Towards the New Transcendental: Stylistic Trends in Contemporary American Choral Music with a Case Study on Eric Whitacre

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List of Publications

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‘“Bright Loud Light”: New Transcendentalism in the Works of Dale Trumbore and Jake Runestad’, Society for Musicology in Ireland Plenary Conference, University College Dublin, 20 June 2025

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii

List of Publications iii

Table of Contents iv

List of Abbreviations viii

List of Tables ix

List of Figures X

Abstract xx

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Towards New Transcendentalism: The American Choral Sound 11

- The Foundations of New Transcendentalism 12
  - Early Influences 12
  - The American Choral Timbre 17
  - Compositional Innovations 23
    - Morten Lauridsen 40
- Choral Infrastructure in the United States 46
  - The Brock Commission 50
- A School? A Style? A Genre? A Tool? 52
- Conclusion 58

Chapter Two: Analysing New Transcendentalism: A Combinative Approach 60

- Methodological Challenges 61
  - On Tonality 61
- Review of Existing Methodologies 64
  - Larson's Textural Density Analysis 69
- Howland's Integrated Parametric Structures (IPSs) 75
  - Sample IPS Analysis: *Lux aurumque* 80
    - Departure/Return IPS Group 81
    - Directional IPS Group 83
    - Parallel Episode 85
- Critical Score Analysis 89
- Interviews 91
- Conclusion 92

Chapter Three: The Fundamentals of New Transcendentalism: Eric Whitacre as Case Study 93
Scholarly Reception 97
Water Night (1994) 99
IPS Analysis 101
Critical Score Analysis 110
Secundal and Clustered Harmony 111
Polychordal Harmony 113
Altered Chordal Harmony 115
'i thank You God for most this amazing day' (1999) 117
IPS Analysis 119
Critical Score Analysis 122
Polychordalism 124
Cluster Chords and Secundal Harmony 131
A Boy and a Girl (2002) 133
IPS Analysis 135
Critical Score Analysis 139
Secundal Harmony 140
Silences 142
Her Sacred Spirit Soars (2002) 143
IPS Analysis 145
Critical Score Analysis 150
Extended Harmonies 150
i carry your heart (2016) 153
IPS Analysis 154
Critical Score Analysis 162
Subverted Tonality 162
Bifurcated Texture 166
Stylistic Features 167
Secundal Harmony and Cluster Chords 167
Bifurcation 169
Polychordal and Polytriadic Harmony 171
Tonality: Pandiatonicism and the Lydian Mode 173

Tension/Release Phrases Mimicking the 'Musical Breath' 175
Conclusion: Refining his Technique 177
Chapter Four: Expanding New Transcendentalism: Comparative Analysis 179
IPS Analysis 182
Spirited Light (Runestad) 183
After the Storm Passes (Trumbore) 188
'Selah' (Forrest) 193
I Will Stand With You (Garrett) 199
I Should Be Glad (LaBarr) 202
Conclusion 205
Comparative Critical Score Analysis 206
Secundal Harmony 206
Cluster Chords 219
Bifurcation 235
Alternative Approaches to Texture 248
Pandiatonicism 256
Harmonic Frameworks 259
The Extended Chord of IV 267
New Approaches to Timbre 278
Conclusion 281
Chapter Five: Understanding New Transcendentalism: Discussion and Conclusions 283
The Combinative Approach 284
Harmony/Pandiatonicism 285
The Lydian Mode 286
Cluster Chords 291
The Floating Effect 295
The American Choral Directors Association 296
The Emic Composer 298
The Commercial/Academic Divide 301
The Future of New Transcendentalism 304
New Directions in America 306
Further Research 311

Other Composers and Works 311
Influences in Popular Music 315
Conclusions 317
Bibliography 320
Appendices 332
Appendix A: Ethics Approval 332
Appendix B: Plain Language Statement 333
Appendix C: Eric Whitacre Interview Transcript 335
Appendix D: Jake Runestad Interview Transcript 356
Appendix E: Dale Trumbore Interview Transcript 368
Appendix F: Dan Forrest Interview Transcript 383
Appendix G: Email Correspondence with Dan Forrest 408
Appendix H: Marques L.A. Garrett Interview Transcript 409
Appendix I: Susan LaBarr Interview Transcript 422

List of Abbreviations

IPS	Integrated Parametric System
CSA	Critical Score Analysis
ACDA	American Choral Director's Association
UNLV	University of Nevada, Las Vegas

List of Tables

Table 1.1: The number of performances of the most highly-performed composers at ACDA National Conventions from 1960–1987. 48

Table 1.2: The number of performances of the most highly-performed composers at ACDA National Conventions from 1991–2019. 48

Table 2.1: Patricia Howland's Integrated Parametric Structures, adapted from Parks, 2021, pp. 61–62 (adapted from Parks, 2021). 77

Table 2.2: IPS Analysis of *Lux aurumque*. 81

Table 3.1: IPS Analysis of *Water Night*. 101

Table 3.2: The palindromic structure of IPS Groups in *Water Night*. 102

Table 3.3: IPS-Group Structure of 'i thank You God.' 119

Table 3.4: Modulations in 'i thank You God for most this amazing day.' 123

Table 3.5: IPS Analysis of *A Boy and a Girl*. 135

Table 3.6: IPS Analysis of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. 146

Table 3.7: Structure of *i carry your heart*. 155

Table 4.1: IPS Analysis of *Spirited Light*. 184

Table 4.2: IPS Analysis of *After the Storm Passes*. 189

Table 4.3: IPS Analysis of 'Selah' by Dan Forrest. 194

Table 4.4: IPS Analysis of *I Will Stand with You* by Marques L.A. Garrett. 200

Table 4.5: IPS Analysis of *I Should be Glad*. 203

Table 4.6: The structure of *I Should Be Glad*. 204

Table 4.7: Modulations in *After the Storm Passes*. 260

Table 4.8: Modulations in *Spirited Light*. 263

Table 4.9: Key/mode changes in 'Selah'. 266

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: The opening seven bars of William Billings' *Jargon*. 14
Figure 1.2: Little and Smith's shape-notation. 15
Figure 1.3: 'Amazing Grace', set for the first time to the tune 'New Britain' in *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (1835). 15
Figure 1.4: Homophonic writing in the opening nine bars of Schubert's *Die Nacht* for male-voice choir. 21
Figure 1.5: The polytonal opening of *Psalm 67* by Charles Ives. 24
Figure 1.6: Bichordal expansion in bars 29–30 of Whitacre's *Water Night*. 26
Figure 1.7: Ives' *Psalm 67* chord, quoted in Whitacre's 'i thank You God for most this amazing day', bar 25. 26
Figure 1.8: Dense whole-tone cluster chords emerging from a unison middle C in *Psalm 90*, bars 60–65. 27
Figure 1.9: A secundal cluster chord in bars 47–48 of *Water Night*. 28
Figure 1.10: Whole-tone clusters in the opening of Runestad's *Alleluia*. 29
Figure 1.11: Cluster chords in Cowell's ... *if He please*, bars 27–40. 31
Figure 1.12: Clustered approximated pitches in Nystedt's *De profundis*, bars 19–22. 32
Figure 1.13: The opening two bars of Nystedt's *Immortal Bach*. 33
Figure 1.14: The series of cluster chords arising from the heterophonic singing of the first two bars of *Immortal Bach*. 33
Figure 1.15: A seventeen-part cluster chord in *When David Heard*, bars 13–19. 34
Figure 1.16: The opening chords of Fissinger's *Lux aeterna*. 36
Figure 1.17: Lydian cluster chords and bifurcated textures in Paynter's *The Rose*, bars 38–40. 37
Figure 1.18: Oscillating cluster chords over a contralto solo in the coda of Paynter's *The Rose*. 38
Figure 1.19: oscillating chords, repeating while reducing in dynamic 'to a whisper', at the coda of Whitacre's *Sleep*, bars 71–74. 39
Figure 1.20: A G-sharp 9 chord in second inversion in bars 38–40 of Fissinger's *Lux aeterna*. 40
Figure 1.21: The opening four bars of Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*. 42
Figure 1.22: The opening phrase of Lauridsen's 'O nata lux'. 43

Figure 1.23: A variant of the ‘Lauridsen Progression’ in the opening three bars of *Ubi Caritas et Amor*. 44
Figure 2.1: An extended D chord emerging from a clustered A melodic minor scale in Whitacre’s *Cloudburst*, bars 65–69. 62
Figure 2.2: A B-flat chord with both a major and minor third in *Sainte-Chappelle*, bar 43. 62
Figure 2.3: Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s prolongational tree. 65
Figure 2.4: The first three chords of *A Boy and a Girl* are non-diatonically related major chords in direct parallel motion. 65
Figure 2.5: A fourteen-part secundal chord built on E-flat in Whitacre’s *Water Night*, bars 46–9. 67
Figure 2.6: Chordal sonorities heard in the first eighteen bars of *i carry your heart*. 68
Figure 2.7: Larson’s textural density analysis of the opening eight bars of *Leonardo*. 70
Figure 2.8: Textural density variation in the first eight bars of *Leonardo* represented on a graph. 71
Figure 2.9: Textural density variation over the entirety of *Leonardo*. 71
Figure 2.10: Textural density in bars 15–23 of *i carry your heart*. 72
Figure 2.11: Textural density in bars 15–23 of *i carry your heart* represented on a linear graph. 73
Figure 2.12: Textural density in bars 1–23 of *i carry your heart* represented on a linear graph. 73
Figure 2.13: The opening Departure/Return phrase of *Water Night*, bars 1–5. 79
Figure 2.14: A Steady State phrase in ‘i thank You God for most this amazing day’, bars 76–82. 79
Figure 2.15: A steady-state IPS of oscillating chords, shown in blue, on the word ‘Lux’, bars 1–8. 81
Figure 2.16: An Decreasing Directional phrase on the word ‘calida’ in bars 9–12. 82
Figure 2.17: A Decreasing Directional phrase on the word ‘gravisque’, bars 13–17. 83
Figure 2.18: An Increasing Directional phrase in bars 17–21 (shown in red), followed by a Decreasing Directional phrase in bars 22–23 (shown in green) in *Lux aurumque*. 84
Figure 2.19: An Increasing Directional phrase in bars 24–29 of *Lux aurumque*. 84
Figure 2.20: A Steady State phrase in C-sharp minor, *Lux aurumque*, bars 30–38. 86

Figure 2.21: A Steady State phrase in C-sharp major, *Lux aurumque*, bars 38–48. 87
Figure 2.22: A repeated vi–I–IV–V progression in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 46–49. 90
Figure 2.23: American Standard Pitch Notation. 91
Figure 3.1: the opening B-Lydian cluster chord of 'Go Lovely Rose' (shown in red). 94
Figure 3.2: The opening Departure/Return phrase of *Water Night*, bars 1–5. 103
Figure 3.3: The coda of *Water Night*, bars 53–59. 103
Figure 3.4: Increasing textural density in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 25–26 of *Water Night*. 104
Figure 3.5: Rising register (green) and increased textural density (red) in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 27–28 of *Water Night*. 105
Figure 3.6: Increasing textural density (shown in red), rising register, and increasing dynamics in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 29–32 of *Water Night*. 106
Figure 3.7: The central Tension/Release phrase of *Water Night*, bars 33–37. 107
Figure 3.8: the Decreasing Directional phrase in bars 38–41 of *Water Night*. 108
Figure 3.9: Decreasing terraced dynamics and decreasing register between IPSs in the Decreasing Directional IPS group in *Water Night*, bars 16–24. 109
Figure 3.10: A fourteen-part secundal cluster chord in bar 48 of *Water Night*. 111
Figure 3.11: An eleven-part cluster chord over a G-flat major chord in bar 34 of *Water Night*. 112
Figure 3.12: Clustered harmonies in bar 41 of *Water Night*. 112
Figure 3.13: Polychordal harmony in *Water Night*, bb. 17–18. 114
Figure 3.14: Polychordal *divisi* in *Water Night*, bars 29–30. 115
Figure 3.15: An extended flat-7 sharp-11 chord in bars 23–24 of *Water Night*. 116
Figure 3.16: A cluster chord on the A melodic minor scale, *Cloudburst* bb. 65–69. 117
Figure 3.17: Directional (Increasing) IPS in the opening seven bars of 'i thank You God'. 120
Figure 3.18: Directional (Decreasing) IPS in 'i thank You God', bars 7–10. 121
Figure 3.19: Offset parametric changes in bars 57–61 of 'i thank You God.' 122
Figure 3.20: A simple Phrygian chant-like theme in bars 76–82 of 'i thank You God'. 124

Figure 3.21: The opening polychord of Ives' *Psalm 67* (left), with the key signature of C major in the upper voices and G minor in the lower voices, and bar 25 of 'i thank You God' featuring a C major chord in the sopranos and altos above a G minor chord in the tenors and basses (right). 125
Figure 3.22: A D-dorian cluster in bar 68 of 'i thank You God', shown in green. 126
Figure 3.23: Polychordal voice exchange in the soprano and alto parts of 'i thank You God', bars 21–23. 127
Figure 3.24: Voice exchange between the soprano and alto parts in 'i thank You God', bars 72–74. 128
Figure 3.25: Chordal writing in the tenors and basses under an extended C major chord in the soprano and alto parts in 'i thank You God', bars 44–46. 129
Figure 3.26: Polychordal ending of 'i thank You God'. 130
Figure 3.27: An eleven-note cluster chord spanning from A3 in the bass 1 to D5 in the soprano 1 in bar 84 of 'i thank You God' (shown in blue) over an open fifth on B2 in the lower bass parts. 132
Figure 3.28: Octavio Paz's 'A Boy and a Girl', translated by Muriel Rukeyser, transcribed by Eric Whitacre. 133
Figure 3.29: A painting by Whitacre used as a visual tool during the composition of *A Boy and a Girl*, outlining the 'Emotional Architecture' of the work. 134
Figure 3.30: A 'Style Sheet' of *A Boy and a Girl* created by Whitacre during the compositional process. 134
Figure 3.21: Short Directional (Increasing) IPSs in *A Boy and a Girl* permeated by pauses, bars 18–20. 136
Figure 3.32: The Tension/Release and Directional (Decreasing) IPSs in bars 38–43 are bookended by bars of silence which are not considered part of the phrase. 137
Figure 3.33: The opening Directional (Increasing) IPS of *A Boy and a Girl*. 138
Figure 3.34: Consecutive major chords with added ninths in the opening bar of *A Boy and a Girl*. 139
Figure 3.35: Parallel added 11 chords in *A Boy and a Girl*, bar 7. 140
Figure 3.36: A four-note cluster chord between the bass 1 and alto 1 in bar 25 of *A Boy and a Girl*. 141
Figure 3.37: A four note cluster in the soprano and alto parts in bar 32 of *A Boy and a Girl*. 141

Figure 3.38: The octuple canon on the C aeolian scale that opens *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. 145
Figure 3.39: The opening Departure/Return IPS of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. 147
Figure 3.40: A Steady State phrase on the seventh and eighth lines of the poem (red), followed by a Directional (Increasing) Phrase on the word 'profound' (green). 148
Figure 3.41: The climactic ending of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. 149
Figure 3.42: Parallel seventh chords in the soprano, alto and tenor parts of Choir I in the opening phrase. 150
Figure 3.43: A climactic polychord of A-flat major and F minor 9 in bar 64. 152
Figure 3.44: *i carry your heart*, bars 1–3. 155
Figure 3.45: Building tension in bars 7–9 of *i carry your heart*. 156
Figure 3.46: Decreasing parameters in bars 10–15 of *i carry your heart*. 157
Figure 3.47: Low parametric values at the beginning of the second IPS-group in bar 28 of *i carry your heart*. 158
Figure 3.48: Tenor and bass entry at bar 32 of *i carry your heart*. 158
Figure 3.49: Increase in parametric values in bars 37–43 of *i carry your heart*. 159
Figure 3.50: Linking passage in bar 43 followed by the beginning of the Decreasing Directional phrase in bar 44 of *i carry your heart*. 160
Figure 3.51: Decreasing parametric values in bars 46–49 of *i carry your heart*. 160
Figure 3.52: The coda of *i carry your heart*, bars 49–57. 161
Figure 3.53: chordal harmonies in the first eighteen bars of *i carry your heart*. 163
Figure 3.54: Harmonically ambiguous chord in *i carry your heart*, bar 18. 163
Figure 3.55: Every chord with G in the lowest voice in *i carry your heart* with bar numbers of the occurrences shown above. 164
Figure 3.56: Tonally ambiguous chord heard in bars 4 and 53 of *i carry your heart*. 165
Figure 3.57: Examples of pandiatonic chordal extensions using secundal harmonies within a triadic context. 167
Figure 3.58: A polychord of F-sharp major (red) and G-sharp major (green) in 'With a Lily in Your Hand', bar 51. 172
Figure 3.59: Prominence of the chord of IV in varying inversions in the opening phrase of 'i thank You God.' 174
Figure 3.60: The chord of VI in B-flat minor at the climax of *Water Night*, bar 34. 174

Figure 4.1: A Parallel Episode IPS Group in the opening four bars of *Spirited Light*. 185
Figure 4.2: A Tension/Release IPS in *Spirited Light*, bars 12–19. 186
Figure 4.3: A Tension/Release IPS Group in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 23–31, articulated by Solo 3 and Solo 4 singing a perfect octave on A-flat. 190
Figure 4.4: The opening IPS of *After the Storm Passes*, articulated with three beats of silence. 192
Figure 4.5: Parametric values decreasing in the soprano line (green) while increasing in the alto line (purple), *After the Storm Passes*, bar 13. 193
Figure 4.6: A Parallel Episode in 'Selah', bars 1–17. 195
Figure 4.7: A Parallel Episode in 'Selah', bars 24–43. 197
Figure 4.8: The repeated Steady State phrase in bars 69–72 of *I Will Stand with You*. 201
Figure 4.9: A Tension/Release phrase in bars 7–10 of *I Should Be Glad*. 202
Figure 4.10: Directional (Increasing) phrase with a dramatic crescendo in bar 36, *I Should Be Glad*. 204
Figure 4.11: The accented 'light' motif in the upper voices in bar 2 of *Spirited Light*. 207
Figure 4.12: The 'light' motif reappearing in bar 21 of *Spirited Light*. 208
Figure 4.13: A D major 9 chord sung in *falsetto* by the tenor and bass parts in *Spirited Light*, bars 61–62. 208
Figure 4.14: Secundal harmonies in all voices in the opening twelve bars of 'Holy'. 209
Figure 4.15: Secundal clashes in multiple parts in bar 40 of *Entreat Me Not To Leave You*. 210
Figure 4.16: Secundal harmony in *Light of Late November*, bars 52–54. 211
Figure 4.17: Secundal clashes spaced apart to avoid full cluster sonorities in *Nyon Nyon*, bars 37–40. 211
Figure 4.18: The first instance of the recurring 'clarion' melody of 'Selah', bars 2–7. 212
Figure 4.19: The 'Lauridsen chord' at the beginning of *O magnum mysterium*. 213
Figure 4.20: The 'Lauridsen chord' at the beginning of *O nata lux* (shown in blue). 214
Figure 4.21: The secondary 'Lauridsen chord' in bar 4 of *O nata lux*. 214
Figure 4.22: The secondary 'Lauridsen chord' in the opening of 'Selah'. 215
Figure 4.23: The secondary Lauridsen chord (red) resolving to the parallel major, C major, in bars 9–10. 216
Figure 4.24: Secundal harmony in the introduction of *I Should Be Glad*. 217

Figure 4.25: Conventional (blue) and non-functional (red) secundal harmonies in *Angele Dei*, bars 8–14. 217
Figure 4.26: Secundal harmony in bars 7–10 of *My Heart Be Brave*. 218
Figure 4.27: Dramatic whole-tone cluster chords in the opening of *Alleluia*. 221
Figure 4.28: The return of the opening cluster-chord theme in B-lydian in bars 105–108 of *Alleluia*. 221
Figure 4.29: A four-note cluster chord (red) with an additional secundal clash in the soprano parts (blue) in the opening bars of *Nyon Nyon*. 222
Figure 4.30: A D-ionian tetrachord in the soprano and alto voices in *Spirited Light*, bar 7. 223
Figure 4.31: B-lydian tetrachords in bars 10 and 11 of *Spirited Light*. 223
Figure 4.32: Cluster chords creating extended A-flat-lydian chords in bars 25–28 of 'Selah'. 224
Figure 4.33: Six-note cluster chords in 'Selah', bars 31–34. 225
Figure 4.34: Four-note cluster chords in the bass 1 and tenor parts in the opening three bars of *After The Storm Passes*. 226
Figure 4.35: Six-note (green), five-note (red) and four-note (blue) cluster chords in bars 18–21 of *After the Storm Passes*. 227
Figure 4.36: A series of cluster chords (blue) featuring a six-note cluster chord (red) in *Light of Late November*, bars 45–46. 228
Figure 4.37: A cluster harmony in bar 2 of *I Will Stand With You* between the bass 1 and alto 2 voices (shown in red). 229
Figure 4.38: Stacked secundal harmonies in the upper and lower voices in bar 35 of *I Will Stand With You*. 230
Figure 4.39: Brief cluster harmonies in *My Heart Be Brave*, bar 11. 231
Figure 4.40: Heterophony in 'Selah', bar 59. 232
Figure 4.41: Indeterminacy in the between the chords in bars 82 and 83 of 'Selah.' 233
Figure 4.42: Three-note secundal clashes in bars 55–58 of *Angele Dei*. 234
Figure 4.43: A five-note cluster at the end of the Bridge section of *I Should Be Glad*, bar 45. 234
Figure 4.44: Bichordal harmony in bars 5–6 of *I Will Stand With You*. 236

Figure 4.45: The bass voices provide harmonic pedals and rhythmic contrast under gospel-like homophonic textures in the other voices in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 53–58. 237
Figure 4.46: Bifurcation of textural units between the upper and lower voices in *I Should Be Glad*. 238
Figure 4.47: polyphonic triplet figures in the upper voices over homophonic declamation of text in the lower voices in Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard*, bars 34–37. 239
Figure 4.48: Textural variation in the opening two bars of *Spirited Light*. 240
Figure 4.49: Heterophony in the upper voices juxtaposed with homophony in the lower voices in *Spirited Light*, bars 55–59. 241
Figure 4.50: Homophonic textures as Forrest introduces the mode of A-flat-lydian in 'Selah', bars 18–19. 243
Figure 4.51: Bifurcation of homophonic texture and an offset tenor 2 pedal in 'Selah', bars 25–28. 243
Figure 4.52: A variation of the clarion melody sung in octaves by the soprano 2 and tenor 2 over the homophonic A-flat-lydian chord progression at the climax of 'Selah' in bar 60. 244
Figure 4.53: Double-antiphonal texture in bars 43–49 of 'Selah'. 245
Figure 4.54: Bifurcated textures between the upper and lower voice parts with inner counterpoint in the lower voices in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 53–57. 246
Figure 4.55: Three textural units presented simultaneously in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 18–21. 247
Figure 4.56: Fugal subject of *Spirited Light* in the bass voice, bars 37–42. 248
Figure 4.57: The second entry of the fugue theme in the soprano voice part. 249
Figure 4.58: The dramatic descending whole tone scales concluding the fugal section of *Spirited Light*. 249
Figure 4.59: A triplet rhythm in the alto 3 against tenor 1 syncopated quavers in *After the Storm Passes*, bar 1. 251
Figure 4.60: Motion between the alto 3 and tenor 1 changes from metrical unison in bar 5 to micropolyphony in bar 6. 251
Figure 4.61: Rhythmic variation in imitation between the soprano and alto voices, bars 12–13. 252

Figure 4.62: The text ‘I am truly sorry’ is passed between voice parts in bars 46–51. 253
Figure 4.63: Internal movement (shown in red) and delayed entries (shown in blue) adding textural interest and contras to the opening chordal declamations of *I Will Stand with You*. 254
Figure 4.64: Homophonic textures disrupted by offset rhythms in the alto and tenor parts in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 69–72. 254
Figure 4.65: An extended, inverted chord in the opening phrase of *I Should Be Glad*. 257
Figure 4.66: A held chord with a secundal clash in the upper voices in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 7–11. 257
Figure 4.67: Third-related and chromatic chord progression in bars 102–103 of *Entreat Me Not To Leave You*. 258
Figure 4.68: A cadence in bar 17 of *After the Storm Passes* arriving on F-lydian in bar 18, followed by the establishment of the key of C major through the bass melody. 261
Figure 4.69: The opening four bars of *Spirited Light* cycle through C-dorian (blue), C minor (red), A major (green) and B major (yellow). 264
Figure 4.70: An extended chord of IV in *Good Night, Dear Heart*, bars 15–16. 268
Figure 4.71: An extended chord of IV in the introduction of *Let My Love Be Heard*, shown in blue. 269
Figure 4.72: The extended chord of IV in the final bar of *Let My Love Be Heard*. 270
Figure 4.73: An alternative voicing of the extended chord of IV at the climax of *Let My Love Be Heard*, bars 44–45 (shown in blue). 270
Figure 4.74: Identically voiced extended IV chords in Forrest’s *Good Night, Dear Heart* (left) and Runestad’s *Let My Love Be Heard* (right). 271
Figure 4.75: An extended chord of ii in *Angele Dei*, bar 57. 272
Figure 4.76: An extended chord of IV in Whitacre’s *A Boy and a Girl*, bar 39. 272
Figure 4.77: Extended chords of IV in Garrett’s *I Will Stand With You*, bars 46–49. 273
Figure 4.78: An extended IV chord at the climax of Garrett’s *My Heart Be Brave*, bar 56. 274
Figure 4.80: An extended chord of IV in D major at the beginning of the ‘Bridge’ section of LaBarr’s *I Should Be Glad*, bar 37. 274
Figure 4.81: An extended chord of IV in B-flat major during a brief third-based modulation in bar 43 of *I Should Be Glad*. 275

Figure 4.82: An extended chord of IV in Trumbore's *Like Something Newly Freed*, bar 73. 276
Figure 4.83: A dramatic extended chord of IV in bar 7 of Trumbore's *Light of Late November*. 277
Figure 4.84: The tonic chord (red) and the subdominant chord (blue) in the chord of IV with added seventh and ninth. 278
Figure 4.85: Exaggerated diphthongs on the text 'wow' in the final bars of *Nyon Nyon*. 279
Figure 4.86: Timbral Augmentation in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 14–16. 280
Figure 5.1: Russell's arrangement of the C-lydian scale in primary (quintal), tertian, and scalar formation. 286
Figure 5.2: An E-flat major chord with a flat seventh and a sharpened eleventh in bars 23–24 of *Water Night*. 288
Figure 5.3: A cluster chord on an ascending A melodic minor chord in *Cloudburst*, bars 65–69. 289
Figure 5.4: A Lydian cluster chord in *Chorale after an old French Carol*, bar 9. 290
Figure 5.5: Secundal harmony in bars 58 and 60 of Roger Emerson's arrangement of 'Kiss The Sky' (2024). 308
Figure 5.6: An extended chord of IV at the end of Jennifer Lucy Cook's *Over and Over*. 309

Abstract

Towards the New Transcendental: Stylistic Trends in Contemporary American Choral Music with a Case Study on Eric Whitacre

Kevin Boushel

Since the release of Morten Lauridsen's (b. 1943) celebrated *O magnum mysterium* (1994) and the meteoric success of Eric Whitacre (b. 1970) in the 1990s, expansive choral textures and non-functional tonal harmony have defined the sound of much choral output in the United States, dominating concert programs and album recordings. Their works are characterised by pandiatonic and extended harmonies, alongside thick, homophonic and antiphonic textures, in which voice parts are grouped together to form textural units. While Whitacre is the only composer to write exclusively in this style, elements of this compositional palette can be found in works by many contemporary choral composers developing and expanding on the technique.

Despite the widespread popularity of this style of composition, its proponents have received little scholarly attention. The term 'New Transcendentalism' has been applied to the style, though it has not been established in research. This thesis presents analysis of select works by composers of New Transcendental music with a case study on Whitacre in order to identify the common musical features that link their works and to firmly establish New Transcendentalism as a term for this idiosyncratic style. Alongside interviews with the composers under review, a combinative approach incorporating Patricia Howland's Integrated Parametric Structure Analysis and Critical Score Analysis is presented for illuminating the structure and compositional features of New Transcendental works, providing a basis for future scholarship on this emerging style of choral composition. Through comparative analysis of the music of Whitacre alongside works by Dale Trumbore (b. 1987), Jake Runestad (b. 1986), Dan Forrest (b. 1978), Marques L.A. Garrett (b. 1984), and Susan LaBarr (b. 1981), alongside interviews with the composers under review, this research highlights developments in New Transcendentalism beyond its two epochal figures, inviting further research into this new approach to choral composition.

Introduction

> *There's a style that I'm known for, that when I look at the totality of my catalogue, is a bit anomalous. As much as I definitely have this dark star that I gravitate around—this gooey, milky, honey inner world that I fall towards—I'm fascinated by and inspired by reason.*[1]
>
> Eric Whitacre, 2022

The soundworld pioneered by the American choral composer Eric Whitacre (b. 1970) and his contemporaries has dominated choral concert programmes and album recordings in the United States over the last three decades. Composers such as Jake Runestad (b. 1986), Dale Trumbore (b. 1987), Dan Forrest (b. 1978), Susan LaBarr (b. 1981), and Marques L. A. Garrett (b. 1984) are frequently performed at national choral conventions and appear on many collegiate choral programmes in the United States. The widespread popularity of this repertoire is due in large part to stylistic trends present in the repertoire that are appealing to singers, conductors, and audiences of choral music. These include the use of accessible, pandiatonic harmonic frameworks in much of their work, based largely upon traditional harmonic modes and scales combined with clustered and extended harmonies, and the use of thick, 'wall-of-sound' textures, drawing upon a heritage of dense choral timbres in American choral music. Composed for unaccompanied voices, these chordal sonorities have created a novel and captivating sound, sparking a surge of interest in contemporary American choral music. These shared compositional features suggest the emergence of a new set of stylistic and compositional tools. The research presented in this thesis explores the emerging choral style of 'New Transcendentalism'—a term attributed to the choral historian Nick Strimple.[2] This thesis focuses on developments within the style demonstrated through critical analysis of select works

[1] Hannah Fiddy, 'Interview: Eric Whitacre', *alternative classical*, online, 2022 <https://www.alternativeclassical.co.uk/interviews/eric-whitacre> [Accessed 8 February 2023].

[2] Paul Mealor, 'Music from the New Transcendental School' (keynote lecture, Association of British Choral Directors Convention 2019, Royal Conservatoire Birmingham UK, August 22, 2019), cited in Seán Doherty, 'Toward "Transcendence": Music and Meditation in Michael McGlynn's O Maria', *The Choral Journal*, 62 (2022), 8–19, p. 9. Despite the attribution of the term to Strimple, it is yet to appear in any of his published work.

by US composers between 1994 and 2021.[3] Each of the composers mentioned above has engaged with New Transcendentalism to varying degrees over the course of their careers, though none has engaged with the style as exclusively or as prolifically as Whitacre.

The music of Eric Whitacre has had a significant impact on the American choral sphere since the first major performance of his work at the Western Region conference of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) in 1992. He has received commissions from prestigious institutions, including the BBC Proms, the King's Singers, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and the ACDA Raymond Brock Memorial Commission. He rose to widespread prominence with his highly popular 'Virtual Choir' videos, the first of which was uploaded to YouTube in March 2010. The video, featuring the voices of 185 singers from twelve different countries singing his *a cappella* work *Lux Aurumque* (2000) went viral, receiving over one million views within two months.[4] While most of the composers listed above have experimented with other musical styles, Whitacre has rarely deviated from the musical language of New Transcendentalism in his choral output, instead developing an idiosyncratic compositional voice and creating a niche soundworld for which he has gained worldwide recognition. Andrew Larson noted that Whitacre's name is frequently invoked in choral rehearsals as an adjective to describe clashing harmonies.[5] As Whitacre engages with New Transcendentalism most prominently, and serves as an archetype of the style, select works are examined in an in-depth case study in Chapter Three.

Despite their widespread popularity of New Transcendentalism among choral audiences and performers, the repertoire of these composers, as well as contemporary American composers of a similar style, has been largely overlooked in scholarly literature. Chester Alwes, in *A History of Western Choral Music* (2015), refers to 'those twenty-first-century American composers whose music has become popular' in the context of the compositional innovations of Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943), but trends and common stylistic features linking these composers are not discussed beyond the observation that much of their

[3] While composers of this style are most concentrated in North America, composers in Europe such as Paul Mealor (b. 1975), Kim André Arnesen (b. 1980) and Ēriks Ešenvalds (b. 1977), have also incorporated this compositional language into their music, and have had their works widely performed in the United States.
[4] Eric Whitacre, 'Virtual Choir 1: Lux Aurumque', *Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir* (online), <https://ericwhitacre.com/the-virtual-choir/history/vc1-luxaurumque> [Accessed 8 February 2023]. It has since garnered over seven million views, presaging the eventual popularity of virtual choir projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.
[5] Andrew Larson, 'Textural Density in the Choral Music of Eric Whitacre', *The Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 22–33, p. 23.

output takes the form of choral octavos rather than larger works.[6] Beyond cursory suggestions of a shared compositional language, there is a lack of comparative critical analysis to expose the nature and breadth of these stylistic trends.

One contributing factor to this dearth of scholarship may be the historic neglect of *a cappella* choral music in music academia outside of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, resulting in a lack of pre-existing literature upon which to build scholarly discourse. Since choral musicians are often amateur, untrained singers, unlike orchestral musicians who undergo years of institutional or conservatory training, choral music is often seen as a less 'serious' art form. This bias against the intellectual rigour of choral composition has resulted in a wealth of scholarly discourse on instrumental music and a paucity of literature on choral music.

Addressing this lack of scholarly literature, the current study is steered by the following research questions:

1. What are the stylistic features of New Transcendentalism as exemplified in the choral music of Eric Whitacre?
2. To what extent do other American choral composers beyond Whitacre engage with this compositional language?
3. Do these stylistic trends indicate a new school of compositional thought?

It is envisaged that this research will contribute to solidifying the characteristics of this style in choral scholarship, offering an analytical framework for analysing New Transcendentalism and identifying its stylistic traits. This framework will equip future scholars with a firmer analytical footing in their analysis of New Transcendentalism, uncovering the breadth of its influence among other North American composers, as well as international composers. Through understanding these compositional trends in contemporary American choral music, we can ascertain how the artform has evolved in recent decades, contextualising programming choices for choral concerts and informing curricula for university-level choral literature offerings into the future.

Within the field of choral scholarship, this style of composition is occasionally perceived as simplistic or shallow. An example of this is Alwes' unflattering characterisation of commercially successful contemporary choral composers, in which he flippantly describes

[6] Chester Lee Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 316.

Eric Whitacre as an 'internet celebrity composer'.[7] Alwes contends that the large number of composers that have engaged with this style are motivated by commercial success:

> [C]omposers in any region of the world, no matter how geographically isolated, can now assess what is commercially popular and marketable, focusing on what is currently in fashion. The result is a disturbingly monochromatic array of music that, while filled with pretty sounds, is bereft of contrapuntal rigor, less attentive to the meaning of the text, and therefore more likely to result in quantity than variety of individual utterance.[8]

While no other composers are directly named in this indictment on the final page of the volume, it is apparent that the author is alluding to 'those twenty-first-century American composers whose music has become popular' referred to earlier.[9] The prioritising of polyphony as a fundamental trait of choral music with intrinsic artistic value betrays a traditionalist, Eurocentric perspective. Alwes' leaning towards traditional musical forms permeates choral scholarship, leading to the dismissal of this contemporary style of choral music as unworthy of academic scrutiny. The analysis presented in this thesis will uncover the high degree of compositional thought that exists in each of these composers' works, and will examine how they construct this idiosyncratic soundworld through the combination of conventional and modern compositional techniques.

This study challenges the characterisation of New Transcendentalism as less artistically significant than other choral artforms. Through use of a combinative framework of analysis combining Critical Score Analysis with elements of Patricia Howland's Integrated Parametric Structure (IPS) Analysis,[10] this thesis will demonstrate the high level of artistic thought behind these compositions, revealing the logic that governs their sound and structure. The importance attributed to polyphony in Alwes' assessment ignores the wealth of choral music through the centuries that has pushed the boundaries of other parameters while adhering to simpler textures, such as homophony and antiphony. This research seeks to present a new mode of analysis for future scholarship into this burgeoning field of choral production. Comparative analysis with this combinative methodological approach unlocks the epistemological possibilities of uncovering shared compositional traits and common influences. However, emerging attitudes within musicology raise criticisms of such narrative discourse that must be considered.

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[7] Alwes, p. 384.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., p. 316.
[10] See Patricia Howland, 'Formal Structures in Post-Tonal Music', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 37 (2015), 71–97.

The dearth of scholarship on recent stylistic trends in American choral music may also stem from an aversion towards generalisation among both composers and musicologists. The fear of being pigeon-holed leads many composers to resist their categorisation under any one specific label of composition. This has been recognised by scholarship, as the creation of such labels inevitably delineates in-groups and out-groups, a dichotomy that is increasingly problematic given the historical context of the United States regarding musicians and composers from marginalised backgrounds. This fragmentation and individualisation of scholarly inquiry into compositional developments has resulted in a disconnect between scholarship and practice, where the compositional trends that are widely acknowledged by choral practitioners remain underexplored by musicologists. This thesis offers a nuanced perspective on New Transcendentalism, divorcing its compositional brushstrokes from epochal figures like Lauridsen and Whitacre by highlighting its independent philological qualities and assessing the degree to which various contemporary composers employ its stylistic features in their music. This enables us to avoid the paradigm of a history of 'great men', instead focusing on the compositional methods and techniques themselves.

To date, several potential titles for this emerging style of choral composition have been put forward, two of which come from Whitacre himself. In his doctoral dissertation, Lynch dubs the new style as 'Neo-impressionism' based on comparative analysis of aesthetic and stylistic similarities in the music of Whitacre, Lauridsen and Clausen and the single work of *a cappella* choral music composed by Claude Debussy, his *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orleans* (1898–1908).[11] The music of these three American composers certainly contains some impressionistic features, like modal tonalities and examples of coloristic writing. For example, staggered entries on the word 'Sanctus' in Whitacre's *Sainte-Chappelle* (2013) are used to evoke rays of light shining through the stained glass of the titular Parisian chapel. It is not entirely clear, however, that a firm musical link can be established, considering that Debussy only published one unaccompanied choral work. Incidentally, the genre of American Impressionism,[12] led by Edward MacDowell (1860–1908), is not considered in Lynch's study, though this style has generally received less academic scrutiny and is therefore not as firmly established as French Impressionism.

[11] See Shane M. Lynch, 'Music Historiography and Useful Style Histories: The Case for the Evolving Era of Neo-Impressionism and its Influence on American Choral Music of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 2008), pp. 22–36..
[12] David P. DeVenney, *Varied Carols: A Survey of American Choral Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press , 1999), p. 93.

Aesthetically, the artistic goals of some of the contemporary composers of this style, such as Whitacre, Runestad and Trumbore, could be interpreted as impressionistic. For Lynch, Debussy's stated ambition to "re-create Nature's atmosphere" through music is the essential quality of impressionist music, that is that the music stimulates the sensation of the phenomenon rather than presenting a sonic icon.[13] Whitacre's *Deep Field* for orchestra, chorus and smartphone app (2015) took inspiration from his lifelong interest in space and technology. He composed the piece to evoke his own personal reaction to seeing the 'Deep Field' image taken by the Hubble Space Telescope in 1995: 'It's a very humbling photo to look at, and what I was hoping to do was to recreate that sense of awe and wonder in the audience'.[14] This ambition of 'recreating' an emotional experience inspired by nature, or in Whitacre's case, space, resonates with the above quote from Debussy, strengthening the case for the title of Neo-Impressionism.

Other monikers for this music have come from Whitacre himself. Early in his career, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* in 2000, he described his style as "Romantic Minimalism" or "Dynamic Minimalism."[15] No scholars have substantiated these potential descriptors with reference to Whitacre's style or that of his peers. Whitacre offered these monikers to the Los Angeles Times following the premiere of *Equus* (2000) for wind ensemble. He still identifies with the term for certain works, though he does feel that the label is 'limiting': 'I don't know if it applies to everything. Maybe it applies to a kind of aesthetic'.[16] While they may adequately relate to his works for large instrumental ensembles, such as *Equus*, their relation to his *a cappella* choral works is less apparent.

The other term created to describe this emerging genre, attributed to choral historian Nick Strimple, is 'New Transcendentalism'.[17] Unlike the aforementioned Neo-Impressionism, this nomenclature situates the genre in the artistic and literary history of the United States, evoking the literary and philosophical Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and Walt Whitman (1819–92), as well as the musical Transcendentalism of Charles Ives, though the influence literary Transcendentalism is not referenced explicitly in the public

[13] Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music: the Critical Writings of the Great French Composer Claude Debussy*, ed. Francois Lesure, trans. and ed. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 277, cited in Lynch, 2008, p. 26.
[14] Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 'Eric Whitacre: Deep Field', online video recording, YouTube, 15 March 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNsO2KwwDXE&t=44s> [Accessed 26 August 2022].
[15] See Larson, p. 23.
[16] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[17] See Doherty, p. 9.

comments of these composers. Musically, the strongest links between the 'new' and 'old' transcendentalism exist within Ives' approach to tonality, particularly his use of bitonality and polytonality. Ives' bichordal harmonies combined with traditional inner voice-leading created a distinctive sound that sounds both novel and traditional. As examined in Chapter One, his soundworld has had a significant impact on contemporary American choral composers of this emerging genre, particularly Whitacre. The genesis of this term, however, is unclear. While it has been attributed to Strimple, it does not appear in any of his published writing thus far. Due consideration of the etymology and semantics of the title is therefore required for the adoption of this term.

The distinction between the prefixes 'Neo-' and 'New' presents semantic challenges when relating a trend to an earlier phenomenon. 'Neo-' carries with it the weight of the earlier phenomenon, implying either direct engagement with the stylistic traits, a perceived aural similarity, historical awareness, or, as Whittal notes, parody and distortion.[18] Despite the intentions of the composers to which it is implied, it may also connote a revivalist movement, or, in its most derogatory usage, regression; Lynch, citing Messing, notes that the term neo-classicism was first employed by French musical critics to disparage German composers as backward-thinking.[19] Despite these implications, Whittal argues that postmodern thinking since the 1970s has challenged these notions of regression and nostalgia associated with Neo-Classicism, instead understanding it as a postmodernist movement itself, displaying 'distinctly contemporary multiplicity of awareness'.[20] For Taruskin, the assimilation of the practices of the past with the knowledge of the present constituted 'a tendentious journey back to where we had never been'.[21] In hindsight, therefore, movements with titles containing the prefix 'Neo-' may be understood as entirely new and postmodern explorations of the parameters and limitations of a given style. History, however, shows that such classifications are often utilised and interpreted contemporaneously as disparagements or insults, as demonstrated in the quote from Messing. This tendency should give pause to musicologists designating such nomenclatures to contemporary movements.

[18] Arnold Whittal, 'Neo-classicism', *Grove Music Online* (2001), <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19723> [Accessed 19 August 2022].
[19] Scott Messing, 'Polemic as History: The Case of Neo-Classicism', *The Journal Of Musicology*, 9 (1991), 481–497, pp. 482–3, cited in Lynch, p. 40.
[20] Whittal.
[21] Richard Taruskin, 'Review: Back to Whom? Neo-classicism as Ideology', *19th-century Music*, 16 (1993), 286–302, p. 287.

Unlike the prefix 'Neo-', 'New' places the current trend in contrast with the pre-existing phenomenon, connoting a development, expansion, response, reassessment, rebuke or departure from its predecessor. For example, so-called New Musicology encompasses schools of thought that have countered the positivism and formalism of earlier musicologists who strove to replicate the scientific method in musicological research.[22] New Musicologists have departed from these earlier modes of criticism, engaging in the postmodernist approaches of pluralism, interdisciplinary methodologies and historically informed criticism. In American literary theory, New Criticism represented a total admonishment of the impressionistic aesthetics of the previous generation of English poets.[23] This antagonistic quality to the prefix 'New' supports the nomenclature of 'New Transcendentalism' in spite of the absence of clear links with the American Transcendentalism of the late nineteenth century. Since 'New' can represent a re-evaluation or departure from the original phenomenon, the lack of direct Emersonian influence and the contrast between Ives' non-tonal, chromatic harmonic language and the pandiatonicism of New Transcendentalism is no longer problematic. For these reasons, the term 'New Transcendentalism' is adopted for the purpose of this research.

Within the backdrop of American art music, Chapter One traces the origins of New Transcendentalism with reference to influential movements in American choral music alongside important compositional developments. The chapter addresses the growth of 'wall-of-sound' choral textures, from Sacred Harp singing and the hymnal writing of the First and Second New England Schools, to imported traditions including German *Männerchor*, glee clubs, choral societies, and Russian orthodox music, shaping an increasingly popular choral sound of thick textures and harmonies. The timbral possibilities of these choral forces were effectively exploited into the twentieth century by composers experimenting with new directions in harmony. Charles Ives' choral works, notably *Psalm 67* (1894) and *Psalm 90* (1894–1924), expanded harmonic and textural possibilities through use of cluster chords and polytonal harmonic frameworks. During the post-war period, avant-garde composers such as Henry Cowell (1897–1965) incorporated aleatoricism and heterophony into their choral works, crafting new vocal timbres and sonorities. Knut Nystedt (1915–2014) synthesised ancient musical concepts with modernist processes, forging a new yet familiar choral sound presaging New Transcendentalism. National choral infrastructure, particularly the annual conferences of

[22] Glenn Stanley, 'Historiography', *Grove Music Online* (2001), <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51674> [Accessed 19 August 2022].
[23] William Logan, 'Forward into the Past: Reading the New Critics', *Praising It New: The Best of the New Criticism*, ed. By Garrick Davis (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 2008), p. xii.

the ACDA, gave composers a national platform to present work, share ideas, and gain inspiration. Advancements in choral education produced a well-trained public capable and eager to perform new American music. All of these developments combined to lay the groundwork for the formation of a new style of choral composition, though modern musicology has lagged in its recognition of this phenomenon.

Chapter Two addresses the methodological challenges and opportunities presented by New Transcendentalism and presents a combinative approach for effective analysis of New Transcendentalist choral repertoire. As discussed above, the obfuscation of traditional structural signifiers in these works—for example, functional harmony or melodic development—presents difficulties when attempting to incorporate traditional modes of analysis. For the purposes of this study, a combinative approach of Critical Score Analysis (CSA) and select elements of Howland's Integrated Parametric Structure (IPS) Analysis is employed for the purpose of illuminating New Transcendentalist approaches to choral composition present in the works of the composers considered in the study. Howland designed the original IPS framework in order to identify phrases, segments, and structural units within small-scale instrumental works by post-war composers including Babbitt, Carter, and Stockhausen. The scarcity in these works of traditional structural signifiers like modulations to a dominant key, or melodic development, necessitated a new method of exposing the underlying architecture of the works and identifying unified passages. By analysing the combined effect of increases, reductions, or plateaus of primary and secondary musical parameters, Howland identified phrases, or IPSs, informing analysis and performance of these works. Since New Transcendentalist works often eschew functional harmonic relationships and melodic development, a fresh analytical approach is required to illustrate how phrases are constructed within this style, and Howland's methodology has already shown promise in the analysis of contemporary choral works.[24] Chapter Two will introduce and draw on Howland's methodology in illustrating its applications alongside CSA in the analysis of select works from the composers under review.

Eric Whitacre, as noted above, is an exemplary figure in New Transcendentalism. Chapter Three addresses the first research question of this thesis through presentation of a case study of Whitacre's contribution to the style, with an in-depth analysis of five *a cappella* works

[24] See Daniel Edward Parks, 'To the Hands by Caroline Shaw: A Conductor's Guide and Analysis' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, 2021).

spanning the course of his career: *Water Night* (1994); 'i thank You God for most this amazing day' from *Three Songs of Faith* (1999, rev. 2009); *A Boy And A Girl* (2002); *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* (2002); and *i carry your heart* (2016). Employing the combinative framework presented in Chapter Two, this chapter explores the harmonic, textural and structural devices employed in Whitacre's works, revealing how his compositional language has developed and how he has advanced New Transcendentalist composition. The case study is followed by a comparative analysis of works by Runestad, Trumbore, LaBarr, Garrett, and Forrest in Chapter Four. This penultimate chapter approaches the second research question of this thesis, examining various approaches to the compositional language of New Transcendentalism, exposing its widespread usage in American choral music, and assessing similarities and differences in the compositional approaches of these composers. The comparative analysis presented demonstrates how the musical features of New Transcendentalist manifest in the idiosyncratic styles of each composer, and explores how they have advanced the style through their compositions.

Finally, Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings of this research and their implications alongside recommendations for further study. This chapter considers the third research question, consolidating analytical data gathered in Chapters Three and Four alongside interviews with the composers within the context of the discussion presented in Chapter Two. Key findings of previously unexplored stylistic trends in New Transcendentalist music, such as the prominence of the Lydian mode and variations of approaches to cluster chords, are also discussed. The relationship between New Transcendentalist composition and choral singing is addressed, informing future approaches to the repertoire in scholarship and in practice. While this thesis offers a methodological approach for analysing New Transcendentalist works, and presents a rigorous analysis of the main exponent of the style, further research is required in order to establish the scope of its influence in the United States and beyond. Owing to the limitations of a doctoral research project, a select few composers were chosen for analysis in this study. A comprehensive survey of the usage of New Transcendentalism in contemporary choral music is merited to further elaborate on the various features of this compositional language as they are manipulated in the works of a diverse range of composers that have adopted, developed, and sustained the style.

Chapter One

Towards New Transcendentalism: The American Choral Sound

> *When I started singing in choir, I was moved physically by the sound of these close harmonies.*[1]
>
> Eric Whitacre, 2019

Before analysing the stylistic characteristics of New Transcendentalism, we must understand the context in which it evolved, developed and subsequently gained popularity. While many of these works bear similarities to contemporary choral music and styles found in Europe and elsewhere, like Holy Minimalism and neomodal music, the characteristics of New Transcendentalism were borne from the predominant styles of choral singing in the United States, influenced by experimentation and innovation in choral harmony and texture by prominent composers over the past two and a half centuries. This chapter examines the various choral movements, domestic and imported, that have shaped the choral soundworld of America since the foundation of the country, laying the foundations for the emergence of New Transcendentalism. From Sacred Harp singing to liturgical hymns to barbershop, the American choral soundscape has been dominated by a 'wall-of-sound' effect created by the homophonic *a cappella* singing of close harmonies.[2] The largely homorhythmic, text-driven nature of many New Transcendentalist works bears similarity to the Protestant hymnal and the vernacular close-harmony styles that dominated the choral landscape of the United States for much of the past two hundred and fifty years. The thick, rich timbres created by unaccompanied voices evoke the German *Männerchor* and Russian Orthodox choral traditions brought to the US through immigration in the nineteenth century. Harmonic and textural developments by influential composers such as Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Knut Nystedt, integrating traditional tonal and modal harmonies with contemporary compositional techniques, laid the groundwork for the pandiatonic framework that permeates the output of Whitacre and other

[1] Classic FM, 'Eric Whitacre Talks 'Chord Clusters' | Explained | Classic FM Meets', online video recording, YouTube, 20 May 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iU9vUydTpZQ&t=1s> [Accessed 10 February 2023].

[2] In this thesis, the term 'wall-of-sound' refers to the dense timbral impact of homophonic choral singing, often featuring close harmonies, as distinct from the use of the term in music production popularised by Phil Spector.

New Transcendentalist composers. None of this would be possible without a robust choral infrastructure to sustain choral singing and promote contemporary choral works, therefore it is necessary to examine the influence of national and regional choral education programmes and organisations, chiefly the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), as well as advancements in choral education that produced a large number of highly capable choral ensembles. This chapter situates the composers under review in the contemporary field of American choral production, and interrogates the paucity of scholarship on New Transcendentalism to date. A discussion of the musicological issues that have hindered scholarly inquiry of this shared compositional language is presented, alongside a consideration of the classification of New Transcendentalism as both a style and a set of compositional tools.

The Foundations for New Transcendentalism

New Transcendentalism emerged from a field of choral production in the United States that developed independently from European choral cultures. This choral ecosystem favoured lush choral timbres over the ideals of polyphony that preoccupied many European choral composers and performers. Domestic forms of recreational multi-part singing exploited these thick, 'wall-of-sound' sonorities, while European styles that were compatible with this soundworld gained popularity in the United States. The discussion below traces the advancement of wall-of-sound choral timbres and secundal harmony throughout the history of choral music in the United States. This investigation displays the emergence of an American choral soundworld that was conducive to the emergence of the compositional approaches that would later form the New Transcendentalist style.

Early Influences

While song and dance practices in North America date back millennia among Indigenous populations, the earliest records of choral singing date back to the psalm books of the early European settlers. Pilgrim and Puritan settlers in the northeast brought with them collections such as *Sternhold and Hopkins* (1562) and *Ainsworth* (1612), while the first full-length book published by a British publishing house in North America was the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640),

highlighting the importance of the practice in British colonial America.[3] During the seventeenth century, psalm-singing was characterised by slow tempi, consistently loud volume, improvised, heterophonic ornamentation and independent individual lines.[4] Unhappy with the "miserably tortured, twisted and disorderly noises" produced by this unruly approach to singing in worship, church authorities invested in the musical education of their congregations.[5] They promoted music textbooks including Reverend John Tuft's *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes* (1720) and encouraged the use of letter notation rather than staff notation to improve accessibility to the average worshipper.[6] This marked the first example of an attempt to formalise choral education in the United States, creating an infrastructure that was receptive to new music by American composers. It is in this context that the two New England Schools of choral composition emerged.

The First New England School is a term associated with the itinerant hymnists and music educators who offered their services to parishes in New England from the mid-seventeenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century. These musicians were hired by churches to lead music courses for parishioners over the course of one to three months, teaching part-singing, vocal technique and solmisation to classes of around fifty singers to improve congregational singing in the parish.[7] Students of these singing schools banded together during worship and sought to sing dedicated pieces as an ensemble, leading to a flourishing of community and church choirs across the northeast, including The Stoughton Musical Society founded in Massachusetts in 1786, which is the longest running community choir in the United States.[8] These singing schools and the choral organisations that sprung up under their influence, with their dedication to the well-trained performance of hymns and psalms by American composers, laid the groundwork for an idiosyncratic American choral sound characterised by part-singing, homophony and textual primacy.

William Billings (1746–1800) was the leading composer of the First New England School, publishing several collections of newly composed music and texts for practical and educational use. His first collection, *American Chorister* (1770) was engraved by Paul Revere. His second publication, *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1778), contained the first example of

[3] Samuel Adler et al., *American Sacred Choral Music* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2001), pp. 2, 8.
[4] James G. Smith, Thomas Brawley and N. Lee Orr, 'Choral Music', *Grove Music Online*, 2012, <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2218820> [Accessed 21 October 2021].
[5] Samuel Adler, 'Sacred Music in America: an overview', in Adler et al., pp. 8–20, p. 9.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Smith et al.
[8] Ibid.

a ‘fuguing tune’, a style of poetic psalm-setting marked by homophonic openings with a quicker middle section featuring imitative entries.[9] Billings would often double contrapuntal lines at the octave to create a thicker vocal texture.[10] His collections featured educational materials and lessons on subjects such as notation, solfège and music theory. While most of his compositions followed the conventional contemporary practices of harmony and voice-leading, one of his most unusual works, *Jargon* (1778), is a sarcastic response to critics that described his music as reactionary or overly consonant. The short, fourteen-bar composition features extreme dissonances and extended chords rarely seen earlier than the twentieth century, with Samuel Adler comparing the harmonies to those of Stravinsky (see Figure 1.1):[11]

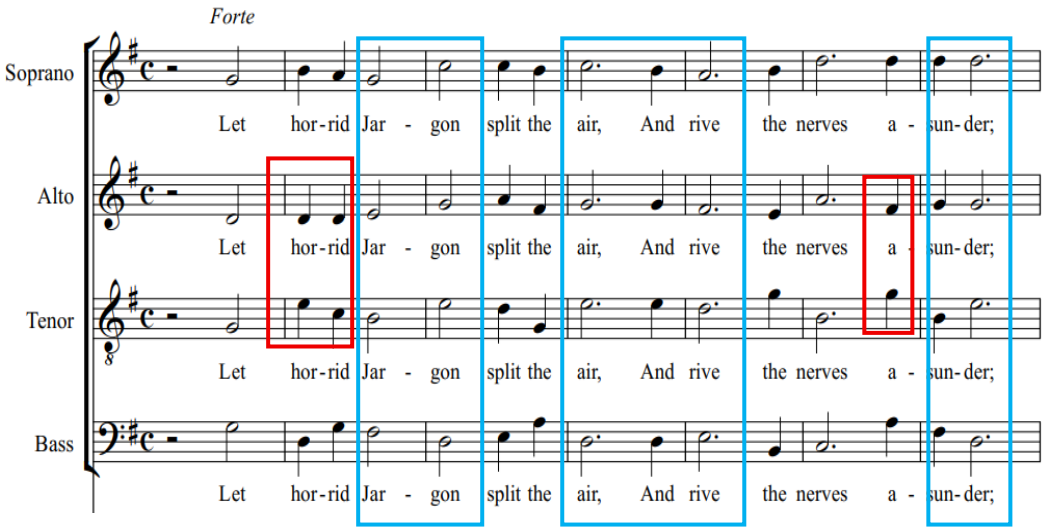


Figure 1.1: The opening seven bars of William Billings’ *Jargon*.

Although the work was likely written as a sarcastic, facetious retort to critics, some of the harmonies, the secundal clashes of inner parts (shown in red) and the superimposition of triads over an unrelated bass note (shown in blue) for example, pre-empt the extended, polychordal and clustered harmonies that would dominate the American choral landscape over two centuries later.

As the United States expanded south and westwards, new methodologies of choral education emerged to sustain congregational singing in churches, notably the Sacred Harp tradition. Turning away from the fugal and harmonically intricate hymns of the northeast, singing groups across the South drew influence from the improvisational nature of Appalachian

[9] Chester Lee Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 289.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Adler, p. 9.

and Deep South folk music, adopting the simplified shape-notation system of William Little and William Smith's *Easy Instructor or A New Method of Teaching Sacred Harmony* (1798).[12] This system contained a simplified solmisation, nicknamed *fasola*, using four note names, *fa*, *sol*, *la* and *mi*, with unique noteheads to connect notes with their *fasola* names (see Figure 1.2):

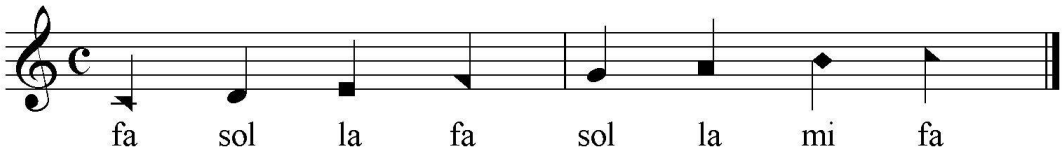


Figure 1.2: Little and Smith's shape-notation.[13]

Shape-note singing became a widespread musical activity, with William Walker's shape-note music collection *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (1835) featuring the first printed version of 'Amazing Grace' (shown in Figure 1.3) reportedly selling six hundred thousand copies.[14]

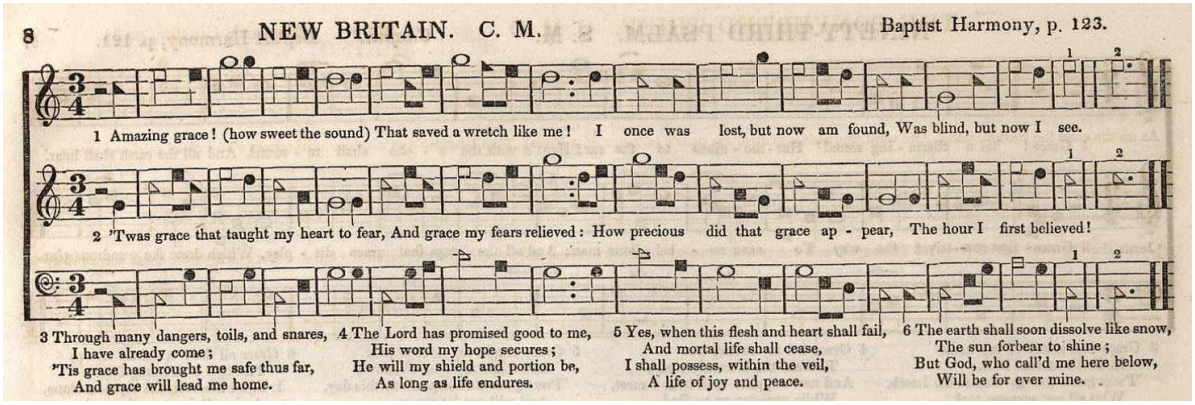


Figure 1.3: 'Amazing Grace', set for the first time to the tune 'New Britain' in *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (1835).

Linking Sacred Harp singing and the pedagogical tool of solfège through shape-notation elicits a heightened awareness of choral intonation. Combined with the vocal timbre of unrefined congregational voices, Sacred Harp singing creates an overtone-rich wall of sound, creating a similar effect to the close harmonies and nasal vocal quality of barbershop. Many revivalist movements have emerged in the twentieth and twenty-first century, inspired by the unique

[12] Alwes, pp. 291–92.
[13] David Warren Steel, 'Shape-note Singing', *Britannica*, online, 2017 <https://www.britannica.com/art/shape-note-singing> [Accessed 10 February 2023].
[14] Harry Eskew, revised by James C. Downey, 'Shape-note hymnody', *Grove Music Online*, 2001 <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25584> [Accessed 10 February 2023]. The melody is sung by the tenor voice.

timbral effect of Sacred Harp singing. It exists as another example of the thick, homophonic textures that have dominated the choral landscape of the United States.

New England in the nineteenth century saw a large number of immigrant and native-born composers incorporating the traditions and conventions of European classical music into their works. The most prominent mid-century composer in this style was Lowell Mason (1792–1872), described by Adler as 'the first American music educator'.[15] He was involved in the founding of the Boston Academy of Music, composed over twelve hundred hymns, and arranged five hundred melodies, including those of canonic European composers such as Beethoven, for liturgical use.[16] In 1827 he became the president of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, whose Christmas concert of 1815 has been described as a watershed moment in American choral history, transitioning the social role of group-singing from purely spiritual to cultural, with greater attention given to the composer and performers.[17] This European influence led to the formation of a new generation of composers creating in a more harmonically and texturally complex style under the banner of the Second New England School. Amy Beach (1867–1944), a prominent composer of this movement, profited from the well-educated singers graduating from the singing schools of New England churches established by members of the First School. This enabled her and her contemporaries to expand beyond the format of hymns to new forms, including the anthem and the secular partsong. Her early works demonstrated an aptitude for writing long, sustained lines, as well as a keen attention to text-music relationships.[18] Her harmonic palette became more complex in her later works, with an increased use of non-functional harmonies, altered and borrowed chords, and daring modulations to distantly related keys.[19] Described as 'the most important anthem composer' of the late nineteenth century,[20] Horatio Parker (1863–1919) was heavily influenced by contemporary European music, having studied in Munich under Josef Rheinberger for four years. His most enduring large work, *Hora novissima* (1893), has been compared to Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900) with its Germanic syntax and Romantic formal design.[21] This prolific new wave of composers wrote for liturgical and performance contexts, synthesising the

[15] Adler, p. 12.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Smith et al.
[18] Adrienne Fried Block, revised by E. Douglas Bomberger, 'Beach [Cheney], Amy Marcy [Mrs H.H.A. Beach]', *Grove Music Online*, 2020, <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2248268> [Accessed 21 October 2021].
[19] B. Jean Reigles, 'The Choral Music of Amy Beach' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1996), p. 301.
[20] Smith et al.
[21] Alwes, p. 294.

familiar practices of homophonic, declamatory, text-driven hymnal singing with European stylistic trends, like expanded harmonies and contrapuntal textures. Drawing from European influences, the Second New England School transitioned choral music from a purely functional form for participatory musical contexts to a performance artform. Choristers became better trained and differentiated by ability, building a population of amateur and professional performers prepared for more daring experimentation in harmony and texture by choral composers.

The American Choral Timbre

New Transcendentalism is intrinsically linked to the timbral effect of lush, choral textures. Such timbres, created by resonant vocal production in close harmony, have been prominent throughout the history of group-singing in the United States. Combining *a cappella* voices in dense, homophonic textures transforms the choir into a new instrument, lying somewhere between Sandell's categories of augmented timbre and emergent timbre.[22] For Sandell, timbre augmentation involves the embellishment of an instrument's timbre through combination with another, such as a cello and bassoon pairing, while emergent timbre refers to the synthesis of a new sound from two timbres.[23] The combination of resonant voices in close harmony results in not only the clashing of the fundamental pitches, but the clashing of overtones, creating a powerful wall-of-sound effect. This timbral force has been a driving factor in choral participation and composition throughout the history of American choral music across multiple genres. American composers have written this timbre into their music, while European genres in which it is already present grew to prominence in the United States.

Alwes' broad criticism of much contemporary American choral music being 'bereft of contrapuntal rigor' is a particularly Eurocentric critique,[24] as it discounts the many traditions of homophonic, wall-of-sound styles of group-singing that have defined the American choral soundscape, from the loud, metrical psalm-singing of the early settlers, to the text-driven German and Russian repertoires that flourished in the nineteenth century, to the thick, overtone-rich sonorities of barbershop, to the chant-inspired compositions of Morten Lauridsen. This American choral timbre, developed over centuries, left a tangible imprint on choral music in

[22] Gregory J. Sandell, 'Roles for Spectral Centroid and Other Factors in Determining "Blended" Instrument Pairings in Orchestration', *Music Perception*, 13 (1995), 209–246, p. 212.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Alwes, p. 384.

the concert and vernacular contexts in America and sowed the seeds for the soundworld of New Transcendentalism.

As discussed earlier, the expansion of music education through singing schools allowed for the emergence of choirs in performance contexts beyond functional liturgical services. The advent of radio enabled elite choral ensembles, like the Salt Lake City Tabernacle Choir, to disseminate high-quality choral performances to wider audiences who may not have heard choral singing outside of their parish or school.[25] While groups such as the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston and the Philadelphia Mendelssohn Club were dedicated to the presentation of oratorios, cantatas, and other forms of large-scale choral repertoire, a significant number of high-performing *a cappella* ensembles led by influential conductors emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. One such conductor is F. Melius Christiansen (1871–1955), founder of the Music Department of St Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. Christiansen is viewed as one of the leaders of the *a cappella* movement of the early twentieth century in America, favouring straight singing without vibrato, a unified, blended tone, and absolute precision of pitch.[26] He established the St Olaf Choir at the college in 1912 and remained its conductor until 1942, influencing generations of students and singers. Christiansen encouraged his singers to emulate this effect and produce a tone that was 'disciplined, controlled, and free of excessive vibrato'.[27] The choir exclusively performed unaccompanied music, though canonic Renaissance works like those of Palestrina rarely featured in their concerts. Instead, the choir focused on the music of Bach, Russian sacred repertoire, and compositions and arrangements composed by Christiansen for the ensemble, many of which were in Norwegian, the native language of many of the students at the Norwegian Lutheran institution.[28] Christiansen led the movement in America for high-level concert choirs focusing on vertically oriented choral repertoire, devising programmes that centred on choral harmony and intonation rather than horizontally oriented music that prioritised individual lines and contrapuntal textures, such as Renaissance polyphony. For Fansler, the St Olaf Choir exerted immense influence on American choral composition, as evidenced by the frequency with which other choirs imitated their repertoire and vocal technique.[29] If not for the singing culture cultivated through

[25] Terry Lee Fansler, 'The Anthem in America: 1900–1950' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, North Texas State University, 1982), pp. 75–76.
[26] Carol J. Oja, 'Christiansen, F(rederik) Melius', *Grove Music Online*, 2011, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.dcu.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002092397> [Accessed 10 June 2025].
[27] St Olaf Choir, 'History', online, 2023 <https://wp.stolaf.edu/choir/history/> [Accessed 14 February 2023].
[28] Fansler, p. 83.
[29] Ibid.

Christiansen's leadership of the *a cappella* movement, New Transcendentalism may never have emerged in the United States. The St Olaf Choir, led today by its fourth director, Anton Armstrong, pioneered an American choral aesthetic that has since dominated high-level choral performance in the United States.

Other influential composers of this period include Roger Wagner (1914–1992) and Robert Shaw (1916–1999), whose editions and anthologies of American choral music provided resources for school and collegiate choirs across the US, increasing choral literacy and promoting American choral works.[30] Wagner and Shaw each founded professional choral ensembles, which in turn inspired the formation of other professional and semi-professional choirs, creating opportunities for the performance of new works by American composers by ensembles with the necessary technical capabilities.[31] Professional and semi-professional choirs—for instance, Chanticleer, The Crossing, The Dale Warland Singers, Skylark Vocal Ensemble, Conspirare, The Kansas City Chorale and others—are a vital component of the American choral infrastructure, and remain an important platform for composers in the US. This network of high-level ensembles provides a crucial outlet for New Transcendentalist composers, often commissioning, performing and recording their works. The availability of these ensembles, and their willingness to engage with new, American music, would become a vital resource for the flourishing of New Transcendentalism.

Alongside these developments in the United States, European styles that were compatible with this emerging choral aesthetic rose to prominence. Russian orthodox choral music has long been a popular genre in the American choral repertoire, with Rachmaninoff's *Vespers* receiving more performances at National Conventions of the ACDA than any other work between 1960–1987.[32] This work still has an enduring impact on American choral music, with the Kansas City Chorale and Phoenix Chorale under the direction of Charles Bruffy releasing a centenary recording of the work in 2015 which won the 2016 Grammy award for Best Choral Performance. Many American scholars, music publishers and conductors promoted Russian sacred music in the US. N. Lindsay Norden's essay 'The Music of the Russian Liturgy' (1915) spread awareness of the style in America, as did his arrangements and

[30] Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2002), p. 220.
[31] Ibid.
[32] William Daryl Jones, 'An Index of Choral Music Performed During National Conventions of the American Choral Directors Association (1960–1987)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1988), p. 40.

translations of over one hundred Russian choral works.[33] In New York, the wealthy businessman Charles Richard Crane personally financed the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, where the works of Alexandr Grechaninov (1864–1956) were frequently performed.[34] The Russian Orthodox choral literature is filled with modal harmonies and rich, homophonic choral textures with frequent *divisi*. Reid argues that the soundworld of this repertoire had a profound impact on choral practice in the United States.[35] The vocal demands of sustained chords sung by unaccompanied voices required greater emphasis on pure-tone singing with little vibrato and disciplined vowel matching, a technique that is well-suited to the textural and harmonic features of New Transcendentalism. Russian Orthodox repertoire is yet another pre-existing choral tradition in the United States that fostered a culture of choral practice that pre-empted the emergence of New Transcendentalism.

The timbral impact of wall-of-sound choral textures is heightened in conjunction with the more overtone-rich male voice, as deeper pitches contain a greater number of overtones audible to the human ear. This phenomenon creates a richer timbre than treble voices. Two forms for lower voices, one imported and one native, exploited this timbral effect: the German *Männerchor* and barbershop. The German *Männerchor*, brought by German immigrants in the nineteenth century, became particularly popular in the United States, with the musicologist Frédéric Louis Ritter writing that the musical life in cities like Milwaukee was 'entirely under German influence', and that 'wherever at least four Germans gather together, one may be sure to find a Mannerchor'.[36] These ensembles would regularly perform partsongs with social, amorous, musical, natural and patriotic themes, performing works by prominent German composers, including Mendelssohn, Brahms and Schubert.[37] These partsongs, composed for male-voice choir, featured homophonic, syllabic text-setting, and the constraints of writing for the male vocal range resulted in closer harmonies than the wide harmonic spread that is achievable by mixed voices.

[33] Fansler, p. 158.
[34] Ibid., pp. 167–168.
[35] Robert Addison Reid, 'Russian Sacred Choral Music and its Assimilation Into and Impact on the American A Cappella Choir Movement' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1983).
[36] Frédéric Louis Ritter, *Music in America* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972 reprint of 1890 edition), pp. 403–404.
[37] Karen Ahlquist, 'Männerchor', *Grove Music Online*, 2010 <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2088074> [Accessed 14 February 2023].
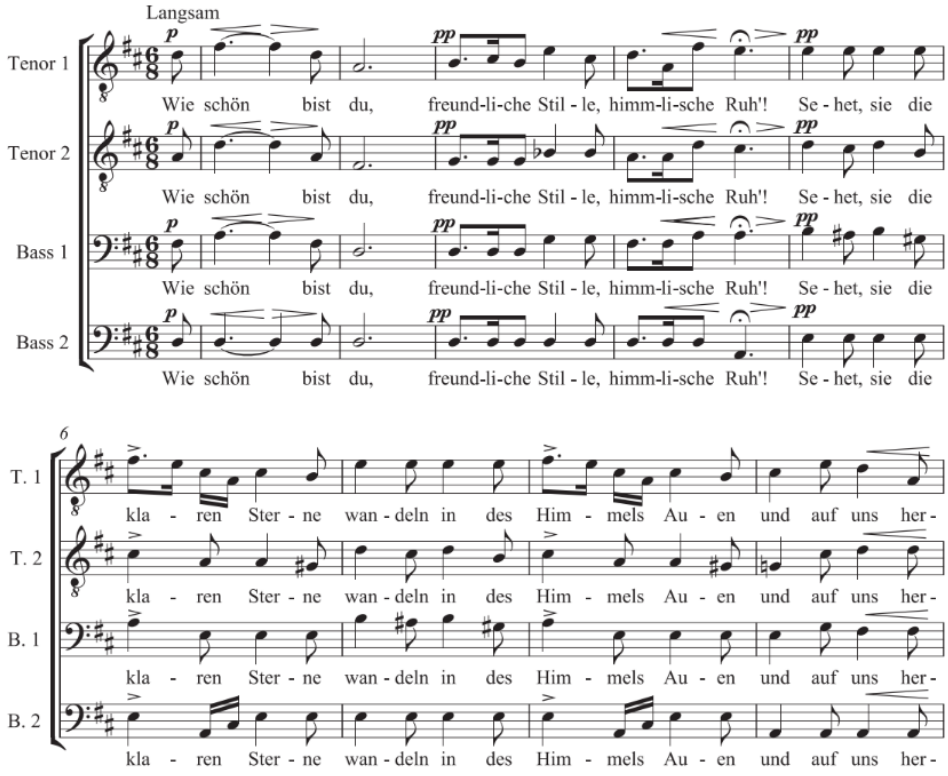


Figure 1.4: Homophonic writing in the opening nine bars of Schubert's *Die Nacht* for male-voice choir.[38]

The texture in Figure 1.4 above, combined with the overtone-rich timbre of male voices, creates a rich sonority that is both pleasing to the ear and satisfying for the singer. The social aspect of these choirs as described by Ritter suggest that for the members of the *Männerchor*, the music-making process was as important, if not more important, than the presentation of the music to an audience. The music was primarily designed for the gratification of the singer.

As the recreational tradition of German *Männerchor* singing was taking root in America in the late nineteenth century, a separate, domestic, vernacular form of *a cappella* close-harmony singing was increasing in popularity. For Gage Averill, barbershop harmony 'has played a central—and overlooked—role in the panorama of American music', with its close-harmony, four-part singing synthesising the musical features of both African-American vernacular music and imported European forms.[39] Barbershop repertoire consists of four-part arrangements of pre-existing tunes, traditionally for an all-male quartet, with the melody placed in the second highest voice. The texture is usually homophonic, with the exception of the

[38] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Scores* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 441.
[39] Gage Averill, *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

occasional use of call-and-response and ‘swipes’, the name given to harmonic changes in three voice-parts while one voice holds a pedal tone. Barbershop harmony is characterised by close harmonies, necessitated by the vocal ranges of the singers, and the frequent use of dominant, diminished and half-diminished seventh chords, often presented in inversion and cycling through the circle of fifths. This harmonic approach creates a very fluid effect. Strings of perfect cadences with inverted chords across the circle of fifths undermine the tonic gravity of the home key, and intuitive voice-leading through chromatic harmony lines lend a sense of momentum to the music. Close harmonies, paired with the overtone-rich sonority of male voices in particular, produces a physical feeling in the singer that, according to the Barbershop Harmony Society, is the reason singers often become ‘hooked’ on the practice.[40] Like the German *Männerchor* tradition, the culture of barbershop singing is quite insular and is primarily concerned with gratification of the singers. This is evident in the origins of the style, with young African-American singers singing for pleasure on street corners or in barbershops. The practice of ‘tagging’ is further evidence of this, with barbershoppers performing ‘tags’ (codas) of barbershop pieces in isolation, usually at social gatherings following performances. The most adventurous and challenging harmonies of a barbershop arrangement are usually found in the tag. The short format enables singers to quickly learn or sight-read their lines in casual settings. While it has occupied a niche area of American musical culture, barbershop harmony significantly influenced the development of contemporary *a cappella* singing in the United States, contributing to the formation of vocal jazz and pop groups such as Singers Unlimited and Take 6. Barbershop is yet another genre incorporating the American choral aesthetic of rich textures, close harmonies and homophonic, declamatory text-setting. Centuries of exposure to these choral textures has undoubtedly supported the accessibility and appeal of New Transcendentalism to American singers and audiences.

The title of this subsection, ‘The American Choral Timbre’, is somewhat provocative. When describing any cultural phenomenon in the United States, it can be problematic to use the definite article in identifying a singular, unifying theme. Such an approach disregards the diversity and the multiplicity of cultures present in the United States. However, the discussion above highlights the prevalence of one particular choral timbre across multiple genres of choral singing in the United States: the thick, overtone-rich, wall-of-sound timbre.

[40] Barbershop Harmony Society, ‘About Our Music’, online, 2023 <https://www.barbershop.org/music/about-our-music> [Accessed 14 February 2023].

The composers under review in this research tend to work primarily in the field of choral music. The bulk of their output is written for choirs, and they often have extensive experience as choral singers and conductors. This can be understood as an emic/etic paradigm in American choral composition, with New Transcendentalism becoming a preferred method of composition among emic composers who deeply understand which musical elements resonate most with singers, conductors and choral audiences. Such a perspective raises the question of who this music is written for; is it for the enjoyment of the audience or the singers? Whitacre often references the physical sensation of singing close harmonies with others in an ensemble as a primary motivational factor in his compositions.[41] Physical memory of choral singing influences the emic composer's compositional process, creating a phenomenological approach to choral composition that privileges sonorities and sensations. Etic composers, contrastingly, are more likely to use musical and formal processes drawn from their compositions for other forces, making their choral compositions more unique to their individual style, but, perhaps, lessening their accessibility and popular appeal. This phenomenological approach speaks to Zachary Wallmark's 'embodied theory of musical timbre',[42] and explains the enduring popularity of New Transcendentalism among choirs and audiences, as well as its influence on choral composers. Rather than Debussy's edict that 'pleasure is the law', composers of New Transcendentalist music demonstrate that 'sensation is the law', and this sensation is borne of the resonant effect of wall-of-sound textures.

Compositional Innovations

The compositional traits of New Transcendentalism have roots in the experimentation of preceding choral composers in the United States. Within this developing choral soundworld of lush, wall-of-sound textures, composers incorporated *avant-garde* compositional techniques to explore new harmonic and textural possibilities. One of the most innovative composers in American history, Charles Ives' (1874–1954) unconventional approaches to harmony through use of polytonality and bichordal sonorities created a completely unique soundworld, one which has had a lasting impact on American music, particularly on New Transcendentalism.

[41] Eric Whitacre, 'Cluster chords, and why I am so drawn to them. From my talk at @oxford_uni', online video recording, Instagram, 21 August 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CwODVX3t-zz/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==> [Accessed 23 August 2023].
[42] Zachary Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 38.

His music is pluralistic in its influences, displaying the varied musical diet of his upbringing in Connecticut. He gained exposure to vernacular styles of music through his father's work with bands, churches and minstrel shows in Danbury, and he received tutelage in contemporary European art music at Yale University studying under Horatio Parker from 1894–1898. For Burkholder, Sinclair and Magee, Ives possessed 'an unparalleled ability to evoke the sounds and feelings of American life'.[43] Ives' unique compositional voice stemmed from his unconventional patchwork approach to combining musics from American life.[44] His ability to manipulate and recast the Presbyterian hymnal style within polytonal and non-tonal harmonic frameworks evoked a sense of transcendental spirituality similar to the style developed by Olivier Messiaen half a century later.

Ives' innovations in harmony are pertinent to this research, particularly his polychordal and polytonal works. Polytonality involves the combination of two or more conventional tone-sets, usually divided between voices or groups, within one piece of music. Polychordal harmony is the combination of two or more chords, usually referring to triads taken from traditional diatonic tonesets. Ives' most striking polytonal choral work is his setting of *Psalm 67* (1894) for unaccompanied mixed voices. In this piece, the soprano and alto voices sing in the key of C major, while the tenor and bass parts sing in the key of G minor (see Figure 1.5):

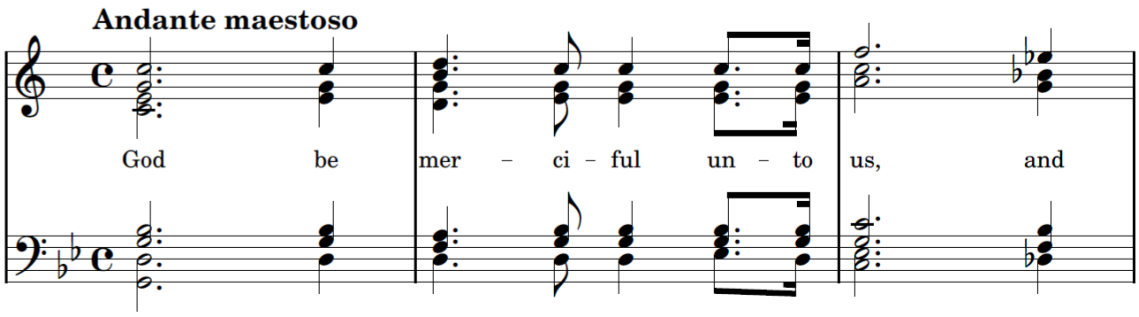


Figure 1.5: The polytonal opening of *Psalm 67* by Charles Ives.

Jan Swifford described the soundworld of this polytonal setting as 'cosmic barbershop'.[45] This characterisation alludes to two central aspects of Ives' harmonic language that left a lasting impression on harmonic innovations of twentieth-century American choral music. Swifford's

[43] James Peter Burkholder, James B. Sinclair and Gayle Sherwood Magee, 'Ives, Charles (Edward)', *Grove Music Online*, 2020 <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2252967> [Accessed 10 February 2023].
[44] See James Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes : Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).
[45] Jan Swifford, *Charles Ives: A Life With Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), p. 81.

suggestion that the popular barbershop style of the 1890s may have guided Ives' use of close harmony[46] points to the rich textural effects of clustered vocal harmonies and homorhythmic declamatory singing that are idiosyncratic of the barbershop style, and are commonly exploited by many choral composers since Ives. Overtone-rich singing allows for these close harmonies to create a wall of sound that seems to expand beyond the constituent notes of the harmonies themselves. The other aspect identified by Swifford is the 'cosmic' effect that these polychordal harmonies produce. When heard in isolation, the upper two parts or the lower two parts sound like a conventional hymn harmonised according to the well-established principles of Presbyterian hymnody with which Ives was familiar from his musical upbringing. The combination of the two tonalities creates a novel sound rooted in familiar structural processes. For Ives, experimenting with the expansion of harmony in his sacred works beyond the simplistic arrangements typical of contemporary hymn arrangements was a deeply spiritual exercise, seeking to deconstruct limitations to the expression of faith.[47] While the harmonic palette Ives utilised was challenging and new, the use of conventional voice-leading lends coherence to the work. This method of combining traditional and modern elements is a consistent theme in American choral composition leading towards the emergence of New Transcendentalism.

The impact of these harmonic developments is evident in the work of many contemporary American choral composers. For instance, Eric Whitacre frequently uses bichordal harmonies, often through use of expansion into *divisi* within voice-parts. *Water Night* (1994) features a passage in which a B-flat minor chord is sounded before the soprano, alto and tenor parts divide, with the seconds changing pitch down a step to create an A-flat major chord (shown in Figure 1.6 in blue) sounding simultaneously against the B-flat minor chord over an open fifth of B-flat minor in the bass parts:

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ray Robinson, *Choral Music: A Norton Historical Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1978), p. 1087.
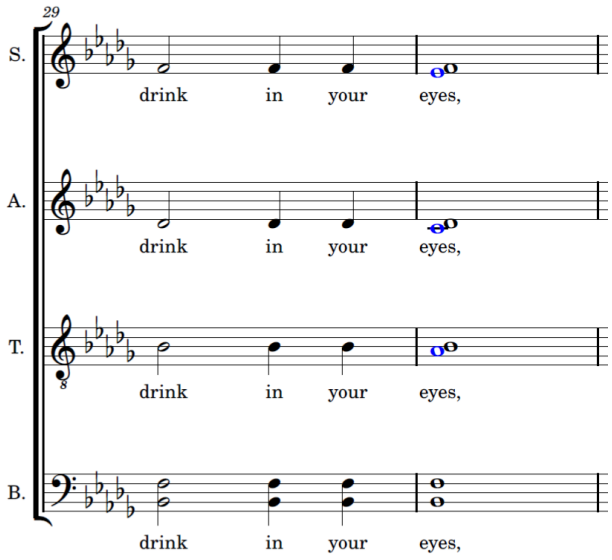


Figure 1.6: Bichordal expansion in bars 29–30 of Whitacre's *Water Night*.

The Ivesian influence on Whitacre's work is evident in 'i thank You God for most this amazing day', one of his *Three Songs of Faith* (1999), in which he suddenly quotes the opening chord of *Psalm 67* following a nine-bar passage in the A-mixolydian mode (see Figure 1.7):

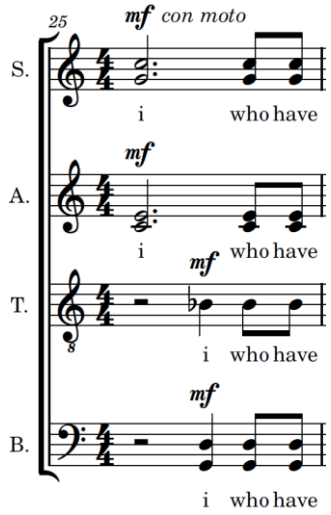


Figure 1.7: Ives' *Psalm 67* chord, quoted in Whitacre's 'i thank You God for most this amazing day', bar 25.

This quote sets the C major/G minor bichord antiphonally, with the lower voices entering two beats after the sopranos and altos. The only harmonic deviation from the original *Psalm 67* chord is the omission of the tenor 2 part that doubles the bass 2 at the octave. The sudden appearance of the chord combined with the diligent study of bichordal harmony throughout the work strongly suggests that Whitacre knowingly quoted Ives in this instance.

Alongside harmony and bitonality, Ives pioneered significant developments in choral timbre, incorporating dense cluster chords and rich textures. Ives considered *Psalm 90* (1894–

1924) the only one of his compositions with which he was completely satisfied.[48] Written for mixed choir, organ and chimes and composed over the course of three decades, the work incorporates several modernist techniques, including whole-tone scales, musical palindromes and secundal harmony. In bar 60, the choir sings a unison middle C before fanning out into a twenty-two-part cluster chord built upon the whole-tone scale, with a semitone interval only in the outermost soprano and bass parts at the apex of the chord in bar 63. The chord then gradually reduces back to a unison middle C in bar 65 (see Figure 1.8):
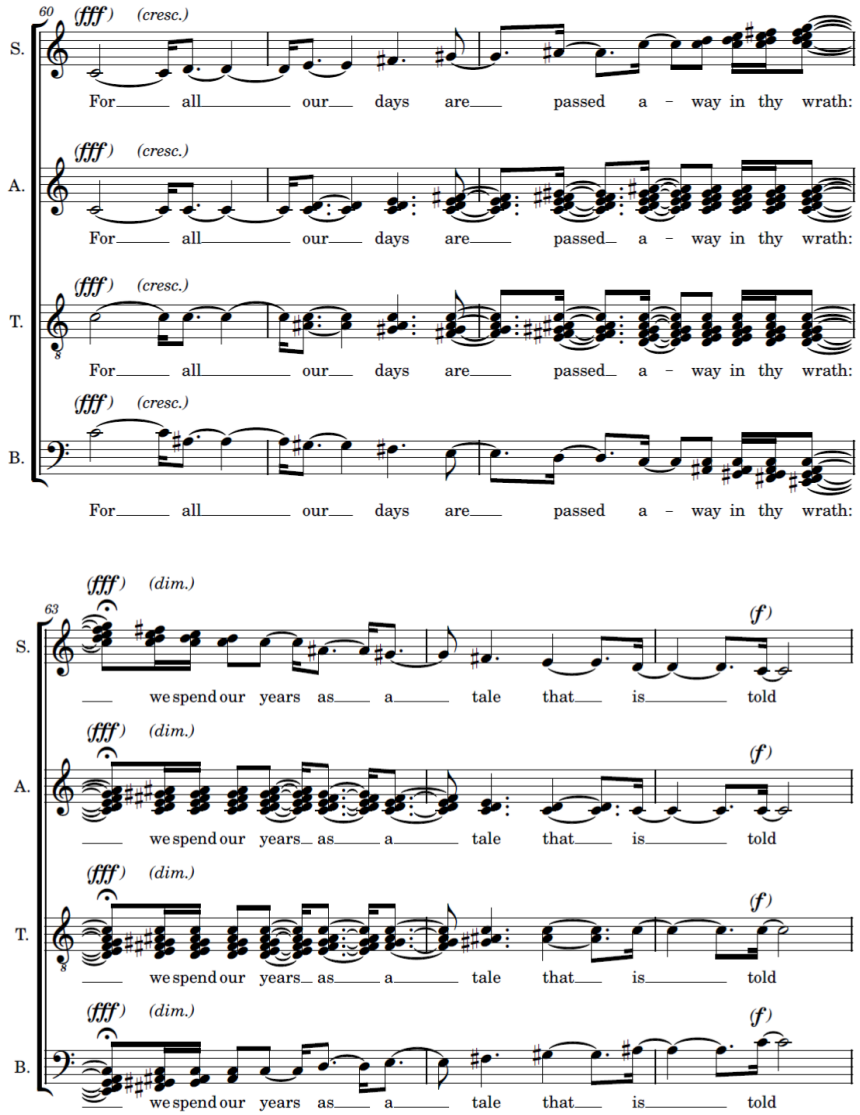


Figure 1.8: Dense whole-tone cluster chords emerging from a unison middle C in *Psalm 90*, bars 60–65.

[48] Swifford, p. 347.

Cluster chords are a core element of the New Transcendentalist style, evoking the 'wall of sound' effect when applied to unaccompanied voices. Again, we see the influence of Ives in Whitacre's *Water Night*. Using vocal painting on the text 'fills you from within', Whitacre fans out his cluster chord of fourteen stacked pitches in the reverse method to Ives, beginning with the extreme low and high pitches of E3 in the bass, tenor and alto parts, and D5 in the soprano part. The two sections step in contrary motion until a full secundal cluster chord is formed, filling the texture from within (see Figure 1.9):

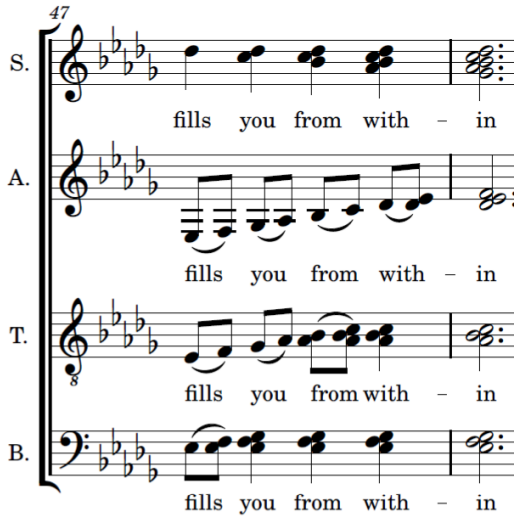


Figure 1.9: A secundal cluster chord in bars 47–48 of *Water Night*.

Jake Runestad emulates Ives' use of whole-tone clusters in the opening of his *Alleluia* (2013), with the stack tones emerging in a rising figure from a unison G in the upper voices and subsequently in the lower voices (see Figure 1.10):
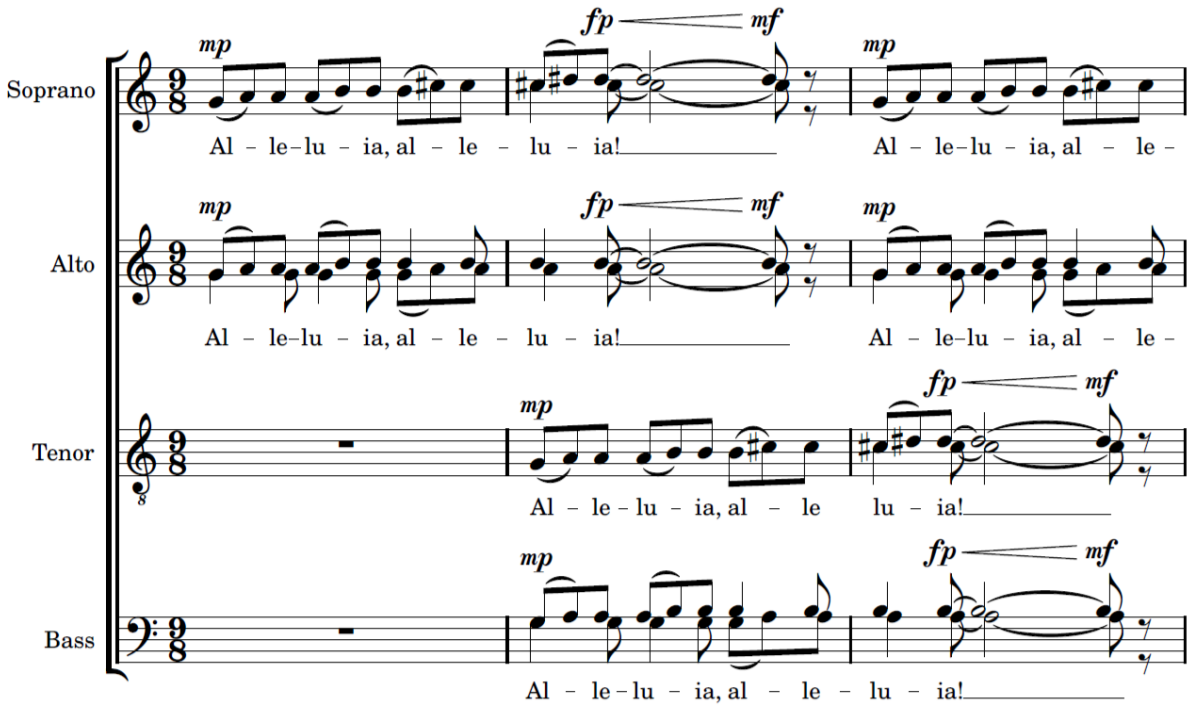


Figure 1.10: Whole-tone clusters in the opening of Runestad's *Alleluia*.

These stylistic fingerprints found in the works of Whitacre and Runestad demonstrate the lasting contribution of Ives' innovations in choral harmony and texture to the American choral soundscape. While Ives used modernist harmonic frameworks, such as whole-tone and octatonic scales as well as polytonal harmony, the sonic effect of the techniques of chordal combination and clustered chords proved inspiring for later generations of choral composers working within the tonal contexts of traditional modal and diatonic harmony.

Dennis Shrock has noted that American choral composition post-Ives has been markedly conservative, writing that 'no other Americans of the early twentieth century followed his lead, and the few composers in the following decades who embraced modern styles and techniques are generally not widely known'.[49] While many composers in the United States engaged in modernist and avant-garde compositional techniques, these methods were rarely applied within choral compositions. Composers tended towards tonal frameworks. There is a practical reason for this; unlike an instrumentalist, a singer must internalise pitch and intonation and produce the notes independently and with proper technique according to their vocal tessitura. Chromaticism, non-diatonic lines and wide, irregular melodic intervals are far easier to accomplish on an instrument than to audiate and produce with the voice, particularly for amateurs. This limitation may have driven experimental composers away from the medium

[49] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 825.

of choral composition, as evidenced by Elliot Carter's comments on moving away from choral composition in the wake of the Second World War, aspiring to compose music that was "more adult and significant".[50] Despite these tensions, numerous twentieth-century composers devised methods of incorporating avant-garde compositional techniques into choral music, including aleatoricism, contemporary notation and extended performance techniques. These approaches were usually grounded in tonality to create greater accessibility for performing groups, pre-empting the New Transcendentalist soundworld that would come to dominate American choral music.

