the Carl Rosa Opera Company at a memorial concert held in Liverpool in November 1890, was for triple quartet solo voices, chorus and orchestra. It was the only work of Cowen's own that he never heard, as he was unable to be in attendance at the concert, and it was only ever performed on that occasion. Cowen was told that 'it came out well

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[33] [Melbourne] *Leader*, 4 August 1888.

[34] Dibble, J., *C. Hubert H. Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 270. Parry must have been in an uncompromising state of mind, as Ouseley's *Polycarp* received similar harsh comments: 'Worse than I expected; purely asinine'. (Dibble, 270.)

and impressively at performance, and the combination of the twelve solo voices was very effective'.[35] The work is not listed in *NGDMM2*.

The year 1897 marked the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, an event that was marked by a vast outpouring of adoration for the ageing queen, and a significant number of artistic endeavours; Cowen was not alone among composers in offering a tribute.[36] His Commemoration Ode, *All Hail the Glorious Reign*, was released by Novellos in its second series of part-song books [no. 773]. The *NGDMM2* catalogue entry classes it in the section 'Choral and Vocal' along with the other major works such as *Ruth*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Veil*. This may lead to false impressions of its dimensions. Indeed, it is not a large-scale work in terms of length: it takes up only eleven pages in the vocal score. Perhaps it should be categorised along with Cowen's other part-songs. However, Cowen made it in two versions, one that could be sung unaccompanied, and the other with orchestra. It is the orchestral arrangement that has given it more prominence. Cowen has been skilful in creating its dual nature, such that the orchestra is added to the unaccompanied version without any alteration in the choral writing. The refrain gives a flavour of its strident patriotism:

Victoria, Victoria!
All tongues upraise the strain;
Let earth rejoice with heart and voice,
And hail thy glorious reign.

The work could be considered to be in a ternary form, with the verse 'Ring out from spire and steeple' and the refrain 'Victoria, Victoria!' (E major) considered the A section, the verse 'True Queen from that first morning' (G major) the B section, and the verse 'Her Empire's heart her sceptre' and the refrain 'Victoria, Victoria!' the return of the A material. The first performance may have been The Exhibition Chorus and Dan Godfrey's Military Band's rendition of it on 24 May 1897 at the opening, by the Duke of Cambridge, of the Victorian Era Exhibition at Earl's

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[35] *MAMF*, 227-8.
[36] See Richards, J., *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), for a full account of all the activities and events.

Court, London.[37] Cowen himself conducted it on 20 June 1897 at the Queen's Jubilee Concert.[38] It was later adapted and set to new words by Clifton Bingham as 'a National Chorus' and re-titled *His Majesty the King* for King Edward VII's celebrations in 1902 on his accession to the throne.

Cowen conducted the first performance of his *Ode to the Passions* on the last day of the Leeds Festival (8 October 1898) at Leeds Town Hall.[39] Its first performance was held under the cloud of Cowen's recent sacking by the Hallé from his position as conductor in favour of Hans Richter, and so the overwhelmingly positive response that it received was seen by many as more a statement of support for Cowen and his situation, rather than an expression of confirmation as to the success of the new work. And yet on closer examination, it is one of his most inspired creations with some of the fervour that he had imbued in his *The Dream of Endymion* a year or two before. Based on a poem by William Collins (1721-59) entitled *The Passions* (first published in 1746),[40] it approaches the different aspects of passion: fear, anger, despair, hope, revenge, pity, melancholy and cheerfulness. Cowen here establishes his approach to the musical ode and the *pièces d'occasions* by giving us a single continuous movement structure, which is through-composed, dictated in part by the nature of the poetry. However, *Ode to the Passions* and nearly all its successors in this form have some sort of musical recapitulation of the opening material near the end to bring things full-circle. There are many variations of mood in the work, as Collins explores the assorted facets of passion that the poem of necessity undergoes. Cowen's music all the way through is in his most cheerful manner, at once light and fanciful: he responds completely to the opportunities that the poem offered him for tone-painting, with a changing technique of orchestral handling successfully portraying the many poetic features that introduce themselves. He has provided both orchestra and chorus with some enchanting morsels: the section 'Through

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[37] Richards, 138. This may have been the work's premiere.

[38] Ibid., 142. Also at the concert were Frederick Bridge who conducted his *Blessed Be the Lord Thy God*, George Martin with his *Jubilee Te Deum and Antiphon*, and Eaton Faning with *The Queen's Song*.

[39] Cowen's commission for this work only came about because Sullivan had been 'unable to fulfil his promise of a choral composition for Leeds', and so Cowen's new *opus* must have been quite hastily written. (Jacobs, A., *Arthur Sullivan* (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1992), 388.)

[40] It had previous been set to music by Miss Alice Mary Smith (Mrs Meadows-White) for the Hereford Festival in 1882.

glades and glooms', with its horn solo and *pianissimo* ending, is especially appealing. The horn and harp are liberally engaged right the way through. Other features that claim our attention are the effect produced at the words 'And blew a blast so loud and dread' (*crescendoing* trumpets followed by a dissonant explosion with descending chromatics of which Richard Strauss would have been proud); lighter operatic and ballet devices, such as the pipe and tabor effect after letter H and a short 'bacchanale' before letter L; and Cowen's use of the bass clarinet, a tone colour which he also exploited in his *The Idyllic* Symphony of the same period.

The *Yorkshire Post* said that the new work 'distinctly advances his [Cowen's] reputation, and it is difficult to point to any of his works that shows a more sustained power'. [41] The *Leeds Daily News*, with succinctness, simply wrote: 'It is a work of the highest class, and if not the best that Mr Cowen has done, it ranks high among his best.'[42] *The Times* carried on the pretty unanimous praise saying that

> The words have suggested to the composer a series of musical pictures of precisely the kind in which he [Cowen] happily excels. Passages of delicate grace are admirably contrasted with more vigorous scenes, and the massive harmonies of the closing invocation to music, with their skilful building-up of a really impressive climax, reach a level that the composer has most seldom attained before.[43]

However, Hans Richter, probably somewhat influenced by events, described Cowen's work in his diary (15 March 1900) as 'watery soup'.[44] But *The Musical Times*, a journal not prone to expressing the extremities of praise or condemnation, said that 'Mr Cowen's setting of Collins' poem, "The Passions" is as a whole the strongest choral work he has yet given us. The various pictures which the poet conjures up in rapid succession afford an opportunity for varied and suggestive descriptive music, that is in Mr Cowen's very happiest vein'.[45] And Ernest Walker said that the *Ode* contained 'plenty of vitalized utterance of a considerably more solid kind than usual, and not a few pages in it combine their composer's usual melodiousness with definite emotional

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[41] *Yorkshire Post*, 10 October 1898.
[42] *Leeds Daily News*, 8 October 1898.
[43] *The Times*, 10 October 1898.
[44] Fifield, C, *True Artist and True Friend: A Biography of Hans Richter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 339.
[45] *Musical Times*, xxxix (1898), 189.

strength'.[46] Cowen's *Ode to the Passions* is clearly a short, but impassioned *opus*, and its popularity ensured many further performances.[47] The many positive critiques of its first performance suggest that it is worthy of rediscovery. However, as Cowen noted himself, the ovations it received were probably as much a sign of support for the situation he found himself in with the Hallé's guarantors, than an encouraging signal of approval for the work itself. Only a modern rendering of the Ode will clear this matter up.

Edward VII's Coronation was to have taken place at Westminster Abbey on 26 June 1902, but his ill-health had led to the postponed of the event, and also to the cancellation of the State concerts that were to be held in his honour, the latter resulting in the loss of the planned first performance of Cowen's Coronation Ode.[48] The premiere eventually took place on 22 October 1902, when it was performed at the Norwich Festival. The Ode is a setting of Sir Lewis Morris' *Coronation Poems*, which originally appeared in the paper *John Bull*; it is conceivable that the general style and character of this work was suggested to Cowen by two lines in the poem: 'Sing and rejoice, our anxious fears are done, – Peal, solemn organ music, deep, sublime'.[49] *The Times* thought that Morris' words were 'not in themselves very inspiring' and gave 'little scope for the composer's special powers of fancy or dainty grace'.[50] Cowen only set just over half of the text (he seems to have filtered out most of the overtly war-like passages) into a single movement work for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra, which is divisible into about five internal sections. Cowen avoids any monotony in the choral sections by giving episodes to different divisions of the chorus, and this is further enhanced by the soprano solo section introduced by a few bars of clarinet solo. Cowen has gone well beyond the normal ceremonial requirements of such a work, instilling it with some of the qualities of his operatic and cantata works. *The Norfolk Chronicle and*

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[46] Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 1924), 297.
[47] Cowen also performed it at Scarborough in September 1899, Norwich on 5 October 1899, the Bradford Festival Choral society on 23 March 1900. It was given again on 4 February 1902 the Glasgow Choral Union under the baton of Joseph Bradley, their regular choral conductor.[47]
[48] The Coronation finally went ahead on 9 August 1902, with the music under the directorship of Sir Frederick Bridge.
[49] These remarks were founded upon markings in the pianoforte score noted by Joseph Bennett who wrote the original analytic programme notes for the first performance (*Concert Programme, Norwich Musical Festival, 1902*, 26).
[50] *The Times*, 23 October 1902.

Norwich Gazette thought that 'he has laid an elaborate design, and has filled it in with music of character that does not receive its deserts if it is to be performed but once...[it] is a welcome addition, not only to Coronation music, in particular, but to musical literature in general...the orchestration was well presented.[51] However, the ever-disparaging Fuller Maitland, in *The Times*, was much less impressed with the it, saying that the music 'serves its purpose well enough for what is called an "occasional piece"', but that 'there is no very great cause to regret the improbability that this work will be often heard in the future'.[52] It did have at least four further outings,[53] but then Fuller Maitland's judgement became reality.

Cowen's next foray into to the ode/*pièces d'occasions* was in 1907 with his *He Giveth His Belovèd Sleep* at the Cardiff Festival, a version of Elizabeth Browning's poem, for solo contralto, chorus and orchestra, the title taken from Psalm 127:2. This 'delicate' piece of work,[54] according to the *South Wales Echo* 'grasped the spirit of the words with wonderful success, and the peace, tender consolation which the music breathed made it specially in consonance with the sentiment expressed'.[55] Indeed, it is a sort of meditation with the words 'he giveth his belovèd sleep' recurring at the end of every verse as a refrain given mostly to the chorus, with the soloist responsible for the text of each verse. However, the verses are differently treated every time (through-composed), and the refrain is also slightly modified on each appearance. Gradually, however, the roles of the soprano and chorus are varied and the demarcation line between their verse/refrain responsibilities becomes less marked. The work is quite brief, occupying only 23 pages of vocal score, in a single movement form, with sections that reflect the nine verses of Browning's poem. Therefore, the *NGDMM2*'s label of 'oratorio' is quite inappropriate—a more

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[51] *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 23 October 1902.
[52] *The Times*, 23 October 1902.
[53] Cowen's Coronation Ode also opened the 1902/3 Glasgow Choral Union season on 25 November 1902, conducted by Joseph Bradley;[53] Cowen gave it at the 1902/3 Liverpool Philharmonic season, and at New Year (1903) in Bradford.
[54] *Hazell's Annual* cited in Foreman, L., *Music in England: 1885-1920* (London: Thames Publishing, 1994), 76.
[55] *South Wales Echo*, 27 September 1907.

accurate description would be 'a meditation for solo voice, chorus and orchestra'. It seems to have had only one further outing.[56]

According to most catalogues, including the *NGDMM2*, after Cowen had completed *He Giveth His Belovèd Sleep*, the only choral work to follow was his *The Veil.* However, in the Royal College of Music Library there is another choral work with orchestra dated 1914 entitled *What Shall We Dance?* Indeed, apart from the MS, there is no mention of this work anywhere, nor is there any evidence that it had an outing. Like *All Hail the Glorious Reign*, it is a part-song, in which form it was published in 1914, to which Cowen, perhaps from the beginning, gave an orchestral accompaniment; it consumes just 22 pages of MS.

As was indicated at the beginning of this section, the odes and *pièces d'occasions* represent most of Cowen's later ventures into choral writing. The majority are mature single movement works that are through-composed with some recapitulation of material from the beginning of the work at their end, whether they last ten minutes or half an hour. Depending on their subject matter and their commemorative function, they can exude some of the qualities of Cowen's operas and ballets, or radiate the more devotional style of works like *The Transfiguration.* Of their number, the *Ode to the Passions* deserves serious rediscovery and performance. Here we find much that is good in Cowen's mature style.

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[56] The 1907/8 Liverpool Philharmonic season gave a performance of *He Giveth His Belovèd Sleep* with Ada Crossley singing the contralto solo.

7. Cowen: the Man and his Music

Reflecting on Cowen, the man and his music, it is clear that his own personality, upbringing and the environment in which he worked, all played their part in his career, both as a conductor and as a composer. He was raised in surroundings that were both cultured and privileged: in the early years he could rely on the financial and moral support of his father and his family in his endeavours, and had the patronage of the Earl of Dudley. Indeed, the Cowen household must have been a very cosmopolitan setting in which to be brought up, as it not only allowed a musical talent to be born and nurtured, but also permitted an artist, in Cowen's brother Lionel, to flourish, and the theatrical bent of his sister, Henrietta, to develop. Cowen's father seems to have actively relished promoting the work of all his children. Indeed, he probably doted on them, and was perhaps a little self-indulgent and snobbish in getting some of Frederic's early pieces published when he was a child, although he no doubt felt a certain amount of parental pride in doing so. Moreover, the Cowen siblings seem to have been a close-knit family unit: Lionel supported Frederic when he went to Australia to conduct the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, and Henrietta gave recitations at several of the festivals at which Frederic conducted. William Ward's (First Earl of Dudley) influence on Cowen's career, as a great patron of all the arts, cannot be taken too lightly. Indeed, he did a great deal to support Cowen's gifts from an extremely youthful age: he was actively involved in attaining the guidance of Benedict and Goss as Cowen's tutors, and his musical gatherings were a vital stage for Cowen's first musical endeavours. Between them there existed a solid understanding and companionship—Dudley visibly and sometimes less so, helped and encouraged Cowen, acting as a vehicle through which Cowen could channel and reflect on his ideas. Indeed, after Cowen's father's passing in 1876, he probably became still more essential to him. However, Cowen's own skills enabled him to rise from an already advantageous position, to the top of his profession. He could afford to live in a large, tremendously fashionable house, in one of the most elegant streets (Hamilton Terrace [at No. 73 and later at No. 54]) of one of the most stylish suburbs (Saint John's Wood) in London.

Cowen, at the peak of his career, had a lavish lifestyle and was able to invite the great and the good to his 'at homes'.

Willeby observed that Cowen's 'intellectual habits were...excellent, and his love of literature very great'.[1] He collected 'first editions', notably Dickens and Thackeray; illustrations by Cruikshank, Rowlandson, Leech and other humorists and caricaturists of the earlier part of the nineteenth century; and mezzotint portraits of famous musicians.[2] Indeed, when the Rev. Isidore Harris visited 73 Hamilton Terrace in 1896 he commented on the overflowing bookcases throughout the house![3] Moreover, Willeby concludes that through his reading and study of literature 'he was gradually attaining a steadiness which placed him much in advance, both as regards thought and the expression of it, of many of his fellow workers'.[4]

Cowen was very much a product of his time, with the proliferation of his music and its dispersal into the lives of Victorian society being possible due to the Industrial Revolution and Victorian ingenuity and technology, which permitted a vast expansion in the quantity of musical provision. Cowen's roving career as a conductor would have been impossible without the growth in the train network, as he was able to do several concerts a week, all in different parts of the country, as he demonstrated in those years in which he was simultaneously conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic, Bradford Festival Choral Society, Scottish Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Society. Indeed, the growth of fully fledged seaside resorts and the practice of 'taking the waters' at spa towns was almost wholly reliant on the capacity of folk (performers and audiences) to get to them by train. Many of the music festivals developed from this innovation; they provided Cowen with countless opportunities for commissions and engagements. The expansion in the shipping industry and the development of faster vessels made Cowen's trip to conduct the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition possible. Also, the ever-

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[1] *MEM*, 202.
[2] *MTC*, 718; *FCI*, 384; 'Sir Frederic Cowen's Collection', *The Connoisseur* (ed. Baily, J. T. H.), vol. xxxi, no. 121, September 1911, 11-7.
[3] *FCI*, 384.
[4] *MEM*, 202.

expanding Victorian entertainment industry provided an explosion in the theatre, music hall, opera (particularly comic opera), ballet, pantomime, the pageant and the circus; Cowen turned his musical hand to nearly all these pursuits at some point in his career, catering for every class and taste. As the influence of the exotic, particularly India, the Orient and the Far East began infiltrating Victorian tastes, Cowen naturally responded, and we see a number of examples of works that reflect this trend, notably in a few of his songs and especially in his *Indian Rhapsody*.

The high romantic, gothic nature of Victorian philosophy demanded of their poets, painters and composers works that contained a strong 'message' that was explicit and drummed home. Such romantic ideas and gestures were often largely fantastic and unattainable, and light years apart from the realities of the mainly comfortable, secure and arrogant world of the middle and upper classes for whom most of the art was intended. Their values have long since been regarded as outmoded, but have come to be seen in a clearer light with the passing of time. By attempting to satisfy these notions, Cowen inadvertently left a large part of his *oeuvre* open to such criticism.