Like the work of Ives, the innovations of Henry Cowell (1897–1965) were central the expansion of harmony and texture in contemporary American music. Through his experimentation with avant-garde compositional techniques including indeterminacy, polymetric and polytonal music, cluster chords and extreme complexity, Cowell 'helped to create and build a foundation for "modern" music in America'.[51] His interest in world music and his perspectives on the boundaries of music and sound had a lasting impact on his students, including John Cage and Lou Harrison.[52] Adapting to the more conservative, nationalist sensibilities of the American public following the Second World War and the New Deal, Cowell merged his avant-garde compositional idiom with more familiar tonal and structural frameworks from the American choral tradition. According to a review in *The New York Times*, his cantata *... if He please* (1955) for mixed chorus, children's chorus and orchestra features an 'archaic flavor (although a flavor definitely dictated by contemporary taste buds)'.[53] Strimple claims that Cowell was 'the first composer to systematize the use of chord clusters', a crucial element of New Transcendentalism.[54] Cluster chords are the central thematic material of *... if He please*, with Cowell using clusters based upon various modal, tonal and non-tonal scales. The work opens with a dramatic, *fortissimo* G major cluster chord played by the flutes and oboes. Figure 1.11 below shows a fourteen-part chord based on the F-dorian scale sung by the mixed chorus. This chord expands upwards from an initial F2 in the bass. The chord contains three separate clusters: a five-note cluster in the bass parts over an F2, a three-note cluster over an F3 in the tenors, and a six-note cluster over a C4 in the upper voices. This is

[50] Strimple, p. 230.
[51] R.F. Goldman: "Henry Cowell (1897–1965): a Memoir and an Appreciation," *PNM*, 4/2 (1965–6), 23–8 cited in David Nicholls and Joel Sachs, 'Cowell, Henry (Dixon)', *Grove Music Online*, 2013 <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2249182> [Accessed 10 December 2022].
[52] Nicholls and Sachs, 2013.
[53] Thurston Dox, *American Oratorios and Cantatas: A Catalog of Works Written in the United States from Colonial Times to 1985* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986), pp. 5–6, cited in Strimple, p. 226.
[54] Strimple, p. 226.

sung over a chromatic cluster chord between F2 and C3 played by the double basses and celli (shown in the left hand of the piano reduction), and chromatic trills played by the violas and violins (played by the right hand):
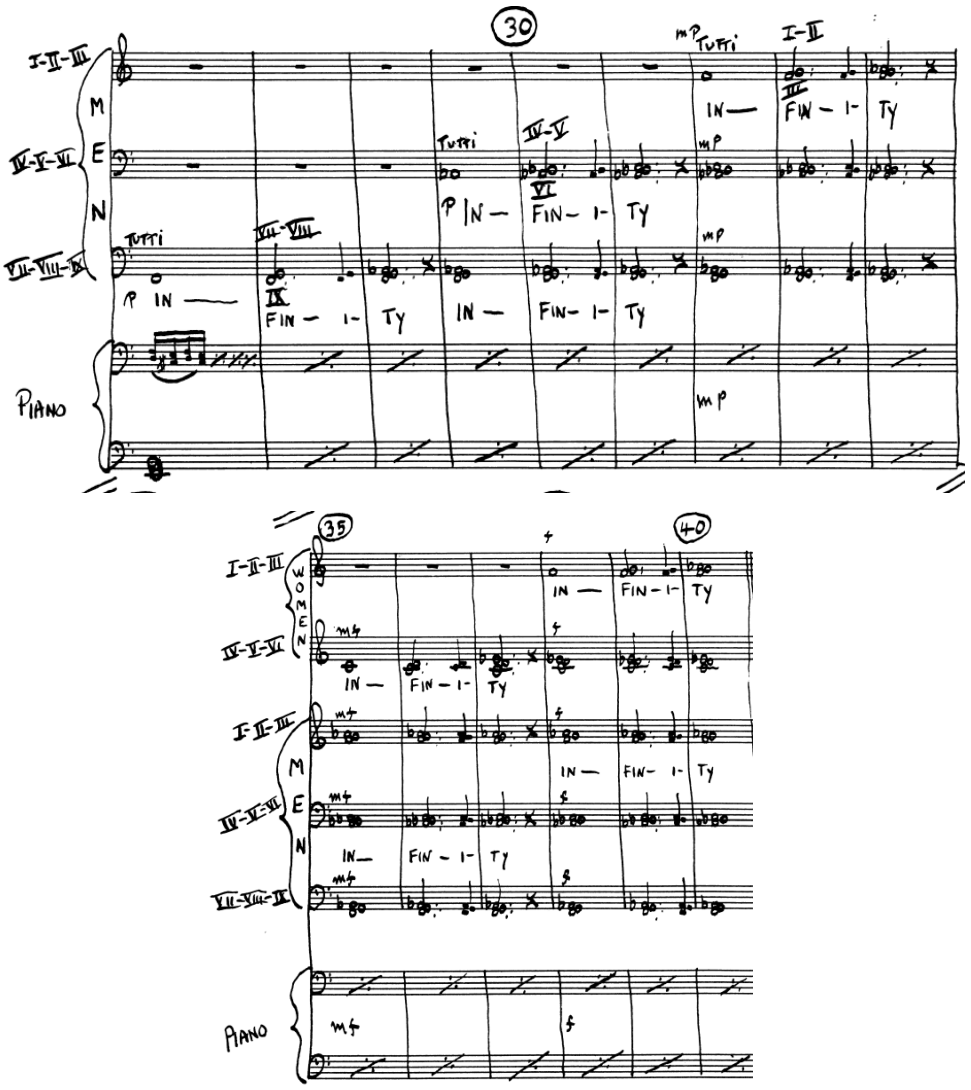


Figure 1.11: Cluster chords in Cowell's *... if He please*, bars 27–40.

The use of familiar tonal and modal scales for the cluster chords aids singers in correctly pitching their notes, and provides a crutch of familiarity to the listener, ensuring that this avant-garde technique is accessible to the audience. The variation and juxtaposition of the intervallic and timbral colour of clusters throughout the work exploits the compositional possibilities of cluster chords. This technique of exploring various cluster sonorities would later become a crucial aspect of New Transcendentalist composition.

While Cowell was mostly known for his work with instrumental music, Knut Nystedt (1915–2014) was a prolific choral composer, with three quarters of his four hundred compositions written for chorus. Like Cowell, Nystedt sought to integrate contemporary

compositional techniques into his choral compositions while adhering to principles of harmony, voice-leading and counterpoint that he learned through his study of Palestrina and Bach. Although Nystedt never emigrated to the United States from his native Norway, he travelled to the US early in his career to take composition lessons with Aaron Copland, and his music rose to popularity in the United States owing to his collaboration and friendship with American collegiate choral conductors Frank Pooler (1926–2013) at California State College, Long Beach, and Leland B. Sateren (1913–2007) at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. Pooler in particular was a strong advocate for avant-garde compositional techniques in choral music, often turning to his 'good friend' Nystedt when seeking commissions and repertoire suggestions for his choir.[55] Nystedt was frequently invited to lead workshops and masterclasses at American colleges and universities. Through the advocacy of American choral directors and publishing houses, Nystedt became one of the most-performed choral composers at national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association in the late twentieth century. Nystedt, like Cowell, juxtaposed traditional idioms of European art music with avant-garde compositional techniques. Elements of Gregorian chant feature prominently in his works, for example, *De profundis*, Op. 54 (1966) uses chant-like homorhythmic declamation in the choir, with notated boxes to indicate an approximate pitch range in which singers may choose individual pitches (See Figure 1.12):

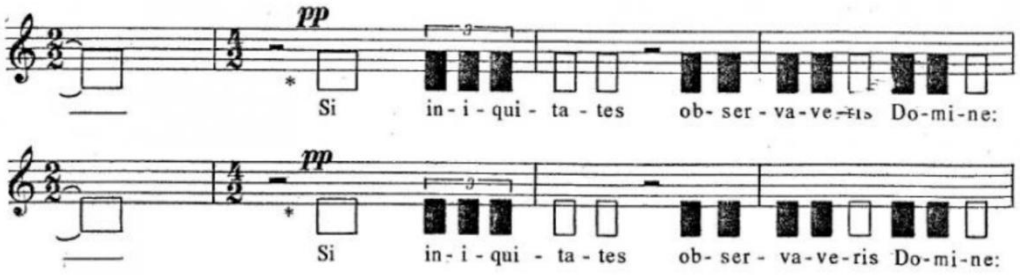


Figure 1.12: Clustered approximated pitches in Nystedt's *De profundis*, bars 19–22.[56]

Although the effect of these combined indeterminate pitches is a complex, clustered, non-tonal texture, the homorhythmic declamation of the text displays textual primacy in this style of composition, lending a certain accessibility to these avant-garde works.

The process of combining indeterminacy with traditional features of Western choral music often resulted in clustered, expansive, 'washy' chords that are now idiosyncratic of the

[55] Frank Pooler and Edgar J. Thompson, 'Comments on Avant-Garde Choral Music: An Interview with Frank Pooler', *The Choral Journal*, 12 (1971), 9–14, p. 9.
[56] Ágnes Török, 'The Notation of the 20th and 21st Century Choral Music' (online), Debreceni Egyetem Zeneművészeti Kar, <https://music.unideb.hu/hu/notation-20th-and-21st-century-choral-music> [Accessed 9 August 2021].

New Transcendentalist soundscape. A pertinent example of this phenomenon is Nystedt's *Immortal Bach* (1998), in which the first eight bars of Bach's funeral chorale 'Komm süßer Tod' are sung in their original format and are then sung in polytempo by groupings within the choir singing at different beats per second. This work bears great resemblance to an earlier composition by the American composer Edwin London entitled *Bach (Again)* (1974), in which an English translation of the same chorale is sung by each singer aleatorically in individual tempi. This heterophonic chorale creates a series of clustered chords with secundal harmony arising from step movement within the parts (see Figures 1.13 and 1.14):
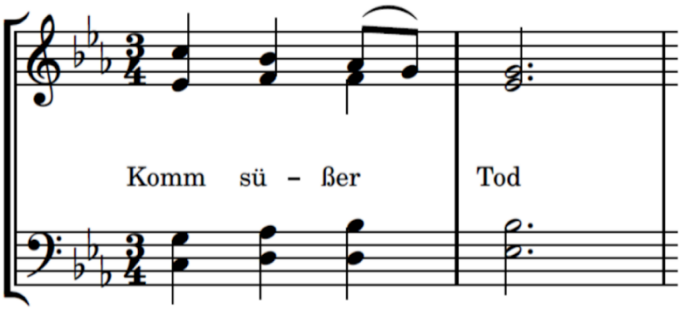


Figure 1.13: The opening two bars of Nystedt's *Immortal Bach*.[57]

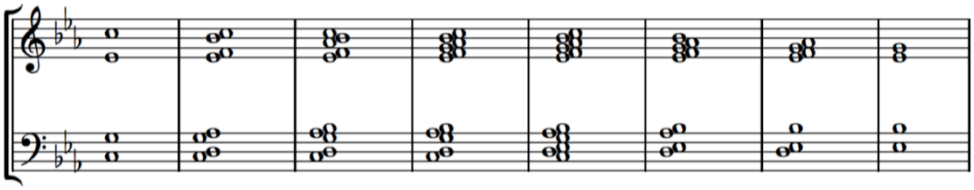


Figure 1.14: The series of cluster chords arising from the heterophonic singing of the first two bars of *Immortal Bach*.[58]

Through the contemporary technique of heterophony, Nystedt and London created a modern soundworld using archaic sources. Evidently, these developments had a significant impact on Eric Whitacre's harmonic palette, with Whitacre performing London's *Bach (Again)* with his ensemble the Eric Whitacre Singers at the iTunes Live festival of 2014.[59] This work is still part of Whitacre's repertoire as a conductor, leading a performance of the work as recently as 25 May 2025.[60] In *Immortal Bach* we observe the American choral tradition of merging ancient

[57] Kevin Boushel, 'The Choral Music of Knut Nystedt and its Influence on Late-Twentieth- and Early-Twenty-First-Century Composers in the United States' (unpublished masters dissertation, Dublin City University, 2021), p. 38.
[58] Boushel, p. 39.
[59] Eric Whitacre, Bach arr. Edwin London - Come Sweet Death (Eric Whitacre Singers), online video recording, YouTube, 13 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-6z0gCw_sk&list=PLAwgrwRtiDPfWlNIRNxLh7ldP11ksilMD&index=3> [Accessed 10 December 2022].
[60] Vlaams Radiokoor, 'eternity in an hour', online event description, <https://www.vlaamsradiokoor.be/en/concerten/eternity-in-an-hour-25-05-2025> [Accessed 3 June 2025].

musical sources with modern compositional processes to form a rich, harmonically dense soundworld rooted in familiarity. The fifth cluster chord seen in Figure 1.14 above contains nine secundal clashes, pre-empting the prominence of this sonority in many New Transcendentalist works, notably Whitacre's *When David Heard* (2000) (See Figure 1.15):
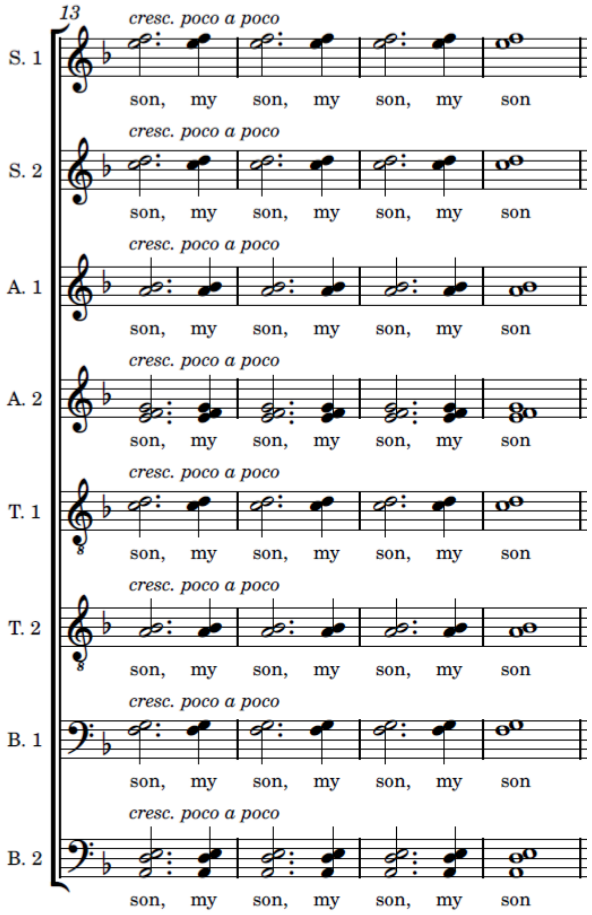


Figure 1.15: A seventeen-part cluster chord in *When David Heard*, bars 13–16.

As with the Ivesian influence discussed above, dense, secundal cluster chords in a traditional tonal framework have become a hallmark of New Transcendentalism. This compositional tool, employed in a pandiatonic context, draws upon the history of this technique as both notated clusters, as in works of Ives, alongside the cluster sonorities that arose from aleatoric and heterophonic writing in the choral works of Cowell and Nystedt.

Alongside the broader choral context in which the New Transcendentalist style emerged, several individual twentieth-century works have had a direct impact on the style, specifically on the compositional approach of Eric Whitacre. During his keynote speech at the virtual 2021 American Choral Directors Association National Conference, Whitacre reminisced about his first time attending an ACDA conference as an undergraduate student.

His most striking memory from this conference was the series of concerts given during the conference of contemporary music performed by high-level ensembles. He recalls one performance by the Northern Arizona University choir directed by Jo Michael Scheibe as having a lasting impact on his compositions, listing three works in particular: *When David Heard* (1975) by Norman Dinerstein (1937–1982), *Lux aeterna* (1989) by Edwin Fissinger (1920–1990) and *The Rose* by the English composer John Paynter (1931–2010). On these three pieces, Whitacre stated: 'I can even look back now on all the music I've written to that moment and say, "that's the moment half of my harmonic language, and dramatic language was formed."'[61] This speaks to the significance of the national and regional conferences of the ACDA on the development of choral composition in America, examined in detail below under *Choral Infrastructure in the United States*. These three works share many harmonic and textural features that would become hallmarks of New Transcendentalism, particularly in Whitacre's early works. All three are largely homophonic and composed within a tonal/modal framework. These works feature clustered chords, secundal clashes, extended chords and non-functional harmony. Precursors to stylistic tropes of New Transcendentalism can be found in all three works, particularly *Lux aeterna* and *The Rose*.

Fissinger's *Lux aeterna* is composed according to the traditional structure of liturgical chant settings, with verses of the original chant intoning choral variations upon the text. The piece opens with an adaptation of the 'Lux aeterna' chant from the Requiem Mass, followed by staggered entries on the word 'Lux' forming an eight-part chord. The first four notes, sung by the basses and tenors in *divisi*, outline four notes of the A-pentatonic scale beginning on E, creating secundal clashes within the voice-parts. This is followed by four notes of the B-pentatonic scale in the alto and soprano parts. The resultant chord has a distinct Lydian quality, with the implication of the A major tonality in the first four chords offset by the presence of a D-sharp in the second four chords (see Figure 1.16):

[61] Eric Whitacre, 'Keynote Address by Eric Whitacre', online video recording, YouTube, 30 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAIzDFoeAd8&t=341s> [Accessed 10 January 2023].

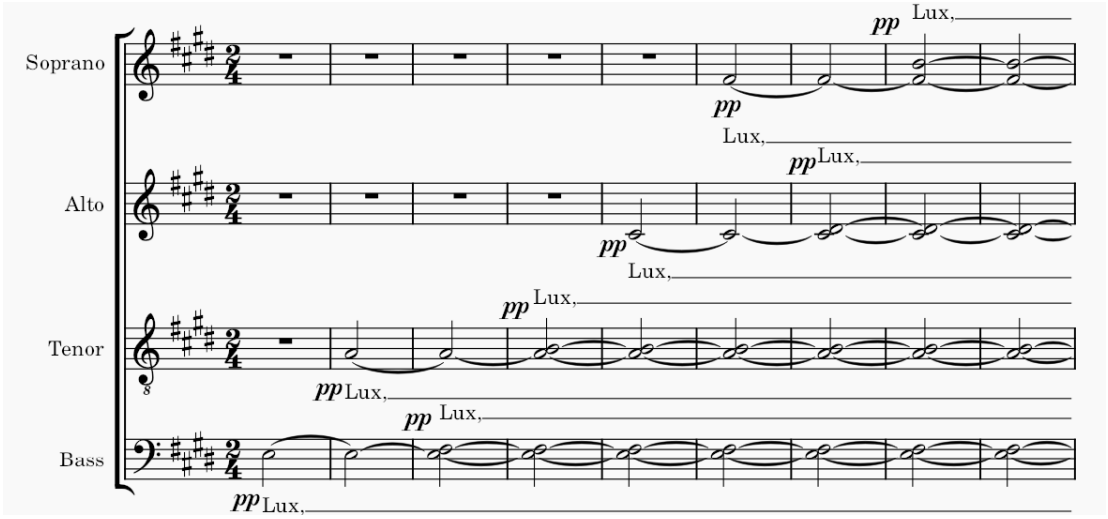


Figure 1.16: The opening chords of Fissinger's *Lux aeterna*.

Lydian cluster chords feature prominently in Paynter's *The Rose*. In the middle section of the work, the ensemble is bifurcated into Chorus I and Chorus II. Chorus I chants Latin text heterophonically on a sustained G major chord, while Chorus II sings a series of cluster chords fanning out from unison pitches. Figure 1.17 below shows an F-lydian pentachord sung by the sopranos and altos in Chorus II over the aleatoric chanting of Chorus I:
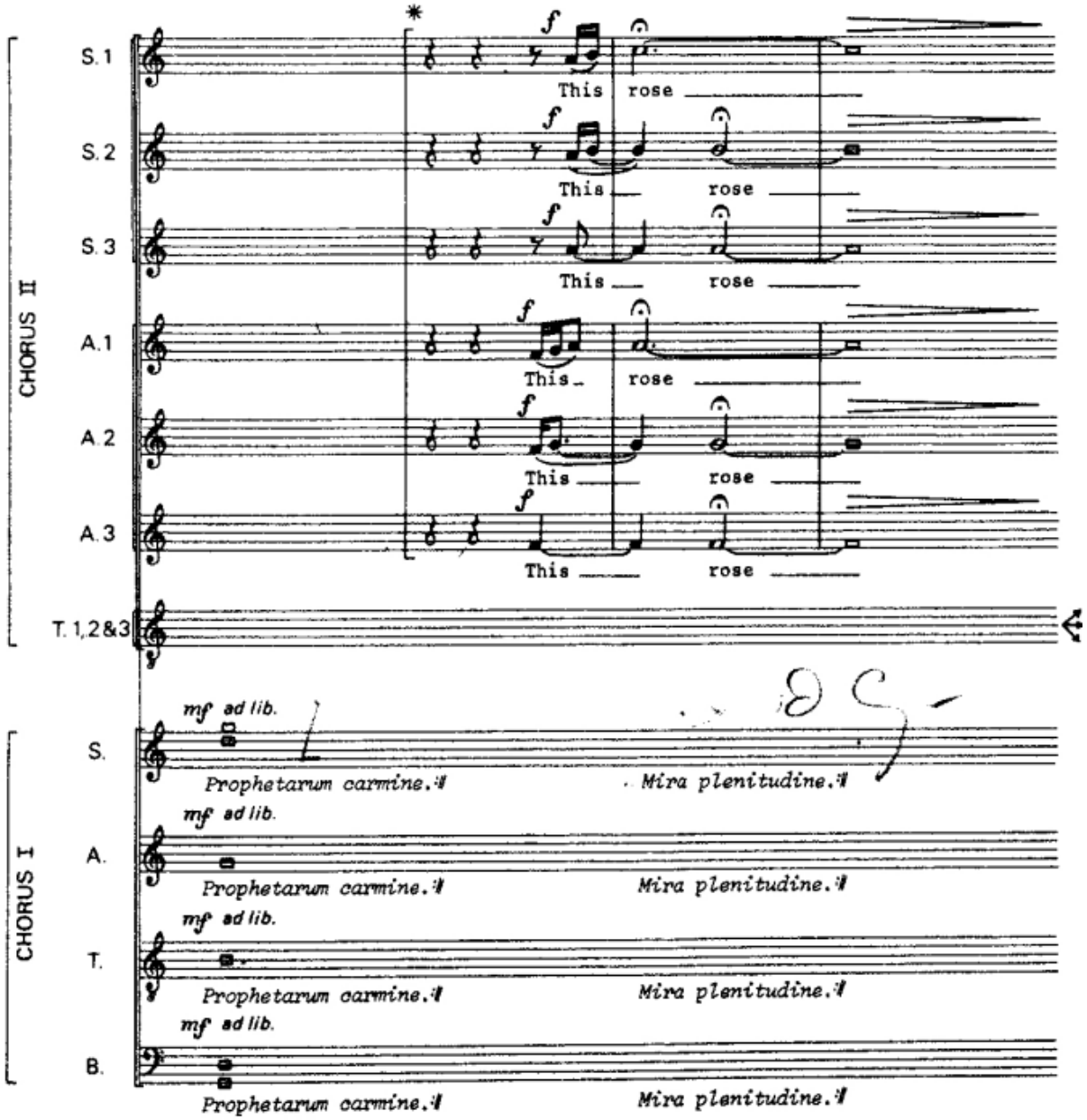


Figure 1.17: Lydian cluster chords and bifurcated textures in Paynter's *The Rose*, bars 38–40.

Lydian cluster chords possess a shimmering quality, created by the juxtaposition of the major triad with the tritone interval between the first and fourth scale degrees, the semitone clash between the fourth and fifth degrees and the polar tension between the first and fifth degrees. The first degree possesses the modal centre, while the fifth degree would be the root in diatonicism. This harmonic flavour has been particularly attractive to New Transcendentalist composers, with a sustained Lydian pentachord heard in the opening of several popular works of this style, such as Whitacre's 'Go Lovely Rose' (1991), Frank Ticheli's *There Will Be Rest* (2000) and Jake Runestad's *Alleluia* (2013). Figure 1.17 above features another crucial element of New Transcendentalist composition: bifurcated textures. As analysis in Chapters Three and

Four will demonstrate, dividing the choir into textural units is an important method by which New Transcendentalist composers generate polyphonic interest and textural contrast while maintaining the wall-of-sound timbral effect. Although Paynter is an English composer, the performance of this work at the 1991 ACDA National Conference in Phoenix, Arizona has had a lasting impact on the style.[62]

Another feature of Whitacre's compositional style found in these works is the oscillation between two non-functionally related extended chords within a tonal context. *The Rose* ends with a contralto solo over two oscillating chords. These dense, clustered chords repeat without a clear ending, with a *diminuendo al niente* bringing the piece to a conclusion.

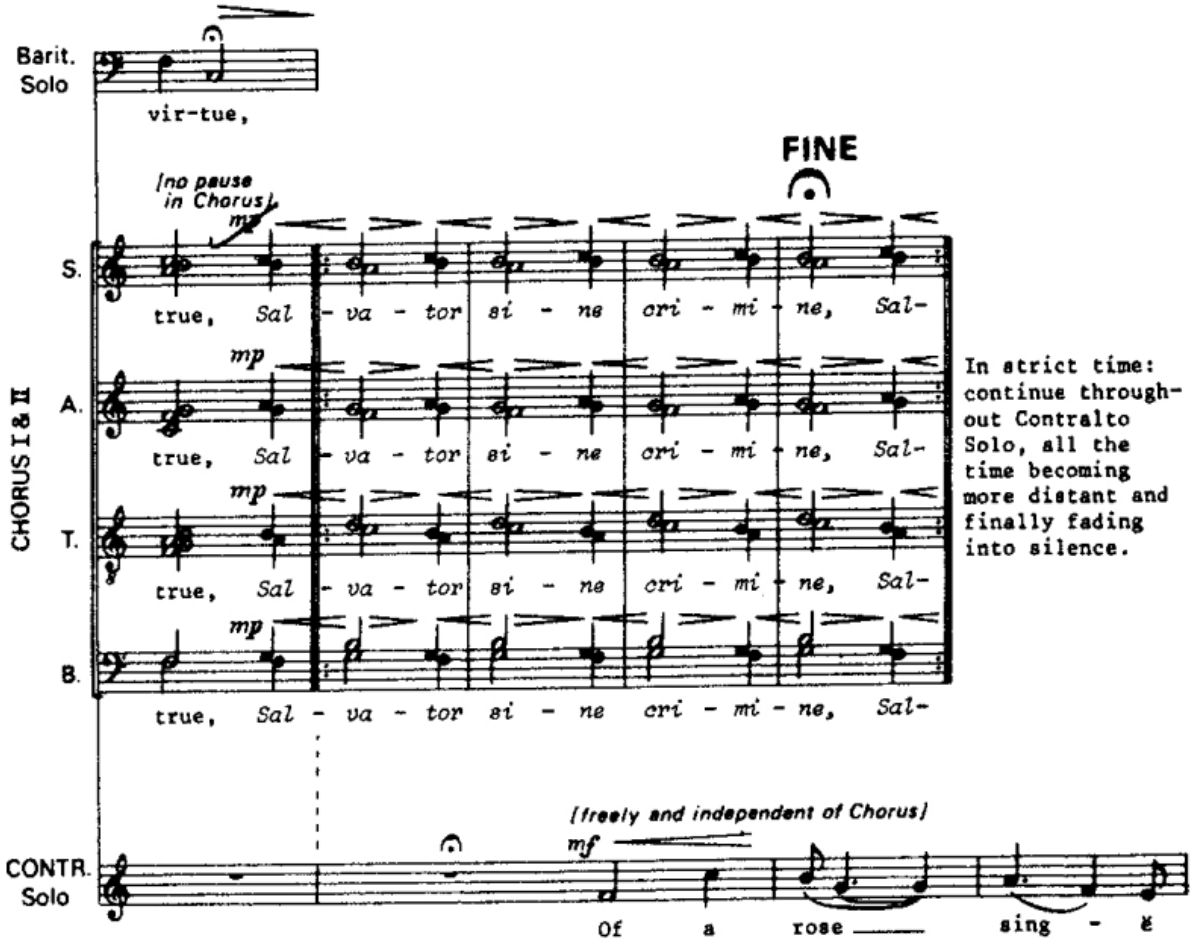


Figure 1.18: Oscillating cluster chords over a contralto solo in the coda of Paynter's *The Rose*.

[62] The work was performed again at the following ACDA National Conference in San Antonio, Texas in 1993 by the University of North Dakota Concert Choir with conductor James Rodde.

Whitacre concludes his 2002 work *Sleep* in a similar way, with oscillating non-functional chords repeating in the alto, tenor and bass parts, under a pedal soprano G, repeating while reducing in dynamic (see Figure 1.19):

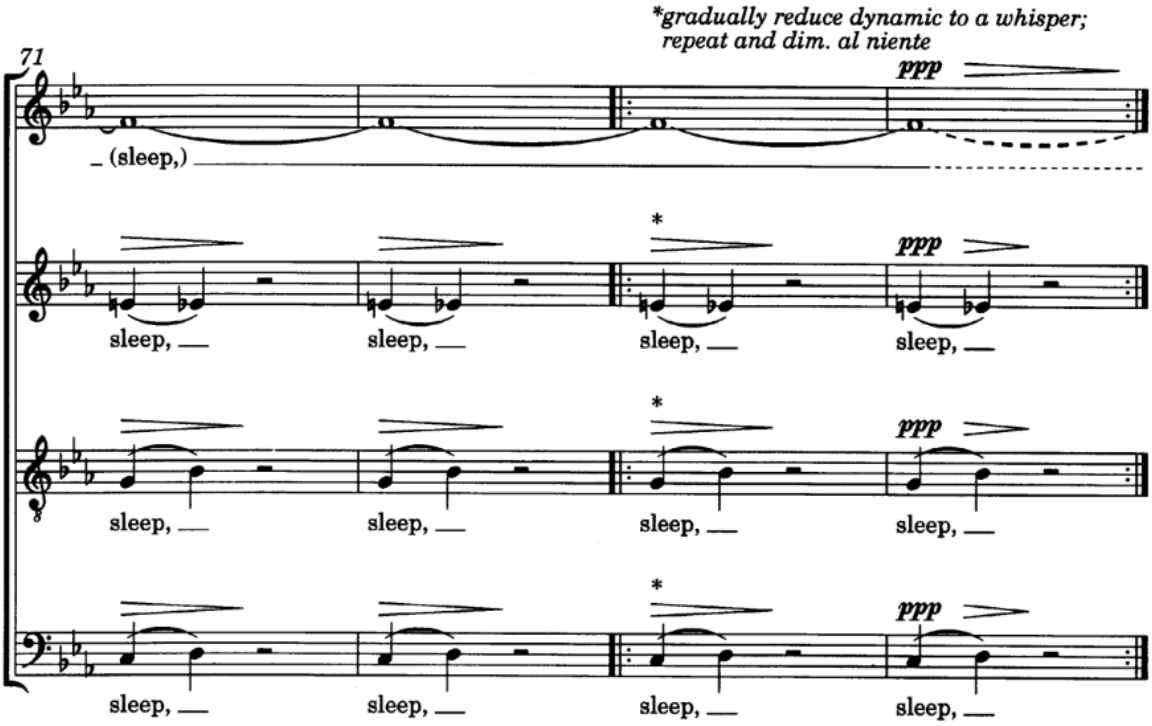


Figure 1.19: oscillating chords, repeating while reducing in dynamic 'to a whisper', at the coda of Whitacre's *Sleep*, bars 71–74.

As in Paynter's *The Rose*, these final chords are not functionally related and are tonally ambiguous. Although *Sleep* is written in the key of E-flat major, the final chords of the piece are C major—the parallel minor chord with a raised third—and E-flat major 7 in third inversion, with the major seventh in the bass voice. The first of the two chords exists outside of the home tonality, while the second is presented in a highly removed inversion, destabilising the home chord of E-flat major. The works of Ives, Cowell, Fissinger and Paynter examined above demonstrate an approach to harmony that presents choral chords as sonic objects in their own right with their own dramatic impact, rather than functional, harmonic support mechanisms for the melody. While still leaning on familiar intervallic relationships of diatonic and modal harmony so that they are not entirely alien to the audience, New Transcendentalist harmony is simultaneously modern and accessible.

Destabilised chords are foundational to New Transcendentalism, allowing the harmony to occupy a tonal or modal space without the weight of traditional hierarchical relationships between chords. This is generally achieved through the combination of extended harmony

notes and the presentation of chords in inversion. Fissinger's *Lux aeterna* features many extended chords in inversion, for example, the G-sharp major 9 chord in second inversion heard on the word 'Domine' in bars 38–40 (see Figure 1.20):
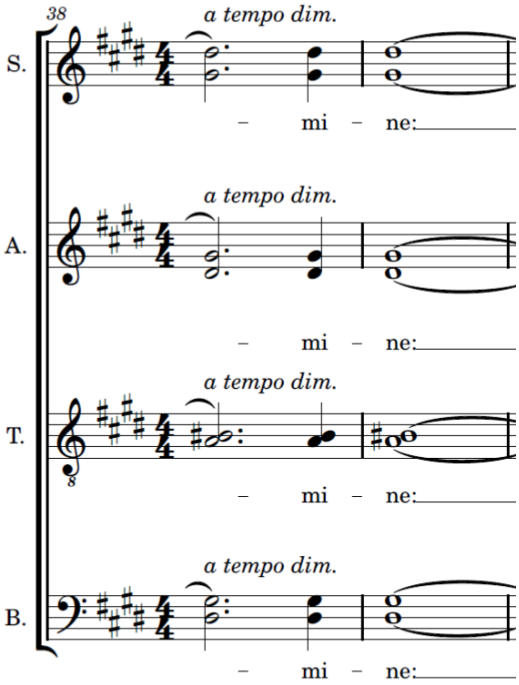


Figure 1.20: A G-sharp 9 chord in second inversion in bars 38–40 of Fissinger's *Lux aeterna*.

Through the use of extended chords in inversion, the composer offsets the gravity of the tonic note, giving the music a sense of flexibility and levity. The technique of composing in a tonal context while using inversions and chord extensions in this way later became synonymous with a composer largely understood to be a foundational figure in New Transcendentalism: Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943).

Morten Lauridsen

The choral music of Morten Lauridsen has had a profound and lasting impact on choral composition in the United States. Nick Strimple describes Lauridsen as a 'mystic', writing that 'Lauridsen's probing, serene work contains an illusive [*sic*] and indefinable ingredient which leaves the impression that all the questions have been answered'.[63] Alongside his career as a composer, he taught at the University of Southern California from 1964–2019. His works are defined by their lyrical melodies and fluid rhythmic quality. In an interview with conductor

[63] Strimple, p. 247

Larry Livingston, Lauridsen stated 'things that influenced me always were those composers that were able to take a lyric line and make it memorable', listing Bach, Brahms, Verdi and Palestrina as influences.[64] Strimple characterises this engagement with composers of the past as an inheritance from his teacher, Halsey Stevens (1908–89), whose works incorporated Neoclassical concepts.[65] One of his primary influences, however, was Gregorian plainchant. Lauridsen explored a compositional approach in his seminal work, *O magnum mysterium* (1994). According to the composer, 'both the musical themes and phrase shapes in *O Magnum Mysterium* have their roots in Gregorian chant, with a constant metric flow and ebb'.[66] James Arthur Bond identified melodic ideas from chant in the work, such as intoning phrases.[67] The non-metrical quality of chant complemented Lauridsen's Neoclassical fondness for *rubato*, undermining the primacy of musical parameters and heightening the primacy of the meaning and the metrical qualities of the source text. Despite Lauridsen's focus on melodic, rhythmic and textural elements, it is his contribution to choral harmony that has had the most enduring impact.

O magnum mysterium was a turning point in Lauridsen's career. Following its publication, he employed the central harmonic material of the work in all of his subsequent choral compositions, either in its original form or in a variation. *O magnum mysterium* opens on a D9 chord in first inversion sung by the soprano, tenor and bass voices with a countermelody entering in the alto voice. This is followed by an A major chord in first inversion and a G major chord in first inversion before returning to D9, now in second inversion:

[64] American School Band Directors Association, *ASBDA Legends Series Interview with Morten Lauridsen, May 26, 2021*, online video recording, YouTube, 28 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWSHC7fD1kY>, 46:20 [Accessed 4 June 2025].
[65] Strimple, p. 247.
[66] Morten Lauridsen, 'It's a Still Life That Runs Deep: The Influence of Zurbaran's Still Life With Lemons, Oranges and a Rose', *Wall Street Journal*, 21 February 2009 (online), <https://www.mortenlauridsen.net/articles.html> [Accessed 3 June 2025].
[67] James Arthur Bond, "Thunderstruck by Art": The Interdisciplinary and Interpretive Contexts of Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*', *The Choral Journal*, 59 (2018), 8–21, p. 16.

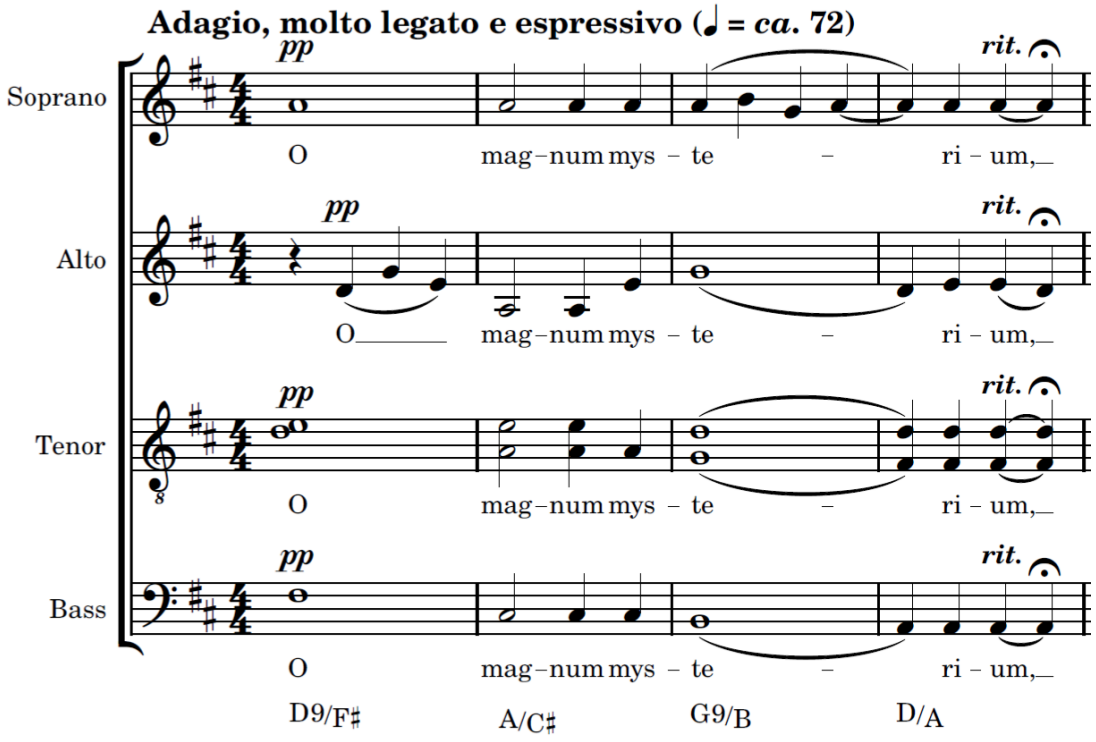


Figure 1.21: The opening four bars of Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*.

The opening chord of the work, the first inversion major chord with an added ninth, became so immediately iconic that it is often referred to as the Lauridsen chord. According to the composer, the purpose for using consecutive inverted chords is to create an ethereal effect: 'The piece seems to float, to hover in the air, due to a predominant use of inverted chords'.[68] This particular sequence of chords is used in 'O nata lux', the central *a cappella* movement from his *Lux aeterna* (1997) for choir and orchestra. Lauridsen varies the progression with the inclusion of an additional G major first inversion chord preceding the A major chord, and an added eleventh on the A major chord (see Figure 1.22):

[68] Lauridsen, 2009.

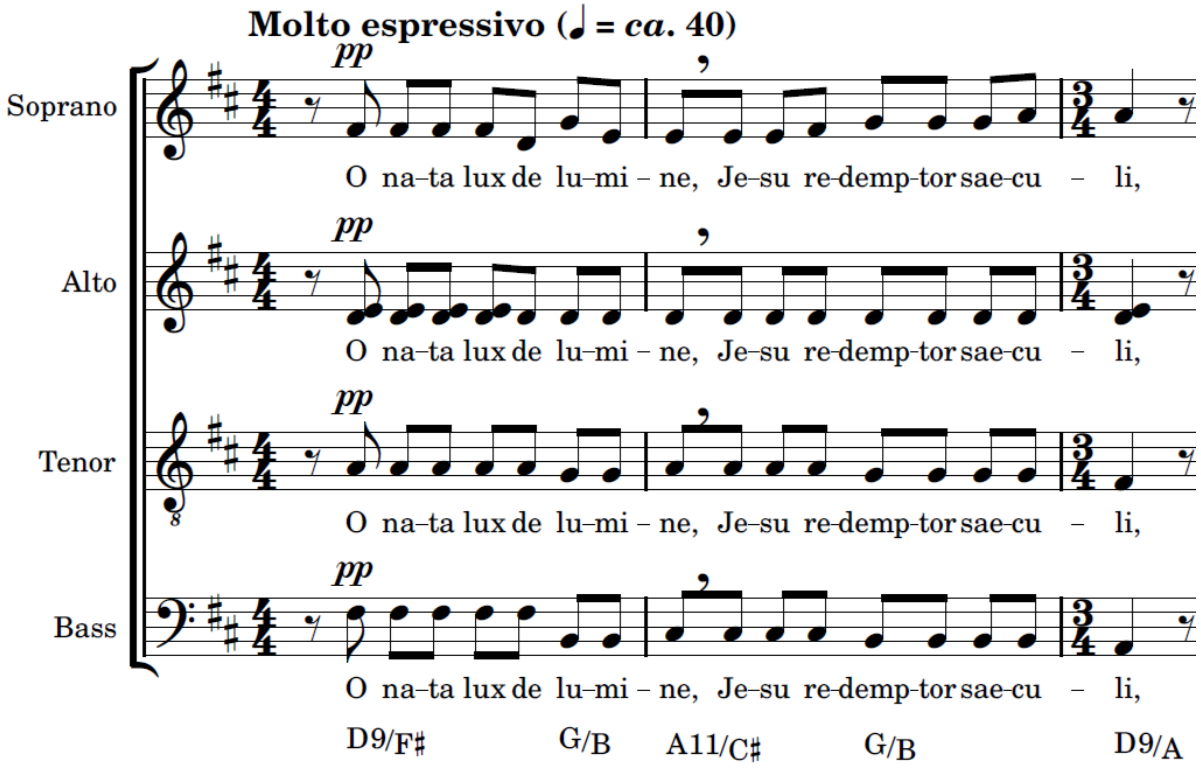


Figure 1.22: The opening phrase of Lauridsen's 'O nata lux'.

Lynch, noting the recurrence of this particular sequence of chords in numerous works by Lauridsen, dubbed it the 'Lauridsen progression'.[69] Variations of the progression appear in the choral harmonies or piano accompaniment of each of his subsequent works. *Ubi Caritas et Amor* (1999) opens with the tonic chord in root position, and the final chord of the sequence is a chord of V rather than a return to the chord of I in second inversion as in *O magnum mysterium* (see Figure 1.23):

[69] Shane M. Lynch, 'Music Historiography and Useful Style Histories: The Case for the Evolving Era of Neo-Impressionism and its Influence on American Choral Music of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 2008), pp. 49–50.

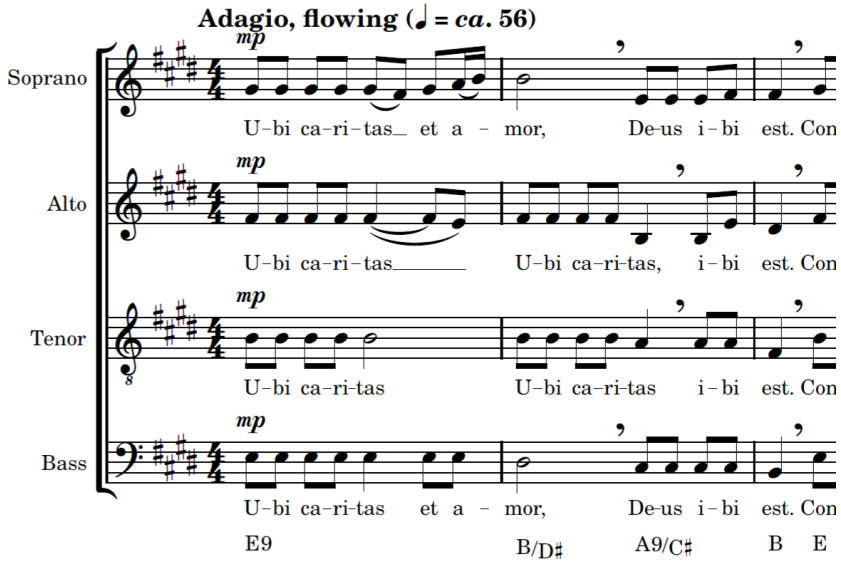


Figure 1.23: A variant of the 'Lauridsen Progression' in the opening three bars of *Ubi Caritas et Amor*.

Bond describes Lauridsen's harmonies as creating a 'gossamer effect', using words like 'shimmering' and 'glimmering' to describe their sonic impact.[70] For Byron Adams, Lauridsen's 'refulgent *Lux aeterna* for chorus and orchestra (1997)', from which the movement 'O nata lux' is taken, is the 'quintessence of Lauridsen's style'.[71] While Lauridsen does not discuss his approach to harmony in great detail in interviews or in his writing, focusing instead on melody and text-setting, it is clear that he became deeply invested in this harmonic framework, abandoning the non-tonal and dissonant harmonies of some of his earlier works, such as *Mid-Winter Songs* (1980), and dedicating the remainder of his compositional career to the pandiatonic framework he developed for *O magnum mysterium*. The descriptions of his harmonies as 'glimmering' and 'refulgent' suggest that Lauridsen developed a new and approach to choral harmony, a discovery that inspired a generation of choral composers in the United States.

As well as being a turning point in Lauridsen's own career, *O magnum mysterium* had a major impact on choral composition in the United States more broadly. Dan Forrest explains the profound impact that the work had on him and on the broader community of American choral composers:

[70] Bond, pp. 15–16.
[71] Byron Adams, 'Lauridsen, Morten (Johannes)', *Grove Music Online*, 2015, <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2285141> [Accessed 18 July 2025].

> The piece that influenced me more than any other was Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, and there are so many other choral composers who would say the same thing, I think. […] I think so many people heard that sound, and there was some *divisi* in it, and just really rich, beautiful harmonies […] it certainly inspired me to want to write choral music that was that deeply moving. And I suspect that it did that for hundreds, or maybe even thousands of other people as well. So for me, I think that's a bit of the starting point where lots of people just wanted to write really beautiful chords.[72]

The use of successive inverted chords has become a common aspect of New Transcendentalist music, giving the works a weightless, ethereal feel compared with the earthy, grounded feeling of traditional harmony based on root-position chords. Other scholars have investigated stylistic links between Lauridsen and Eric Whitacre.[73] Whitacre himself credits Lauridsen's work with introducing him to the emotional and dramatic effects of secundal harmony:

> That's what that is, the second, the major second, I think I must have first heard that from Lauridsen. Morten Lauridsen's music is filled with those ninths. […] I don't know if it's because of his music […] but it sounds to me like California optimism. It sounds like going as far west as you possibly can. The sun just shines with those ninths, it's just radiant and golden, and so I use them all the time. It's just a way of just painting with light.[74]

While Lauridsen is certainly not the first composer to use secundal harmony—Whitacre also describes the impact of Arvo Pärt's *Passio* (1982) on his own approach to unresolved dissonance[75]—the popular success of his compositions augmented his impact, with many of his works being discovered by young choral singers who would later become choral composers. Whitacre's description of this harmonic soundworld as 'California optimism' highlights the perceived Americanism of New Transcendentalism, the Dionysian approach of composing beautiful chords, contrasted with the Apollonian, European preference of form and process. While Lauridsen's harmonic framework was an organic outgrowth of his approach to harmony and texture, his legacy is captured by the chord and progression named after him. This new harmonic palette merged seamlessly with the choral timbres that excited American choral singers and composers.

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[72] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.
[73] See Lynch, 2008, and Kenneth Lee Owen, 'Stylistic Traits in the Choral Works of Lauridsen, Whitacre, and Clausen (1995–2005)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 2008). These theses present comparative analysis of the two composers alongside the works of René Clausen (b. 1953).
[74] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[75] Ibid.

Choral Infrastructure in the United States

For New Transcendentalism to take root in the United States, a robust choral infrastructure and a well-trained population of choral singers was required to foster its growth. Increased choral activity in university-level institutions created an ecosystem of highly capable collegiate ensembles eager to perform exciting contemporary repertoire. The proliferation of choral competitions across the US promoting high standards of *a cappella* singing raised the level of amateur choral singing in the country, encouraging choirs to seek new and challenging repertoire. Besides ensembles under his own direction, the group that has recorded the most works by Eric Whitacre to date is the student choir of Brigham Young University, conducted by Ronald Staheli, recording a two-volume album of Whitacre's works.[76]

The development of tertiary level choral education programmes, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, nurtured a generation of influential choral conductors to perform, commission and promote newly composed American choral music. Some of the efforts to increase choral musicianship training were spearheaded by religious institutions in order to increase the musical proficiency of ministers and enhance the experience of parishioners. Alongside the music programme at St Olaf College addressed earlier, John Finley Williamson (1887–1964) founded the Westminster Choir College in his native Dayton, Ohio with the express intent of training a new generation of church musicians.[77] The college choir gained widespread repute through radio broadcasts, as well as international tours and high-profile concerts with world-renowned orchestras and conductors, with its graduates continuing to establish regional choral traditions and schools of choral philosophy, furthering the American *a cappella* movement and broadening the influence of choral music in America.[78] Graduate programmes in choral conducting also had a pivotal role in the advancement of choral music in the US, particularly the programme at the University of Illinois led by Harold Decker (1914–2003) from 1957 to 1981. Decker co-authored the influential resource book *Choral Conducting: A Symposium*[79] alongside Julius Herford (1901–1981), also a noted choral educator, and taught many influential choral conductors, including Anton Armstrong and René Clausen. Higher education has provided musicians across the United States with the requisite

[76] Whitacre composed *When David Heard* for this ensemble, dedicating the work to the memory of Staheli's son.
[77] Kathy Saltzman Romey and Matthew Mehaffey, 'A multiplicity of voices: choral music in the United States', *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, ed. by André de Quadros, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 115–129, p. 120.
[78] Ibid.
[79] (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988).

tools to achieve choral excellence with their ensembles, preparing a base of well-trained singers for the emergence of a new genre of choral composition.

Choral education and infrastructure have been essential to sustaining choral music in the United States. Both of the New England schools benefited from an increase in amateur choral ensembles, such as church choirs and singing schools, strengthening Randall Thompson's assertion that such an abundance creates a fertile ground for the growth of a school of composition.[80] The development of choral music in the United States in the late twentieth century and the consolidation of the stylistic trends examined in this study were facilitated by the establishment of national choral institutions and associations, particularly the ACDA and Chorus America. Much like the Singing School movement of the late nineteenth century that catalysed the growth of the Second New England School of choral composition,[81] the growth of a national choral infrastructure gave composers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries a platform for experimentation with form, harmony, and choral sound. William Jones (1988) and Jonathan Hall (2020) systematically documented the frequency with which certain choral composers and works have been performed at National ACDA conferences. Jones recorded performances from 1960–1987 (see Table 1.1), while Hall's study is limited to 1991–2019 (see Table 1.2).[82]

[80] Randall Thompson, 'Writing for the Amateur Chorus: A Chance and a Challenge (1980)', *Source Readings In American Choral Music*, ed. by David P. DeVenney (Missoula, Mont.: College Music Society, 1995), pp. 192–204, p. 197.
[81] See David P. DeVenney, *Varied Carols: A Survey of American Choral Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press , 1999), p. 5, and Reigles, p. 64.
[82] Jones (1988), and Jonathan Randall Hall, 'An Index of Choral Music Performed During the National Conventions of the American Choral Directors Association (1991–2019)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2020). It is notable that female composers are not represented in the top sixteen most commonly performed composers at ACDA conferences from the foundation of the ACDA to 2019. The highest-ranking female composer in Hall's study is Gwyneth Walker, ranking twenty-eighth in the list of most commonly performed composers.

Composer	Number of Occurrences
Brahms,Johannes	46
Schubert,Franz	33
Bach,J.S.	23
Poulenc,Francis	16
Thompson,Randall	16
Kodaly,Zoltan	15
Palestrina,G.P.	15
Victoria,Tomas Luis de	15
Britten,Benjamin	14
Lasso,Orlando di	14
Nystedt,Knut	14
Vaughan Williams,Ralph	14
Distler,Hugo	13
Handel,George Frederick	12
Gallus,Jacobus (Handl)	11
Mechem,Kirke L.	11
Schutz,Heinrich	11

Table 1.1: The number of performances of the most highly performed composers at ACDA National Conventions from 1960–1987.[83]

Composer	Number of Occurrences
Brahms, Johannes	59
Bach, Johann Sebastian	43
Poulenc, Francis	36
Whitacre, Eric	34
Mendelssohn, Felix	33
Monteverdi, Claudio	25
Lauridsen, Morten	24
Mozart, Wolfgang	23
Victoria, Thomas Luis de	23
Tormis, Veljo	22
Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi	21
Stroope, Z. Randall	21
Britten, Benjamin	20
Schütz, Heinrich	20
Clausen, René	18
Ešenvalds, Ēriks	18

Table 1.2: The number of performances of the most highly performed composers at ACDA National Conventions from 1991–2019.[84]

[83] Jones, p. 48.
[84] Hall, p. 24.

These datasets expose trends in contemporary choral practice, illuminating the priorities and preferences of choral directors and professionals in the United States. The examination of the ACDA offers particular insight into the contemporary choral *zeitgeists* throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, as these performances were given by choral directors for fellow choral directors. In the latter period, greater emphasis was placed on the performance of living composers: from 1960–1987, six of the seventeen most performed composers were alive during the period under review, amounting to a total of eighty-six performances. Of these six living composers, only two were American—Thompson and Mechem. Similarly, during the period considered within the latter study, six of the top sixteen composers were alive between 1991 and 2019, and four of these composers—Whitacre, Lauridsen, Stroope and Clausen—are American, illustrating an increased preference for newly composed, domestic repertoire, though their combined total of performances of works comes to just 137 out of a total 3,447.

These national choral advocacy organisations are responsible for the publication of the primary journals in the field of choral studies: the *Choral Journal*, established in 1959 and published by the ACDA, and the National Collegiate Choral Organization's (NCCO) publication the *Choral Scholar & American Choral Review* (*CSACR*), a merged publication of the *Choral Scholar*, founded in 2009 by the NCCO, and *American Choral Review*, founded in 1961 by The American Choral Foundation. Both the *CSACR* and the *Choral Journal* are peer-reviewed journals focusing on musicology, analysis, ethnomusicology, pedagogy and performance-based research surrounding choral music. The *CSACR*, despite its name, does not feature much analysis of American music, publishing four articles on J. S. Bach but only two articles on twenty-first-century American composers since 2008. The *Choral Journal* features many articles on the analysis of contemporary American choral music, though much of the published material in this journal has been focused on the pedagogical and technical considerations of a choral conductor when teaching this music to a choir due to a lack of suitable journals in this area. While Music Analysis and Performance Studies are two established fields under the umbrella of instrumental music scholarship, much of choral scholarship is practice-based. The ACDA has recently established another two journals, the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* (*IJRCS*) and *ChorTeach*, easing the burden on the *Choral Journal* by providing an outlet for specialised research areas of vocology and pedagogy. Founded in 2002 and acquired by the ACDA in 2012, the *IJRCS* is described as 'The Scientific Research Journal of the American Choral Directors Association', focusing on

vocal health and performance with an emphasis on practice-based research.[85] *ChorTeach*, founded in 2008, is a non-peer-reviewed journal aimed at teachers and choral directors, highlighting pedagogical tools and resources for choral rehearsals and programmes. These two journals provide a platform for researchers of choral pedagogy, vocal technique and health, and practice-based research, allowing the *Choral Journal* to focus more on musicological research. The dearth of scholarship into this emerging genre of choral music may be due in part to the general lack of musicological and analytical scholarship into American choral composition. While the outlets for such scholarship are certainly improving, alongside the work of the NCCO to promote choral music in research and higher educational settings, scholarship is certainly lagging behind practice in the field of contemporary choral music.

The Brock Commission

One of the most important contributions of the ACDA to the development of New Transcendentalist composition is the establishment of the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission and Awards. These awards commemorate Raymond W. Brock (1930–1991), who established the ACDA Endowment Trust and served as administrative assistant for ACDA from 1987 until his death in 1991 following a battle with cancer. The Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission was established in 1993 with the commissioning of *A Time to Dance* by Carlisle Floyd for the 1993 National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Since then, the Commission has buoyed the careers of many New Transcendentalist composers, including Morten Lauridsen, Eric Whitacre, and Jake Runestad. The commissioned piece receives its premiere at the ACDA National conference by an invited or auditioned choir chosen by the conference committee. For Whitacre, receiving the commission for *Leonardo Dreams* changed the trajectory of his career:

> It totally changed everything for me. […] When ACDA called me up and offered me this piece that would be performed in front of thousands of other choral conductors, I was humbled and thrilled […] This is the audience you can literally write for and say what you want to say as opposed to any other audience because they will understand it on a much deeper level.[86]

[85] American Choral Directors Association, *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* (2023), <https://acda.org/publications/international-journal-of-research-in-choral-singing> [Accessed 10 January 2023].
[86] Tom Wine, 'Searching for an Icon: Eric Whitacre on Composing & Conducting', *The Choral Journal*, 58 (2017), 44–58, p. 49.

The Brock Commission is primarily a recognition from the ACDA of a composer whose work has had an extraordinary impact in the field. According to its website, it exists to 'perpetuate quality choral repertoire.'[87] It is perhaps the most prestigious choral commission in the US. For Whitacre to have been offered the commission at such a young age and at such an early stage in his career, before more senior figures such as Lauridsen and Clausen, speaks to the immediate and widespread impact his music had on American choral music.

In 1998, the ACDA established the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Student Composition Competition. This competition, unlike the commission, is open to submissions from student members of the ACDA. The winning composer has their work premiered at the regional conferences of the ACDA, which take place in years during which the National convention is not held. One of the works under review in this study, Dan Forrest's 'Selah', won this award in 2005 for performance at the 2006 ACDA Southwestern Region Conference in Charleston, West Virginia. Another competition was established in 2018, the ACDA Brock Prize for Professional Composers. This competition offers the winning submission a cash prize, a performance of their work at a National conference, and free registration to present their music at the composers' fair at the conference. The first winner of this prize was Dale Trumbore in 2018 with her work *In The Middle* which was premiered at the 2019 National Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. The most recent winner was Saunder Choi, whose work *Lakbay ng Agila* (Eagle's Flight) was premiered at the 2025 National Conference in Dallas, Texas. These compositions encourage composer engagement with ACDA conferences, strengthening the collaborative relationship between composers and conductors at the conferences and offering composers a platform to share their compositional innovations with the American choral leadership community. Chapter Four presents analysis of Forrest's 'Selah', composed for the 2005 Brock Student Composition Competition. Forrest used this opportunity to experiment with the compositional language of New Transcendentalism, with strong influences of Lauridsen evident in 'Selah'.

The development of the choral infrastructure in America contributed to the construction of a national choral identity, exemplified by the high-quality recordings and performances of choirs emerging from the *a cappella* movement. The expansion of choral education in the United States created a highly trained population of choral singers with a deep knowledge of

[87] American Choral Directors Association, 'Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission' (online), <https://acda.org/about-us/awards-competitions/raymond-w-brock-memorial-commission> [Accessed 2 May 2025].

choral literature, particularly American choral repertoire. The increase in high-skilled choristers led to a proliferation of amateur and semi-professional choirs capable of performing challenging contemporary repertoire. The focus on balance, blend and tuning, inspired by the priorities of F. Melius Christiansen, enabled these ensembles to perform repertoire containing challenging extended and secundal harmonies with security of pitch and intonation. National conferences of the ACDA provided these choirs with an opportunity to share their programmes and to be inspired by the latest innovations of other ensembles, including the discovery of new composers and repertoire. These were the perfect conditions in which a style could emerge that exploits the stylistic features of choral singing that were most attractive to choral singers and directors, providing an eager and competent outlet for the performance of this music. The subsequent advent of the internet amplified the reach and popularity of these trends even further, entrenching the style into the American choral ecosystem.

A School? A Style? A Genre? A Tool?

In a 1959 lecture, Randall Thompson posed the following question referring to the abundance of amateur choruses in the United States seeking new repertoire: '*Why* has there not sprung up in this country a *bona fide* school of choral composers?'[88] The United States is home to an enviable choral infrastructure, with national and regional advocacy organisations and an abundance of high-performing professional, educational, and amateur ensembles. These have been an essential outlet for choral composition in the US, supporting generations of domestic and international choral composers. One could potentially argue that New Transcendentalism is the answer to Thompson's question. The problem, however, lies in his use of the term 'school.' The concept of a 'school of composition' has shifted radically since these remarks were first penned, particularly in the wake of New Musicology, raising the question of whether such a perspective on compositional trends and music historiography is still relevant.

According to Lawrence Kramer, 'Postmodernist strategies of understanding are incorrigibly interdisciplinary and irreducibly plural. Like the theories that ground them, they make up not a system but an ethos.'[89] Much of the discourse of New Musicology is preoccupied

[88] Thompson, p. 197.
[89] Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 5.

with how we should interpret, or reinterpret, the past, but little certainty is asserted regarding the assessment of the present, or indeed the recent past. This is in part due to the paralysis that may result from the sheer multiplicity of approaches embraced by postmodernist musicology, undermining narrative discourse. In 2009, Harry White described the effect of new musicology as follows:

> When the idea of narrative itself is under siege [...] history waits in the wings while the debates rage on. These debates can be pernicious in the domain of music. More monuments are torn down than are raised up by the new musicology.[90]

While Kramer argues that musicologists should find this 'enabling rather than paralyzing', the aversion toward a history of 'great men' and a reluctance to contribute to what Goehr called the Imaginary Museum of Musical Works may have given pause to scholars seeking to answer Randall Thompson's question and make assertions regarding compositional trends or schools. New Musicology's tendency towards individualism and pluralism is challenged by research into cultural production:

> But an artist is, of course, never truly alone. The writing of, among others, George Dickie, Pierre Bourdieu, Howard Becker, and Janet Wolff has stressed the situatedness of even the most seemingly hermetic and socially isolated creators within an "artworld" or "field" of cultural production.[91]

Such arguments raise the question of how to classify New Transcendentalism, now that this critical research has identified its musical characteristics and the means by which it manifests in the works of various composers. Is it a school? A style? A genre? Or simply a compositional tool at the mercy of the composer?

Among composers and critics, one of the most problematic aspects of generalisation is pigeon-holing. When identifying a 'school of composition', a binary construct is inevitably constructed, in which composers are either 'in' or 'out'. If a composer does not meet certain criteria, they may be omitted from discourse on contemporary choral music, which over time may serve to exclude them from a historiological canon. This issue bears particular salience in the historiography of American music, where many musicians have been marginalised from

[90] Harry White, 'Irish Identity and the Musical Artwork', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, 13 (2009), 63–69, p. 64.
[91] Charles Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 1 (2004), 5–28.

the music profession and forgotten by history, particularly on the basis of race and gender.[92] Any history of American music must address these issues and acknowledge these structural biases and disadvantages towards marginalised artists. With the exception of Marques L.A. Garrett, the composers whose works are examined in this study are all racialised as white. Proposing and drawing boundaries around an 'American school of composition' consisting predominantly of white composers is clearly problematic, and erases cross-cultural influences in the increasingly diverse American choral ecosystem.[93]

Another issue stemming from pigeon-holing is that divergent works by composers deemed to fall within a specified genre may be excluded from scholarly research as they do not fit pre-existing models of analysis in that field. For example, scholarship on Schubert's operas has lagged significantly behind research on his songs due to his strong association with the latter artform.[94] By ascribing composers to a specific genre, a musicologist may inadvertently assign research limitations to the work of that composer, building a corpus of research on some works deemed more worthy of academic scrutiny than others. Furthermore, many composers reject the titles given to the movements with which they are associated. Some composers associated with minimalism, the last major school of composition to be identified by musicologists, abhorred the term.[95] Generalisation is a powerful tool in the hands of musicologists, and the full weight of its semantic and historiological power should be carefully considered before categorising composers into a school or movement.

Technological advances have further divided scholarship from practice due to disparities in attitudes towards the identification of genres and the categorisation of music. The conversation surrounding generalisation has become more relevant in recent years due to online streaming services and the race to create the most hyper-personalised user experience through genre-based algorithms. Periodisation and generalisation were once simply tools for the musicologists in identifying trends and interconnected spheres of influence for better informed and contextualised analysis. With the development of recording technology and the record

[92] See Naomi André and Denise Von Glahn et al., 'Shadow Culture Narratives: Race, Gender, and American Music Historiography', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 73 (2020), 711–784; Susan McClary, 'Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies*, 19 (1993), 399–423.
[93] This diversity is reflected in initiatives of the ACDA, such as the development of the 'Lift Every Voice' column in the *Choral Journal*, and the programming of numerous themed panels and sessions and ACDA conferences highlighting choral music from a wide spectrum of communities.
[94] See Lorraine Byrne Bodley and Julian Horton, eds, *Rethinking Schubert* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1–2.
[95] See Timothy A. Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?', *The Musical Quarterly*, 78 (1994), 742–773, p. 742.

store, generalisation became a marketing tool to direct customers toward their preferred music and for artists to associate themselves with popular styles and reach targeted audiences. This function of genre grows increasingly prevalent with the advancement of personalisation algorithms on streaming services, such as Pandora's *Music Genome Project*.[96]

The contrast between the predisposition toward individualism in contemporary art music and the widespread engagement of artists with genres and subgenres in popular music is remarkable, and, in the case of popular music, may be understood as symptomatic of the profit motive. While a contemporary composer of art music may seek to present the aesthetics of total individualism devoid of direct influence from their contemporaries, artists in the popular music industry proudly associate themselves with more established acts in order to elevate their profile, either through performing as support acts, wearing the merchandise of another band while performing, or publicly announcing their musical influences to ensure that their music is placed on the same shelves (or playlists) to attract the audiences of other artists. This has created an interconnected web of genres and subgenres, funnelling new music directly to an artist's target audience. Genre has also become understood as a sociological phenomenon rather than a purely musicological one, particularly in the field of popular music studies.[97] A person's musical preferences are often a performative facet of their cultural identity, made particularly visible when wearing merchandise or uploading photographs at concerts on social media. Musical 'fandom' may also involve other social factors, including political attitudes and social mannerisms.[98] In certain cases an algorithm may look to a user's social network for tailoring advertisements or music recommendations, relying not on sonic qualities or music charts but on the preferences of a user's friend or friend-of-friend network.[99] The lack of differentiation of sociocultural indicators among audiences of varying genres of classical music may be a factor that has impeded the visibility of this emerging style of New Transcendentalism. Furthermore, the understanding of genre as a marketing tool and a sociocultural phenomenon is often antithetical to the approach favoured by many contemporary art composers, particularly those for whom commercial success is not a priority and the aesthetics of individualism and autonomy are more desirable.

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[96] Pandora, *Music Genome Project* (2022), <https://www.pandora.com/about/mgp> [Accessed 29 August 2022].
[97] See Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012).
[98] Daniel Silver, Monica Lee and C. Clayton Childress, 'Genre Complexes in Popular Music', *PLoS ONE*, 11 (2016), 1–23, p. 5.
[99] Ibid., p. 4.

The wide variety of styles that exist within so-called 'classical' music, from Medieval organum singing to Wagnerian opera to Ludovico Einaudi, are often grouped together in record shops and on streaming services under the umbrella of 'classical music'. We cannot rely on the music industry and commercial music streaming services to determine the boundaries of New Transcendentalism. Their criteria for the categorisation of works and composers, particularly in 'classical' music, are based purely on sociological aesthetics and not concerned with compositional processes or subcultural contexts within the field of choral music production.

For varying reasons, neither scholarship nor the music industry have discerned the stylistic trends in contemporary American choral music that have created this burgeoning form of choral composition. As well as providing a corpus of analysis for future scholarship of New Transcendentalism, it is envisaged that the research presented in this thesis will inform the curation of choral programmes, albums, and playlists as audiences seek to engage with the style.

Anne C. Shreffler has noted that American musicologists have been less inclined toward music historiography than their European counterparts.[100] This trend is particularly noticeable in the field of choral music, with many reputable textbooks and monographs on American music favouring instrumental works.[101] Despite the reticence toward generalisation in late twentieth-century musicology, instrumental movements like ultra-modernism and minimalism have received much scholarly attention, and schools such as the Fluxus movement have been identified and categorised. The categorisation of American schools of choral composition, however, is uncommon past discussions of late nineteenth-century music. The most widely acknowledged examples are the New England Schools, the first dominated by William Billings and his eighteenth-century contemporaries, and the second comprising John Knowles Paine, Arthur Foote, George Chadwick, Horatio Parker, and Amy Beach.[102] Societal changes over the twentieth century may have created an environment that would preclude the formation of such schools again: Firstly, the continual secularisation of American society meant that hymn-singing was no longer the universal cultural phenomenon that it was in

[100] Anne C. Shreffler, 'Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History', *The Journal of Musicology*, 20 (2003), 498–525, p. 498.
[101] One example of this is David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Detailed discussion on choral music is confined to the chapter on sacred music to 1800 when hymn-singing was the predominant form of music-making on the continent. Otherwise, choral music receives cursory acknowledgement, or is examined as an inspiration for orchestral music.
[102] Charles S. Freeman, 'New England Composers, Schools of', *Grove Music Online*, 2010, <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2085423> [Accessed 29 August 2022].

Billings' time. The growth of so-called popular music, aided by the dawn of recording technology and the radio, undermined the centrality of hymns and anthems in the musical diet of the general public; secondly, technological and infrastructural advancements created a more interconnected United States, from the construction of the first highways in the early decades of the twentieth century to the information superhighway in the last. In such a regionalised and globalised US, the sphere of influence in which choral composers operated was no longer geographically limited. Without monocultural universality provided by a dominant form of religious expression, or the constraints of locally available resources, composers were free to explore more individualistic creative avenues, and compelled to develop a unique compositional voice to garner a following. These phenomena undermine the usefulness of geographical groupings of composers, and call into question the efficacy of researching 'schools' of composition in the modern era, deterring teleological research into stylistic trends in contemporary American choral music.

Perhaps it is Maurice Mandelbaum's characterisation of history that should guide us as we analyse this new compositional trend: "The relationship which I take to be fundamental in historiography is the relationship of part to whole."[103] To avoid pigeon-holing composers as members of a particular school, we may understand New Transcendentalism as a set of compositional tools in the choral composers' toolkit, or as Mandelbaum would put it, a part of a whole. Timothy A. Johnson defines minimalism in a similar way, separating historiological discourse surrounding its development from how individual works and composers should be classified:

> Considering minimalism as an aesthetic or style may be useful and appropriate for historical references to the development of minimalism. These terms accurately reflect the essential aspects of groups of pieces that share numerous affinities, as described earlier in this article. But defining minimalism primarily as a technique clarifies the term and more accurately reflects the continuing influence of minimalism on recent composers and their works. Thus, labeling a musical work minimalist simply identifies one of the compositional techniques used in the piece. Likewise, labeling a composer minimalist only reflects the composer's predilection for using the technique. From this viewpoint the term may be seen as much less limiting than it would as an aesthetic or style, and composers and listeners may begin to appreciate minimalism more fully.[104]

[103] Maurice Mandelbaum, 'A Note on History as Narrative', *History and Theory*, 6 (1967), 413–9, cited in Leo Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 106.
[104] Johnson, p. 770.

Such a nuanced approach allows for the examination of the providence and evolution of New Transcendentalism as a broader style while avoiding the limitations of generic categorisation of the individual. Some composers, like Whitacre and Runestad, utilise the tools of New Transcendentalism frequently, continuously pushing its boundaries and exploring its possibilities, while others, such as Garrett and LaBarr, employ it in certain circumstances while also engaging with other forms of choral composition. It would be overly restrictive to label these composers as 'the New Transcendentalists', however, the comparative IPS Analysis and Critical Score Analysis (CSA) presented in this thesis demonstrates that each of them has incorporated New Transcendentalist features into their compositions.

Conclusion

A crucial element of the success of New Transcendentalism is captured within the opening quote of this chapter; close harmonies sung by *a cappella* voices creates a physical response in the singer and the audience. New Transcendentalist music is as enjoyable—if not more enjoyable—for the singer than it is for the audience. This phenomenon is well known in vernacular styles of *a cappella* singing, such as barbershop, in which the tension of the close harmonies is heightened by the use of a nasal vocal timbre, exciting overtones and creating a fuller sound and a physical, buzzing feeling from well-intonated overtones.[105] The use of just dintonation rather than equal temperament allows for a more satisfying 'ringing' effect created by perfectly aligned overtones. Performing and listening to such music is deeply satisfying. A feature of barbershop singing that resonates with New Transcendentalism is the concept of *chord-worshipping*. In performance, a barbershop quartet may employ excessive *rubato* in order to lengthen particularly satisfying chords. New Transcendentalism is often marked by slow tempi and text-driven *rubato*, luxuriating in its shimmering chords. New Transcendentalism is the most popular style of contemporary choral music among singers and audiences because it is fun to sing and enjoyable to listen to. While critics may argue that this is evidence of superficial, shallow artistic thought, this chapter has outlined how wall-of-sound sonorities and practices of close harmony have been cornerstones of American choral music, with New Transcendentalism representing the latest innovation in this choral soundscape. The

[105] This dynamic is reflected in the recreational practice of 'tagging', in which barbershop singers gather in social settings, usually following concerts or competitions, to quickly learn and perform the 'tags', or codas, of barbershop songs.

following chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in this thesis to uncover the structural and stylistic features of these works, and to expose the compositional processes that inform New Transcendentalist composition. The comparative analysis of New Transcendentalist composers in this thesis, alongside the case study of Eric Whitacre as the archetype of the style, will illustrate the high level of artistry and stylistic coherence present in these works, and illuminate these stylistic trends, bolstering the study's findings on the emergence of a new style of choral composition.

Chapter Two

Analysing New Transcendentalism: A Combinative Approach

> *Whitacre's choral works defy traditional harmonic analysis because of the frequent use of altered and embellished triads, tone clusters, and non-traditional voice leading into and out of dissonant sonorities.*[1]
>
> Andrew Larson, 2006

As the analysis in later chapters will demonstrate, key characteristics of the New Transcendentalist style include non-functional harmonies, bifurcated textures, clustered and secundal chords, utilisation of traditional diatonic and modal tone-sets, and obfuscation of melodic structures. In many cases, traditional relationships between chords present in diatonic music are avoided through inversion, extension, and polychordalism. Drawing from the harmonic innovations of Ives, Cowell, Nystedt, and a number of other influential twentieth-century composers in the United States, composers of New Transcendentalist music often utilise chords as sonic objects for the purpose of eliciting an emotional response rather than functional, harmonic progressions underpinning a melody. Melodic structures are frequently obfuscated, intensifying the focus on vertical sonorities and harmonic progressions rather than melodic development. For these reasons, conventional methods of analysis prove insufficient for exposing the underlying structural devices used by New Transcendentalist composers in their music. A fresh analytical perspective is required to illuminate the structural and compositional elements of New Transcendentalism. This chapter presents a review of existing methodologies and outlines the analytical challenges presented by New Transcendentalism, and proposes a combinative analytical approach consisting of adapted elements of Patricia Howland's Integrated Parametric Structure (IPS) analysis in conjunction with Critical Score Analysis (CSA).

[1] Andrew Larson, 'Textural Density in the Choral Music of Eric Whitacre', *The Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 22–33, p. 33.

Methodological Challenges

One of the primary challenges in the analysis of New Transcendentalist repertoire is the lack of melodic structures as formal signifiers. Repetition and variation of melodic motifs have the effect of situating the listener within the narrative arc of a work. As will be shown in the analysis in following chapters, melodic structures are often omitted—as in Whitacre's *Water Night* (1994)—or undermined—as in Whitacre's *A Boy and a Girl* (2002)—to achieve the weightless, floating character that is characteristic of New Transcendentalism. This is combined with an approach to harmony that avoids functional relationships and disrupts tonal stability through use of chord extensions and inversions, secundal harmony, and cluster chords.

On Tonality

Before consolidating a methodological approach for analysing New Transcendentalist music, we must ascertain the degree to which this music may be understood as tonal, and whether other categorisations such as post-tonal, neo-tonal or pandiatonic are more appropriate. Whitacre, the archetypical composer of New Transcendentalism, rarely uses tonesets outside of familiar tonal and modal scales. Many of his works, such as *i carry your heart* (2016) and *When David Heard* (1999) feature no modulations or accidentals throughout the entire piece. Some outliers in Whitacre's output explore less traditional harmonic colours, such as *She Weeps Over Rahoon* for treble chorus, English horn and piano (1993) in which he uses mixed modes and chromatic passages, and *The Stolen Child* (2008) which features brief octatonic passages. Both of these songs also heavily emphasise the augmented second of the harmonic minor scale as a recurring motif. Variations of the diatonic minor scale are often used by Whitacre to create non-tonal chords, such as the use of a cluster chord on an ascending A melodic minor chord to create a D major chord with a flattened seventh and a raised eleventh in *Cloudburst* (1995):
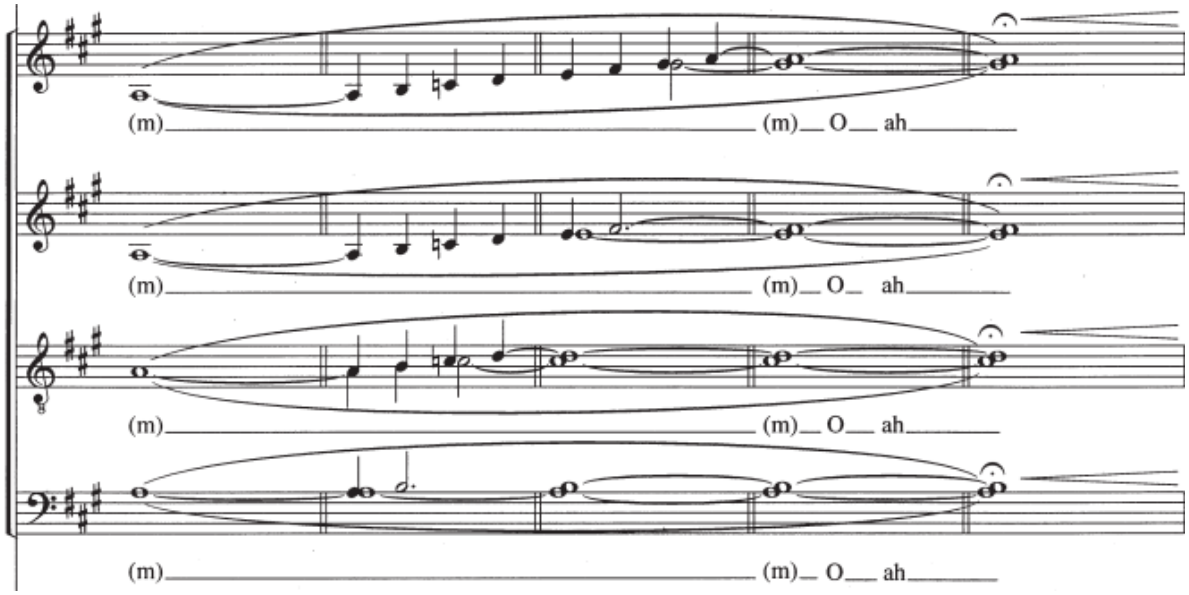


Figure 2.1: An extended D chord emerging from a clustered A melodic minor scale in Whitacre's *Cloudburst*, bars 65–69.

Whitacre uses the D harmonic minor scale in *Sainte-Chappelle* (2013) to create a B-flat major chord with a raised ninth. The leading tone of C-sharp and the tonic note of D sound as both a major and minor third over the B-flat in the bass, creating a false relation (see Figure 2.2):

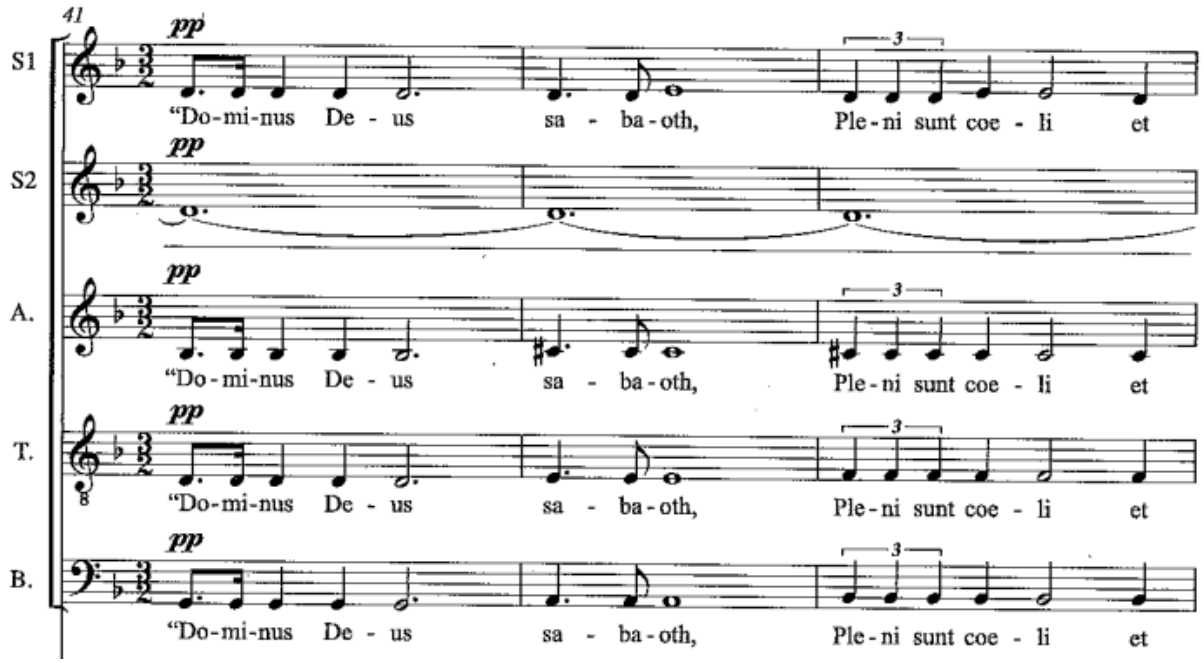


Figure 2.2: A B-flat chord with both a major and minor third in *Sainte-Chappelle*, bar 43.

While these non-tonal outliers push the boundary of Whitacre's usual compositional style, they are predicated on familiar, diatonic tonesets, and they still contain the dense, clustered harmonies that are typical of the New Transcendentalist style. Although *i carry your heart*

exclusively contains pitches from the scale of G major, Whitacre weakens the tonal gravity of G by avoiding root-position G major chords throughout the work, rarely placing G in the lowest voice of chords. Other works, such as *A Boy and a Girl* (2002), have a tonal centre but use third-related harmonies and non-diatonic pitches. Some works, *The Seal Lullaby* (2008) for instance, are unambiguously diatonic, though Whitacre tends towards functionally weaker chord progressions, with music of the piece oscillating between the tonic and the mediant chord.

The comparative analysis in Chapter Four demonstrates general adherence to established diatonic and modal tonesets among the five composers examined. While two of the works by Runestad examined in this study feature brief passages in which the whole-tone scale is used, the overwhelming majority of discrete vertical harmonies at any given time in these works contain pitches belonging to a single diatonic or modal toneset.

Dennis Shrock described the music of the more 'conservative' American choral composers of the late twentieth century as pandiatonic, listing Morten Lauridsen, Carol Barnett, Stephen Paulus, Libby Larsen, René Clausen among them.[2] The term 'pandiatonicism' was coined by Nicolas Slonimsky in 1938. This tonal framework employs all seven pitches in a tonal or modal scale 'freely in democratic equality', favouring major modes.[3] Pandiatonic music features bichordal harmonies, most commonly created through the combination of the tonic and dominant or the subdominant and dominant chords, with added ninths, sixths and sevenths over the bass reflecting partials of the harmonic series.[4] Pandiatonicism, by this definition, rarely features the added eleventh, or fourth. This stands in contrast with the style of Whitacre and other New Transcendentalist composers, who have used this interval prominently in their works.

The primary characteristic of New Transcendentalist works that undermines diatonicism is the use of non-functional harmony and clustered chords. These two compositional tools allow composers of New Transcendentalist works to compose within the well-established tonal or modal framework while creating music that sounds new, avoiding a sense of pastiche or traditionalism. In this way, New Transcendentalism is distinct from contemporary tonal choral arrangements and compositions. The compositional decision to utilise tonality but to actively undermine its potency creates the sense of weightlessness that gives New Transcendentalist works their idiosyncratic soundworld and may be understood as

[2] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 897.
[3] Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 4th edn (New York: Scribner, 1971), p. 1474.
[4] Ibid.

pandiatonic composition. Such a style of music therefore requires an analytical approach that extends beyond traditional perspectives on harmonic functionality.

Review of Existing Methodologies

A review of conventional analytical methodologies reveals the challenge presented by New Transcendentalist repertoire, particularly in the analysis of structural phenomena and phrase construction. Because composers of New Transcendentalist choral music tend to avoid conventional structural signifiers, many frameworks are unhelpful in providing deeper analytical data. This section examines several methodologies to demonstrate the necessity for a fresh analytical approach.

The non-functional nature of harmony in New Transcendentalist works precludes the use of methodologies derived from Schenkerian analysis, a framework in which melodies are reduced to their simplest functional form. Since this music tends to avoid or obscure melodic structures, this framework, oriented towards melodic development, is not appropriate. Some scholars have expanded upon Schenkerian analysis to account for musics that do not adhere to the conventional tonal frameworks for which the methodology was created. Incorporating concepts taken from Noam Chomsky's theory of generative grammar,[5] Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff argue in their seminal book *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* that music that does not adhere to hierarchical tonal relationships or regular metrical structures, 'usually avoids symmetry and overt repetition', and weakens the ability of the listener to recognise grouping organisation, instead drawing the listener's attention to timbre and dynamics.[6] While this statement may apply to atonal music, it fails to consider post-tonal developments. For example, Whitacre's *i carry your heart* features a repeated harmonic *leitmotif* of a semitone clash between the alto and soprano (discussed in Chapter Three). Lerdahl and Jackendoff's 'prolongational trees' track patterns of tension and relaxation over the course of a musical phrase, in order to show their rhythmic properties in the context of functional tonal music (See Figure 2.3):

[5] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton. 1957).
[6] Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, 'Musical Universals and Related Issues', *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 297–8.

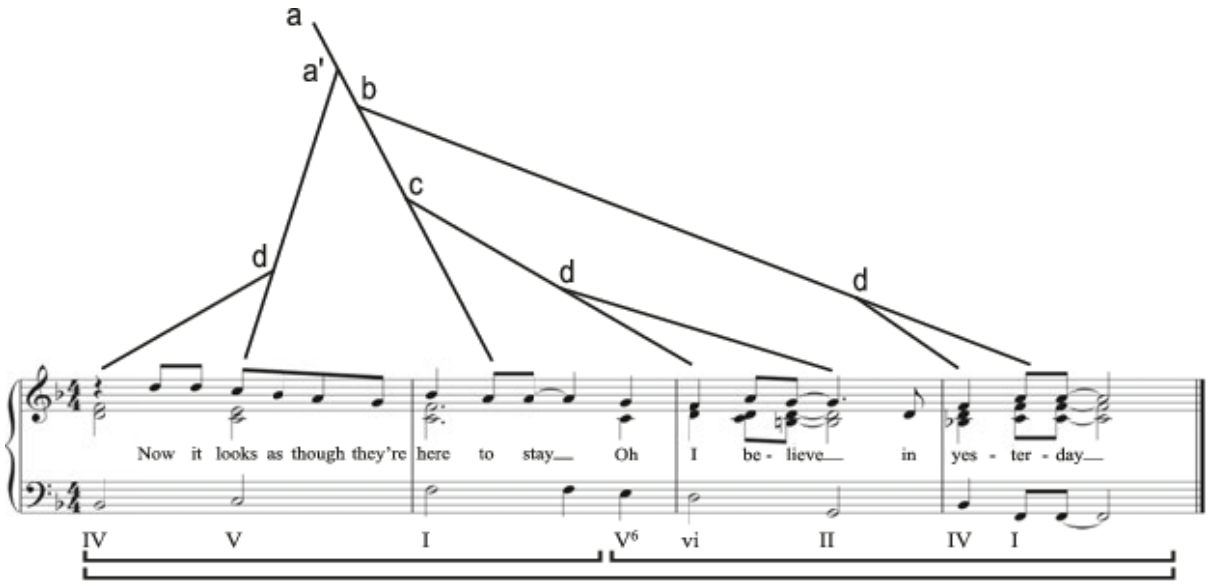


Figure 2.3: Lerdahl and Jackendoff's prolongational tree.

In the formation of prolongational trees, chordal relationships such as Dominant-Tonic, and Subdominant-Dominant are considered. Due to the non-hierarchical harmonic language of the music under review in this study, such a method is also not applicable. For example, the first three chords of *A Boy and a Girl* are parallel major chords, C major, Eb major, F major, each featuring an added ninth in the alto part (see Figure 2.4).

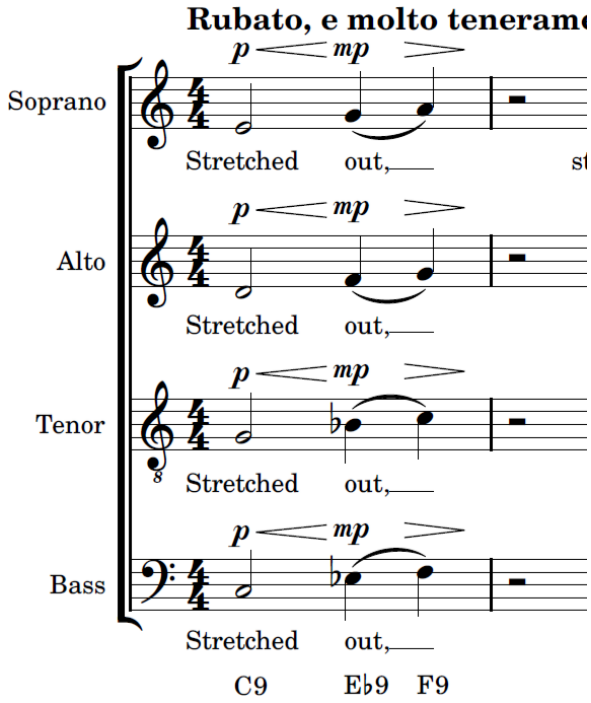


Figure 2.4: The first three chords of *A Boy and a Girl* are non-diatonically related major chords in direct parallel motion.

The first two of these chords are third-related, lying outside of traditional harmonic relationships. Such parallel motion and repetition of chordal structure could be analysed as strong prolongation according to Lerdahl and Jackendoff's method; however, the sense of tension and relaxation is governed by secondary parameters such as register and dynamics, limiting the capacity of prolongational analysis to glean structural details of the work.

On the other side of the analytical spectrum, Allen Forte's methodology of pitch-class analysis, designed to analyse atonal pieces by Schoenberg and his contemporaries, also presents difficulties in the context of non-functional tonal music. While Whitacre occasionally uses non-tonal compositional techniques, such as the parallel major chords in *A Boy and A Girl*, these chordal sonorities are drawn from the familiar language of traditional tonality, rather than being based upon an atonal series. Furthermore, the compositional process of Whitacre and others within this style of music is informed by the effect of combined tones on the listener or singer rather than an adherence to a regular or mathematical process of pitch relations. For these reasons, pitch-class analysis does not offer valuable analytical insight into the compositional process of the New Transcendentalist works considered in this study.

Another methodological framework that has received increased attention in recent years is Neo-Riemannian theory. This approach was designed for the analysis of music of the late nineteenth century rooted in the triadic harmonies of the tonal era, but deviating from harmony such that conventional harmonic analysis is not effective, like the compositions of Wagner and Liszt.[7] The method involves mapping and analysing triadic 'Transformations', the term given to phrase development in this framework. Stephen Rings expands upon Neo-Riemannian theory in his monograph *Tonality and Transformation*, offering a re-evaluation of its efficacy in analysing tonal music.[8] Due to its intense focus on sequences of individual pitches rather than combinations of pitches to create harmony, Transformational theory is not appropriate for this study. In addition, as the compositional language under review in this research often prioritises harmonic variation and development over melodic development, Neo-Riemannian theory, useful for horizontal analysis rather than vertical, is unsuitable as a methodological framework for this style.

In his doctoral research into stylistic similarities in the choral music of Whitacre, Lauridsen and Clausen, Shane Lynch applies Roman numerical chordal analysis, labelling the

[7] See Richard Cohn, 'Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory: A Survey and a Historical Perspective', *Journal of Music Theory*, 42 (1998), 167–180.
[8] See Steven Rings, *Tonality and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

I_6^{+2}–V_6–IV_6–I^4_3 progression as the 'Lauridsen progression' having identified its use in several of Lauridsen's works.[9] Andrew Larson notes that Roman numerical analysis presents difficulties when analysing works that feature extensive *divisi* and dense tonal clusters, such as Whitacre's *Water Night* that contains a fourteen-part secundal chord in (See Ex. 3.4):

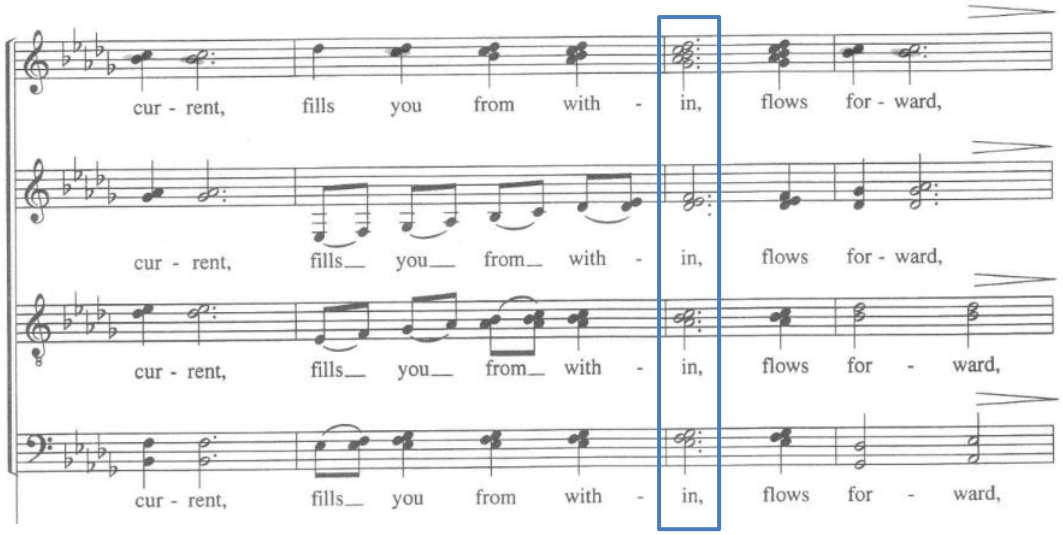


Figure 2.5: A fourteen-part secundal chord built on E-flat in Whitacre's *Water Night*, bars 46–9.

Another challenge to Roman numeral analysis is the absence of a strong tonal centre in some New Transcendentalist works. *A Boy and A Girl* (as shown in Figure 2.4) features tonal harmonies but the use of directly parallel major chords diminishes the strength of a tonal centre, subverting analysis using hierarchical chord symbols. Many New Transcendentalist works systematically avoid hierarchical tonal relationships and obscure the tonal centre, creating a sense of detachment and harmonic flexibility. Whitacre employs the toneset of G major in *i carry your heart* but avoids sounding a G in the lowest voice of any chord for eighteen bars (see Figure 2.6):

[9] Shane M. Lynch, 'Music Historiography and Useful Style Histories: The Case for the Evolving Era of Neo-Impressionism and its Influence on American Choral Music of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 2008), pp. 49–50.
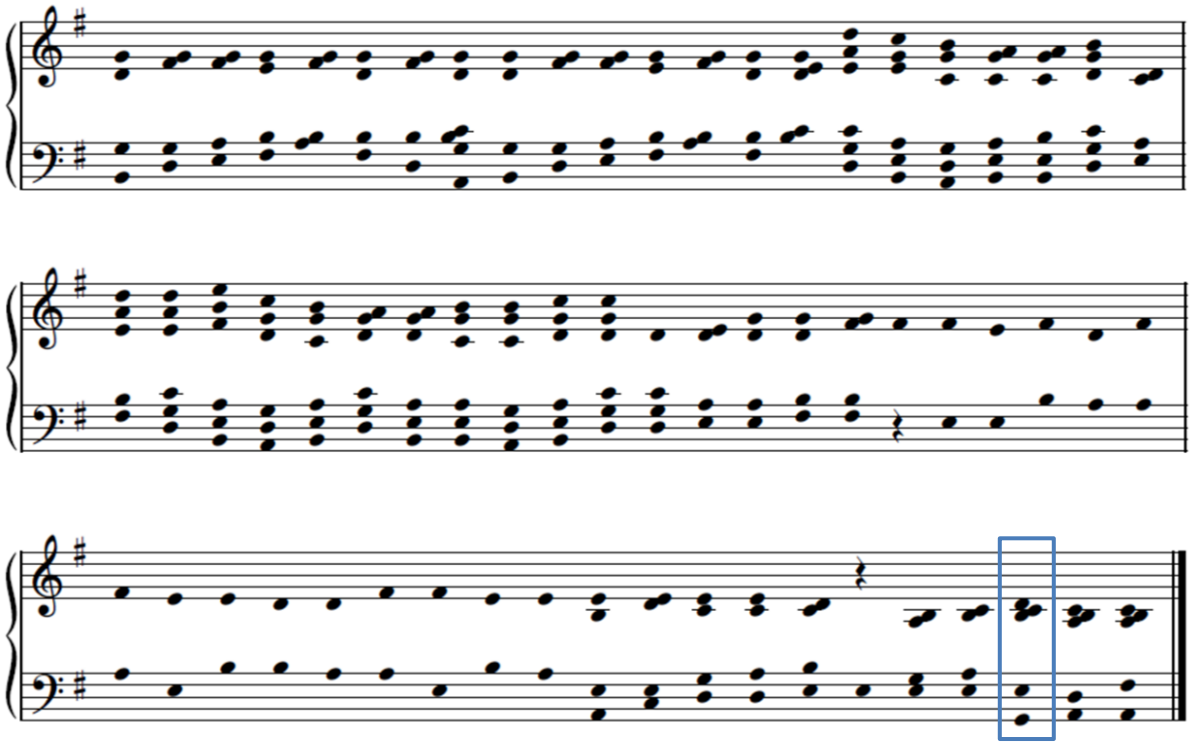


Figure 2.6: Chordal sonorities heard in the first eighteen bars of *i carry your heart*.

Whenever G does occur in the lowest voice, it acts as the fifth of the subdominant C chord. The first instance of a G in the lowest voice is shown in Figure 2.6 above in blue. The only instance in which all three notes of a G major chord are present without extensions is in the final chord of the piece, however, the second bass sings a D, placing the chord in second inversion and weakening the functional role of G major in the piece. This purposeful erosion of tonality presents challenges for conventional modes of harmonic analysis.

While Roman numeral analysis serves a purpose for this analysis, it cannot by itself fully expose the relationships, functions, and forms present in these works. Roman numeral analysis is incorporated into the Critical Score Analysis portions of this thesis in a limited fashion, primarily for the purpose of exploring the treatment of the chord of IV in New Transcendentalist works, related to the predominance of Lydian modal elements in New Transcendentalism. This is used as a definitional term rather than as an element of traditional Roman numeral analysis.

Larson's Textural Density Analysis

One researcher has previously developed a bespoke analytical framework for New Transcendentalist music. Andrew Larson's methodological framework of Textural Density Variation Analysis was designed with the singular purpose of tracking the number of discrete pitches heard at any given moment in the early *a cappella* choral works of Eric Whitacre.[10] It is to date the only methodological framework that has been designed exclusively for analysing contemporary choral music of this style. While Larson's framework illuminates textural density variation of chords over time, his methodology does not analyse the quality, voicing, register, or position of chords. Furthermore, it was developed for Larson's doctoral research in the early 2000s during Whitacre's early period in which he employed frequent variation of *divisi*. One of the examples given in Larson's study is *Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine* (2001, hereafter *Leonardo*), in which the division of voice parts within choir splits ranges from unison to twelve parts at times. The following is an example from Larson's 2006 *Choral Journal* article where this method of analysis is applied to the first eight bars of *Leonardo* (see Figure 2.7). The numbers below the score represent the number of discrete pitches heard at each given moment.

[10] Andrew Larson, 'Textural and Harmonic Density in Selected Choral Works (1992–2003) by Eric Whitacre' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 2004); Larson, 2006.
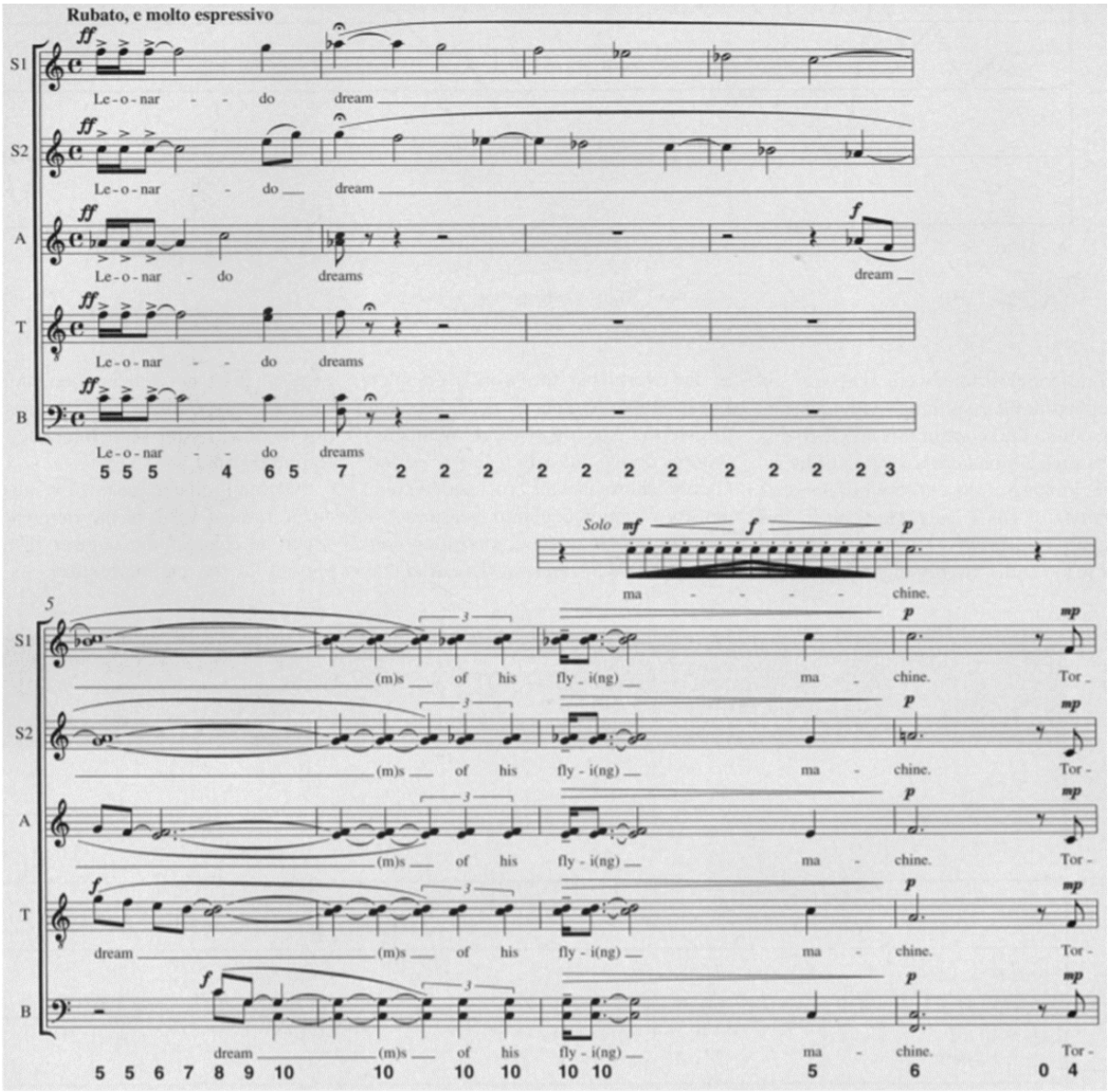


Figure 2.7: Larson's textural density analysis of the opening eight bars of *Leonardo*.[11]

Larson inputs this data into a graph to depict the textural variation over the course of the introduction, with the y-axis in these graphs representing the number of discrete pitches heard, while the x-axis represents events at which there is melodic movement, a change in pitch, or a change in syllable in one or more voice (see Figure 2.8):

[11] Larson, 2006, p. 25.

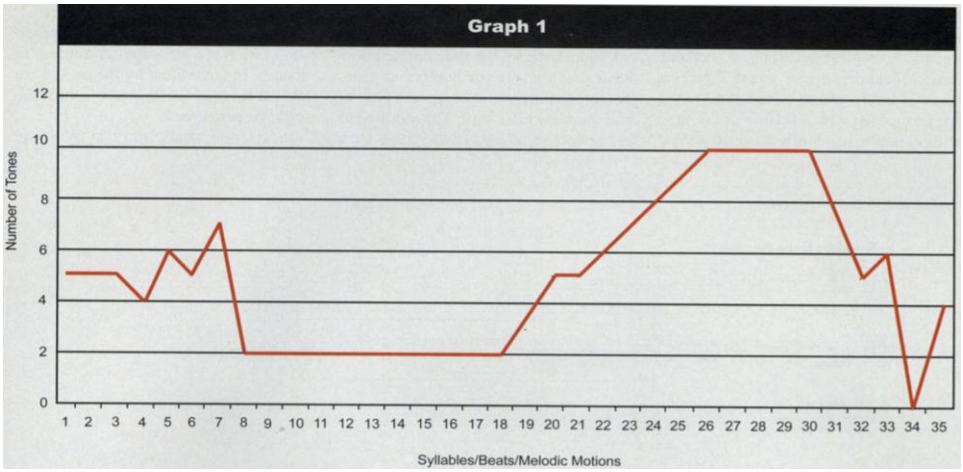


Figure 2.8: Textural density variation in the first eight bars of *Leonardo* represented on a graph.[12]

He uses this analytical procedure to map the textural variation of the entire piece on a line graph, as shown below:

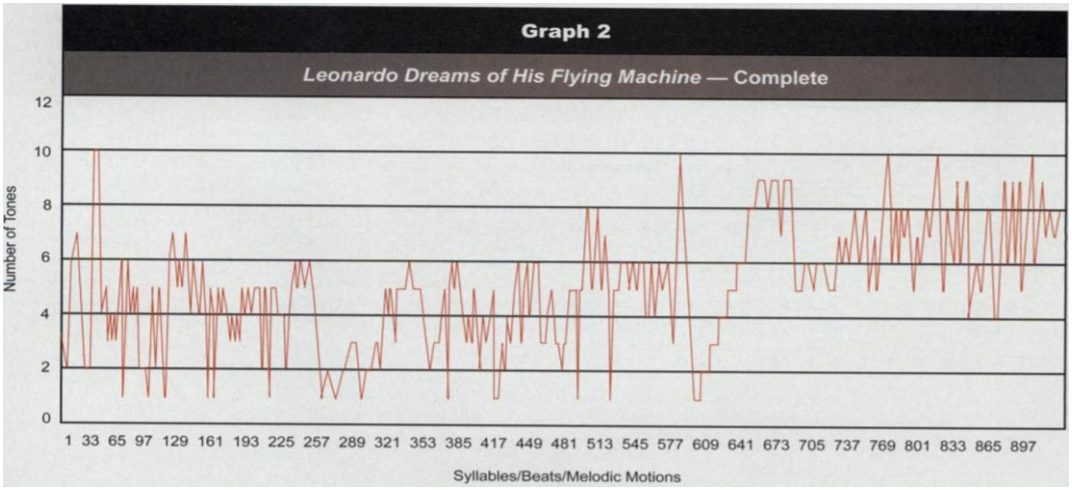


Figure 2.9: Textural density variation over the entirety of *Leonardo*.[13]

Following his analysis of these works, Larson concluded: 'That Whitacre's works can be thus graphed does not render them unique. That the graph lines change direction (up or down) with such frequency and amplitude does.'[14] Larson goes on to claim that '[a] defining characteristic of Whitacre's music resides, then, in the frequency at which he changes the number of tones present in the choral texture.'[15]

[12] Larson, 2006, p. 26.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

By way of testing this claim, and assessing the extent to which it may effectively analyse Whitacre's more recent work, Larson's framework of analysis is presented below, applied to the beginning of the second stanza (bars 15–23) in *i carry your heart*, with the number of discrete pitches in each chord marked above the score.
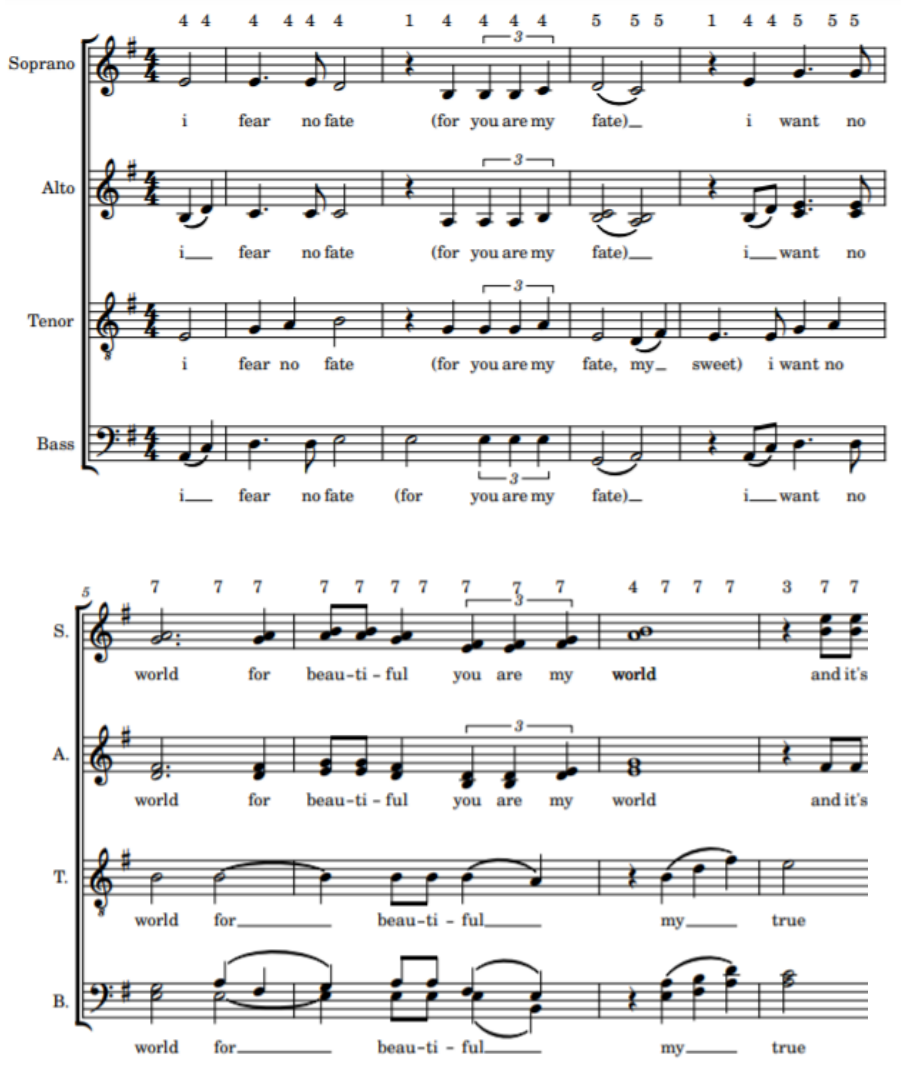


Figure 2.10: Textural density in bars 15–23 of *i carry your heart*.

When mapped onto a graph, the variation in texture is markedly less dynamic and varied than in *Leonardo* (see Figure 2.11):

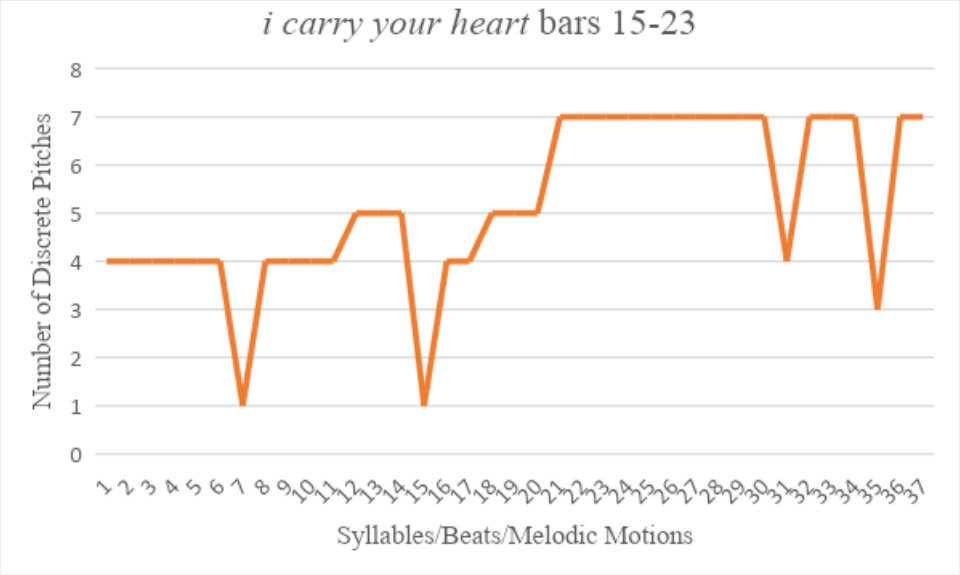


Figure 2.11: Textural density in bars 15–23 of *i carry your heart* represented on a linear graph.

There are occasional dips in the chart when a single voice part continues singing in isolation between phrases, as in the bass in bar 17. Otherwise, this section displays a gradual, consistent building of textural density from four to seven distinct pitches. When expanded to show bars 1–23 (see Figure 2.12), the graph shows far more plateaus and gradual increases and decreases in texture compared to the constantly changing number of pitches shown in Larson's graph of *Leonardo*:

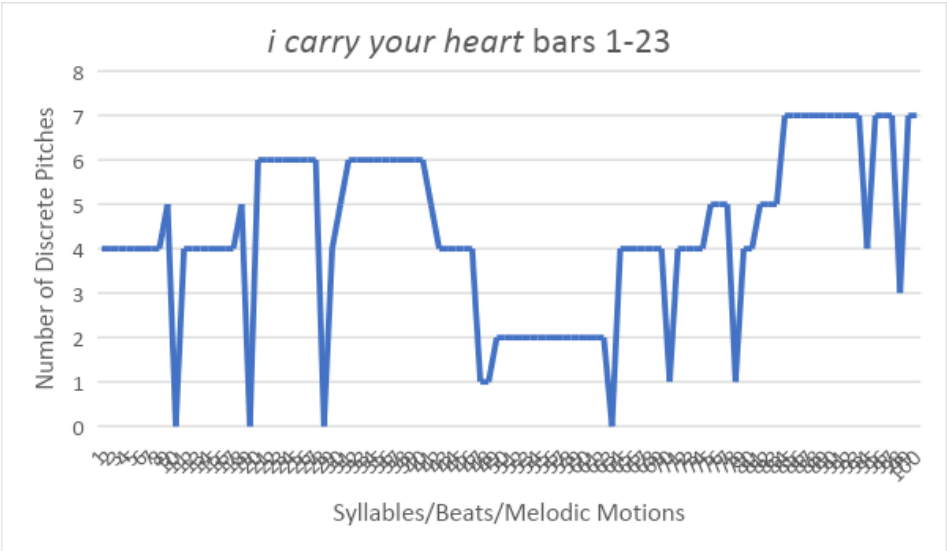


Figure 2.12: Textural density in bars 1–23 of *i carry your heart* represented on a linear graph.

Following his analysis of Whitacre's early works using this methodological framework, Larson identified seven distinct methods of voice-leading used by Whitacre to vary textural density:

1. Internal Stepwise Movement (in divisi, one stays constant and one diverges by step)
2. Internal Leap Motion (in divisi, one stays constant and one diverges by leap)
3. Additive/Subtractive by Scale or Leap (texture fans from unison or reverse)
4. Direct Increase or Decrease (added notes without preparation, like tintinnabulation, sudden 1 to 9 on 'modo' at end of *Lux aurumque*)
5. Triadic increase or Decrease (stepwise motion in parts creates polychord)
6. Counterpoint (SSAA on 'grow' in *i carry your heart*. Often direct imitation)
7. Melody versus Chord Accompaniment (final section of *Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine*).[16]

These findings offer a valuable insight into Whitacre's early compositional style. The use of intuitive methods of voice-leading explains the accessibility of Whitacre's music to amateur choruses, instilling confidence in singers in their own line in spite of dissonance against neighbouring voice parts. However, as mentioned above, this methodology of formal analysis based on textural variation alone only applies to pieces from Whitacre's early period in which he uses extensive and frequently varied *divisi*, hence it is not applicable across the catalogue of New Transcendentalist works.

Larson's methodology was designed to conduct research into works from the first decade of Whitacre's career, during which the nature of the ensembles for which he was composing had a significant impact on his compositional approach. Following the successful performance of Whitacre's 'Go Lovely Rose' at the 1992 ACDA Western Division Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, Whitacre received commissions from professional, collegiate, and advanced-level choirs, such as the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay, the Dale Warland Singers, and the Brigham Young University Singers. The performance capabilities of these singers gave him the scope to compose highly complex, challenging music with extensive *divisi* in a wide variety of styles. Since then, Whitacre has composed for community choirs, children's choirs, and virtual choirs with singers of widely varying levels of musical experience, for instance, *Glow* (2013). The practical limitations associated with composition for such ensembles required Whitacre to compose in a more reserved style, using limited *divisi*. In comparison, *i*

[16] Larson, 2006, pp. 27–31.

carry your heart, was composed for Whitacre's own professional ensemble, the Eric Whitacre Singers. That being said, although this piece was written for a highly capable professional ensemble, it appears that the influence of the restrictions of writing for amateur voices has had a lasting impact on Whitacre's compositional process, particularly with regards to consistency in the use of *divisi*.

While Larson's research provided ground-breaking insight into contemporary works by one of the most sought-after composers in the United States, notable developments in Whitacre's compositional style, alongside the compositional innovations of other composers who engage with New Transcendentalism, have significantly weakened its efficacy in analysing later works. Larson's claim that textural density variation takes precedence over traditional harmonic function and voice-leading in Whitacre's choral output[17] was supported by his research into Whitacre's early works, however, the frequency with which Whitacre changes the textural density within his pieces has significantly reduced in the last fifteen years, and in his works for children and amateur choruses, *divisi* is not used at all. Furthermore, Whitacre's initial tendency toward frequent and unpredictable variations in textural density did not become a consistent feature of New Transcendentalist music by other composers. Although textural density analysis alone may not give a comprehensive insight into Whitacre's compositional process, it may form a part of a more holistic analytical framework incorporating additional musical parameters.

Howland's Integrated Parametric Structures (IPSs)

In her 2015 article 'Formal Structures in Post-Tonal Music', Patricia Howland draws upon Leonard B. Meyer's concept of secondary parameters to create a method of structural analysis based on what she calls 'Integrated Parametric Structures' (IPSs).[18] Howland developed this methodological framework for the purpose of analysing the chamber music of post-war composers such as Stockhausen, Babbitt, and Carter, whose works preclude formal analysis based upon the primary parameters of melody, harmony, and rhythm, and must therefore be analysed based upon the integrated functionalities of secondary parameters such as timbre, dynamics, register, temporal density (speed of attacks), and spatial density (number of

[17] Larson, 2006, p. 24.
[18] Patricia Howland, 'Formal Structures in Post-Tonal Music', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 37 (2015), 71–97.

sounding voices) or, as Larson categorised it, 'textural density'. For the purpose of this study, the term 'textural density' will be used to ensure continuity of terminology in Whitacre research. The lack of traditional structural signifiers in these works, like modulations to a dominant key or melodic development, necessitated a new method of exposing the underlying architecture of the works and identifying unified passages. By analysing the combined effect of increases, reductions, or plateaus of primary and secondary parameters, Howland identified phrases, or IPSs, informing analysis and performance of these works. Drawing too on Robert Fink's concept of the musical surface, Howland describes her system as follows:

> [I]f we wish to achieve a full appreciation of both the structure and the expressive possibilities of this music, we must broaden our field of inquiry to include features of the musical surface and the powerful effects of parametric relations.[19]

While Howland developed this methodology for small-scale, post-tonal instrumental music, it has illuminating applications in the analysis of neo-tonal choral music—for example, this methodology was employed by Daniel Edwards Parks for his 2018 doctoral dissertation in which he analysed Caroline Shaw's *To The Hands* (2016) for choir and string ensemble. This analytical framework is introduced below, accompanied by select examples of how it may be applied to New Transcendentalist music.[20]

Howland identified five different categories of Integrated Parametric Structures, shown in Table 2.1:

[19] Howland, p. 94.

[20] Analysis in this study makes reference to the 'construction' of IPSs in New Transcendentalist choral works. This is not to suggest that composers consciously write according to the criteria expressed in Howland's article. IPSs are observed by the analyst. They arise from compositional choices made by composers when designing phrases and compositional structures. For this reason, the analysis presented in this thesis describes the construction of IPSs by composers despite this phenomenon potentially occurring subconsciously.

IPS Categories	Characteristics	Coherence	Articulation
Tension/Release	A rise in relative parametric values creates tension that is released by a reduction of parametric values. The parameters involved are typically spatial density, temporal density, and/or dynamics.	Coherence is provided by the continuity of the audible build-up and the release of tension.	Articulation is provided by the return to the initial parametric state. The build-up and release of tension is audible. The border is not always clear until the start of a new IPS.
Departure/Return	This is a ternary process: an initial state, a middle section, and a return to the relative conditions of the initial state. This may involve changes in register or static registration.	Coherence is provided by the perception of a unitary process and solidified by the return.	Articulation is provided by the return to the initial parametric state.
Symmetrical	The structure of this IPS is forward/reverse.	Coherence is provided by the audible forward/reverse process.	Articulation is provided by a completion of the reverse phase.
Directional	This structure is a unidirectional series of parametric changes, i.e. increasing or decreasing one or more parameters. Typically a build-up of tension that is suddenly cut off without resolution.	Coherence is provided by the relative constant motion in the same direction.	Articulation is frequently provided by a prominent event that arises from the material of the IPS. “Ending is relatively sudden and unpredictable but also aurally clear and unmistakable.”

Table 2.1: Patricia Howland’s Integrated Parametric Structures, adapted from Parks, 2021, pp. 61–62 (adapted from Parks, 2021).[21]

[21] Daniel Edward Parks, ‘To the Hands by Caroline Shaw: A Conductor's Guide and Analysis’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, 2021), pp. 61–62.

Steady State	This is a musical structure that has a condition of relative stasis. Parametric values are unchanged or change within a steady band. In other words, an audible "process" does not occur.	"[Steady state IPSs] occur frequently in post-tonal music and present the perceptual dilemma of extreme discontinuity"	Articulation achieved by salience (sudden punctuation) or replacement.

Table 2.1 (continued).

Articulation refers to the demarcation of the end of a phrase, which may occur through a process of Return (characterised by a perceptible return to initial parametric conditions), Salience (where an event arises from the phrase construction, such as the arrival of a Directional IPS at its logical endpoint), or Replacement (where the end of an IPS is identifiable through the perceived beginning of a new IPS).[22] IPSs function similarly to musical phrases, with an identifiable beginning and end articulated by changes in multiple musical parameters. Below is an example of how these phrases may be identified in works by Eric Whitacre through demonstration of a Departure/Return Phrase and a Steady State Phrase.

A Departure/Return phrase, as described by Howland, harkens back to early traditions of Western art music. The phrase is 'a ternary process in which an initial state gives way to a contrasting middle section, followed by a return to the relative conditions of the original state.'[23] Unlike the Symmetrical phrase, the structure is not strictly palindromic. In Figure 2.13 we see a departure/return phrase in the first five bars of *Water Night*:

[22] Howland, p. 72.
[23] Howland, p. 78.

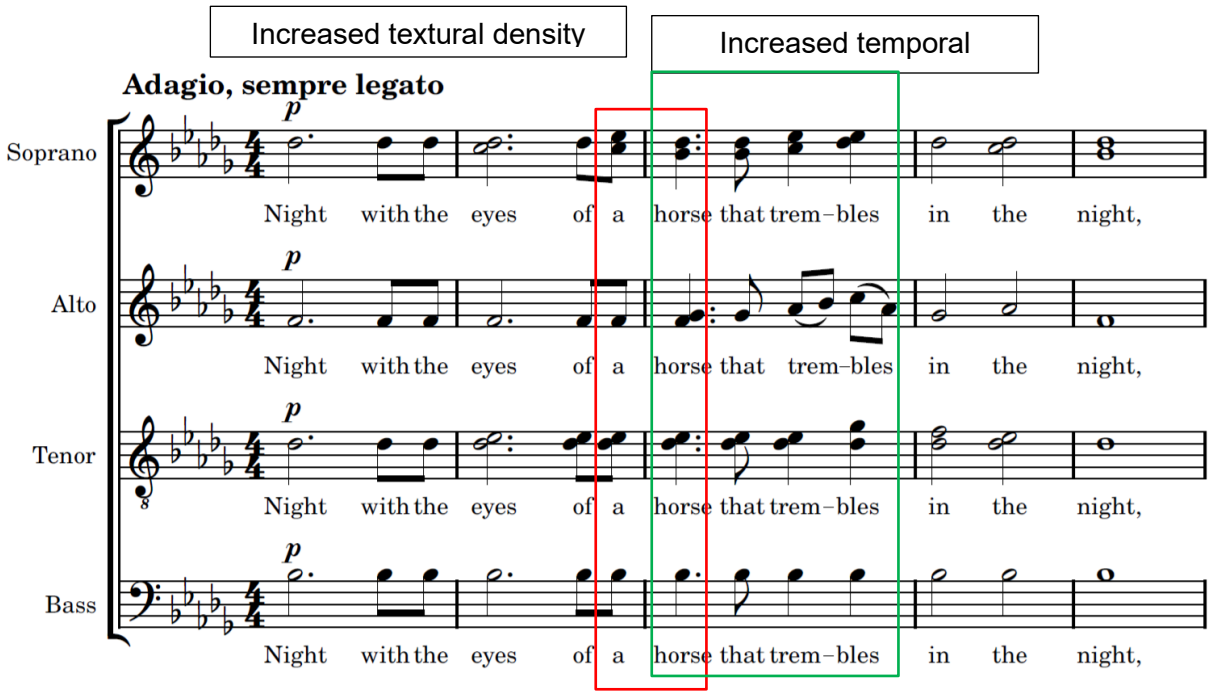


Figure 2.13: The opening Departure/Return phrase of *Water Night*, bars 1–5.

After departing from the initial state of a B-flat minor chord with a *piano* dynamic marking, tension is built through increased temporal and textural density before decreasing and returning to the relative parametric conditions of the point of departure in bar 5. By examining the collective functionality of these parameters, we may observe how Whitacre forms longer phrases in his works.

Figure 2.14 is taken from bars 76–82 of 'i thank You God for most this amazing day', the final movement of Whitacre's *Three Songs of Faith* (1999). Here a Steady State phrase is apparent as there are few changes in parametric values:

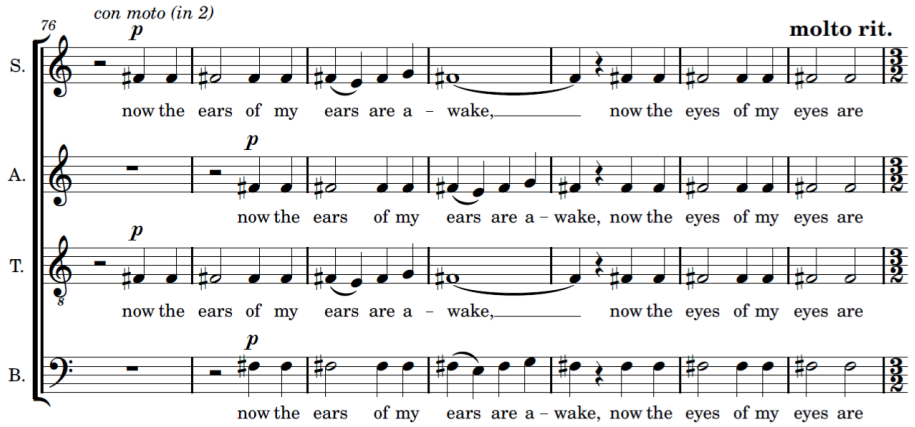


Figure 2.14: A Steady State phrase in 'i thank You God for most this amazing day', bars 76–82.

For Howland, a Steady State phrase is one in which 'internal parts cohere as a unit on the basis of their overall parametric similarities.'[24] While there is a reduction in tempo and temporal density at the end of the phrase illustrated above, parametric values remain relatively unchanged as Whitacre evokes a simple recitative chant in this phrase.

According to Howland's theoretical framework, IPSs may combine to form an IPS-group, which can be viewed as a structural unit. Typically, internal IPSs within a group will have weaker articulation, while the final IPS will have the strongest articulation, drawing the group to a close, thus articulating the structural unit. Similar to the IPSs, Howland identified four main types of IPS-groups: Tension/Release; Departure/Return; Directional; and Parallel Episode. The first three are similar in construction to the IPSs shown in Table 2.1 above, while the fourth type, the parallel episode, will be discussed in detail below.

Sample IPS Analysis: Lux Aurumque

For the purpose of demonstration, a structural analysis of one of Whitacre's best-known works, *Lux aurumque* (2000), based upon the IPS framework, is presented, illustrating the capacity of this framework to expose structural units in a New Transcendentalist work.

Table 2.2 presents the overall structure of *Lux aurumque* based on the IPS framework. The work consists of three IPS-groups: a Departure/Return IPS-group, a Directional IPS-group, and a Parallel Episode, each with constituent IPSs:

[24] Howland, p. 86.

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	Text
Departure/Return	Steady State Directional (Decreasing) Directional (Decreasing)	1–8 9–12 13–17	Lux, calida gravisque
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing) Directional (Decreasing) Directional (Increasing)	17–21 22–23 24–29	pura velut aurum et canunt angeli
Parallel Episode	Steady State Steady State	30–37 38–48	canunt molliter modo natum

Table 2.2: IPS Analysis of *Lux aurumque*.

Departure/Return IPS Group

Bars 1–17

The first of these groups occurs in the first seventeen bars of the work. IPS A is a Steady State IPS, with the choir oscillating between two chords at a consistent, low dynamic level. While the short phrases have inner Tension/Release mechanics of swelling dynamics, the repetition of this short, modular motif creates an overall sense of steadiness in the phrase. A soprano solo is introduced in bar 5, however, the choir maintains the same musical material underneath.

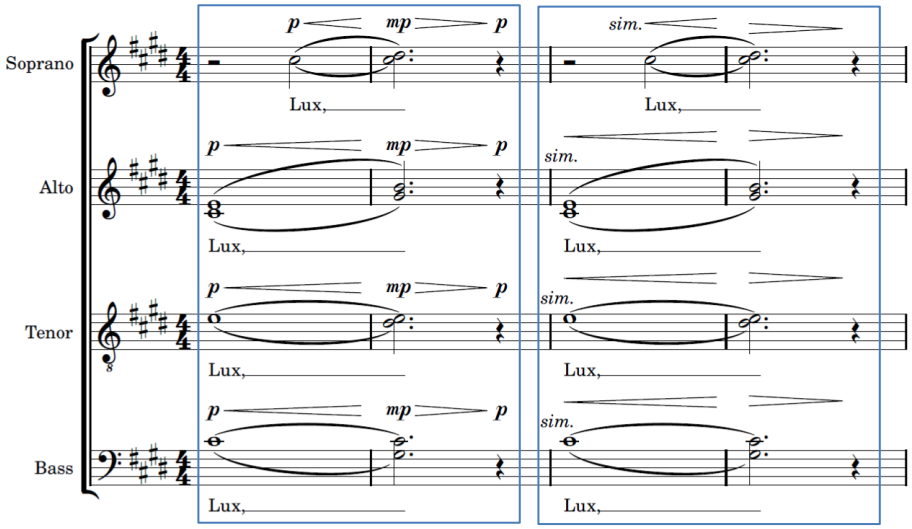


Figure 2.15: A Steady State IPS of oscillating chords, shown in blue, on the word ‘Lux’, bars 1–8.

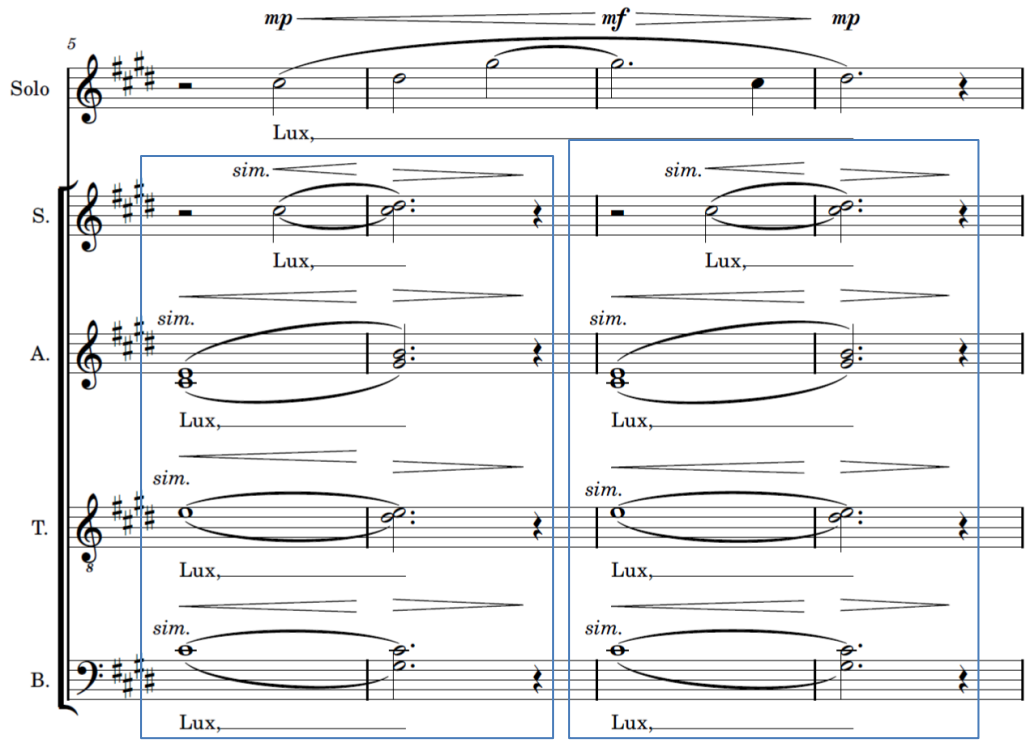


Figure 2.15 (continued).

This phrase is articulated by replacement at bar 8, with the introduction of a new chord in a higher register in the upper voices. This is a repeated directional phrase, with an increase in dynamics and textural density:
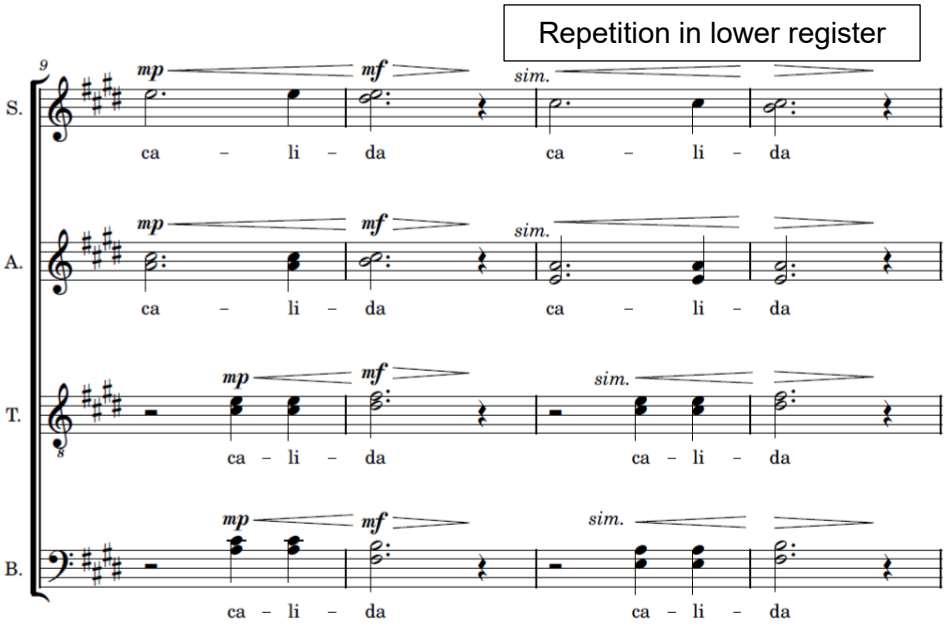


Figure 2.16: A Decreasing Directional phrase on the word ‘calida’ in bars 9–12.

The sudden rise in register and dynamic level represents a departure from the low parametric values of the opening Steady State IPS. The Decreasing Directional phrase is followed by the

final IPS of the group, another directional phrase that gradually decreases in dynamic, textural density, and register (see Figure 2.17):
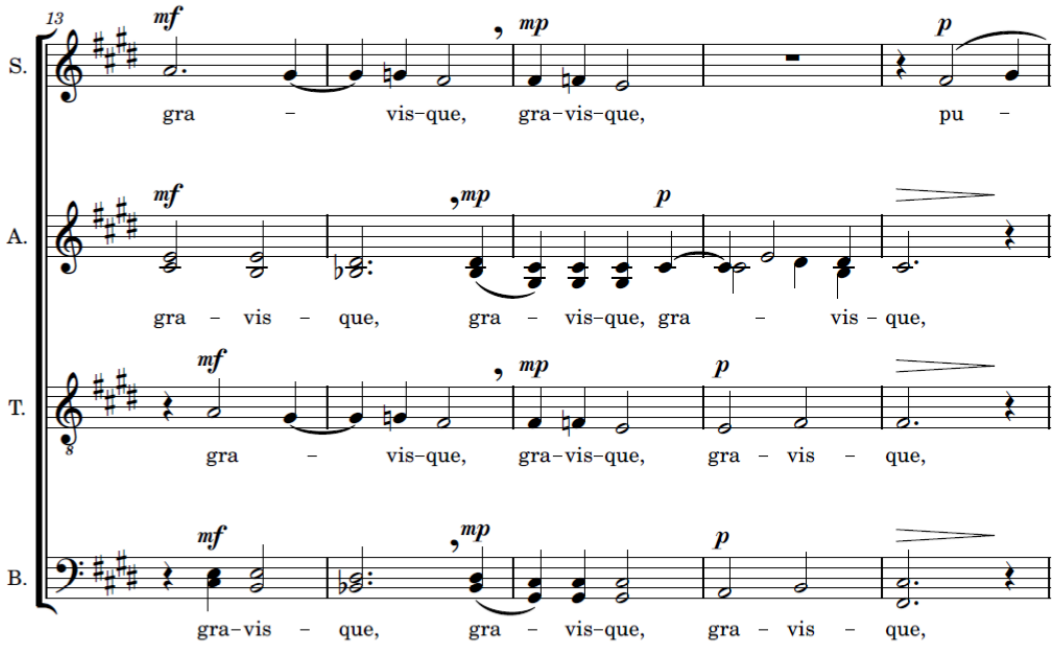


Figure 2.17: A Decreasing Directional phrase on the word ‘gravisque’, bars 13–17.

Parametric values return to the relative values of the beginning of the IPS-Group to a 4-note chord sung softly by the three lower parts, albeit in a lower register, giving coherence to the IPS-Group by returning to the point of departure.

Directional IPS Group

Bars 17–29

The second structural unit in this piece is a Directional IPS group in bars 17-29, from a soft dynamic with a narrow range and low textural density which increases to a *forte* dynamic with a wider range and greater textural density. This Directional IPS group consists of three directional IPSs, the first of which increases in parametric values, while the second decreases. These two IPSs back to back could also be interpreted as a Departure/Return IPS, although the point of return has a much greater tension than the point of departure due to the higher range as well as increased textural density and dissonant harmonic intervals. This marks the beginning of the third directional IPS, which gradually increases in textural density and dynamics, from three voices to seven and from pianissimo to forte. This IPS-group is then articulated by a large unmetered break in the music.
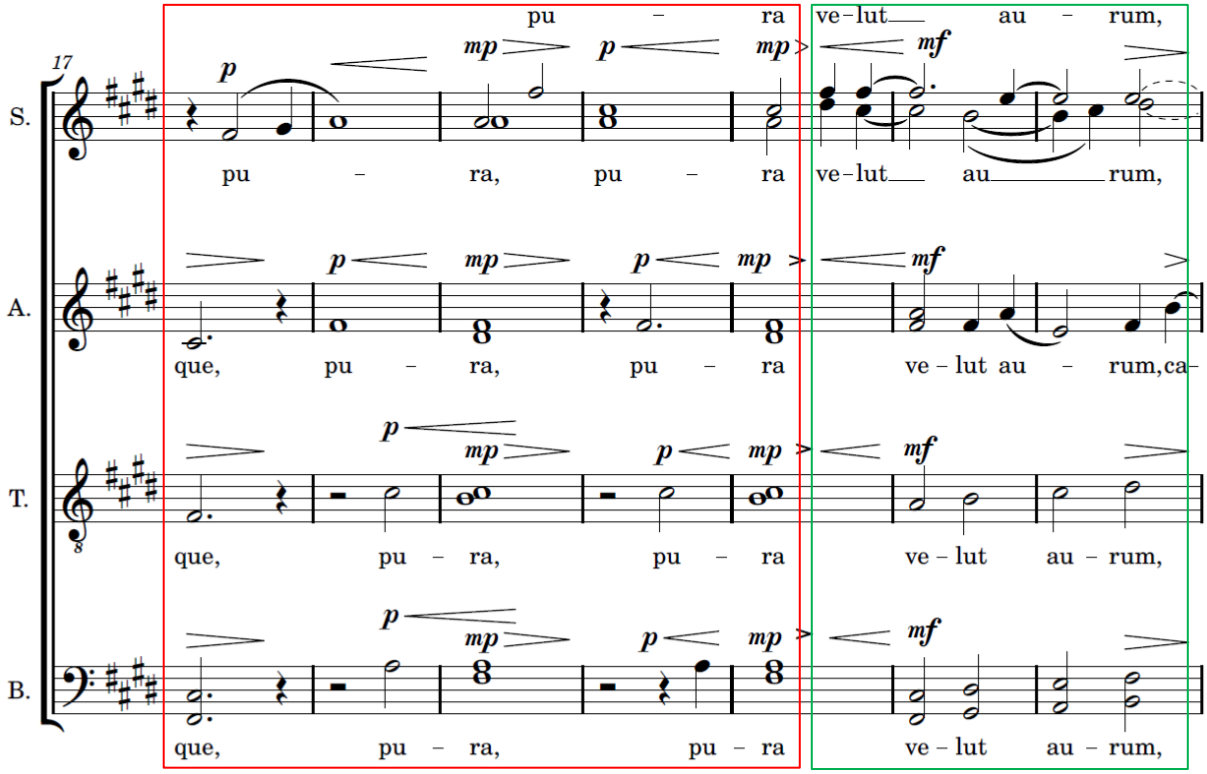


Figure 2.18: An Increasing Directional phrase in bars 17–21 (shown in red), followed by a Decreasing Directional phrase in bars 22–23 (shown in green) in *Lux aurumque*.
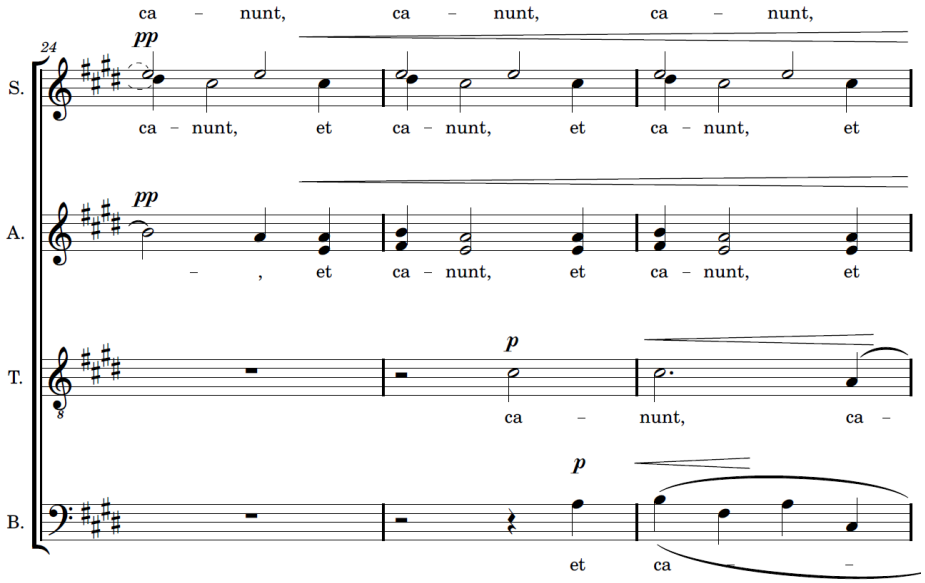


Figure 2.19: An Increasing Directional phrase in bars 24–29 of *Lux aurumque*.

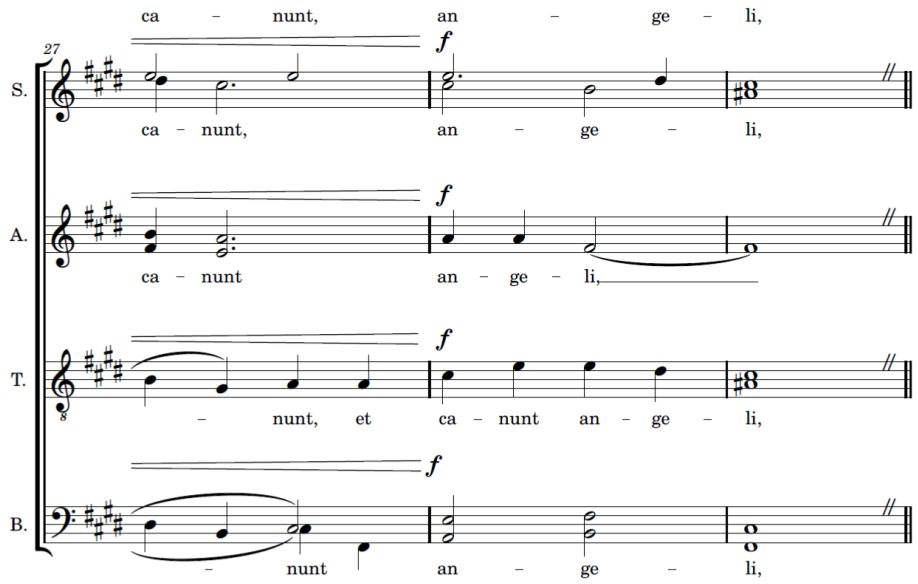


Figure 2.19 (continued).

Parallel Episode

Bars 30–48

For Howland, a parallel episode occurs 'when two consecutive IPSs of the same type feature prominent structural parallels', having 'similar parametric profiles.'[25] This phenomenon is found in the final section of *Lux aurumque*, with a Steady State IPS of oscillating chords in C-sharp minor, evoking the opening Steady State IPS, followed by another Steady State IPS in the key of C-sharp major (see Figures 2.20 and 2.21). While there is a slight increase in textural density, and a decrease in temporal density and dynamics in this second IPS, the similarities in parametric profiles between the two consecutive IPSs show an intrinsic link between them.

[25] Howland, p. 89.
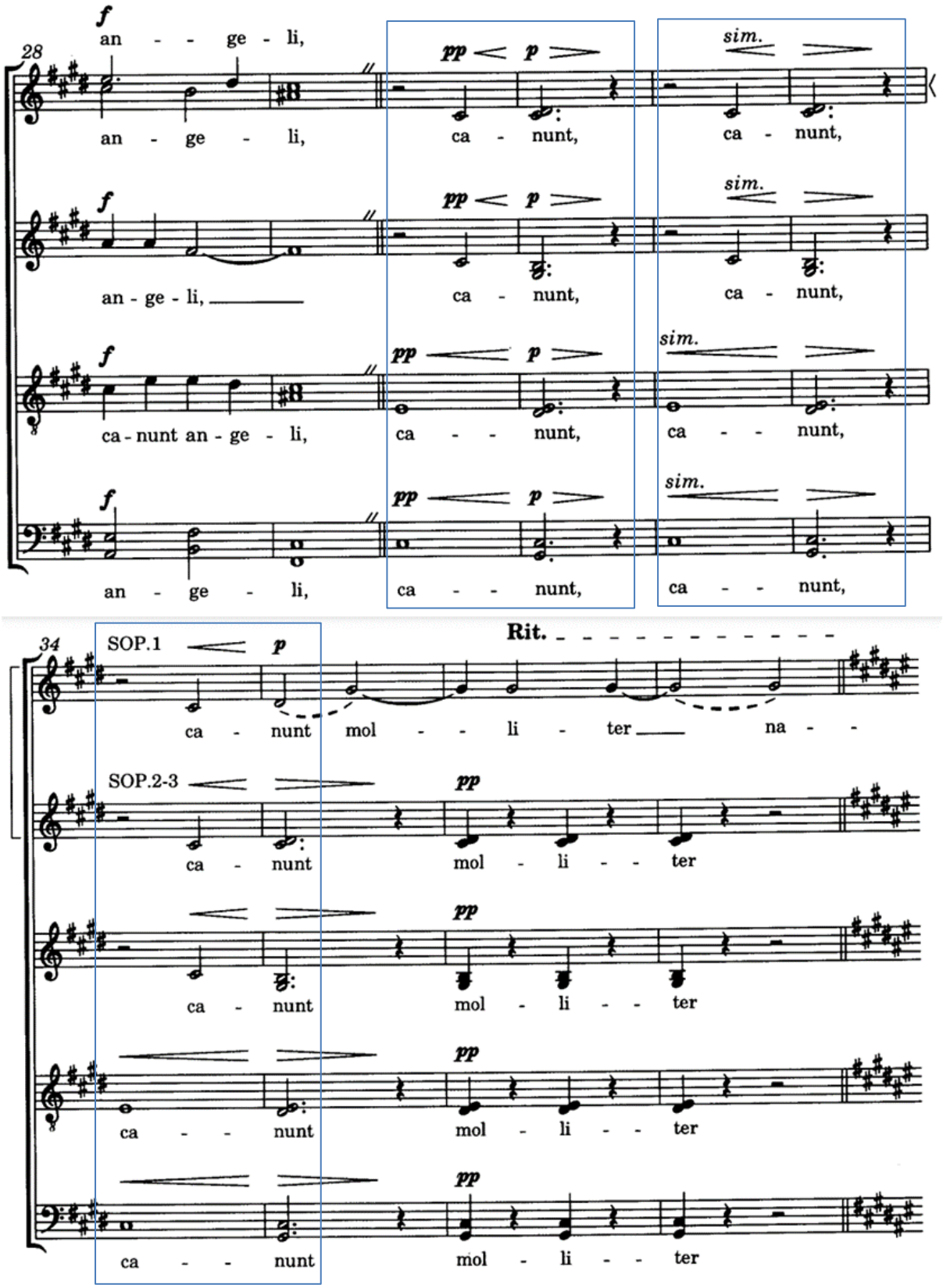


Figure 2.20: A Steady State phrase in C-sharp minor, *Lux aurumque*, bars 30–38.

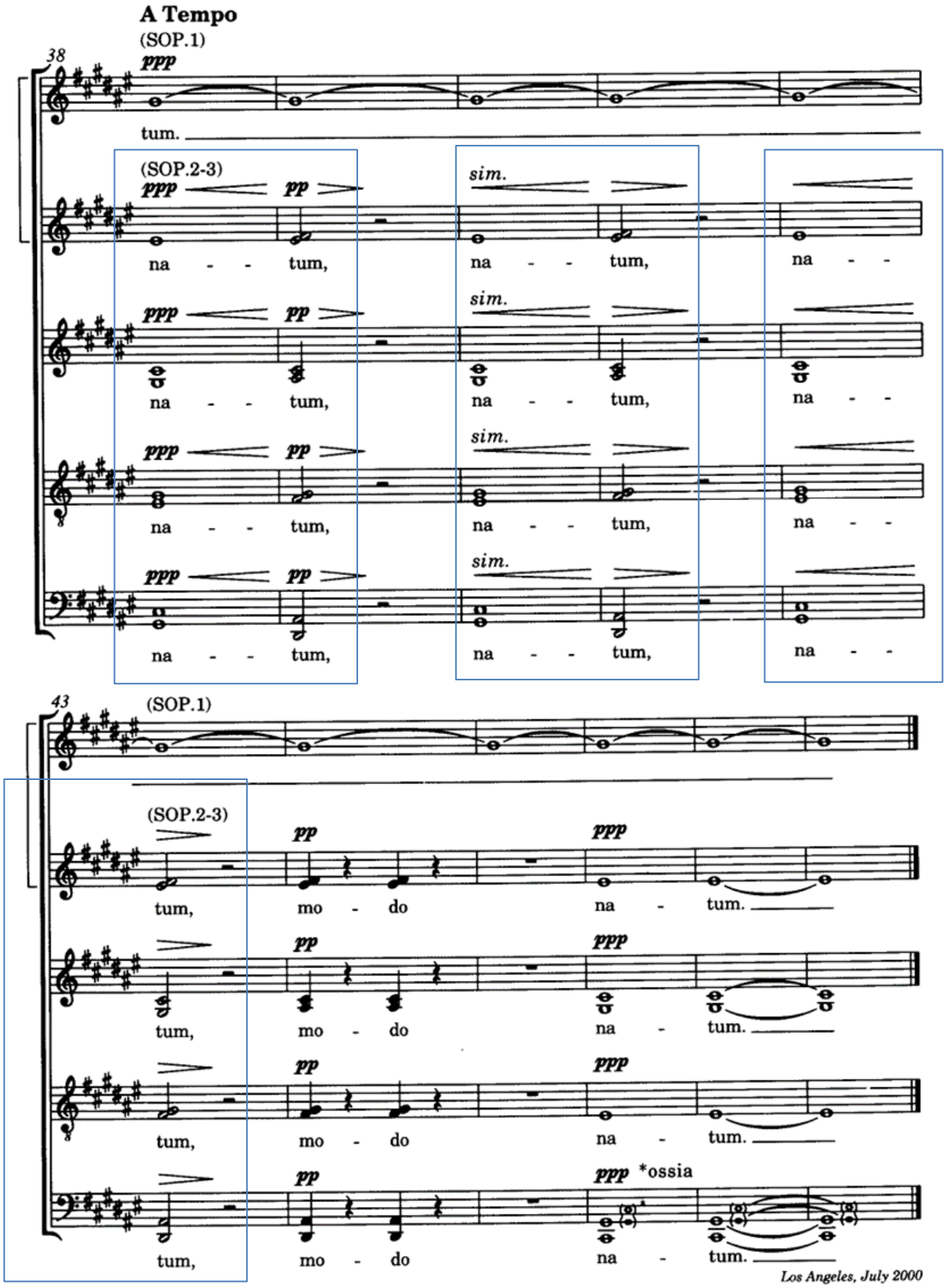


Figure 2.21: A Steady State phrase in C-sharp major, *Lux aurumque*, bars 38–48.

Like the opening Steady State IPS, these IPSs contain swelling, oscillating chords (shown in blue above). In instances such as this, the combination of Critical Score Analysis enriches IPS

Analysis. The poem chosen for this work is a translation of a Nativity poem that describes the singing of angels upon the birth of Jesus Christ. By examining the relationship between the text and the compositional choices made by Whitacre, we may ascertain that the choice to create a Parallel Episode may reflect the duality of the world before the birth, and the transformation of the world in its aftermath. IPS Analysis not only reveals how a work is segmented into formal structures; analysis of the nature of the IPSs and IPS Groups themselves also gives an insight into the composer's interpretation of the source text.

The programmatic nature of choral music allows for simpler formal analysis than the absolute music for which the IPS framework was designed. The structure of the source text, such as stanzas of a poem, is frequently reflected in the musical structures created by the composer. This is not always the case, however, such as in Jake Runestad's *Spirited Light* (2014), which takes its text from the translation of a text by Hildegard von Bingen. IPS Analysis reveals how exactly composers design these formal structures, and can uncover incongruities between the music and the source text. In Chapters Three and Four, the source text of each selected work will appear as a guide to underpin the formal analysis according to the adapted IPS framework. Textual analysis alone does not reveal how structural units are related, constructed, or articulated, therefore IPS Analysis is crucial in understanding how the work is organised.

Notwithstanding the IPS framework's usefulness in revealing structural signifiers on the musical surface of works that traditional methodologies oriented towards harmonic and melodic development may overlook, Howland's methodology is not without its limitations: As it was developed for the analysis of post-tonal works by Carter, Babbitt and Stockhausen, this approach does not account for the quality or character of chordal sonorities within a tonal framework. The IPS system analyses chords only according to their register, the number of tones present and the size of the constituent harmonic intervals in order to show relative increases, decreases or plateaus in intensity. This does not account for the harmonic relationships within those chords, particularly in relation to a tonal centre, nor does it address the emotional response Whitacre and others seek to elicit through certain harmonic relationships; for example, the clash between a major third and a suspended fourth is a favourite harmonic employed by Whitacre. In a 2021 Instagram Live video, he used an example from *Sleep*, to explain that the presence of both a suspended fourth and a major third in a chord creates a sense of motion in stationary chords:

> You don't let the resolution happen in a clear, typical way […] they dance between resolving and not resolving […] and so what you get is this static chord that doesn't move, it doesn't go

> anywhere, but at the same time it's changing and evolving […] you can just stop time and everything moves a little bit.[26]

Howland's methodology purports that a semitone clash between the major third and the suspended fourth is equivalent to that of a clashing minor and major third, as the intervallic distance is equal. Such a dissonance, however, would elicit an entirely different emotional response from the listener. It is therefore necessary to incorporate elements of Critical Score Analysis, such as harmonic analysis, motivic analysis, and text-setting analysis, in order to fully reveal the structural, narrative and dramatic devices at work in these compositions.

Critical Score Analysis

Critical Score Analysis (CSA) involves the identification of compositional features and musical elements in the works under consideration to develop an understanding of the artistic thought behind compositional decisions made by the composer. It relies on well-established methods of musical analysis, such as chordal, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, structural and textural analysis. This methodological approach enables the identification of discrete motifs and musical ideas which the broader framework of Integrated Parametric Structures does not address, as IPS Analysis is designed to determine larger structural units in a work. But together, IPS Analysis and CSA uncover the discrete musical ideas alongside the overall formal process of New Transcendentalist composition.

CSA includes the application of conventional, functional harmonic analysis in cases where the composer adheres to a more traditional harmonic structure. The use of this mode of analysis is also helpful for exposing the limitations of traditional analysis in works that obscure tonal harmony. Conventional harmonic analysis is deployed on non-functional tonal works to show how certain New Transcendentalist works challenge the norms of harmonic relations in tonal works. One example of this is Whitacre's *i carry your heart*, discussed earlier (see Figure 2.6) in which the composer purposely avoids placing the tonic note G in the lowest voice of any chord during the first eighteen bars. According to functional harmonic analysis, this weakens the chords and their relationships to one another, with the lack of root-position tonic chords removing any sense of gravity towards a tonal centre. In this way, Whitacre has written music in a neo-tonal language that is accessible for singers and audiences while avoiding the

[26] Eric Whitacre, *Time is a River: Walking through my writing process in real time*, online video recording, Instagram, 6 November 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CV8b2mBsPdh/?utm_medium=share_sheet> [Accessed 9 November 2021], 10:48–11:42.

strong chordal relationships that would associate the work with the classical style. Observing these harmonic relationships through the lens of classical harmonic analysis enables us to uncover how Whitacre has worked with purpose to circumvent the conventions of classical tonal music.

Traditional harmonic analysis through CSA is also employed in the comparative chapter when examining works with New Transcendentalist elements that do incorporate conventional harmonic progressions, particularly works by Susan LaBarr and Marques L. A. Garrett. For example, in *I Will Stand With You* (2021), Garrett utilises the familiar vi–I–IV–V progression, the so-called four-chord progression, with some variations in voicing and extension of chords:
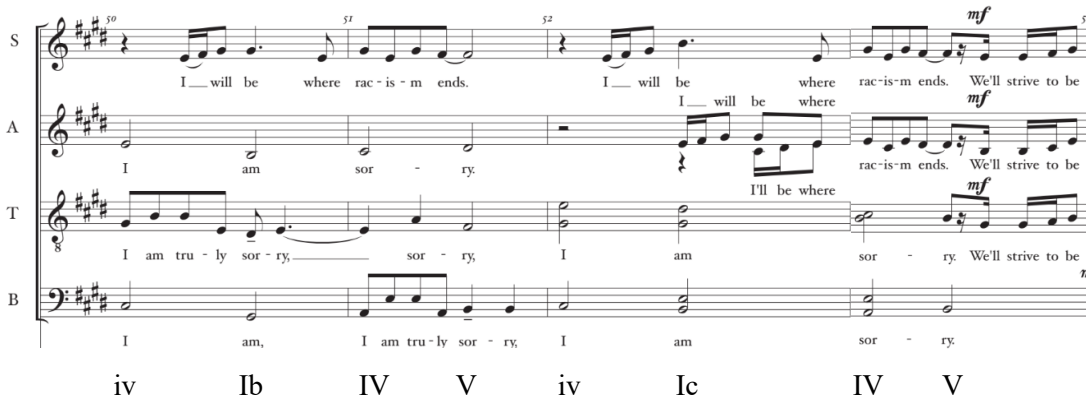


Figure 2.22: A repeated vi–I–IV–V progression in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 46–49.

While undermining conventional harmonic functionality in a pandiatonic context is a crucial element of New Transcendentalism, not all New Transcendentalist works are as maximalist in their application of this approach as Whitacre's *i carry your heart*. Many works feature moments of familiarity amid the pandiatonic wash of harmony, such as the four-chord progression emerging in Figure 2.22 above. Others employ a repeated sequence of chords, such as the repeated V–vi–IV progression in Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard* (2014). Furthermore, later analysis will reveal the importance of the Chord of IV in New Transcendentalist music as a second pole of tonal gravity. Through discrete employment of conventional modes of harmonic analysis, CSA augments our ability to engage deeply with these elements to identify the common stylistic approaches shared among the composers examined in this thesis.

While Whitacre's music often prioritises harmony over melody, other composers are more melodically oriented in their composition. The works of Susan LaBarr, for example, are more informed by pianistic, melodic writing, and therefore feature greater emphasis on melodic development. Other composers, such as Jake Runestad, incorporate polyphonic textures into

their compositions to a greater degree than Whitacre. The vertical, chordal perspective often dominates the composition and interpretation of New Transcendentalist works, but there are composers who incorporate the horizontal, melodic perspective into their compositions to a greater extent. For these works it is necessary to employ conventional melodic analysis, identifying melodic themes and motifs and investigating how the composers develop, combine and contrast these melodic ideas with one another.

The combinative approach of IPS Analysis to identify structural phenomena and CSA to explore compositional elements across select works in this study is a recognition of the diversity of approaches present in New Transcendentalist composition. A singular lens of analysis, such as Larson's Textural Density Analysis, cannot achieve the aims of this thesis in exploring the intersection of ideas across composers of this emerging style. The incorporation of CSA alongside the new method of structural analysis developed by Howland forms a holistic approach to understanding New Transcendentalist choral repertoire and may inform future scholarship of the repertoire.

This thesis does not systemically engage in text-music analysis. While the programmatic effect of certain compositional devices are occasionally referenced, the relationship between compositional choices and the interpretation of the source text is not discussed unless relevant to a particular compositional device of New Transcendentalism.

For the purpose of clarity, American Standard Pitch Notation is adopted for this thesis:

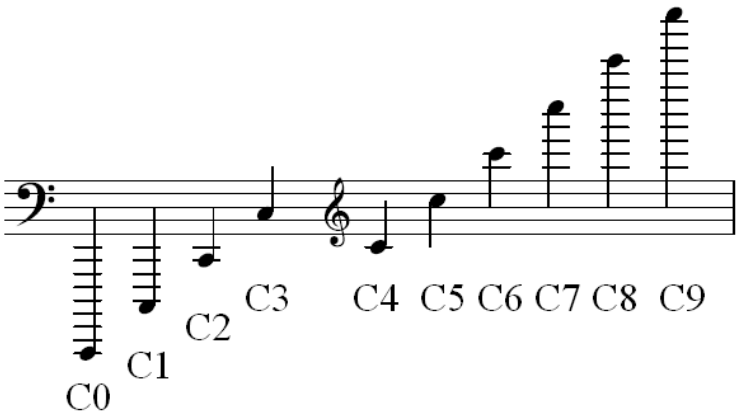


Figure 2.23: American Standard Pitch Notation.

Middle C is referred to as C4, and all pitches between C4 and C5 are followed by the number 4—for example, the bottom line of the treble clef staff is E4.

Interviews

To enrich the analysis presented in this thesis, in-person and virtual interviews were conducted with each of the composers under review. Data gathered from these interviews, as well as correspondence with the author, will be considered as part of the analysis and discussion chapters. Questions asked during these interviews were focused on the stylistic influences that led them to creative and compositional decisions made in their works, shedding light on shared influences, processes and outlooks on choral composition. These interviews were held both remotely on Zoom and in-person with the author.[27]

Conclusion

As discussed in the previous chapter, avant-garde and modernist developments in American choral music laid the groundwork for a new style of choral composition in the United States. This occurred in tandem with a well-established American choral tradition of homophonic, wall-of-sound choral textures across multiple genres of vocal and a cappella music. Having emerged from both of these traditions, New Transcendentalism requires a combinative framework of analysis that incorporates traditional and newly devised methodologies to ascertain a holistic understanding of how the music is constructed. Such an approach may also expose the stylistic features that have given rise to the popularity of New Transcendentalist choral music among both singers and audiences. This framework begins with a macro-analysis of structural phenomena through IPS Analysis, followed by micro-analysis of discrete compositional elements through CSA. The following chapter applies this combinative mode of analysis to the exemplar of New Transcendentalism, Eric Whitacre. This is followed by a comparative analysis in which the works of several of Whitacre's peers are analysed through the same lens in search of common characteristics and compositional features (see Chapter Four). Applying the above methodologies in combination, this thesis will demonstrate the analytical potential of New Transcendentalism, a style that has thus far been dismissed as beneath scholarly criticism, and present a framework for future scholarship in this field.

[27] The author received approval from the Dublin City University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee to conduct these interviews (see Appendix A). Interviewees were provided a Plain Language Statement (PLS) outlining the purpose of the research and data safety regulations before the interview (see Appendix B). All interviewees agreed on the record to the conditions outlined in the PLS. Correspondence over email is also included. The interview transcripts and correspondence are provided in full in the appendices of this thesis with the intention of providing primary sources for future scholarship on New Transcendentalism and on the works of these composers individually.

Chapter Three

The Fundamentals of New Transcendentalism: Eric Whitacre as Case Study

> *I do think we will look back on music history […] Whitacre is going to be the point of where we changed.*[1]
>
> Susan LaBarr, 2024

The composer most associated with the development and proliferation of New Transcendentalism after Morten Lauridsen is Eric Whitacre. While Lauridsen's New Transcendentalist approach emerged in the latter half of his career following the publication of his *O magnum mysterium* (1994), Whitacre's stylistic language is highly consistent throughout his choral oeuvre.[2] As the composer who has engaged most prolifically and exclusively with New Transcendentalism, and as the composer whose works are seen by many as the archetype of the style, Whitacre's works merit an in-depth case study. This chapter will address the first research question of the study: What are the stylistic features of New Transcendentalism as exemplified in the choral music of Eric Whitacre? Analysis of the idiosyncratic compositional approaches of Whitacre provide a benchmark for the New Transcendentalist style for comparative analysis in Chapter Four.

Born in Reno, Nevada in 1970, Whitacre attributes his earliest musical influences to electronic pop artists, such as Duran Duran and Depeche Mode: 'I wanted to be a pop star […] I didn't read music but I played synthesisers and drum machines.'[3] Whitacre's interest in choral music began at eighteen years old after joining the choir at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) during his undergraduate studies, where he was immediately captivated at the first rehearsal of 'Kyrie' from Mozart's *Requiem*.[4] He immersed himself in contemporary choral repertoire, listening to the works of Morten Lauridsen, Arvo Pärt and Samuel Barber, and

[1] Susan LaBarr, interview with the author, 13 May 2024.
[2] The work commonly cited as an outlier in Whitacre's choral output is *The City And The Sea* (2010), which features complex meters, punchy melodies, and rhythmic piano accompaniment.
[3] TED, *A virtual choir 2,000 voices strong | Eric Whitacre*, online video recording, YouTube, 4 April 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NENlXsW4pM> [Accessed 12 November 2024].
[4] Ibid.

attending high-level concerts at conferences of the American Choral Directors' Association (ACDA).[5] David Weiller, the director of the UNLV choir, regularly performed various settings of the poem 'Go, lovely rose!' by Edmund Waller. In his second year at UNLV, Whitacre composed a setting of the poem for the advanced choir, which was subsequently performed at the 1992 Western Region Conference of the ACDA in Hawai'i. Whitacre produced the work using recordings of himself singing on a four-track tape recorder and playing additional parts on the piano, and workshopped the piece with the singers in rehearsal until he arrived at the final version.[6] The piece opens with an ascending Lydian pentachord on B, with each voice-part in turn sustaining a note in the scale to create a five-note cluster chord (see Figure 3.1):

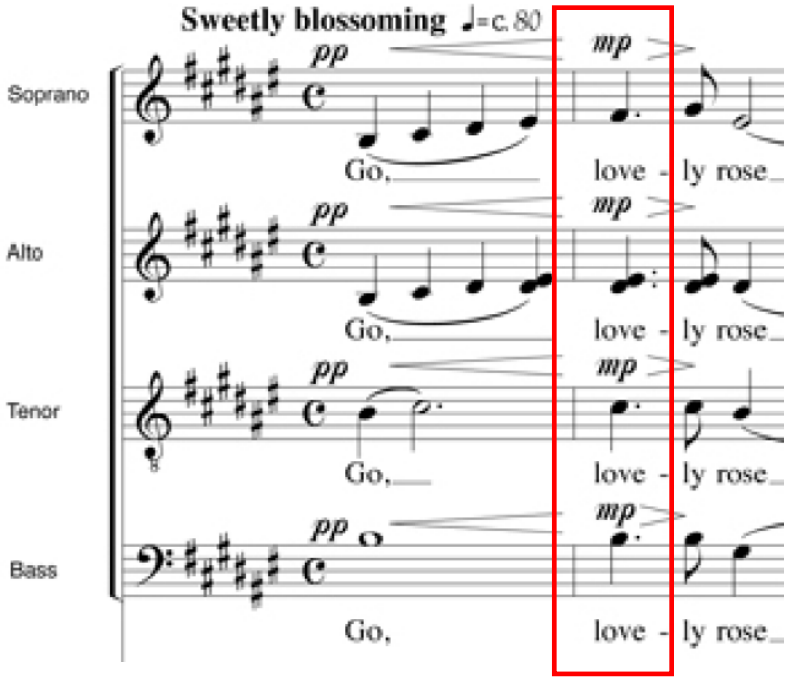


Figure 3.1: the opening B-Lydian cluster chord of 'Go Lovely Rose' (shown in red).

As posited in Chapter One, Whitacre was likely influenced by similar chords in works he encountered at other ACDA conferences, such as Edwin Fissinger's *Lux aeterna* and John Paynter's *The Rose*.[7] This first utterance of his compositional career, a clustered chord in the Lydian mode, was a prescient distillation of several compositional ideas that have since defined

[5] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024. The UNLV choir is also where he met his longtime friend and collaborator, the poet Charles 'Tony' Anthony Silvestri, who has composed texts for many of Whitacre's works.
[6] Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024. 'Go Lovely Rose' was later published as the first movement of Whitacre's *Three Flower Songs* (1992).
[7] See Chapter One, Figures 1.16 and 1.17.

his career and permeated the choral landscape for decades. Following the performance of the work at ACDA Western, Barbara Harlow of Santa Barbara Music Publishers approached Whitacre to propose a publishing deal, launching Whitacre's career as a published choral composer.[8]

In the first decade of his professional career, Whitacre received numerous commissions from collegiate and professional choirs. The five years following Whitacre's graduation from the Juilliard School in 1997 were the most prolific of his career as he committed to pursuing composition professionally, seeking to widen his profile and attain work.[9] During this period he composed some of his most enduring pieces in the contemporary choral repertoire: *When David Heard* (1999); *Lux aurumque* (2000); and *A Boy and a Girl* (2002). Whitacre received the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission from the ACDA for a choral work to be performed at the National ACDA Convention in San Antonio, Texas in 2001. He composed *Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine* (2001) with a newly composed text by Charles Anthony Silvestri to be performed by the Kansas City Chorale. After the commission of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* (2002), Whitacre stopped taking commissions for newly composed works for five years in order to focus on composing his electronic opera *Paradise Lost* (2007). The birth of his first son also occurred during this period, impacting the amount of commissions and projects he could take on.[10] Between 2003–07, the only choral works Whitacre composed were *This Marriage* (2004), an anniversary present for his wife, and two choral miniatures which would later form part of his trio of short pieces, *Animal Crackers*, volume I (2002; 2005; 2006). *This Marriage* is Whitacre's most harmonically and texturally austere work, standing in total contrast to the rest of his oeuvre. The unmetered, chant-like work is composed for SATB chorus, non-*divisi*, featuring a series of diatonic chords in mostly parallel motion. The alto and bass parts are scored in octaves throughout with the exception of a single chord on page 7 of the choral score.[11] Not accounting for octave equivalences, there are no chords featuring more than three notes in the entire work.

After this relatively fallow period while developing *Paradise Lost*, Whitacre returned to choral composition with a commission from the King's Singers and the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain for their fortieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries respectively. This

[8] Eric Whitacre, 'Three Flower Songs', *Eric Whitacre* (online website), <https://ericwhitacre.com/music-catalog/three-flower-songs> [Accessed 13 November 2024].
[9] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[10] Ibid.
[11] The work is without barlines, therefore a bar number is not available for reference.

commission was for a setting of W. B. Yeats' poem *The Stolen Child* (2008). Whitacre was then appointed Composer in Residence of Sidney Sussex College Cambridge from 2010–2015, taking on a number of projects in the United Kingdom, including writing several compositions for the college as well as commissions from professional ensembles such as The Tallis Scholars and The Kings Singers. High-profile performances during this period include a livestreamed performance at the iTunes Festival alongside Hans Zimmer, and two premieres at the BBC Proms.

After five prolific years in England during which Whitacre wrote twelve original choral works and three orchestral works, the volume of his output slowed. Between his 2015 Proms performance and the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, Whitacre composed only four original works. These included one *a cappella* choral work, *i carry your heart* (2016), and three extended works: *The Boy Who Laughed at Santa Claus* (2017) for SATB choir, children's chorus and piano; *The Sacred Veil* (2018) for choir, cello and piano; and *The Gift of the Magi* (2019), a miniature opera for choir, soloists and piano. Since the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, Whitacre has composed six original works: three short choral works—*Sing Gently* (2020), *All Seems Beautiful to Me* (2022) and *Time is a River* (2023); two short orchestral works—*Prelude in C* (2022) and *The Pacific Has No Memory* (2025); and his most recent commission for the BBC Proms, *Eternity in an Hour* (2024) for choir, piano, string quartet and live electronics. It is possible that 2015 marked a turning point in Whitacre's career where his focus has since turned from producing high volumes of choral octavos to developing more large-scale works. Whitacre has also gravitated towards more philosophical texts, such as the writings of Walt Whitman, Marcus Aurelius and William Blake.

Whitacre is widely viewed as an influential figure in contemporary choral music in the United States and abroad. As shown in the quotes at the opening of this chapter, he is highly regarded by his contemporaries in choral composition. His online persona, epitomised by his professionally produced social media posts and his immensely popular Virtual Choir projects, dominates the online choral space. In his doctoral thesis on the impact of Whitacre on choral singers, Mark Konewko describes him as a 'transformational leader' when referencing his influence on choral singers across the world through his internet presence.[12] While Whitacre is

[12] Mark Konewko, 'The Phenomena of Eric Whitacre: Infusing New Energy in the Choral World?' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cardinal Stritch University, 2013), p. 172.

recognised as such by his peers in the choral community, scholarly attention towards his music is somewhat lacking.

Scholarly Reception

As discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter One, there is a dearth of scholarly criticism on Whitacre's compositional style. Chester Lee Alwes' *A History of Western Choral Music* (2015) makes reference to Whitacre only as an 'internet celebrity composer' without appraising his compositions.[13] Alwes mentions only the popularity of the music of Whitacre and his peers, despite dedicating greater word count to other commercially successful choral composers, such as Bob Chilcott and John Rutter. The omission of consideration of one of the most ubiquitous choral soundworlds of the twenty-first century displays surprising oversight in an otherwise comprehensive anthology of Western choral repertoire. In addition, Whitacre's music has never been analysed as part of a purely musicological PhD thesis:[14] His choral music was the sole focus of three dissertations for the completion of a Doctorate in Musical Arts (DMA) in the United States.[15] Only two peer-reviewed articles have been published on Whitacre, one of which—Larson's *Choral Journal* article—is derived from one of the three DMA theses.[16]

As well as entries in choral literature textbooks, these scholarly works draw several conclusions about Eric Whitacre's compositional style. First, his harmonic palette is defined by diatonic/pandiatonic chords with frequent use of secundal harmony and cluster chords, described by Shrock as 'a trademark' of his music.[17] Second, homophonic textures dominate his work, founded on chordal declamation of text, with limited use of counterpoint often written

[13] Chester Lee Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 384.
[14] The only PhD thesis centred on Whitacre is a phenomenological study of singers who are admirers of Whitacre and participants in his Virtual Choir projects: Konewko, 2013.
[15] Phillip Allen Swan, 'In his own words: The choral music of Eric Whitacre from 1991–2004' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 2016); Matthew Lyon Hazzard, 'The Veil Opens: An Analysis of Storytelling Features in Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 2023); Andrew Larson, 'Textural and Harmonic Density in Selected Choral Works (1992–2003) by Eric Whitacre' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 2004).
[16] Ana Maria Melinte, Mădălina Ionescu, and Mirela Matei, '"Leonardo dreams of his flying machine" – stylistic aspects. Inside Eric Whitacre's fascinating musical world', *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, 7 (2023), 137–48; Andrew Larson, 'Textural Density in the Choral Music of Eric Whitacre', *The Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 22–33. While the first of these articles is published in what is referred to as a peer-reviewed periodical, limited original analysis is presented, and the only secondary sources referenced are two masters theses.
[17] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 760.

between homophonic groupings of voices.[18] For Larson, '[a] defining characteristic of Whitacre's music [is] the frequency at which he changes the number of tones present in the choral texture' through use of *divisi*: He argues that this approach is defined by textural variation within this broadly homophonic, broadly pandiatonic compositional style.[19] Finally, with regard to form, Hazzard refers to the concept of the 'Golden Brick', a method developed by Whitacre through which he constructs a work from a single, foundational idea.[20] While this research identifies several compositional idiosyncrasies in Whitacre's music, consideration of their broader relationship to a compositional style beyond Whitacre is notably lacking.[21]

Owen and Lynch's DMA theses present a comparative analysis of Whitacre's style with those of more senior composers, Morten Lauridsen and René Clausen (b. 1953), and consider works composed before 2008. The only publicly available scholarly work comparing the influence of Whitacre's work on younger composers is a 2019 master's dissertation by Hicks, though it is also limited in scope and does not identify a shared compositional language.[22] This gap in scholarship linking Whitacre to broader trends in contemporary American choral music highlights the need for a fresh analytical perspective on Whitacre's output and greater examination of stylistic connections within his own works and with the works of his contemporaries. Whitacre's widespread influence on contemporary choral music in the United States and his ubiquitous association with the stylistic features of New Transcendentalism necessitate a case study of his compositions. Furthermore, as identified by Lynch,[23] Whitacre's choral output is highly consistent in style, making him a suitable case study for the development of an idiosyncratic style. By examining how Whitacre consolidated his compositional approach in his earlier works and developed his style in a later composition, we may arrive at a deeper understanding of the fundamental elements of New Transcendentalism before comparing the compositions of other composers who have engaged with the style in select works.

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[18] Owen, 2008, p. 2.
[19] Larson, 2006, p. 26.
[20] Hazzard, p. 24.
[21] Lynch's thesis labels the style 'Neo-impressionism', but his analysis is broadly founded upon aesthetic and conceptual approaches to composition with reference to the compositional philosophies of Claude Debussy rather than discrete musical elements. Owen's thesis does not articulate the existence of a shared compositional style beyond the identification of compositional techniques between Whitacre, Morten Lauridsen and René Clausen.
[22] Theodore Hicks, 'The Influence of Eric Whitacre's Compositional Technique in the Music of Emerging Choral Composers' (unpublished master's thesis, Ball State University, 2019). One of the composers examined in the study is the author himself.
[23] Lynch, 2008, p. 63.

Applying the combined methodological framework outlined in Chapter Two, this case study chapter presents IPS Analysis and Critical Score Analysis (CSA) of five *a cappella* choral octavos by Whitacre, four from his prolific early period and one from his later period: *Water Night* (1994), 'i thank You God for most this amazing day' (1999, rev. 2009), *A Boy and a Girl* (2002), *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* (2002), and *i carry your heart* (2016). The four early works demonstrate the unrestrained, experimental approach to New Transcendentalist ideas in Whitacre's early period. The later work, *i carry your heart*, represents a consolidation of the ideals and techniques of New Transcendentalism into a highly accomplished choral work. Discussion of the development of Whitacre's compositional language and formal design of choral octavos from his earlier period to later work will follow, focusing on common features and evidence of reconciliations of compositional technique. Details from an interview with the author, alongside other public interviews and speeches delivered by Whitacre, are drawn upon in further contextualising the analytical material.

Water Night (1994)

Water Night is Whitacre's first setting of poetry by Octavio Paz, based on an adaptation of his poem 'Agua Nocturna' translated by Muriel Rukeyser.[24] Whitacre later included extracts from this poem in their original Spanish in *Cloudburst* (1995).[25] Paz's poetry features expressive, colouristic language, inspired by French surrealism, Buddhism and Marxism.[26] Whitacre returned to Paz's poetry several times in his early period, and is the most frequently set poet by Whitacre after e.e. cummings (1894–1962) and Charles Anthony Silvestri:

[24] Octavio Paz, 'Agua nocturna/Water night', *Early Poems, 1935–1955*, transl. by Muriel Rukeyser et al. (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 16–17.
[25] *Cloudburst* also features Spanish-language extracts from 'El cántaro roto' or 'The broken water-jar.'
[26] 'Paz, Octavio', *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Dinah Birch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.dcu.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780192806871.001.0001/acref-9780192806871-e-5819> [Accessed 31 October 2023].

Night with the eyes of a horse that trembles in the night,
night with eyes of water in the field asleep
is in your eyes, a horse that trembles,
is in your eyes of secret water.

Eyes of shadow-water,
eyes of well-water,
eyes of dream-water.

Silence and solitude,
two little animals moon-led,
drink in your eyes,
drink in those waters.

If you open your eyes,
night opens, doors of musk,
the secret kingdom of the water opens
flowing from the center of night.

And if you close your eyes,
a river, a silent and beautiful current,
fills you from within,
flows forward, darkens you,
night brings its wetness to beaches
in your soul.

The piece is Whitacre's fifth choral composition, and the first composed for an ensemble outside of his alma mater, UNLV. It quickly gained commercial success, becoming one of the top-selling choral octavos of the 1990s.[27] The structure of the piece is roughly palindromic, centred around a climactic *forte* consisting of a fourteen-part chord sung on the text 'if you open your eyes' in bars 32–33. The work is permeated with compositional techniques based on

[27] Gene Brooks, 'From the Executive Director: Whitacre Awarded 2001 Raymond W. Brock Memorial Composition', *Choral Journal*, 41 (2000), 2, 62, p. 2.

the separation of voice-parts into structural and harmonic units. From antiphonal textures between pairings of voice-parts to polychordal harmony, Whitacre generates harmonic and textural interest throughout the work through the juxtaposition of groupings of voices.

IPS Analysis

Phrases in *Water Night* are largely linear, with the use of techniques such as terraced dynamics and steady expansion or contraction of textural density used to create clarity of directionality in phrases to create larger Tension/Release structures. With the exception of the Departure/Return IPSs that form the introduction and coda sections, and the climactic Tension/Release phrase at the centre of the work, every IPS in the work is Directional (see Table 3.1):

IPS Group	**Constituent IPSs**	**Bar Numbers**	**First line of text**
[Introduction]	Departure/Return	1–5	Night with the eyes
Directional: Increasing*	Directional: Increasing	6–10	night with eyes
	Directional: Increasing	10–15	a horse that trembles
Directional: Decreasing*	Directional: Increasing	16–18	Eyes of shadow water
	Directional: Increasing^	19–21	eyes of well-water
	Directional: Decreasing^	22–24	eyes of dream water
Tension/Release	Directional: Increasing	25–26	Silence and solitude
	Directional: Increasing	27–28	two little animals
	Directional: Increasing	29–32	drink in your eyes
	Tension/Release	33–37	If you open your eyes
	Directional: Decreasing	38–41	the secret kingdom
Tension/Release	Directional: Increasing	42–46	And if you close
	Directional: Increasing	47–48	fills you from within
	Directional: Decreasing	48–52	flows forward
[Coda]	Departure/Return	52–59	Night brings

Table 3.1: IPS Analysis of *Water Night*.

IPSs in Table 3.1 marked with ^ enter at lower parametric values than the previous IPS. IPS Groups marked with * may be understood as forming a larger Tension/Release IPS Group, as outlined in Table 3.2 below. The first two IPS groups following the Departure/Return phrase

of the Introduction, marked with asterisks above, outline a larger Tension/Release structure, the first an Increasing Directional phrase, followed by a Decreasing Directional phrase. When viewed in this way, the piece follows a roughly palindromic metastructure of three Tension/Release IPS groups, bookended by Departure/Return phrases (see Table 3.2):

IPS Group	Bar Numbers
Departure/Return [Introduction]	1–5
Tension/Release	6–24
Tension/Release	25–41
Tension/Release	42–52
Departure/Return [Coda]	52–59

Table 3.2: The palindromic structure of IPS Groups in *Water Night*.

Water Night is structured with an arch-like trajectory of increasing and decreasing parameters, with a climax at the central point of the work on the text 'if you open your eyes.' This arch-like macrostructure is echoed in the microstructure of the opening and closing Departure/Return phrases, creating an architectural unity to the piece. The phrase opens on a *piano* B-flat minor chord, followed by increases in textural (red) and temporal (green) density, before returning to the relative conditions of the opening chord with the sole addition of a B-flat in the second soprano part (see Figure 3.2):

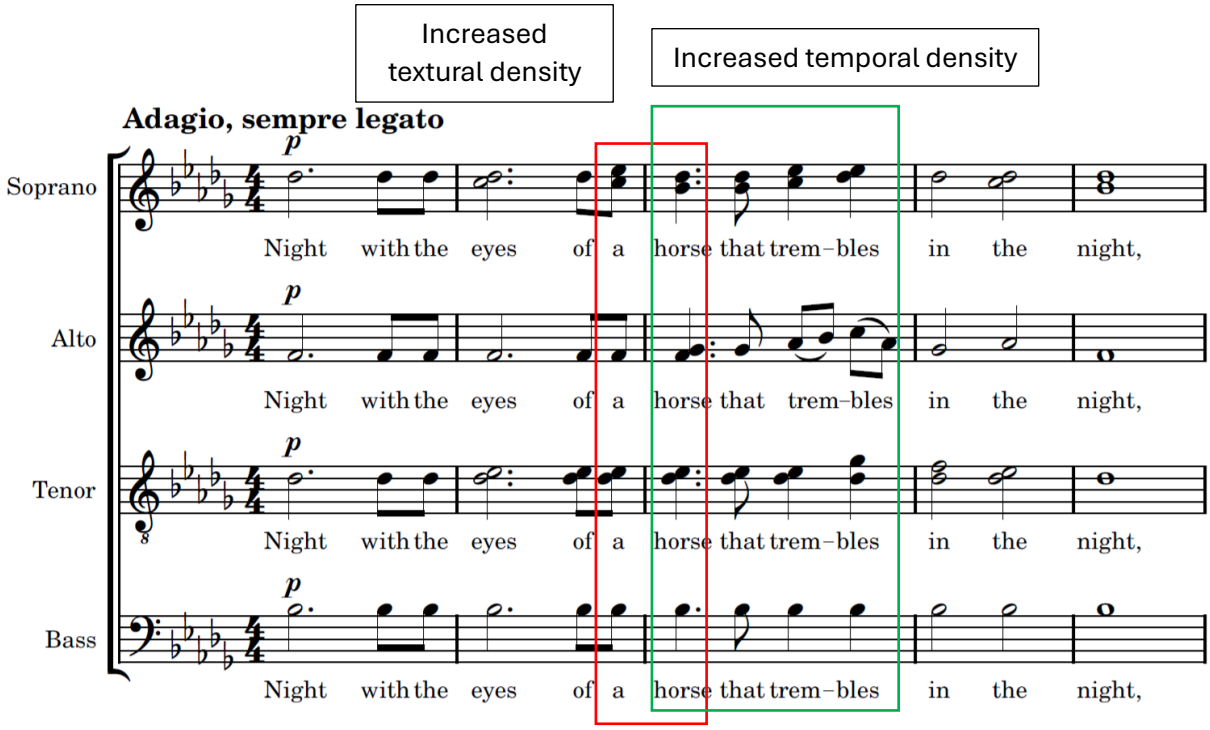


Figure 3.2: The opening Departure/Return phrase of *Water Night*, bars 1–5.

This is echoed in the coda of the work, which opens with the same *piano* B-flat minor chord on the word 'night' (see Figure 3.3):

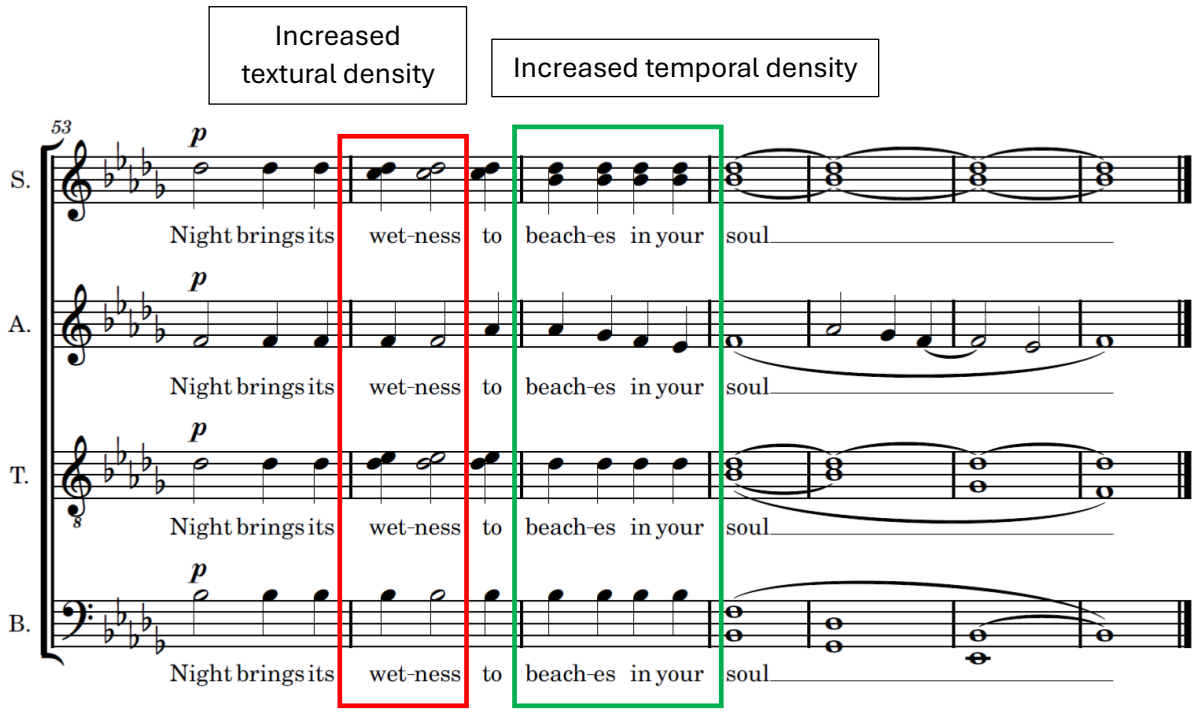


Figure 3.3: The coda of *Water Night*, bars 53–59.

In this instance, the final chord has greater range and textural density than the opening chord, though it has lower temporal density. This marks a return to the relative parametric conditions of the beginning of the phrase and, essentially, the beginning of the piece.

To demonstrate how Whitacre constructs phrases and larger IPS-groups through integrated parametric changes, we may take the central Tension/Release Group in bars 25–41 as an example. This phrase begins with three successive Directional (Increasing) IPSs. The first is two bars in duration, and features the increasing parameter of textural density, with the soprano parts dividing to create a secundal clash (See Figure 3.4):

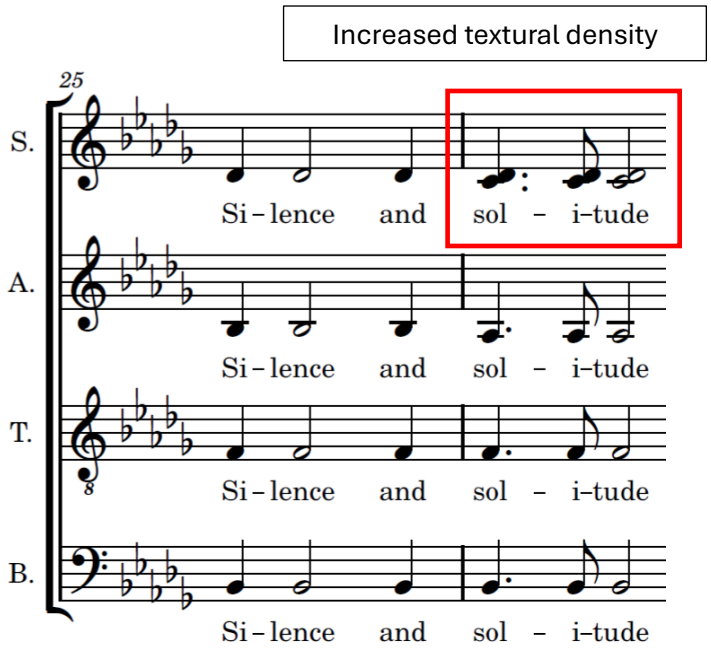


Figure 3.4: Increasing textural density in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 25–26 of *Water Night*.

This phrase is articulated by a sudden change in parametric values at the beginning of the following two-bar phrase. The soprano and alto voices enter relatively low in their range, singing a homophonic phrase in triplet crotchets that rises in register, building tension. Rhythmic duration decreases in bar 28, however, textural density increases from two pitches to four, including a three-note cluster between the soprano 2 and alto parts, maintaining the forward momentum of this Directional (Increasing) Phrase (see Figure 3.5):

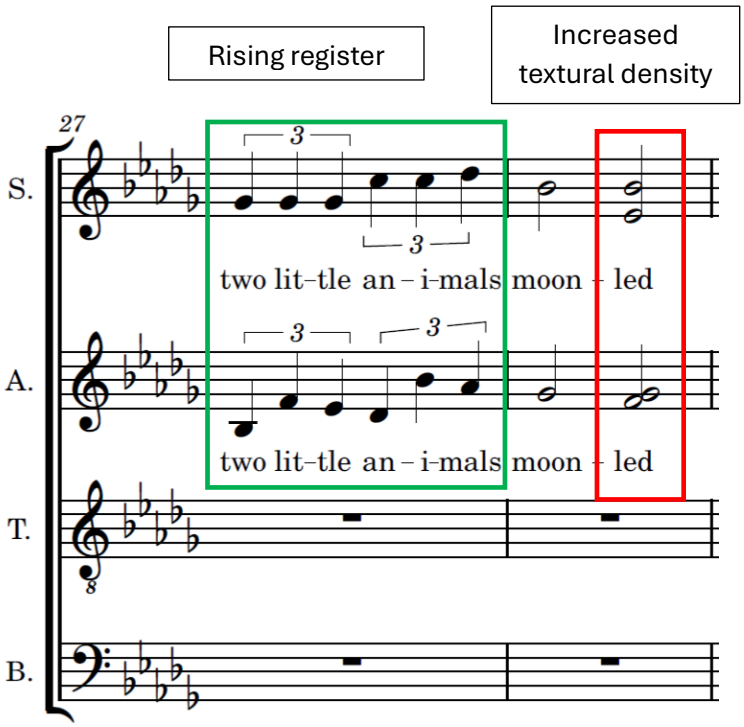


Figure 3.5: Rising register (green) and increased textural density (red) in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 27–28 of *Water Night*.