The process of trying to catalogue Cowen's place in the musical history as a composer is not as easy as it first may appear. Cowen's music is, in many ways, quite individual, of no particular school, cast, moulded and developed from a lifetime of musical, literary and personal experiences. His life began in what we would normally call the latter part of the Romantic period; he clearly possesses many of the traits that we normally associate with Romanticism:

> To transcend immediate times or occasions, to seize eternity, to reach back into the past and forward into the future, to range over the expanse of the world and outward through the cosmos…[cherishing] freedom, movement, passion, and endless pursuit of the attainable…haunted by a spirit of longing, of yearning after an impossible fulfilment…classical clarity is replaced by…suggestion, allusion, or symbol.[5]

Like many composers of the nineteenth century, as we have seen, he was well read and interested in literary expression. Indeed, much of his music seems to be driven by what Grout and Palisca called the 'lyrical spirit of the Lied rather than the dramatic spirit of the [Classical]

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[5] Grout, D. J., and Palisca, C. V., *A History of Western Music* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), 658-9.

symphony'.[6] However, whereas most composers, at least outside the United Kingdom, during the romantic period were composing for posterity, for some imaginary model audience who would one day appreciate and value them, especially Berlioz, Cowen gives the impression of having mostly been driven by a need to compose for a middle-class market-orientated audience. Yet, in the symphonies and perhaps the operas too, Cowen seems to have been consumed with a desire to write more serious works for that aforementioned 'posterity'. However, his lack of genuine passion in his writing, and his inability to deliver real intensity in his music, meant that his 'serious' compositions were, and remain, perceived as lightweight pieces. Indeed, the conflict between writing for the professional and amateur, whose demarcation lines had become ever wider as the celebrity status of the virtuoso performer grew, is evident at times in Cowen's output. At one moment he is writing the most simplistic of ballads for family gatherings around the parlour piano; in the next he is trying to write a full-scale opera. His skills, according to most critics, were more apt for the former rather than the latter: unfortunately, on many occasions his penchant for the first rears its ugly head in the second. Indeed, the four-square regular periodicity of many of his ballads does unconsciously find an echo in his larger scale movements from time to time. Indeed, Cowen's preparedness to lower his standards to that of a 'ballad-monger' and entertainer is often cited as a reason why his more serious works are ignored by scholars. Moreover, his works have become tarnished with the critical assessment that his three hundred songs are representative of his total output – which they are not. Also, Cowen (along with many others, including Sullivan, and later German and Coates) got caught up in the attractions of 'Olde England' as revealed by the likes of Sir Walter Scott, looking on past ages with rose-tinted spectacles. Indeed, he is often accused of pandering to these sentimental and nostalgic ideals in his choice of themes for his works and conveying such tendencies in his music, as in his suite for strings, *In the Olden Time*, and his two suites of old English dances for orchestra. Part of Cowen's less than flattering *Musical Times* obituary, recorded in the foreword

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[6] Ibid., 660.

of this thesis, called 'ye olde style', 'the bane of English music'.[7] Cowen's brother Lionel was similarly accused of sentimentality in his paintings.

Throughout Cowen's output there is a specific manifestation of this Victorian escapism from the realities of the world, highlighted above, i.e. an almost child-like obsession with fairies, fairy stories and all things fanciful, with much of his subject-matter never truly breaking away from the halcyon days of his childhood. As early as 1869 we find a piano piece entitled *Fairy Flowers*; in 1873 comes the *Flower Fairies* Suite. In 1891 comes *The Fairies' Spring*, a cantata for female voices; this is followed two years later by a song 'Fairyland', and a further two years elapse before 'A Fairy Song'. In 1896 his orchestral suite de ballet *In Fairyland* explores the fairy world again, returning to it twice more in 1927 in his songs for children 'The Dream Fairy' and 'When You Go To Fairyland'. These only represent the works in which the word 'fairy' or its variants appear: *The Rose Maiden* and *Sleeping Beauty* both have their share of fairymania, and there are many other works that allude to similar subject matter. E. F. Jacques accurately wrote that Cowen 'has long held office, by divine right, as musician of the flowers and fairies'.[8] However, Cowen was not some crank living out his own childhood fantasy world through his music, but a man responding to a trend in the literary and artistic world, which Diane Purkiss explains thus:

> In Victorian England...Fairies, elves, gnomes and small winged things of every kind multiply into swarms and infest writing and art and the minds of men and women...Many Victorians...wanted somehow to have the countryside and also the benefits of the Industrial Revolution – to have fairies, but not Queen Mab. In an age of progress, one way to square this circle was to see ideal, unspoilt innocence as a phase. The Victorians took up the Romantic notion of the child as perfect innocent, and linked that innocent child with fairies.[9]

However, as Purkiss later explains, the fate of the fairies, as reinvented by the Victorians, was to become 'mortally wounded by the carnage on the Western Front' [during the First World War] and 'when Arthur Conan Doyle authenticated the fairy photographs taken by two adolescent girls in a Yorkshire mining town, he moved fairies from heroines of story to the objects of the

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[7] *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.
[8] Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Concert Programme, 5 November 1901.
[9] Purkiss, D., *Troublesome Things* (Harmondsworth: The Penguin Press, 2000), 220.

voracious lenses of the twentieth century and its mania for the visual. From that moment on, the fairies were as vulnerable to the paparazzi as any other superstar'.[10] In terms of posterity, it is perhaps unfortunate for Cowen that his career ran in parallel to that of the heyday of the fairy: his preoccupation with such fanciful themes reinforces perceptions of the 'lightweight' tag that he has long since acquired. It is perhaps not a matter of coincidence that this fairymania and Cowen's musical decline occur at a similar time. It also limits his appeal to modern audiences unacquainted with such receptiveness to these Victorian sensibilities.

What Grout and Palisca called the 'mystic sense of kinship with nature, counterbalancing the artificiality of city existence',[11] is a different aspect on the argument that Purkiss puts forward above as to the Victorian fixation with escapism from the realities of life. Whether it was through fairy-tales or via images of nature and the countryside, there was an instinctive desire on the part of the Victorians to clothe the actualities of their existence with a layer of fantasy or transfer themselves into another reality altogether. Indeed, when Cowen is not actually in a fairyland dreamworld, which he often is, his musical predisposition is often to portray real or imagined scenes of the natural world, whether consciously or not. Willeby acknowledges Cowen's love of 'the wildness of Scandinavia, the snow-clad ranges of Switzerland, the soporific yet suggestive atmosphere of Italy…his "dreamful ease" has always been followed by a splendid activity'.[12] Nature and the natural world reappear throughout his output and give weight to the fulfilment of Willeby's assertion. His titled symphonies all show this tendency: the *Scandinavian*, *The Welsh* and *The Idyllic* – all have their pastoral depictions; *The Language of Flowers* suites, while ultimately about the poetic symbolism of flowers, has nature at its root; the overture *Niagara* is a depiction of a feature of the natural world, i.e. the Niagara Falls; and *The Butterfly's Ball* overture, while inspired by literature, has this most beautiful of insects and its companions as its theme.

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[10] Ibid., 284.
[11] Grout and Palisca, 663.
[12] *MEM*, 221-2.

Furthermore, one can turn to countless songs that have nature at their heart, as well as many moments among the choral works that have scenes of countrified life at their core.

With regards to Cowen's religion, much has already been discussed: i) that he mostly stayed silent on matters of his belief; ii) he willingly conceived many works on Christian subjects, but especially *The Tranfiguration*; iii) and he readily wrote a work that expressed ideas of mysticism – *The Veil.* Whatever Cowen's religious and theological inclinations were, he, like many romantic composers of the nineteenth century, gave voice to a universal spiritual desire in his non-liturgical settings, instilling an immense amount of his music with a naive craving that one may possibly call 'religious'. His songs exemplify this, as do many of the themes of his choral works. From these observations, it is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that he saw his Jewish background and values as completely separate from his Art. Therefore, one can merely hypothesize that, at the same time as he kept his rabbi and synagogue at ease, as far as we know, by following the *Halakah* (the Jewish way of life – abiding by the Talmud [the Law] and respecting Jewish custom), on questions of individual conviction and belief, he had his own personal vision. However, Cowen's silence on matters of faith must be remembered in the context that anti-Semitism remained a powerful political and social force on the European continent at this time. As he traversed the English Channel frequently in order to conduct abroad during his career, he would not have wanted to have jeopardised lucrative engagements because of his religion, nor get caught up in anti-Jewish uprisings. Of course, even in Britain, Jews were not entirely free from prejudice – Jews did not receive full emancipation in England until Cowen himself was 19 years old (in 1871), and there were occasional anti-Semitic outbursts, such as the anti-Jewish riots by Welsh miners in Tredegar in 1911, in which Jewish shops were looted.[13] Anti-Semitism was also found in the writings of the British authors, such as Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and American-born poet T. S. Eliot.[14] With the rise of Fascism in

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[13] Bacon, J., and Gilbert, M., *The Illustrated Atlas of Jewish Civilization* (Enderby, Leicester: Silverdale Books [an imprint of Bookmart Ltd.], 2003), 141.
[14] Ibid., 156.