Another tension-building device employed in the phrase above is the repetition of secundal clashes between the soprano and alto parts as the register rises, building tension towards the third Directional (Increasing) Phrase. Like in the first of these three phrases, it begins with a homophonic, chordal declamation which subsequently increases in textural density. This is followed by another two bars, now in a higher register in all voices alongside a *crescendo* (See Figure 3.6):

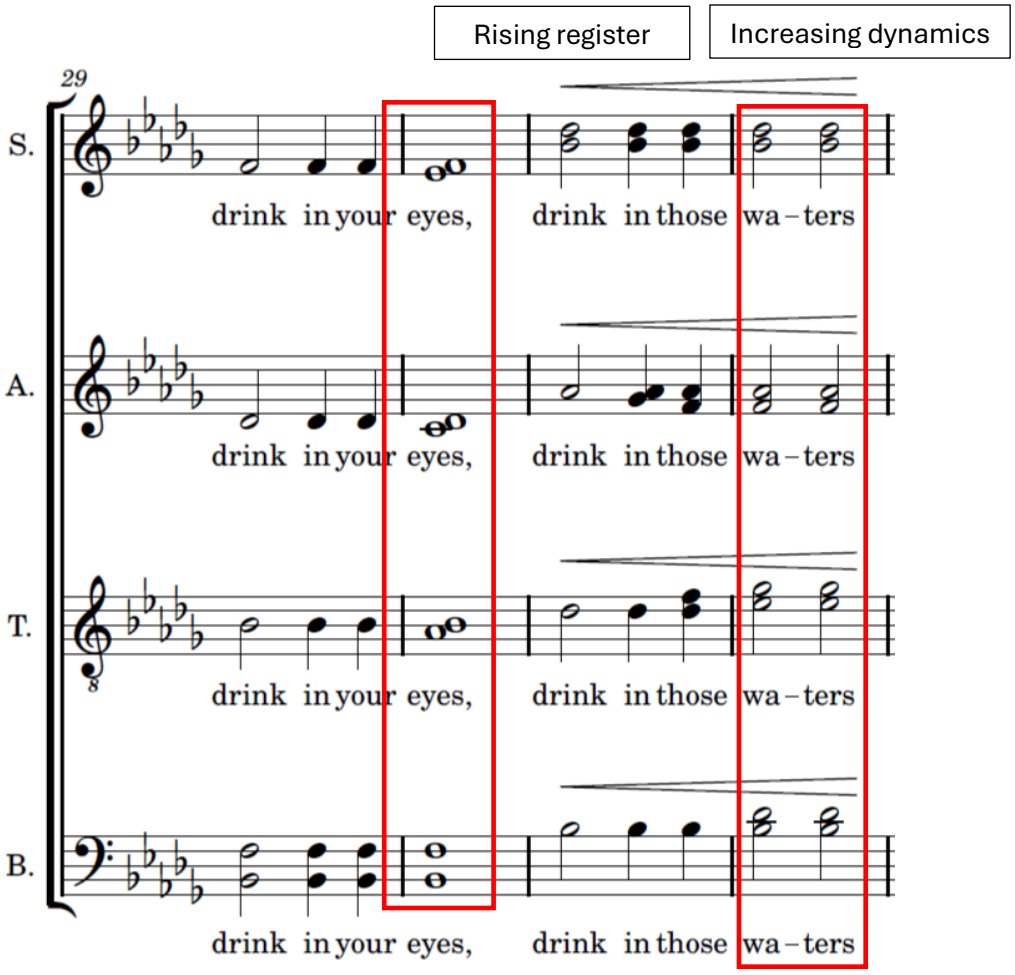


Figure 3.6: Increasing textural density (shown in red), rising register, and increasing dynamics in a Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 29–32 of *Water Night*.

This phrase features the most dramatic parametric increases in the IPS-Group so far, building towards the following phrase in which the climax of the piece occurs. The choir enters on a unison D-flat in the tenors and basses with the sopranos an octave above and the altos on F, the major third of D-flat major. The voices then fan out to create an eleven-part cluster chord over a G-flat major chord in the bass voices. This is followed by decreases in textural and temporal density, creating an overarching Tension/Release Phrase (see Figure 3.7):

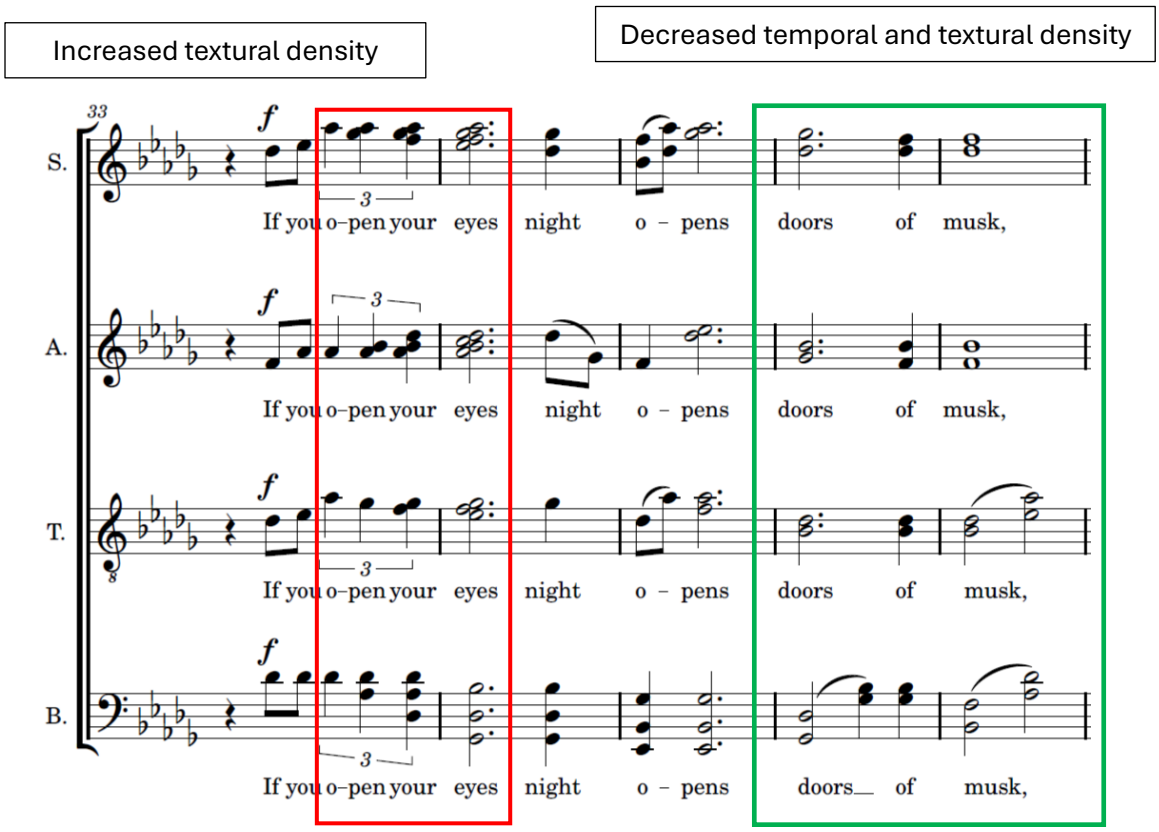


Figure 3.7: The central Tension/Release phrase of *Water Night*, bars 33–37.

The following Decreasing Directional phrase in bars 38–41 is worthy of scrutiny for its unique construction (see Figure 3.8). The phrase begins in eight-part *divisi* on a *forte* dynamic carried from the previous phrase. It features constant quaver motion until its conclusion on a semibreve in bar 41. From the initial eight-part chords in bar 38, textural density decreases to two pitches in the final quaver of bar 39, before expanding again into an eventual nine-part chord:

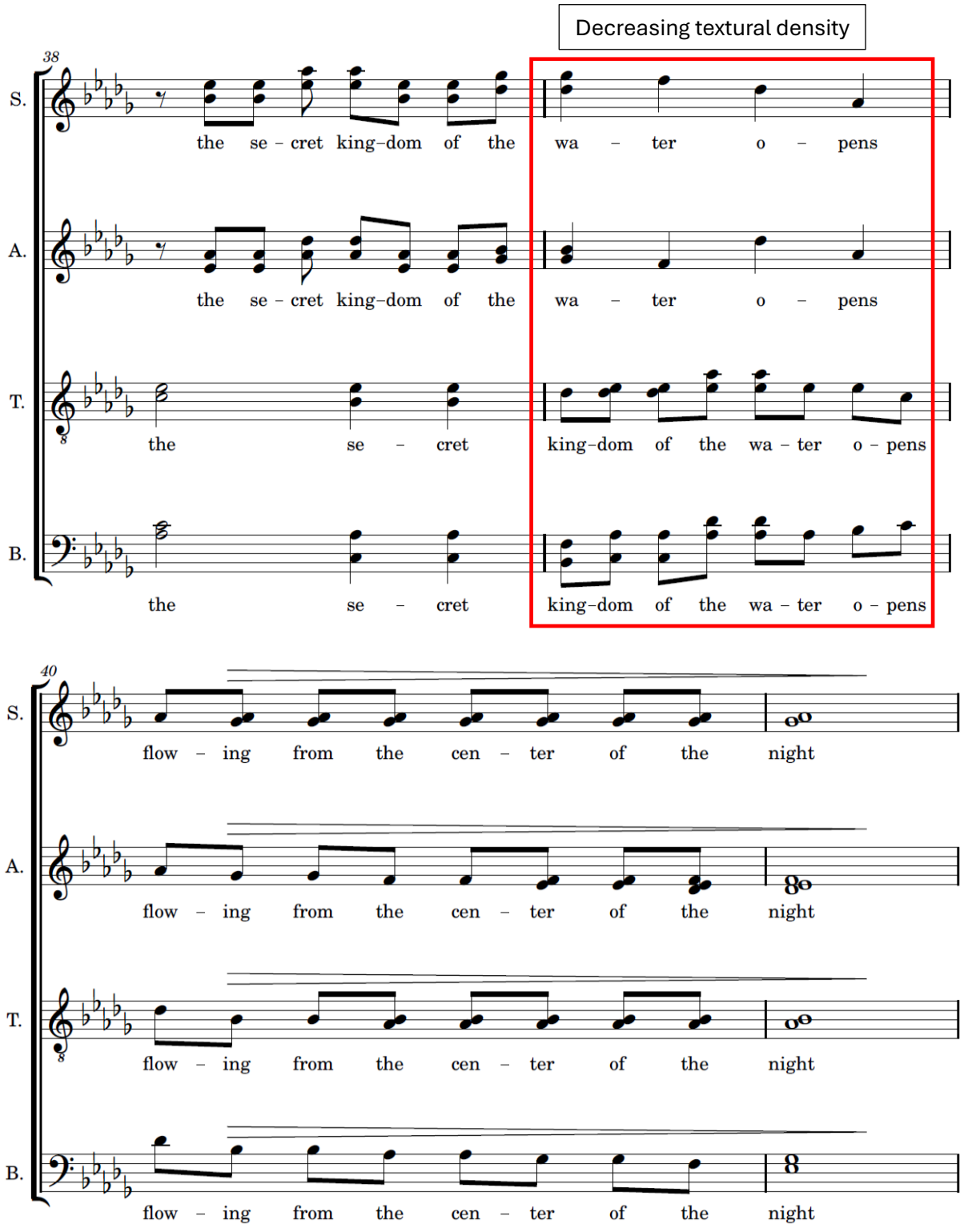


Figure 3.8: the Decreasing Directional phrase in bars 38–41 of *Water Night*.

While the fanning of *divisi* in bars 40–41 constitutes a parametric increase of textural density and range, the intensity of volume on individual pitches naturally decreases as voice parts subdivide, decreasing the parameter of volume and timbral intensity on individual pitches. In the first chord of bar 40, all sopranos and altos sing an A while all tenors and basses sing a D

in their upper register, creating an intensified sound on these two pitches reinforced by the sympathetic overtones of an open fifth. As each voice-part divides into the eventual nine-part chord of bar 41, individual pitches within the chords decrease in volume. While there is an increase in textural density, it is a functional decrease in volume which, combined with the diminuendo, creates an overall effect of parametric decrease. In his recording of the 'Water Night' conducting the Eric Whitacre Singers, Whitacre adds a *rallentando* to bar 40, heightening this parametric decrease.[28] This demonstrates Whitacre's deep familiarity with the choral instrument, even at this early stage in his career.

The linear nature of phrases in this work demonstrates an approach in which Whitacre develops them through consistent parametric change. Unlike later works such as 'i thank You God' in which IPSs overlap, or *A Boy and a Girl* which features a Steady State IPS, Directional phrases appear consistently throughout this work, with the exception of the mirrored Departure/Return phrases in the introduction and coda. This directional approach is explicit in the Decreasing Directional IPS Group in bars 16–24. Although the first two phrases are, themselves, Increasing Directional IPSs, Whitacre uses terraced dynamics and sudden registral change at the beginning of each phrase to heighten the sense of decreasing directionality that gives coherence to the entire IPS group (see Figure 3.9):

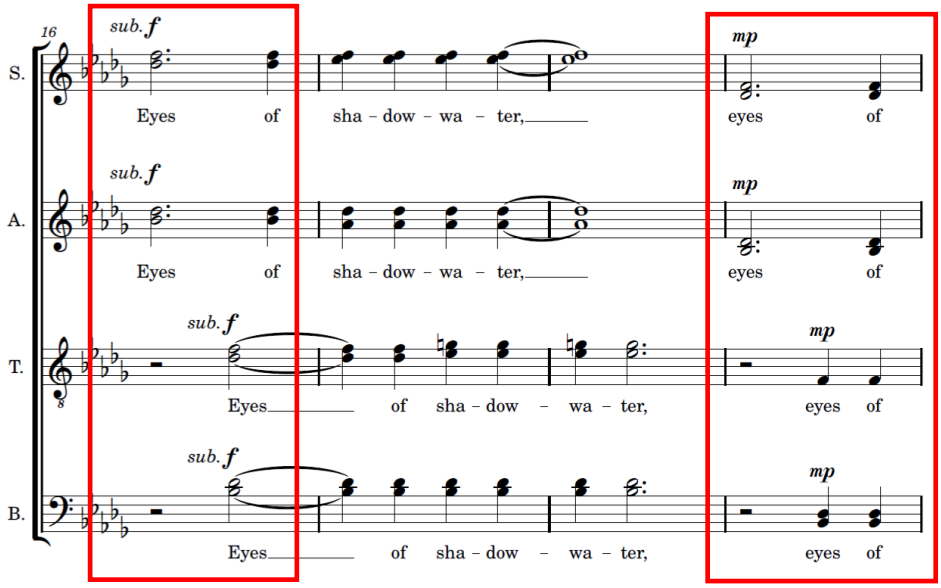


Figure 3.9: Decreasing terraced dynamics and decreasing register between IPSs in the Decreasing Directional IPS group in *Water Night*, bars 16–24.

[28] Eric Whitacre and The Eric Whitacre Singers, 'Water Night', from *Light and Gold* (Universal Decca, 2010).
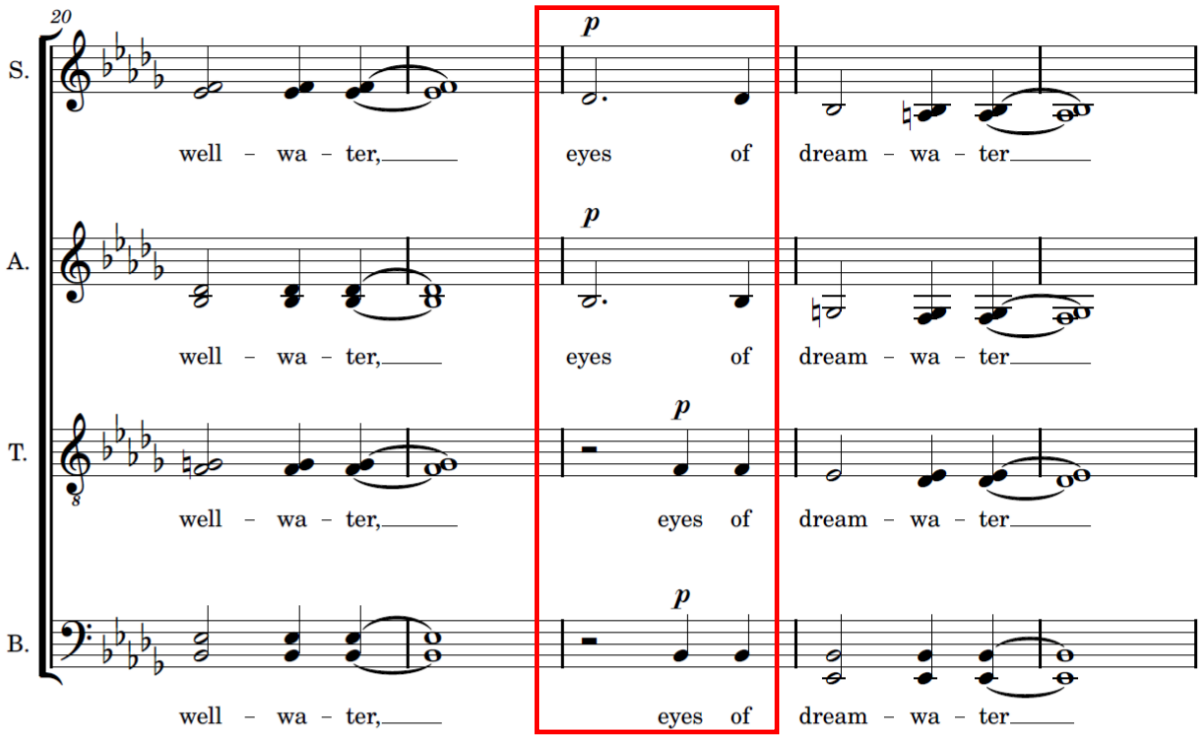


Figure 3.9 (continued).

This sense of trajectory gives structural unity to the larger Tension/Release and Departure/Return IPS groups that mirror the structure of the introduction on a broader scale. The Tension/Release structure, mirroring the musical breath of expansion and contraction, is central to the architecture of this piece.

Critical Score Analysis

Water Night was composed following a four-hour conversation between Whitacre and Bruce Mayhall, then Director of Choral Activities at the University of Nevada, Reno, in which Mayhall encouraged Whitacre to complete his studies at UNLV and pursue a career in music.[29] The piece was then commissioned by the Dale Warland Singers, a well-established professional chamber choir. With this piece we see Whitacre's early experimentation with the boundaries of the new compositional language he is developing. This experimental approach would also have been bolstered by writing the work originally without a commissioning choir in mind, enabling him to compose without limitation. Whitacre used extensive *divisi* to create expansive cluster chords as a dramatic tool in the expression of the text. As demonstrated by the IPS Analysis

[29] Eric Whitacre, 'Water Night', *Eric Whitacre* (online website), <https://ericwhitacre.com/music-catalog/water-night#satb> [Accessed 26 November 2024].

above, the dramatic trajectory of the piece is primarily directed by the expansion and contraction of textural density alongside other parametric values, supporting Larson's claim that textural density variation is a primary feature of Whitacre's early choral works. Critical Score Analysis exposes how Whitacre, through unfettered manipulation of choral texture with expanding and contracting *divisi*, experiments with the secundal, clustered, polychordal and altered-chord harmonies that would become hallmarks of his idiosyncratic choral language.

Secundal and Clustered Harmony

Despite being one of his earliest works, *Water Night* features some of the most extensive application of cluster chords in Whitacre's output to date. Here, he explores the boundaries of secundal chord-writing for unaccompanied chorus, writing chords of up to fourteen consecutive pitches (see Figure 3.10):

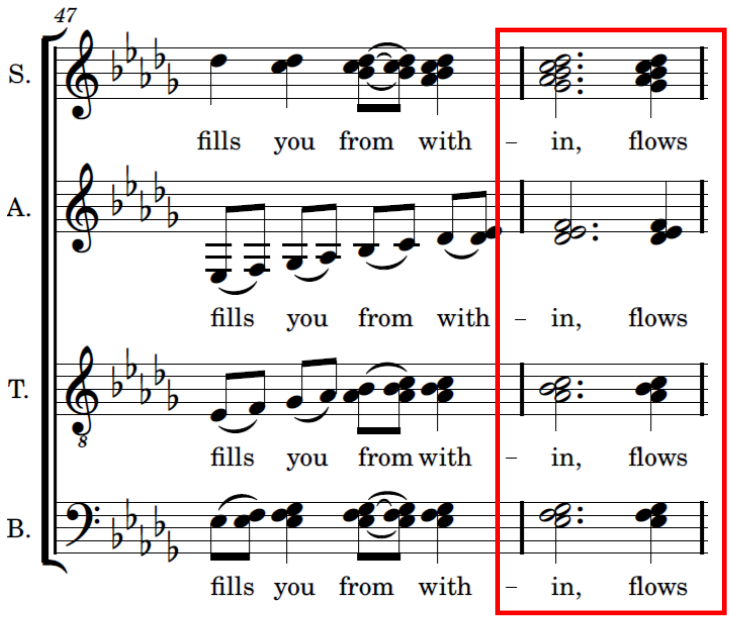


Figure 3.10: A fourteen-part secundal cluster chord in bar 48 of *Water Night*.

This is the second largest choral secundal chord of his *a cappella* choral output, following the seventeen-part secundal chord found in his 1999 work *When David Heard* (see Chapter One, Figure 1.15). The chord shown in Figure 3.10 is utilised as direct word painting of the underlying text. The soprano parts sing a fourteenth above the other voice parts at the beginning of bar 47 before all voices fan inwards to create the secundal cluster chord, portraying the text 'fills you from within.' The climax of the work occurs on the text 'if you open your eyes', for

which Whitacre composes an eleven-part cluster chord in the soprano, alto and tenor parts over a G-flat major chord sung by the bass parts (see Figure 3.11):

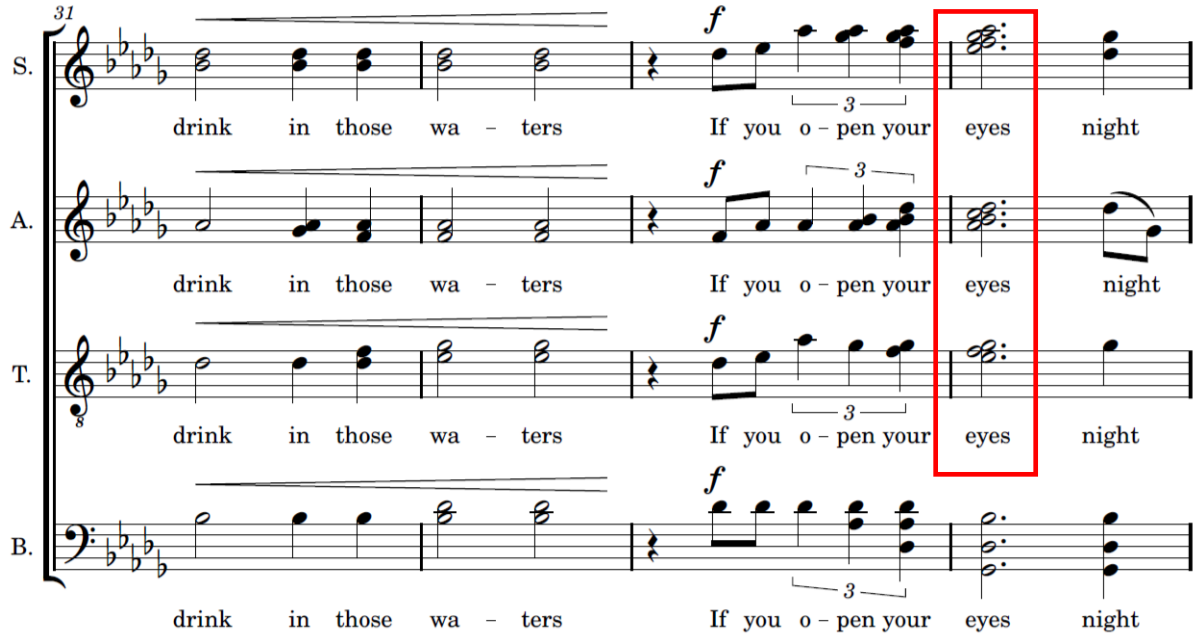


Figure 3.11: An eleven-part cluster chord over a G-flat major chord in bar 34 of *Water Night*.

As seen earlier in Figure 3.8, the choir also sings a clustered chord in bar 41 at the conclusion of the climactic inner IPS-Group. This chord features a five-note cluster in the soprano and alto parts above a three-note cluster in the tenor and bass 1 parts. These are sung above an E-flat in the bass 2:

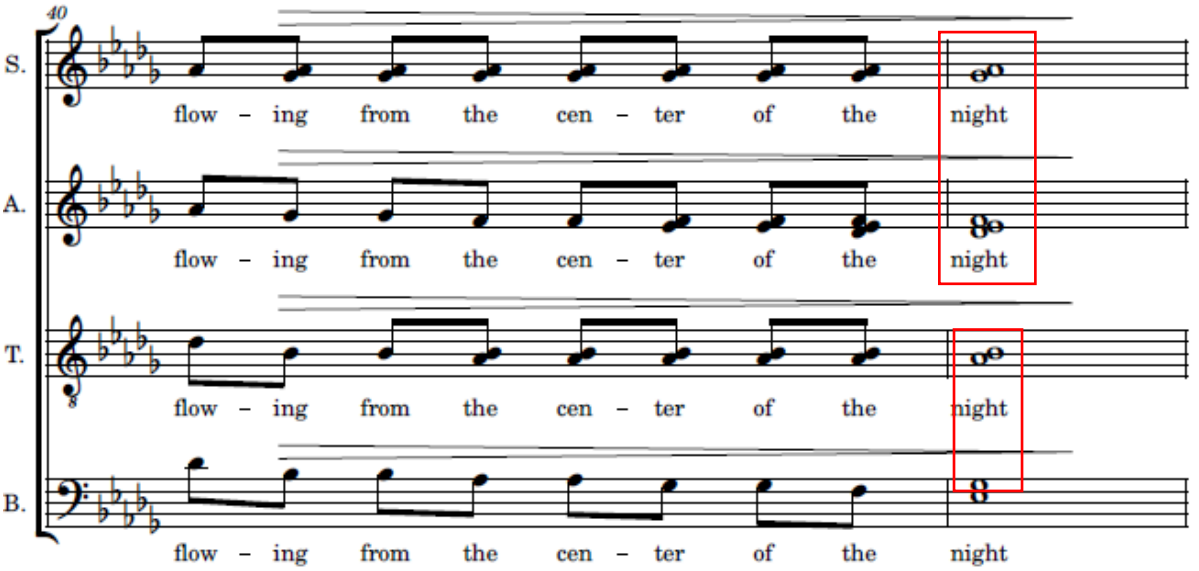


Figure 3.12: Clustered harmonies in bar 41 of *Water Night*.

It is notable that both of the extensive cluster chords in Figures 3.10 and 3.11 begin on E-flat, the second scale degree in the key signature of D-flat major, and the clustered harmony in Figure 3.12 features an E-flat in the lowest voice. The fourteen-part cluster in Figure 3.10 creates an expansive Dorian cluster chord, while the eleven-part cluster shown in Figure 3.11 is scored over the chord of IV in D-flat major, G-flat major, giving the sonority a Lydian quality. Linking back to the Lydian cluster chord that opens 'Go Lovely Rose', Whitacre's employment of cluster chords in *Water Night* is rooted in the Lydian mode and its related minor, the Dorian mode, giving a distinctive modal flavour to his cluster sonorities.

While fanning out from unisons into cluster chords is one tool Whitacre uses to generate secundal harmony, another method by which he constructs secundal chords is through polychoral harmony.

Polychordal Harmony

The method of bifurcation informs Whitacre's approach to harmony in this work, lending itself to the construction of polychordal harmonies. These harmonies occur between groupings of voice parts, or through *divisi* within voice parts. An example of the first occurs in bars 17–18 (see Figure 3.13), in which the upper and lower voice parts enter in imitation a minim apart. The soprano and alto parts enter on a B-flat minor chord (shown in green), followed by the tenor and basses. The upper voices then sing a second-inversion D-flat9 chord (shown in red) over the B-flat minor chord in the lower voices, before the tenors and basses then change to a E-flat7 chord in second inversion (shown in blue).

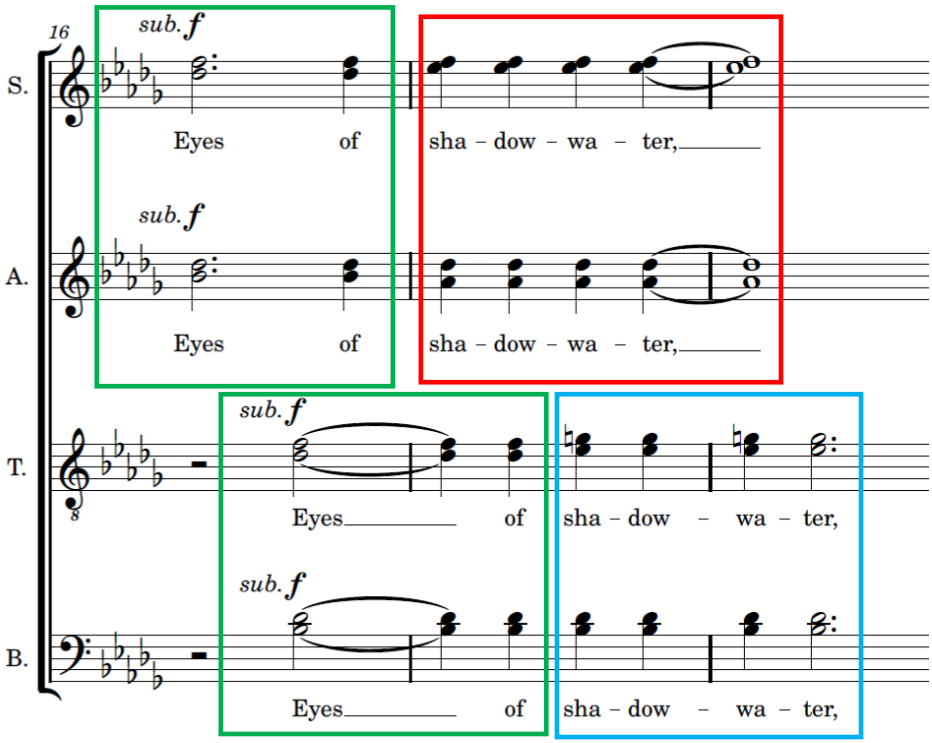


Figure 3.13: Polychordal harmony in *Water Night*, bb. 17–18.

The polychordal construction of this harmony is accentuated by the antiphonal setting of the parts. While the chords could be construed as extended B-flat minor chords, Whitacre's antiphonal separation of the parts combined with their independent congruity as pantonal chords suggests that these chords are intentionally polychordal.

Another method by which Whitacre constructs polychordal harmonies is the bifurcation of upper and lower *divisi* parts as antiphonal units. This occurs in bars 29–30 (Figure 3.14), when the first sopranos, altos and tenors maintain a B-flat minor chord, while the second sopranos, altos and tenors step downwards to an A-flat major chord (highlighted in blue):
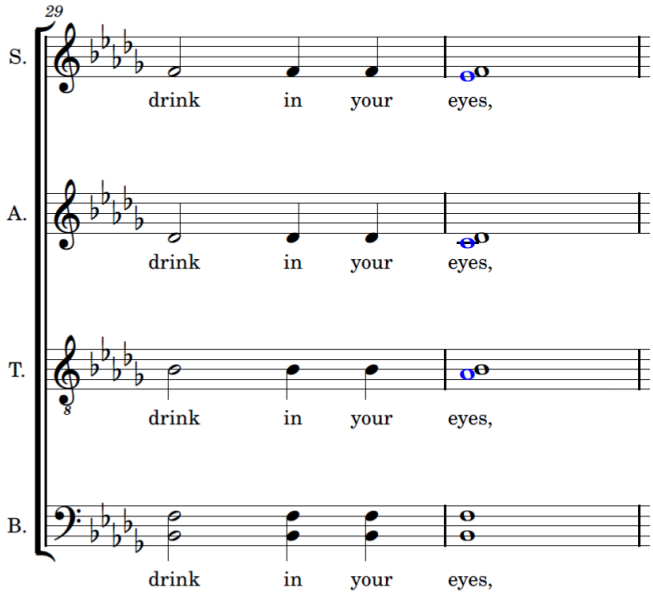


Figure 3.14: Polychordal *divisi* in *Water Night*, bars 29–30.

In this instance, there is no antiphonal separation of the voice parts, and the bass part maintains a pedal of the open fifth of B-flat minor, thereby strengthening the interpretation of this chord as simply an extension of B-flat minor. However, the congruity of the divided parts as two distinct triads supports the conclusion that this chord is polychordal. Larson identified this feature as a common method by which Whitacre increases textural density in his works, labelling it as 'Triadic Increase.'[30] This device allows Whitacre to construct highly extended chords with accessible and singable voice-leading, using simple, stepwise motion in a familiar diatonic or modal framework.

Altered Chordal Harmony

Water Night features only one chord that is constructed with pitches not belonging to a natural diatonic or modal scale. The chord, located in bars 23–24, is constructed through triadic increase and draws an end to the Directional Decreasing Group in bars 16–24. As opposed to an extended chord which contains diatonic pitches beyond the root, third, fifth and seventh, an altered chord contains notes borrowed from other scales.[31] In this case, Whitacre sounds an E-

[30] Larson, p. 29.
[31] Steven Strunk, 'Harmony, jazz', *Grove Music Online*, 2003 <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.J990085> [Accessed 30 July 2024], 1. (ii).

flat major chord to which he adds a flattened seventh, a ninth, and a sharpened eleventh (see Figure 3.15):

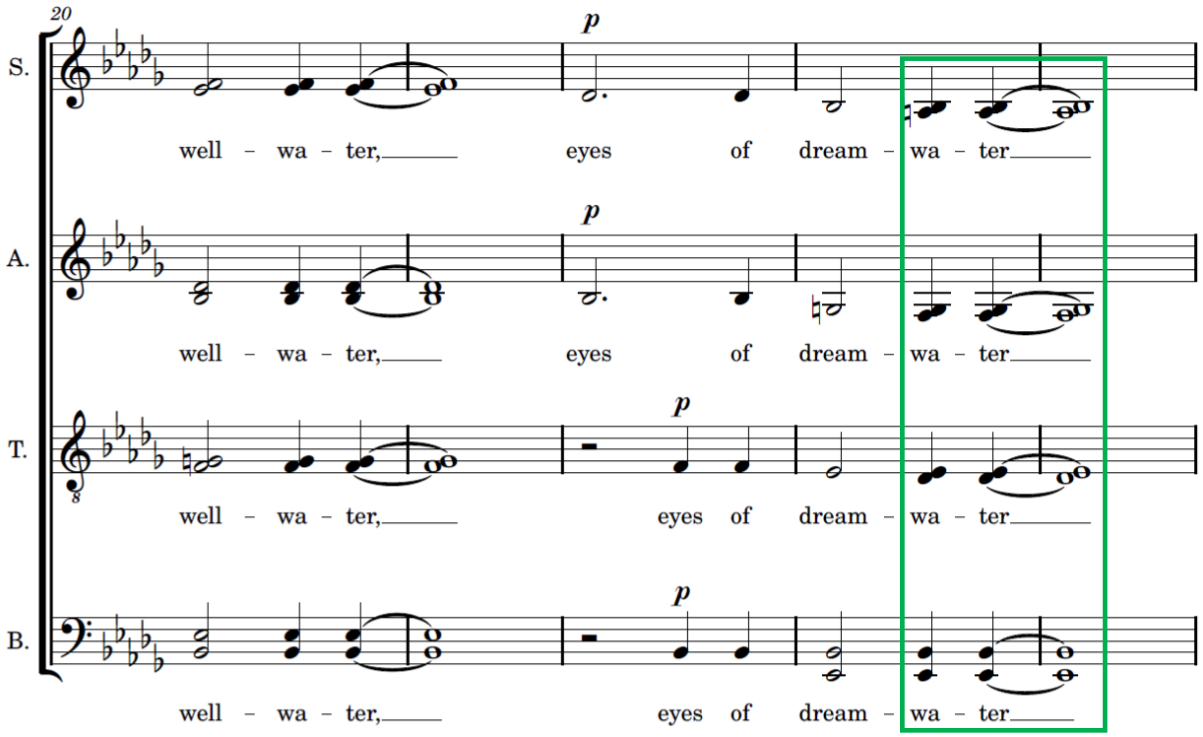


Figure 3.15: An extended flat-7 sharp-11 chord in bars 23–24 of *Water Night*.

The flat-7-sharp-11 chord is built on the familiar Lydian scale with an addition of a flattened seventh. This chord features commonly in jazz music as the dominant sharp eleven, or augmented eleven chord.[32] Whitacre has utilised this chord several other times, particularly in his earlier works: it first appeared as a sudden, unprepared, passing harmony in bar 34 of his second composition, 'With a Lily in Your Hand' from *Three Flower Songs* (1992); it was later employed as the central theme of his large work, *Cloudburst* (1995) for choir, piano and percussion, in which the extended D chord is constructed using the A melodic minor scale. In bar 65 of the work, the choir enters on a unison A3 before fanning upwards on the melodic minor scale (see Figure 3.16):

[32] Strunk, 1. (ii).

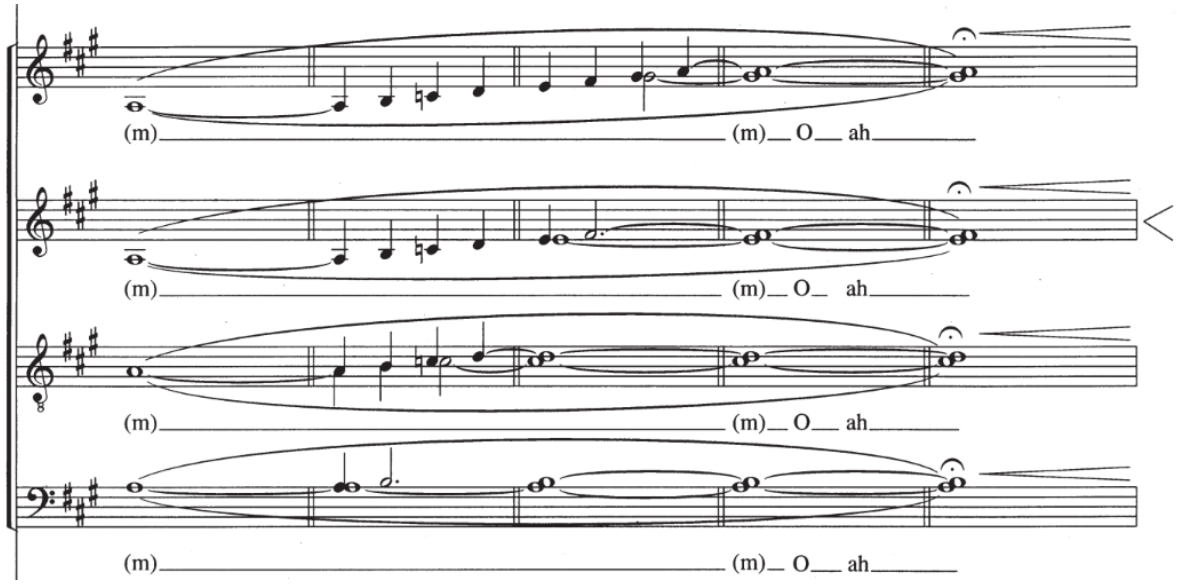


Figure 3.16: A cluster chord on the A melodic minor scale, *Cloudburst* bb. 65–69.

When sounded in combination, the pitches of the A melodic minor scale create an extended D major cluster with the flattened 7 and sharpened 11. Due to the chord's connection to the Lydian mode and its exclusive usage in clustered or secundal chords, it is likely that Whitacre arrived at this harmony as a result of his experimentation with secundal and polytriadic harmony, rather than borrowing it from its jazz harmony equivalent. This conclusion is supported by the lack of other prominent jazz chords in Whitacre's work, the absence of reference to jazz theory in his public interviews and writings, and his infrequent use of other altered chords from jazz harmony. It also suggests a pandiatonic approach, as Whitacre experiments with new ways to use a familiar diatonic scale.

'i thank You God for most this amazing day' (1999)

'i thank You God for most this amazing day' (hereafter 'i thank You God') is the last of Whitacre's *Three Songs of Faith* based on poems by e.e. cummings, composed in 1999 for the centennial celebration of the School of Music of Northern Arizona University. In *Three Songs of Faith*, Whitacre uses self-quotation as well as quotation from the American choral canon, drawing on his 1995 work for choir, piano and percussion, *Cloudburst*, as well as Charles Ives' polychordal *Psalm 67* (1894). Quoting historic American choral music in the context of a setting of poetry by an acclaimed twentieth-century American poet suggests an attempt to engage with the artistic canon of America and imbue his work with a sense of Americanism.

The source poem takes the structure of a Shakesperean Sonnet, however, typical of the style of e.e. cummings, it contains unpredictable and erratic punctuation, including the use of parentheses and dashes separating non-sequiturs from the primary narration of the poem. Enjambment features prominently, creating the sense that the poem is a stream of consciousness inspired by the divine with the narrator's mind flitting from one thought to another:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes
>
> (i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth)
>
> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any — lifted from the no
> of all nothing — human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You?
>
> (now the ears of my ears awake and
> now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Whitacre's setting of 'i thank You God' is a study in bifurcation, with textures and harmonies often based upon the juxtaposition of two groupings of voices. Whitacre's setting of the sonnet is largely through-composed, with the only recurring material being the opening chords of the piece returning for the beginning of the third stanza. Without melodic or harmonic organisation, formal congruity is achieved through integrated parametric changes alongside the continuous exploration of bifurcation as a harmonic and textural tool.

IPS Analysis

Structural units in ‘i thank You God’ are not like the broad, expanding and contracting Tension/Release IPS Groups in *Water Night*. IPS Analysis of the work reveals that Whitacre mimics the erratic narrative structure of the source poem through use of shorter and more contrasting IPSs and IPS Groups (see Table 3.3):

IPS Group	**Constituent IPSs**	**Bar Numbers**	**First line of text**
Departure/Return	Directional: Increasing	1–7	i thank You God
	Directional: Decreasing	7–10	for the leaping
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	10–12	and a blue
	Tension/Release	12–15	and a blue
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	15–23	and for everything
	Directional: Decreasing	23–24	which is yes
Directional: Decreasing	Directional: Increasing	25–28	i who have died
	Directional: Decreasing	28–30	this is the sun’s
	Departure/Return	31–38	this is the birthday
	Directional: Decreasing	38–40	and this is the birthday
Parallel Episode	Tension/Release	40–44	of wings
	Tension/Release	44–46	illimitably earth
	Tension/Release	46–51	illimitably earth
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	52–54	how should tasting
	Tension/Release	55–56	hearing seeing
	Tension/Release	57–61	breathing
	Directional: Decreasing	62–64	lifted from the no
	Directional: Increasing	65–70	human merely being
	Tension/Release	71–75	unimaginable You?
Steady State	Steady State	76–82	now the ears
Tension/Release	Directional: Increasing	83–84	opened
	Directional: Increasing	85–86	opened
	Directional: Increasing	87–88	opened
	Tension/Release	89–91	opened
	Steady State	91–94	i thank You God

Table 3.3: IPS-Group Structure of ‘i thank You God.’

As in *Water Night*, the work opens with a Departure/Return construct. While in *Water Night* this was a standalone IPS, in 'i thank You God', Whitacre constructs a larger Departure/Return IPS Group from two Directional IPSs. The first is an Increasing IPS that begins with a four-part C major chord at a *mezzo piano* dynamic. This is followed by increases in textural density, dynamics, and register, concluding with a nine-part *fortissimo* chord (see Figure 3.17):

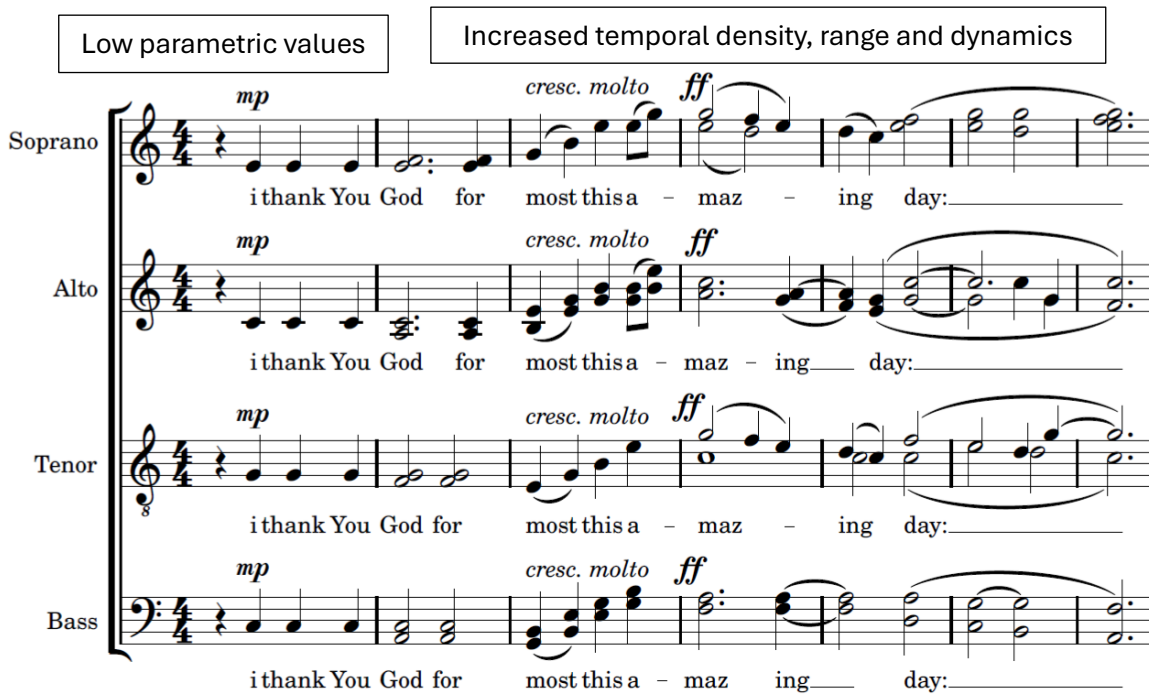


Figure 3.17: Directional (Increasing) IPS in the opening seven bars of 'i thank You God'.

The IPS is articulated by a breath mark and an immediate change in parametric values. It is followed by a short Decreasing Directional Phrase featuring decreases in temporal and textural density, dynamics, and register, ending on an A minor triad at a *piano* dynamic (see Figure 3.18):
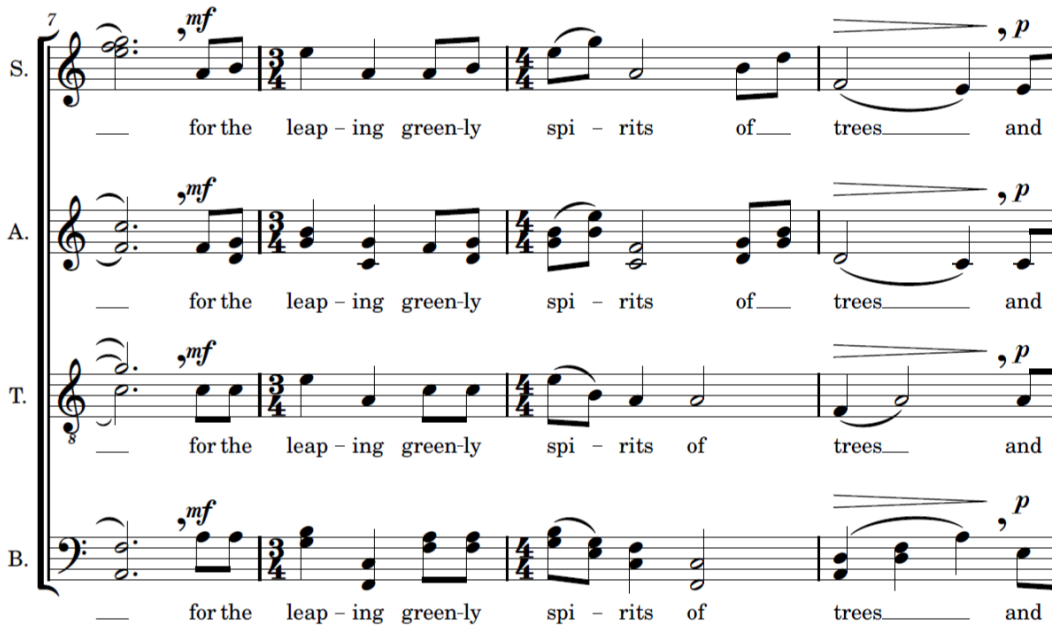


Figure 3.18: Directional (Decreasing) IPS in ‘i thank You God’, bars 7–10.

While there is some bifurcated and internal textural contrast, such as changes in pitch in the inner voices within the chords in bars 6–7, or the staggered entries of the word ‘of’ in bar 9, the texture in this opening IPS group is largely homophonic. While the soprano 1 line is more contoured and melodic than the two-note soprano 1 line in the opening IPS of *Water Night*, the homorhythmic chordal writing undermines the primacy of the melody, particularly at moments of high temporal density like the quaver movement in bars 7–9. By undermining the melody as the primary narrative and structural agent, Whitacre heightens the integrated functionality of parametric changes, crafting phrases through IPSs.

Following the theme of bifurcation throughout the work, many of the IPSs overlap or occur in canonic fashion between two sections of the choir. At various times as a result of this division, parameters may be increasing in one section of the ensemble and decreasing in the other. This is often true in the case of dynamics, for example in the Tension/Release phrase at bars 57–61, in which the increase and decrease of volume between the upper and lower voices on the word ‘breathing’ is offset by a crotchet (see Figure 3.19):

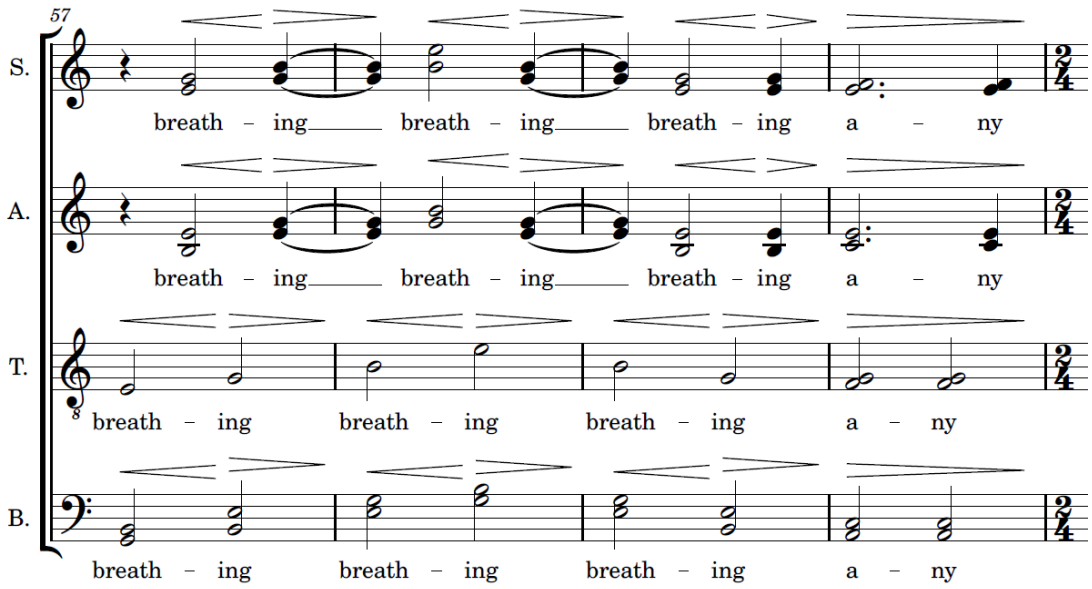


Figure 3.19: Offset parametric changes in bars 57–61 of ‘i thank You God.’

While these inner tension/release motifs are disjointed, the entire phrase forms an overarching Tension/Release IPS created by the rising and falling pitch range within the phrase, reaching its apex in bar 58, shown in green above.

IPS Analysis of ‘i thank You God’ reveals Whitacre’s approach to crafting structural elements in a choral work with greater melodic features. Even where a melodic construct is present, its primacy is undermined, heightening the importance of integrated parametric changes in the generation of structural elements. This obfuscation of melody is a significant factor in New Transcendentalist composition, avoiding the firm grounding of a hummable tune and heightening the ‘ethereal’ and ‘floating’ effect of the music.

Critical Score Analysis

Unlike other works examined in this chapter that maintain a constant tonal centre or toneset, ‘i thank You God’ features several key changes throughout the piece (see Table 3.4):

Mode/Key	Bar Numbers
C major	1–10
A minor	11–15
A-mixolydian	16–24
G-dorian	25
G-lydian	26
G-dorian	27
E minor	28–29
A-mixolydian	30–34
A major	35
A-mixolydian	36
F-lydian	37–40
C major	41–71
A-mixolydian	72–75
F#-phrygian	76–82
B-mixolydian	83–86
B major	87–91
B-lydian	91–94

Table 3.4: Modulations in ‘i thank You God for most this amazing day.’

Despite these frequent key changes, each segment shown above is confined within their traditional toneset with no non-tonal combinations of pitches. Whitacre modulates frequently without abandoning the familiar soundworlds of tonal and modal harmony. This piece also features a rare instance of the Phrygian mode in Whitacre’s work, occurring in bars 76–82 on an introspective chant-like theme sung in canon (see Figure 3.20):

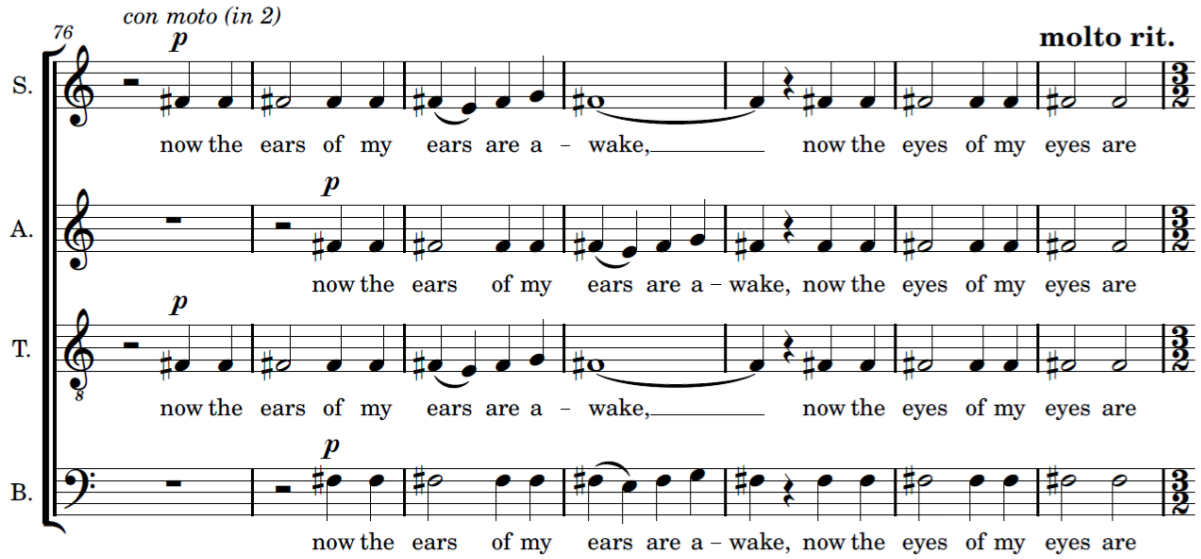


Figure 3.20: A simple Phrygian chant-like theme in bars 76–82 of 'i thank You God'.

Whitacre's transient approach to tonality in this work serves a programmatic purpose. The sudden and dramatic changes echo the ecstatic gaiety of the source text, praising God's creation through run-on sentences with unpredictable non-sequiturs. Whitacre's fluid approach to tonality dovetails with an approach to harmony based on polychordalism, a technique explored in this work more than any other composition in his catalogue. The constant variation of modal quality and tonic centre enables Whitacre to exploit this compositional device in a wide range of harmonic contexts.

Polychordalism

Whitacre treats 'i thank You God' as a study in polychordal and bichordal harmony, using the compositional technique to construct his signature harmonic and textural soundworld. Combinations of diatonic triads feature throughout the work, creating clustered harmonies, adding internal textures to static harmonies, and building extended chords. Whitacre makes clear his intention to critically explore polychordalism in the piece through direct quotation of one of the most recognisable polychordal harmonies in the American choral canon: the opening chord of Charles Ives' *Psalm 67* (see Figure 3.21):
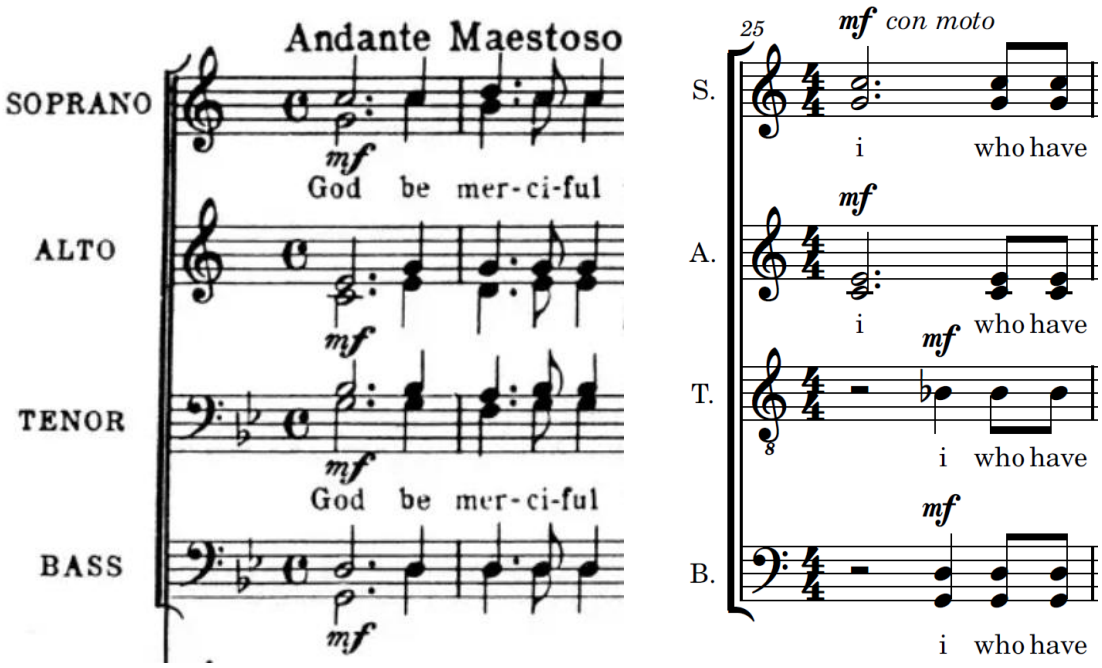


Figure 3.21: The opening polychord of Ives' *Psalm 67* (left), with the key signature of C major in the upper voices and G minor in the lower voices, and bar 25 of 'i thank You God' featuring a C major chord in the sopranos and altos above a G minor chord in the tenors and basses (right).

Here Whitacre affirms his intentional use of polychords to form extended harmonies rather than using simple diatonic chords with arbitrarily added tones, linking his composition to a historic method of experimental harmony in American choral writing.

As discussed earlier, clustered, secundal chords are a distinctive feature of the New Transcendentalist style, particularly those built on the Lydian and Dorian modes. In bar 68, Whitacre creates a clustered secundal chord of a D-dorian scale through combined chords in the tenor, alto, and soprano parts over a D minor chord in the bass and tenor 3 parts. The resulting cluster is most clearly visible in the piano reduction (see Figure 3.22):

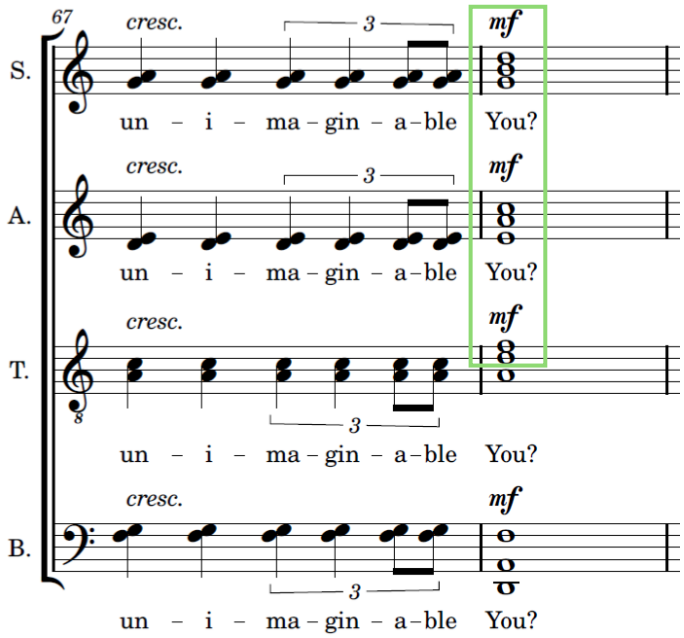


Figure 3.22: A D-dorian cluster in bar 68 of 'i thank You God', shown in green.

Whitacre generated secundal cluster chords through scalar motion in *Water Night*, with pitches stacking in ascending order of voice-part. Here, Whitacre crosses voices between voice-parts to create self-contained triadic chords: D minor in the tenor; A minor in the alto; and G major in the soprano. The timbral blend of voices within a part, as well as the textural separation of the parts in performance contexts, allows for three distinct chords to be heard within the secundal cluster chord. By constructing the cluster chord in this way, Whitacre achieves his signature harmonic soundworld through his study in polychordalism.

Manipulation of texture through voice exchange is a compositional technique that enables Whitacre to dwell on a single chord for extended periods while maintaining a sense of motion. In bars 21–23 he uses bichordal voice exchange between altos and sopranos to create an undulating effect within a harmonically ambiguous extended chord that lasts for two and a half bars (see Figure 3.23). The section features interchanging second-inversion G major and A major chords against one another in the soprano and alto parts (shown in red), over a sustained chord inversion in the lower parts (shown in blue). The chord sung by the tenor and bass could be interpreted as D major13 in first inversion, or B minor7 in second inversion. This harmonic ambiguity contributes to the pandiatonic framework of the piece:
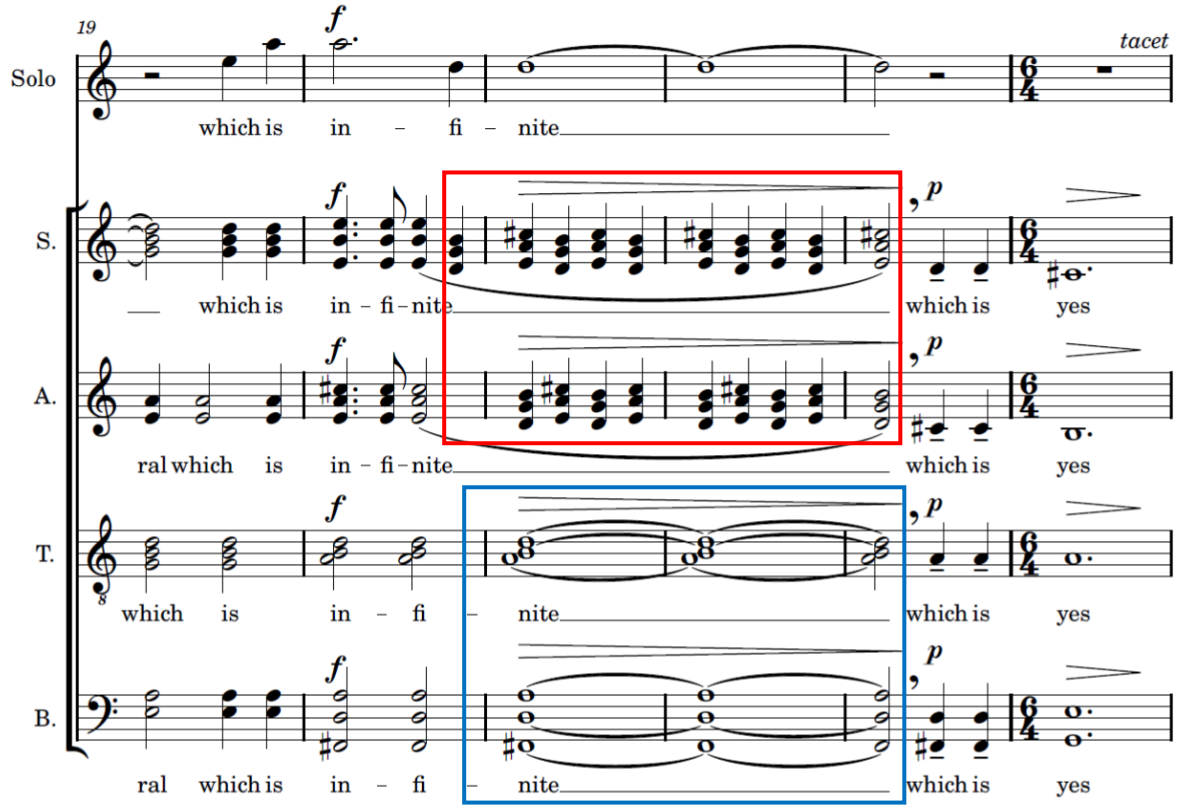


Figure 3.23: Polychordal voice exchange in the soprano and alto parts of ‘i thank You God’, bars 21–23.

Similarly, in bars 72–74, the sopranos and altos exchange incomplete chords of G major and A major (shown in red) over a first inversion E minor chord in the lower voices (shown in blue):

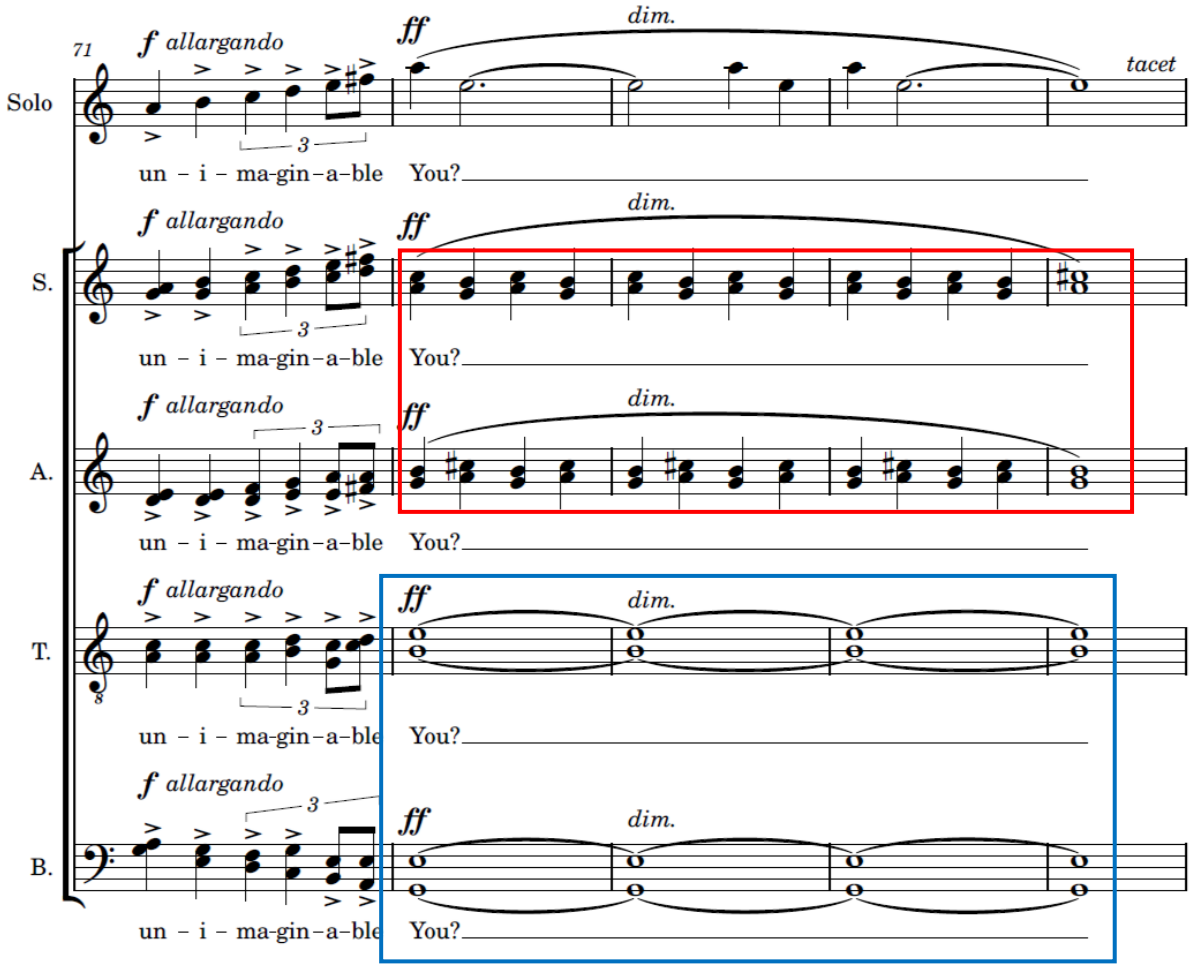


Figure 3.24: Voice exchange between the soprano and alto parts in ‘i thank You God’, bars 72–74.

The sense of motion within the chord generated by this technique is similar to a timbral shake in instrumental music. For example, the chord in bars 72–74 may be interpreted as an extended E minor chord in first inversion with an added fourth (A) and sharpened sixth (C-sharp), based on the pitches in the tenor and bass parts. Excluding the solo line, the constituent notes of this chord do not change for the entire three bars, however, the internal motion of the voice exchange in the upper parts creates a sense of momentum throughout, allowing Whitacre to dwell on the harmony for longer without causing the music to become stilted and static. This alternative approach generates the recognisable harmonies and textures of the New Transcendentalist soundworld while maintaining the ecstatic energy of e.e. cummings’ source text.

Another method of bifurcated, polychordal writing is the combined use of clustered chords and extended singing technique. Cluster chords, sung to a closed consonant, are used as timbral objects against which other voice parts sing the text in declamatory, homophonic

texture. This occurs in bars 41–49 (see Figure 3.25) when the soprano and alto parts sing the word ‘wings’, creating a clustered C major chord with an added second and fourth on a closed ‘-ng’ consonant, under which the tenors and basses sing as a homophonic unit:

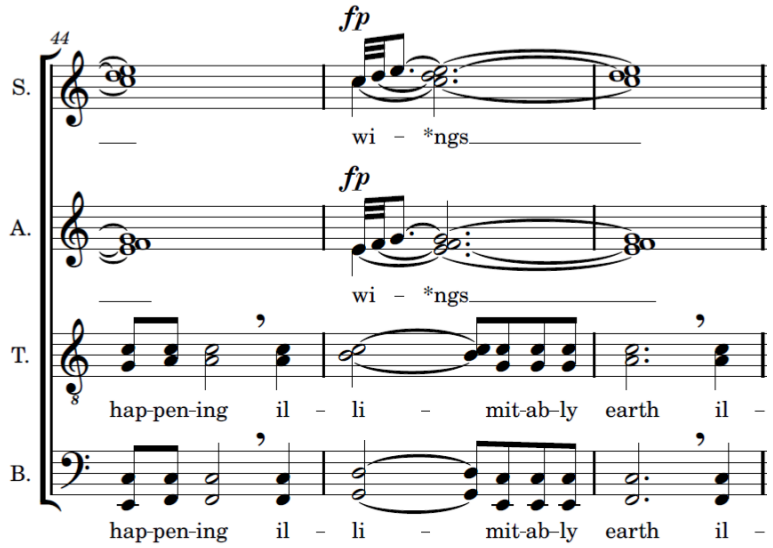


Figure 3.25: Chordal writing in the tenors and basses under an extended C major chord in the soprano and alto parts in ‘i thank You God’, bars 44–46.

The lower voices cycle between the chords of F major, G major with an added fourth, and C major in second inversion, each against the extended C major chord in the upper voices. The extended vocal technique of singing on the closed ‘-ng’ consonant gives these clustered trichords a colouristic effect that separates them from the conventional singing occurring in the tenors and basses, allowing the sung text to be clearly expressed while creating a series of polychordal harmonies between the upper and lower voice-parts. Since the trichords in the alto and soprano voices are in close harmony and are sung to a closed consonant, they may be interpreted as timbral, coloristic objects rather than self-contained chords designed to create polychordal harmonies with the lower voices.

The final chord of the piece, shown below in Figure 3.26, is constructed of a polychord of C-sharp major with an added ninth in the sopranos and altos (shown in red), and B major in second inversion in the tenors and basses (shown in blue):
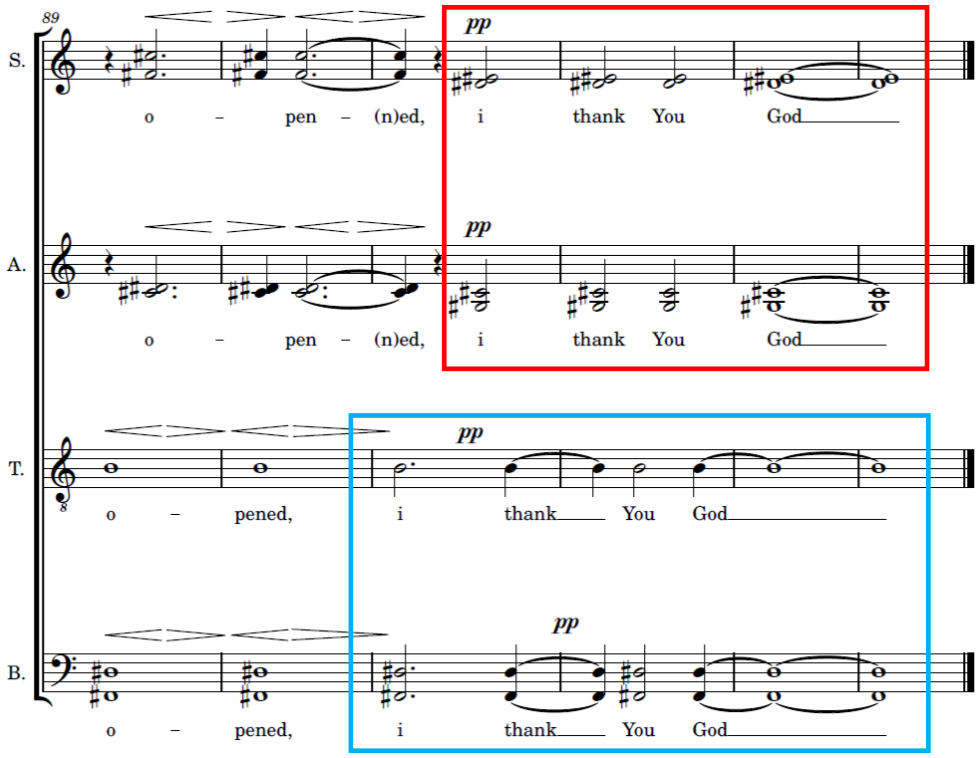


Figure 3.26: Polychordal ending of ‘i thank You God’.

The explicit quotation of Ives in ‘i thank You God’ is one of only a few instances within Whitacre’s oeuvre where he directly references the work of earlier composers. *Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine* features passages that mimic Monteverdi and Gesualdo, though these references are used as story-telling devices to evoke Renaissance-era Italy. Here, the quotation of *Psalm 67* seems more reverent, establishing the work as a continuation of the ideas of Ives. While some works, such as *Sainte-Chappelle* and *Oculi omnium* utilise ancient and modern compositional techniques, namely plainchant and aleatoricism, ‘i thank You God’, and the *Three Songs of Faith* more broadly, is Whitacre’s most academic study in composition. The songs display an eagerness to expand upon his own compositional ideas as well as those of American choral composers before him, paying respect and contributing to the lineage of American choral composition. He quotes his former works, such as *Cloudburst*, as well as using common motifs across the three movements of the work, though his attempts to quote material from the first movement in ‘i thank You God’ proved to overcomplicate the work, leading to him publishing a simpler, revised version in 2009. Whitacre speaks to this in his description of the work on his website:

> I can remember feeling actual pride—a very ‘scholarly’ pride—for so brilliantly and effortlessly manipulating motivic material […] The text just became lost in the ‘clever’ writing, and the

> most important sentence in the poem just vanished in a fog of academic writing and… pride […] I think of those measures every time I start to 'overthink' while I'm writing.[33]

While Whitacre portrays this experience as a cautionary tale against preferencing 'clever' musical ideas over accessibility and textual primacy, it reveals his keenness to take a 'scholarly' approach while composing the *Three Songs of Faith*, seeking ways to both situate his New Transcendentalist style within a history of modern American choral music, and to expand the textural and timbral possibilities of New Transcendentalism. The choice to do this on a setting of texts by e.e. cummings, a renowned American poet, may also be interpreted as an exploration of Americanism, though Whitacre's own description of the work as an exploration of faith is more likely.[34]

Polychordalism is a type of choral bifurcation that provides a structured approach to achieving the archetypical choral timbres of New Transcendentalism. As discussed earlier, bifurcation of the choir into separate groupings of voices is a crucial organisational strategy in the construction of New Transcendentalist music enabling the composer to create expansive choral textures through combinations of choral groups that have inherent textural and harmonic coherence. While Whitacre's music contains bifurcated textures, such as the occasional use of polychordal harmony in *Water Night* to create cluster sonorities, 'i thank You God' embodies the ideals of New Transcendentalist composition through its determined adherence to this bifurcated approach. Whitacre's structured approach to crafting clustered and extended harmonies through polychords in this early work is one of his most ambitious and effective explorations of New Transcendentalist harmony.

Cluster Chords and Secundal Harmony

As discussed above, most cluster chords in 'i thank You God' differ from those in *Water Night* as they derive from polychordal harmonies. The only instance of cluster chords with pitches ascending according to the order of voice parts occurs at the ending of the piece on the word 'opened' (see Figure 3.27):

[33] Eric Whitacre, 'Three Songs of Faith', *Music Catalog*, <https://ericwhitacre.com/music-catalog/three-songs-of-faith> [Accessed 15 May 2024].
[34] Ibid. While Whitacre has composed on many texts by cummings, and has recently set texts by Walt Whitman, his only explicit engagement with American national or historical identity is his arrangement of the *Star-Spangled Banner* (2013).
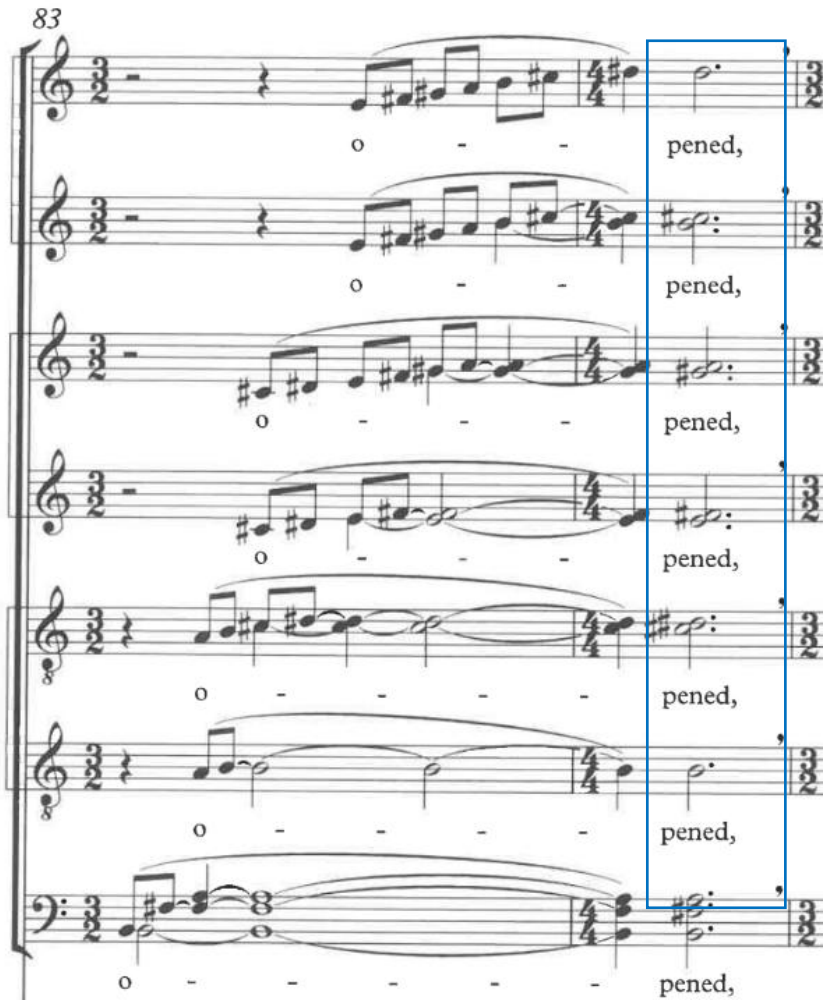


Figure 3.27: An eleven-note cluster chord spanning from A3 in the bass 1 to D5 in the soprano 1 in bar 84 of 'i thank You God' (shown in blue) over an open fifth on B2 in the lower bass parts.

It is notable that this expansive eleven-note chord occurs after the section with the sparsest texture of the entire piece; a simple, recitative-like chant in the Phrygian mode (shown in Figure 3.20). This chant is sung in canon, with the sopranos and tenors singing an octave apart followed by the repetition by the alto and basses four beats later. The juxtaposition of thick textures with sparse and unison entries heightens the impact of the cluster chord and prevents the work from becoming a repetitive wash of cluster sonorities. The chant here explores a less familiar modal colour in Whitacre's output, the Phrygian mode. Furthermore, the chant is solemn and restrained, with a range of only three notes. Unlike the sweeping, melodic composed chants used in *Sainte-Chappelle* and *Oculi omnium*, this passage is remarkably restrained, and the simplicity of the canonic imitation creates one of the most musically austere phrases in Whitacre's entire output.

One other instance of non-polychordal close harmonies is in the upper voices on the word 'wings', demonstrated in Figure 3.25 above, though they do not meet this study's definition of cluster chords as they do not contain four or more consecutive pitches. While clustered harmonies still represent an important feature of Whitacre's writing at this juncture in his career, it is clear that he is experimenting with new ways of achieving clustered sonorities beyond the simple construction of stacked secundal intervals, exploring varying approaches regarding polychordalism, bifurcated textures, modality, and voicing of clusters.

A Boy and a Girl (2002)

A Boy and a Girl is another setting of a work by Octavio Paz. A setting of Muriel Rukeyser's translation of the poem 'Los novios', *A Boy and a Girl* appears in a quasi-strophic form, matching the structure of the three quatrains of the source poem.[35] The text portrays the romantic relationship between the titular boy and girl in three stages: lying together on the grass; lying together on the beach; and lying together underground, the last of which suggests the end of their relationship in life but implies its continuation into eternity in death (see Figure 3.28):[36]

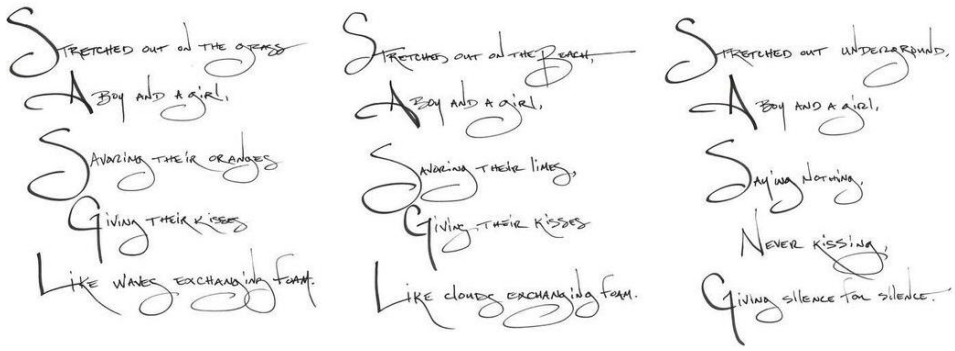


Figure 3.28: Octavio Paz's 'A Boy and a Girl', translated by Muriel Rukeyser, transcribed by Eric Whitacre.

Whitacre's strophic form mirrors the source poem, with variation in parametric values and harmonic relationships driving the dramatic and emotional arc of the piece. This narrative arc,

[35] In his transcription of the original poem, Whitacre divides the third line of each stanza in two, creating three five-line verses.

[36] Whitacre writes that when first approaching a text for a choral setting, he first transcribes the poem in his own handwriting and often paints visual representations of the text as guides during the composition process: Eric Whitacre, 'I often "paint" a piece before I write a note of it', post on social media, Instagram, 4 January 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnAqVpkvOgG/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==> [Accessed 31 October 2023].

or ‘emotional architecture’ for Whitacre,[37] and thematic unity is clear in the visualisation of the piece painted by Whitacre during the composition process (see Figures Figure 3.29 and 3.30):

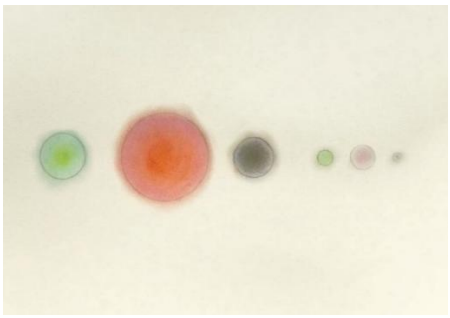


Figure 3.29: A painting by Whitacre used as a visual tool during the composition of *A Boy and a Girl*, outlining the ‘Emotional Architecture’ of the work.[38]

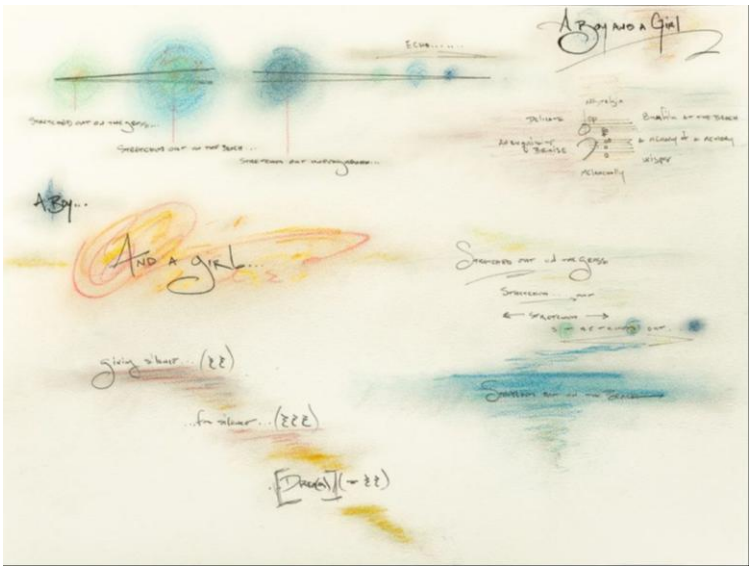


Figure 3.30: A ‘Style Sheet’ of *A Boy and a Girl* created by Whitacre during the compositional process.[39]

The illustrations above portray the broad Tension/Release dynamic permeating the work that the IPS Analysis below will show. Figure 3.29 presents a tripartite structure of a green circle, a large orange/red circle, and a small black circle, which is then repeated at a smaller scale. Tension builds in the centre of this structure and then is released. The style sheet in Figure 3.30 illustrates in greater detail how these Tension/Release structures emerge within the music,

[37] Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Eric Whitacre, ‘Often when I am writing a new piece I will make a kind of “style sheet” before I write any notes’, post on social media, Instagram, 5 December 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C0cUT9avcxE/?hl=en> [Accessed 6 December 2023].

using dynamic swells and colour application to indicate the text upon which he will alter parametric values to build and release tension. For example, we see the contrast of blue/grey shading on the words 'A Boy' with the vibrant yellow/red shading on 'And a girl' in the centre left of the style sheet. Whitacre's visualisation of the work, displaying increases and decreases in tension without pointing to singular musical devices such as harmonic or melodic development, demonstrates his overarching perspective on the function of integrated parameters in the construction of narrative in a choral work. IPS Analysis illuminates how Whitacre creates these structures.

IPS Analysis

Like 'i thank You God', *A Boy and a Girl* features shorter, more modular IPSs, some of which are only one bar in duration. These structures, however, appear more modelled after Whitacre's approach in *Water Night*, with frequent use of either Tension/Release IPSs, or Directional IPSs that form larger Tension/Release IPS Groups (see Table 3.5):

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	First line of text
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	1	Stretched out
	Directional (Increasing)	2–3	stretched out…
	Directional (Decreasing)	4–5	a boy
	Directional (Decreasing)	5–6	and a girl
	Directional (Decreasing)	7–8	savoring…
	Tension/Release	8–10	giving their kisses
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	10–11	like waves
	Tension/Release	11–13	exchanging foam
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	14	Stretched out
	Tension/Release	15–17	stretched out…
	Directional (Increasing)	18–19	a boy
	Directional (Increasing)	19–20	and a girl
	Directional (Increasing)	21–22	savoring
	Tension/Release	23–24	giving their kisses

Table 3.5: IPS Analysis of *A Boy and a Girl*.

Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing) Tension/Release	24–25 25–27	like clouds exchanging foam
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing) Directional (Decreasing) Directional (Increasing) Directional (Increasing) Directional (Decreasing) Directional (Decreasing)	27–28 29–30 31–32 32–33 33–34 35–37	Stretched out stretched out… a boy and a girl saying nothing never kissing
Parallel Episode*	Tension/Release Tension/Release Directional (Decreasing)	38–39 40–41 43	giving silence for silence (humming)
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing) Directional (Increasing) Tension/Release Tension/Release	45 46–47 48–49 50–52	(humming) (humming) (humming) (humming)

Table 3.5 (continued).

A Boy and a Girl features the shortest phrases of the works by Whitacre examined in this thesis, some lasting just one bar in duration and punctuated with pauses (see Figure 3.31):
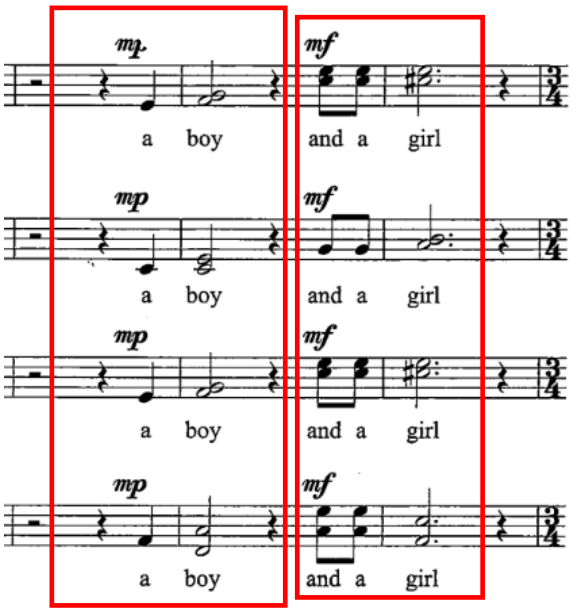


Figure 3.31: Short Directional (Increasing) IPSs in *A Boy and a Girl* permeated by pauses, bars 18–20.

For the purposes of IPS Analysis, the pauses are not considered part of the parametric changes as by their nature they are the absence of musical parameters. Instead, their usage as a compositional tool is considered later under Critical Score Analysis. For example, the Directional (Decreasing) IPS in bar 43 is surrounded by bars of silence which are not included in Table 3.5 above:

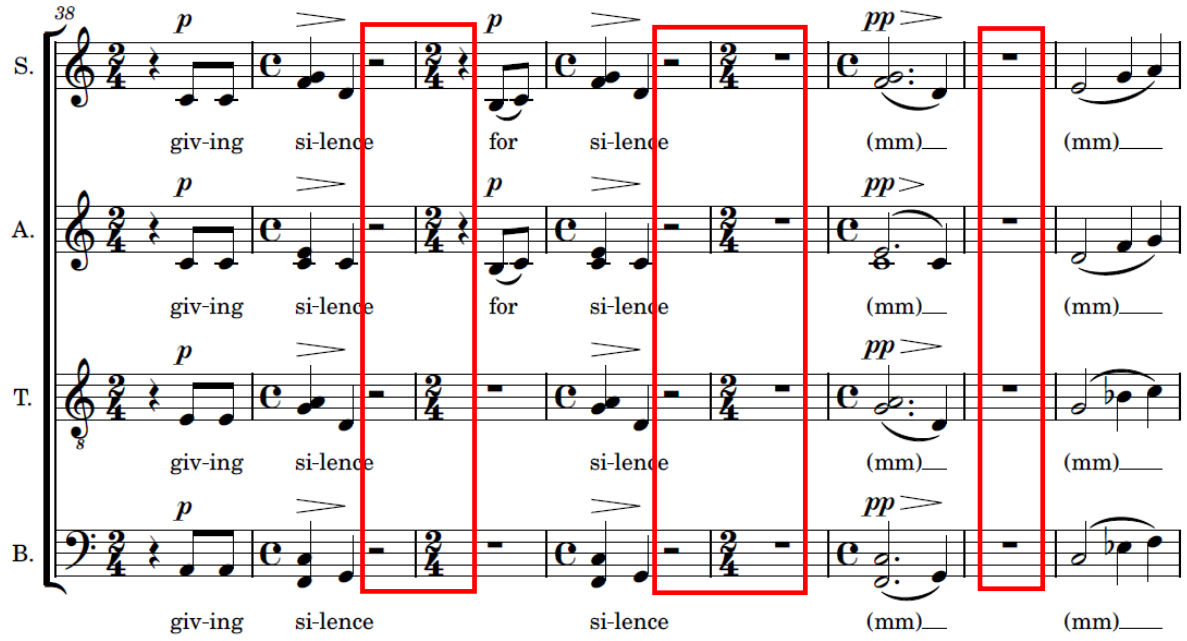


Figure 3.32: The Tension/Release and Directional (Decreasing) IPSs in bars 38–43 are bookended by bars of silence which are not considered part of the phrase.

Whitacre varies the length of these pauses throughout the work, with shorter pauses in the energetic second verse compared to lengthier silences in the final verse. While silences have an important gestural role in this piece, they cannot be considered within IPS Analysis beyond a point of reference against parametric conditions at another point.

Many of the phrases analysed here as Directional (Increasing) phrases may be understood as Tension/Release phrases with an 'upward release', created by the reduction in dynamic at the end of each of these phrases, though functionally the increasing parameters of these phrases give forward momentum to the overall IPS group, creating continuity despite the many lengthy pauses that punctuate the work. Many of these phrases feature the parameter of rising register but are paired with a *decrescendo*, contrasting an increase in one parameter with a decrease in another. The first phrase, for example, features three chords rising in parallel motion with an increase in textural density from a minim to crotchets (see Figure 3.33):

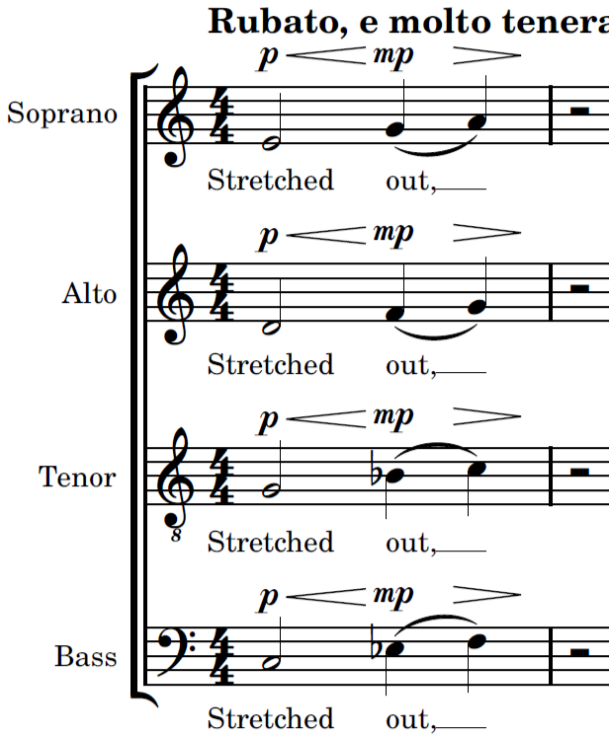


Figure 3.33: The opening Directional (Increasing) IPS of *A Boy and a Girl*.

While the dynamic level decrease encourages the singers to taper off at the end of the phrase, the increasing direction of other parameters and the contribution of the phrase to the larger Tension/Release IPS Group supports the analysis of such phrases as Directional (Increasing). This compositional technique enables Whitacre to construct the phrase mimicking the tension and release of the human breath while maintaining forward momentum.

The only moment that subverts the Tension/Release pattern of the work is a brief Parallel Episode in bars 38–43 containing two mirrored Tension/Release IPSs with an additional Directional (Decreasing) IPS varying the musical material of the previous two IPSs (shown in Figure 3.32 above). This relates to Whitacre's notion of mimicking the breath with his construction of phrases. These shortened and isolated phrases bookended with silence may mimic the slowing and shortening of the breath before death.

The final Tension/Release IPS Group contains abbreviations of musical material from earlier in the work hummed by the choir, representing the continuation of the relationship between the boy and the girl beyond words, beyond their earthly lives. While the poem ends with the third stanza, Whitacre is not strictly limited to the structure of the original text and is therefore able to represent a continuation of the relationship beyond spoken words through non-lexical musical expression. The IPS Group mirrors the form of the work, demonstrating

how Whitacre achieved the formal concept envisioned in his preliminary visualisation shown in Figure 3.29.

Critical Score Analysis

The dominant thematic material of the piece consists of extended chords moving in parallel motion, established in the first bar with three consecutive major chords with an added ninth in the alto part:

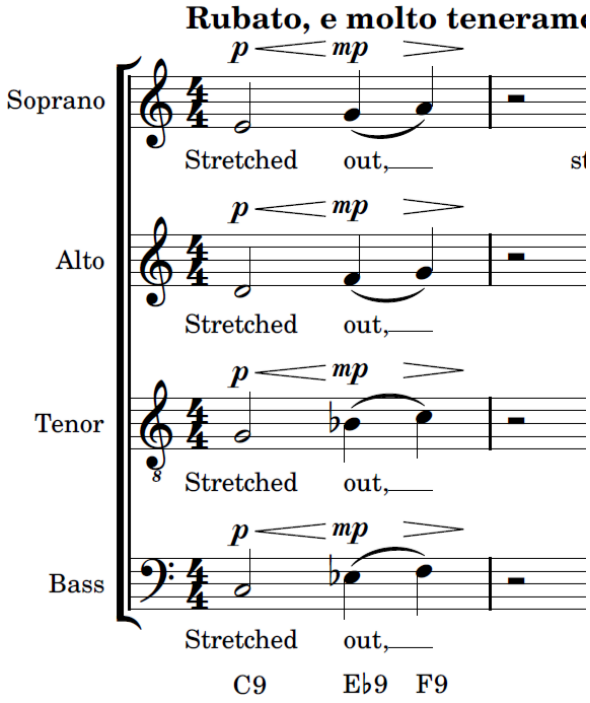


Figure 3.34: Consecutive major chords with added ninths in the opening bar of *A Boy and a Girl*.