Europe, Cowen's last years would have be endured with an undercurrent of anti-Semitism, further manifesting itself in Britain under the leadership of Sir Oswald Mosley.[15]

It is a paradox that Cowen, as a Jew, should have ever had any affinity as a conductor with the music of Wagner, a self-confessed anti-Semite, who described Jews as 'former cannibals, educated to be society's business leaders' who had corrupted 'Aryan' purity.[16] In a letter written to King Ludwig II of Bavaria he wrote: 'I regard the Jewish race as the born enemy of humanity'.[17] Wagner arraigned the Jews, who, because they did not share 'the Germans...heritage of myth and legend', out of necessity produced art that 'was imitative, superficial, baneful'.[18] He detested the meretricious, Frenchified, Italianized opera of Meyerbeer,...the pseudo-Beethovian, decadent instrumental music of Mendelssohn...[and] the press', who were at the time dominated by Jewish businessmen.[19] How could Cowen have reconciled these outbursts by Wagner with his own beliefs? Indeed, Cowen clearly thought that Wagner was wrong on some of his pronouncements: Cowen said that the Jews 'had always been a musical race and always would be',[20] although he did perhaps concede that Jewish musicians had not often succeeded as composers: 'It is more on the executive side than the creative side that Jews are so tremendously musical, although we have three or four great composers such as Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer and Halévy'.[21] He added that 'considering the comparative smallness of our numbers, the Jewish race is the most musical in the world...Jews in every country form a large proportion of the concert-going public, and that is due to their innate love of music'.[22] Of course, Cowen was not the only Jewish-born composer to show an empathy with Wagner's music – both Mahler and Schoenberg revered Wagner. Indeed, they renounced their faith in order to further their respective careers.

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15 Ibid.
16 Legrand, J. (ed.), *Chronicle of the World* (Harlow, Essex and London: Longman Group UK Ltd. and Chronicle Communications Ltd., 1989), 987.
17 Bacon and Gilbert, 143.
18 Jacobs, R. L., *Wagner* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1980), 60.
19 Ibid.
20 *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 October 1935, 10.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 13 March 1931, 28, and 11 October 1935, 10.

Cowen's music is almost completely devoid of any overtly Jewish influences. Indeed, it is interesting to note that when asked as to whether he had made a study of Jewish music, Cowen replied: 'I cannot say that I have. The fact is it is difficult to know what real Jewish music is'.[23] He added that 'I should think that the Hebrew melodies are more Eastern than Hebrew, and I do not think they are particularly common to the old Jewish race. I do not think...that there is any typical Hebrew or Jewish music'.[24] As far as can be ascertained, Cowen only ever borrowed one 'ancient Hebrew melody' and incorporated into his music. This was in the case of the main theme from 'Dance of Reapers (with Chorus of Gleaners)' from his oratorio *Ruth*.

As a musician, Cowen during the course of his career was variously a pianist, composer, conductor and teacher. Cowen was a pianist of some repute in his early years – Buffen described Cowen's playing as 'of a refined and intellectual character'[25] and Cowen himself claimed that in the 1870s he 'had the reputation of being the best accompanist in England'.[26] However, his career as a pianist was short-lived: he 'was very nervous when playing in public' and felt that he could not do himself justice.[27] Indeed, a plethora of 'virtuoso' pianists, many of whom had been pupils of Liszt, Rubinstein and Clara Schumann, were beginning to come on-stream. While from reports it is clear that Cowen was clearly competent, he was no virtuoso and would have struggled to compete for concert billing. Moreover, he 'preferred composition'; he considered that he 'was not strong enough to combine the two'.[28] As a result, after the age of twenty-two or twenty-three, he gave up his solo piano career.

Much has already been written about Cowen as a conductor in the biography chapter. Beyond Cowen's contribution as a conductor *per se*, he actively used his posts to further the cause of home-grown music and musicians, evidenced by his performing of some ninety British pieces during his tenure of office at the London Philharmonic alone. Indeed, Cowen's

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[23] Ibid., 11 October 1935, 10.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Buffen, F. F., *Musical Celebrities* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1889), 64.
[26] Cowen, F. H., 'How I Turned the Corners' in *The Etude* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., July 1927), 501.
[27] *IEM*, 251-2.
[28] Ibid., 252.

promotion of his compatriots' music extended to all his conducting engagements. No other Briton of his generation, apart from perhaps Mackenzie, did so much to bring British music to the concert platform. Moreover, Michael Kennedy suggests that Cowen, both directly and indirectly, did much to further Elgar's cause as a composer, both through his conducting and through his contacts with publishers.[29]

As a music teacher, there is little documentary evidence of Cowen's activities. Unlike Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie, Cowen had not been at the centre of the musical education of the nation, although he was involved with the National Training School of Music during its brief existence before it was subsumed by the Royal College of Music;[30] had shown an interest in the Principalship of the Royal Academy of Music, before his sojourn to Australia, in 1878; and was a professor at the Guildhall School of Music following his retirement from regular conducting engagements. He was also a Fellow of both the Royal Academy of Music [FRAM] and of the Guildhall School of Music [FGSM]. Curiously, he wrote next-to-nothing about his time at the National Training School, nor is there much from his own mouth about his professorship at the Guildhall. Indeed, he also does not seem to have taught music students privately during his life. Therefore, all that can be suggested is that he did not regard these activities with much esteem. Perhaps it was just an additional source of income when his conducting engagements and commissions had dried up. Yet, if he did not enjoy teaching, why would he have applied for the RAM Principalship? Although, this application was probably more about the prestige of the post than the teaching! Whereas there have been handed down many tales of Parry's and Stanford's teaching methods, eccentricities and personalities by their respective pupils, of Cowen we have almost nothing. Did he simply not enthuse his students as a teacher? However, if this was the case, surely somebody would have said so. Conversely, Cowen does not appear to have taught

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[29] Kennedy, M., *Portrait of Elgar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 28; Kennedy, M., 'Elgar and the Festivals' in *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of the Three Choirs Festival* (Gloucester: The Three Choirs Festival Association, 1977), 31.

[30] George Grove had approached Cowen to take up a chair with the Royal College of Music, but he declined (Hughes, M., and Stradling, R., *The English Musical Renaissance* (2nd Ed.)(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 31).

anyone who later became famous in the musical world whose views would have been worthy of documentation, whereas Parry and Stanford had the likes of Vaughan Williams to tell us of their respective musical qualities, skills, tastes and sensibilities.

It is commonplace among commentaries on Cowen's music to find references to his 'graceful', 'elegant', 'pretty' or 'delicate' melodies, e.g. Robert Elkin's assessment: 'He wielded a refined and graceful pen'.[31] While Cowen as a composer was brought up in the German musical tradition, his relaxed, pleasant, and unfussy melodic style shows us that he was not ignorant of the 'bel canto' school of Italian composers. Indeed, the free and often vocal quality of his themes owed as much to Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini or Verdi (but without the coloratura ornamentation and *melismas*) as it did to his German masters. Moreover, the dramaturgy of his scores, especially in the operas and the choral works, was probably descended from not only German and Italian sources, but from French grand opera and ballet as well. Therefore, Cowen's musical voice was a piquant blend of the high romantic thoughts of his Teutonic education, with that of Italian vocalism and French opera. In addition, as can be discerned from Cowen's remarks in 1932 to the Musicians' Club, he placed paramount importance on 'melody' being 'the basis of all music'.[32] Moreover, Cowen's own views on 'modern' music are clear from his definition in *Music as She is Wrote* of 'Zukunfts Musik' ('Music of the Future'): 'Half-semitones, one orchestra playing in several different keys, splitting of ears, general disruption – and Chaos – if we go on like this, which Heaven forbid!'[33] Elsewhere, in a critical remark possibly aimed at Richard Strauss, Cowen described the music around him in his latter years as 'the present hysteric palpitations'.[34] Dr John Warriner, the chairman of the Corporation of the Trinity College of Music, remarked that Cowen's music was 'not like that, for he has never written an ugly note in his life'.[35] Gerald Norris adds: 'To the end, he maintained a broad and tolerant

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31 Elkin, R., *Royal Philharmonic: The Annals of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (London: Rider and Company, 1946), 83.
32 'Musicians Club of London: Dinner to Sir F. Cowen', *The Times*, 10 February 1932, 10.
33 Cowen, F. H., *Music as She is Wrote* (London: Mills and Boon Ltd., 1915), 60.
34 Kennedy, M., *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 110.
35 *The Times*, 29 April 1929, 8.

outlook, viewing with humour and equanimity certain modern fashions and crazes, knowing well that only the true and sincere in the art would ultimately prevail'.[36]

Like his style of melody, Cowen's approach to harmony was rarely radical. Indeed, while Wagner's voluptuous harmonies were beginning the demise of tonality through the emancipation of dissonance and the development of a high degree of chromaticism (which ultimately dragged the world towards atonality), Cowen was still employing a tonally-centred brush to all his musical pictures. While in his larger scale works the formulaic approach found in a majority of his songs and ballads is mostly avoided, his harmonic language, on the whole, does not advance much beyond those of the Romantic composers of the mid-nineteenth century such as Mendelssohn and Schumann. Moreover, while there are moments of chromaticism within his music, with movement in and out of different key centres, thus testing the listener's perception of tonality, the music is, as a whole, very tonal, with chords of the Neapolitan sixth, augmented sixth, diminished and dominant extensions (mostly ninths), and pedals (of tonic, dominant and double varieties) most characteristic of his style. Only as Cowen entered his twilight years as a composer, is evidence found, especially in his *The Veil*, of him dabbling in sound worlds that he had not studied in his youth.

From the evidence of this thesis, Cowen's use of form was often conservative, drawing on the Classical forms. The overall plans for his symphonies all follow the traditional early nineteenth century model of four movements. His use of form for individual movements was sometimes a little freer, as has been shown, but most movements rely on tried and tested formulae, especially sonata form, scherzo/minuet and trio forms, and ternary form. There is much tinkering at the edges, with three-subject sonata form movements, and with disguised returns and false reprises of the opening material, but rarely anything more radical. His orchestral pieces also fall back on familiar forms. However, he is a little more adventurous with his Concertstück, with its rhapsodic approach (a rather complex tripartite form with coda), and

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[36] Norris, G., *Stanford, The Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980), 189.

his *A Phantasy of Life and Love*, in a compressed four movement symphonic structure, played as one continuous movement. The operas move from the old English ballad opera form in *Pauline* through to an opera with non-stop acts in *Harold*, with the middle two operas somewhere in between. From *Thorgrim* onwards Cowen starts to experiment with leading-themes and *leitmotiven*, although his approach with the latter is not developed to the level achieved by Wagner. The early cantatas and oratorios rely on Handelian and Mendelssohnian models, with recitatives, arias and choruses, but Cowen quickly introduces elements from the opera and the ballet, such that there are longer continuous *scenas* (sometimes achieved by the same quasi-*leitmotiven* approaches found in the operas) and dance movements in the later works. This cross-fertilisation of operatic ideas to his choral works is one of his specific contributions to the development of the British choral work. In his later choral works, Cowen moves to a more through-composed method, but usually with some form of recapitulation of an opening idea near the end to bring the work full-circle.

Considering that Cowen never had a lesson in orchestration, he developed a remarkable understanding of the art through the practical experiences of music-making. Right from his early days with the Mapleson Opera Company, he absorbed all that he heard as a musician and then as a conductor, assimilating a wide orchestral palette into his psyche. Therefore, it is not surprising that Cowen's colourful orchestration is nearly always mentioned in critics' reviews of his works. Given the lack of full scores for Cowen's operas and most of his choral works, these observations are a blessing for current investigators. But, his skills are clearly demonstrated in his symphonies and orchestral works. The only criticism that can be levelled at Cowen's orchestrations is that they are often lacking in a mastery of the darker timbres, especially in those more profound moments in a work. Also, a Cowen *fortissimo tutti* seems deficient in depth and bite, compared with say a near-contemporary Tchaikovsky one. However, at the lighter end of the colouristic spectrum, Cowen is often very creative, with the best examples of this imagination being found in *The Butterfly's Ball* overture and the Indian Rhapsody. Here his gifts for graceful melody and colourful orchestration are shown to best advantage, often taming a

symphony orchestra to tiptoe like a chamber ensemble, making that which could have been trivial, sound fanciful. Indeed, *The Sketch* felt able to write in 1901 that 'since Sir Arthur Sullivan, no English musician has been more successful in delicate treatment of the orchestra'.[37] Indeed, Ernest Walker agreed that Cowen had acquired Sullivan's 'talent for cleverly dainty and effective orchestration'.[38] Frank Howes wrote: 'His amiable orchestral pieces...have a certain sweet poignancy, a deftness that light music must have and a daintiness that emerges at the smallest excuse'.[39] W. H. Hadow likewise recorded: 'At his best he [Cowen] rises to real daintiness of fancy'.[40] Ernest Walker concurred, stating:

> The pages where he treats subjects of a more or less fairylike character show him in his most individual mood; the best parts of *The Sleeping Beauty* or *The Water-Lily* are very polished and delicate work, not more...than ballet-music, but touched with an exceptionally light hand, and in that slender way sometimes very charming. It is...water-colour work like Bennett's, but far more piquant than serenely classical...nor is it exactly French or Mendelssohnian—it is, in its slight evanescent style, something that may fairly be called Cowen's own.[41]

Percy Young also agreed: 'Cowen...was at his best with exotic or fantastic ideas'.[42] However, Cowen rarely stretches the orchestra as might Elgar or Richard Strauss; yet, neither could it be said that his music plays itself.

As a composer, Cowen's early musical roots were in the German school. This, of course, is not utterly surprising, considering that he was educated in his youth by Goss and Benedict (both direct successors to that tradition through their own teachers who were pupils of Mozart and Beethoven respectively) and he spent nearly two years in Leipzig and Berlin, where Mendelssohn and Schumann were by then the role models for all nascent composers. Indeed, elsewhere in this thesis, reference has been made to the fact that most British musicians and composers since Mozart's day had sought after the prospect to expand their musical education

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[37] *The Sketch*, 424, xxxiii, 13 March 1901, 301.
[38] Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (3rd Ed., rev. and enlarged by Westrup, J. A.)(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 327.
[39] Howes, F., *The English Musical Renaissance* (London, 1966), 64.
[40] Hadow, W. H., *English Music* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 150.
[41] Walker, E., *A History of Music in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 296-7.
[42] Burton, N., 'Oratorios and Cantatas' in *The Romantic Age: 1800-1914* (ed. Temperley, N.)(London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 232.

in Germany, 'the perceived fountainhead of all musical wisdom'.[43] Yet, as Willeby noted in Cowen's youthful first symphony (1869), a unique voice was already beginning to emerge. Frank Howes similarly felt that Cowen's 'German training never completely overlaid his talent for the lighter, prettier things that were possible in the romantic idiom of his time'.[44] Jacob, quoted in Andrade's *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica*, says that 'Cowen represents the new and promising School of Composition, which has sprung up in England in recent times – a type of music not ultra modern, but still full of an increasing freedom, while yet retaining enough of the old classical forms to take a stronger hold of the conservative public than is possible with the newer music'.[45] Jacob may have been correct at the time, but it was Cowen's lack of forward-thinking and pandering to the above-mentioned conservatism that ultimately caused his rapid demise from popularity. Dr John Warriner, the chairman of the Corporation of the Trinity College of Music, rather flatteringly described Cowen as 'the English Mozart',[46] but his remarks are more of a brash pronouncement of a sycophant, than words founded on any academic basis. As a song composer, Cowen was described as 'the English Schubert' in 1898.[47] Again this was as much a publicity stunt, than backed with any degree of scholarly evidence, but does show the standing that Cowen had in this regard as a composer. Michael Kennedy was more accurate in his comments when he said that Cowen's music had 'a vein of fancifulness and originality', but 'lacked gusto and impulse: it was manufactured and workmanlike'.[48] However, as Lewis Foreman remarked: 'Vivid, fluent and tuneful, Cowen must have seemed a striking new force in his day, appealing to a wide public'.[49] Like Sullivan, Cowen wanted to be regarded as a 'serious' composer, both of them setting great store by their operas, oratorios, cantatas, symphonies and orchestral works; yet they are both now remembered primarily for their lighter pieces. Ernest

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[43] Self, G., *Light Music in Britain since 1870: A Survey* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2001), 4.
[44] Howes, 64.
[45] Andrade, J. A. P. M., *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Jamaica Times Ltd., 1941), 151.
[46] *The Times*, 29 April 1929, 8.
[47] Several of Cowen's later sets of songs refer to Cowen as: 'our English Schubert', and attribute the phrase to the *Daily Telegraph*.
[48] Kennedy 1960, 110.
[49] Foreman, L., *Music in England: 1885-1920* (London: Thames Publishing, 1994), 11-2.