Whitacre treats this sonority of an added-note major chord in root position as a textural unit in this phrase, with all four parts moving in direct parallel motion, creating a sense of *thick melody*. Whitacre varies the quality of extended chord at various points in the composition to evoke a different emotional response. This is most notable in the variation between added 9 chords and added 11 chords. In Figure 3.35 below, Whitacre uses parallel added 11 chords to create increased tension on the word 'savoring':

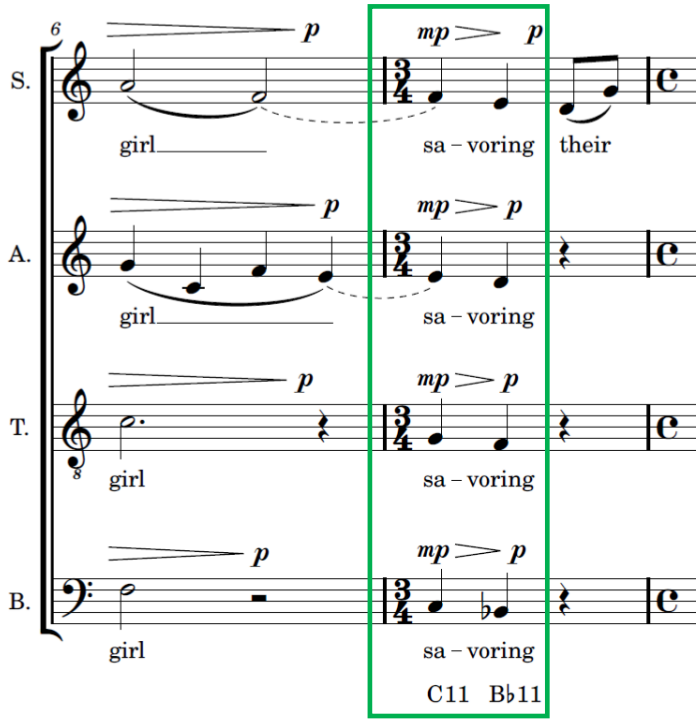


Figure 3.35: Parallel added 11 chords in *A Boy and a Girl*, bar 7.

By their very nature, added 11 major chords feature greater dissonance than major chords with an added ninth due to the fact that an added eleventh in a diatonic chord must contain a semitone clash with the third or fifth of the chord depending on the position of the chord within the toneset, unlike the added ninth which has a distance of a whole tone from the root and the major third. Whitacre's use of the added eleventh heightens tension by condensing pitches in closer dissonance.

Secundal Harmony

Unlike other works from this period, Whitacre uses cluster chords sparingly in *A Boy and a Girl*. The work only features two chords with four or more consecutive secundal pitches: the first occurs on the word 'clouds' in bar 25, perhaps evoking the cumulus nature of a cloud (see Figure 3.36):

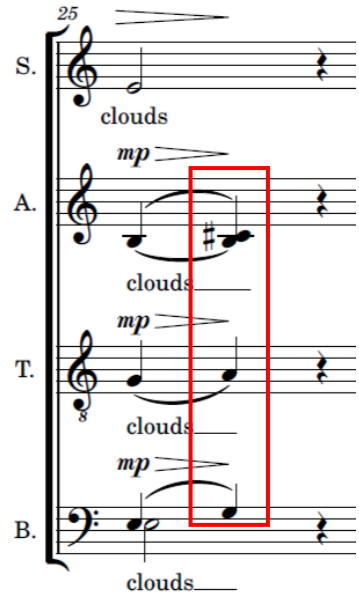


Figure 3.36: A four-note cluster chord between the bass 1 and alto 1 in bar 25 of *A Boy and a Girl*.

The only other cluster chord of four notes occurs during Whitacre's setting of the final stanza of the source poem. Whitacre employs an increase in textural density to increase tension (see Figure 3.37):

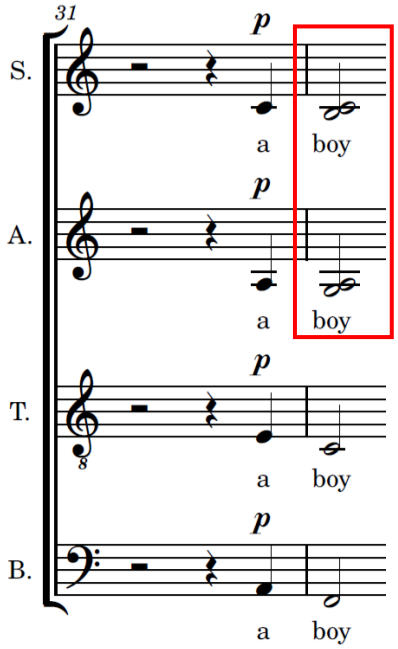


Figure 3.37: A four note cluster in the soprano and alto parts in bar 32 of *A Boy and a Girl*.

This cluster chord is part of a Directional (Increasing) phrase leading towards the emotional climax of the long, melisma on the text 'never kissing', as the poem's conclusion with the death of the two characters is revealed. It is noteworthy that both of these chords have a Lydian character, building on the modal cornerstone of Whitacre's choral output during this period. The first in Figure 3.36 is a G-Lydian tetrachord on G over an E in the bass, creating an E-Dorian extended chord. The second in Figure 3.37 is a G-Ionian tetrachord over an F in the bass, creating an F-Lydian extended chord. Like in *Water Night*, Whitacre draws on this Lydian modal palette when writing cluster chords in *A Boy and a Girl*, exploiting the timbral effect of stacked whole tones.

Silences

As mentioned above, phrases throughout *A Boy and a Girl* are punctuated by silences of varying durations. This work represents Whitacre's most frequent and varied use of silence as a gestural technique, with lengthy pauses accentuating individual phrases while short pauses increase momentum. For Whitacre, silence is an active musical gesture:

> Silence has texture, it has gravity, it has weight, it's liquid. And I find even when I'm conducting silences that I've composed, I conduct them with *rubato*. So even just three beats of rest, I'm never just thinking 'one, two, three, now we sing again' […] the silence is this thing to be shaped. It's alive. And every note of rest that I've written as a composer is designed to be performed that way, not as just a placeholder between sound but as a living, breathing thing.[40]

For Whitacre, the silences are a deliberate gesture within the music that demand to be performed. The performance of these silences may be influenced by the acoustic space in which the work is performed or the interpretation of the conductor or ensemble of a silence's dramatic effect. The discourse on silence in music is vast, and Whitacre's perspective is not unique, however, *A Boy and a Girl* presents an interesting exploration of this technique by Whitacre in the early stages of his career.

[40] Eric Whitacre, 'Silence.' online video recording, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERNr6cVSR8c> [Accessed 6 December 2024].

Her Sacred Spirit Soars (2002)

Commissioned in 2002 by the Heartland Festival at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* is another collaboration between Whitacre and Silvestri. The Heartland Festival was a revival of the Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival which ran from 1977–94. To celebrate the return of the festival to UW-Platteville, Dr Robert Demaree, director of the university chamber choir, commissioned a new work from Whitacre and Silvestri. Inspired by the heritage of the festival, Silvestri wrote a Shakespearian sonnet of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter. Whitacre requested that the text feature the phrase 'long live fair Oriana', a reference to a collection of twenty-five madrigals by twenty-three composers published in 1601 by Thomas Morley in honour of Queen Elizabeth I. Each of the madrigals concludes with the phrase 'Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of Diana: long live fair Oriana', a colloquial nickname for the Queen. Silvestri added the phrase 'LONG LIVE FAIR ORIANA' in capital letters as a fifteenth line to his poem. He also embedded another salute to the Virgin Queen, with the fourteen lines of the sonnet creating an acrostic of 'Hail fair Oriana':

> Her sacred spirit soars o'er gilded spires,
> And breathes into creative fires a force;
> In well-tuned chants and chords of countless choirs
> Lives ever her immortal shadowed source.
>
> From age to age the roll of poets grows;
> And yet, a lonely few are laurel-crowned,
> In whose sweet words her inspiration shows,
> Revealing insights deep and thoughts profound.
>
> O shall Cecelia, or shall Goddess Muse
> Reach then to me across eternal skies?
> Is heaven's quick'ning fire but a ruse,
> Abiding rather here before mine eyes?
>
> Nearer than I dream'd is She whose fame
> All poets sing, whose glory all proclaim:
> "LONG LIVE FAIR ORIANA!"

Whitacre's setting of the piece is for SSATB double choir unaccompanied. For the majority of the piece the two choirs sing the same musical material offset by a single bar. Influenced by the English and Shakespearean, this appears to be one of Whitacre's earliest attempts at incorporating European styles in his compositions. The use of a double choir canon creating sweeping polychordal sonorities is strongly evocative of John Tavener's (1944–2013) *Hymn to the Mother of God*, premiered in 1985 by the choir of Winchester Cathedral. This may have been the inspiration of the double-choir canon in *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, though Whitacre's piece follows a more regular metrical offset of a single bar rather than Tavener's constant three-beat offset amid changing meters. Tavener's canon also results in highly dissonant chords at times, such as a false relation of an E natural and an E-flat over a chord of C, while Whitacre's does not feature any notes outside of the toneset of A-flat major.

The primary thematic material of the work consists ascending and descending scales in various modes within the A-flat major toneset. Here, Whitacre eschews his more common, homophonic approach to texture, instead using simple polyphonic writing to create an ever-expanding wall of sound effect. The piece begins with a canon in Choir I of an ascending C aeolian scale in the two soprano parts, the altos and the tenors over a drone on middle C in the basses. The canon, offset by two beats, creates parallel thirds between the moving voice parts before arriving at a chord of A-flat major7 in bar 3 on the word 'soars' before falling back down in parallel thirds to a unison on middle C. This quadruple canon is then repeated, in canon, by Choir II, creating an octuple canon of ascending C aeolian scales a third apart:

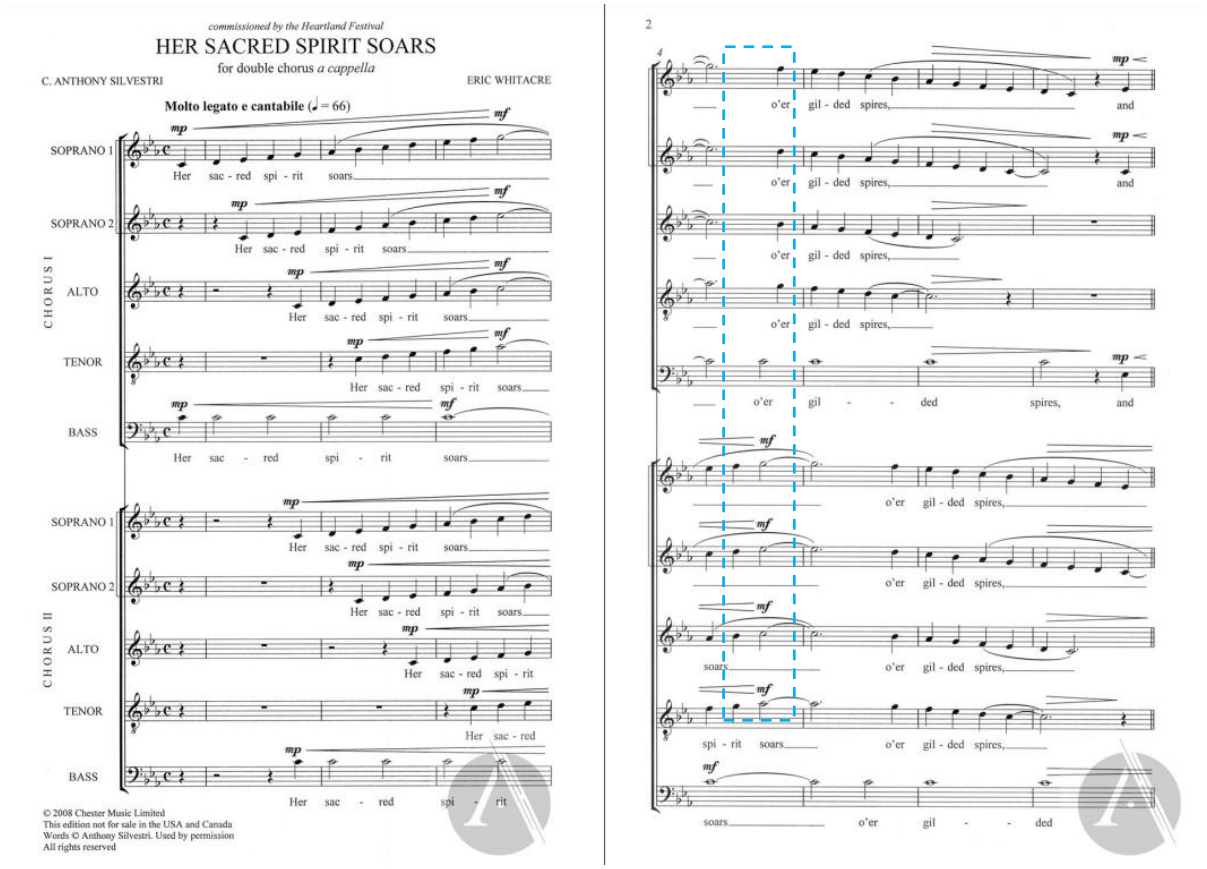


Figure 3.38: The octuple canon on the C aeolian scale that opens *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*.

When Choir II arrives on the A-flat major7 chord, Choir I begins their descent, creating a *perpetuum mobile* of crotchet movement throughout the opening of the work. The effect of these rising and falling scales in constant parallel third motion is evocative of the Shepard tone, an aural illusion of a constantly ascending pitch that appears to never stop rising. Using this simple textural device, Whitacre finds a new way to explore clustered and extended harmonies in a pandiatonic context while alongside antiphonal and homophonic passages.

IPS Analysis

Phrases in Whitacre's setting of Silvestri's sonnet are mostly aligned with the structure of the poem. Some phrases combine two lines of the poem, such as the seventh and eight lines combined into a Steady State phrase in bars 49–55. Twice in the piece, Whitacre uses fragments of a line of text to create a phrase, such as the Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 55–59 on the word 'profound.' The relationship between IPSs and their associated lines of text are noted

in Table 3.6 below, as Whitacre often breaks the rigid fourteen-line structure of the sonnet to create internal or enjambed phrases:

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	First line of text
Parallel Episode	Departure/Return	1–8	Her sacred
	Departure/Return	8–15	And breathes
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	15–20	In well-tuned
	Tension/Release	20–27	Lives ever her
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	27–36	From age
	Steady State	35–48	And yet
Tension/Release	Steady State	49–55	In whose
	Directional (Increasing)	55–59	profound
	Tension/Release	59–68	O shall Cecilia
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	68–77	Is heaven
	Steady State	78–86	Nearer
	Directional (Increasing)	87–91	is she
	Directional (Increasing)	92–99	LONG LIVE

Table 3.6: IPS Analysis of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*.

Contrasting growth and contraction dominate this work, with the majority of phrases containing consistent increases and decreases in parameters as the music unfolds, expands, and shrinks methodically and deliberately. The first two IPSs are Departure/Return phrases in which the parameters of volume, register and textural density increase and then return to the relative conditions of the beginning of the phrase. These two phrases are the only two Departure/Return IPSs, as nearly all others have relative increases and decreases without relative similarity of parametric conditions at the beginning and end, forming either Directional or Tension/Release phrases. The first phrase of the piece could be considered a Symmetrical phrase if only one of the choirs is examined; however, the canonic effect offsets the symmetry, and the overlapping of the second phrase prevents the full return to a unison Middle C on two voices as heard in the beginning of the phrase.
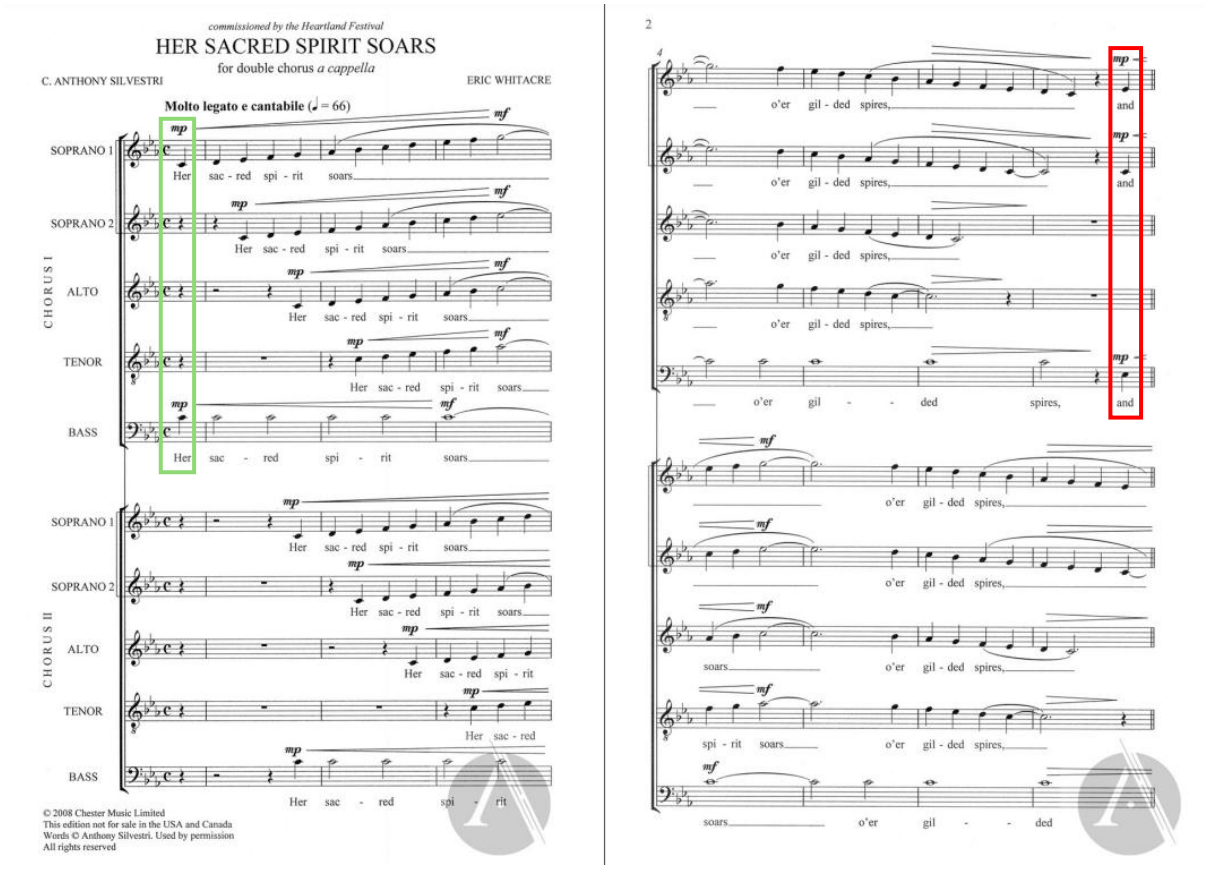


Figure 3.39: The opening Departure/Return IPS of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*.

The beginning of the phrase on a unison C is shown in Figure 3.39 in green. The beginning of the next Departure/Return Phrase is shown in red, entering before Choir II has completed its canon. The overlapping of phrases arising from the use of the canon maintains momentum throughout the piece, while previously heard material sung by Choir I is transformed with new harmonies and text sung over the echo in Choir II as the piece progresses. After fully establishing the canon and the *perpetuum mobile* of crotchet movement—with the exception of a quaver and dotted crotchet in bars 22 and 23 emphasising the word 'shadowed'—Whitacre creates contrast by bringing the sopranos and altos of both choirs together in bar 48 on a G3 and B3 over a minim, the first time a chord is held for two beats in the piece. This is followed by the first homophonic section of the piece: a chorale on the seventh and eight lines of the poem with the same material sung by both choirs, creating a Steady State phrase through use of relatively stable parametric values during this section. The final word of the eighth line, 'profound', is repeated in a rising pattern with a gradual *crescendo* over a pedal C-flat3 in the bass parts. The rhythm in the two choirs diverges by one beat, with Choir II leading the canon. The canon is also pitch-offset by a single degree in the C-flat Lydian scale, with Choir I entering one note lower and one beat behind Choir II. The repeated word contains increases in dynamics,

range, textural density and temporal density in the form of consistent movement on every crotchet beat. This creates a short Directional (Increasing) Phrase on this single repeated word (see Figure 3.40):
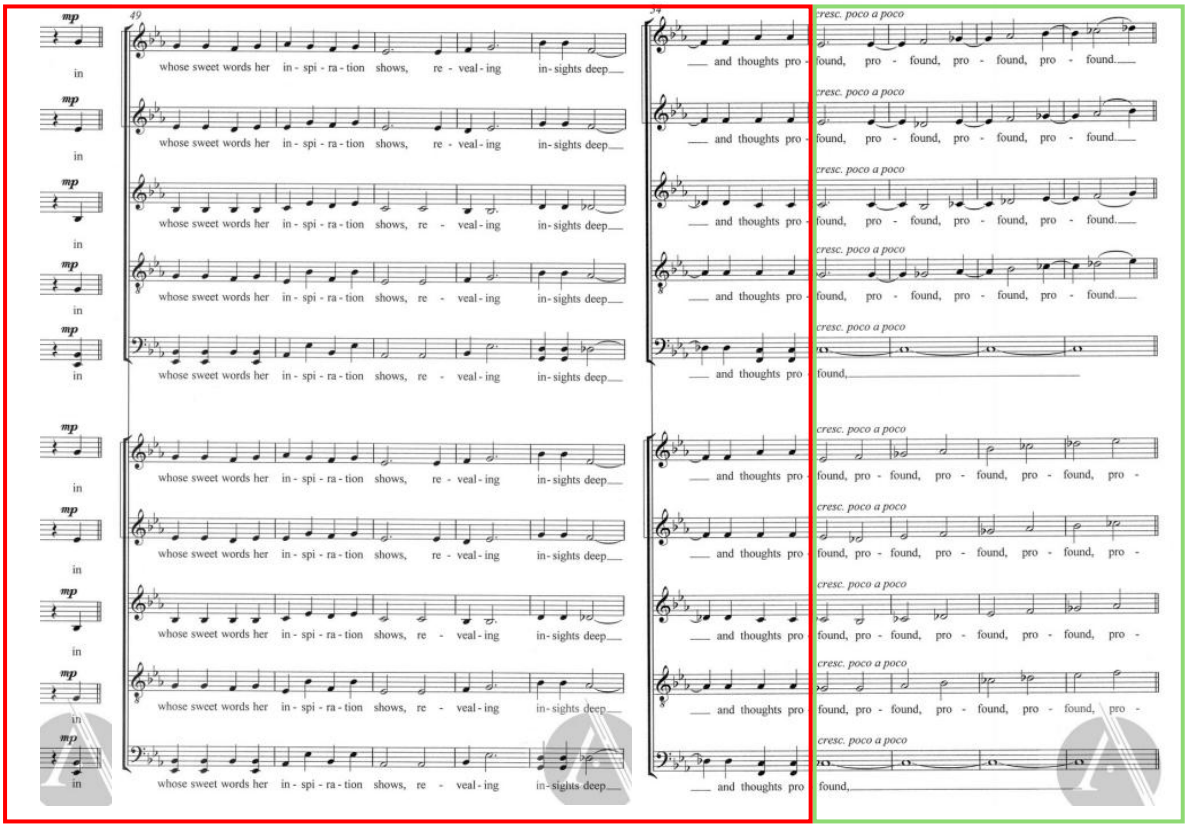


Figure 3.40: A Steady State phrase on the seventh and eighth lines of the poem (red), followed by a Directional (Increasing) Phrase on the word ‘profound’ (green).

The work concludes with a Directional (Increasing) IPS Group, building in intensity towards a climactic, nine-part chord at a triple *forte dynamic* (see Figure 3.41):
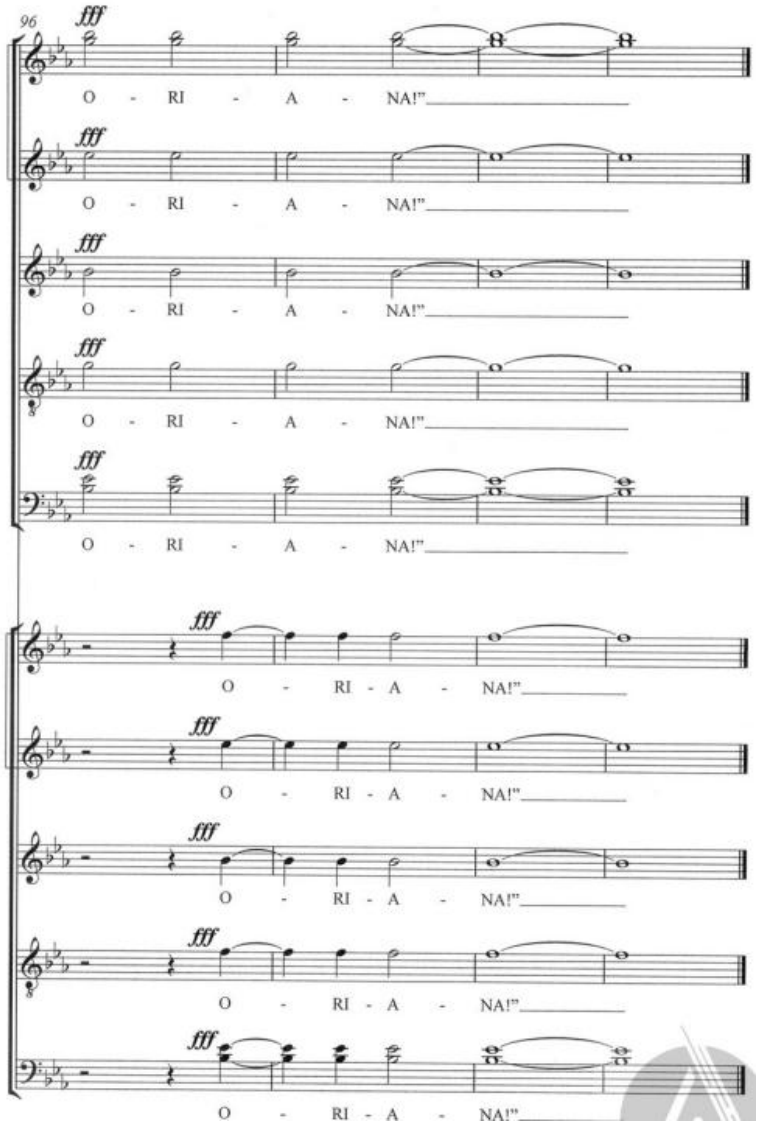


Figure 3.41: The climactic ending of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*.

Unlike other works that conclude on a Tension/Release IPS, thereby ending the work with a sensation of release, Whitacre maintains this intensity until the very end, creating a robust choral sonority that reverberates when sung in a space with a suitable acoustic for choral singing. Whitacre may have intended for that short period of reverberation to be the final parametric release of the work, manipulating the physical and practical realities of choral performance.

As in *Water Night* and *A Boy and a Girl*, Whitacre relies heavily on Tension/Release IPSs in *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. Whitacre's strict adherence to the canonic relationship between Choir I and Choir II at times muddies the coherence of the IPSs, particularly in instances where there is an overlap (for instance, in Figure 3.39). Whitacre's adherence to the form of the canon while still utilising his idiosyncratic compositional approach in the individual

chorus parts enables him to achieve new textures and harmonies that do not appear elsewhere in his output, as is discovered through CSA.

Critical Score Analysis

Extended harmonies

As seen in the construction of cluster chords in *Water Night*, rising stepwise motion from a unison note is a device frequently employed by Whitacre. The emergence of this maximalist, dense sonority from the most minimalist texture of a single pitch creates contrast, heightening the timbral effect of the cluster. Like the opening of 'Go Lovely Rose', this work begins on a unison pitch before expanding through rising stepwise motion. The movement of four voice parts in parallel thirds creates parallel seventh chords. In the opening phrase of the piece, this movement reaches its climax on an A-flat major 7 chord over the pedal C in the bass part (see Figure 3.42):

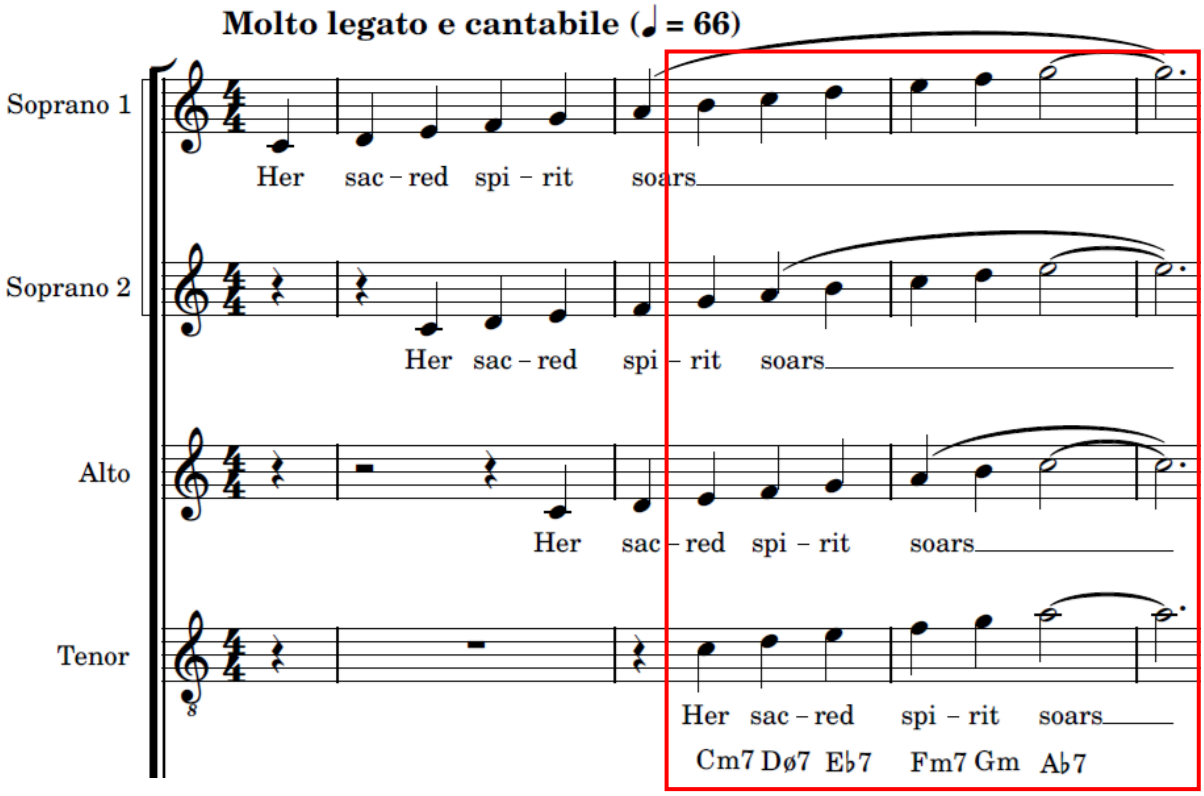


Figure 3.42: Parallel seventh chords in the soprano, alto and tenor parts of Choir I in the opening phrase.

These extensions continue with the entry of the Choir II canon, with the most extended tertial chords sounded upon the entry of the Choir II tenors, creating a Cm13 and a Dø13 in bar 3, the

maximum number of tertial chordal extensions. The presence of a pedal C4 sung by both bass parts further complicates traditional chordal analysis here, as it effectively makes each chord in this section an extended C chord, or at the very least, a polychord over C. It is clear that Whitacre's intention here is not functional harmonic relationships, but rather an exploration of the textural and sonic quality of stacked thirds moving in parallel motion. The palindromic expansion and contraction of cluster chords from a unison pitch is reminiscent of Ives' *Psalm 90* (see Chapter One, Figure 1.8) As mentioned earlier, this movement creates a Shepard-tone-like effect, evoking a constant rising and cascading of notes. This is how unusual chordal extensions, such as the thirteenth, emerge during this work.

At times when one choir sustains a chord while the other choir is still in motion, the canonic texture creates a series of clustered sonorities. These chords oscillate between clustered and non-clustered harmonies as the choirs align and diverge. Taking the opening phrase, Choir I arrives at the sustained A-flat major 7 chord on the third beat of bar 3 (see Figure 3.42 above). Choir II subsequently arrives at this chord on the third beat of bar 4. During the beat before and after the point of arrival of Choir II, there is an eight-note cluster chord from the G4 in the Choir II tenor to the G5 in the top soprano in Choir I (shown in blue in Figure 3.38), with each voice part in Choir II one step below their Choir I counterpart. This is mirrored on the fourth beat of bar 4 as Choir I descends to these pitches again. Through this simple canonic device, Whitacre composes a series of expanding and contracting cluster sonorities, exploring new ways of achieving this timbral effect.

One of the most climactic moments arrives in bar 64, when, after the two choirs have sung a unison F minor 9 chord in second inversion, Choir I crescendos into a *fortissimo* A-flat major chord. Combined with the F minor 9 chord sung by Choir II, this creates a complex polychord with extensions not normally found in Whitacre's works (see Figure 3.43):
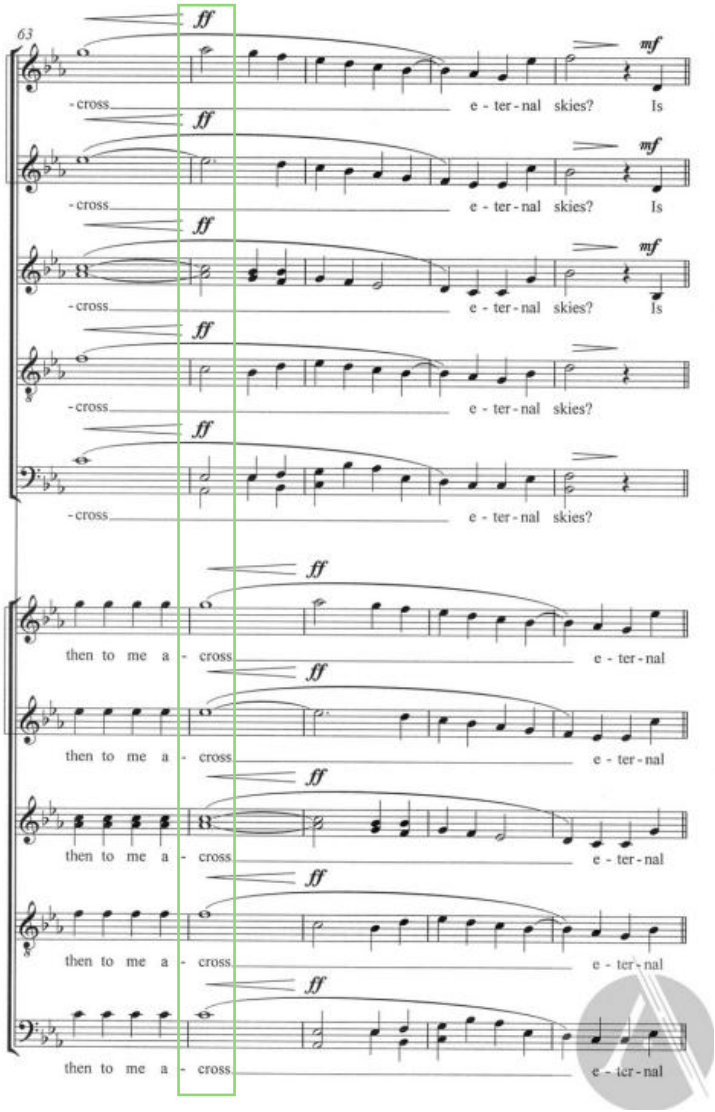


Figure 3.43: A climactic polychord of A-flat major and F minor 9 in bar 64.

The chord created by the two choirs is an A-flat major chord with an added seventh (Choir II soprano 1) and thirteenth (Choir II tenor). While this chord does feature a semitone clash in the two highest voices and a sudden shift to the chord of VI in C minor, both common features of his work, the use of a seventh and a thirteenth are uncommon in Whitacre's compositional language. These two extensions usually only appear in chords written by Whitacre that are fully saturated cluster chords, such as the opening chords of the work that feature all possible chordal extensions (see Figure 3.42), or cluster chords that contain all pitches of the given mode or diatonic scale. Perhaps Whitacre avoids this particular combination as the two notes create a secundal clash with one another despite not belonging to the root chord, causing additional dissonance that overly weakens the chord. It is clear that in this chord, as in much of the work, Whitacre prioritises the integrity of the canon over the quality of chords it creates.

In *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, Whitacre chooses to maintain the integrity of the canon rather than make ad hoc alterations, allowing complex, polychordal harmonies to unfold unfiltered and uncurbed. This approach offers a new way for Whitacre to create expansive cluster sonorities while also allowing for the emergence of extended harmonies rarely seen elsewhere in his work. The canon also has practical utility, as a conductor is required only to teach one of the choir parts to an amateur ensemble before splitting the group in two and beginning the canon. *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* is one of Whitacre's most methodical compositions, abandoning his usual pursuit of chords as emotional sonic objects and choosing to adhere firmly to a compositional process of canonic writing. John Tavener's polychordal *Hymn to the Mother of God*, as well as his study of polychordal works by Charles Ives, likely influenced Whitacre in his composition for the Shakespeare festival. The following analysis considers a more recent work by Whitacre that displays a similarly mature and methodical approach to composition.

i carry your heart (2016)

While the four works considered thus far were written during the early period of Whitacre's career when he was composing prolifically and developing his niche as a choral composer, *i carry your heart* was written in the third decade of Whitacre's career as a published composer. This follows the composition of his large-scale electronic opera, a five-year residency in the United Kingdom at Sydney Sussex College Cambridge, the development of a mainstream, non-specialist audience through the wide publicity of his Virtual Choir projects, and multiple premieres at the BBC Proms. Not only had Whitacre's compositional language developed during this time, but New Transcendentalism had also, with compositional features from other composers creating dialogue and advancing the style. Whitacre's setting of the poem of the same name by e.e. cummings features notes within the toneset of G major exclusively without any accidentals. Despite this constraint, Whitacre creates a sound that is identifiably consistent with his choral output and mimics the structure of the source poem through structural units that combine multiple musical parameters. This work represents one of Whitacre's most mature New Transcendentalist works, epitomising the harmonic and textural aspects of the style refined from the innovative and unrestrained experiments of his early career.

IPS Analysis

With the exception of his collaborations with lyricist Charles Anthony Silvestri, Whitacre has set texts by e.e. cummings more than any other poet. The poem features the rhyme-scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet, though it is presented on the page with an unusual division of lines, obfuscating the sonnet structure:

> i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
> my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
> i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
> by only me is your doing, my darling)
> i fear
> no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
> no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
> and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
> and whatever a sun will always sing is you
>
> here is the deepest secret nobody knows
> (here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
> and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
> higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
> and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
>
> i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)[41]

Typical of cummings' poetry, the structure of the poem and syntax used within is enigmatic. With the exception of the words 'i fear' splitting the first and second stanzas, the poem has fourteen lines with five metrical stresses, implying the form of a Shakespearean sonnet suitable to the romantic theme, though this structure is obscured and the lines feature a mix of iambic and dactylic metrical stresses. Furthermore, the rhyming couplet that concludes the sonnet is separated, with the final line standing in relief from the second stanza. The length of sentences increases as the poem crescendos in intensity, reaching a climax with a lengthy run-on sentence in the second stanza, before settling back for the mantric phrase that opens the poem: 'i carry

[41] e.e. cummings, 'I carry your heart with me', *Poetry*, 80 (1952), 128.

your heart (i carry it in my heart).' Reflecting the maturity of Whitacre's writing, and perhaps influenced by his experience composing more long-form works at this point in his career, IPSs in this work are far longer than in his earlier works, in which phrases are short and modular. Whitacre mirrors the structure of the poem with two IPS groups and a brief coda that reprises the musical material of the opening IPS (see Table 3.7):

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar numbers	First line of text
Parallel Episode	Tension/Release	1–15	i carry your heart
	Tension/Release	15–29	i fear no fate
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	29–43	here is the deepest
	Directional (Decreasing)	44–49	this is the wonder
(Coda)	Departure/Return	49–57	i carry your heart

Table 3.7: Structure of *i carry your heart*.

The first two quatrains of the sonnet are set in fourteen-bar phrases that create Tension/Release IPSs. The first phrase begins with relatively low parametric values: all four voice parts are singing low in their tessituras, the temporal density is no higher than triplet crotchets, the dynamic is *piano*, and there is no *divisi* (see Figure 3.44):

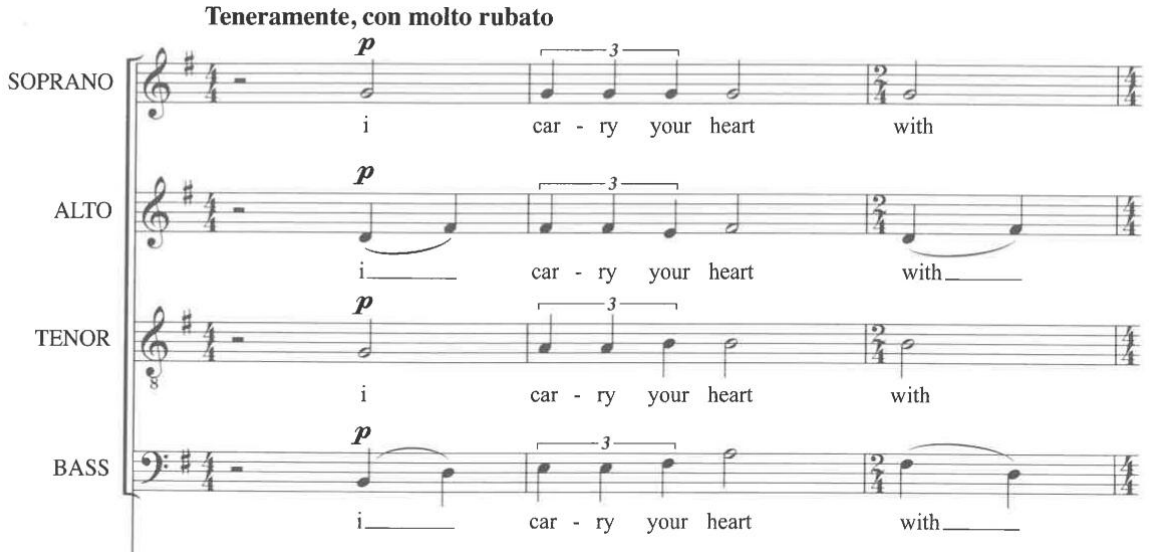


Figure 3.44: *i carry your heart*, bars 1–3.

This is followed by a relative increase in tension through heightened range, quaver movement, a *mezzo piano* dynamic, *divisi* in the soprano and bass parts and rhythmic variation between the lower and upper voice parts:

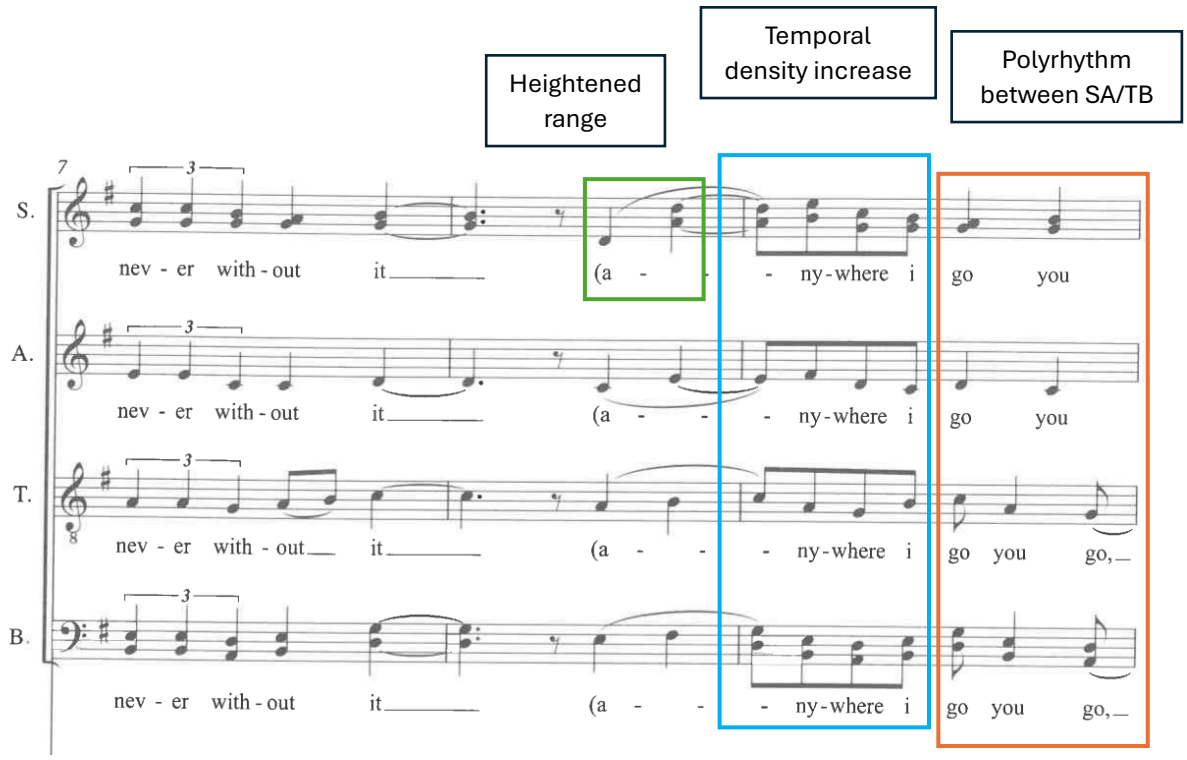


Figure 3.45: Building tension in bars 7–9 of *i carry your heart*.

This is followed by a *decrescendo* back to *piano*, a reduction of voice parts to just the alto and tenor parts and a *ritenuto* towards the end of the phrase (see Figure 3.46):

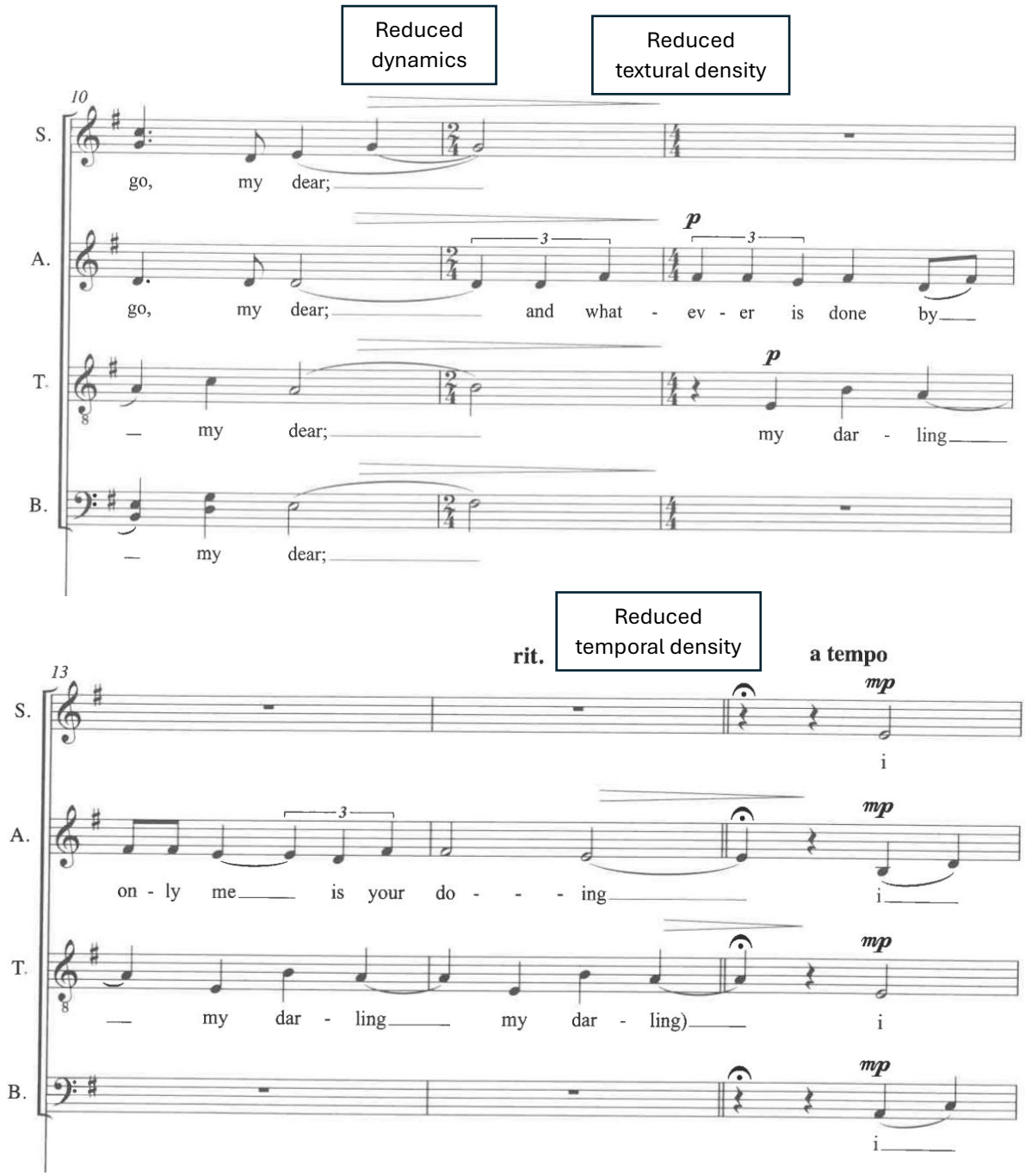


Figure 3.46: Decreasing parameters in bars 10–15 of *i carry your heart*.

The parameters decrease but do not return to the relative parametric values of the opening of the phrase, supporting the conclusion that it forms a Tension/Release IPS rather than Departure/Return. Whitacre mirrors this structure in his setting of the second quatrain, though with higher relative values throughout. The phrase begins in four parts in a low tessitura at *mezzo piano*, reaching seven parts and a *mezzo forte* dynamic at its climax before reducing to two voice parts again, this time bass and soprano, with a *ritenuto* and a *diminuendo* to

pianissimo. The striking similarities within these two IPSs suggest a broader IPS group of a Parallel Episode forming the two quatrains of the first stanza.

Emulating the break in the structure of the poem, Whitacre alters the pacing of parametric value changes for the third quatrain, with the Tension/Release phrase broadened from self-contained IPSs to a larger Tension/Release IPS-group consisting of two Directional IPSs, one increasing and one decreasing. The stanza begins in bar 28 with only the sopranos and altos singing at a *pianissimo* dynamic on the word 'you' (see Figure 3.47):

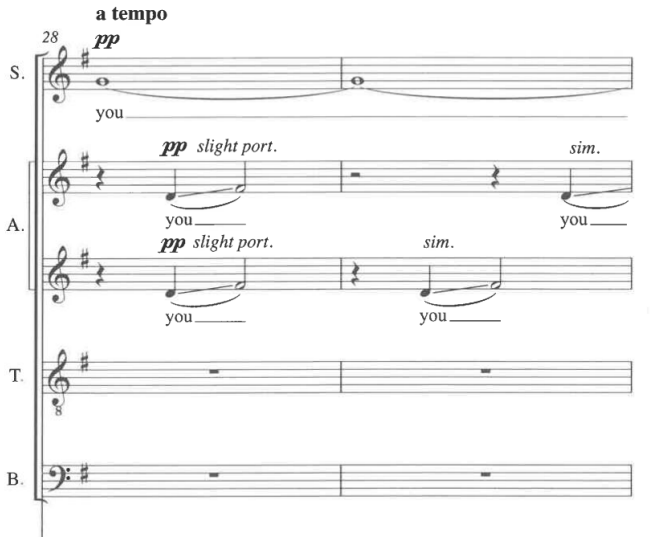


Figure 3.47: Low parametric values at the beginning of the second IPS-group in bar 28 of *i carry your heart*.

The tenors and basses enter four bars later relatively low in their tessituras at a *piano* dynamic on the text 'here is the deepest secret nobody knows' (see Figure 3.48):

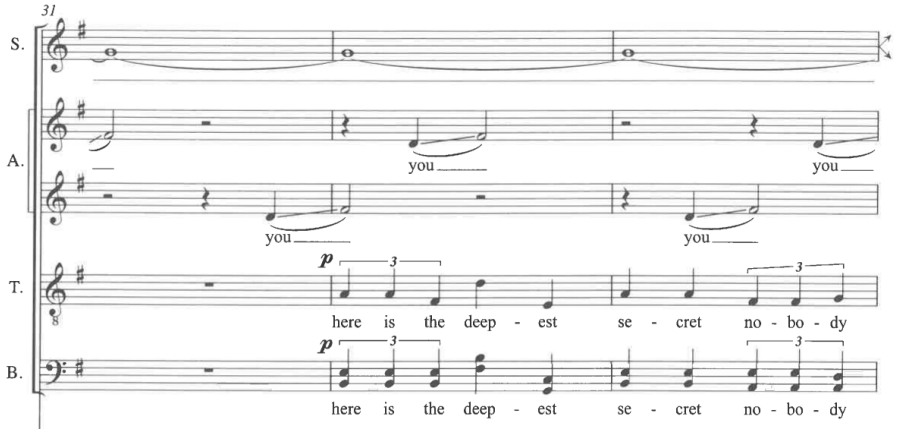


Figure 3.48: Tenor and bass entry at bar 32 of *i carry your heart*.

This is followed by a sustained increase in range, dynamics and textural and temporal density on the run on sentence beginning with ‘here is the root of the root…’. The tenor and bass parts rise in a string of triplet crotchets in bars 37–39. Entries in the upper voices rise in register and are no longer punctuated by rests (see Figure 3.49):

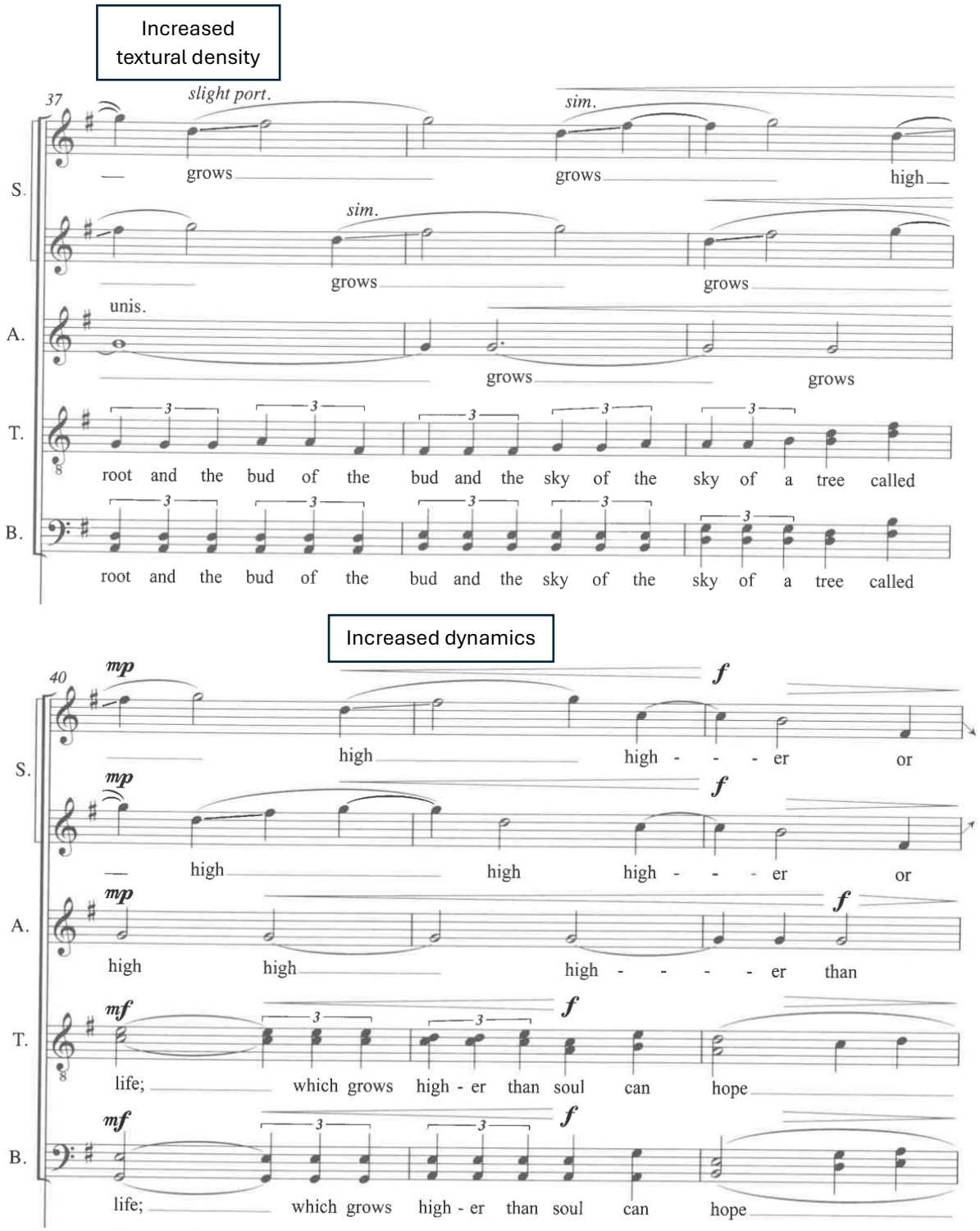


Figure 3.49: Increase in parametric values in bars 37–43 of *i carry your heart*.

This Increasing Directional phrase is connected to the following Decreasing Directional phrase by a linking bar in which the parameters of dynamics and textural and temporal density are briefly reduced before returning to the high parametric values that form the arrival point of the Increasing phrase (see Figure 3.50):

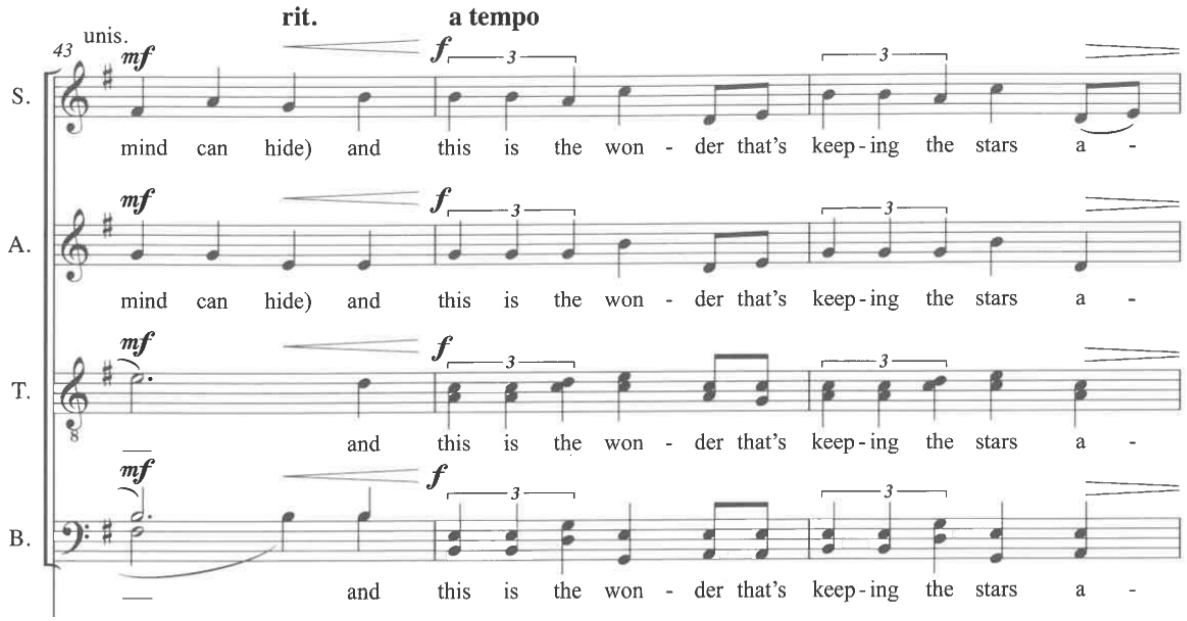


Figure 3.50: Linking passage in bar 43 followed by the beginning of the Decreasing Directional phrase in bar 44 of *i carry your heart*.

The Decreasing Directional phrase begins with repeated musical material in bars 44 and 45 (shown above) before a linear decrease in parametric values on a melisma of the second syllable of 'apart' (see Figure 3.51):

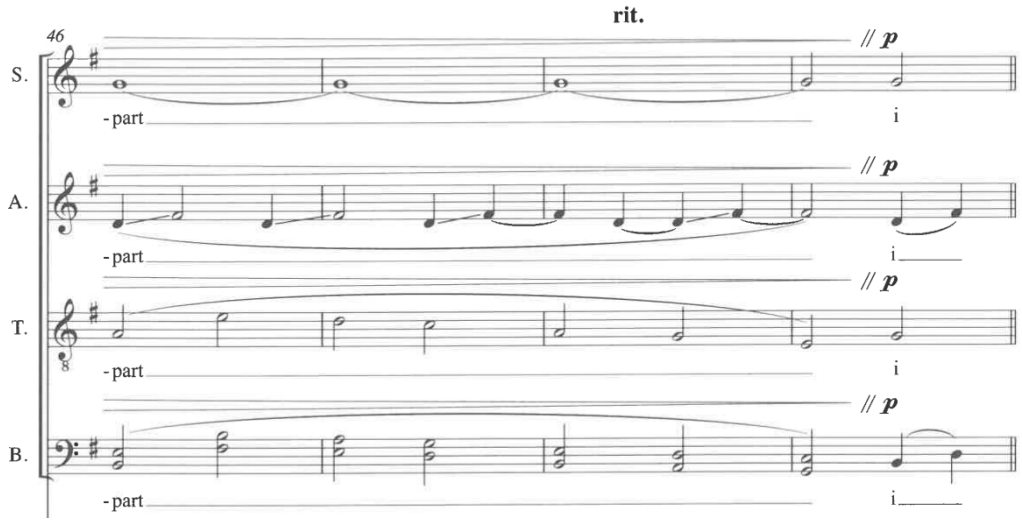


Figure 3.51: Decreasing parametric values in bars 46–49 of *i carry your heart*.

The Decreasing phrase ends on a five-part chord in the low tessituras of all voices at a *piano* dynamic and a slow tempo, with greatly reduced parameters from the high-point of tension across bars 40–45. These two directional phrases together form a broader IPS-Group of Tension/Release, mirroring the structure of the opening quatrains though on an expanded level, much like the expansion of intensity written into the poem by cummings.

The final line of the work, much like in the source text, is set in relief of the broader structure. It creates a subtle Departure/Return phrase, with an increase in textural density in bar 53 from four to six parts, before returning to a four part chord to end the work:

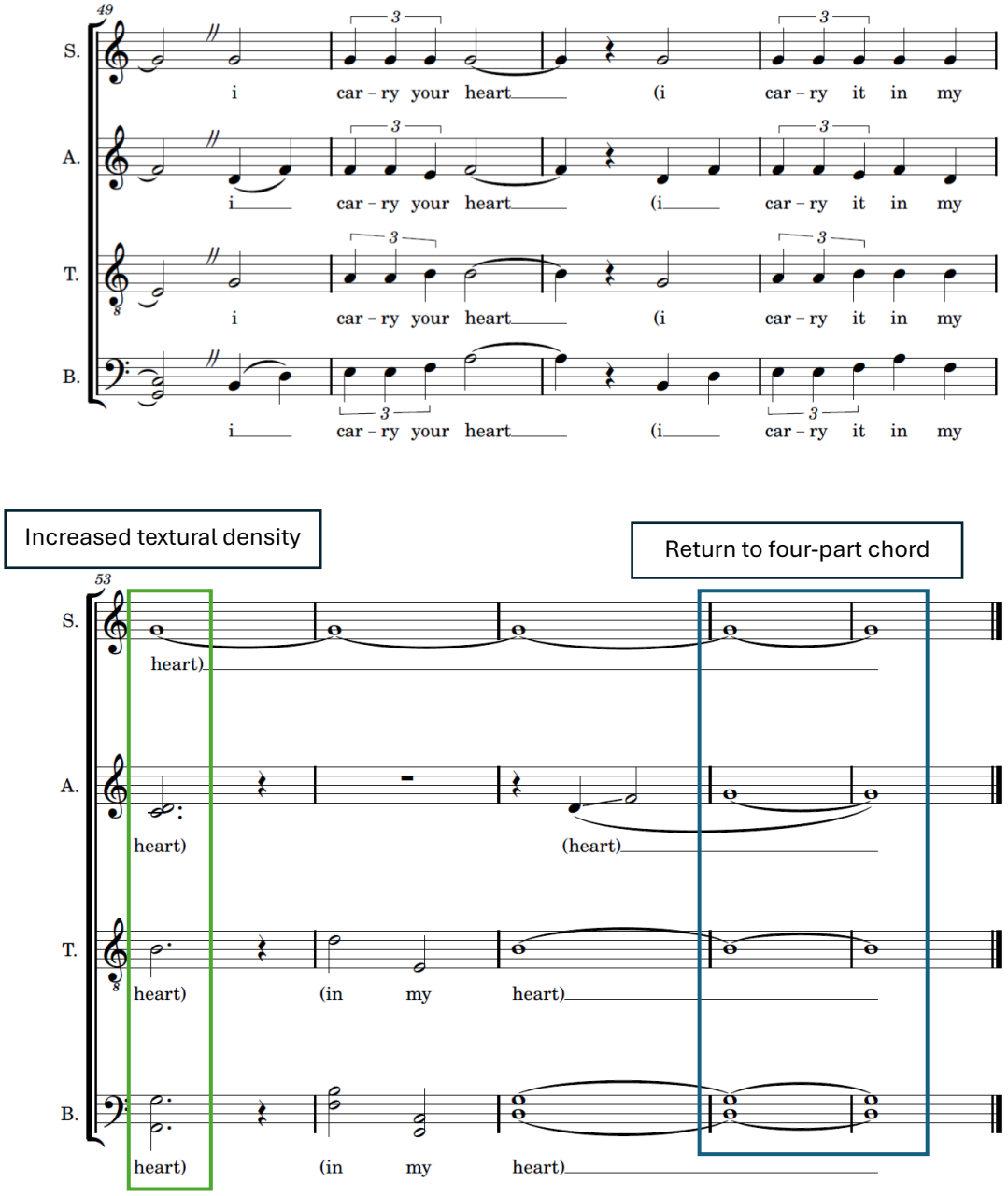


Figure 3.52: The coda of *i carry your heart*, bars 49–57.

Other than this increase and decrease in textural density, other parameters remain largely the same. This reflects the calming effect of the shortened sentence structure and the separation of the final line in the poem following the ecstatic emotional climax of the second stanza, creating a meditative atmosphere for the mantric text to close the piece.

As in previously examined works, tension and release form much of the metastructure of *i carry your heart*, though the concept is also composed into the work on the microstructural level. The central theme of the work, or 'golden brick' in Whitacre's nomenclature, is the rising D to F# figure in the alto part clashing against the pedal G in the soprano part. This is heard in the opening chords of the piece as well as throughout the second stanza. The tension built by this semitone clash throughout the piece is finally resolved when the alto part rises to a unison G with the soprano part in the final bar. Whitacre describes the relationship between the soprano and alto in this work as two beings, likely representing his two friends for whom he wrote the piece, coming into close contact with each other before finally being joined together at the end of their shared journey.[42] The concept of tension and release governs the structure of the work at all levels of analysis. Key to the success of this structural technique is Whitacre's ability to compose within an expanded tonal idiom, enabling him to write without being tethered to the rigid, formal associations of functional harmony. This aspect of the work is revealed through CSA.

Critical Score Analysis

Subverted Tonality

Although *i carry your heart* contains the key signature of G major and does not feature any accidentals, Whitacre adopts an approach of undermining the tonal gravity of the tonic chord of G major throughout. Hierarchical chord relationships are subverted through strategic voicing and extension of chords and the denial of clear resolution to the tonic. An example of this is Whitacre's systematic avoidance of G major chords in root position throughout the entire work. The following example shows all of the chordal harmonies heard in the first eighteen bars of the piece. The tonic note is not heard in the lowest voice of any chord until bar 18, approximately one minute into the work (highlighted in orange in Figure 3.53 below):

[42] Eric Whitacre, 'i carry your heart; I discuss the writing process of my latest a cappella work "i carry your heart."', online video recording, Facebook, 19 February 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10156127649622229> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
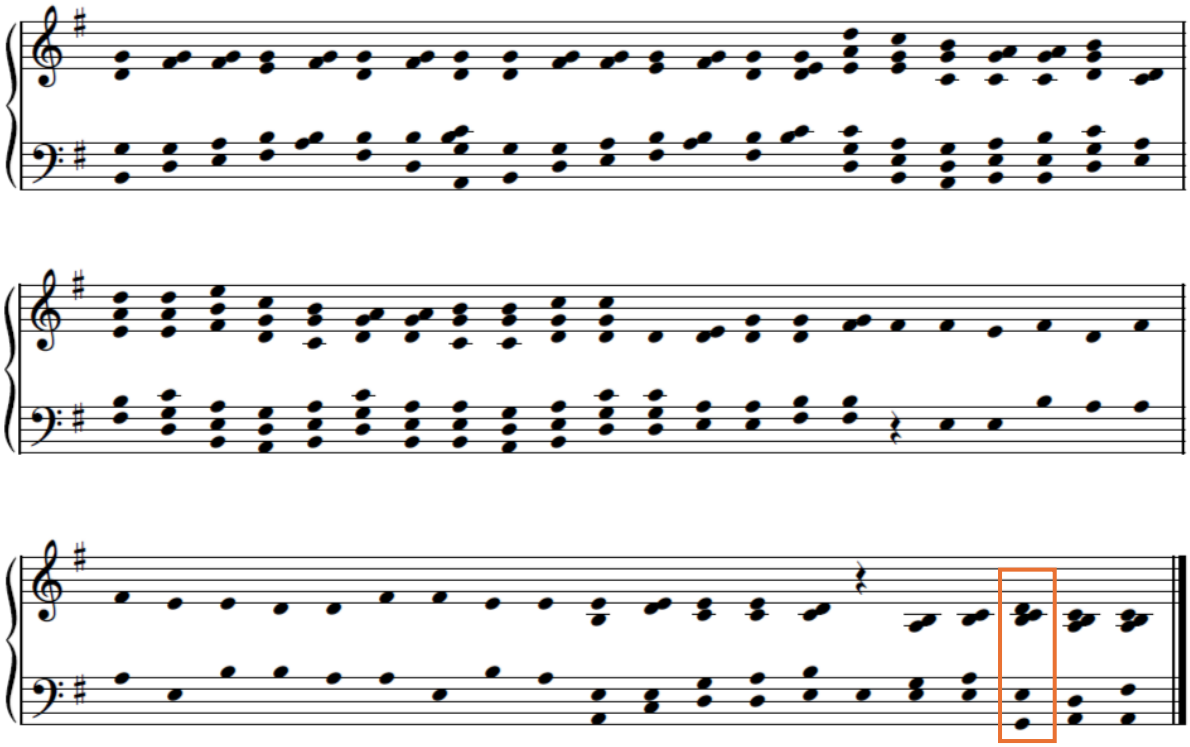


Figure 3.53: chordal harmonies in the first eighteen bars of *i carry your heart*.

The chord in bar 18 features a G in the lowest voice but the quality of the chord based on upper harmony pitches is less clear. This is the only chord with a G in the lowest voice that could potentially be construed as an extended tonic chord in root position. Following two extended E minor chords, the bass voice sings G2 under an E3 in the tenor and the pitches B3, C4 and D4 in the upper voices (see Figure 3.54):

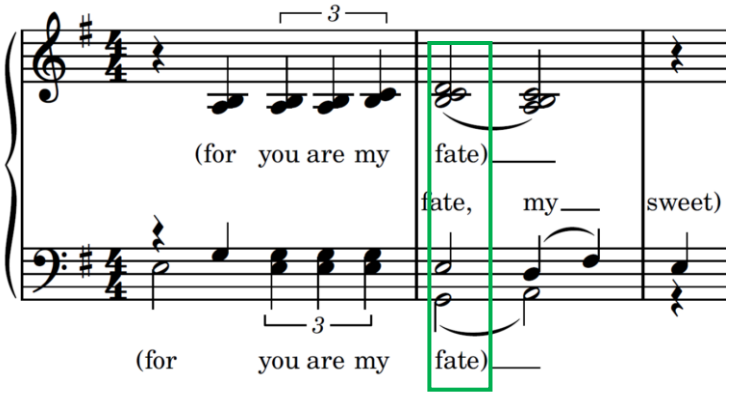


Figure 3.54: Harmonically ambiguous chord in *i carry your heart*, bar 18.

Identifying the quality of this chord is challenging, as it contains all three triadic tones of C major, G major, and E minor, suggesting that it may be interpreted as an extended version of any one of these chords—G11/13, C7/9, or Em7/13. As shown above, Whitacre has established

a pattern of avoiding chords of G in root position. Additionally, the presence of E3 as the first pitch above the G2 in the lowest voice weakens the chords interpretability as a chord of G. In chords with multiple extensions in the upper voices, Whitacre tends to strengthen the fundamental with an open fifth, which in this instance would be a D3 in the tenor voice. These facts in combination rule out G as the root of this chord. Distinguishing between a chord of E minor or C major is less straightforward. Three factors imply that this is an extended chord of C major. The first is that in every other instance where G appears in the lowest voice (see Figure 3.55), the chord is an extension of C major, implying the continuation of this pattern in this instance:

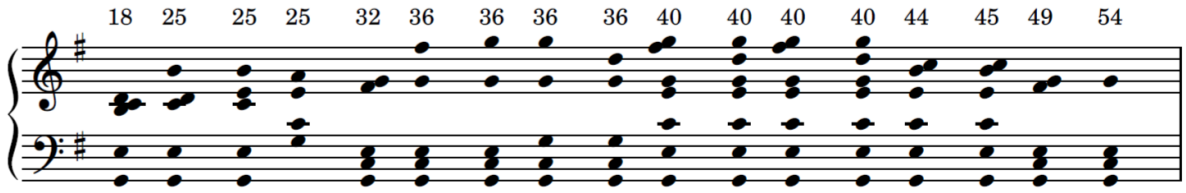


Figure 3.55: Every chord with G in the lowest voice in *i carry your heart* with bar numbers of the occurrences shown above.

Secondly, the rising bassline suggests a chord progression returning to E minor of C major–D major–E minor, arriving on the single pitch E3 in bar 19, following a IV–V–vi progression. Lastly, by examining the chord extensions, we can uncover Whitacre's intent with this chord. If the chord is an E minor chord, the extensions would be a flat seventh (D) and a thirteenth (C) voiced consecutively in the two upper voices. The other option is a C major chord with a seventh (B) and a ninth (D) surrounding the root pitch in the upper voices. It would be highly unusual for Whitacre to place two chordal extension notes a second apart outside of scalar cluster chords such as those found in *When David Heard* and *Cloudburst*. Secondly, the chordal extension of the thirteenth features far less prominently in Whitacre's writing than the seventh and the ninth. These combined factors strongly suggest that the chord found in the above example is an extended chord of C major. This is confirmed through listening analysis by playing a C2 or an E1 underneath the chord to critically examine the quality of the extensions. Following this assessment, we may hear that Whitacre intended this chord to function as a C major extension. This highly deliberate method of eschewing the tonal gravity of G within the work represents a significant development in New Transcendentalist harmony, further realising a pandiatonic harmonic approach that creates a floating, untethered feeling throughout.

Accompanying the subversion of hierarchical chordal functionality in *i carry your heart* are tonally ambiguous chords that operate as emotional sonic objects rather than standard choral harmonisations. Masking the place of a chord in the hierarchy of functional tonality enables Whitacre to present each chord as a unique dramatic moment and use intervallic relationships within chordal sonorities as the primary colouristic tool to evoke the atmosphere of the text. By removing the familiar signposts of chordal relationships, the listener is no longer guided by the expectations of linear, diatonic chord progressions, heightening focus on the emotional impact of each discrete chord. In the coda of the piece, the musical material of the first phrase (bars 1–4) is repeated, matching the structure of the source poem which closes on an abbreviation of the opening text: 'i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)'. This reiteration of the beginning includes the return of a tonally ambiguous chord heard on the word 'me' in bar 4 and on the word 'heart' in bar 53:

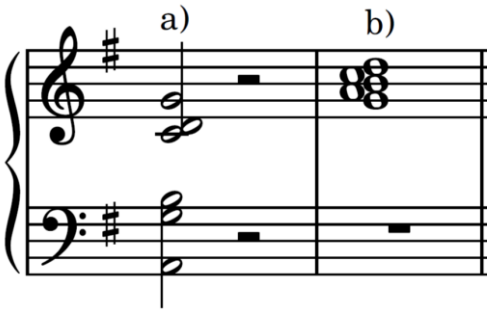


Figure 3.56: Tonally ambiguous chord heard in bars 4 and 53 of *i carry your heart*.

In the above example, the chord in bar 53 is shown under a). When the individual pitch classes are isolated and stacked in closed form, they create a G major pentachord on the note G, as shown under b). When the five pitch classes are sounded in this form, it sounds as an extended G major triad with the added ninth and eleventh chordal extensions—the upper five notes in the chord as voiced under a) also give the impression of an extended G major chord. The placement of the note A—the extended ninth of this chord—in the bass, however, entirely destabilises the chord. Of the triads to which the note A belongs in G major, there are only two pitches from A minor or D major present in the chord, weakening any triadic role the bass note may have. This leaves the chord in a functional limbo, allowing it to be heard and interpreted as an emotional object in its own right, rather than a stepping stone within an inevitable chord progression relating to a tonic chord of G major. There is a sense of suspense within the chord; it is unresolved and must lead somewhere, but the lack of discernible functionality creates uncertainty as to where the music might go next. The choir pauses time by stepping outside of

the confines of predictable, functional harmony, creating a still-frame effect that evokes stopping to observe one's surrounding circumstances amid the uncertainty of life. This analysis of the chord is supported by Whitacre's own interpretation of the chord as a conductor in his recording of the piece with the Eric Whitacre singers. The tempo instruction for the piece is *Teneremente, con molto rubato* (much like the *Rubato, e molto teneramente* instruction for *A Boy and a Girl*). This tempo direction allows for stretching and lengthening to extract the emotional weight of each chord as intended by the composer. In his premiere recording of *i carry your heart*, Whitacre holds the first minim-length chord of the work in bar 2 for 2.46 seconds, while the second minim-length chord, shown in Figure 3.44 above, is held for 3.44 seconds. Whitacre composed the piece as a wedding gift, with the interplay between the sopranos and altos mirroring the journey of a couple through life until they finally find each other. By choosing to dwell on this moment of suspension, he emphasises the importance of these moments of tonal ambiguity as dramatic signposts in the narrative arc of the source text.

Bifurcated Texture

A new aspect of Whitacre's approach to texture in *i carry your heart* is the juxtaposition of two different textural devices at the same time during the central Directional (Increasing) IPS in bars 29–43. During this long, building phrase, the text of the poem is sung in homophony by the tenors and basses (shown earlier in Figures 3.48 and 3.49). At the same time, the soprano and alto parts are singing rising *glissando* figures with staggered entries, creating a polyphonic weave of rising, sliding pitches (shown in Figures 3.47, 3.48 and 3.49). Unlike the bifurcated textures in previous works, where homophonic groupings of voices are juxtaposed texturally with each other, here Whitacre combines polyphony in one half of the ensemble and homophony in the other. The polyphony is delegated to the upper voices, whose lighter timbre does not overpower the rich, sonorous timbre of the lower voices, ensuring that the text can be easily heard by the audience.

In Chapter Four, CSA of works by Jake Runestad will demonstrate that this is a technique employed in his *Spirited Light* and *Let My Love Be Heard*, both of which were composed in 2014, two years before *i carry your heart*. This may be indicative of a stylistic dialogue between the two composers, as the New Transcendentalist approach of bifurcated textures with an emphasis on textual comprehensibility evolves in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Stylistic Features

The combination of IPS Analysis and CSA in this chapter illuminates the compositional choices that govern Whitacre's music, creating a coherent and idiosyncratic soundworld. Several techniques employed with consistency and congruity throughout Whitacre's oeuvre demonstrate a fluency of style that has matured and developed as his career has progressed. Whitacre has advanced New Transcendentalism as a choral style beyond the superficial understanding of a handful of tropes associated with his earlier works, such as perceived over-reliance on cluster chords and homophonic textures. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates how harmonic and textural techniques are applied thoughtfully and with dramatic or narrative intent, bolstering Whitacre's assertion that his use of extended and clustered chords is 'always about painting the text and the idea of the text' rather than simply creating a 'hot moment.'[43] When combined with IPS Analysis, we see how Whitacre uses these techniques to construct structural units in tandem with changes in other parameters, creating formal coherence in his works with no need for the motivic and functional harmonic development that often characterises choral works within a tonal idiom.

Secundal Harmony and Cluster Chords

Throughout his choral output, Whitacre uses variation in chordal extensions, most frequently ninths and elevenths, for dramatic effect. He may decide to change the quality of the chord while maintaining the textural density of a chord to four pitches, thereby altering intervallic relationships within the chord without changing the texture. This contrast is most apparent between ninths in a major chord—sitting a whole-tone apart from the tonic and mediant on either side—and elevenths, situated between a tone and a semitone (see Figure 3.57) for an example)

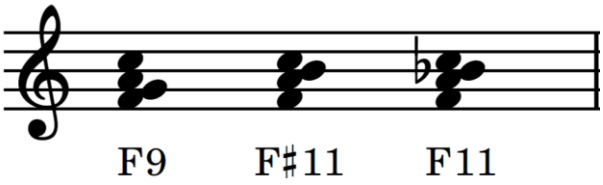


Figure 3.57: Examples of pandiatonic chordal extensions using secundal harmonies within a triadic context.

[43] Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

The sonic impact of a semitonal clash within an extended chord as compared to chords with whole-tone clashes speaks to the physicality of singing that influences Whitacre's writing. The semitonal clash, particularly between the major third and suspended fourth, features prominently in his writing, particularly in *A Boy and a Girl* and *Sleep* (2000). For Whitacre, the two notes 'dance between resolving and not resolving.'[44] This may be a reference to the physical effect of 'beating', when pitches close in range cause a pulsating effect for the listener.

Varying intervallic relationships within a static textural density is a development from Whitacre's earlier compositional style which, according to Larson, was defined by varying the textural density. This sophisticated approach to extended tonal harmony speaks to a high degree of specificity on the emotional and dramatic function of certain chordal extensions. Rather than building tension simply by adding notes through *divisi*, Whitacre has devised a harmonic language that can function within textural limitations, both refining his own idiosyncratic compositional language and making his music more accessible to choirs with limited capacity for extensive *divisi*.

Another element of Whitacre's secundal harmony is his relatively sparing usage of cluster chords, despite the widespread association of the technique with his choral music. As illustrated in the analysis of *Water Night*, Whitacre's use of extensive cluster chords is reserved for the building of tension or direct word painting, such as the fourteen-part cluster chord that develops over the text 'fills you from within', shown in Figure 3.10. According to the composer, cluster chords are always a result of compositional process, rather than an ornamental addition to add interest to a chord:

> It's more than just a collection of clusters. It's like contraction and expansion, contraction and expansion […] I never even think in terms of clusters. The part that I think sometimes people miss is that for me, it's always, always, always about painting the text and the idea of the text; that's everything to me. So the only time I would ever use some kind of crunchy chord is because the text requires it. It's never because, 'oh, let's just have a hot moment here!'[45]

Extended chords with secundal harmonies that feature two or three adjacent pitches occur frequently throughout Whitacre's works, but cluster chords of four or more adjacent pitches are used far more sparingly than the caricature of his music would suggest. As Whitacre

[44] Eric Whitacre, *Time is a River: Walking through my writing process in real time*, online video recording, Instagram, 6 November 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CV8b2mBsPdh/?utm_medium=share_sheet> [Accessed 9 November 2021]. (10:48-11:42)

[45] Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

articulates above, clusters are purposefully used as a word-painting device for direct mimesis of the text, such as in the example cited earlier on the text 'fills you from within', or as a form of indirect mimesis portraying character of the text, such as the building of tension with a seventeen-note cluster chord in *When David Heard* to mimic the agony of a grieving father.

When paired with IPS Analysis, we see that Whitacre's cluster chords are also commonly employed to create structural integrity for formal units alongside changes in other parametric values. This is clearly demonstrated in *A Boy and a Girl*, where cluster chords are used once as a word-painting device on the word 'clouds', and once as a tension-building device leading to the emotional climax of the piece. This selective and functional employment of clustered harmony in an early work by Whitacre demonstrate the intentionality behind his use of the device. Compared with *Water Night* and 'i thank You God', where cluster chords are a central feature, *A Boy and a Girl* is restrictive with its use of the technique, revealing the functional role that cluster chords play in Whitacre's compositional toolkit.

The juxtaposition of thick choral textures and clustered sonorities with a single, unison pitch is a frequent occurrence in Whitacre's compositions. Dating back to the opening phrase of 'Go Lovely Rose', this technique can be found in the beginning of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* and the fanning effect of cluster chords in *Water Night*. The contrast between the maximalist texture of dense, clustered sonorities and the minimalist sound of a single unison pitch heightens the timbral effect of the cluster chord. It is clear that Whitacre employs this juxtaposition to leaven his use of cluster chords and to avoid oversaturation of dense choral textures. As well as its artistic merit, this approach also has practical purposes, particularly in the case of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. Beginning a piece on a single unison note allows the conductor to give only a single pitch to the choir, rather than an entire chord with different pitches for each voice part. This clean, efficient initiation of the performance impresses audiences as the choir generates expansive choral textures from the single pitch.

Bifurcation

As noted by Owen,[46] Whitacre's textural organisation often involves antiphony between two homophonic groupings within a piece, frequently the upper voices against the lower voices. From the above analyses, we see that this method of bifurcation also extends to harmony and

[46] Owen, p. 79.

timbre. The textural effect of bifurcation allows Whitacre to add polyphonic variety while maintaining thick textures in the constituent parts. As referenced in Chapter One, homophonic wall-of-sound and 'thick melody' textures are fundamental elements of American choral music. By separating the choir into textural units, Whitacre avoids the thin colour of traditional polyphony while generating polyrhythmic interest.

Alongside textural contrast, the separation of groupings of voice parts creates timbral variety. The analysis of 'i thank You God' demonstrates how Whitacre has used this technique to incorporate the 'timbral shake' into his music using voice exchange between groupings, such as the interchange of chords between altos and sopranos over pedal chords in the lower voices. In this example, the choir sings a series of identical chords with timbral differences as the audience hears variations when pitches are sung in the mid-register of the sopranos or the upper register of the altos. Whitacre also employs this compositional tool to situate a 'thick melody' within a more complex texture. In *i carry your heart*, the upper voices sing a series of rising *glissandi* in polyphony over four-part homophonic declamation of the text in the tenor and bass parts. This maintains the timbral impact of wall-of-sound choral texture cutting through a polyphonic matrix created by the upper voices.

Regarding Whitacre's bifurcated approach to harmony, each section often comprises self-contained chords. This heightens the structural and thematic unity of the piece, allows for easier sight-reading and rehearsal of individual parts, and maintains interest in individual lines beyond the vertical chordal sonorities rather than creating arbitrarily extended chordal harmonies. Bifurcation maintains clarity in what otherwise could be an incoherent mess of close harmonies. It creates textural and timbral interest and allows for the creation of forward momentum in otherwise static moments. This principle extends to Whitacre's approach to harmony, leading to polychordal construction of harmonies.

One of the effects of Whitacre's predilection for bifurcation and bipartite structures in his choral writing is a blurring of structural units. This is particularly apparent in the instance of overlapping IPSs in 'i thank You God' and *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. As these works are studies in polychoral writing, Whitacre is steadfast in the unfolding of formal processes in both units, even when they occur in contrast with one another. This demonstrates the importance he places on bifurcation as a compositional tool, overshadowing considerations of clarity of structure.

Polychordal and Polytriadic Harmony

As the analyses above illustrate, polychordal harmony is a tool commonly applied by Whitacre to develop extended chords within his pandiatonic framework. While polychords can be found throughout his output, the clearest example is 'i thank You God', which presents a study in polychordal harmony. This work was featured in the analysis portion of Owen's 2008 dissertation, though he fails to identify the importance of polychordal harmony to the construction of the work. For example, Owen does not categorise the final chord of 'i thank You God' as a polychord:

> In the final measures of "i thank You God," […] there are three added tones. This could be construed as a polychord with a B major triad in the men's and second soprano parts, and a C sharp major triad in the soprano and alto parts (excluding the second soprano). However, the resultant sonority is difficult to hear as two distinct triads. All of the pitches come from the B major diatonic scale, which implies B as a root of the entire verticality. The open position of the tenor, baritone and bass parts on the B major triad pitches also draws the ear to the B major root, while the C sharp, E sharp and G sharp are clustered closer together creating the harmonic second color.[47]

The final chord of the work features a C-sharp 9 chord in second inversion in the upper voices over a B major second inversion chord in the lower voices (see Figure 3.26). Owen's analysis omits the direct influence of polychordalism that Whitacre explores in this work through his explicit quotation of Charles Ives' polychordal *Psalm 67*. He also erroneously states that all notes present belong to the key of B major. E-sharp is not present in B major, rather, it belongs to the B Lydian mode. As demonstrated previously in this thesis, clusters based on the Lydian scale are of particular interest to Whitacre—the first chord that he composed for choir was a cluster of the first five notes of B Lydian in 'Go Lovely Rose.' In works such as 'i thank You God' and 'With A Lily in Your Hand' (1992), Whitacre finds pathways towards Lydian chords with added seconds through polychordal harmony. In Figure 3.58 from 'With a Lily in Your Hand', Whitacre constructs an extended F-sharp Lydian chord through polychordalism:

[47] Owen, p. 10.

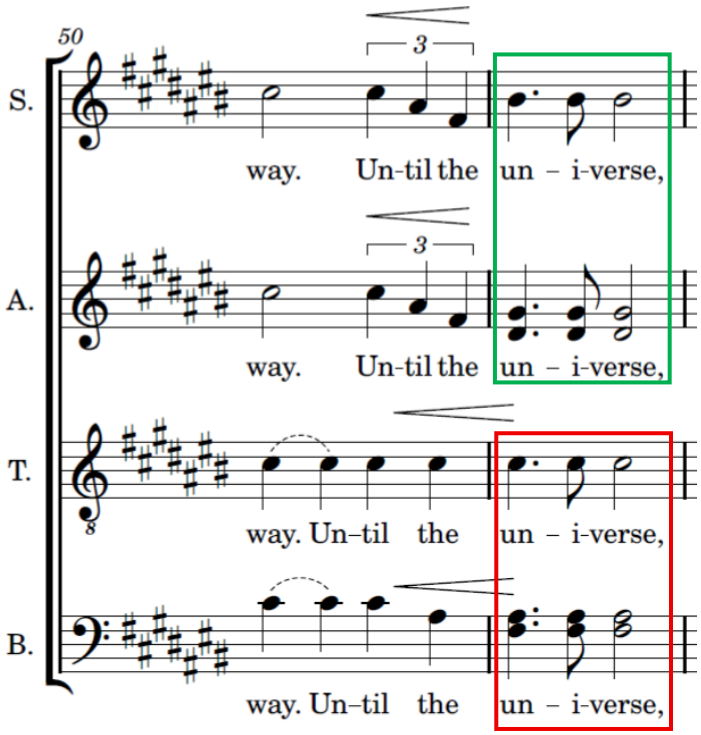


Figure 3.58: A polychord of F-sharp major (red) and G-sharp major (green) in 'With a Lily in Your Hand', bar 51.

Since these stacked chords consist of notes belonging to a single diatonic scale, F-sharp major in the case if 'i thank You God', they create a harmony that is familiar and accessible, unlike some of the more challenging bitonal harmonies found in works such as Ives' *Psalm 67* and Edward Elgar's 'There is sweet music' (1907), in which multiple key signatures are utilised.

While polychordalism is a thematically interesting method for expanding chordal harmony, it also contains a functional purpose, as alluded to in the analysis of *Water Night*. Polychordalism, particularly that which is achieved through triadic increase, allows a conductor to rehearse the choir in two separate groups to develop security within their line before combining the two together to create the wash of extended harmony. As an emic composer of choral music, Whitacre understands the needs of choral singers and the pedagogical methods used by conductors to teach singers, particularly at the collegiate level in which Whitacre began singing and composing. Polychordalism lends coherence to extended harmonies in Whitacre's work, in turn providing a gateway for amateur singers to learn and perform these works. This is yet another factor indicating Whitacre's practical knowledge of the choral instrument, envisaging the challenges and solutions that can be composed into his works.

Tonality: Pandiatonicism and the Lydian Mode

Whitacre's works often avoid modulation or high levels of deviation from an established key or modality. This is potentially related to his 'Golden Brick' method of composition, where works are built upon a singular musical idea, which for Whitacre may mean a specific chord in a specific key. Four of the five pieces examined in this chapter maintain a constant tonal centre or toneset throughout. The exception to this trend is 'i thank You God', in which Whitacre frequently shifts between modes and tonalities, echoing the ecstatic, free-form poetry of the source text. In the works that maintain more consistent tonal and modal frameworks, functional and conventional harmonic relationships are often weakened to undermine aural associations with traditional diatonicism. This is most prevalent in *i carry your heart*, in which Whitacre judiciously avoids chords in the 'home key' of G major in root position for the entirety of the piece. By undercutting the tonal gravity of the tonic chord, Whitacre imparts a weightless, floating feeling to the harmonies in his works, achieving the New Transcendentalist pandiatonic soundworld to great effect. Functional harmonic relationships in his works are further destabilised through use of parallel motion, extended chords without conventional resolutions of dissonance, and cluster harmonies. This suggests that Whitacre's harmonic palette is pandiatonic, functioning within familiar tonal frameworks while resisting the hierarchies of pitches and chords present in traditional diatonicism.

While many of the works draw on the toneset of the major or minor scales, the Lydian mode and its relative minor of the Dorian mode hold a place of prominence in Whitacre's oeuvre. As discussed above, the first chord of his debut composition, 'Go Lovely Rose', is a cluster chord constructed from a rising B-lydian scale. Cluster chords in Whitacre's works are often built upon Lydian or Dorian scales. This includes, for example, the two cluster chords found in *A Boy and a Girl*, the first of which is within an extended E-dorian chord, and the second of which is based on an F-lydian chord. It can therefore be concluded that not only are cluster chords a significant component of Whitacre's New Transcendentalism, but also cluster chords containing Lydian modal characteristics.

The centrality of the Lydian mode in Whitacre's music is also reflected in the gravitation towards the chord of IV in the major context or the chord of VI in the minor context. In *i carry your heart*, the only instances in which the tonic note of G is sung by the bass is as the fifth in a C chord. The opening phrase of 'i thank You God' arrives on the chord of IV in C major, an extended F chord, at the apex of the phrase. This is followed by a cycle of chords resolving to an extended chord of IV in first inversion:

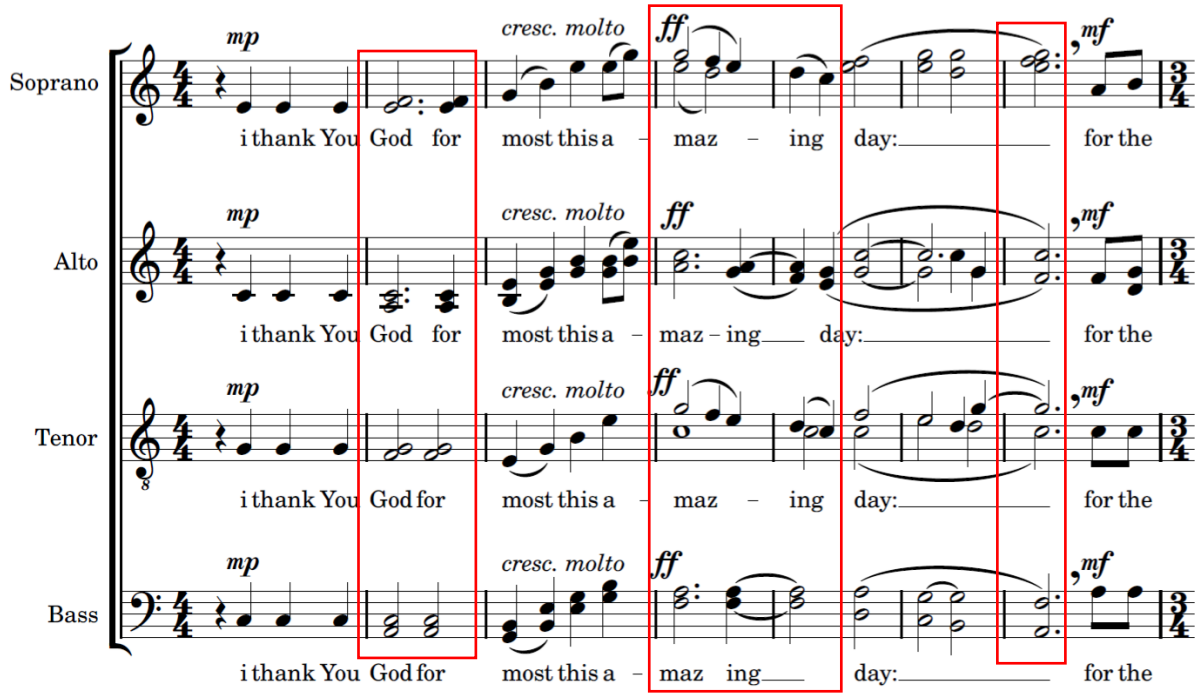


Figure 3.59: Prominence of the chord of IV in varying inversions in the opening phrase of 'i thank You God.'