Walker suggested that Cowen's musical style owed much to Sterndale Bennett, in that he 'can be traced in the graceful ease of the workmanship at its best and in the fondness for what may perhaps be called drawing-room pictorialism'.[50] However, Percy Young thought that Cowen's music lacked 'any substantial sense of musical logic'.[51] Frederick Buffen's 1889 appraisal of Cowen's music, while probably a little generous, demonstrates the admiration in which he was held by some during his lifetime:

> Apart from the smaller compositions, which are all more or less marked by grace of fancy and tenderness of feeling, Cowen has, in the construction of his symphonic works and oratorios exhibited so much power and knowledge of his art that he naturally ranks with the first of English composers. As one of the few men whose labours have contributed to raise this country as a musical nation, Cowen is justly entitled to the prominent position he now occupies and to the esteem and respect with which he is deservedly regarded by the musical world.[52]

Eduard Hanslick, however, proffered the idea that Cowen's [and Stanford's] music was 'not strikingly original, but...showed good schooling, a lively sense of tone-painting, and much skill in orchestration'.[53] Hanslick recommended that Cowen concentrated his efforts on 'purely instrumental music in the more concise forms, as well as serious choral music'.[54] Cowen's less than flattering *Musical Times* obituary, recorded in the foreword of this thesis, said:

> It was perhaps the real cause of his ultimate failure that he shrank from the outspokenness of Savoyard speech, that in his more jocund music an excess of delicacy put a restraint upon what should have been unfettered. His refinement and his fancifulness were all to the good, but he lacked gusto, and his idiom needed that kind of reinforcing. He came nearest to it in 'St. John's Eve', 'John Gilpin', and the first set of 'Four Old English Dances' for orchestra.[55]

Walker acknowledged Cowen's weaknesses thus:

> It is not very often that he is really at his best; he is unfortunately capable of writing a good deal of music where daintiness of touch degenerates into mere refined commonplace or still lower into mere triviality...As a general rule he is less happy in his more serious moods...his...works...contain a good deal of suave picturesqueness of a kind, but...singularly little that is at all solidly satisfying...there is plenty of cleverness...but somehow there is a lack of vitality about the works as wholes...his style is inclined to become uncertain when he feels he must not indulge his desire to be frankly pretty; that really is his *metier*, and at his best he can exercise it with a graceful adroitness that compels

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[50] Walker 1952, 327.
[51] Burton, 232.
[52] Buffen, 67.
[53] Hanslick, E. (transl. & ed. Pleasants, H.), *Music Criticisms (1846-99)*(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), 258.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *Musical Times*, lxxvi (1935), 1008.

> the admiration even of those who may feel that it is but a small thing on which to found a reputation.[56]

W. H. Hadow agreed and wrote that 'at his worst he sinks to triviality and commonplace'.[57] With reference to several of Cowen's later works, mention has been made to an underlying influence of Tchaikovsky in the music. Interestingly, Cowen reveals in a 1902 interview that he, along with many other musicians, had fallen under the spell of Tchaikovsky in more recent years: 'Everyone is influenced more or less by his works; they cannot help it'.[58]

George Bernard Shaw's tirades about Cowen's music have done much to permanently damage Cowen's position as a composer of worth. Indeed, his sometimes near-defamatory remarks caused much consternation among musicians and readers alike. His most devastating rant about Cowen's music and his collaborations with Bennett, whilst damaging in the extreme, has been proven by the test of time to be not wholly inaccurate in its prediction for the fate of Cowen's scores:

> No doubt plenty of simple people who have never heard these original compositions will be charmed with [them]...The same people will, as likely as not, find Mr Bennett's verses as poetic as Mr Stopford Brooke[59] finds Wordsworth's. I do not quarrel with their opinion. I simply record my own...[All these] works which have been manufactured by the same process altogether fail to please me. I do not say they are bad; I do not attempt to prove that they are 'wrong'; I do not deny that choral societies sing them, and that audiences pay at least once to hear them sung; I do not question the genius of the composers or the impartiality of the librettist-analyst-critic; I do not assert, suggest, imply, or hint anything about anybody but myself; and of myself I only say—fully admitting that the fact may be entirely discreditable to me—that, if the whole collection of these works were in my power, I would unhesitatingly commit them to the nearest County Council 'destructor'.[60]

Cowen may have occasionally been maimed by the criticism that flowed from Shaw's nib, but he never laid down his own pen, and he resolutely persisted in promoting his own cause, and that of his contemporaries. Indeed, Cowen's long career spanned many changes in the musical world. Writing in the 1920s he noted: 'The old custom of family gatherings, at which the music was provided by the company themselves, has practically died out – due, no doubt, to the popularity

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[56] Walker 1945, 296-7.
[57] Hadow, 150.
[58] Armstrong, W, 'Two English Composers of To-day: Frederic H. Cowen – Edwin [*sic*] Elgar' in *The Etude* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., February 1903), 47.
[59] The Rev. Stopford Brooke was an Irish-born cleric who wrote several studies of English literature.
[60] Shaw, G. B., 'A Sulphurous Sublimity' in *The World*, 8 November 1893.

of gramophones and the wireless'.[61] With regard to the position of artists he observed: 'There are more opportunities of engagements than in past days – for restaurants, cinemas and broadcasting studios all have their music programmes – but...concert audiences are probably more difficult to attract. Concert artists must possess a really high standard of ability if they hope to succeed'.[62]

The success of artists and celebrities today is often rather more dependent on personality than actual talent. Indeed, often it is their peers or audiences that determine their success or failure. While there is little dispute as to the fact that Cowen was talented, his public persona and private qualities seem to have hindered his perceived reputation during his lifetime, and subsequent assessments of him. Indeed, when one tries to reach a generalisation about his standing among his peers, one is struck by how few of them were prepared to make statements about him. The Rev. Isidore Harris may partially explain this fact: when interviewing Cowen in 1896 he noted that he was 'one of the most modest public men I have ever come across. To "draw" him out is anything but an easy task, it is almost necessary to *force* him in order to get him to talk about himself; and therefore he is not a subject for what journalists call "good copy"'.[63] Cowen's reticence in talking about himself is evident from the time of the Hallé-Cowen-Richter affair: Gerald Cumberland tried to interview Cowen about it, but wrote that he

> would not talk of the musical situation in Manchester and I could see that he was very sensitive about his uncomfortable position.
> 'If I am wanted, I shall stay', was all he would give me.
> 'And are you going to write about me in the paper?' asked he, at the end of the interview.
> 'How interesting that will be!' And he smiled with gentle satire.
> 'I shall make it as interesting as I can', I assured him, 'but, you see, you have said so little'.
> 'Does it matter?' he returned.
> 'I have always heard that you gentlemen of the Press can at least – shall we say – embroider?'
> 'But may I?' I asked.
> 'How can I prevent you? Do tell me how I can, and I will'.
> 'Well, you can insist upon seeing the article before it appears in print'.

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[61] Cowen, F. H., 'Then – and Now', *Music Masterpieces* (ed. Pitt, P.)(London: The Amalgamated Press (1922) Ltd., 18 February 1926), Vol. 10, 102.
[62] Ibid.
[63] *FCI*, 384.

> 'Oh, "insist" is not a nice word, is it? But, if you would be kind enough to send me the article before your Editor has it...'[64]

This dialogue rather speaks for itself. Cowen appears to be displaying an extraordinary level of naivety in his exchanges with the pressman. But, perhaps he was being rather cleverer, and the conversation was meant to be somewhat more tongue-in-cheek than Cumberland took it to be! Surveying the interviews that Cowen gave and his own writings, it can be seen that he was a rather characterless individual in public, of whom people felt no particular overwhelming love or hate for. Gerald Cumberland wrote of Cowen that

> it was impossible not to like him, for, if he had no great positive qualities that seized upon you at once, he had a good many negative ones. He had no 'side', no self-importance, no eccentricities. He had never long hair, nor a foreign accent. He did not use a cigarette-holder. He did not loll when he sat down, or posture when he stood up...[He was always] faultlessly dressed, immaculately groomed.[65]

Archibald Henderson, who became acquainted with Cowen during his Scottish Orchestra years, sheds a different light on Cowen's personality in his *Musical Memories* (1938):

> Cowen had a keen sense of humour, and was an uncommonly good story teller. As he had an immense fund of stories always on hand, I found by experience that it was important to get the rehearsal completed before Cowen got launched, or the rehearsal might last for hours...He was ever a faithful and attentive letter-writer and his beautiful clear penmanship was a pleasure to read. He was one of the best 'all-round' musicians of our time; an excellent composer, conductor, and pianist. He was also a good linguist, and as a man of letters, his gifts were revealed in his delightful book, *My Art and My Friends*.[66]

Douglas Sladen agreed with Henderson about Cowen's sense of humour, stating that Cowen 'had a most comical finish'.[67] Cowen's own sense of humour was demonstrated in the anecdotes in his writings – in his letters, within his autobiography: *My Art and My Friends*, the biographies he wrote about others, an article entitled 'Long Hair and Music' in *The Strand Magazine*[68] and especially in his satirical book *Music as She is Wrote*. William Armstrong says of Cowen that 'He has the same restraint of manner that distinguishes many of his [English] countrymen, yet much

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[64] Cumberland, G. (Kenyon, C.F.), *Set Down in Malice, a Book of Reminiscences* (modern reprint by Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 228-9.
[65] Ibid., 228.
[66] Henderson, A. M., *Musical Memories* (London: Grant Educational Co., 1938), 87-8.
[67] Sladen, D., and Markino, Y., *Twenty Years of My Life* (modern reprint by Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 91.
[68] Cowen, F. H., 'Long Hair and Music' in *The Strand Magazine* (London: George Newnes Ltd., xxxiii, Jan. to June 1907), 89-94.