At the climax of *Water Night*, the voice parts fan out in *divisi* to construct an eleven-note cluster chord over the chord of VI in B-flat minor:

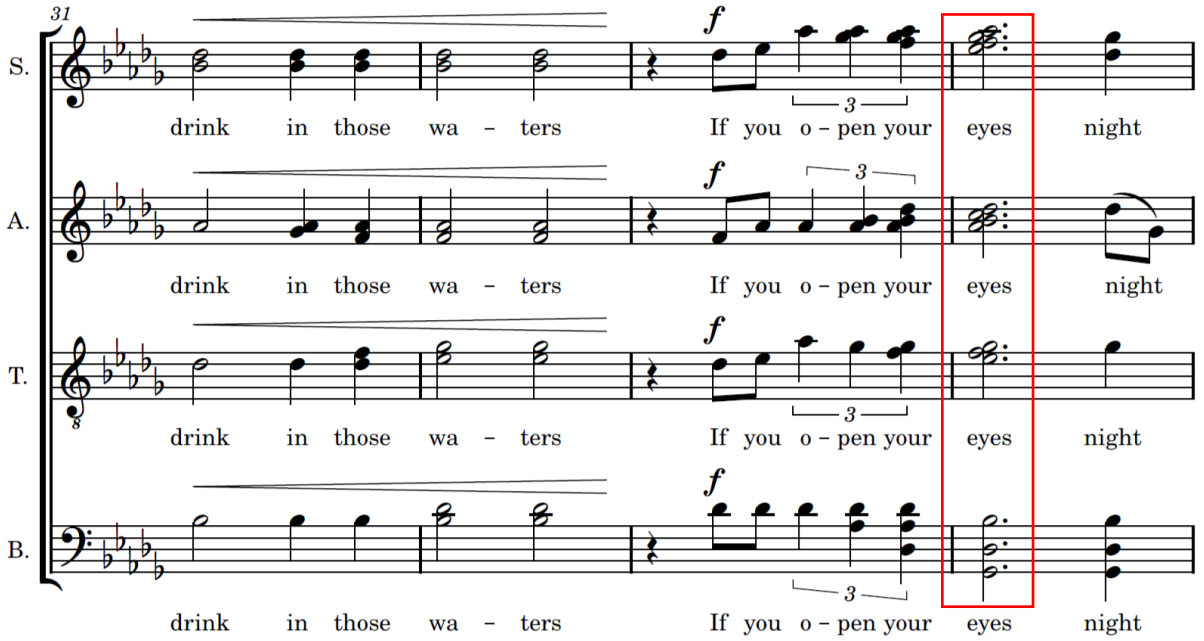


Figure 3.60: The chord of VI in B-flat minor at the climax of *Water Night*, bar 34.

The presence of this chord at climactic moments is a common feature of Whitacre's works, displaying a sense of tonal gravity towards the chord. This intersects with the prominence of the Lydian mode as it is the chord upon which the mode in based.

Use of the Lydian mode enables Whitacre to compose secundal chords with a greater number of consecutive intervals of a whole tone. The harsh dissonance of a semitone clash is often retained for moments of emotional impact in Whitacre's works, while the clash of a tone is presented almost as a consonant interval due to its frequency, eschewing traditional notions of consonance and dissonance. The Lydian tetrachord is the only sequence of three whole-tone steps in conventional modal harmony, creating the opportunity for the composer to write four stacked pitches without using a semitone clash while adhering to familiar tonesets. It is notable also that Whitacre's only use of a non-tonal sequence of pitches in the works examined above is the use of a flat-seven sharp-eleven chord in *Water Night* (see Figure 3.15). By arranging the clustered pitches from the flattened seventh up (D-flat, E-flat F, G, A, B-flat), Whitacre creates a six-note cluster that features four consecutive whole tones intervals and a semitone clash at the top.

While scholars such as Shrock have associated pandiatonicism and secundal harmony with the work of Whitacre,[48] the analysis in this thesis reveals the previously unexplored connection between whole-tone secundal harmony and the Lydian mode in Whitacre's compositional language. The timbral effect of whole-tone secundal clashes and the Lydian 'flavour' of these modal harmonies are key components of the idiosyncratic style of New Transcendentalism, separating this soundworld from other neomodal and neotonal choral composition.

Tension/Release Phrases Mimicking the 'Musical Breath'

A recurring theme in Whitacre's comments on his compositions is the concept of the human breath as a lens through which musical form and phrasing is understood. The IPS Analysis in this chapter confirms Whitacre's statements regarding his structuring of works according to the human breath:

[48] Shrock, p. 760.

> The first is — and it's the most fundamental thing I think I do when I compose music for choir — is I think about the breath. And I think about what Schoenberg famously said, that 'a phrase is any group of notes that can be sung in one breath.'[49]

The prevalence of Tension/Release and Departure/Return phrases in Whitacre's music demonstrates how he utilises these IPSs to great effect in mimicking the breath, increasing tension with each inhalation, and releasing with the exhalation. In an interview with the author, Whitacre summarised his musical style as 'contraction and expansion, contraction and expansion', using hand gestures to communicate the desired effect.[50] Occasionally, this link is intentionally is subverted. Whitacre may write long phrases that are impossible to sing in one breath, encouraging the choir to use staggered breathing, to subvert the breathing pattern adopted by the audience through listening to a work:

> [T]he final note at the end of Lux where they're holding for 45 seconds. We do it with stagger breathing. But I think the audience hears that, and at some point you think that's actually impossible. At some point, there should be a breath there, and there's not, and it creates this sense of transcendence, like you're listening to something superhuman. And so oftentimes I'll play with that, the length of phrases, knowing that I can use stagger breathing to make them impossibly long.[51]

This is reflected in the IPS Analysis of this phrase demonstrated in Chapter Two. The phrase is a Steady State phrase, subverting the Tension/Release pattern that dominates the work, showing how Whitacre manipulates integrated parameters to achieve the 'sense of transcendence.' The IPS Analysis in this chapter not only confirms the formal principle of the human breath adopted by Whitacre, it also demonstrates how he achieves it.

The intense focus of Whitacre's compositions on the breath reinforces New Transcendentalism's intrinsic connection to choral singing. As the physical sensation of singing clustered pitches demonstrated in the discussion of secundal harmony above links the harmonic palette of New Transcendentalism to the choral idiom, the concept of the breath as an organising principle connects its formal structures with choral singing.

[49] Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Conclusion: Refining his Technique

With *i carry your heart*, it appears that Whitacre has consolidated his compositional language into a more precise and concise style, echoing a statement he made in 2004: 'I am constantly trying to refine my palette for each piece to just a few simple brushstrokes and gestures.'[52] In an interview with Phillip Swan in 2006, he stated that his intention was to refine his compositional language beyond simply adding notes to create thicker textures; when asked how he felt his compositional style had developed since 1995, Whitacre responded:

> I would like to think that I'm getting […] that it's all getting sort of more elegant in a way. That I'm able to use fewer notes and fewer gestures to say the same sort of thing. I would like to think that, but I don't know if it's true. But that's certainly what I hope would be true.'[53]

These quotes, combined with the analysis of *i carry your heart* above, make clear that Larson's contention that the use of increasing and decreasing *divisi* and textural density is a 'defining characteristic' of Whitacre's music is no longer true in his later period. For this reason, *i carry your heart* may be the finest and most cogent demonstration of New Transcendentalism achieved by Whitacre.

Another potential reason for Whitacre's more conservative approach towards texture in his later works is the changing nature of the ensembles for which he is writing. At the beginning of his career, the majority of his commissions came from high-level collegiate and professional ensembles capable of extensive *divisi* and challenging vocal lines. Since his early period, he has composed for children's choirs and amateur ensembles. These ensembles demand less complex textures and more intuitive and approachable lines for ease of teaching to singers. Whitacre's creativity in the early period of his career faced no limitations due to the capabilities of the choirs for which he composed. It is possible that the experience of composing within the limitations of a children's choir and amateur ensembles necessitated that he refine his compositional approach to achieve stylistic coherence within a simpler musical structure. While *i carry your heart* was premiered by the fully professional Los Angeles Master Chorale, Whitacre's experience of paring back his textural palette appears to have enabled him to achieve his goal of creating his New Transcendentalist soundworld with fewer notes and fewer gestures.

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[52] Eric Whitacre, 'Eric Whitacre', *Composers on Composing for Band*, volume 2, ed. Mark Camphouse (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2004), pp. 253–268, p. 255.
[53] Swan, pp. 140–141.

One consistent theme throughout Whitacre's composition is his enthusiasm to study particular techniques within a work. These include silences in *A Boy and a Girl*, polychordal harmony in 'i thank You God', and multi-choral canon-writing in *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*. These works present rigorous experimentation with the technique while maintaining his signature New Transcendentalist soundworld. This has been observed by Whitacre himself: 'I feel like, no matter what style or how hard I try to push myself in whatever direction, it always seems to sound like me.'[54] This demonstrates Whitacre's desire to push the boundaries of New Transcendentalism while achieving a remarkable consistency of style throughout his oeuvre.

While Whitacre has employed a New Transcendentalist compositional approach throughout his choral output, many composers have engaged with elements of New Transcendentalism in certain works while experimenting with other styles and forms in their composition. The following chapter will examine instances of New Transcendentalist features in works by Jake Runestad, Dale Trumbore, Dan Forrest, Marques L.A. Garrett, and Susan LaBarr. While these composers have written in a wide variety of styles, each of them has engaged in some way with New Transcendentalism, expanding the style beyond Whitacre's individual contribution.

[54] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

Chapter Four

Expanding New Transcendentalism: Comparative Analysis

> *In the choral world, people like Eric Whitacre and Morton Lauridsen are so iconic and have had such a strong influence on everything. So I'm sure I've been influenced by them in some way*.[1]
>
> Jake Runestad, 2023

> *And of course, Eric Whitacre in the American scene is kind of the most ubiquitous composer*.[2]
>
> Dan Forrest, 2024

> *I feel like every composer or choral person of a certain generation loves Eric Whitacre, had an Eric Whitacre phase. So, like many composers—I feel—I had one of his albums on repeat*.[3]
>
> Dale Trumbore, 2024

While Eric Whitacre is widely regarded as the epochal figure of New Transcendentalism alongside Morten Lauridsen, it has been over three decades since he first began his compositional career while studying at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Between 2000–09, he was the third most frequently programmed composer at the biennial National Conferences of the ACDA behind Johannes Brahms and J. S. Bach, with twenty separate performances of his works at five conferences.[4] This number fell in the 2010s to twelve as concert programmes at the conference became more diversified. Since the apex of Whitacre's popularity during the 2000s, a new generation of choral composers has emerged in the United States who have engaged with the stylistic features of New Transcendentalism popularised by Whitacre in their own choral output. The second research question of the study is considered

[1] Jake Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.
[2] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 23 April 2024.
[3] Dale Trumbore, interview with the author, 7 March 2024.
[4] Jonathan Randall Hall, 'An Index of Choral Music Performed During the National Conventions of the American Choral Directors Association (1991–2019)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2020), pp. 70–71.

in this chapter: To what extent do other American choral composers beyond Whitacre engage with the compositional language of New Transcendentalism? The chapter presents comparative analysis of IPS construction and stylistic approaches in select works by five contemporary American composers: Dale Trumbore (b. 1987), Jake Runestad (b. 1986), Dan Forrest (b. 1978), Marques L.A. Garrett (b. 1984), and Susan LaBarr (b. 1981). Due to the limitations of this thesis, one work by each composer is structurally analysed through IPS to demonstrate the applicability of this framework for identifying formal structures in New Transcendentalist Music, and multiple works are considered under Critical Score Analysis (CSA) to identify shared stylistic features.

Jake Runestad (b. 1986) is one of the most sought after choral composers in America for commissions, masterclasses and guest conducting appearances. His works have received an Emmy Award and two Grammy Award nominations. He was the recipient of the prestigious Brock Commission for the 2019 ACDA National Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, and the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas, Texas concluded with a performance of Runestad's *Earth Symphony* (2021) for choir and orchestra conducted by the composer. In the 2010s, he was the second most frequently programmed composer at National ACDA conferences after Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds, with fifteen performances across five conferences.[5] He studied composition under Kevin Puts and Libby Larsen, and his works have been commissioned, performed and recorded by many of America's top-performing choral ensembles, such as Seraphic Fire, VocalEssence, Cantus and Conspirare. In his DMA Thesis on Runestad's *American Triptych* (2017), Neviton Barros argues that Runestad's compositions capture the 'essence' of Transcendentalism, referencing a text by Henry David Thoreau used in the work, and positing that his works are written 'in consonance with the planet's and the humanity's needs.'[6] His works draw inspiration from a wide variety of musical influences and a diverse range of texts and poets.

Dale Trumbore (b. 1987) is a composer and author based in the Los Angeles area. She has composed for large and small instrumental and vocal forces, with the majority of her output consisting of choral music. She studied composition at the University of Southern California under Morten Lauridsen. She has received major national and international commissions and performances from professional and collegiate choral ensembles, including the Los Angeles

[5] Hall, p. 81.
[6] Neviton Barros, 'Jake Runestad, An American Triptych: Conductor's Guide' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2021).

Master Chorale, Conspirare and the Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, Ireland. In 2018, Trumbore won the inaugural Raymond W. Brock Competition for Professional Composers with her work *In the Middle*.[7]

Compared to other composers in this study, Dan Forrest (b. 1978) has composed fewer unaccompanied choral works proportional to his output. Many of his works feature optional or prescribed accompaniment, perhaps owing to his background as a repetiteur for choir rehearsals from an early age.[8] Alongside his career as a composer, he serves as Vice President of Publications and Editor at Beckenhorst Press and holds the position of Professor of Composition at Furman University. Forrest is a dedicated advocate for choral composers in America. He previously served as Chair of the National ACDA Composition Committee and is an active member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). Forrest engages deeply with Christian spirituality through his work, often writing a prayer or reflection on scores of his sacred works, and including a section on his personal faith on his website.[9]

Marques L. A. Garrett (b. 1984) is a composer, conductor, singer and researcher of choral music. On his website, Garrett divides his catalogue of works into idiomatic and non-idiomatic repertoire.[10] His idiomatic repertoire directly engages with styles and genres associated with African-American culture, such as gospel, spiritual and jazz. Non-idiomatic works refer to any works composed outside of these styles. Alongside his work as an accomplished composer and singer, Garrett is a scholar and editor of choral repertoire with a particular focus on the work of black composers. He is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Choral Music by Black Composers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), a collection of non-idiomatic works by black composers. He has conducted extensive research into the works of R. Nathaniel Dett (1882–1943), and has published articles on the integration of non-idiomatic repertoire of black composers into choral programmes, arguing that 'the representation of the original works of Black composers rarely receive the same attention in comparison to similar

[7] This open competition founded in 2018 invites entries of newly written music from ACDA member composers. The award consists of a five thousand dollar prize and a premiere of the work at the ACDA National Conference. It is not to be confused with the Raymond W. Brock Commission for which a highly recognised composer is invited to compose a work for the ACDA National Conference.
[8] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 23 April 2024.
[9] See Dan Forrest, 'What I Believe', *Dan Forrest* (online), <https://danforrest.com/what-i-believe/> [Accessed 28 February 2025].
[10] Marques L. A. Garrett, 'Works', *MLAG Music* (online), <https://www.mlagmusic.com/works> [Accessed 26 February 2025].

contributions of white composers.'[11] He holds a PhD in Music Education from Florida State University, and currently hold the position of Associate Professor of Choral Studies at the University of North Texas.

Susan LaBarr (b. 1981) is a choral composer, arranger and editor based in Missouri. Her extensive catalogue of choral compositions is performed widely across the United States. She regularly receives commissions from collegiate and professional ensembles such as New York Polyphony and Seraphic Fire. She also serves as Editor of Walton Music. Her compositional style fuses elements of New Transcendentalism with songwriting techniques of melody-writing and strophic structure. LaBarr's utilisation of conventional formal structures makes IPS Analysis less helpful in gleaning additional data on how she constructs phrases, though CSA reveals her approach to incorporating discrete New Transcendentalist features into her work.

While each of these five composers has developed their own unique compositional voice, characteristics of New Transcendentalism can be found in structural and compositional features present in their works. The combinative approach of IPS Analysis and CSA outlined in Chapter Two is used below to uncover New Transcendentalist features in their works, thereby demonstrating how these composers are engaged in a dialogue both with Whitacre and with each other in the forward enhancement of New Transcendentalist composition.

IPS Analysis

As demonstrated in the analysis of works by Eric Whitacre in Chapter Three, IPS Analysis is a useful tool for identifying phrases in New Transcendentalist music that eschews the traditional parameters of musical structure, such as melodic and harmonic development and recapitulation. Furthermore, it uncovers connections between structural units that may not be immediately apparent from thematic or harmonic analysis. This analytical framework has broad applications beyond the works of Whitacre, revealing how composers use parametric changes in combination to build structures within New Transcendentalist choral works. While this approach is most effective in works that adhere strictly to the New Transcendentalist approach of undermining traditional structural signifiers, some composers favour conventional methods

[11] Marques L.A. Garrett, 'Unaccompanied Non-Idiomatic Choral Music of Black Composers', *The Choral Journal*, 61 (2020), 16–33, p. 17.

of structuring works, using established structures, or melodic and harmonic organisation while incorporating New Transcendentalist musical features. In such works, IPS Analysis can be deployed, though it does not reveal structural features beyond the clear structures delineated by the melody or harmonic framework. An IPS Analysis of one work by each of the five composers under review in this chapter is presented below to demonstrate the analytical potential of this framework when applied to composers other than the archetype of New Transcendentalism, Eric Whitacre. Select structural phrases are examined in detail to reveal how they construct formal structures through integrated parametric changes.

Spirited Light (Runestad)

Spirited Light (2014) was commissioned by the Spire Chamber Ensemble, a professional choir based in Kansas City, and conductor Ben Spalding. The text of the work is a translation by Barbara Newman of the *Antiphon for the Angels* (*O gloriosissimi lux vivens angeli*) by Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179):

> Spirited light! On the edge
> of the Presence your yearning
> burns in the secret darkness,
> O angels, insatiably
> into God's gaze.
>
> Perversity could not touch your beauty;
> you are essential joy.
> But lost your companion,
> angel of the crooked wings.
> He sought the summit,
> shot down the depths of God,
> and plummeted past Adam –
> that a mud-bound spirit might soar.

The composer took inspiration from Hildegard's writings on the intense spiritual experience of her visions of the divine, often featuring vivid imagery and expressive language.[12] IPS Analysis of *Spirited Light* (Table 4.1) illuminates Runestad's approach to infusing the programmatic underpinning of the work into its architecture:

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	First line of text
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	1–2	Spirited light!
	Directional (Increasing)	3–4	Spirited light!
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	5–9	Spirited light!
	Directional (Decreasing)	9–12	Spirited light!
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	12–19	on the edge
Parallel Episode	Tension/Release	20–22	Perversity could not
	Tension/Release	22–24	you are essential joy
Parallel Episode	Tension/Release	25–27	But lost
	Directional (Increasing)	28–32	angel of the crooked
	Tension/Release	32–34	but lost
	Directional (Increasing)	34–36	angel of the crooked
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	37–47	He sought the summit
	Directional (Decreasing)	48–52	plummeted
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	52–53	that a mud-bound spirit
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	54–62	that a mud-bound spirit
	Directional (Increasing)	62–68	that a mud-bound spirit
	Directional (Increasing)	68–73	that a mud-bound spirit
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	73–78	Spirited light!
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	79–80	Spirited light!
	Directional (Increasing)	81–85	Spirited light!
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	85–90	Spirited light!
	Directional (Increasing)	90–94	Spirited light!
	Directional (Increasing)	94–96	O light!

Table 4.1: IPS Analysis of *Spirited Light*.

[12] Jake Runestad, 'Spirited Light', *Jake Runestad* (online) <https://jakerunestad.com/products/spirited-light?srsltid=AfmBOorf6wqOmkJhATa8YybvinO5ACMOyvv3Mu8edm5zK3S0e50vBdQP> [Accessed 24 February 2025].

This analysis reveals how Runestad reconstructs Hildegard von Bingen's vivid lucid dream in *Spirited Light*. Sixteen of the twenty-five IPSs in the work are Directional (Increasing), including each of the ten IPSs in the final forty-four bars of the work, creating a sustained atmosphere of heightening intensity. Most of the Directional (Increasing) IPSs do not contribute to an overarching Directional (Increasing) IPS Group, including in groups consisting only of IPSs of this nature. Instead, parametric values are abruptly reset before increasing again, creating Parallel Episode IPS Groups. This is apparent in the first IPS Group, the opening four bars of the work (see Figure 4.1):

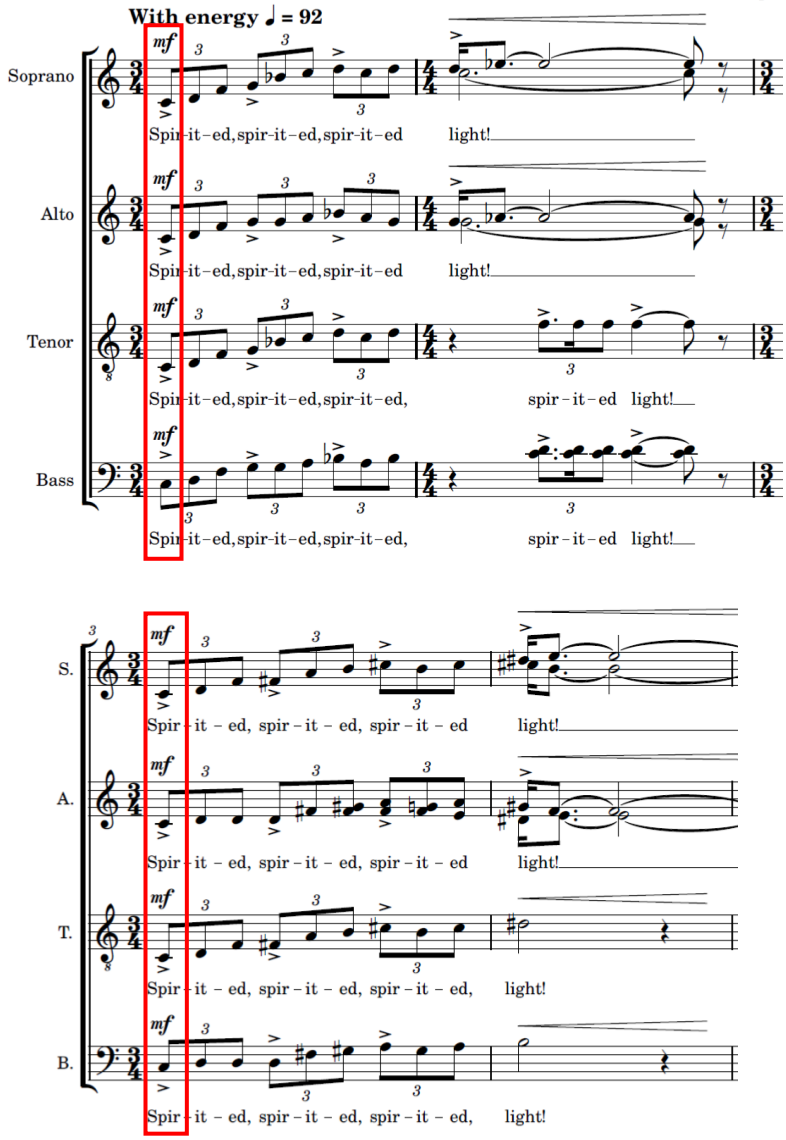


Figure 4.1: A Parallel Episode IPS Group in the opening four bars of *Spirited Light*.

In Figure 4.1 above, we see two consecutive Directional (Increasing) IPSs, each beginning with the choir singing a perfect octave on C at a *mezzo forte* dynamic (shown in red) followed by

increases of register, textural density, and dynamics. Runestad articulates these IPSs by replacement with an abrupt return to initial low parametric values. This articulation of phrases is used repeatedly throughout the work, enabling Runestad to maintain a frenetic, energetic atmosphere of consistent rising and resetting intensity. The effect is to mirror the chaotic, rollercoaster effect of lucid dreams, where each frenzied event is followed by another without necessarily following a linear progression. Through the examination of integrated parametric changes via IPS Analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of structural processes in this work, and how the numerous Directional (Increasing) phrases may be grouped and related to one another and to the programme of the text.

Runestad employs melodic structures throughout *Spirited Light*, contrasting with Whitacre's approach of undermining melody as a primary narrative guide. These melodic structures often guide the listener's ear in delineating formal structures. IPS Analysis bolsters melodic formal analysis by demonstrating the combinative effect of parametric changes within an IPS. For example, the Tension/Release IPS in bars 12–19 features an identifiable melody in the soprano part. This melody has an arch-shaped structure, suggesting a Tension/Release structure. The increase in tension is supported by rising dynamics and textural density alongside an increase in tempo. Tension is then released as dynamics, textural density, register, temporal density and tempo decrease (see Figure 4.2):

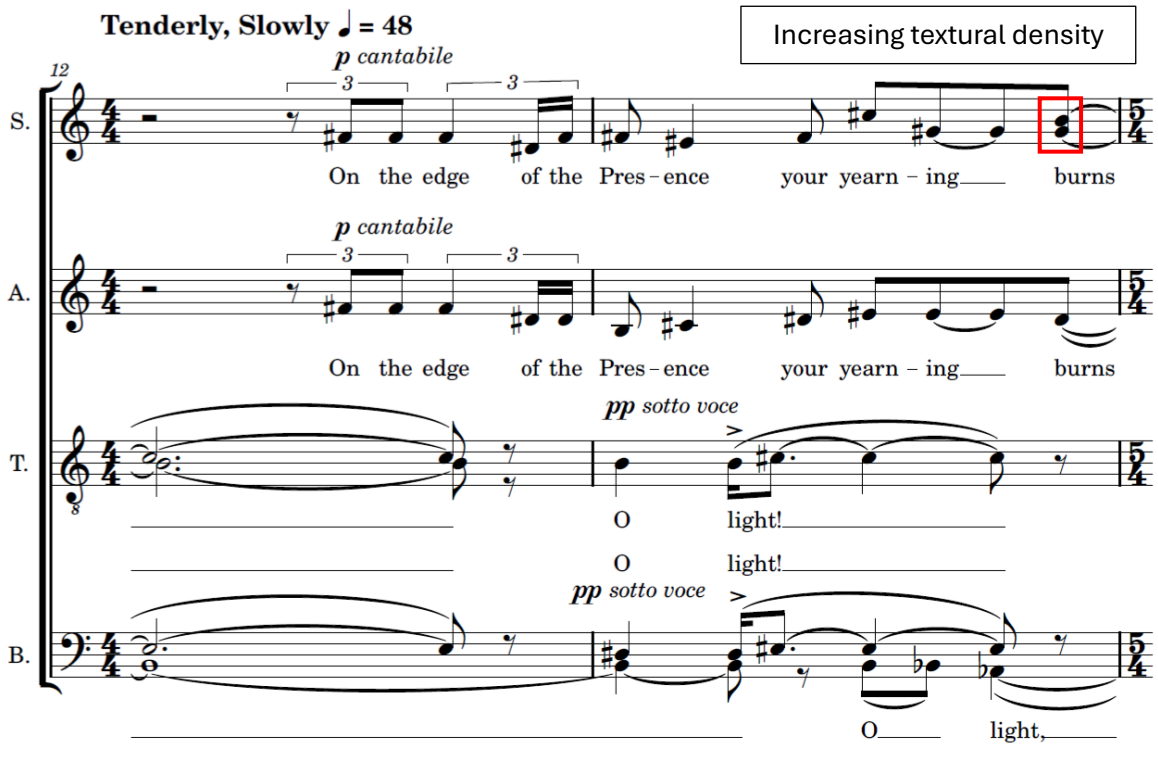


Figure 4.2: A Tension/Release IPS in *Spirited Light*, bars 12–19.
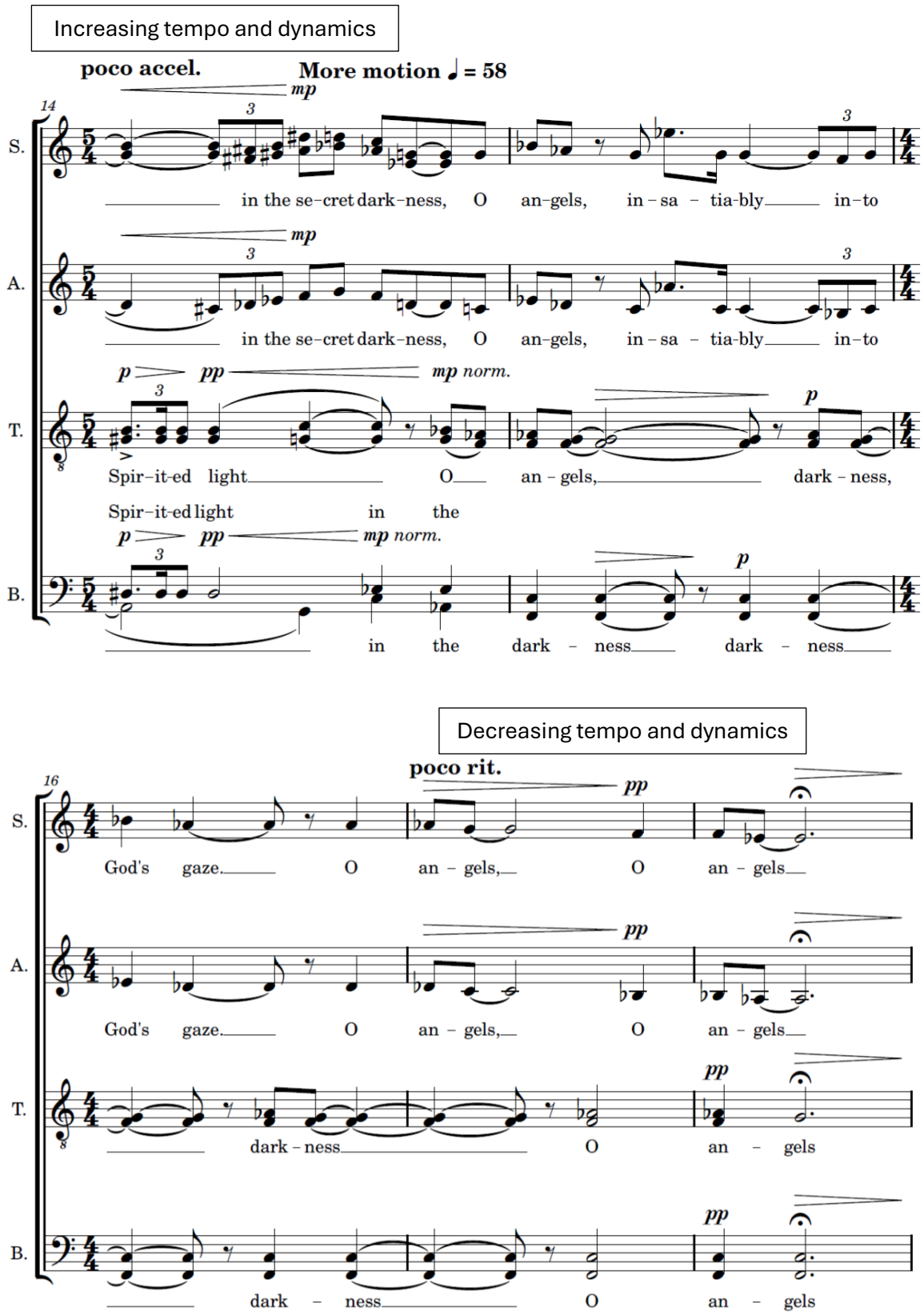


Figure 4.2 (continued).

IPS Analysis reveals how Runestad shapes phrases through more than simple melodic phrasing or functional harmony. The holistic impact of parametric changes support the Tension/Release

structure outlined by the melody, creating a highly cohesive phrase. IPS Analysis of this nature becomes increasingly necessary in works that frequently undermine or omit melodic structures.

After the Storm Passes (Trumbore)

After the Storm Passes (2014) takes its text from Trumbore's long-time collaborator, poet Barbara Crooker. Trumbore has set upwards of thirty-five of Crooker's poems to music, drawn to her reverence for nature and quotidian life.[13] The dramatic text of the work juxtaposes abrasive and forceful language with stillness and beauty, evoking the duality of the violence of a storm and the calmness of its aftermath. The poem begins abruptly with the first line following on from the title of the poem:

> AFTER THE STORM
>
> passes, the wind rinses the sky to aquamarine.
> In this clean new light, the corn is polished,
> carved of jade, leaves of beryl, viridian;
> the gold of the wheatfields, stripes of beaten ore.
>
> Under this great glass eye
> we stand, on the rim of summer,
> the bones of winter under our feet,
> washed again in this bright loud light.

As will be demonstrated later through CSA, many of the compositional devices employed during the piece have a programmatic function, evoking aspects of storms and extreme weather conditions. IPS Analysis shows that this is also true of the formal design of the piece. Through integrating the subject of the text into the methods of composition rather than simple word-painting, Trumbore enmeshes the atmosphere of the storm into the work by indirect mimesis. Five of the eight IPS groups within the work are articulated with sustained notes sung by two solo singers (marked with an asterisk in Table 4.2).

[13] Dale Trumbore, interview with author, 7 March 2024.

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	First line of text
Directional (Decreasing)	Directional (Decreasing)	1–4	Ah
	Directional (Decreasing)	5–8	Ah
	Directional (Decreasing)	9–12	Ah
Tension/Release*	Tension/Release	12–14	After the storm passes
	Tension/Release	14–18	the wind
	Tension/Release	18–23	rinses the sky (bass)
Tension/Release*	Directional (Increasing)	23–24	in this clean
	Tension/Release	24–27	new light
	Tension/Release	27–31	the corn is polished
Tension/Release*	Tension/Release	31–32	leaves of beryl
	Tension/Release	32–35	viridian
	Departure/Return	35–37	the gold
Directional (Increasing)*	Directional (Increasing)	38–41	stripes of beaten ore
	Tension/Release	42–47	Under this great
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	47–52	on the rim of summer
Directional (Increasing)*	Directional (Increasing)	52–57	the bones of winter
	Directional (Increasing)	58–62	under our feet
Directional (Increasing)	Tension/Release	63–66	Washed again
	Directional (Increasing)	67–70	Washed again
	Tension/Release	71–74	Washed again
	Directional (Increasing)	75–80	in this bright

Table 4.2: IPS Analysis of *After the Storm Passes*.

These moments of stillness fulfil both a functional and aesthetic role as they demarcate formal structures while evoking the calm, ethereal atmosphere that follows a storm. Figure 4.3 below shows two solo voices at the conclusion of the Tension/Release IPS Group in bars 12–23, parametric structures creating a Tension/Release IPS Group in bars 23–31, and two solo voices articulating the end of this IPS Group in bars 30–31.

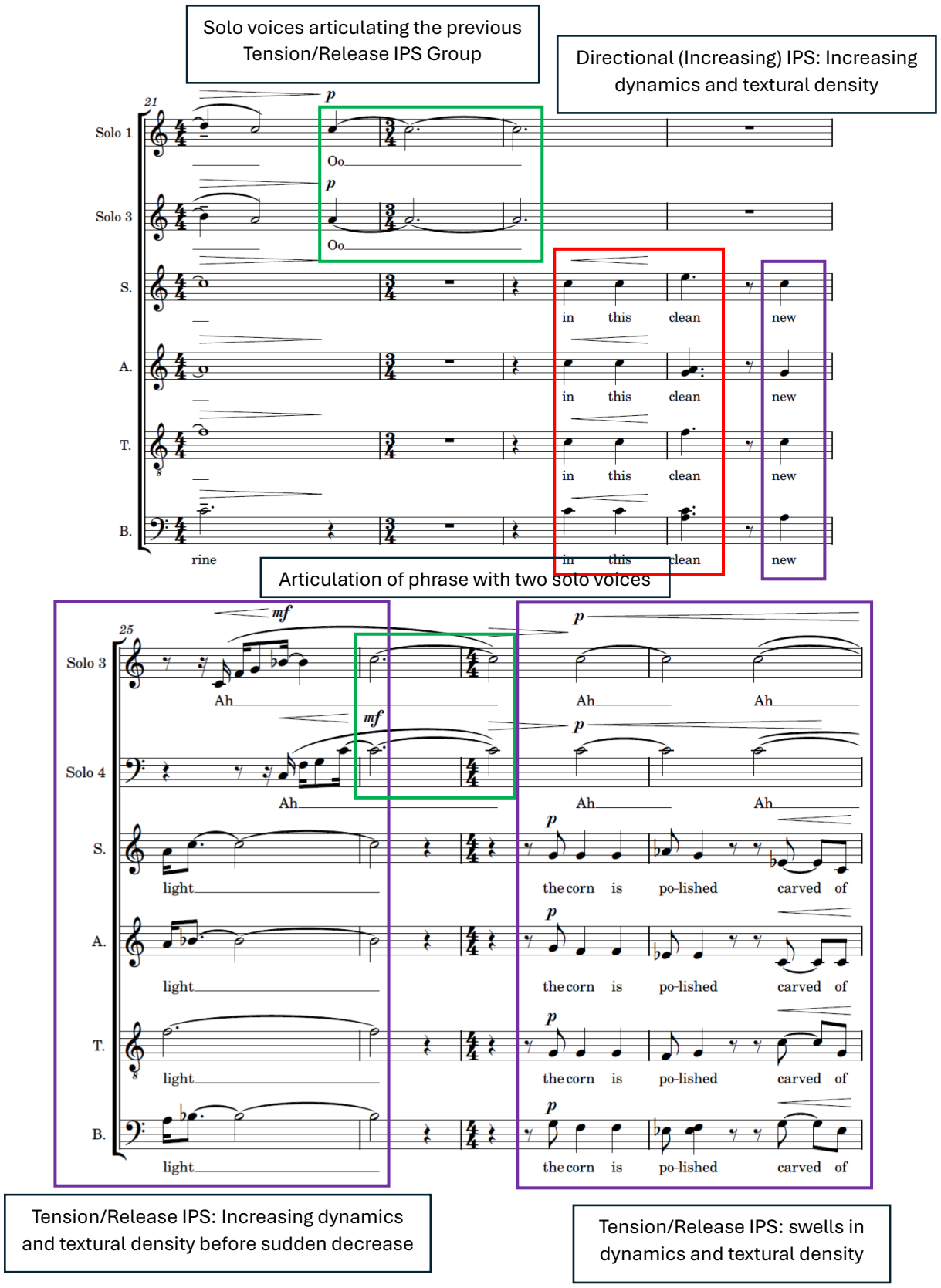


Figure 4.3: A Tension/Release IPS Group in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 23–31, articulated by Solo 3 and Solo 4 singing a perfect octave on A-flat.

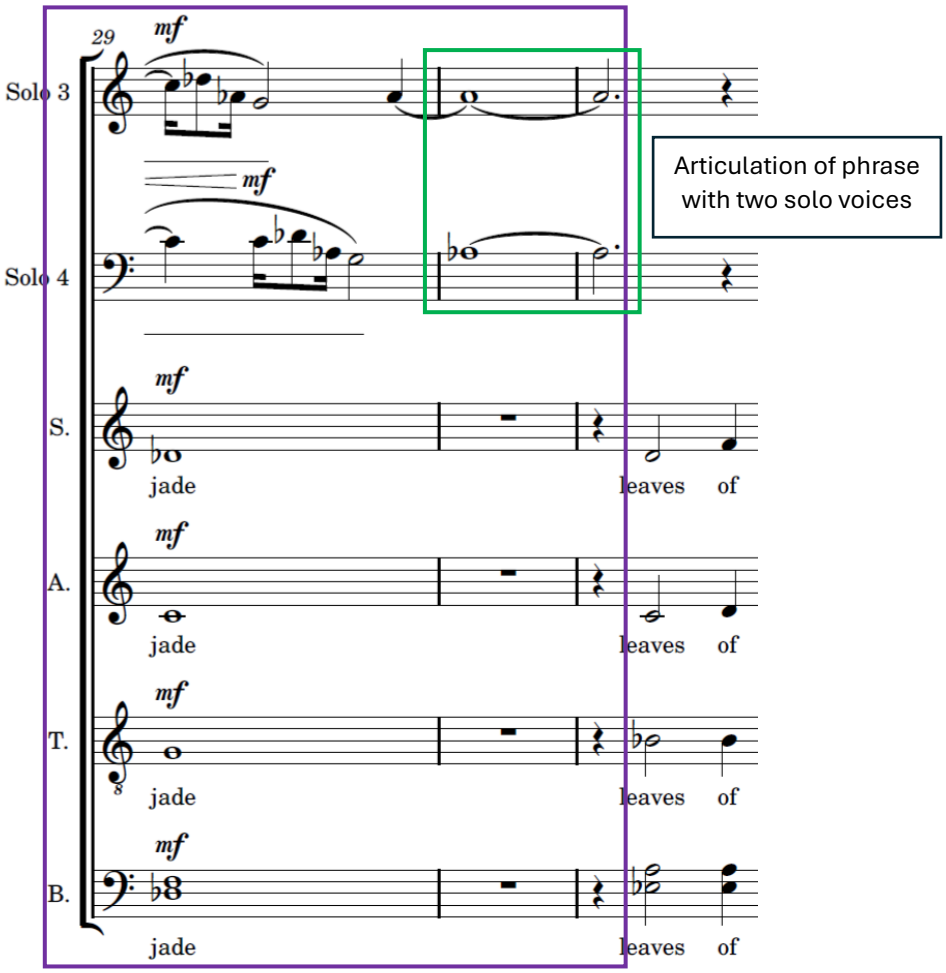


Figure 4.3 (continued).

The other two transitions between IPS groups are demarcated by either a sustained two-note chord, or a silence. The work opens dramatically on a *fortissimo* twelve-part extended chord with inner rhythmic variation. This 'thunder chord' evokes a clap of thunder with a sudden and harsh attack followed by a gradual decay. Temporal and textural density reduces toward the end of the Directional (Decreasing) IPS, as the two solo voices quit on rising *glissandi* in bar 2 and the chorus settles on a sustained chord in bar 3. While bar 3 contains an increase in dynamics over this sustained chord, the greater effect of parametric changes across this phrase represent a broad decrease in parametric intensity. The thunder chord is then followed by a tacet bar (see Figure 4.4):

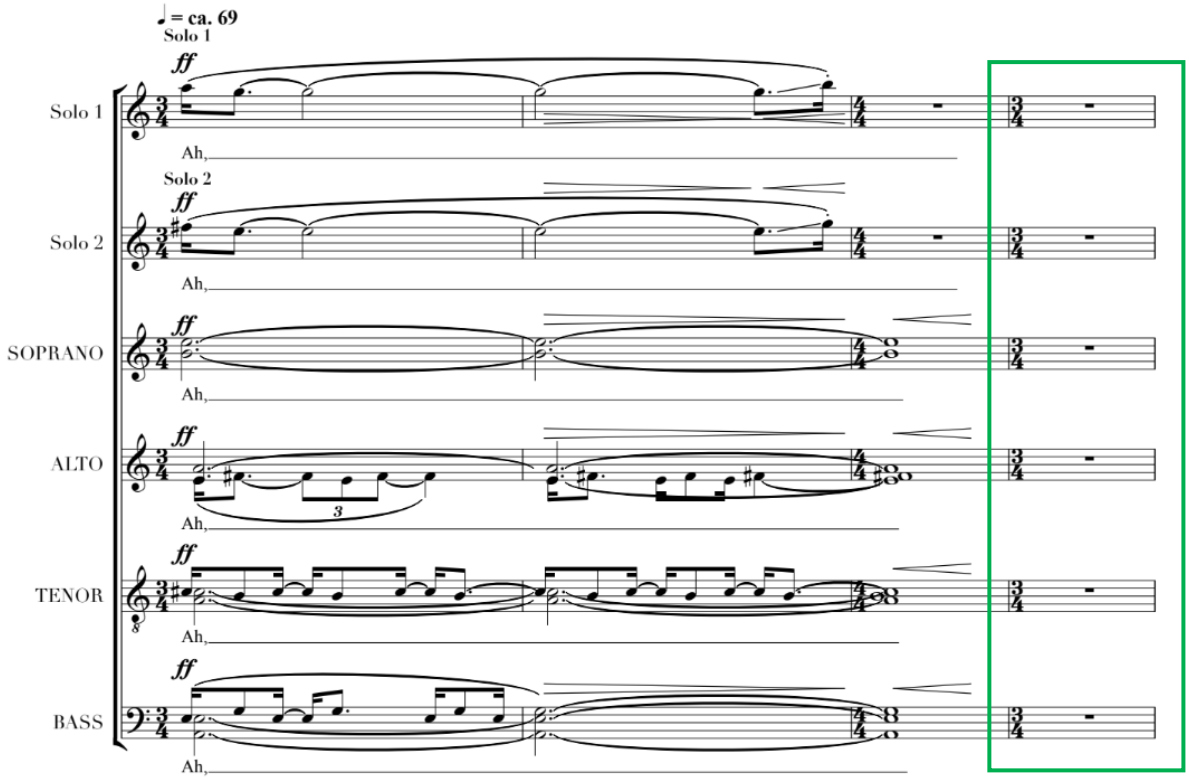


Figure 4.4: The opening IPS of *After the Storm Passes*, articulated with three beats of silence.

Like the abrupt ending of Whitacre's *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, these silences allow the dense *fortissimo* chord to reverberate in a suitable acoustic for choral performance, while also heightening the dramatic effect of the sudden burst of sound. Two variations of this thunder chord follow, creating a broader Directional (Decreasing) IPS Group.

Similar to the bifurcated structure of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, IPSs in this work often feature voices working antagonistically within a more coherent overall structure. The first Tension/Release IPS of the second IPS group for example, set to the text 'After the storm passes', features imitation between the soprano and alto parts, with a reduction in parametric forces occurring in the soprano line while textural density in the alto line increases:

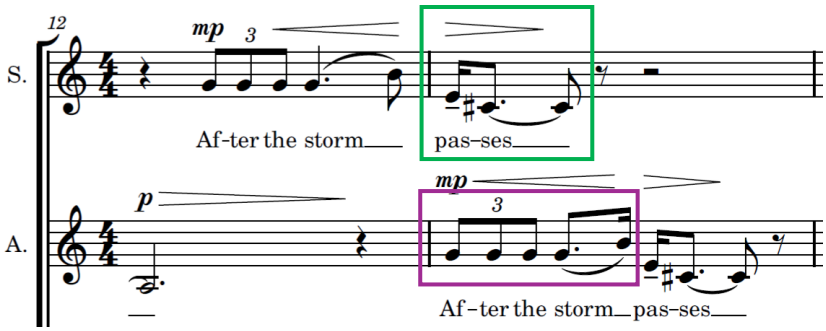


Figure 4.5: Parametric values decreasing in the soprano line (green) while increasing in the alto line (purple), *After the Storm Passes*, bar 13.

This imitation creates textural variety within an overall Tension/Release IPS articulated by a return to the relative parametric values at the beginning of the next IPS.

The analysis above demonstrates the usefulness of IPS Analysis in grouping shorter phrases in a New Transcendentalist work into larger structures to better understand how the piece is organised. Furthermore, it reveals how Trumbore designs phrases without the traditional markers of melodic development or conventional harmonic progressions. Later in this chapter, CSA will be utilised to demonstrate the New Transcendentalist compositional devices employed within these structures.

'Selah' (Forrest)

'Selah' is the third movement of Forrest's choral cycle *Words From Paradise* (2006). Each movement is based upon a singular word taken from Christian scripture:

1. 'Holy'
2. 'Hallelujah'
3. 'Selah'
4. 'Hosanna'
5. 'Amen'

'Selah' was the first of the movements composed by Forrest, winning the 2005 ACDA Raymond Brock Memorial Composition Contest and receiving its premiere at the 2006 ACDA Southwestern Region Conference. Forrest describes the movement as the 'keystone' of the larger work, defining the singular word of the movement as follows: 'It is a term of musical expression and literally means a 'suspension' of music—a pause or rest. This idea is developed

here through the use of both rests and the suspension of harmonic motion.'[14] A critical examination of how Forrest uses integrated musical parameters to create broader structures unveils the relationships between structural units in the work (See Table 4.3 below):

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	1
	Tension/Release	2–8
	Directional (Increasing)	9
	Tension/Release	10–17
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	18–19
	Directional (Increasing)	20–23
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	24–28
	Tension/Release	29–35
	Directional (Increasing)	35–36
	Tension/Release	37–43
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	44–50
	Steady State	50–52
	Directional (Decreasing)	53–56
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	57–58
	Directional (Increasing)	59
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	60–67
	Directional (Increasing)	68–70
Parallel Episode	Directional (Increasing)	71–72
	Tension/Release	73–79
	Directional (Increasing)	80–82
	Tension/Release	83–89

Table 4.3: IPS Analysis of 'Selah' by Dan Forrest.[15]

Forrest bookends the work with two near-identical Parallel Episodes in bars 1–17 and bars 71–89, consisting of a pair of connected Increasing Directional (shown in Figure 4.6 in green) and Tension/Release (shown in purple) IPSs:

[14] Dan Forrest, 'Selah' (Glendale, CA: Hinshaw Music, 2006), p. 2.
[15] This table does not feature a column for text, as the work uses only one word throughout.

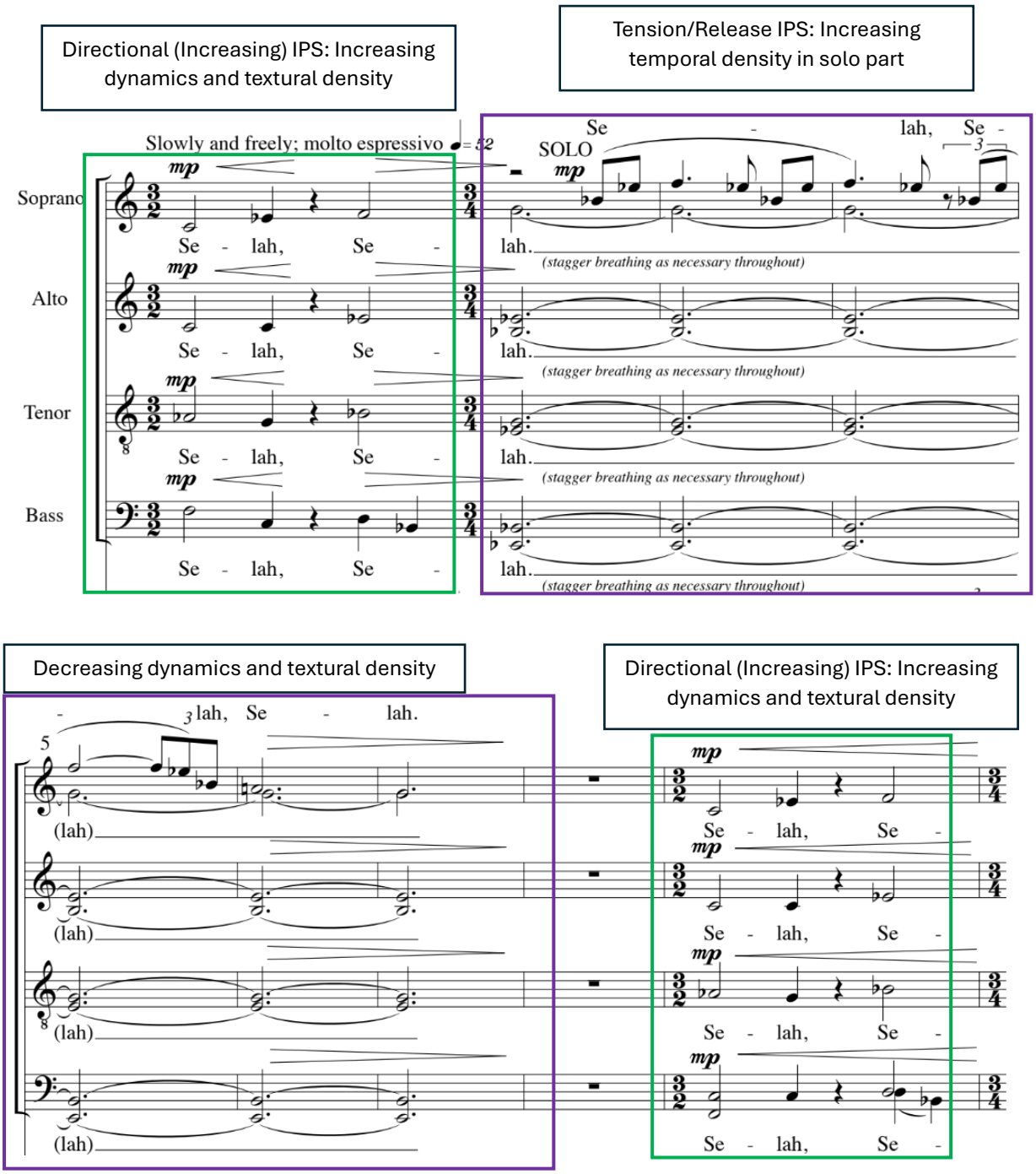


Figure 4.6: A Parallel Episode in ‘Selah’, bars 1–17.

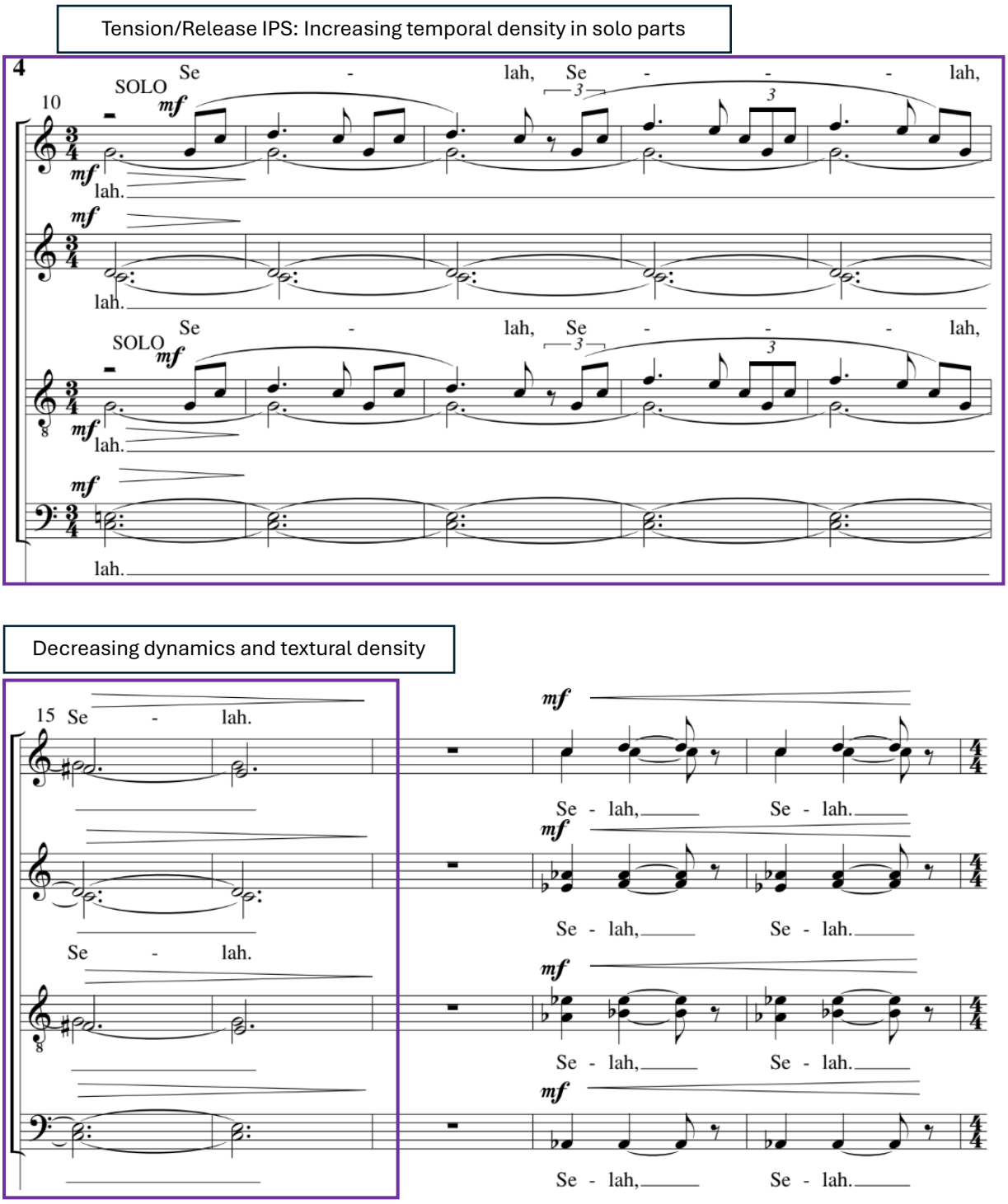


Figure 4.6 (continued).

As shown in Table 4.3, the parametric changes forming this IPS Group are found again in bars 24–43, though this is not apparent from CSA alone as the musical material itself is different (see Figure 4.7):

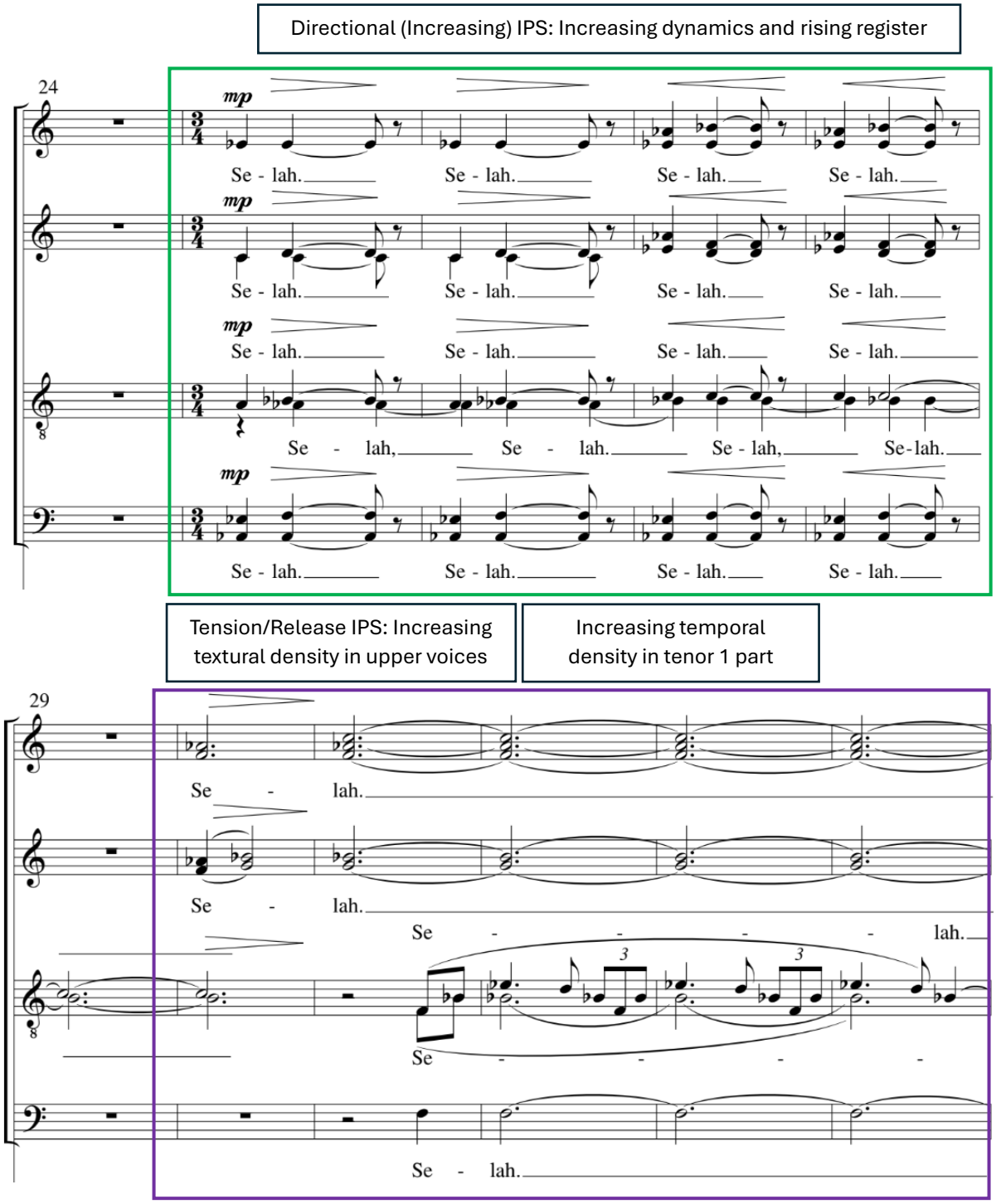


Figure 4.7: A Parallel Episode in ‘Selah’, bars 24–43.

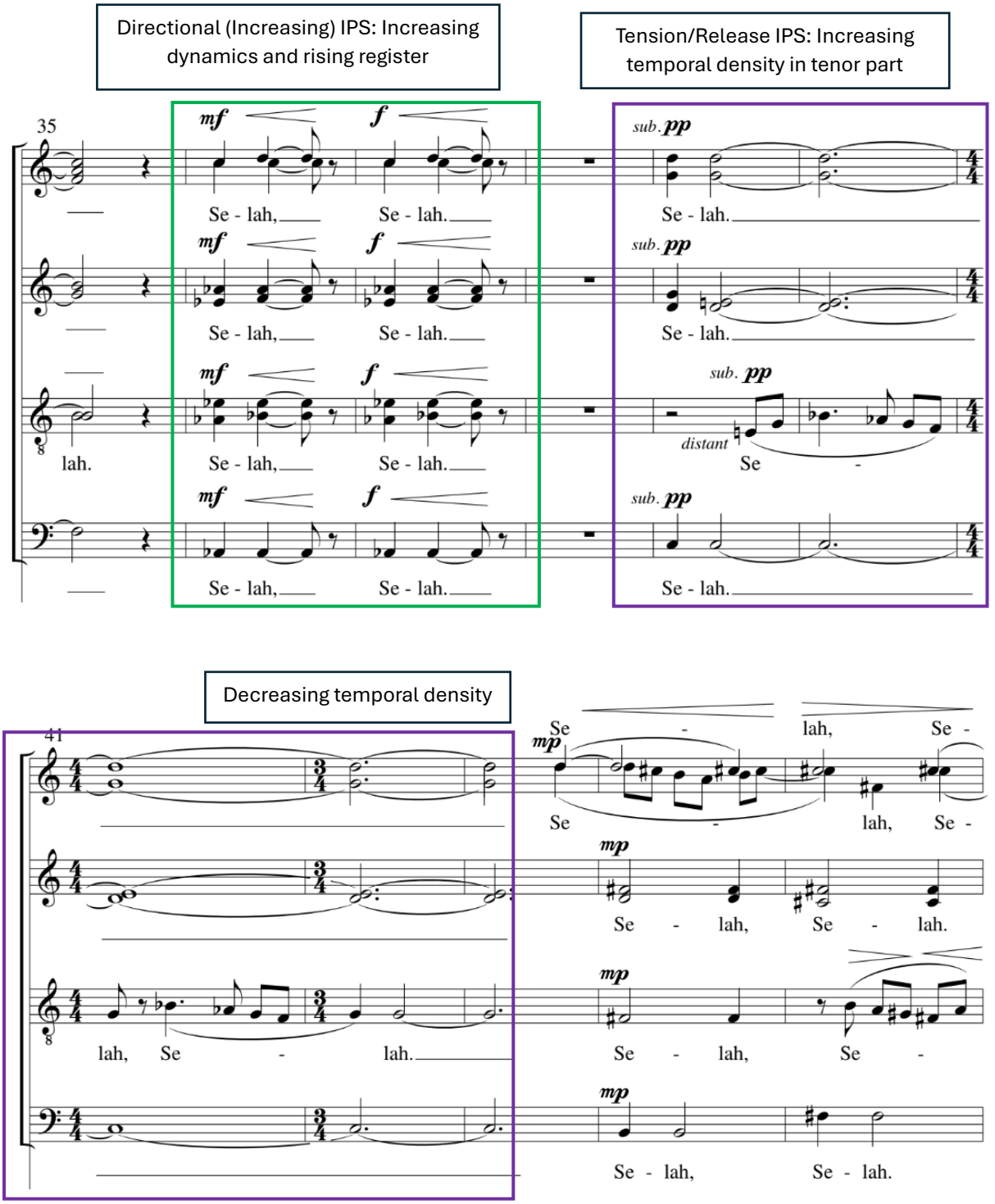


Figure 4.7 (continued).

While the musical material in this central Parallel Episode is quite different to the material found in the opening and closing sections, IPS Analysis demonstrates that the structural processes within this section mirrors that of the opening and closing IPS Groups. While the harmonic and textural material in this middle IPS Group is significantly different to the opening Parallel Episode, the mirroring of the formal process imbues the work with a strong sense of

structural coherence. This enables Forrest to explore the Lydian melody and wall-of-sound timbres that permeate 'Selah' while maintaining formal unity.

I Will Stand With You (Garrett)

I Will Stand With You was composed in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2020, and the ensuing national and global protests and demonstrations under the campaign Black Lives Matter (BLM). It was commissioned by the Festival Singers of Florida, of which Garrett was a member. The work is listed by the composer under non-idiomatic despite its connection to the Black experience in America, as it is not based upon a specific African-American genre of composition. According to Garrett's introduction of the piece, 'The work begins with a plaintive cry for mercy, moves through introspection and requests of forgiveness, and resolves to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly.'[16] This emotional journey is reflected in the text, arranged by Garrett in collaboration with members of the choir.

The text of the work begins with a slogan of the BLM movement, 'Say her name', after which demonstrators would chant the name of a victim of police killings. This is followed by quotes of the last words uttered by victims in high-profile police killings, including the final words of Oscar Grant ("You shot me"), Elijah McClain ("I'm just different") and both Eric Garner and George Floyd ("I can't breathe"). The remainder of the text was compiled by Garrett from notes and messages from members of the choir:

> Say her name.
> "I can't breathe."
> "Please don't let me die."
> "You shot me."
> "I'm just different."
>
> But are you different? We are different yet the same.
> How could I have been so blind?
> The hurt and pain were there.

[16] Marques L.A. Garrett, *I Will Stand With You* (self-published, 2021).

The hatred was hidden.

I am truly sorry.
I will be where racism ends.

We'll strive to be better. I acknowledge your pain.
We'll strive to be better. I'll understand your fear.
We'll strive to be better. I'll fight for your rights.

I will stand with you.

The piece features instructions for spoken word in which members of the choir from non-minority backgrounds are invited to speak out on their resolutions to combat racism over a repeated mantra of 'I will stand with you' sung by the choir. Suggested lines for this section include: 'Will my voice matter? Can I actually make a difference?'; 'I want to speak up; I just don't know how'; 'We cannot stand for peace without first standing for justice.' The composer invites the choir to add their own lines during this section of the work.

Throughout most of the piece, Garrett avoids traditional compositional approaches to melodic and harmonic structural development. IPS Analysis reveals how phrases in the work are designed (see Table 4.4):

IPS Group	**Constituent IPSs**	**Bar Numbers**	**First line of text**
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	1–4	Ah
	Directional (Increasing)	5–7	Say her name
	Directional (Increasing)	8–11	I can't breathe
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	12–19	Say her name
	Directional (Decreasing)	20–27	I can't breathe
Directional (Increasing)	Tension/Release	28–32	But are you diff'rent
	Directional (Increasing)	32–36	How could I
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	36–37	The hatred was hidden
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	38–45	(humming)
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	46–52	I am truly sorry

	Steady State Directional (Decreasing)	52–60 61–64	I will be I will stand with you
Steady State	Steady State	65–72	I will stand with you
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing) Directional (Decreasing)	73–74 75–78	I will stand with you I will stand with you

Table 4.4: IPS Analysis of *I Will Stand with You* by Marques L.A. Garrett.

The climax of the work occurs during the Steady State IPS before the final IPS Group. Here, the choir are instructed to repeat the titular mantra of the work while choir members speak about their engagement with anti-racist action (see Figure 4.8):

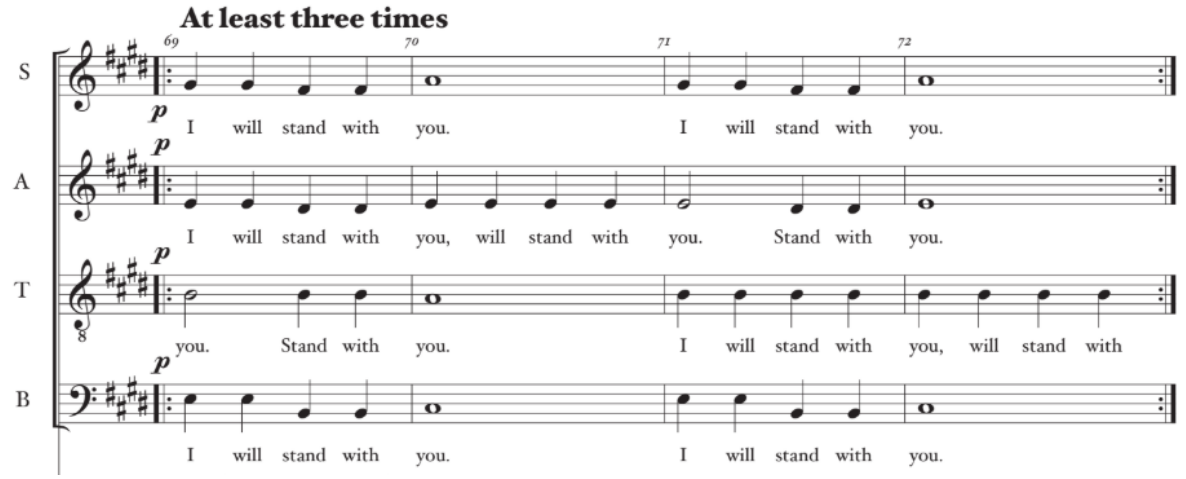


Figure 4.8: The repeated Steady State phrase in bars 69–72 of *I Will Stand with You*.

By using a repeated Steady State phrase here, Garrett shifts the audience's attention to the words being spoken by choir members, ensuring that they can be clearly heard while also enabling the audience to dwell on the words and consider their importance. The use of a Steady State phrase produces a still and contemplative atmosphere, heightening the prominence of the spoken words above the music. The continuation of the alto through bars 70–71 and the tenors through the repeat at the end of bar 72 ensures that there is always at least one voice part singing, creating a consistent, unbroken sound. This consistent, unchanging type of phrase construction is seen less often in New Transcendentalist works, as many IPSs and IPS groups draw on Tension/Release or Departure/Return constructs to mimic the human breath, upon which choral singing is predicated. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is an important element of the compositional style of Whitacre. This Steady State phrase removes the audience's attention from established breathing patterns, as the choir is now vamping

underneath the speakers. This speaks to the interdisciplinary stylistic approach taken by Garrett, which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter through CSA.

I Should Be Glad (LaBarr)

Some composers who incorporate New Transcendentalist elements into their music do not eschew traditional formal identifiers in the same way that Whitacre does. Susan LaBarr, for example, composes music that is largely melody-driven, and can be analysed according to melodic development and repetition without necessitating IPS Analysis to uncover hidden formal structures. In *I Should Be Glad* (2015), the usefulness of IPS Analysis is limited, as LaBarr employs traditional methods of phrase construction through melodic devices, particularly in the two-part counterpoint at the beginning of the piece. Many Tension/Release phrases could be described as Steady State phrases as the changes in parametric values are subtle. Since the phrases are melodies written for the voice, the subtle changes in range and rhythm are intended to give shape to the phrase rather than dwelling around a steady level of parametric values, therefore such phrases are identified as Tension/Release phrases (see Figure 4.9):

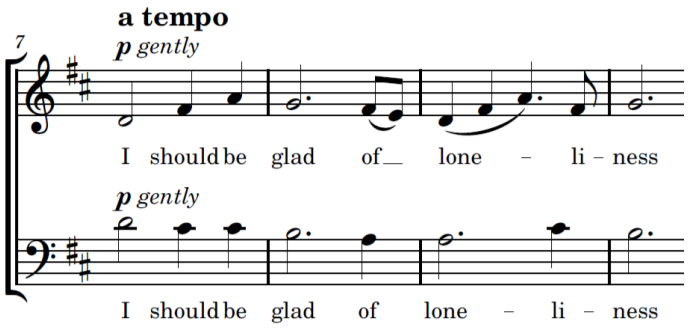


Figure 4.9: A Tension/Release phrase in bars 7–10 of *I Should Be Glad*.

As shown in Figure 4.9, parametric values remain relatively stable in both the melody in the upper voice and the counter-melody in the lower voice in bars 7–10. The phrase does contain slight increases in tension, however, giving shape to both vocal lines. It begins with a unison D4 sung by all voices before the two parts diverge, increasing textural density. The range of the phrase expands as the upper voice rises and the lower voice falls. The apex of tension occurs in bar 9. Here the upper voice sings a rising arpeggio with a note change occurring on each crotchet beat of the bar. Finally, the phrase settles on a dotted minim, releasing parametric

tension by returning to a note with a longer rhythmic value. Phrases such as the one shown above dominate the work (see Table 4.5 below):

IPS Group	Constituent IPSs	Bar Numbers	First line of text
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	1–2	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	3–4	I should be glad
	Directional (Decreasing)	5–6	I should be glad
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	7–10	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	10–13	And hours that go on
	Tension/Release	13–17	A thirsty body
	Tension/Release	18–21	I should be glad
Tension/Release	Tension/Release	22–28	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	28–32	A thirsty body
	Tension/Release	33–35	I should be glad
Directional (Increasing)	Directional (Increasing)	36	glad
Parallel Episode	Tension/Release	36–40	If I could
	Tension/Release	40–45	If I could
Tension/Release	Directional (Increasing)	46–47	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	48–49	I should be glad
	Directional (Decreasing)	50–51	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	52–53	I should be glad
	Tension/Release	54–56	I should be glad

Table 4.5: IPS Analysis of *I Should Be Glad*.

The majority of phrases in the work are Tension/Release IPSs, complimenting the arch-like trajectory of conventional melodic phrase-writing of Western art song employed in *I Should Be Glad*. The only phrase that is not a Tension/Release phrase or part of a larger Tension/Release IPS Group is the Directional (Increasing) phrase in bar 36 consisting of a single bar. This phrase exists to build tension ahead of the Parallel Episode of Tension/Release phrases on a new portion of the text (see Figure 4.10):

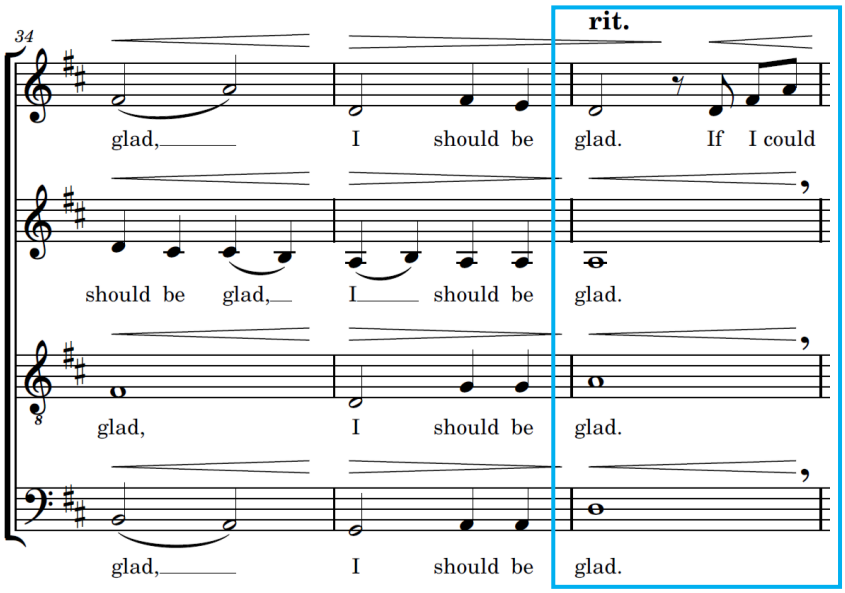


Figure 4.10: Directional (Increasing) phrase with a dramatic crescendo in bar 36, *I Should Be Glad*.

As demonstrated above, IPS Analysis does not reveal much beyond what can be gleaned from conventional melodic analysis. In *I Should Be Glad*, LaBarr does not eschew conventional methods of establishing formal structure in works as other composers under review have done, making IPS Analysis less necessary for a full understanding of her compositional process. Rather, the structure of the work may be understood as similar to that of popular song:

Section	Bar Numbers
Introduction (SATB)	1–6
Verse 1 (2-part)	7–21
Verse 2 (SATB)	22–36
Bridge (SAATTBB)	36–40
Bridge development (SSAATTBB)	36–45
Coda—Recapitulation of Introduction (SAATBB with soprano descant)	46–56

Table 4.6: The structure of *I Should Be Glad*.

LaBarr makes frequent use of this structural framework in her original compositions:

> I use a lot of structure that's similar to pop music structure … a lot of times, especially my original pieces, it'll be very structured in a way that's like a verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge.

> I really think in those terms. And I think that's because I grew up listening to lots of music like that, pop and rock and folk and bluegrass and all those things.[17]

As the formal structure of the work is clearly governed by the melodic material in a given section, IPS Analysis is neither necessary nor revelatory in analysing the structure of the work. The above discussion demonstrates both that IPS Analysis can be deployed to reinforce structural analysis through consideration of the impact of integrated parametric changes on melodic phrases, but it does not reveal any new structural phenomena that are not immediately apparent from conventional approaches. For this reason, CSA is more appropriate in uncovering elements of New Transcendentalism within LaBarr's idiosyncratic approach.

Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates the broad applicability of IPS Analysis in the structural analysis of New Transcendentalist works. Where melodic and harmonic structural signifiers are absent or undermined, the examination of the holistic effect of parametric changes on the musical surface is crucial to uncovering formal structures. Such analysis also reveals how phrases are connected, particularly in instances of Parallel Episodes. This structural analysis may inform both scholarship and practice when examining New Transcendentalist works. While Whitacre steadfastly avoids melodic narrative primacy in many of his works, some other composers associated with New Transcendentalism do utilise conventional signifiers of form and structure, such as melody and modulation. In LaBarr's *I Should Be Glad*, for example, Tension/Release IPS phrases match the construction of melodic phrases. However, this framework provides a deeper understanding of phrase construction methods in works such as Runestad's *Spirited Light* which also contains melodic structures. Such analysis reveals how composers achieve formal integrity within phrases, whether or not conventional structural signifiers are present. Since the obfuscation of functional harmony and melodic narrative form is a common technique employed by composers in the New Transcendentalist style, IPS Analysis may also serve as a litmus test itself to assess the degree to which a composer is adhering to the compositional approach of New Transcendentalism (see discussion in Chapter Five).

[17] Susan LaBarr, interview with the composer, 13 May 2024.

Comparative Critical Score Analysis

The following portion of this chapter presents a comparative analysis of select works by these five composers through CSA. It will focus on the following stylistic features of New Transcendentalism: Secundal Harmony; Cluster Chords; Bifurcation; Pandiatonicism; and the Extended Chord of IV. Divergent approaches to harmony, texture and timbre are also examined, demonstrating the diverse approaches to New Transcendentalist composition taken by these composers. This analysis will illustrate the breadth of influence of New Transcendentalism among contemporary American choral composers, tracing significant developments in the style over the past two decades. Several works by each composer are considered in identifying stylistic trends across their output and providing ample data for cross-comparison with one another and with Whitacre.

Secundal Harmony

It has been previously noted by scholars that secundal harmony is a cornerstone of New Transcendentalism. Owen demonstrates this through a statistical comparison of choral works by New Transcendentalist composers and early twentieth-century composers:

> Added pitches within a diatonic triad is not a new concept, but the music of this style is saturated with these chords to the point that harmonic seconds are treated as consonance. Many of these works begin and end with these harmonies, showing no need to resolve the dissonance created by the added pitches. The percentage of triads with added seconds in selected works by Clausen, Lauridsen and Whitacre ranges from 65–80%, while similar triads in tonal works by earlier composers such as Vaughan-Williams and Randall Thompson range from 25–35%.[18]

The analysis in this dissertation builds upon this understanding by revealing the nature of these secundal harmonies and the differences in character and usage of them in New Transcendentalism. Often, composers of New Transcendentalist choral music will write chords with multiple separated dyads of secundal clashes. This creates a sound distinct from the overpowering, maximalist technique of cluster chords, allowing composers to fully explore the timbre of secundal harmony without risking the overuse of clusters. As discussed in Chapter Three, different secundal harmonies have different timbral effects. A semitone clash is harsher

[18] Kenneth Lee Owen, 'A Distinctive American Sound at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: The Harmonic language of Lauridsen, Whitacre, and Clausen', *Proceedings of ACDA's National Symposium On American Choral Music: In Search For An American Style*, ed. by William Belan (Oklahoma City: American Choral Directors Association, 2013), pp. 219–221, p. 220.

to the ear than a clash of a tone. Secundal harmonies in the bass register are muddy and harmonically charged, as the ear hears the tensions of both the fundamental pitches and their overtones. In higher registers, secundal harmonies are often employed as chord extensions. The analysis in the previous chapter demonstrated Whitacre's preference for the added ninth and fourth. This analysis will examine the quality of chord extension to determine if this trend extends beyond Whitacre's idiosyncratic style.

Secundal harmony features prominently throughout Runestad's *Spirited Light* (2014), including limited use of cluster chords. Runestad leans into secundal harmonies in a recurring motif on the word 'light' in the upper voices. This theme appears numerous times towards the beginning of the work (see Figures 4.11 and 4.12):

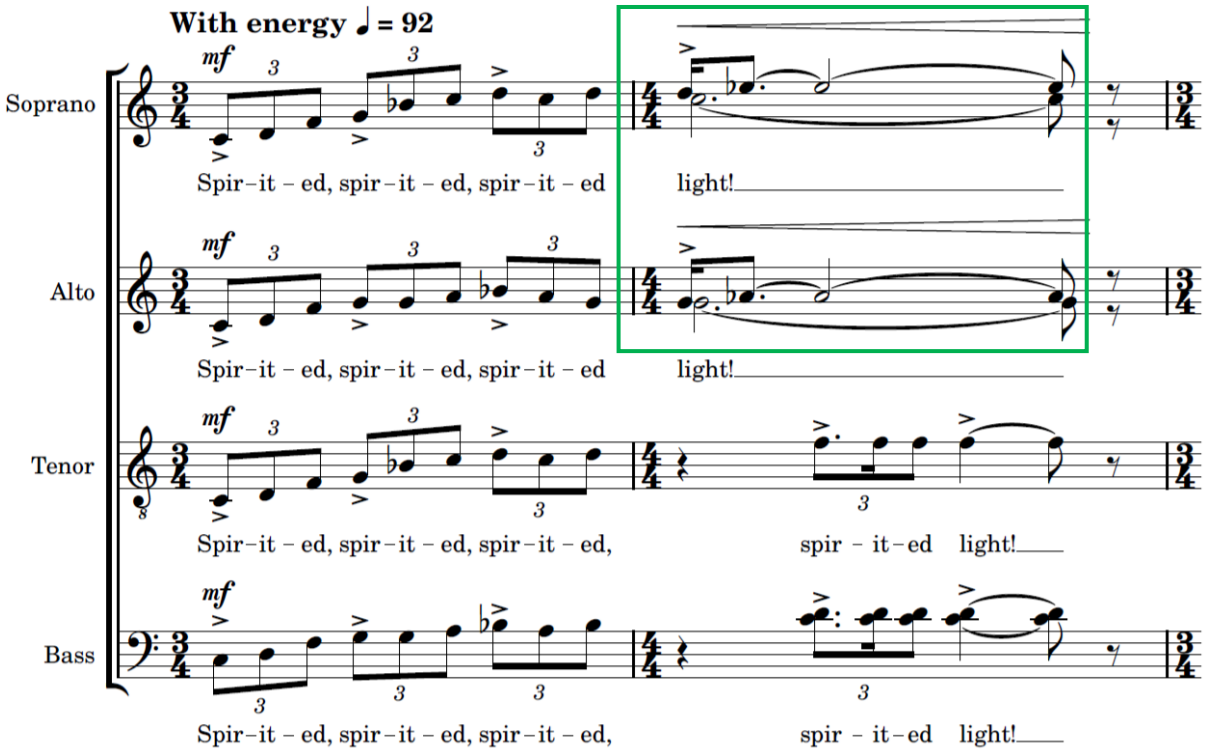


Figure 4.11: The accented 'light' motif in the upper voices in bar 2 of *Spirited Light*.

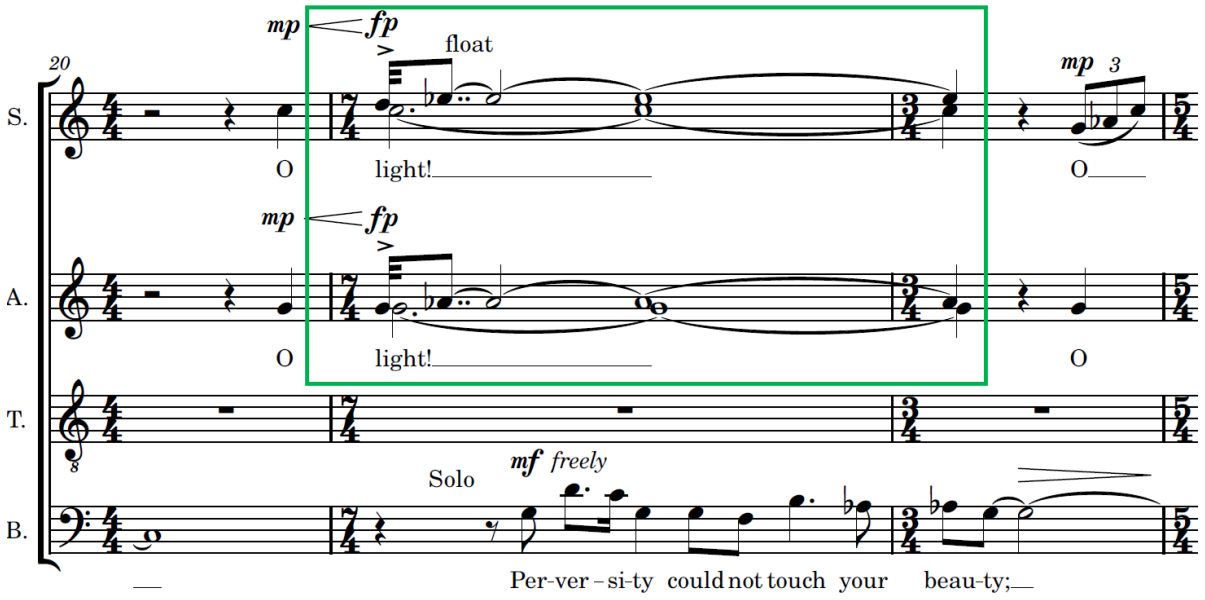


Figure 4.12: The 'light' motif reappearing in bar 21 of *Spirited Light*.

This motif begins with an accented secundal clash in the soprano parts over a unison alto note, before 'resolving' to intervals of a third in the soprano part and a second in the alto voices, creating an A-flat major 7 chord with the major seventh in the lowest voice. The presence of a secundal clash in both the attack and resolution of the figure shows that Runestad's approach to secundal harmony is not based upon dissonance resolving to consonance, but secundal clashes used as colouristic additions in chordal textures.

One of the most dramatic extended chords found in the work demands the timbre of high *falsetto* singing in the bass part. This occurs during the climactic, 'soaring' section in which the tenors and basses sing block chords under streams of rising scales in the upper voices. Following the text 'that a mud-bound spirit might soar', the tenor and bass parts are instructed to sing a D major triad with an added ninth in *falsetto* with the basses singing above the tenors:

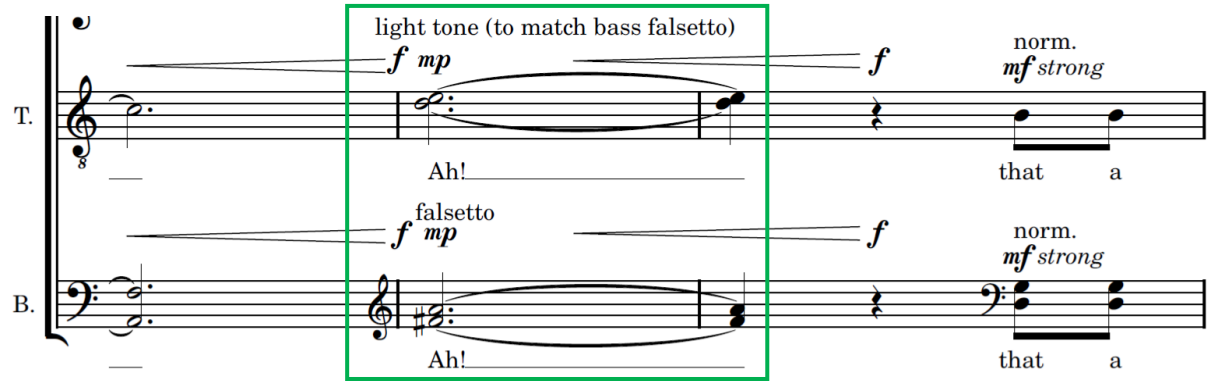


Figure 4.13: A D major 9 chord sung in *falsetto* by the tenor and bass parts in *Spirited Light*, bars 61–62.

This sudden and dramatic change in vocal timbre functions as direct word painting of the soaring spirit. By placing the basses above the tenors, Runestad delegates the root of the chord to the lighter timbre of the tenor voice rather than the traditionally darker and weightier timbre of bass *falsetto*, inverting the balance of the chord. In this way, Runestad imparts further weightlessness to the chord by weakening its foundations. This heightens the contrast with the preceding chords in the low tenor and bass registers. This chord has an additional 'shimmering' effect when combined with the close secundal harmony of three stacked tones, similar to the effect described by Morten Lauridsen regarding his use of secundal harmony as discussed in Chapter One.

A common application of secundal harmony in New Transcendentalist music is the use of separated dyads in a chord, creating a thick texture of secundal clashes without the overpowering effect of a full cluster chord. 'Holy', the first movement of Forrest's *Words From Paradise*, opens with a series of secundal clashes in the four sections of the choir entering in succession to create a complex chord of secundal clashes (see Figure 4.14):
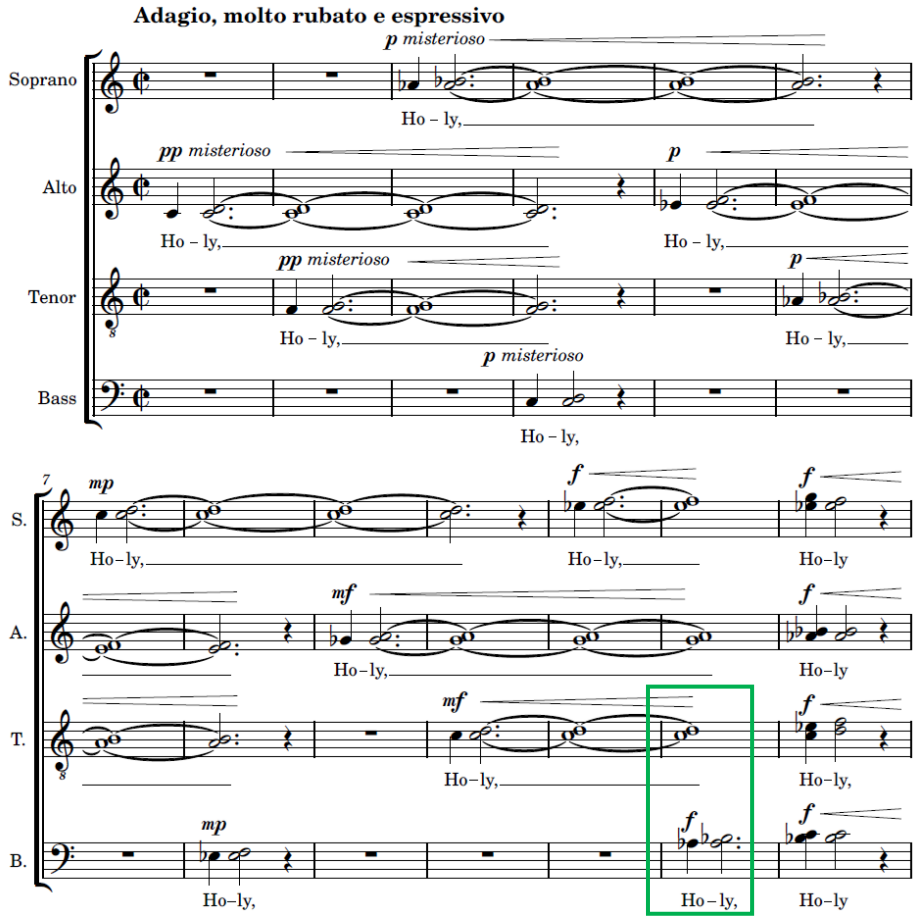


Figure 4.14: Secundal harmonies in all voices in the opening twelve bars of 'Holy'.

It is notable that these secundal clashes are spread out in the choral texture, forming four separate dyads rather than creating larger cluster chords. The only exception to this is the final entry of the bass section in bar 12, creating a four-note cluster chord with the tenor parts (shown in green in Figure 4.14 above), heightening tension before the entry of the new thematic material in bar 13. The presence of multiple secundal harmonies spread out within a chord is a common feature of Forrest's work, such as in the extended chord of IV that appears multiple times in *Entreat Me Not To Leave You* (2012) (see Figure 4.15):
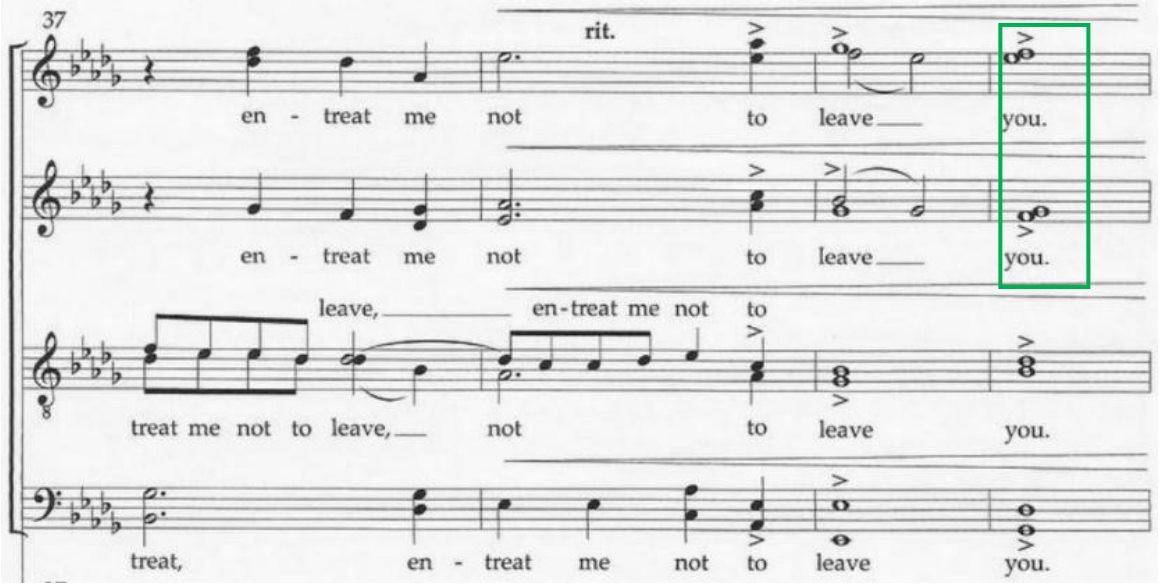


Figure 4.15: Secundal clashes in multiple parts in bar 40 of *Entreat Me Not To Leave You*.

Trumbore uses a similar technique in *Light of Late November* (2013), in which the choral texture in bar 52 contains a secundal dyad between the soprano and alto above a secundal dyad in the bass and tenor (illustrated in green in Figure 4.16):

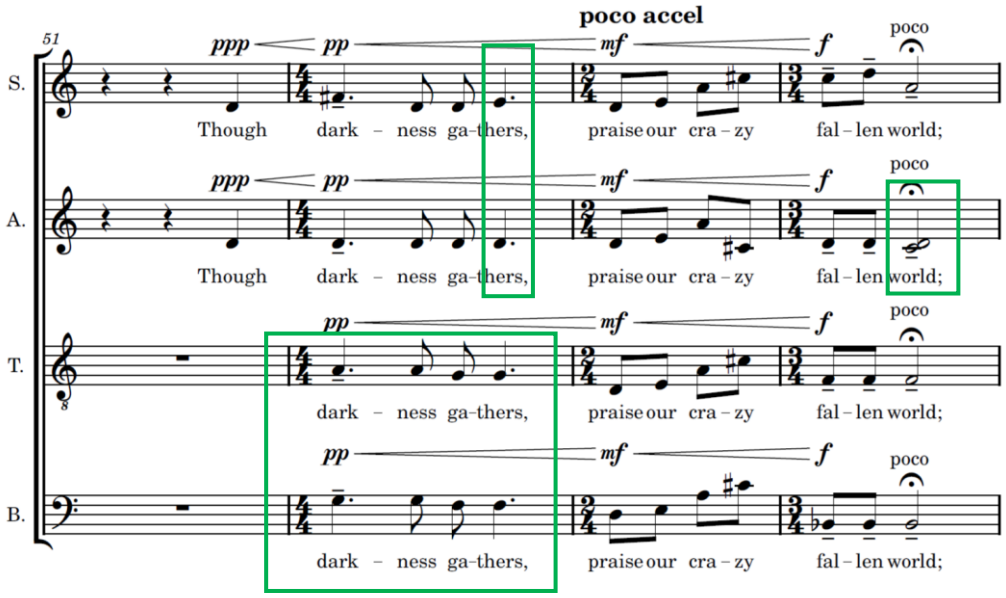


Figure 4.16: Secundal harmony in *Light of Late November*, bars 52–54.