enthusiasm and a marked gift of fluency of speech, directly and simply expressed'.[69] Willeby identified two 'very opposite qualities in his character—his appreciation of the value of solitude; and the hearty interest which he takes, and always has taken, in human life, as regards things both great and small'.[70] Cowen acknowledged that 'the majority of persons, whether artists or not, have a dual nature; one that they live to themselves and one that they show to the world. The artist's half-life is passed within himself, when he goes out he shakes it off'.[71] Frederick Buffen, in his *Musical Celebrities* (1889) gave a generous review of Cowen's qualities:

> By his kindly disposition and genial personality, Fred Cowen, as he is commonly called, has won the hearts of a legion of friends, and at his musical soirées may be met many of the most distinguished artists of the day, amongst them Madame Trebelli, Madame Albani, Madame Essipoff, MM. Piatti, Hans Richter, Edward Lloyd, Charles Santley, Vladimir de Pachmann, and a host of lesser lights, whose friendship testifies to the regard in which the popular composer is held.[72]

And Wilhelm Kuhe also reflected on the esteem in which Cowen was held in 1896 (in *My Musical Recollections*):

> One of the most popular and able of the Philharmonic conductors was F. H. Cowen…the musical historian of the future…will find it an agreeable task to make note of the fact that as a small boy Cowen astonished his friends with compositions written in classical form; and that the bright promise held forth in those early years has more than borne fruit. It must be left to such a biographer to record the many different spheres of art in which them varied attainments of this facile composer have asserted themselves.
> To enumerate even a tithe of the oratorios and other sacred works, operas, symphonies and drawing-room pieces with Frederic Cowen has enriched the world would be a formidable task indeed…Above all will Cowen's name be handed down to future generations as that of a composer who has never pandered to the 'Philistines' in music, or written 'down' to the level of those whose appreciation of the divine art is limited by their meagre knowledge of its beauties.[73]

From these assessments we get a wide diversity of views, which in itself is not all that uncommon, as these different people would have encountered Cowen under dissimilar circumstances, and some will have got to know him personally and others only in a professional capacity. But there are certain threads that can be drawn, i.e. that he had a dual personality – a public persona that was far removed from the realities of a humorous private man. It seems,

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[69] Armstrong, 47.
[70] *MEM*, 198.
[71] Armstrong, 47.
[72] Buffen, 67.
[73] Kuhe, W., *My Musical Recollections* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1896), 255-6.

however, that few got to really know this personal side. Gerald Norris argues that 'for, as much as his music was admired, he excited little enthusiasm as a person...The few tales that we do have of him come almost exclusively from his own pen...the fact remains that Cowen was, on the whole, an outsider, possessed of acquaintances rather than friends'.[74] There is little evidence to contradict this opinion. Indeed, all the facts bear it out: examination of the biographies and especially the autobiographies of Cowen's so-called 'legion of friends'[75] rarely reveal little more than passing references to him. This largely explains why Cowen's reputation declined so quickly, even before his death, as he had few supporters around him to defend his cause.

Lewis Foreman notes that 'of all the composers [of the Victorian and Edwardian period]...Cowen...underwent a more dramatic fall in reputation in the last quarter-century of his career than any of the others...[Sullivan, Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie, and he], who in his day had been one of the most celebrated of British composers, and possibly the highest paid conductor, suffered so complete a reversal'.[76] Nicholas Cook, in his *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, wrote: 'A value system is in place within our culture...which places innovation above tradition, creation above reproduction, personal expression above the market-place'.[77] It is a regrettable reality that if we believe the rants of Shaw and the criticism that has been written over the last century and a half about Cowen's works, that his music, in most cases, falls into the latter category of each of these pairs. Indeed, Cowen was, with perhaps the exception of *The Veil*, still writing in and reproducing a style that would not have been out place almost half a century before, driven predominantly by the conventions and the market-place in which he worked. And yet he was not unaware of Wagner, Mahler, Richard Strauss and Debussy, as he conducted compositions by most of them at some point later in his career. Clearly the music that emanated from their pens did not appeal to him. To quote Michael Kennedy: 'His tastes were

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[74] Norris, 189.
[75] Buffen, 67.
[76] Foreman, 11.
[77] Cook, N., *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14.

not progressive beyond a certain point'.[78] As a result, it is easy to see why scholarship has thus far valued Cowen's works in such a negative fashion. The demise of Cowen's musical popularity can also in part be attributed to the inexorable rise in fame of Elgar's music (which ironically Cowen had done much to promote), which with its combination of exuberant romanticism, nobility, spirituality, melodic charm, fine craftsmanship, and mastery of orchestration, elevated him up to a plane that no other British composer had ever attained. As a result of Elgar's success, both at home and on the continent of Europe, Cowen's music swiftly came to be seen as old-fashioned and obsequious, indulging the tastes of his Victorian and Edwardian audiences; so its fate was quickly sealed. As Cowen entered into the twilight of his years, the decline in the esteem in which his music was held led to ever-increasing financial pressures on him and his wife, on account of the falling income from royalties and copyright, but they continued to live in the sumptuous manner to which they had become accustomed. Eventually the poor state of their finances enforced a move to slightly less lavish accommodation at 18 Regent's Court (but still within a stone's throw of Hamilton Terrace). Two further moves followed, firstly to 79 Saint John's Wood Court, and then to 105 Maida Vale, again apparently for monetary reasons, before Cowen finally succumbed to his 83 years of life.

Even in 1910, before Cowen had retired, his reputation was on the wane, and his name was being unconsciously removed from the history books – in William Daly's 'The History of Music' in *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.), Daly wrote: 'Of living [British] writers for the orchestra there are Prout, Sir A. C. Mackenzie, Stanford, Elgar, E. German, Cliffe, MacCunn, and others'.[79] Presumably Daly would have counted Cowen among these 'others'. Daly does mention Cowen in connection with British opera and oratorio, but, by his omission of him from the orchestral category (was not his *Scandinavian* symphony at one time the most played and most famous British symphonic export?), Daly tells us that his standing was already beginning to fall

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[78] Kennedy 1960, 110.
[79] Daly, W., 'The History of Music' in *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.)(London: Caxton Publishing Co. Ltd., *c.* 1910?), vol. 5., 164.

significantly.[80] H. C. Colles in the section entitled 'The British National Revival' in his *The Growth of Music* (1912), whilst discussing the contributions of Stanford, Mackenzie, Elgar, Samuel Wesley, Parry and Sullivan to the revival, he fails once to mention Cowen.[81] Even J. B. Preistley, a native of Bradford, who must have heard Cowen conduct at the St. George's Hall in that city on many occasions (as he has clear recollections of Richter conducting the Hallé Orchestra at the same venue), does not give Cowen a mention in the music section of his book *The Edwardians.* Equally, Percy Scholes in his 'A little Dictionary of British Composers of Our Own Times', part of his *The Complete Book of the Great Musicians,*[82] devotes pp.87-108 of the third book to a veritable role-call of all the recently deceased and living composers of the British Isles, and yet there is not one paragraph about Cowen![83] The decline in Cowen's popularity is evident from a survey of musical taste in the *Musical Times* entitled 'What were the Choral Societies Performing During the Season 1886-7?' and another done in the 1926-7 season. In the former, it identifies Cowen's choral works having been performed 13 times: 7 *Rose Maiden*, 6 *Sleeping Beauty.*[84] In the latter, he was performed just once, a rendition of the *Rose Maiden.*[85] Robert Elkin gives a depressing, but essentially accurate, summary of Cowen's last years:

> In his latter years...he was to find the current of musical affairs passing him by and leaving him rather pathetically neglected. As a witty rhymester and raconteur, he might still be in demand as an after-dinner speaker; as something of a connoisseur, his opinion might be

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[80] In fairness to Daly, in the fourth volume of the same book, he wrote a 'Biographical Dictionary of Musicians' in which he gives 12 lines to Cowen, 14 to Stanford, 16 to Parry, 20 to Mackenzie, 6 to MacCunn, 5 to German, 3 to Cliffe, and 13 to Prout. Astonishingly he only gives 8 lines to Tchaikovsky and 4 lines to Elgar, a reflection of different times, tastes and availability of music (Daly, W., 'Biographical Dictionary of Musicians' in *The Musical Educator* (ed. Greig, J.)(London: Caxton Publishing Co. Ltd., *c.* 1910?), vol. 4., 186-211.)

[81] Colles, H. C., *The Growth of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 500-4.

[82] Scholes, P., 'A little Dictionary of British Composers of Our Own Times' in *The Complete Book of the Great Musicians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 87-108.

[83] Scholes does list Ernest Austin, Edgar Bainton, Granville Bantock, Arnold Bax, Lord Berners, Arthur Bliss, John Borland, Rutland Boughton, York Bowen, Frank Bridge, George Butterworth, Walter Carroll, Adam Carse, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Benjamin Dale, Henry Walford Davies, Frederick Delius, Thomas Dunhill, George Dyson, Harry Farjeon, Ernest Farrar, H. Balfour Gardiner, Edward German, Cecil Gibbs, Eugene Goossens, Percy Grainger, Hamilton Harty, Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock), Joseph Holbrooke, Gustav Holst, Dorothy Howell, Herbert Howells, John Ireland, Alexander Mackenzie, John McEwen, Tobias Matthay, Ernest Moeran, Sydney Nicholson, Norman O'Neill, Norman Peterkin, Roger Quilter, Cyril Rootham, Alec Rowley, Cyril Scott, Geoffrey Shaw, Martin Shaw, Ethel Smyth, Arthur Somervell, Charles Stanford, Felix Swinstead, Ernest Walker, William Wallace, Felix White, William Whittaker, John Gerrard Williams, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Charles Wood. Elsewhere in the three volume set he mentions Sullivan, Parry and Elgar.

[84] Scholes, P. A., *The Mirror of Music: 1844-1944*, 2 vols. (London: Novello and Co. Ltd. and Oxford University Press, 1947), I, 145.

[85] Ibid., I, 147.

> sought on a first edition or a piece of old furniture or china; but his music, except for an occasional song or orchestral tit-bit, gradually passed out of the concert repertoire, while he himself vanished almost entirely from the public scene.[86]

In the modern world, when a celebrity or very important person dies, there is usually a retrospective interest in that person's work. However, in earlier times this was not always the case. Indeed, with Cowen's death we find almost no nostalgic curiosity in his music. George Bernard Shaw's ruinous analyses of Cowen's music; the negative, at times downright derogatory, *Musical Times* and *The Times* obituaries; Percy Scholes' confirmation in his *The Mirror of Music* that he shared the thrust of the *Musical Times* sentiments; the palatability to modern ears of Cowen's often flowery Victorian texts; and the preconceived notions that he wrote nothing greater than *The Better Land*; seem to have been fatal to Cowen's standing, and even today seem to be the main stumbling block to his re-establishment in the repertoire. However, by the time of Cowen's demise, the imperious march of Elgar's music and the younger generation had so surpassed Cowen's output that only a minority of reviews of the Edwardian age of British music deem Cowen laudable enough for discussion. Moreover, in the 1940s, just a few years after his death, Cowen had almost no reputation to speak of, if Russell Palmer's book *British Music* is taken as a guide: under the heading '"Foundation" Composers of Modern British Music' he wrote: 'There remain the "mighty handful" of British composers who removed their country from the state of creative musical impotence which had characterized Great Britain for the major part of the nineteenth century...'[87] and he lists some sixteen names, but alas, no Frederic Cowen.[88] Still more incredible is the fourth edition of *Who's Who in Music* (1962), where in its section on 'The Hallé Concerts Society' it says that 'Dr Hans Richter followed Hallé'.[89] How could Cowen's three stormy, but constructive years there be so easily ignored? Did a certain amount of backroom anti-Semitism play its part in perhaps a more dramatic fall in his reputation than

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[86] Elkin, 83.
[87] Palmer, R., *British Music* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1947?), 272.
[88] William Sterndale Bennett, George Butterworth, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Frederick Delius, Edward Elgar, Edward German, Ivor Gurney, Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock), Gustav Holst, Majory Kennedy-Fraser, Hamish MacCunn, Charles Hubert Parry, Cecil Sharp, John Stainer, Charles Stanford and Arthur Sullivan (Ibid., 272-283).
[89] Townend, P., and Simmons, D. (ed.), *Who's Who in Music* (London: Burke's Peerage Ltd., 1962), l.

would have otherwise been the case, or was it simply a matter that he had been shown wanting as a musician and composer by the up-and-coming generation that followed him? Indeed, it is also interesting to note that the much younger Henry Wood was knighted in the same year as Cowen, and that all of Cowen's main contemporaries had been honoured with knighthoods many years before him: Mackenzie (1895), Parry (1898), Stanford (1902) and Elgar (1904). While it could be argued that Mackenzie's, Parry's and Stanford's honours reflected their contributions to the musical academic life of the country, as well as their places as composers, and Elgar was seen as the seed of the future of British music, it is curious that Cowen's successful, varied and eventful career had not been acknowledged in such a way before. Perhaps, it suggests that there may have been some form of institutional anti-Jewish or at least anti-Cowen sentiment amongst those who had the influence to put his name forward for such an award, but this, of course, is mere speculation. Indeed, it may simply reflect the fact that he had so few supporters and admirers around him who were prepared to nominate him.

Considering Cowen was a principal conductor to the London Philharmonic, Hallé, [Royal] Liverpool Philharmonic and [Royal] Scottish [National] orchestras, it seems incredible that they and their recording companies continue to ignore so much interesting music that is a part of our British musical heritage. Indeed, until the Marco Polo label's release of the *Scandinavian* Symphony, *Indian Rhapsody*, and *The Butterfly's Ball* Overture on CD (8.223273) in 1990, Cowen's complete works had stayed more or less entirely unheard since his death, save a recording by the Vintage Light Music Society (RRE 190) that captured much of the early recorded material originally on 78 rpm records (including several with Cowen conducting himself), a few reissues on CD of other 78s with famous singers giving us their ballad repertoires, the 1983 *Opera Viva* recording of the 'Sestett' – 'Dear Prince, thy ring shall ever be' from *Pauline*, the recording of *The Welsh* Symphony by the City of Hull Youth Orchestra conducted by Geoffrey Heald-Smith in the mid-1980s (although it has never been issued) and the rendition of Cowen's *The Dream of Endymion* at Slough Parish Church on 28 September

2002.[90] Unfortunately, few of these do much to promote the finer qualities of Cowen's music. Only the recent (2006) issue of Cowen's *The Idyllic* Symphony on the Classico label shows any signs that there is a renewed curiosity in what this once significant British composer wrote and did. But it does show that there is more to Cowen's compositions than his present reputation suggests.

In one of Wagner's anti-Semitic outbursts, he refers to a prominent Jewish-born composer as having 'shown us that a Jew can have the richest abundance of specific talents, be a man of the broadest yet most refined culture, of the loftiest, most impeccable integrity, and yet not be able – not even once, with the help of all these qualities – to produce in us that deep, heart-seizing, soul-searching experience that we expect from art'.[91] Referring to the same composer, George Grove remarked: 'His genius had not been subjected to those fiery trials which seem necessary to ensure its abiding possession of the depths of the human heart...[He] was never more than temporarily unhappy. He did not know distress as he knew happiness'.[92] Both Wagner and Grove had Mendelssohn in mind here, but they could have equally have been referring to Cowen. Moreover, it is an unfortunate reality that by expurgating the repugnant anti-Semitic opening of Wagner's paragraph, we create an epitaph for Cowen which totally reflects his modern perception as a composer, as does Grove's citation, perhaps minus the word 'genius' (which most people may feel is not applicable to Cowen). Vaughan Williams said:

> The 'musicianly' composer has studied the whole anatomy of inspiration, and has found out all the mechanical means by which beautiful music is produced. Equipped with this knowledge, he proceeds to build up compositions with yard-measure and plumb-line, quite forgetting that no man can make a living body out of dead clay unless he has first stolen some of the heavenly fire...What we want in England is *real* music, even if it be only a music-hall song. Provided it possess real feeling and real life.[93]

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[90] This production of *The Dream of Endymion* was at the behest of Lewis Foreman and made possible by the extraction and the making of orchestral parts from the MS in the Royal College of Music, which was undertaken by myself.

[91] Magee, B., *Aspects of Wagner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 24.

[92] Grove, G., 'Mendelssohn', in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Fuller Maitland, J. A.)(Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1922), vol. 3, 177.

[93] Vaughan Williams, R. and Holst, G., *Heirs and Rebels* (Westport: Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1980), 27-8.

Indeed, within Cowen's *opera* one looks in vain for those profound, heart-wrenching moments, those portrayals of the graver aspects of emotion, that Vaughan Williamsonian 'heavenly fire', which show the hands of a master at work. Much of Cowen's more serious music is laudable, but shows few moments of true inspiration and has, therefore, proved wanting in the components essential for permanence. Talented, cultured, central to his country's musical life, and a redoubtable champion of British composers in a long and distinguished conducting career, as Cowen undoubtedly was, in evaluating his output as a composer in all forms and genres, it is difficult to find one *magnum opus* that shows that glimmer of true genius that marks out the first-rate composer from the rest of the pack. Indeed, Cowen's role in the British musical renaissance has thus far been judged as no more than insignificant or small. Sadly, despite a desire to prove otherwise, the evidence is not there to draw any other conclusion. One can only conclude and concur with the *Musical Times* when it said: 'Cowen served well his day and generation and offered them, whether they were choralists or merely listeners, a great deal of refined enjoyment'.[94]

[94] Scholes 1947, I, 106.