Forrest and Trumbore's spacing of clashes in this manner displays a keenness to incorporate the sonority of secundal harmony into their work while avoiding the overuse of cluster chords. This technique is also employed by Jake Runestad in his exuberant concert work *Nyon Nyon* (2006). While the work opens with a cluster chord, the technique is largely avoided throughout the work, with Runestad using secundal clashes spaced apart to avoid full cluster sonorities (see Figure 4.17):
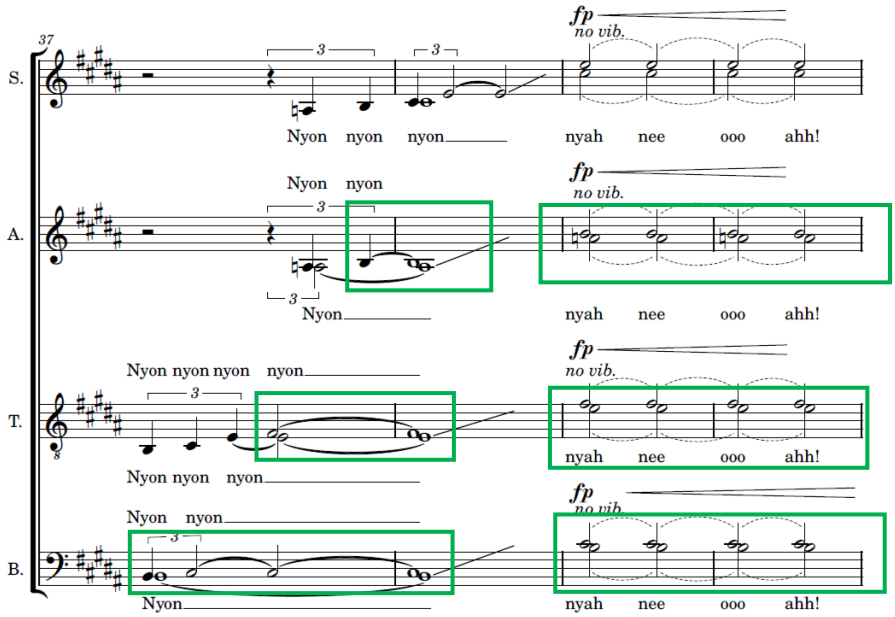


Figure 4.17: Secundal clashes spaced apart to avoid full cluster sonorities in *Nyon Nyon*, bars 37–40.

This approach of using secundal clashes while evading cluster sonorities displays how Forrest, Trumbore and Runestad have developed New Transcendentalist secundal harmony beyond the blunt approach of cluster chords and triadic extensions that exemplified the New Transcendentalism of the 1990s.

In ‘Selah’, Forrest employs a recurring melody throughout sung over sustained chords in the choir. This soaring melody outlines an incomplete arpeggio, evoking a clarion call, and is sung over the underlying chord before leaning into the sharpened eleventh of the chord, an A natural over an E-flat major chord, giving a distinct Lydian flavour to the music (see Figure 4.18):

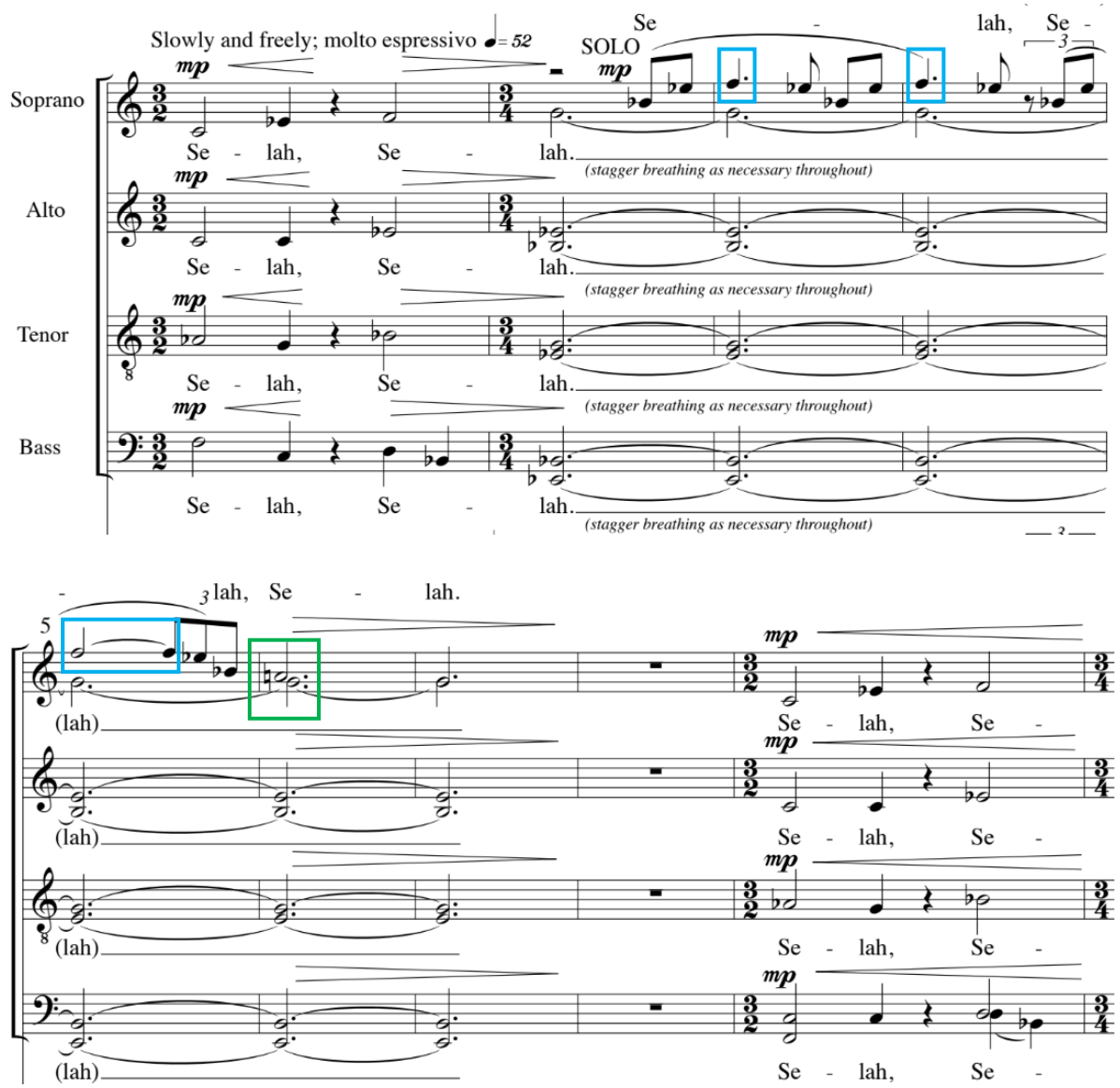


Figure 4.18: The first instance of the recurring ‘clarion’ melody of ‘Selah’, bars 2–7.

Two notes outside of the underlying chord are emphasised by the solo soprano melody: the ninth (shown in blue in Figure 4.18) and the raised eleventh (shown in green). The melody mimics the repeated rising and falling arpeggios of a clarion call, though it arrives on the ninth of the chord rather than the third, holding an F5 on a dotted crotched before falling and rising again. This figure increases in intensity as the temporal density increase from quavers to triplet quavers in bar 4 and the duration of the F5 is lengthened by a crotchet beat. Finally, the melody falls to an A4 over the E-flat major chord. This note is held for three beats before resolving down to the major third. This melody returns several more times in the work in both E-flat-lydian and C-lydian, while variations of the melody are used in other parts of the work to highlight other secundal harmonic relationships. This will be discussed further under the heading *Cluster Chords*.

The influence of the choral music of Morten Lauridsen on Forrest is evident in his use of secundal harmony in 'Selah', particularly in his repeated use of the Dominant chord in first inversion with an added eleventh. As previously noted, the 'Lauridsen chord', a major chord in first inversion with an added ninth, became synonymous with the composer due to his repeated study of the harmony in his works in the 1990s, including *O magnum mysterium* (1994), *Lux Aeterna* (1997) and *Ave Maria* (1997):
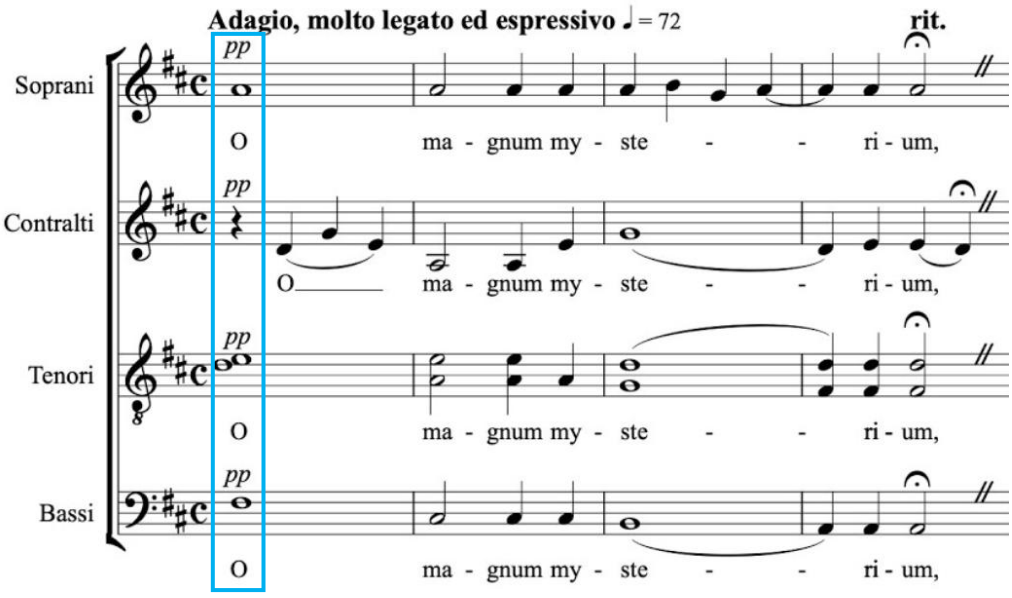


Figure 4.19: The 'Lauridsen chord' at the beginning of *O magnum mysterium*.

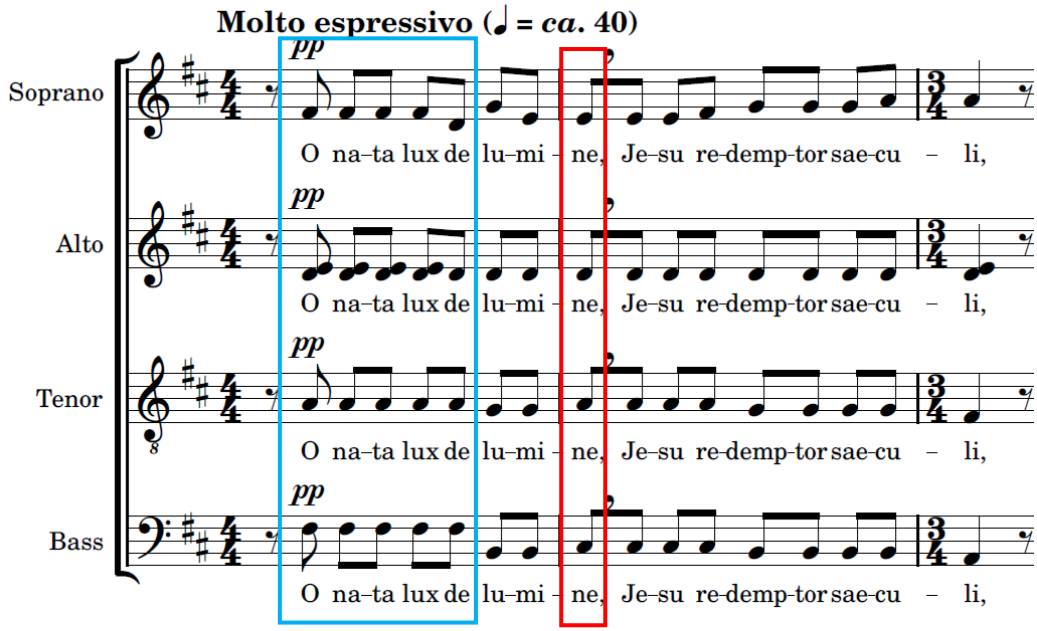


Figure 4.20: The 'Lauridsen chord' at the beginning of *O nata lux* (shown in blue).

In *O nata lux* (see Figure 4.20 above), Lauridsen ends the first phrase of text with a Dominant chord (A major) in first inversion with an added eleventh created by the altos singing a pedal on the tonic note (D) (shown in Figure 4.20 in red). This chord appears later in the work a fifth higher to create a brief modulation to A major/F-sharp minor (see Figure 4.21):

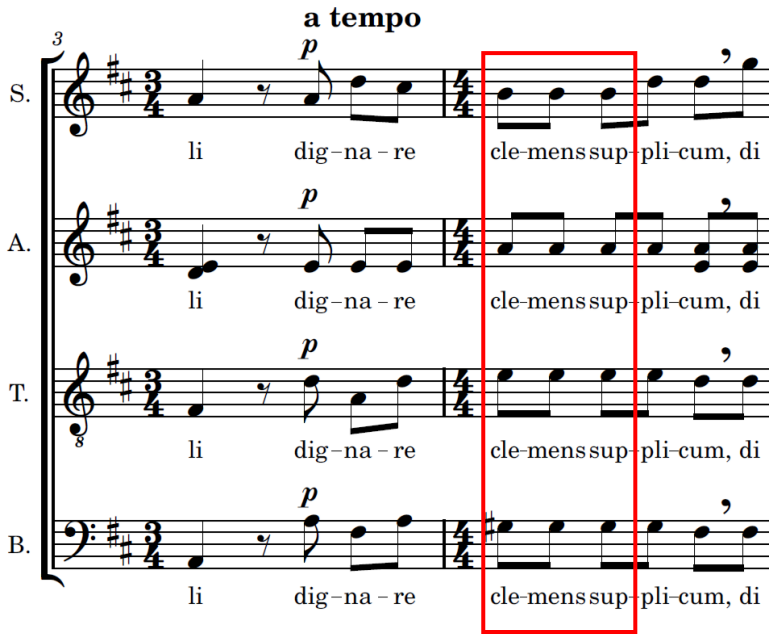


Figure 4.21: The secondary 'Lauridsen chord' in bar 4 of *O nata lux*.

While this particular chord does not receive the same attention as the 'Lauridsen chord' that opens both works, it is distinctive of this particular epoch in contemporary American choral

music. Forrest features this chord prominently throughout 'Selah', particularly in the three-chord theme that appears throughout the work:

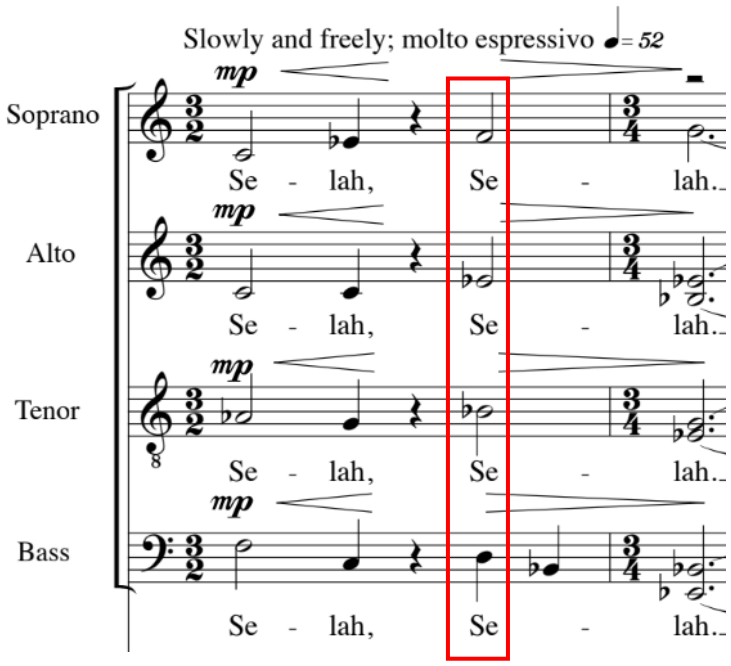


Figure 4.22: The secondary 'Lauridsen chord' in the opening of 'Selah'.

Forrest acknowledges the impact Lauridsen's work had on him and on choral composition in the United States more broadly: 'the piece that influenced me more than any other was Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, and there are so many other choral composers who would say the same thing, I think.'[19] The secondary Lauridsen chord in 'Selah' appears first as a dominant chord resolving to the tonic of E-flat major. Later, Forrest subverts expectations by resolving to the parallel major of C major in its second appearance (see Figure 4.23):

[19] Dan Forrest, interview with the composer, 23 April 2024.

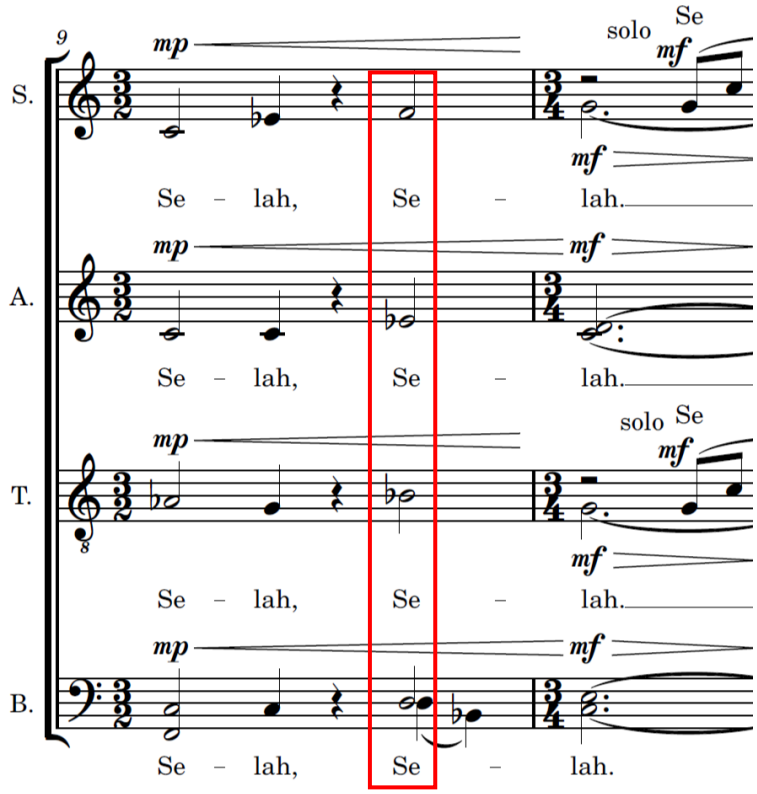


Figure 4.23: The secondary Lauridsen chord (red) resolving to the parallel major, C major, in bars 9–10.

By including this chord in combination with parallel and third-related modulations, Forrest advances the emerging style of New Transcendentalism. This is achieved through engagement with the stylistic features of one of the epochal works of the style alongside a new approach to harmonic relationships.

Like Whitacre and the composers discussed above, secundal harmony features prominently in the choral works of Susan LaBarr in both non-functional contexts and in the context of conventional dissonance and resolution. In the introduction of *I Should Be Glad*, LaBarr immediately establishes secundal harmony as a central feature of the work. The introduction contains six instances of secundal harmony, three of which are the result of passing note motion (shown in Figure 4.24 in blue), and three of which are the product of non-functional chord extensions (shown in red):

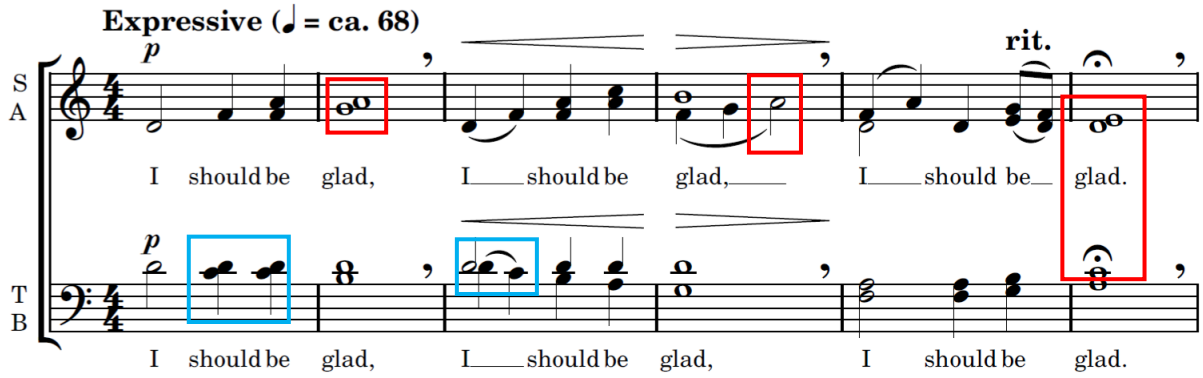


Figure 4.24: Secundal harmony in the introduction of *I Should Be Glad*.

By ending each two-bar phrase of the introduction with a secundal clash, LaBarr quickly establishes the harmonic soundworld of the work for the audience.

One of LaBarr's most widely performed and recorded works, *Angele Dei* (2012), similarly features a combination of conventional and non-functional secundal harmonies (see Figure 4.25):
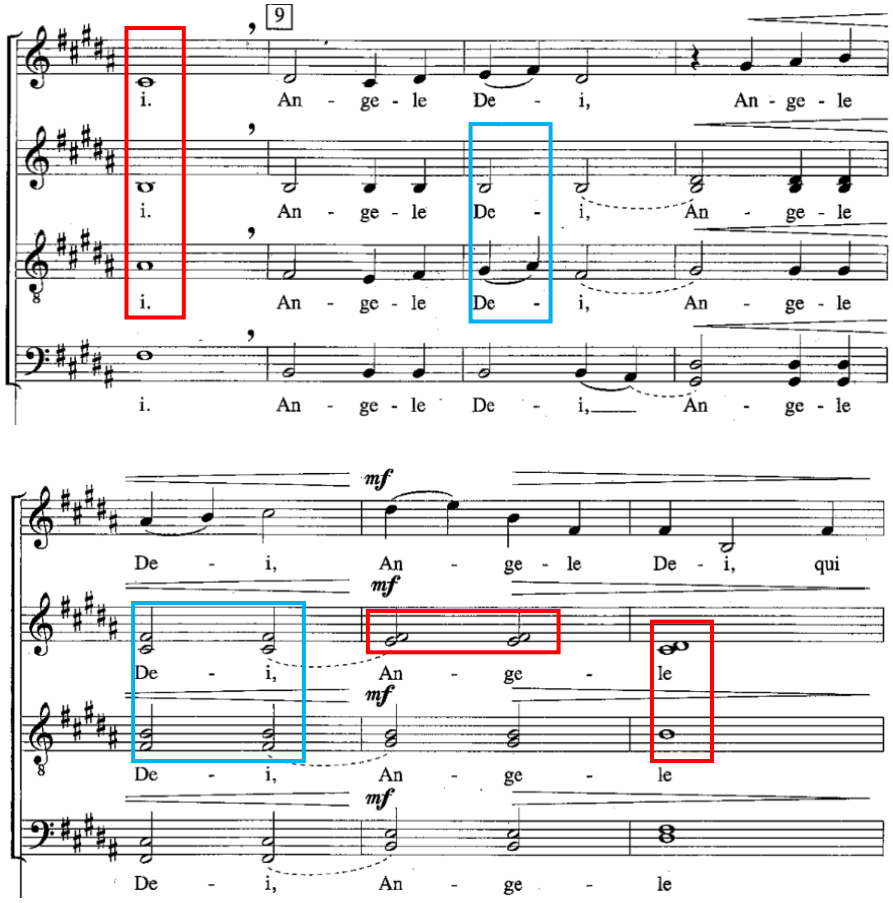


Figure 4.25: Conventional (blue) and non-functional (red) secundal harmonies in *Angele Dei*, bars 8–14.

Angele Dei features parallel secundal clashes in the alto parts in bars 13–14, reminiscent of the parallel secundal clashes between the alto and soprano in Whitacre's *A Boy and a Girl* discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike Trumbore, Forrest and Runestad, who often employ secundal clashes as sonic objects, secundal harmony in the works of LaBarr is almost exclusively utilised in the context of chord extensions. These added-note chords either resolved conventionally or are left unresolved. In Figure 4.25 above, the parallel secundal clashes in the alto parts provide an extended ninth to the underlying chords. Secundal harmonies are not used as textural dyads, like in Forrest's 'Holy' or Runestad's *Nyon Nyon*, nor are they treated as a core *leitmotif*, as in Whitacre's *i carry your heart*. LaBarr's approach bears greater similarity to that of Morten Lauridsen, using extended harmony to enrich chords, undermine tonic gravity, and create a pandiatonic effect.

Garrett is another composer who mostly uses secundal harmonies for the purpose of chord extensions rather than the creation of sonic objects in their own right, utilising added note chords as well as a limited amount of cluster harmonies. Upwards of twenty-seven chords with non-functional secundal harmonies feature in *I Will Stand With You*, with secundal harmonies used for both colouristic effect and to undermine functional harmonic relationships.[20]

My Heart Be Brave (2018) features extensive use of secundal harmony in the context of traditional voice-leading and as textural objects (see Figure 4.26):

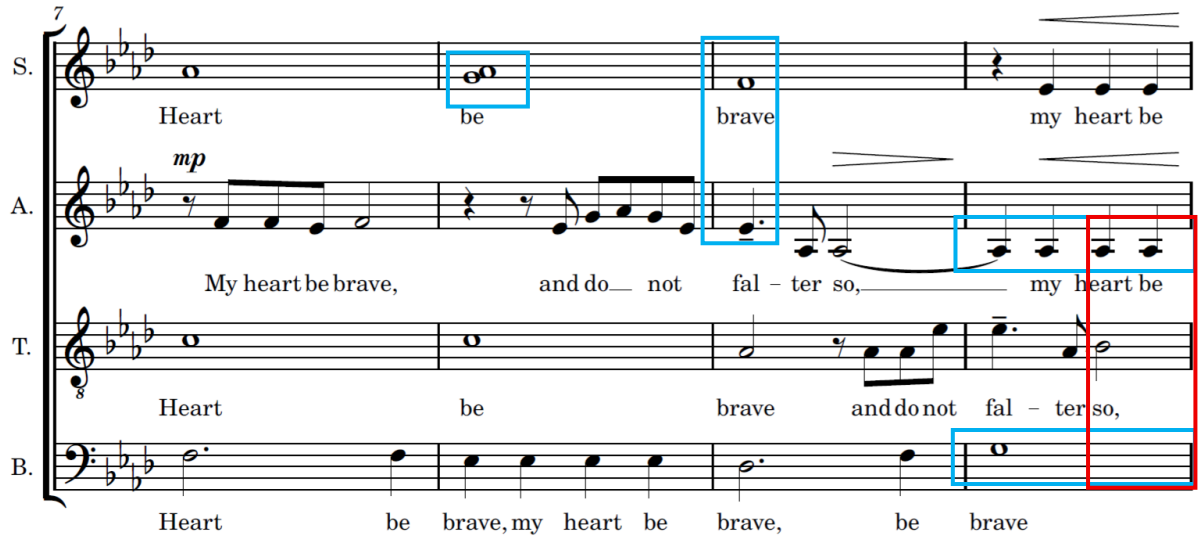


Figure 4.26: Secundal harmony in bars 7–10 of *My Heart Be Brave*.

[20] This is discussed below in sections on Cluster Chords and Pandiatonicism.

Secundal harmonies are often prepared or resolve according to conventional voice-leading in a diatonic context (shown in Figure 4.26 above in blue), however, the lengthy duration of these clashes and their presence on stressed beats in the common-time meter display Garrett's intention to engage with the soundworld of New Transcendentalism. Furthermore, Garrett composes a harmonically ambiguous three-note cluster in bar 10 (shown in Figure 4.26 in red), heightening tension as the soprano voices enter above.

Secundal Harmony is a crucial element of New Transcendentalism, from the first-inversion added-ninth chord known as the 'Lauridsen chord' becoming a defining sonority in American choral music, to the use of parallel secundal clashes and unresolved extended chords throughout the oeuvre of Whitacre. As shown in this research, such application of secundal harmony has become a mainstay of the style, feeding into the undermining of traditional tonal harmony, the development of pandiatonic frameworks, as will be explored later in this chapter. The analyses above demonstrate a notable development of the style, as later New Transcendentalist composers sought to explore the use of the secundal harmony as a sonic object in its own right, creating textures populated with separated secundal dyads. These dyads are spread apart so as to create the secundal clash without forming a single, clustered wash of sound. This suggests a more vertically oriented, sonority-driven approach to composition, an approach that is most evident in the maximalist application of secundal harmony: cluster chords.

Cluster Chords

As discussed in previous chapters, one of the most enduring signifiers of the music of Eric Whitacre, and New Transcendentalism more broadly, is the use of cluster chords. Cluster chords were a striking feature of Whitacre's earlier works, though his compositions after this earlier period are far less reliant on that technique. They were a pivotal development in New Transcendentalism, reaching the peak of their popularity during this period of 1991–2002. The sonority became inseparable from Whitacre as this was the period of his meteoric rise within the choral world, and is therefore perceived as a central pillar of New Transcendentalism. Works such as *Cloudburst* (1995), *Water Night* (1994) and *When David Heard* (1999) feature extensive clusters of up to seventeen pitches. The analysis in Chapter Three demonstrated that Whitacre himself did not use this technique exclusively in his early compositions; *A Boy and a Girl*, for example, features only one cluster chord consisting of four adjacent pitches.

Furthermore, as Whitacre has become more conservative with *divisi* in his later writing, broad cluster chords have been used with less frequency, and specific secundal harmonies have become more prevalent for their particular emotional and dramatic effect.

Despite the relatively sparing use of cluster chords in Whitacre's output, the technique has become synonymous with New Transcendentalism, and specifically with Whitacre, who stated in a 2006 interview 'I know I'm the "cluster guy." I keep hearing that all the time.'[21] It is perhaps for this reason that composers who incorporate New Transcendentalist elements in their choral works tend not to use cluster chords with great frequency. Extensive use of clusters, particularly expansive clusters like those used by Whitacre in the 1990s, might invite direct comparisons to Whitacre, who himself has veered away from overutilising this technique. Despite this hesitancy, clusters do feature occasionally in New Transcendentalist works as a natural result of the focus on secundal harmonies alongside pandiatonic and modal harmonic frameworks. Of the composers examined in this chapter, cluster chords are utilised most often in the works of Runestad. They appear frequently as sonic objects in the work of Trumbore, and less so in the works of Garrett and LaBarr. Forrest generally avoids composing cluster chords, though the technique is employed occasionally in his *Words from Paradise*.

Many of Runestad's works feature cluster chords as coloristic elements, though he is conservative in his approach to avoid overusing the technique. His *Alleluia* (2013) opens with a dramatic whole-tone cluster chord, first sung by the soprano and alto voices and then repeated an octave below by the tenor and bass parts (see Figure 4.27):

[21] Phillip Allen Swan, 'In his own words: The choral music of Eric Whitacre from 1991–2004' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 2016), p. 140.
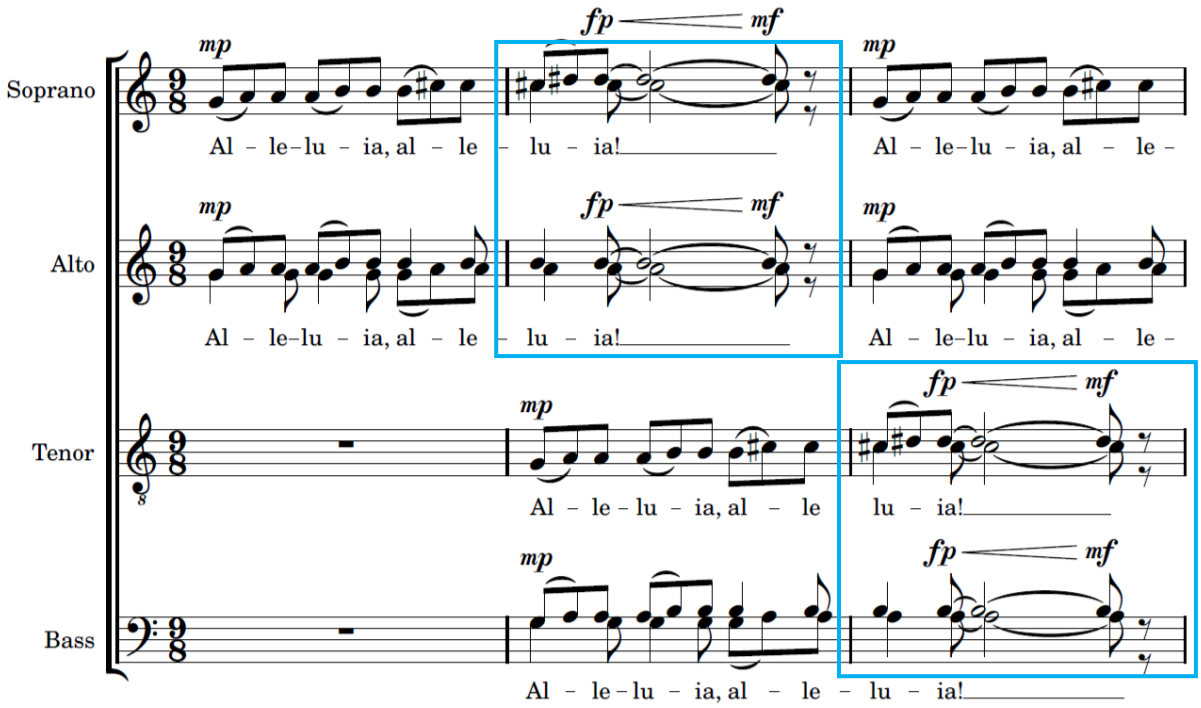


Figure 4.27: Dramatic whole-tone cluster chords in the opening of *Alleluia*.

In this work, Runestad expands upon the conventions of New Transcendentalism by using a non-tonal scale at the opening of the work, a whole-tone scale on G. This antiphonal cluster-chord theme returns at the end of the work, this time on the B-lydian scale:
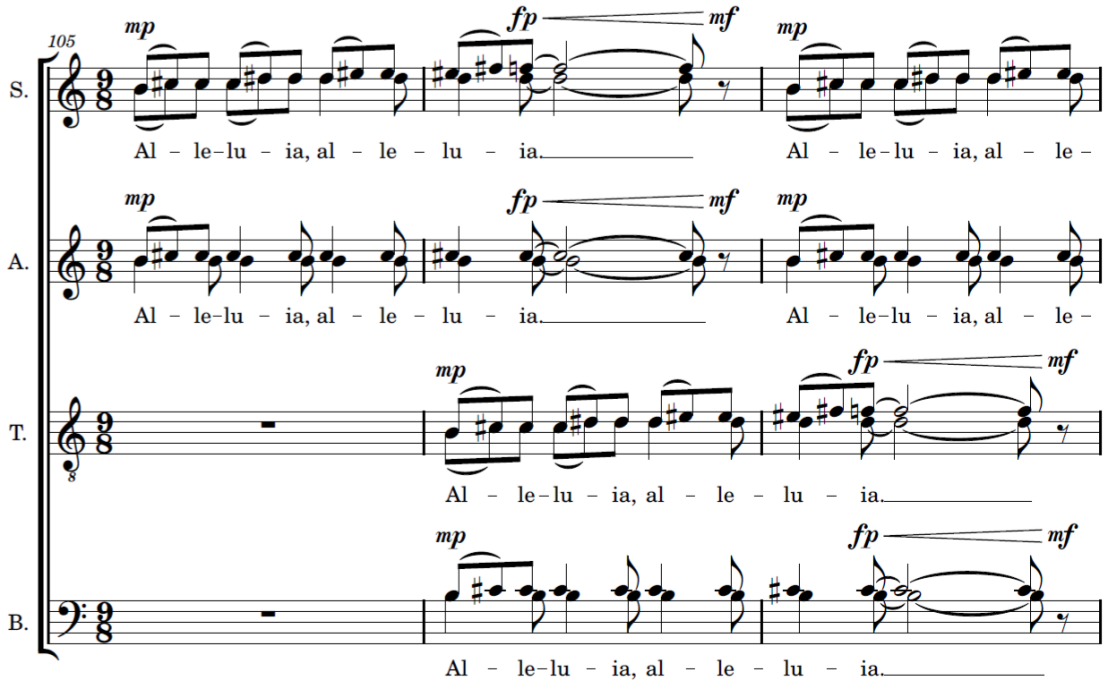


Figure 4.28: The return of the opening cluster-chord theme in B-lydian in bars 105–108 of *Alleluia*.

By opening the work with the harmonically challenging whole-tone scale, Runestad heightens the satisfaction for the singers and the audience when the theme returns to create Lydian clusters, a more familiar sonority in modern choral concert programmes. Another work in which Runestad opens with a dramatic cluster chord is *Nyon Nyon* (see Figure 4.29):

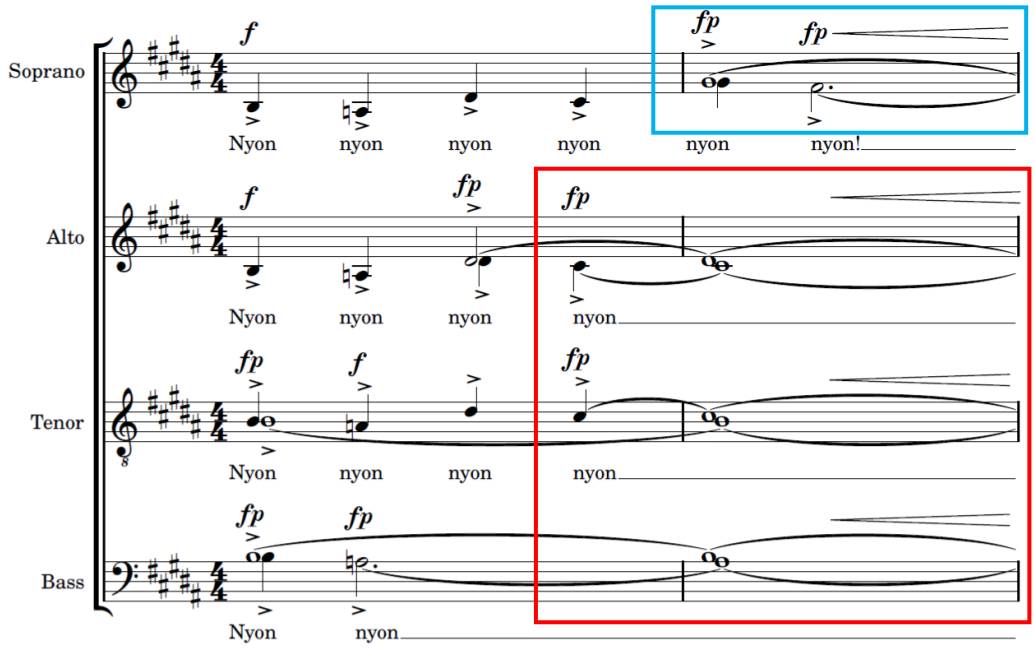


Figure 4.29: A four-note cluster chord (red) with an additional secundal clash in the soprano parts (blue) in the opening bars of *Nyon Nyon*.

The melody of this opening suggests the B-mixolydian mode, though the lowest note in the cluster is an A natural, creating an A-lydian cluster chord. Again, we see the intersection of Lydian modal harmonies and the technique of cluster chords, demonstrating the importance of the combination of these two elements in New Transcendentalist composition.

Only three cluster chords are found in *Spirited Light*. The first, in bar 7, is a D-ionian tetrachord, while the second and third, in bars 10 and 11, are B-lydian tetrachords (see Figure 4.30):
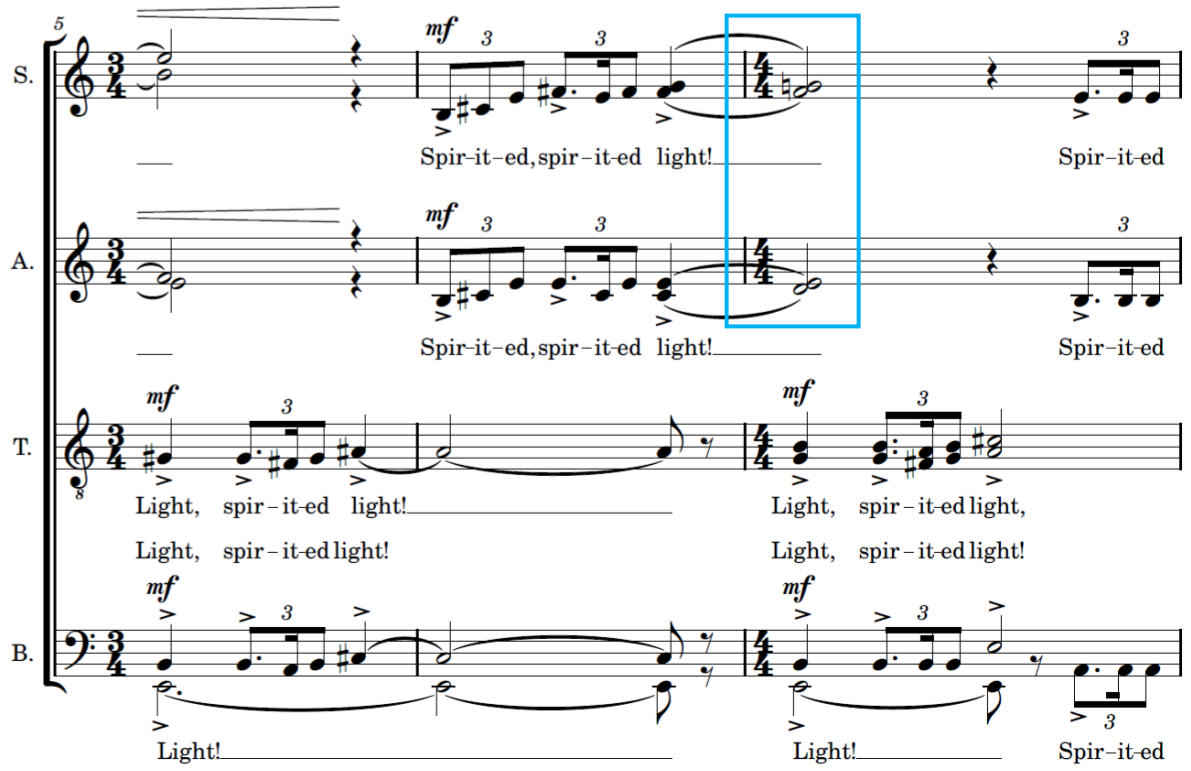


Figure 4.30: A D-ionian tetrachord in the soprano and alto voices in *Spirited Light*, bar 7.
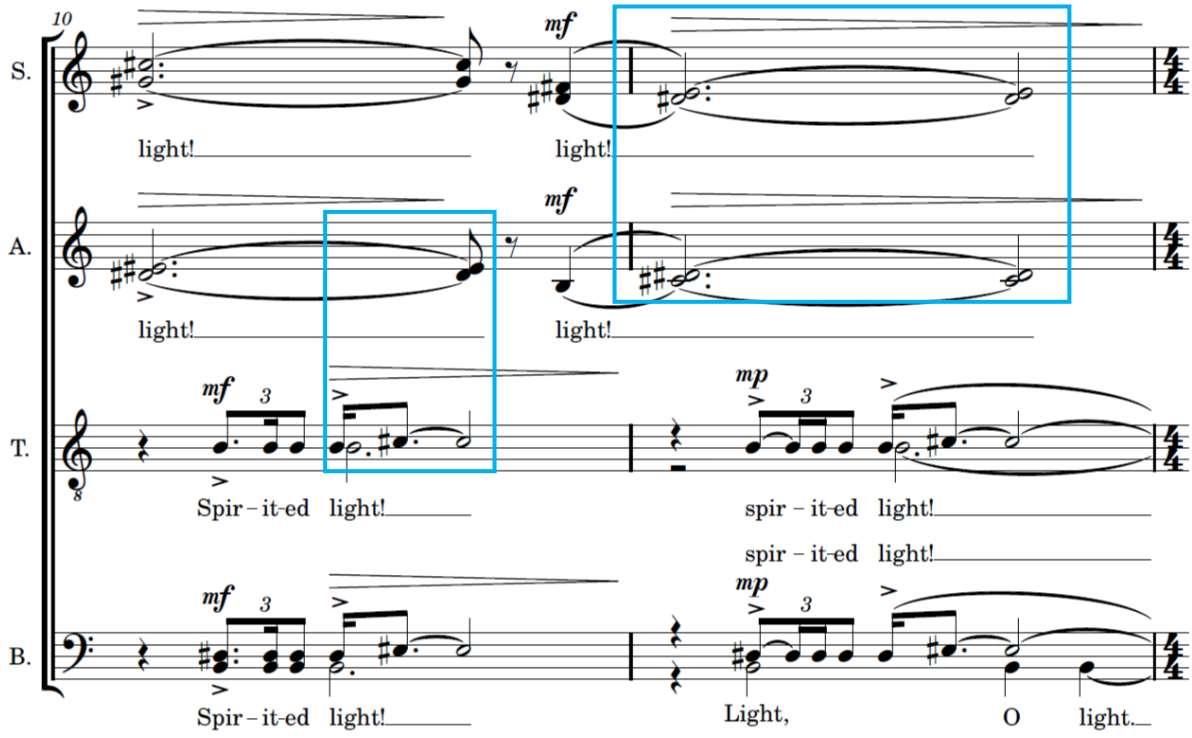


Figure 4.31: B-lydian tetrachords in bars 10 and 11 of *Spirited Light*.

While Runestad uses secundal harmony frequently in this work, cluster chords are not a prominent feature. It is notable that two of the clusters are Lydian in nature, while the other is situated within a E-dorian harmonic context, the related 'minor' mode of the Lydian mode.

In analysing Runestad's choral output, it is clear that he is judicious with his employment of cluster sonorities, using them occasionally as coloristic elements but avoiding their excessive use. He has created new methods for their usage in New Transcendentalist music, both in his use of non-tonal scales such as the whole-tone scale, and his division of clusters into separated dyads. It is notable that in many of the examples examined above, the cluster sonority is paired with Lydian modal qualities, reinforcing the vital link between these two elements of New Transcendentalism. As observed through the analysis of Whitacre's choral music in Chapter Three, the stacking of whole-tone secundal intervals is a key component of the New Transcendentalist soundworld. The longest string of whole-tone intervals found in traditional modal tonesets is the Lydian tetrachord. Combining cluster sonorities with the Lydian mode enables Runestad and Whitacre to expand on whole-tone clashes within cluster sonorities while remaining tethered to familiar harmonic palettes.

In contrast, Forrest's application of cluster chords in his choral output is far less frequent. While 'Selah' features many secundal harmonies and groupings of three stacked pitches, the use of cluster chords is more limited. The first notated cluster chords appear in bars 25–28 as Forrest builds tension on extended A-flat-lydian chords with clusters fanning out from A-flat major triads in the soprano, alto and tenor parts (see Figure 4.32):

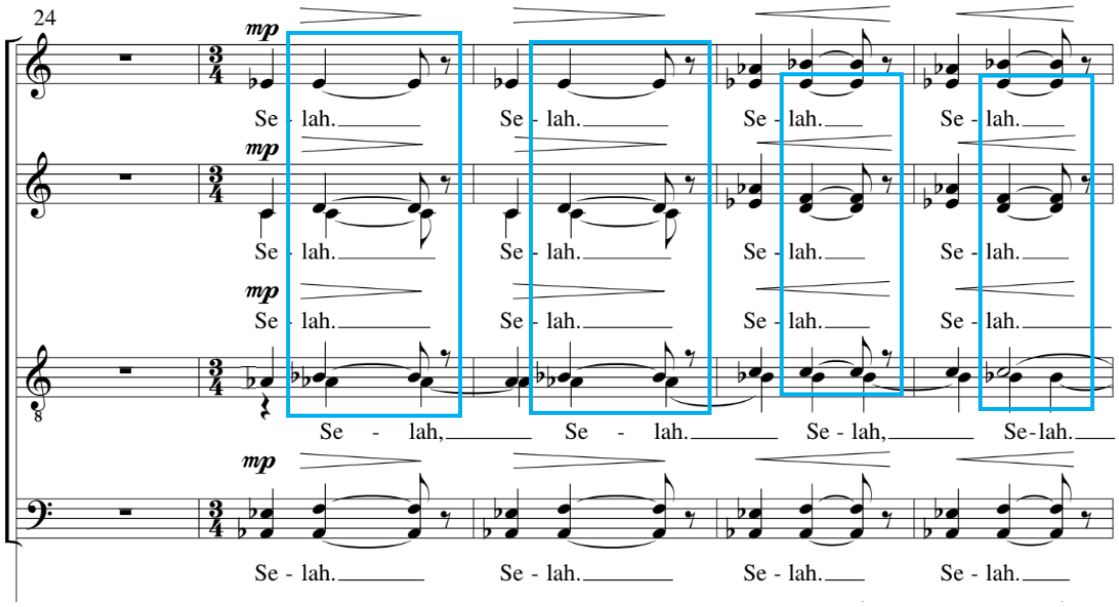


Figure 4.32: Cluster chords creating extended A-flat-lydian chords in bars 25–28 of 'Selah'.

These cluster chords are polychordally constructed, with the bass 1, tenor 1, and alto 1 in bars 25 and 26 rising from an A-flat major triad in second inversion to a B-flat major triad in second inversion while the other parts maintain the chord of A-flat major. As with Runestad's works, Forrest's usage of cluster sonorities is linked to the Lydian modal palette, though he does experiment with other qualities of cluster chords in 'Selah'. The other instance of notated cluster chords occurs immediately after the first, occurring in bars 30–35 (see Figure 4.33). Here, the upper voices fan up from a minor third on F4 to a five-note F minor cluster, while a variation of the clarion melody in the tenor voice intermittently adds a sixth note to the cluster:
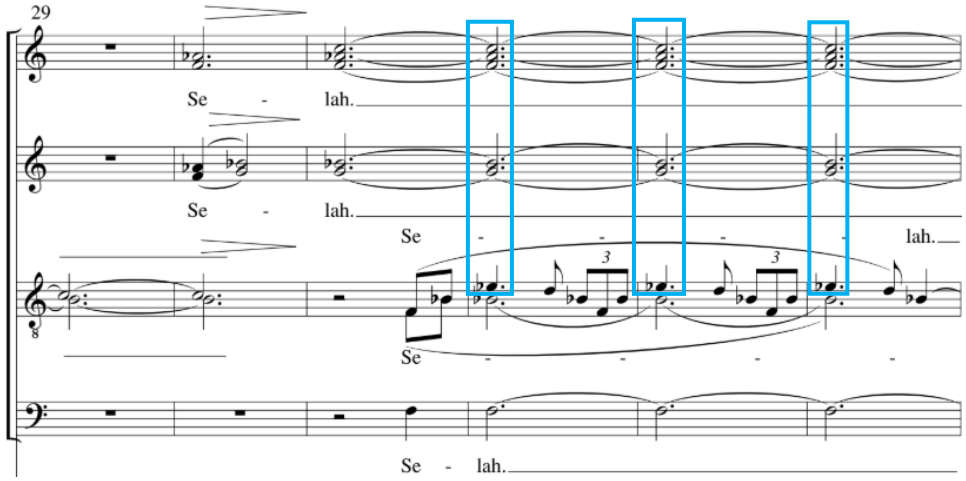


Figure 4.33: Six-note cluster chords in 'Selah', bars 31–34.

Unlike the original clarion melody that rises by step to the sustained note, the variant of the melody found in the tenor 1 voice in bars 31–35 rise another fourth to a sustained E-flat4, adding a sixth note under the five-note cluster chord held by upper voices during this phrase. Furthermore, this creates a polychord of E-flat major in the tenor 1 and alto parts against an F minor chord sung by the soprano parts, evoking the polychordal cluster chords found in Whitacre's 'i thank You God for most this amazing day' (hereafter, 'i thank You God'). Forrest alters the melody to emphasise secundal harmonies above the melodic line, generating interplay between the static cluster chord in the upper voices and the melodic material in the lower voices. It is notable that the clarion melody features a D natural, imparting a Dorian flavour upon the F minor cluster chord in the upper voices. Alongside the previous analysis of Whitacre and Runestad's use of cluster chords, the examples above further strengthen the findings of this research on the crucial link between cluster chords and the Lydian mode in New Transcendentalist composition.

Like Whitacre and Runestad, Trumbore utilises cluster chords in many of her choral works for advanced ensemble, as the experience of the intended singers enables her to apply greater amounts of *divisi* and more complex harmonies. With its dramatic extended chords and erratic modulations, there are twelve instances of cluster chords in *After The Storm Passes*, the most dense of which contains six consecutive pitches. Trumbore combines the cluster sonority with internal rhythmic movement, varying the composition of the chord and creating contrast:
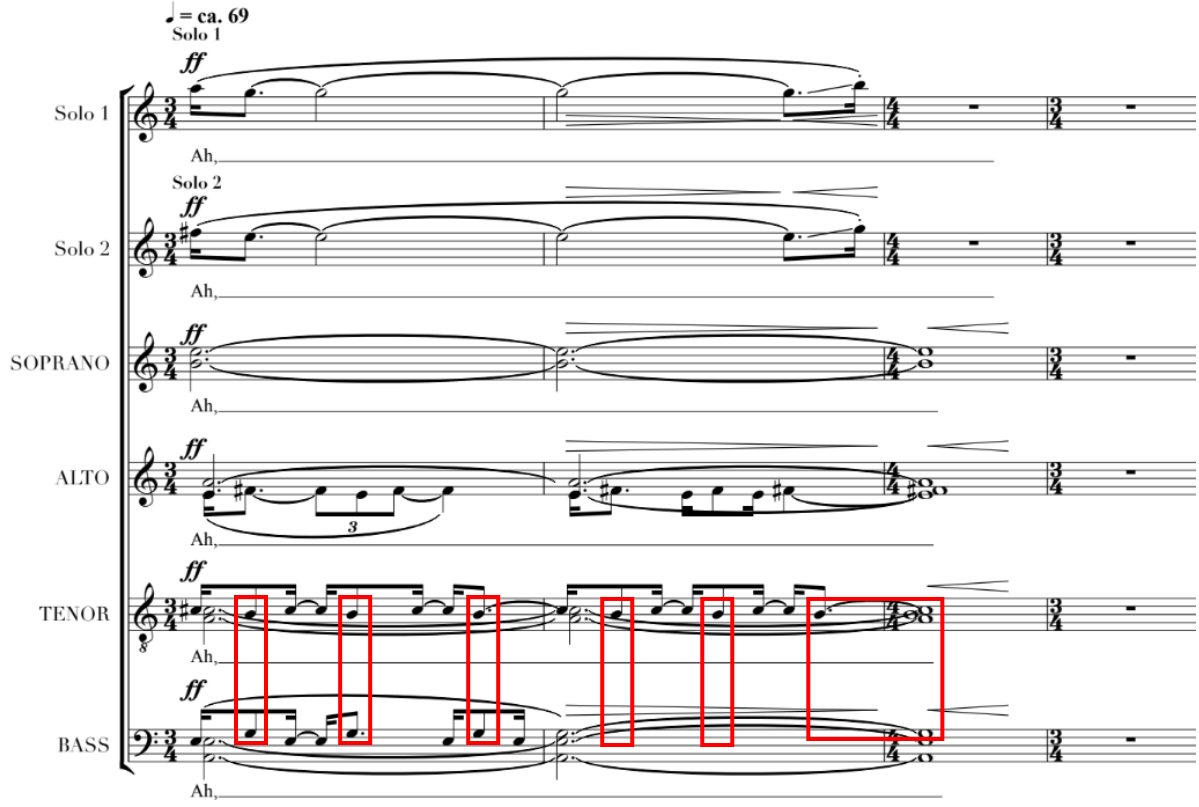


Figure 4.34: Four-note cluster chords in the bass 1 and tenor parts in the opening three bars of *After The Storm Passes*.

In the opening three bars (see Figure 4.34 above), the tenor 1 alternates between a unison C-sharp4 with the tenor 2 and a B3, while the bass 1 alternates between a unison E3 with the bass 2 and a G3, creating alternating chords of a conventionally voiced A major chord in the lower voices, and a four-note cluster between G3 in the bass 1 and C-sharp4 in the tenor 2 (shown in red in Figure 4.34 above). As the choral texture fluctuates between dense clusters and more evenly spaced chords, an undulating effect is created. Whitacre achieved this effect in the opening of *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, during which the texture oscillates between stacked thirds and a full cluster sonority, however, Trumbore's rhythmically complex use of this technique creates a far more unpredictable and erratic undulation. Later, in bars 18–21, a five-note F-

lydian cluster is sung by the tenor, alto and soprano 2 parts. The number of clusters in the chord expand and contract over a bass melody, with the number of pitches gradually reducing until the choir is singing an F major chord in second inversion with no additional notes (see Figure 4.35):
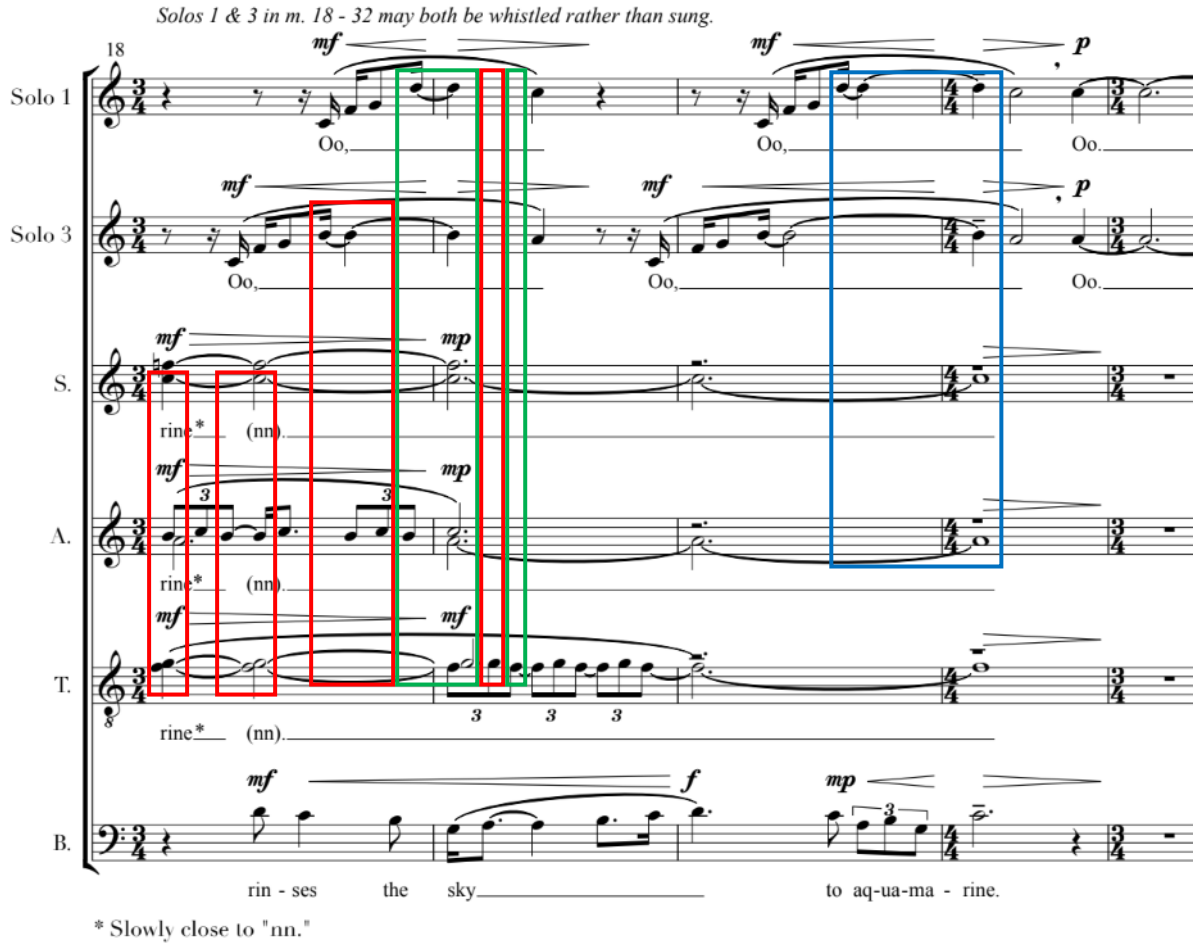


Figure 4.35: Six-note (green), five-note (red) and four-note (blue) cluster chords in bars 18–21 of *After the Storm Passes*.

Throughout *After the Storm Passes*, cluster chords build and dissipate, mimicking sudden and unpredictable changes in atmospheric pressure during an extreme storm. Clusters in this work serve both a coloristic and programmatic purpose. Trumbore engages in high-level mimesis of the atmosphere of the source-text through this technique. An example of this in Whitacre's output is the seventeen-part cluster chord in *When David Heard* (see Chapter One, Figure 1.15). In Whitacre's work, the gradual building of the expansive cluster mimics the rising agony of the grieving father from the biblical source text. Both of these examples demonstrate the efficacy of cluster chords in New Transcendentalist music to enhance the composer's interpretation of the text. While *After the Storm Passes* features cluster chords of various modal

qualities arising from the frequent modulations in the work, eight of the cluster chords are within a Lydian modal context, or are built upon a chord of IV in a diatonic context. In the same vein as Runestad and Forrest in the examples above, Trumbore follows the New Transcendentalist approach of marrying cluster sonorities with the Lydian mode while also expanding their application to other modal palettes.

Only one phrase in *Light of Late November* features cluster chords. The Directional (Increasing) phrase in bars 43–47 contains a series of clusters chords which expand and contract, containing a six-note cluster chord at its most dense point (see Figure 4.36):

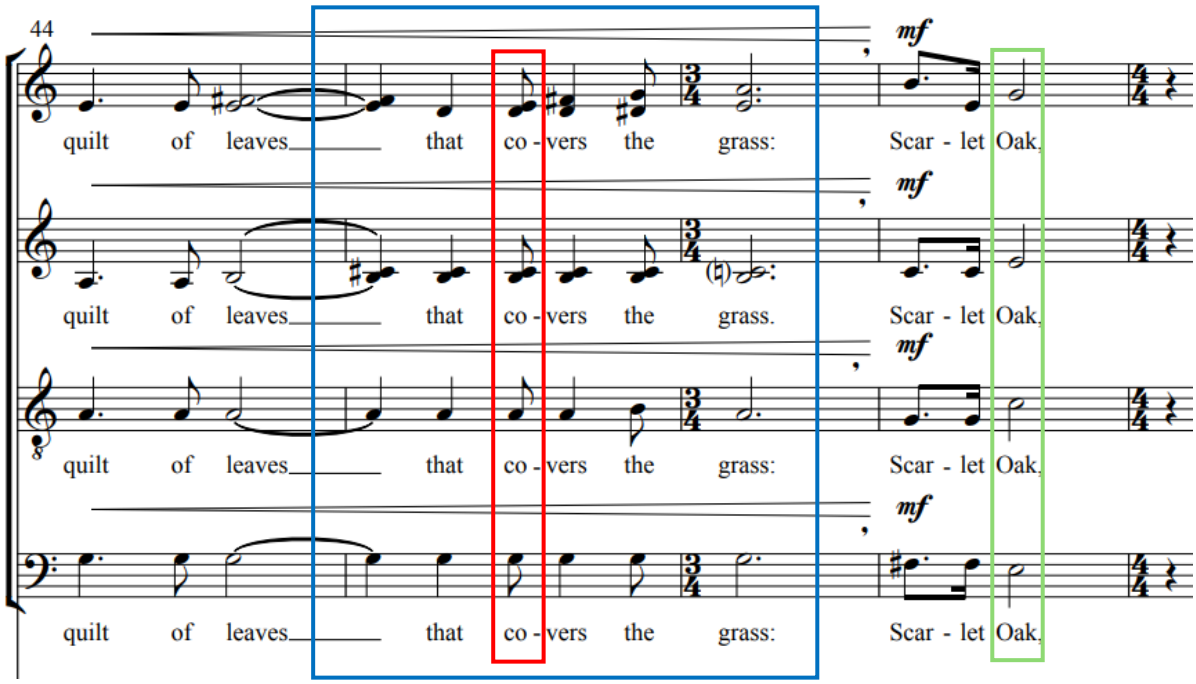


Figure 4.36: A series of cluster chords (blue) featuring a six-note cluster chord (red) in *Light of Late November*, bars 45–46.

This cluster chord begins in bar 45 as a Lydian cluster between the bass and alto 1. The final quaver of the bar features a chromatic movement in the soprano 2 from D natural to D-sharp, creating a brief whole-tone cluster containing five of the six notes of the whole-tone scale. The D-sharp resolves up to an E natural, while the alto 1 moves chromatically down to a C-natural, creating a harmonically ambiguous chord containing a G-ionian tetrachord under a perfect fourth on E and A in the soprano. The larger phrase containing the cluster chords concludes on a C major chord in first inversion with no extended notes (shown in Figure 4.36 in green). Like in Whitacre's 'i thank You God', Trumbore juxtaposes the most dense cluster writing with sparse, tonally or modally familiar harmonies to heighten their impact.

Unlike the output of Trumbore and Runestad, cluster chords appear infrequently in Garrett's works. The only cluster of four stacked pitches utilised in *I Will Stand With You* appears in the dramatic exclamation of the second bar (see Figure 4.37):

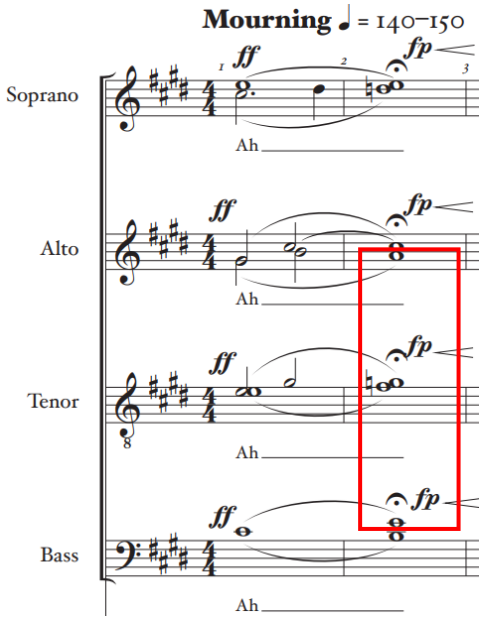


Figure 4.37: A cluster harmony in bar 2 of *I Will Stand With You* between the bass 1 and alto 2 voices (shown in red).

This cluster is situated within the context of an E-dorian extended chord over B, containing every pitch of the E-dorian scale. This dramatic chord sung with a *fortepiano* dynamic accent and has a strong programmatic purpose, representing a 'plaintive cry for mercy' as described in the programme notes of the work.[22] Like Whitacre's *When David Heard* and Trumbore's *After the Storm Passes*, Garrett employs cluster writing as a word-painting technique, once again merging it with a harmonic palette related to the Lydian mode.

Later in the work, Garrett uses secundal harmonies alongside non-textual singing for colouristic effect under a soprano solo melody. The upper voices sing three stacked tones starting on E4 over the lower voices singing three stacked tones on A3 (see Figure 4.38):

[22] Garrett, 2021.

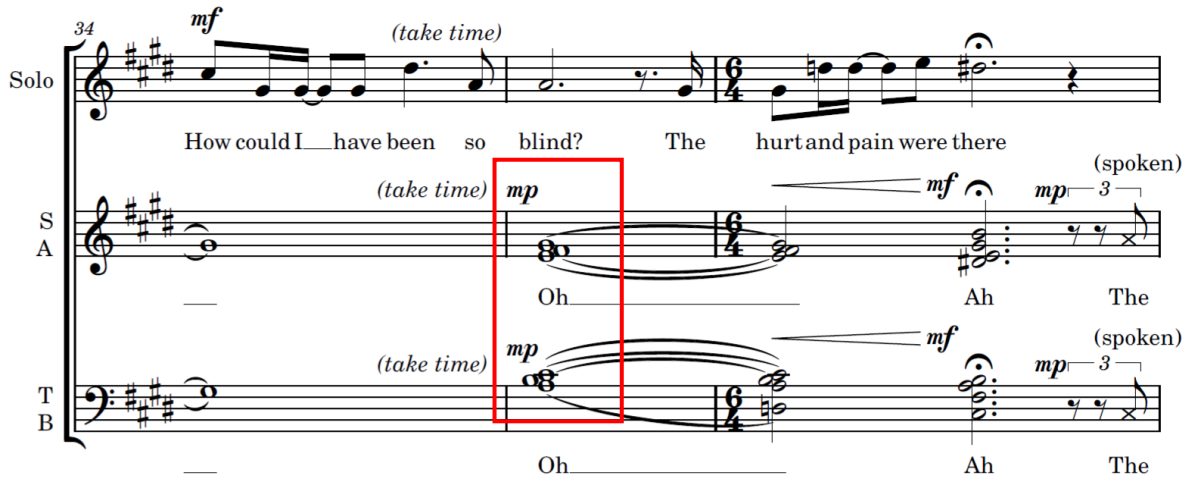


Figure 4.38: Stacked secundal harmonies in the upper and lower voices in bar 35 of *I Will Stand With You*.

These dense secundal chords then open to chromatic chords outside of conventional tonal harmony as the sung vowel opens from 'Oh' to 'Ah.' This heightens tension under the text sung by the solo singer: 'The hurt and pain were there.' These two three-note clusters, spaced apart by a minor third, relate to the advancement of the New Transcendentalist compositional language observed earlier in Forrest's 'Holy' and Runestad's *Nyon Nyon*. Here, Garrett generates a dense choral texture without composing a full cluster.

As discussed above, *My Heart Be Brave* features extensive use of secundal harmony. At one point in the work, the tenor melody under a three-note cluster in the soprano and alto parts briefly creates a four-note cluster (see Figure 4.39):

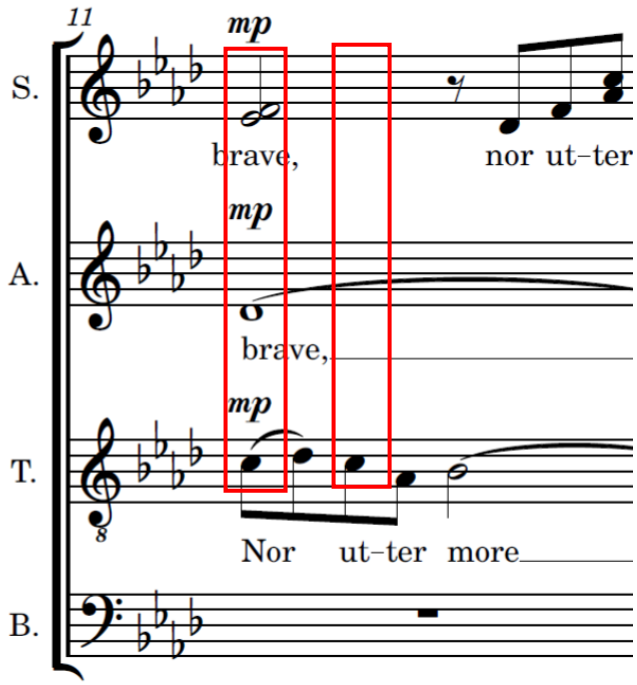


Figure 4.39: Brief cluster harmonies in *My Heart Be Brave*, bar 11.

While this cluster has the duration of only a quaver both times that it occurs, Garrett's repetition of the clashing pitch in the tenor on the beat with the resolution to consonance occurring on the offbeat displays his intentionality in creating this cluster chord and a firm correlation with this New Transcendentalist technique.

One other method of simulating cluster chords is through the use of heterophony. Forrest employs this technique twice in 'Selah'. The first instance is in bar 59 (see Figure 4.40 below), during which melodic lines and short motifs are performed by each singer in the choir *ad libitum* and in individual tempi:

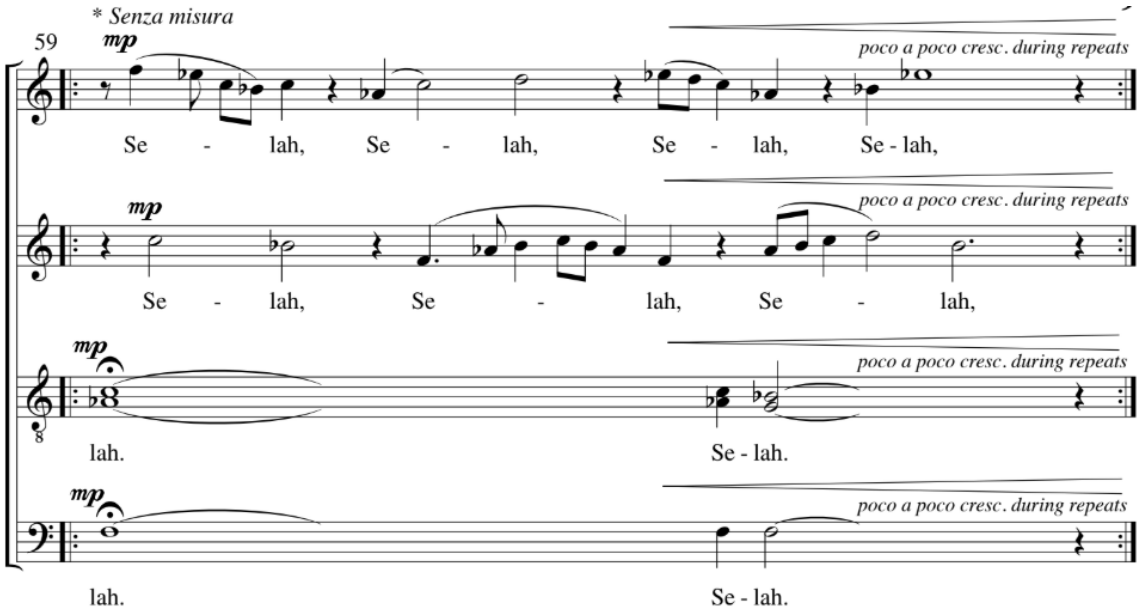


Figure 4.40: Heterophony in 'Selah', bar 59.

This section is accompanied by the following instructions:

> Sopranos and altos slowly enter one at a time, ad lib. Repeat the melody continually. At any time, hold a note as long as you like before continuing. Listen carefully to the group, but sing completely independently. Fade out to take a breath quickly when necessary, and fade back in. Gradually increase in intensity and dynamic.
>
> Tenors and basses stagger breathing. Eventually, ad lib, one by one begin singing the second half of your measure at your own tempo, until all men are repeating selah, selah, ever increasing in volume.
>
> When the music has reached maximum intensity, the conductor will give a signal. At this point, sing to the end of your current phrase or the next phrase, and hold that note until the conductor gives the cutoff.[23]

As this section is sung heterophonically by all voices, amorphous chords based on all notes within the musical material appear and disappear throughout the indeterminate duration of the bar. It is therefore likely that five-note F minor cluster chords will appear in the lower voices between F3 and C4, while a six-note Lydian cluster between A-flat4 and F5 may be heard in the upper voices. The second instance of heterophony occurs between the penultimate and final sustained chord of the work, when the choir are instructed to change note at their own individual tempo:

[23] Dan Forrest, 2006, p. 9.

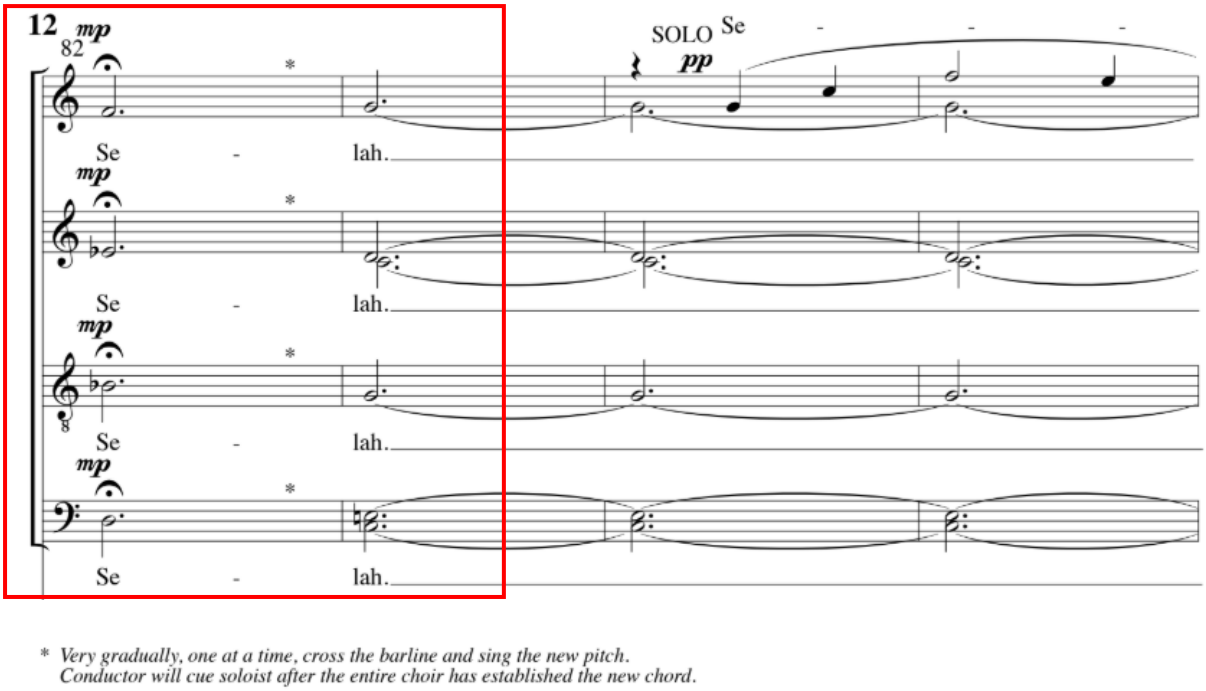


Figure 4.41: Indeterminacy in the between the chords in bars 82 and 83 of 'Selah.'

The singers are instructed in bar 82 to 'Very gradually, one at a time, cross the barline and sing the new pitch.' In the upper voices, this creates the possibility of a five-note C minor cluster chord on C4 emerging as the choir progressively changes chord. This approach evokes the cluster sonorities generated through heterophony and aleatoricism in the works of Cowell and Nystedt.

In 'Selah', Forrest uses both prescribed and aleatoric cluster chords, two of which are within a Lydian/Dorian modal context. The combination of cluster sonorities and the Lydian/Dorian modal soundworld displays Forrest's eagerness to engage with the emerging style of New Transcendentalism in the early 2000s. The rest of his *a cappella* choral compositional output, however, features very few cluster chords, though secundal harmony dominates throughout his output. While 'Selah' appears to have been an intentional study in New Transcendentalism, cluster chords would not become an idiosyncratic feature of Forrest's compositional style. Unlike Trumbore, Runestad and Garrett, Forrest appears to avoid explicitly notating cluster chords, favouring separated secundal harmonies as illustrated earlier in 'Holy'. This may be a function of the avoidance of a compositional technique strongly associated with another composer, namely Eric Whitacre, or it could be a personal preference against the sonority. In any case, Forrest's use of heterophony enables him to achieve these thick, clustered sonorities, synonymous with the New Transcendentalist soundworld, while incorporating the freedom and spontaneity of aleatoricism.

As in the music of Forrest and Garrett, cluster chords appear sporadically in LaBarr's choral works, with the composer usually refraining from presenting more than three consecutive pitches in a single chord. For example, the most dense harmonies found in *Angele Dei* contain no more than three pitches (see Figure 4.42):

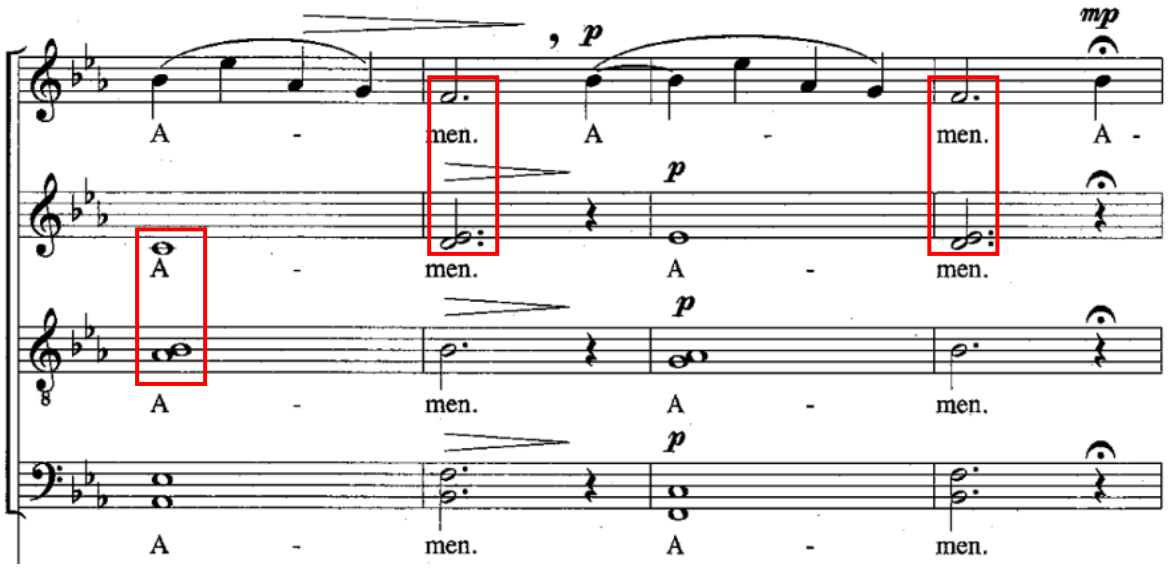


Figure 4.42: Three-note secundal clashes in bars 55–58 of *Angele Dei*.

LaBarr occasionally adds cluster chords for coloristic effect in her choral works, such as the five-note cluster chord that appears at the end of the Bridge section of *I Should Be Glad*:

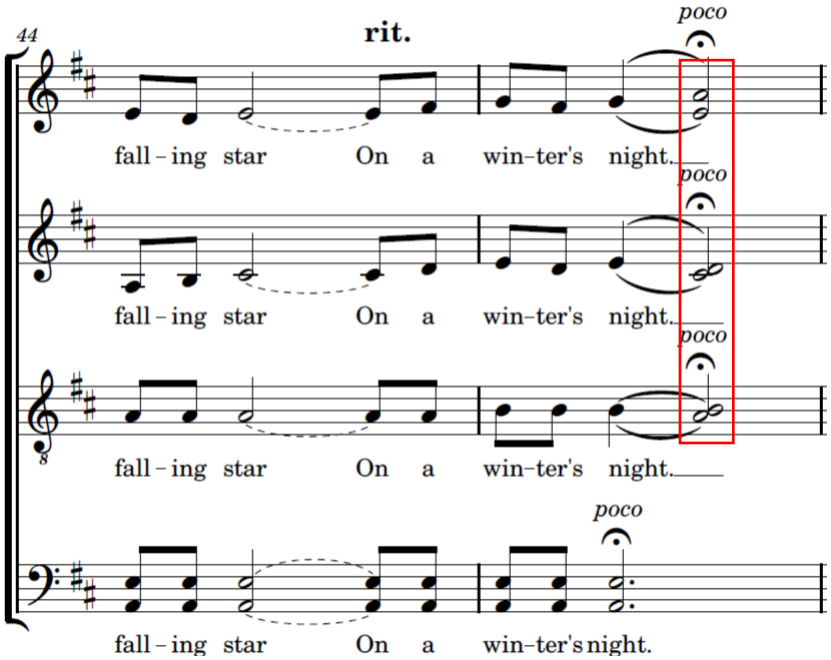


Figure 4.43: A five-note cluster at the end of the Bridge section of *I Should Be Glad*, bar 45.

In *I Should Be Glad* (see Figure 4.43 above), LaBarr uses this cluster chord to add a dramatic and suspenseful conclusion to the extended dominant chord that draws the Bridge section to a conclusion in bars 44–45 before resolving to a unison D at the beginning of the coda in bar 46. As discussed earlier with regard to cluster chords in the work of Trumbore, the juxtaposition of the dense cluster and a sparse texture—in this case a true unison—is crucial to LaBarr's use of the cluster sonority, with the entire work balancing the contrast between lush and austere textures.

While three-note secundal clusters feature prominently in the works examined in this chapter, notated cluster chords containing four or more pitches are less common. This may be due to the strong association of the sonority of cluster chords, particularly expansive clusters, with the idiosyncratic style of Eric Whitacre, causing reluctance among composers to employ this compositional brushstroke with great frequency. However, each of the composers listed above have indeed incorporated cluster harmonies into their work for coloristic or programmatic purposes. Like in the works of Whitacre, the modal quality of clusters are of great importance to these composers: This is particularly true of the Lydian mode, with its four stacked tones on the fundamental pitch. We see in Runestad's *Alleluia* and Trumbore's *Light of Late November* an attempt to expand beyond familiar modal constructs, using whole-tone cluster chords. Modal cluster chords are the most iconic and instantly identifiable feature of New Transcendentalism, though its composers avoid excessive usage, suggesting a disconnect between the perception and the practice of New Transcendentalist composition.

Bifurcation

The previous chapter identified bifurcation of harmony and texture as a foundational principle in the music of Eric Whitacre. This includes his approach to texture and to harmony, with the composer splitting the choir into juxtaposed textural units, and using polychordal harmonies to construct clustered and extended chords. These bifurcated textures allow for the prolongation of a wall-of-sound effect while generating polyphonic interest within a work and are found throughout the works of composers addressed in this current chapter. Unlike Whitacre, however, explicit experimentation with polychordal and bichordal harmony is not as common in their works, particularly in comparison with Whitacre's study in polychordal harmony, 'i thank You God'. While such polychordal construction of a cluster chord appears in 'Selah' (see Figure 4.33), it is not a common feature in Forrest's works. Runestad is the only composer

considered in this chapter who frequently bifurcates harmony in their work, using separate tonesets for various voice parts. He combines this with textural bifurcation or polyphony, creating greater aural contrast between lines and aiding singers in tuning to their own section without being offput by other voice parts. Forrest and Trumbore expand upon textural bifurcation, incorporating additional lines to produce complex weaves of texture in combination with the wall-of-sound choral effect. These varied approaches to bifurcation of choral textures within New Transcendentalism have broadened the style, with each composer developing their own idiosyncratic styles.

The technique of dividing the choir into two textural units features occasionally in Garrett's choral output. At the beginning of *I Will Stand With You*, Garrett separates the choir antiphonally between the upper and lower voices on the text 'say her name.' The lower voices begin in bar 5 (see Figure 4.44) with a second-inversion C# minor chord followed by a second-inversion E major chord before returning to C# minor (shown in red). The upper voices enter half a bar later singing a second-inversion B major chord (shown in green) followed by a second-inversion C# minor chord. The antiphonal entry of the upper voices creates bichordal harmonies between the two groupings of voices upon each entry:

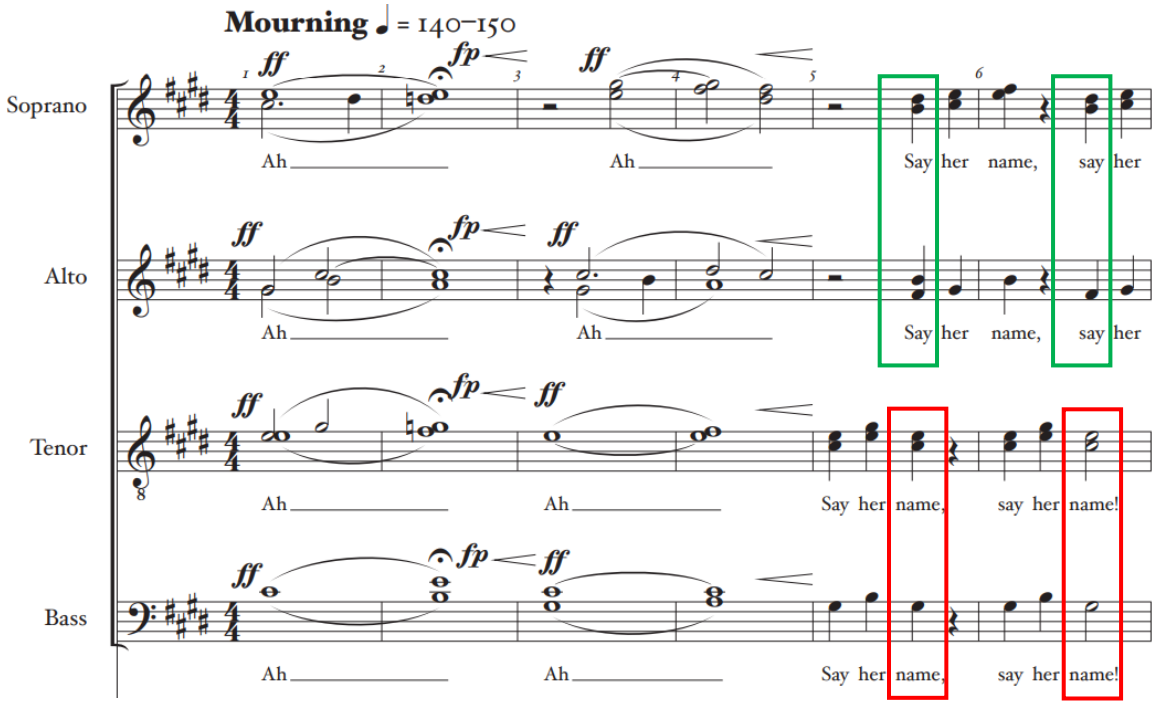


Figure 4.44: Bichordal harmony in bars 5–6 of *I Will Stand With You*.

Another instance of bifurcated texture occurs in bars 53–58. The bass voices (shown in green in Figure 4.45) provide harmonic pedals and rhythmic contrast to the soprano, alto and tenor parts singing inverted chords in parallel motion, evoking gospel music:
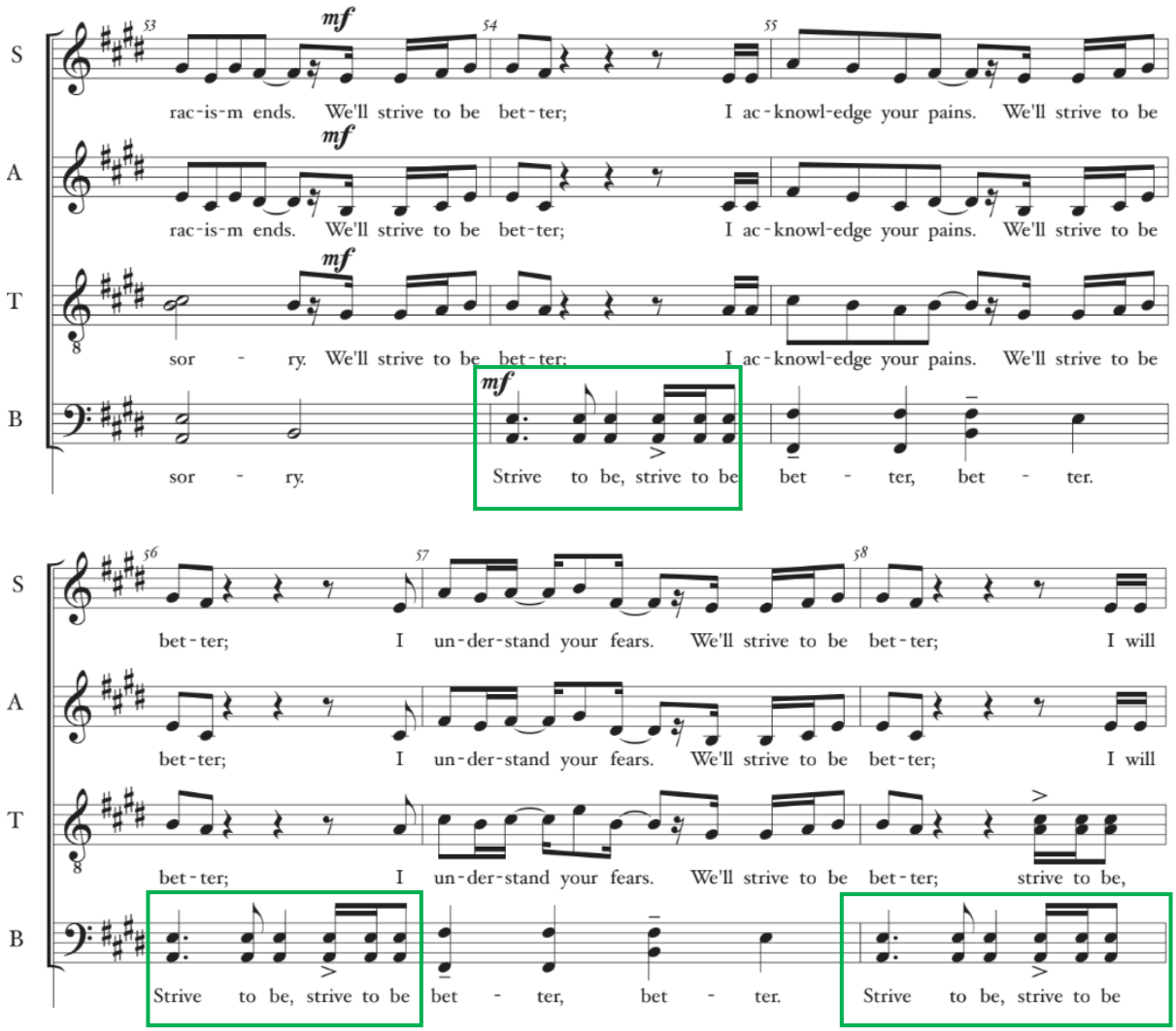


Figure 4.45: The bass voices provide harmonic pedals and rhythmic contrast under gospel-like homophonic textures in the other voices in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 53–58.

While Garrett makes effective use of the method of bifurcating the choir into two groupings of voices occasionally in this work, it is not a primary textural feature and is employed in conjunction with other textures.

At times in *I Should Be Glad*, LaBarr divides the choir into two textural units. In Verse 2, the soprano and alto sing the text in harmony, while the tenors and basses provide chordal accompaniment to the text 'I should be glad' (shown in green in Figure 4.46):

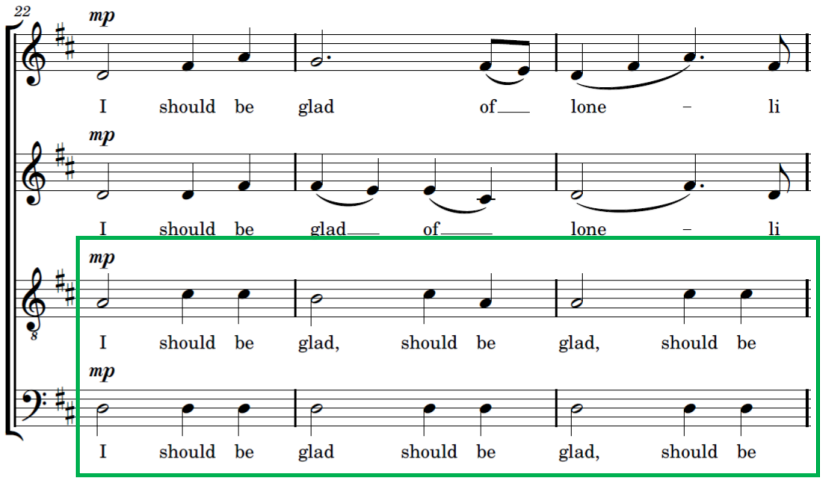


Figure 4.46: Bifurcation of textural units between the upper and lower voices in *I Should Be Glad*.

This is the only clear instance of bifurcated texture in the work, as other sections feature single voice parts in contrast with the rest of the choir, or additional contrasting lines creating more polyphonic textures.

Bifurcation of textures, and occasionally modalities, is a fundamental technique in much of Runestad's choral output. This approach enables him to develop complex textural and harmonic frameworks that are accessible to choirs rehearsing his works, and to audiences perceiving individually cohesive units within the larger structure. Runestad achieves this in *Let My Love Be Heard* and *Spirited Light* through bifurcation of contrasting textures rather than simple counterpoint between two homophonic blocks, creating more complex structures while maintaining wall-of-sound choral timbres. The central section and dramatic climax of Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard* features a *perpetuum mobile* of triplet quaver movement in the upper voices, with each of the four parts entering on a different beat of the bar to create a thick weave of harmony and texture. Simultaneously, the lower voices repeat the titular text of the work in homophonic declamation (see Figure 4.47):
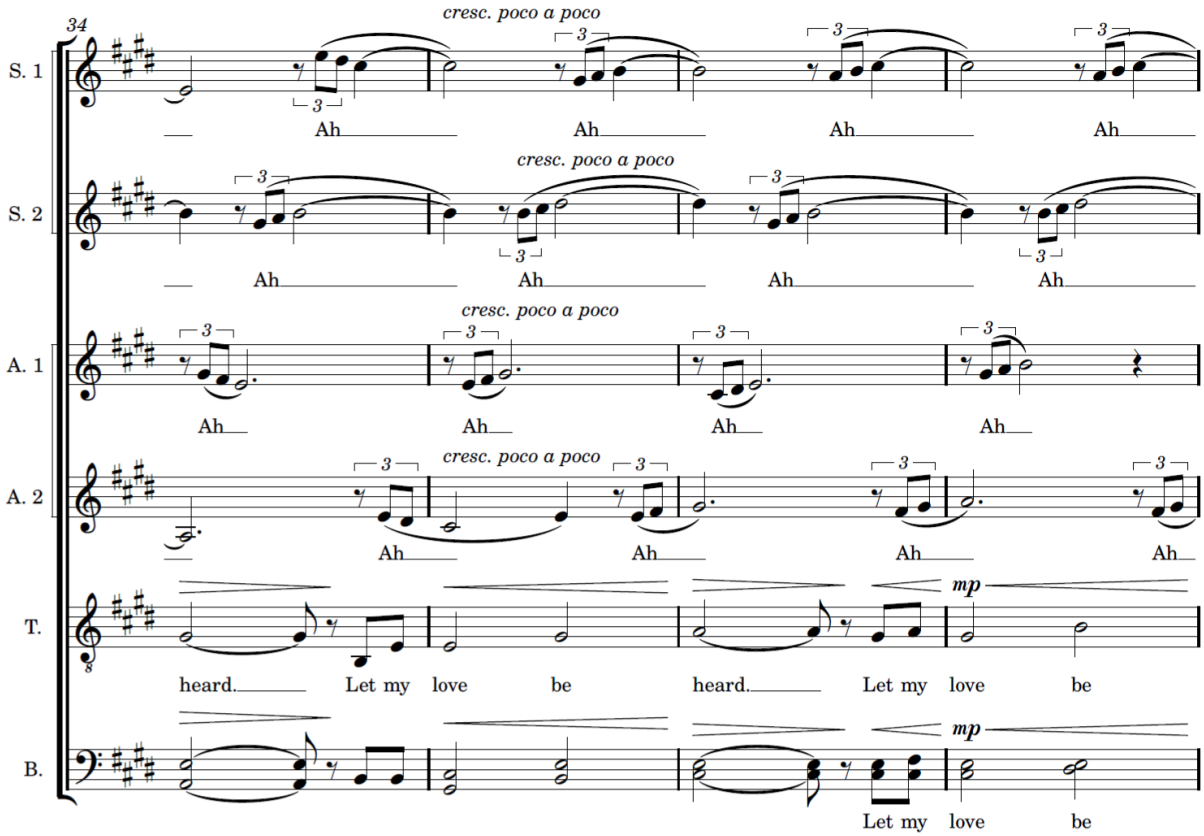


Figure 4.47: polyphonic triplet figures in the upper voices over homophonic declamation of text in the lower voices in Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard*, bars 34–37.

The rhythm in the lower voices features straight tuplet quavers against the triplet quavers in the upper voices, creating polymetric contrast as well as polytextural contrast in this bifurcation of the choir. In *Spirited Light*, the texture in the opening two IPS Groups in bars 1–4 and 5–12 (see Table 4.1) oscillates between homorhythm and antiphony between the upper and lower voice parts. The first bar contains a homorhythmic passage of triplet quavers, beginning in unison octaves before splitting into harmony. In bar 2 this is followed by antiphony between the 'light' motif in the upper voices (shown in Figure 4.48 in red) and chordal exclamations in the lower voices (shown in green):

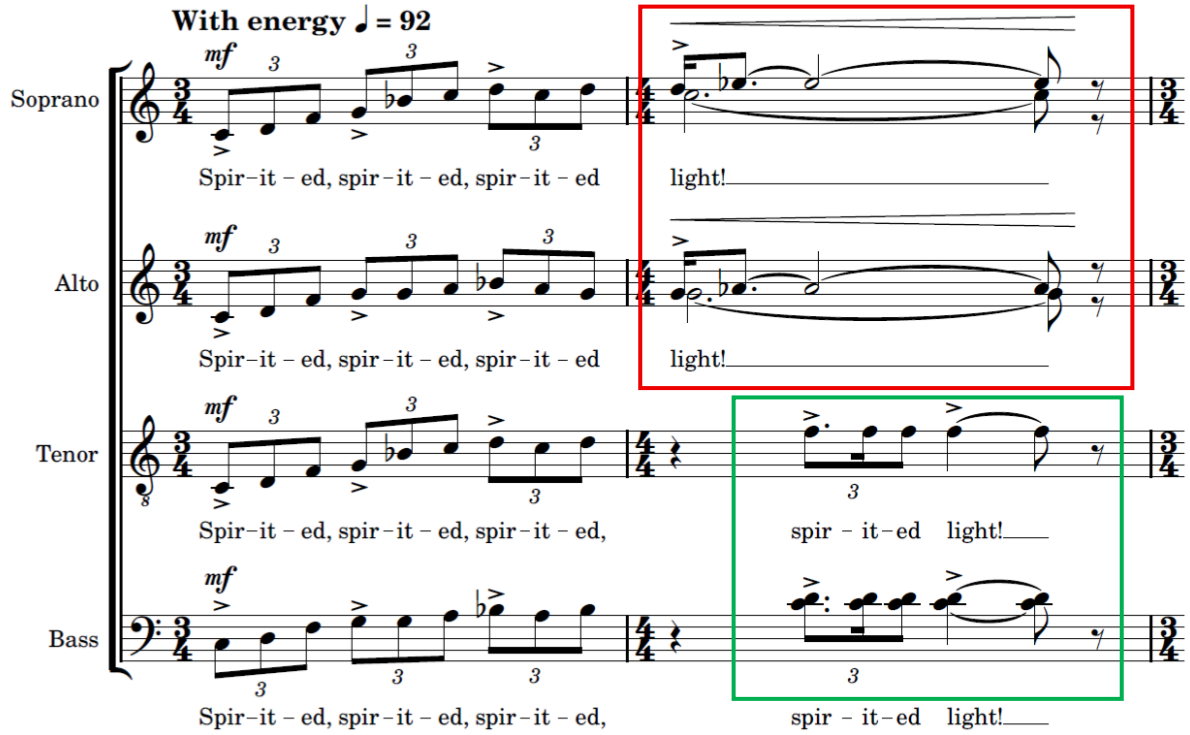


Figure 4.48: Textural variation in the opening two bars of *Spirited Light*.

This pattern continues throughout the opening two IPS Groups before more polyphonic textures emerge.

Runestad bifurcates the choir into two parts later in the work, juxtaposing heterophonic and homophonic textures between the upper and lower voices on the text 'that a mud-bound spirit might soar.' Evoking a soaring spirit, the upper voices sing ascending scales in four-part canon alternating between D-mixolydian scales and F major scales (see Figure 4.49):

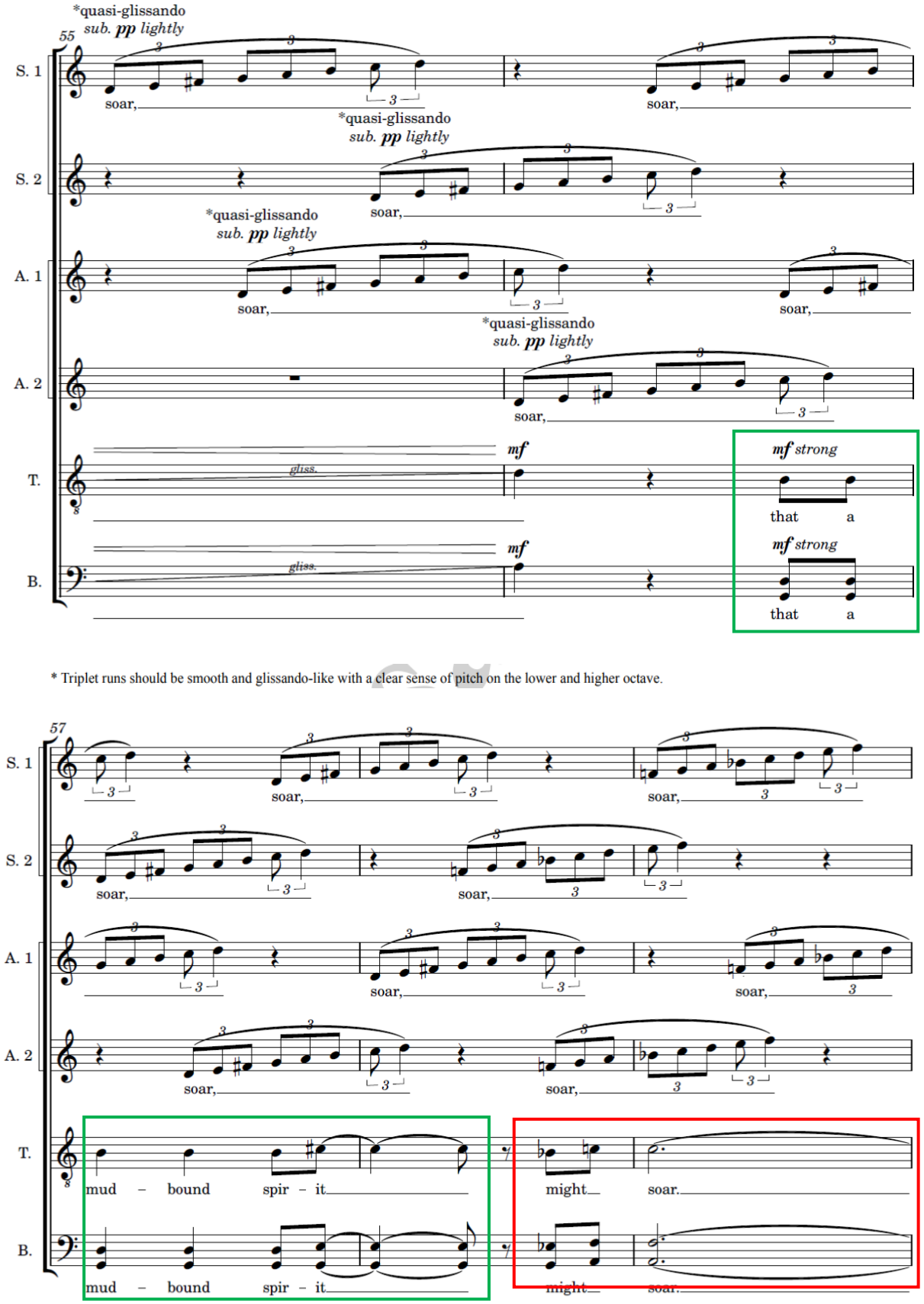


Figure 4.49: Heterophony in the upper voices juxtaposed with homophony in the lower voices in *Spirited Light*, bars 55–59.

Furthermore, Runestad instructs the singers to sing these rising scales *quasi-glissando* with the instruction: 'Triplet runs should be smooth and glissando-like with a clear sense of pitch on the lower and higher octave.' This allows individual variation in each line, creating an even more complex, heterophonic texture in the upper voices. This is contrasted with a *mezzo forte* 'strong' homophonic texture in the lower voices cycling between G-lydian (shown in Figure 4.49 in green) and F-mixolydian (shown in red). Runestad uses this same combination of triplet rhythms in the upper voices sung against straight quavers in the lower voices in *Let My Love Be Heard* (see Figure 4.47). While this is an example of a bifurcation of the choir into upper and lower voices, the contrast of texture between the two parts generates greater textural interest than antiphony of two homophonic blocks of choral texture. Furthermore, the voicing of the two parts, combining the polyphony with the lighter timbre of the upper voices while the richer timbre of the lower voices carries the text.

Runestad's method of bifurcating textures and modalities enables him to craft complex structures and sonorities while ensuring that the music remains accessible to both the choir and the audience. Both examples above bear striking resemblance to the climactic, central section of Whitacre's *i carry your heart*, and occur in a similar place in the overall structure of the work. Whitacre's work, however, was composed after both of these works by Runestad, suggesting that a dialogue is being formed between New Transcendentalist composers.

Forrest's use of heterophony in 'Selah' is discussed earlier in this chapter under *Cluster Chords*, as he creates a dense harmonic cluster through the gradual and aleatoric shift from one chord to another. Other textural devices employed in the work include homophony, antiphony, monody, and polyphony. Homophonic textures are used throughout the work as Forrest explores and develops modal harmonies and sonorities (see Figure 4.50):
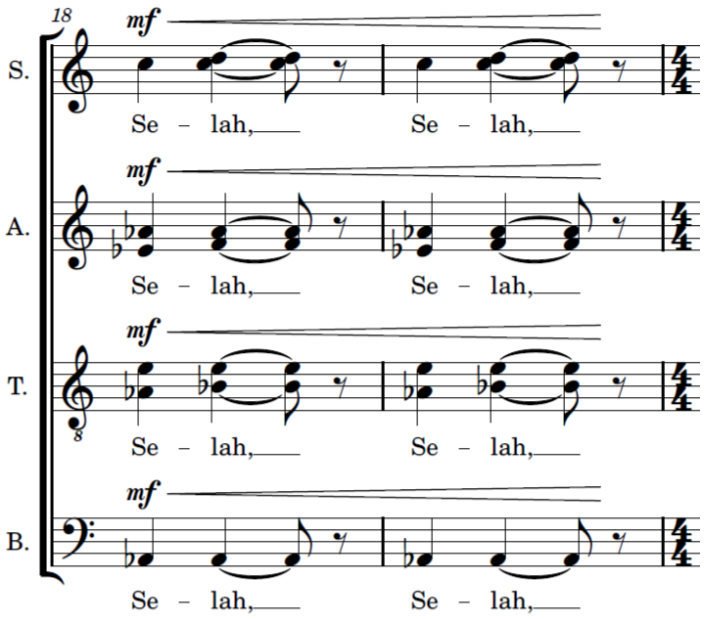


Figure 4.50: Homophonic textures as Forrest introduces the mode of A-flat-lydian in 'Selah', bars 18–19.

After establishing homophony as a textural brushstroke in the work, Forrest later complements the homophonic sections with a single line in relief to add polyphonic interest. Figure 4.51 below displays bars 25–28 in which the tenor 2 sings a pedal tone with the rhythm offset by one crotchet from the homophonic declamation of the text in all other parts:
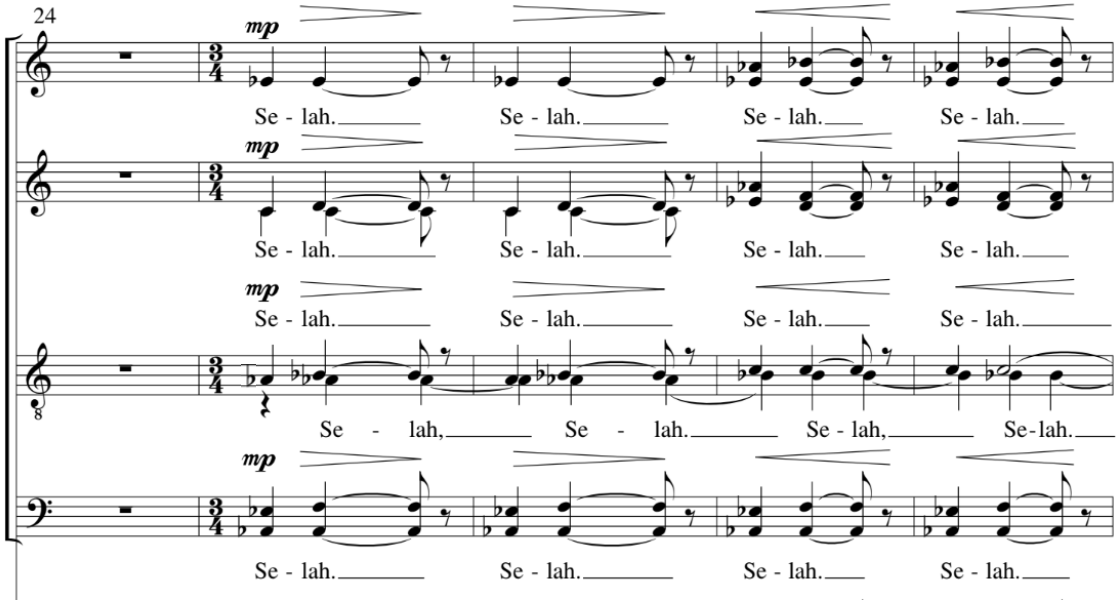


Figure 4.51: Bifurcation of homophonic texture and an offset tenor 2 pedal in 'Selah', bars 25–28.

This polyphonic contrast heightens tension effectively during this phrase, allowing Forrest to build upon the A-flat-lydian harmony while maintaining a sense of forward momentum.

Monody features heavily in the work, as the clarion melody is often placed against sustained chords in the other voices as shown in earlier examples. Nearing the climax of the work, Forrest combines the homophonic chordal textures with the clarion melody in octaves at a triple *forte* dynamic (see Figure 4.52):

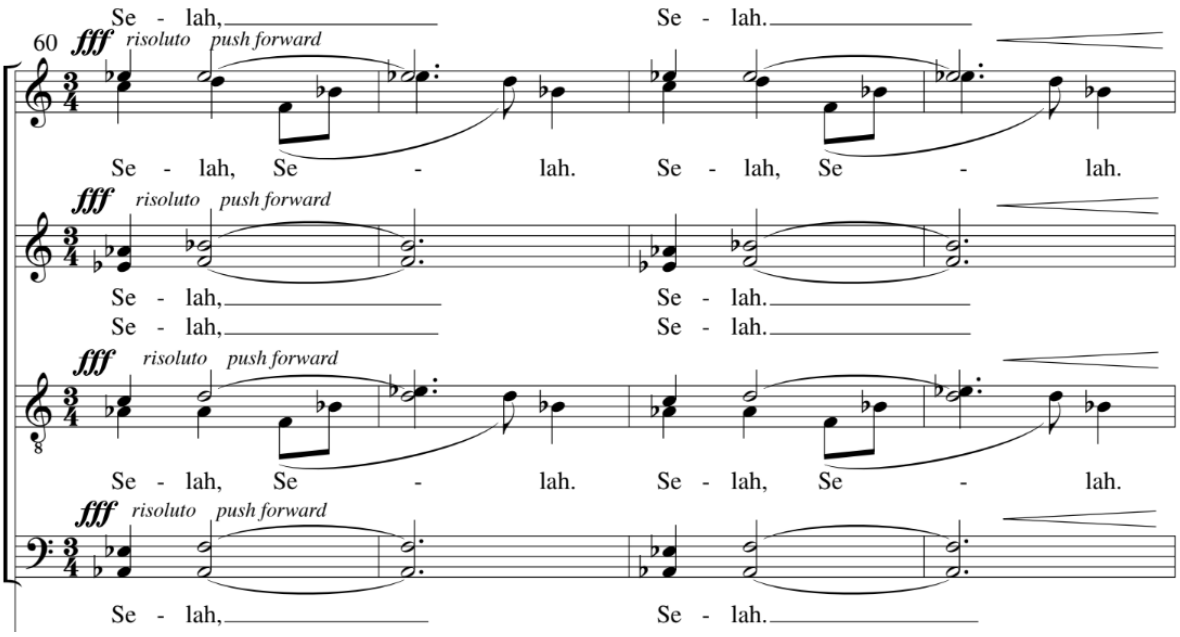


Figure 4.52: A variation of the clarion melody sung in octaves by the soprano 2 and tenor 2 over the homophonic A-flat-lydian chord progression at the climax of 'Selah' in bar 60.

By combining these two ideas, Forrest presents a climactic culmination of all textural units and thematic materials of 'Selah.'

In the most texturally complex section of 'Selah' (see Figure 4.53 below), Forrest uses a double-antiphonal texture, bifurcating the choir into antiphony between the sopranos and tenors (shown in red) alongside rhythmic contrast in the altos and basses (shown in green):
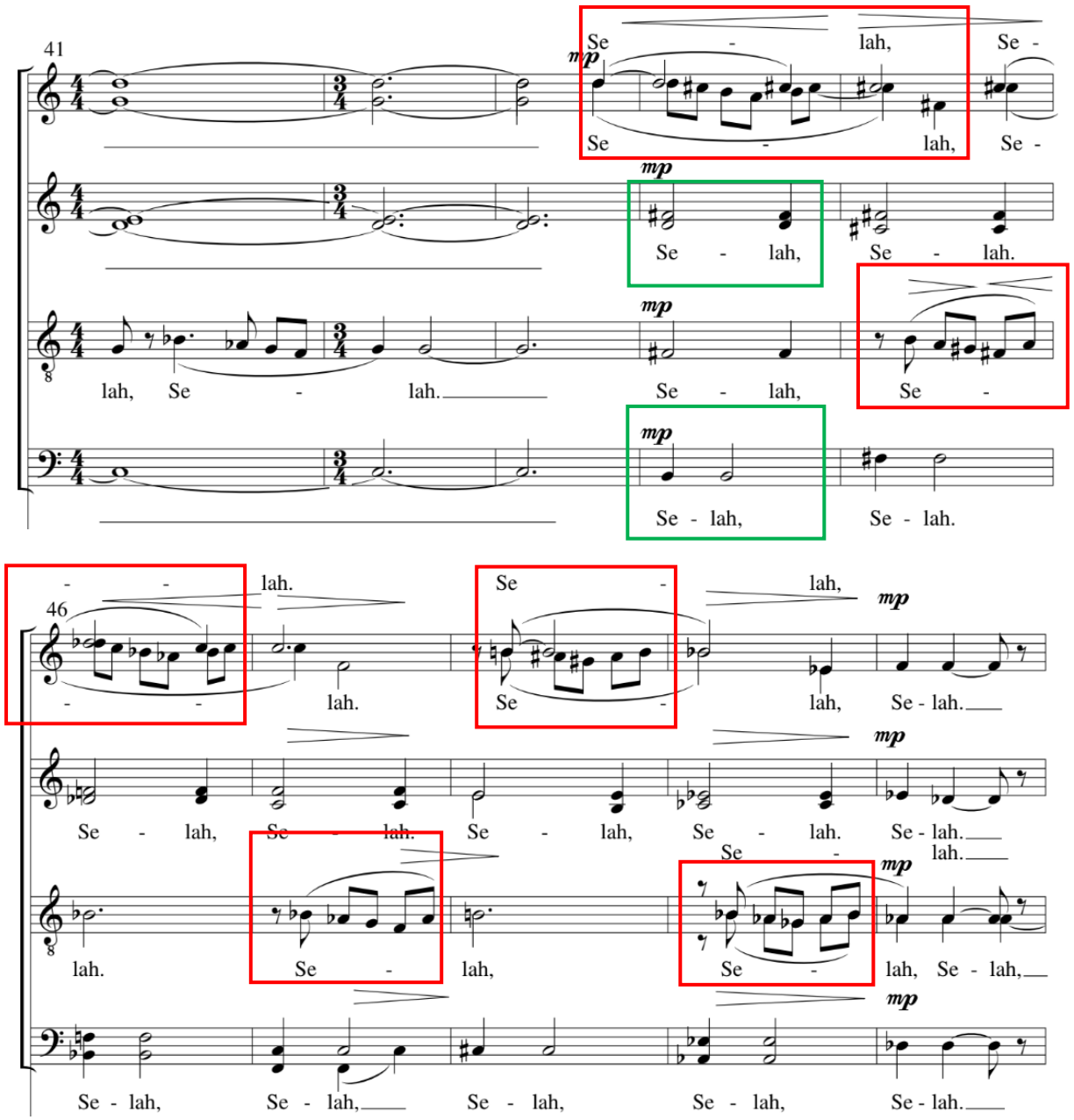


Figure 4.53: Double-antiphonal texture in bars 43–49 of ‘Selah’.

Quaver movement is passed antiphonally between the soprano and tenor voices, while the basses and altos sing alternate rhythms in the division of syllables on the text with the altos holding the first syllable for two beats while the basses hold it for one beat. The bifurcation of the choir with two antiphonal textures, presented simultaneously, creates a complex texture over the chromatic modulation from B minor (bars 44–45) to B-flat minor (bars 46–48). This weaving of multiple antiphonal pairings into a complex fabric of textures goes beyond the usual bifurcation of two clearly audible blocks of homophonic groupings of voices typical of Whitacre’s idiosyncratic style, suggesting an eagerness to expand the textural possibilities of New Transcendentalism.

Another composer who constructs large, complex textures through the combination of multiple antiphonal and polyphonic units is Trumbore. Throughout *After the Storm Passes*, she divides the choir into two textural groupings, with one responsible for the driving of the text and the other providing textural underlay. At times, one of the groups contains inner counterpoint, lending greater textural and rhythmic interest. For example, in bars 53–57 (see Figure 4.54), the soprano and alto parts sing a sustained major third on A-flat over the tenor and bass parts progressing the text of the poem. Within the tenor and bass voice parts there is inner rhythmic variation (shown in red), with the offset rhythms of the opening chords presented in the bass against the tenor:
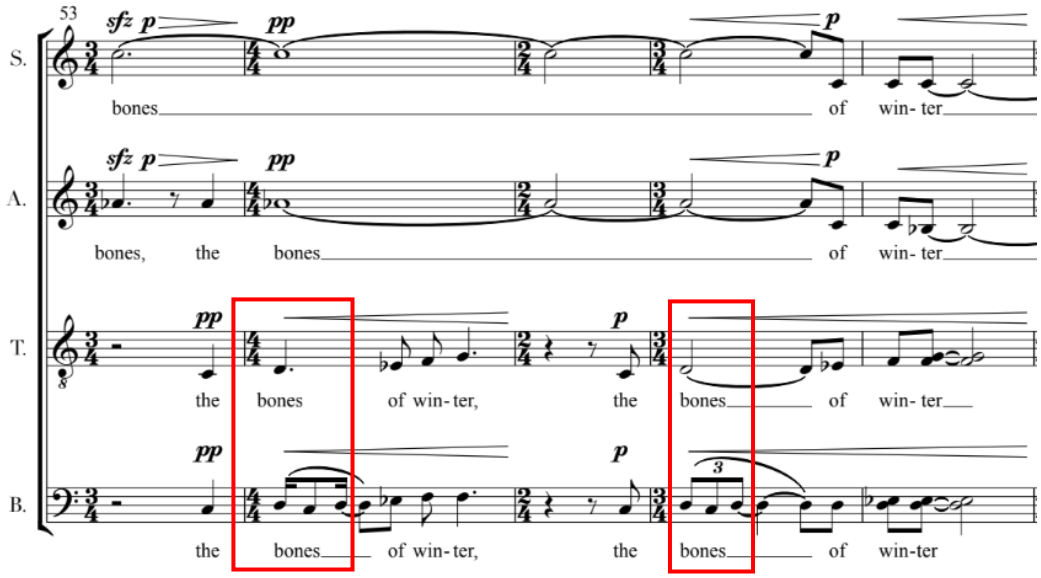


Figure 4.54: Bifurcated textures between the upper and lower voice parts with inner counterpoint in the lower voices in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 53–57.

At one moment in the piece the texture extends to three textural groupings: a non-textual 'wind' motif whistled or sung in canon by Solo 1 and Solo 3 (shown below in Figure 4.55 in red) over the 'thunder' chords in the soprano, alto and tenor voices (blue) while the basses sing the melody (green):



Figure 4.55: Three textural units presented simultaneously in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 18–21.

As with the 'thunder' chord in the opening bars of the work, the chord in the example above features inner rhythmic contrast, varying between quaver triplet and semiquaver movement to maintain a sense of forward momentum within the thick, clustered texture. This similarity in compositional approach by Trumbore in *After the Storm Passes*, and by Forrest in 'Selah', builds upon the wall-of-sound effect integral to New Transcendentalist repertoire by adding further polyphonic lines to generate greater counterpoint and textural complexity.

While the explicit harmonic bifurcation explored by Whitacre through polychordalism has not been adopted widely by his peers, the bifurcated approach to choral texture has become an intrinsic aspect of New Transcendentalist composition. Drawing on the choral timbre of the wall-of-sound effect, these composers have expanded upon this method to create increasingly complex choral textures. These developments in turn have influenced Whitacre, with his 2016 work *i carry your heart* featuring the bifurcation of polyphony in the upper voices and homophony in the lower voices explored earlier by Runestad in *Let My Love Be Heard* and *Spirited Light* (both 2014). Alongside this treatment of choral texture, these composers have

also expanded their textural palette to include other, diverse approaches to texture, creating greater variety within their works.

Alternative Approaches to Texture

While bifurcation of homophonic units is a core element of New Transcendentalism, one area in which the composers addressed in this chapter differ from Whitacre is the diversity of textural approaches present in their works. While Whitacre's works are often limited to homophonic, antiphonal and bifurcated textures with limited use of polyphony, this next generation of composers utilises additional textures, such as fugue and micropolyphony, to generate polyphonic interest and break out of the sameness of homophony.

Runestad's *Spirited Light* navigates a wide range of textures, including homophony, polyphony, antiphony and traditional counterpoint. Under the heading *Bifurcation*, Figures 4.48 and 4.49 displayed bifurcated and juxtaposed textures in the work. Alongside these New Transcendentalist textural approaches, Runestad also engages with traditional contrapuntal writing in *Spirited Light*, composing a fugue on the text 'He sought the summit, shot down the depths of God, and plummeted down past Adam.' The subject first appears in the bass voice in bar 37:

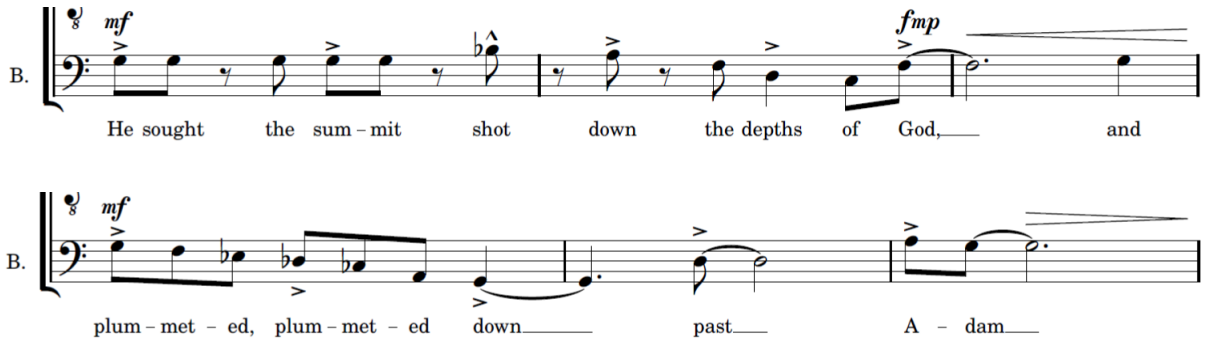


Figure 4.56: Fugal subject of *Spirited Light* in the bass voice, bars 37–42.

The subject begins with a punchy, syncopated and accented motif in G minor ending on an F on the word 'God.' This is followed by descending whole-tone scale on the starting pitch on the words 'plummeted, plummeted down.' In this motif, the division of quavers in the 4/4 metre shifts from 2+2+2+2 to 3+3+2, matching the dactyl stress pattern of the word 'plummeted.' Finally, the theme leaps up a fifth twice before resolving down by step to the starting pitch. The theme then enters a perfect fifth higher in the soprano part on C. As the subject enters seven

semitones above the first entry, the ensuing whole-tone scale is the mutually exclusive second whole-tone scale (see Figure 4.57):

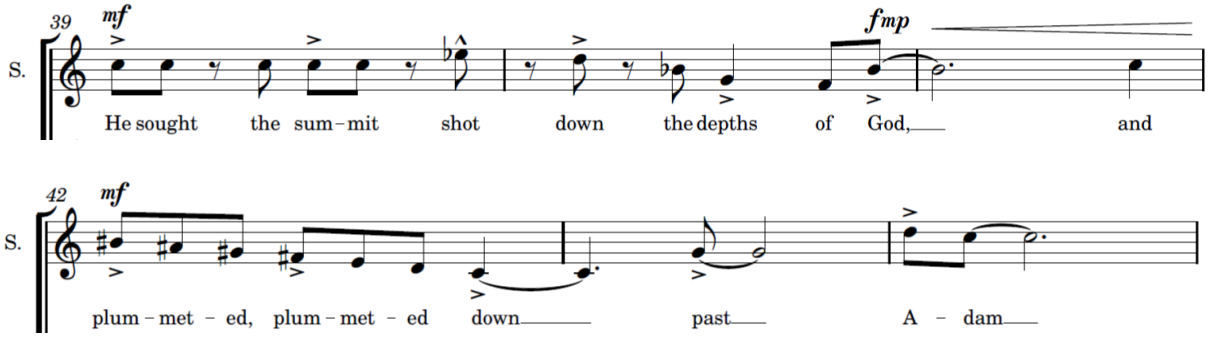


Figure 4.57: The second entry of the fugue theme in the soprano voice part.

As this section combines both whole tone scales, it features all twelve chromatic notes creating a non-tonal harmonic framework for the section. This section concludes with a dramatic descending whole-tone scale in thirds in the tenors and basses, and in thirds in the altos and sopranos a ninth above the lower voices:

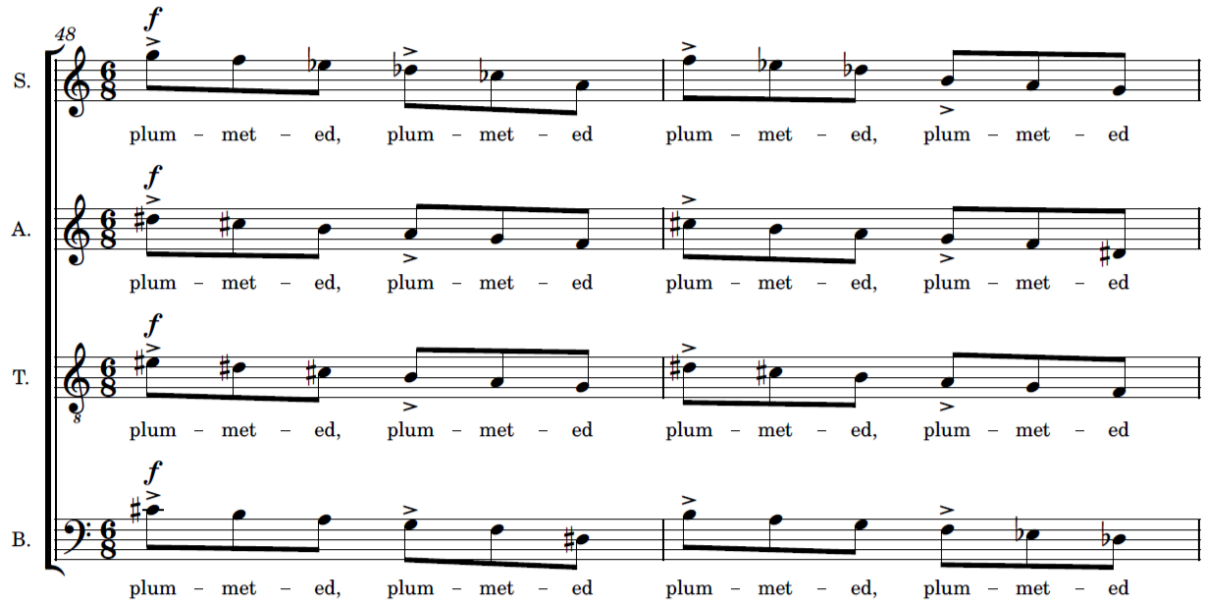


Figure 4.58: The dramatic descending whole tone scales concluding the fugal section of *Spirited Light*.
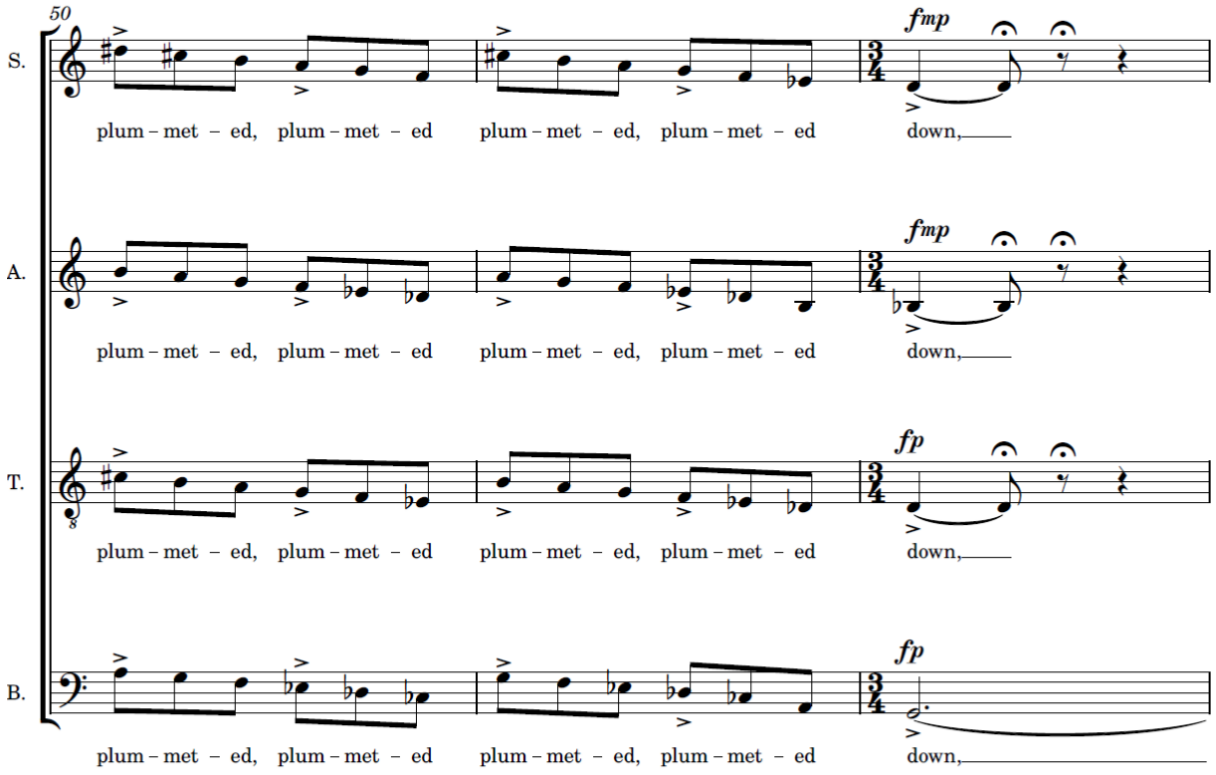


Figure 4.58 (continued).

When the pitches in each of these chords are isolated and arranged in ascending order, they form a four-note Lydian cluster chord, though this is not immediately apparent due to the spacing between the upper and lower voices.

One alternative textural approach explored by Trumbore is micropolyphony. Trumbore creates a sense of momentum and textural intrigue through many of the large chordal exclamations in *After the Storm Passes* by incorporating intricate inner rhythms. Micropolyphony, most associated with Hungarian composer György Ligeti, occurs when rhythmic patterns with subtle differences are sounded simultaneously. The micropolyphonic element that recurs throughout this piece features syncopated quaver movement against triplet quavers (see Figure 4.59):
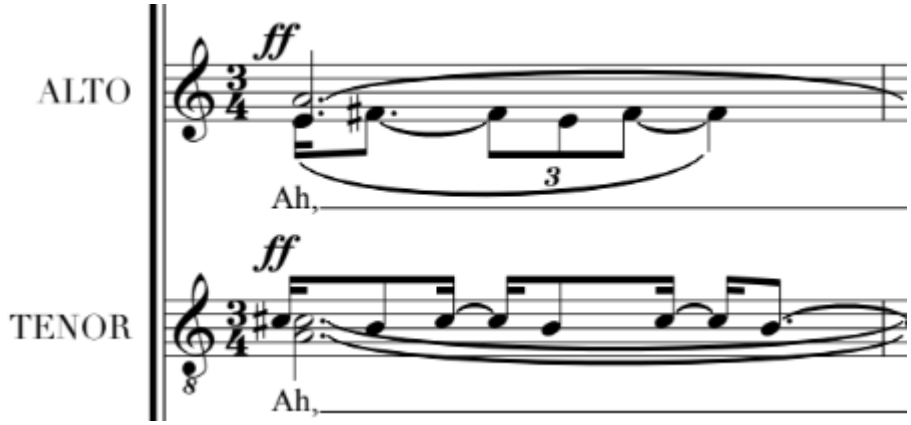


Figure 4.59: A triplet rhythm in the alto 3 against tenor 1 syncopated quavers in *After the Storm Passes*, bar 1.

As discussed earlier, these rhythmic changes in pitch create fleeting cluster chords. Trumbore varies the use of rhythmic unison and micropolyphony in these chords to oscillate between unified strength and decay, like reverberations of thunder during a storm decaying and echoing unevenly as they disperse.
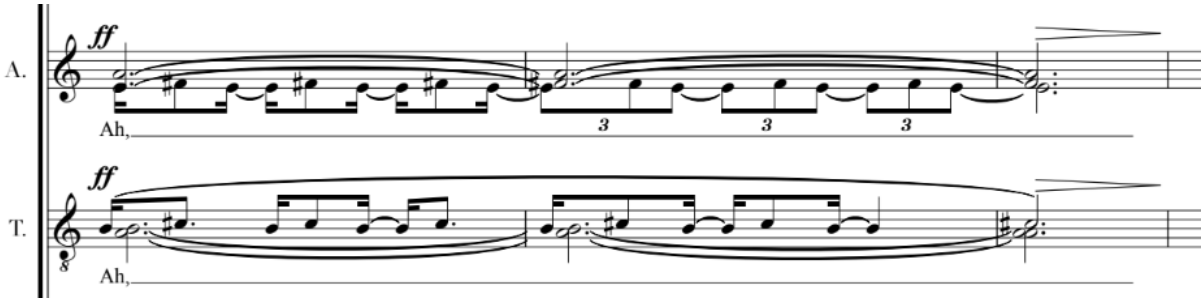


Figure 4.60: Motion between the alto 3 and tenor 1 changes from metrical unison in bar 5 to micropolyphony in bar 6.

While this rhythmic divergence may be considered an increase in textural parameters, the effect is a muddying of rhythm from a robust unison to an unclear, unsteady texture within the chordal unit of the opening exclamations.

Another facet of Trumbore's variable approach to rhythm in the work is her use of repetition and deviation from established rhythmic patterns. This occurs in the first entry of text in the work in the imitation between the soprano and alto voices.

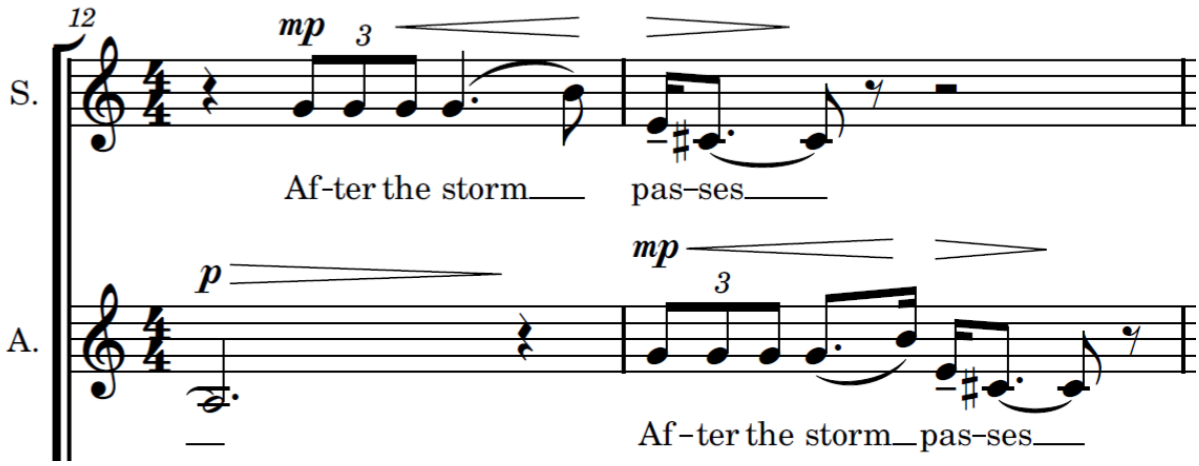


Figure 4.61: Rhythmic variation in imitation between the soprano and alto voices, bars 12–13.

In Figure 4.61 above, Trumbore shortens the duration of the two notes sung on the word 'storm' as it is reiterated by the alto part. Moments like this, as well as the constant shifting between triplet quaver and straight semiquaver movement, reinforce the sense of instability and changeability that permeates the work, reflecting the programme of the text. By incorporating sparser textures in which individual lines are presented polyphonically or antiphonally, Trumbore and Runestad create greater textural variety, expanding their textural palettes beyond the wall-of-sound timbres which have become integral to New Transcendentalism. Their work in this regard is a departure from the established New Transcendentalist soundworld, suggesting the beginning of a post-Whitacre era for the style in the 2010s.

Garrett takes a multi-faceted approach to texture in *I Will Stand With You*, including antiphonal, polyphonic and monodic textures. At no point in the work is the texture purely homophonic. One recurring textural feature in the work is the passing of text between voice parts while the other voices provide harmonic accompaniment with slower rhythmic values, creating polyphonic textures:
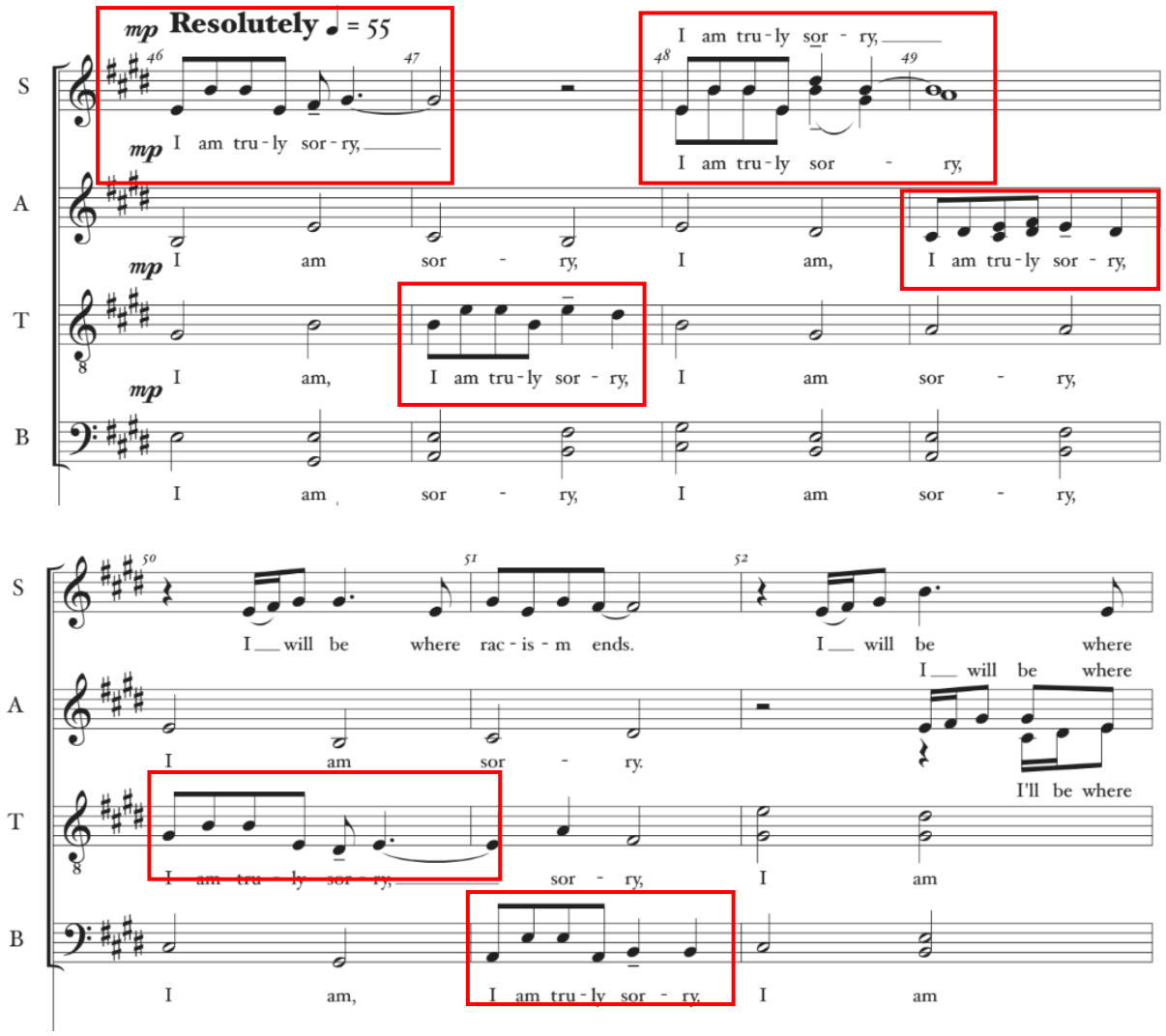


Figure 4.62: The text ‘I am truly sorry’ is passed between voice parts in bars 46–51.

Garrett returns to this technique several times in the work. There are no instances of pure homophony in the entire piece, as Garrett adds internal movement or rhythmic variety in one voice within a texture to create textural contrast. The opening chords, for example, feature internal movement and offset entries of voices:

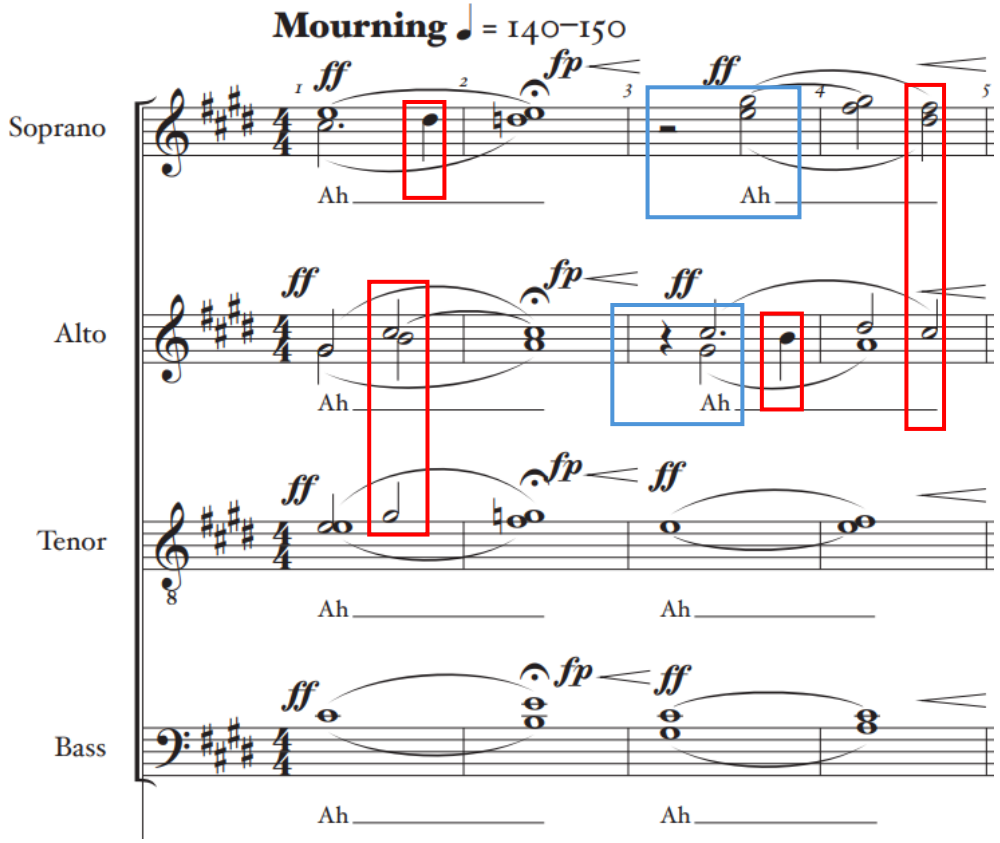


Figure 4.63: Internal movement (shown in red) and delayed entries (shown in blue) adding textural interest and contras to the opening chordal declamations of *I Will Stand with You*.

At other times, one voice part is offset from an otherwise homophonic texture to create polyphonic interest:

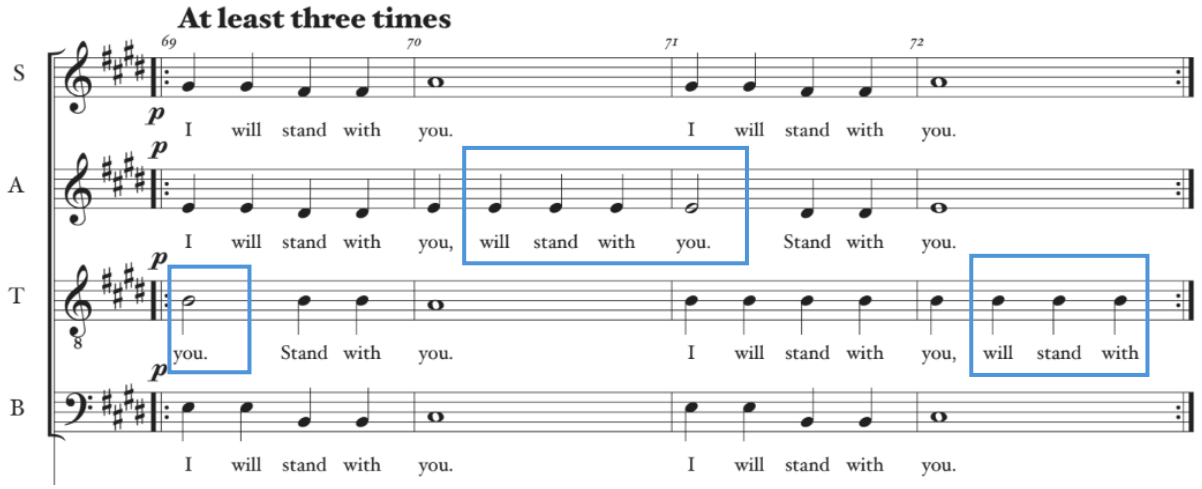


Figure 4.64: Homophonic textures disrupted by offset rhythms in the alto and tenor parts in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 69–72.

These textures permeate the majority of the work, though Garrett also uses the technique of bifurcating the choir into groupings of voice parts to create antiphonal textures and bichordal harmonies. Like Trumbore and Runestad, Garrett's approach breaks the textural mould of New Transcendentalism. In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of his composition, such as incorporating gospel elements into *I Will Stand With You*, Garrett's work draws inspiration freely from various choral styles, including New Transcendentalism. His music demonstrates how New Transcendentalism as a compositional brushstroke may be incorporated into a wide variety of choral styles.

Textural variation serves to maintain interest throughout a work, thereby preventing a repetitive, monotonous sound. What is interesting about many of the works examined in this chapter is their avoidance of homophony, particularly in the case of Garrett's *I Will Stand With You*. This is in direct contrast to foundational New Transcendentalist works, such as Whitacre's *Water Night* and *A Boy and a Girl*, both of which contain lengthy passages of declamatory, vertically oriented homophony. It appears that these composers are seeking to move away from the approach to New Transcendentalist composition that prioritises vertical harmony, instead, to focus on shaping a mode of composition that incorporates greater textural diversity. In an interview with the author, Trumbore described her approach with regard to a workshop on composition at the Western Region ACDA Conference in 2024:

> [I]t's really important to think about texture to be like, 'What are you adding? What's new?' […] homophony should be reserved for really important texts, where you want the audience to perceive exactly those words at exactly that time, in real time, versus playing with a phrase, or having the text be more muddled and then hearing it, or hearing it once and then playing with it, experimenting with it texturally […] I would love to see homophony used more sparingly, rather than being the default, personally, this is just my opinion.[24]

This sentiment was also reflected in an interview with Forrest: 'I try to just make sure that my textural palette is broad enough so that I don't just resort to the same kind of "chords, chords, chords," all the time.'[25] Whitacre's music does contain polyphonic elements, though his stated approach to composition places primacy on intelligibility of text and the emotional impact of choral texture, invoking attitudes towards polyphony in Renaissance Italy:

> I never understood the lure [*sic*] of counterpoint […] And you look at these impossibly intricate machines that [Bach] built. […] It's the human mind at work at its very best. But for me,

[24] Dale Trumbore, interview with the author, 7 March 2024.
[25] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.

> musically, it was never so interesting—I can't remember ever hearing counterpoint and thinking, 'Wow, I'm moved *because* of the counterpoint,' right? There's other things at play. So often when I'm setting choral music, I guess I sort of go back to the Council of Trent and what they told Palestrina, which is like 'enough with the counterpoint, we need to hear and understand the poetry.' And so, more and more, I find myself reserved for homophony, so that the text can be understood. And only in moments where we decide, 'okay, now we're going to meditate on this for a moment and then kind of roll with it,' then it gets a chance to become polyphonic and sort of lose its moorings.[26]

Trumbore's approach reserves homophony for particularly important moments, injecting textural variation throughout the work. Whitacre takes an opposing stance, where homophony is the primary approach to text-setting, and polyphony enters only if the meaning of the text has been established or its intelligibility is not integral to the interpretation of the poetry. While this style of writing is highly idiosyncratic to Whitacre's individual style, other composers of New Transcendentalist choral works are expanding the textural palette of the style by incorporating a greater variety of textures into their works.

Pandiatonicism

One of the essential stylistic elements of New Transcendentalism is its adherence to traditional tonal and modal tonesets. Composing within these familiar harmonic frameworks enhances the accessibility of the style, increasing its appeal for audiences and making it easily singable for choristers. Adhering to these traditional constraints of tonality and modality presents challenging limitations to composers, compelling them to utilise compositional techniques that undermine the tonal gravity of the tonic centre, thereby creating a pandiatonic soundworld.

Pandiatonicism in New Transcendentalist music is achieved through some of the compositional methods discussed earlier in this thesis, particularly secundal harmony and bifurcation. Secundal and extended harmony creates ambiguity in the function and quality of a chord within a diatonic key, particularly if chord extensions are not resolved according to traditional voice-leading methods or if chords are presented in inversion. An example of this is contained in the opening phrase of LaBarr's *I Should Be Glad*, in which the choir fans out from a unison D4 to a G chord in first inversion with an added ninth (see Figure 4.65):

[26] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

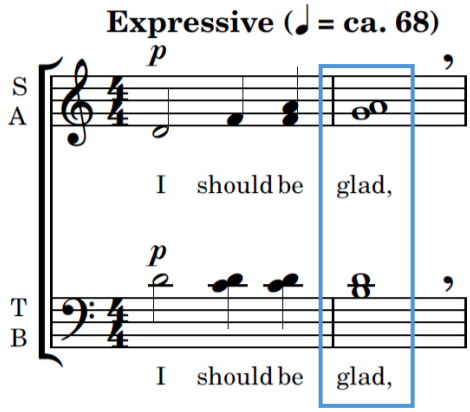


Figure 4.65: An extended, inverted chord in the opening phrase of *I Should Be Glad*.

Here, LaBarr invokes the heritage of New Transcendentalist choral composition, as the first inversion chord with an added nine is a clear reference to the Lauridsen chord. This immediately engenders an association with New Transcendentalism. The inversion of the chord in its most unstable position and the secundal clash against the root in the upper voices weakens the functionality of the chord in the context of D major and enables the chord to be experienced as a sonic object outside of the confines of traditional harmonic relationships.

Many chords and chordal groupings of voices throughout Garrett's *I Will Stand With You* are placed in second inversion. Combined with the frequent use of secundal harmony, this has the effect of destabilising functional chordal relationships and creating a pandiatonic harmonic framework. This is most evident towards the beginning of the work (see Figure 4.66 below) when the soprano parts sustain a clash of a second on C#5 and D#5 over a G#4 in the alto voice:

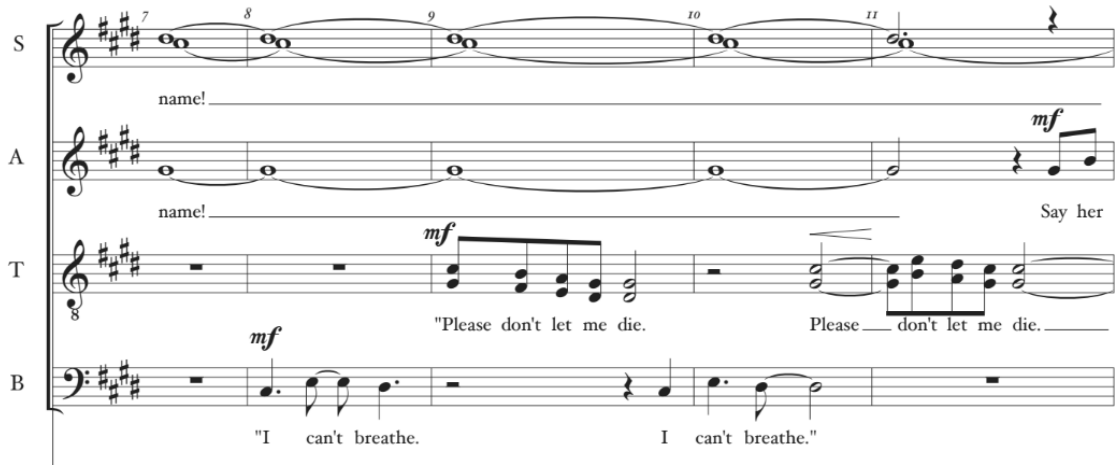


Figure 4.66: A held chord with a secundal clash in the upper voices in *I Will Stand With You*, bars 7–11.

The character of C-sharp minor has been established following the introduction, leading the ear to interpret the chord as C-sharp minor 9; however, it could also be interpreted as a G-sharp minor chord with a suspended fourth. The harmonic ambiguity achieved by placing the fifth in the C-sharp minor scale in the lowest voice of the chord purposefully undermines the tonic centre, allowing the perception of this chord to shift as the lower voices underneath alter the harmonic context. This destabilisation of traditional harmony creates a pandiatonic effect as the tonal gravity of any one pitch is subverted.

Many of Forrest's *a cappella* choral works remain in one key for the entire piece, or feature some modulation but with lengthy sections in one key, unlike the rapid and unpredictable key changes in Whitacre's 'i thank You God'.[27] *Good Night, Dear Heart* (2008), for example, is set in the key of B major and features no accidentals throughout. *Entreat Me Not To Leave You* (2012) opens in D-flat major, modulates to the relative parallel major key of B-flat major, then returns to D-flat major in bar 61. This piece concludes with a modulation back to B-flat major in bars 104–108. Excluding the modulating cadence in bar 61, the only accidentals in the entire work appear in the coda of the work (see Figure 4.67 below), with chromatic third-related chords preceding the final five bars in B-flat major:

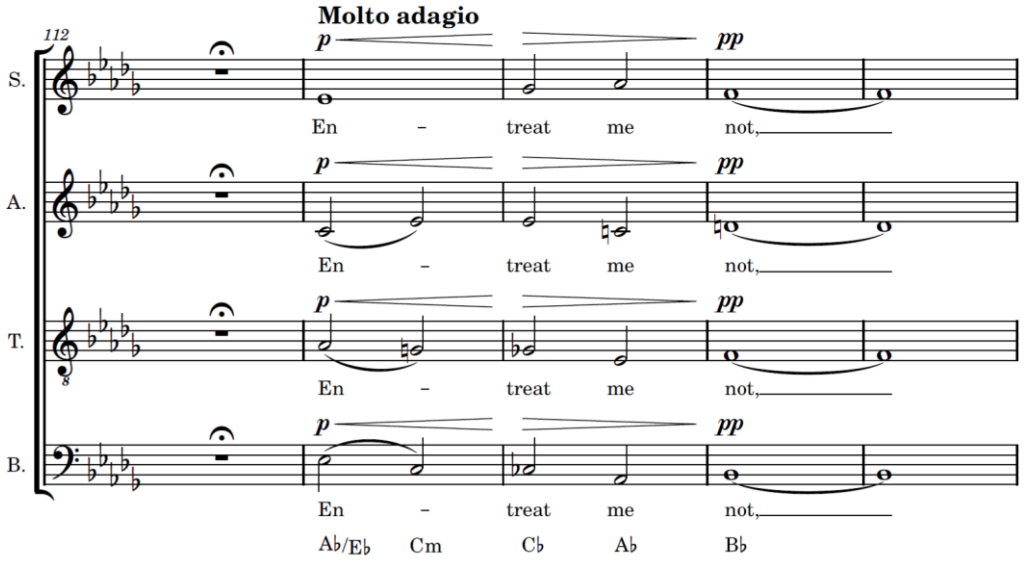


Figure 4.67: Third-related and chromatic chord progression in bars 102–103 of *Entreat Me Not To Leave You*.

[27] One exception to this trend in Forrest's *a cappella* choral output is 'Selah', discussed later under *Harmonic Frameworks*.

Third-related modulations are particularly fluid, as they do not require chromatic leading tones. Instead, they turn on pivot tones. In this case, the major third of D-flat major (F) becomes the fifth in B-flat major. The modulation to B-flat major in Figure 4.67 above is preceded by a string of third-related and chord changes: Bar 102 features a motion from A-flat major to C minor; and in bar 103 a C-flat major chord resolves to A-flat major. This sets up a perfect cadence back to D-flat major; instead, Forrest writes an interrupted cadence to B-flat with a raised third, completing the modulation to the relative parallel major. Forrest's mellifluous approach to modulation leaves a sense of harmonic unmooring despite the presence of familiar chords and intuitive voice-leading. This is another strategy by which a composer engaging with New Transcendentalism may undermine tonal gravity in a work while adhering to familiar tonal and modal tonesets.

The works of each of the composers under review in this chapter are replete with examples of this approach to harmony, featuring the inversion, extension, and combination of chords to create functional ambiguity. This displaces chords from the weight of history and enables the listener to experience them as sonic objects, heightening the emotional and dramatic effect of each chord choice and the text upon which they are placed. Pandiatonicism is the key to the success of New Transcendentalism, as it maintains the accessibility of the repertoire while enable the composers to create sonorities that sound 'new' to the listener, or, as Forrest puts it, 'timely'.[28] While pandiatonicism applied to a single toneset is common throughout New Transcendentalist repertoire, some composers have experimented with higher degrees of harmonic variation, further increasing the instability of tonal gravity in their works.

Harmonic Frameworks

While much of the New Transcendentalist repertoire adheres to a single key with the addition of occasional chromatic notes or passing modulations, some composers, namely Trumbore, Runestad and Forrest, have incorporated complex harmonic frameworks with rapidly changing keys and modes throughout a work. This can serve a programmatic or a practical function, adding variety and interest or reflecting the atmosphere of the source text. This approach was adopted by Whitacre for 'i thank You God', but has not featured prominently in his works in

[28] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.

the decades since its composition, with later works such as *i carry your heart* and *All Seems Beautiful to Me* (2022) maintaining a single key with no chromatic notes.

Much like the changeability of rhythm and texture throughout the work discussed earlier, Trumbore's *After The Storm Passes* features frequent and unpredictable modulations between modes and tonal centres. The piece largely contrasts mixolydian, lydian and diatonic tone-sets (see Table 4.7):

Mode/Key	Bar Numbers
A-mixolydian	1–15
D-lydian	16–17
F-lydian (cadence)	17–18
C major	18–24
Bb-lydian	25–27
Eb major	27–28
Db-lydian	29
Ab-lydian	30–39
Ab major	39–43
C-mixolydian	43–47
C major	47–52
Ab-lydian	53–59
C minor	60–63
Eb major	64–75
C-mixolydian	76
G major	77
C-lydian	78–79

Table 4.7: Modulations in *After the Storm Passes*.

The table above demonstrates Trumbore's transient approach to modality and harmony in this piece. Some modalities last only a single bar in duration. In one case, the F-lydian mode is alluded to in bars 17–18 by a cadential figure in bar 17 before suddenly departing to the next modality (see Figure 4.68):
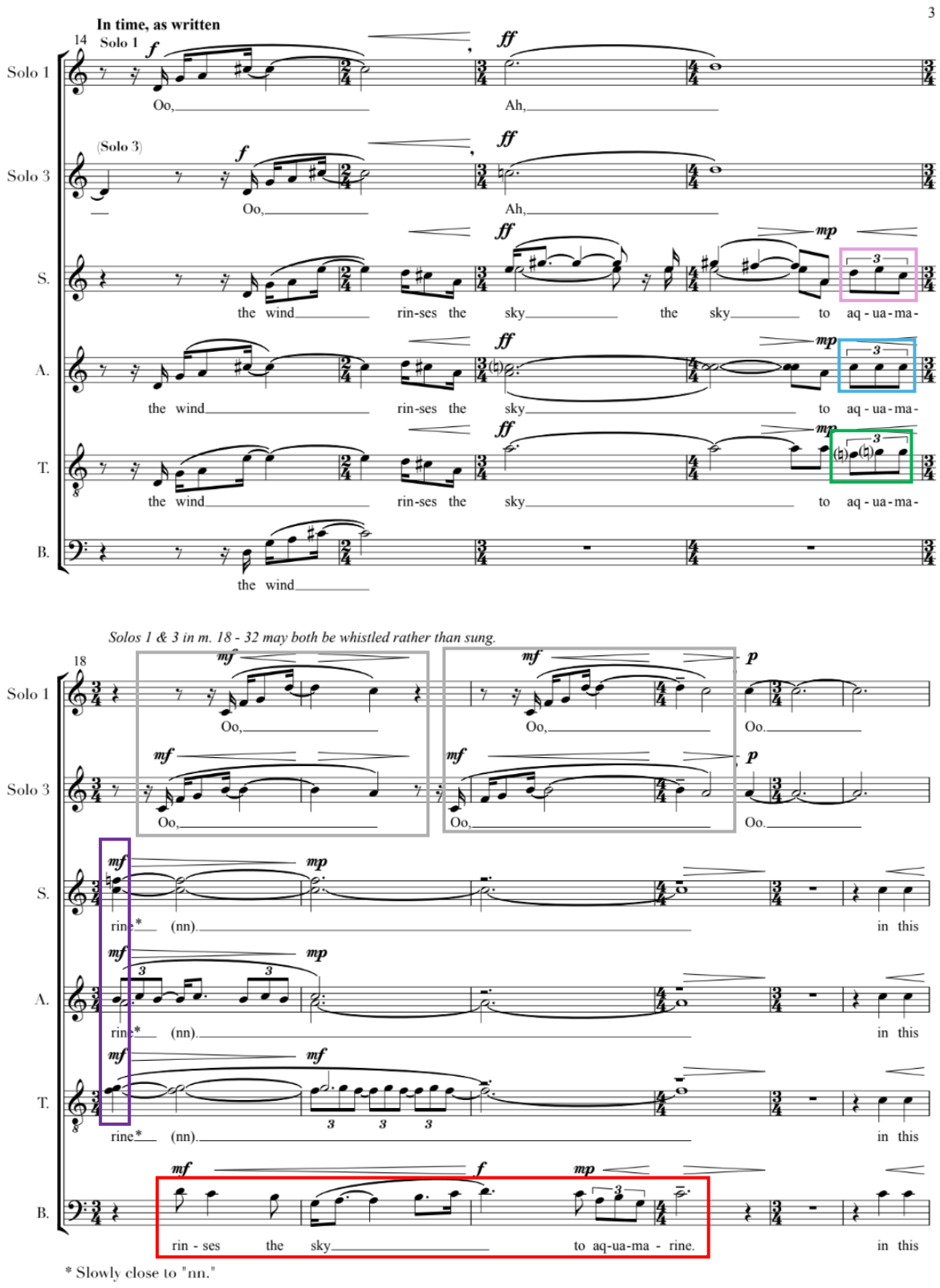


Figure 4.68: A cadence in bar 17 of *After the Storm Passes* arriving on F-lydian in bar 18, followed by the establishment of the key of C major through the bass melody.

In Figure 4.68 we see a cadence to F clearly delineated in the soprano, alto and tenor parts in bar 17, arriving at an F-lydian extended chord in bar 18. The tenorizans occurs in the tenor

voice (highlighted in green), the cantizans in the soprano voice (highlighted in pink), and the bassizans in the alto voice (highlighted in blue). At the arrival point of the cadence on the first beat of bar 18, the tenor, alto, and soprano 2 voices create a five-note cluster of an F-lydian pentachord (highlighted in purple). This tonality is reinforced by upward leaps of a fourth in the Solo 1 and Solo 3 landing on F on the metacrusis and anacrusis (highlighted in grey). This tonality is immediately undermined, however, by a melody sung by the bass part which centres around C (highlighted in red).

While the piece features a combination of Lydian, Mixolydian and diatonic tonesets, Lydian modes occur most frequently, with six different Lydian modes present in the work. Furthermore, during some of the diatonic sections, such as the C major section from bars 18–21 and the Eb major section from bars 64–75, the chord of IV within those keys is heavily emphasised, blurring the line between the major key and the Lydian mode. As shown in Figure 4.68 above, the bass melody centred around C creates a strong sense of tonic gravity towards C, though the F-lydian cluster chord above it and the upward leaps to F in the solo voices heavily emphasise the chord of IV in this key. The gravitation towards the Lydian mode links the work to the harmonic language of New Transcendentalism, while the experimentation with Mixolydian sonorities departs from this trend. The sudden harmonic changes evoke the turbulent and unpredictable nature of a storm, while the work's harmonic ambiguity contributes to an atmosphere of suspense and changeability. While the tonal shifts occur frequently and unpredictably, the work never features combinations of pitches outside of a traditional modal and diatonic toneset, demonstrating Trumbore's strict adherence to the pandiatonicism of New Transcendentalism.

Like Trumbore's compositional approach in *After the Storm Passes*, Runestad cycles unpredictably between tonal centres, tone-sets and modalities in his works. However, unlike the other works considered in this study, *Spirited Light* expands beyond pandiatonic and modal frameworks, including non-tonal scales and polymodal passages to create complex harmonic palettes (see Table 4.8):

Mode/Key	Bar Numbers
C-dorian	1
C minor	2–3
A major	3
B major	4
E-lydian	5–6
E-dorian	7
C major	8
B-lydian	9–14
C minor	14
F minor	15–18
C minor	19–24
E-flat major	25–36
Non-tonal	37–51
G-dorian	52–53
Polymodal	54–73
G-lydian	74–81
G minor	81–82
A minor	83–84
A-mixolydian	85–89
A-dorian	90–93
A (chromatic tag/coda)	94–96

Table 4.8: Modulations in *Spirited Light*.

In some instances, the duration of the key or mode is only one bar long. This is particularly common in the tempestuous opening of the work (see Figure 4.69):
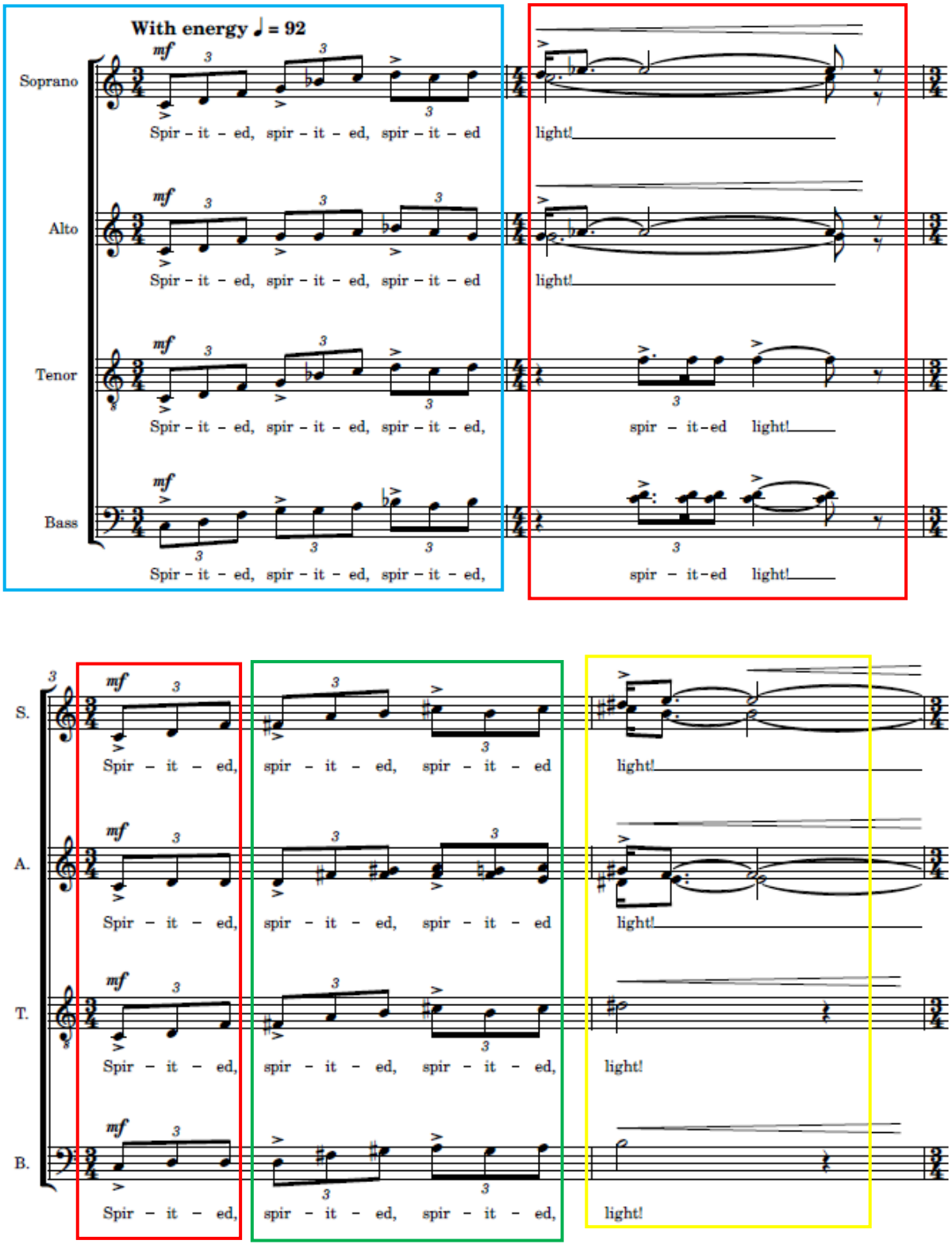


Figure 4.69: The opening four bars of *Spirited Light* cycle through C-dorian (blue), C minor (red), A major (green) and B major (yellow).

The erratic harmonic changes slow towards the end of the first stanza of the text in bars 15–18 as the harmony settles into F minor on the text ‘insatiably into God’s gaze.’ This settling of

tonal gravity occurs during a decrease in parametric values articulating the overarching Tension/Release IPS in bars 12–19.[29]

Runestad regularly employs non-tonal scales in his compositions, featuring the whole-tone scale in *Spirited Light* and *Alleluia*. Using textural devices such as fugue and heterophony in *Spirited Light*, he crafts twelve-tone and polymodal harmonies in the work. The first occurs during the contrapuntal section discussed earlier under *Alternative Approaches to Texture*. In this section, the subject of the fugue features a descending whole tone scale. This scale appears in both permutations in this section, creating a twelve-tone harmonic framework when presented in combination. This is followed by a section in which the composer juxtaposes D-mixolydian and F major ascending scales in heterophony in the upper voices against G-lydian and F-mixolydian harmonies in the lower voices. This was discussed in detail earlier under the heading of *Bifurcation*. Runestad's engagement with these non-tonal harmonic frameworks in his *a cappella* works represents a divergence from other composers of the New Transcendentalist style, particularly Whitacre, suggesting a deviation towards a post-New Transcendentalist approach to choral composition.

In Forrest's choral cycle *Words From Paradise*, the composer makes more frequent use of modulation, exploring a variety of keys and modes and using chromatic alterations. 'Selah', for example, displays third-related, parallel, and chromatic modulations, exploring secundal and Lydian harmonies with several tonal centres (see Table 4.9 below):

[29] For full IPS Analysis of the work, see Table 4.1.

Mode/Key	Bar Numbers
C minor	1
E-flat major	2–5
E-flat-lydian	6–8
C minor	9
C major	10–14
C-lydian	15–17
A-flat-lydian	18–19
C-phrygian	20–24
A-flat-lydian	25–29
F-dorian	30–35
A-flat-lydian	36–38
C mixed mode	39–43
B minor	44–45
B-flat minor	46–48
C-sharp-dorian	49
A-flat-dorian	50–52
F minor	53
C-flat major	54
E-flat major	55–56
F-dorian	57–59
A-flat-lydian	60–63
C-flat-lydian	64–65
D-flat-lydian	71
C minor	72
E-flat major	73–76
E-flat-lydian	77–79
C minor	80–82
C major	83–87
C-lydian	87–89

Table 4.9: Key/mode changes in ‘Selah.’

As the text of the movement consists of a single two-syllable word, Forrest injects greater variety into the piece through the constant shifting of tonality. He explores Lydian and secundal harmonies through placing the repeated clarion melody in a variety of contexts. The increased variety of key centre counterbalances the self-imposed limitations of text and modal quality. 'Selah' is a study in New Transcendentalist modal harmony, with Forrest pushing the boundaries of the Lydian mode to their limit through use of frequent modulation and recontextualisation of the Lydian fourth in multiple key centres.

For Trumbore, Runestad, and Forrest, a high degree of harmonic variety permeates some of their compositional output, as examined above. These composers have adopted this technique and expanded on the harmonic possibilities of New Transcendentalism. The only comparison in Whitacre's output is his study in polychordal harmony, 'i thank You God', which also cycles ephemerally through various keys and modes. This approach may serve a programmatic purpose; in 'i thank You God' and *Spirited Light*, both represent an uncontainable, ecstatic form of spirituality. Trumbore utilises the harmonic changes to mirror the changeable atmosphere of a storm in *After the Storm Passes*. In the case of 'Selah', Forrest uses frequent harmonic changes, many of which are third-related, to add variety to the repeated harmonic and melodic motifs that permeate the work. While Whitacre took this approach early in his career with 'i thank You God', he has not replicated it in a significant manner in his subsequent *a cappella* works.

Extensive harmonic frameworks with numerous key changes undermine tonal gravity, augmenting the unmoored harmonic atmosphere typical of pandiatonic New Transcendentalist composition. While other strategies for destabilising functional harmony can be employed by composers, as examined in the previous section under *Pandiatonicism*, this approach of unpredictable and frequent modulation expands the New Transcendentalist soundworld beyond the limitations of fixed tonesets.

The Extended Chord of IV

One recurring sonority that pervades New Transcendentalist repertoire stems from the prominent use of extended chords on the fourth degree of the scale in the major diatonic context, or the sixth in the minor diatonic context, particularly at dramatic moments in the narrative arc of a work. Owen notes the prevalence of secundal harmony, with works often

beginning and ending with a secundal clash.[30] This is also true of the chord of IV in New Transcendentalist composition, particularly with the inclusion of the added seventh and/or the added ninth. The prominence of Lydian harmonies in New Transcendentalism is intertwined with this phenomenon, as the Lydian mode is based upon the fourth degree of the major scale.[31] By emphasising the chord of IV, New Transcendentalist composers juxtapose the two poles of tonal gravity in the pandiatonic framework of their compositions.

In Forrest's *Good Night, Dear Heart* (2009), an extended chord of IV—a complete IV9 chord in B major—recurs and is dwelt upon for lengthy durations throughout the strophic work when the titular text of the work is sung (see Figure 4.70):

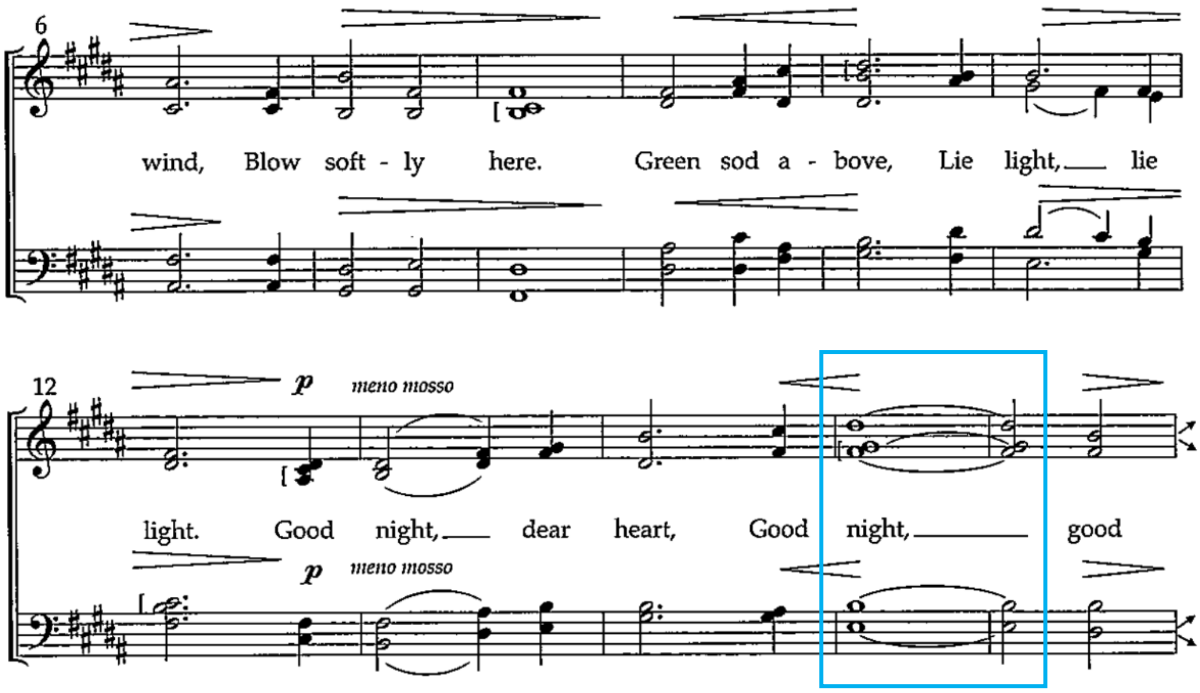


Figure 4.70: An extended chord of IV in *Good Night, Dear Heart*, bars 15–16.

Forrest emphasises this chord in a number of ways. He places it at the apex of a Tension/Release phrase in bars 12–17, with combined increases in register and dynamic volume upon arrival on the chord. The chord is sung on the initial open /a/ vowel of the diphthong within the word 'night', following the more closed, neutral vowel on the word 'Good'. Finally, he disrupts the established rhythm of highly metrical text-setting with an enjambment of the chord from bar 15 into bar 16, detaching this sonority from the pre-established meter and giving the listener a

[30] Owen, 2013, p. 220. See discussion under *Secundal Harmony* above.
[31] The salience of the Lydian mode to New Transcendentalism has been noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Three.

sense of suspension. This chord forms the dramatic climax of each strophe of this hymn-like piece. It is harmonically ambiguous, containing only the intervals of a perfect fifth or a secundal clash. This chord may be considered the 'Golden Brick'—à la Whitacre—of the work due to its prominence.

The same extended chord of IV found in *Good Night, Dear Heart* recurs throughout Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard* (2014). The repeated chord progression found in the introduction and in the repeated refrain of the work ends on an extended chord of IV in E major with a secundal clash between the ninth (B) in the tenor and the major third (C-sharp) in the alto (see Figure 4.71):

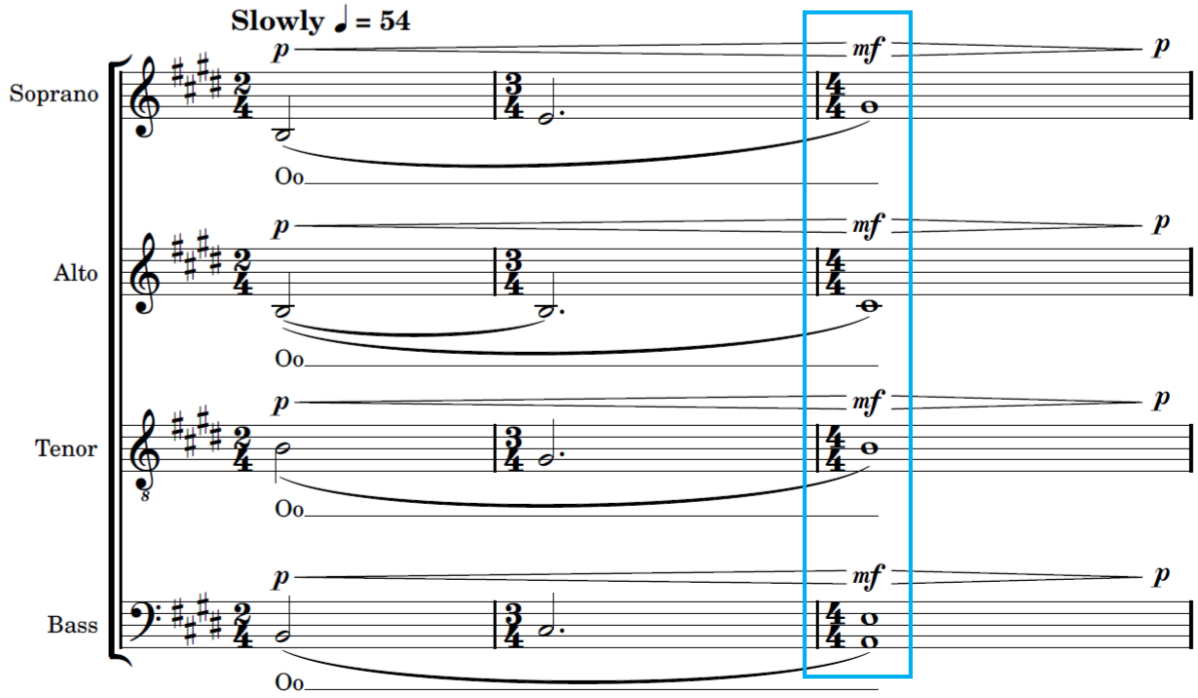


Figure 4.71: An extended chord of IV in the introduction of *Let My Love Be Heard*, shown in blue.

This chord permeates the piece, with the chord progression shown above in Figure 4.71 utilised with the titular text of the work for the refrain. The refrain returns in the final bars of the work, and the chord is held with a *fermata* and a *diminuendo* to *pianissimo* to conclude the work:

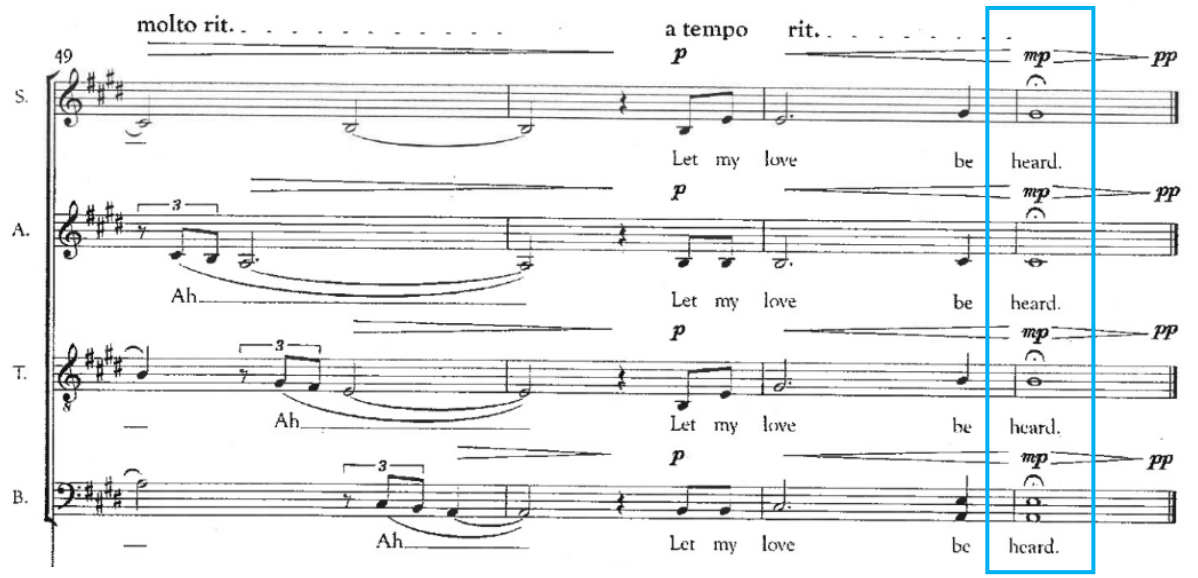


Figure 4.72: The extended chord of IV in the final bar of *Let My Love Be Heard*.

The climactic Directional (Increasing) phrase at the centre of the work concludes with a revoicing of the chord in the upper register of all voices with the third in the lowest voice:

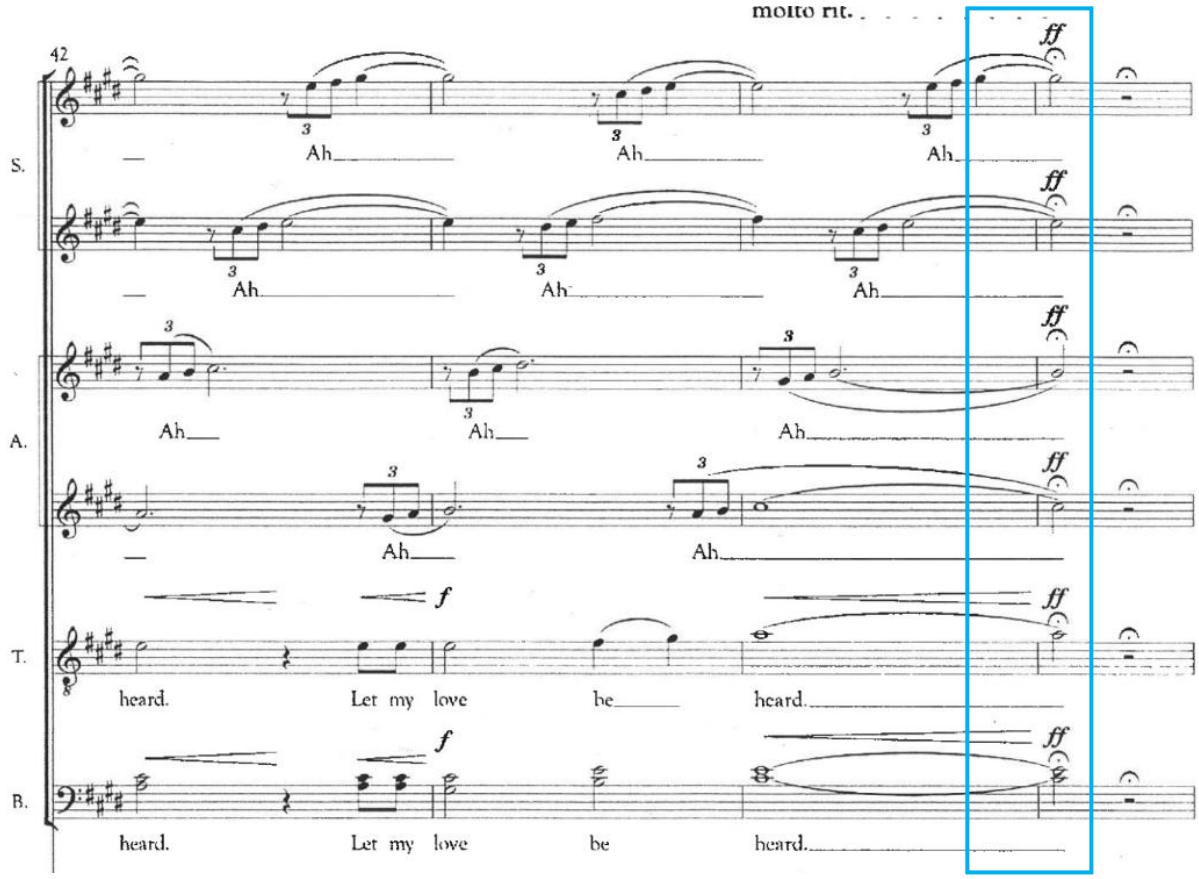


Figure 4.73: An alternative voicing of the extended chord of IV at the climax of *Let My Love Be Heard*, bars 44–45 (shown in blue).

In the opening phrase, and in its reiterations throughout the work, the harmony settles on the extended chord of IV, strengthened by the foundations of the open fifth in the bass voices. At the climax of the work, Runestad revoices the chord with just one root buried within the texture in the tenor voice, the fifth doubled by the soprano 2 and bass 1, the third doubled by the alto 2 and the bass 2, along with the two chord extensions, creating a highly unstable chord. Here the narrator of the source text is singing to heaven alongside angels. To reflect this, Runestad creates a sense of transcendence and ascension, as each voice is in its upper register and the firm grounding of the chord from previous iterations is undermined. In this way, the composer transforms the earthy chord from the chorus into a soaring, spiritual expression. The fact that the vehicle for this is an extended chord of IV is significant. Runestad's constant return to this chord as the 'Golden Brick' throughout *Let My Love Be Heard* displays the narrative and dramatic weight of the extended chord of IV in New Transcendentalist music.

In both examples of the extended chord of IV in Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard* and Forrest's *Good Night, Dear Heart*, the intervallic relationships between pitches from the lowest note is a perfect fifth, a perfect fifth, a tone, and a perfect fifth:

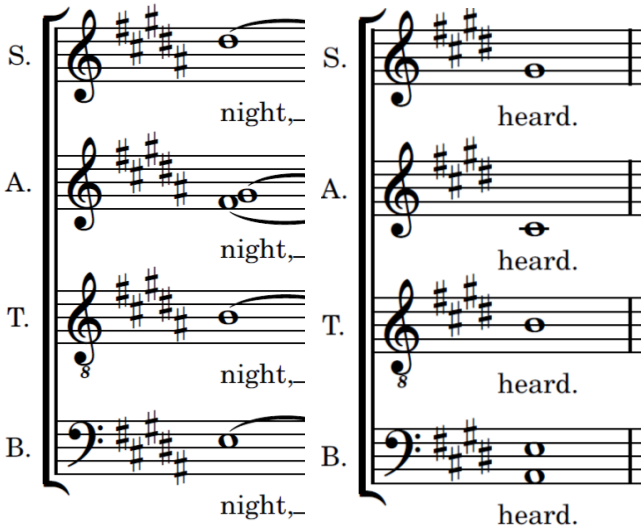


Figure 4.74: Identically voiced extended IV chords in Forrest's *Good Night, Dear Heart* (left) and Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard* (right).

This arrangement of intervals also occurs on the chord of ii in the coda of LaBarr's *Angele Dei* under a soprano melody, with the central secundal clash of a semitone rather than a tone, suggesting that this particular configuration of harmonic intervals can be applied to other scale degrees for a similar effect:

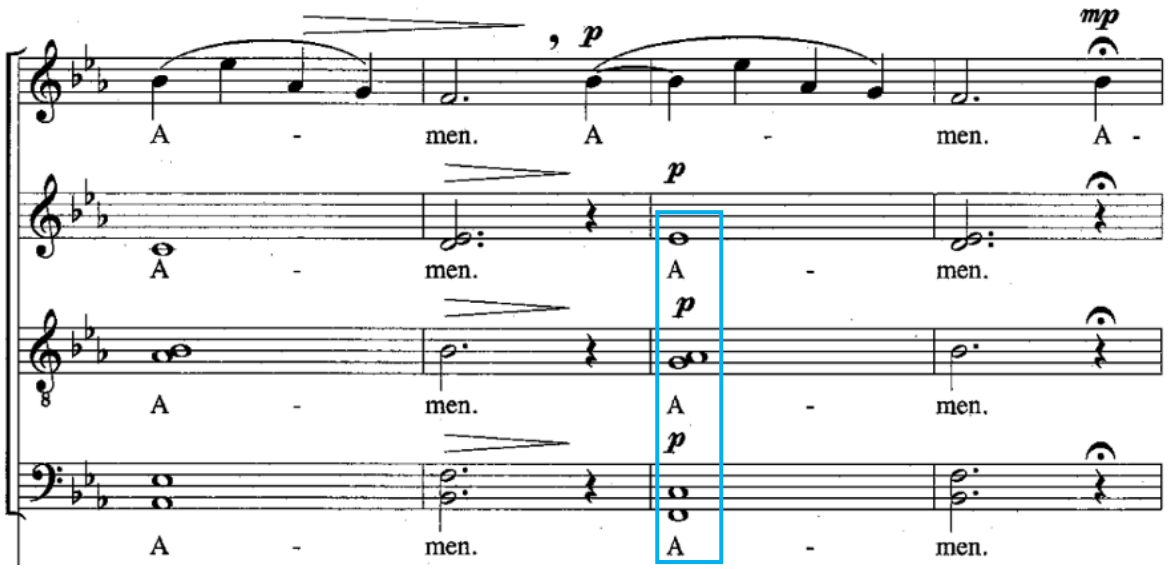


Figure 4.75: An extended chord of ii in *Angele Dei*, bar 57.

Whitacre employs a similar chord of IV on the word 'silence' in *A Boy and a Girl*, with the stacked quintal harmonies in the lower three voices followed by a clash of a tone, though this chord features additional pitches in the alto and soprano parts:

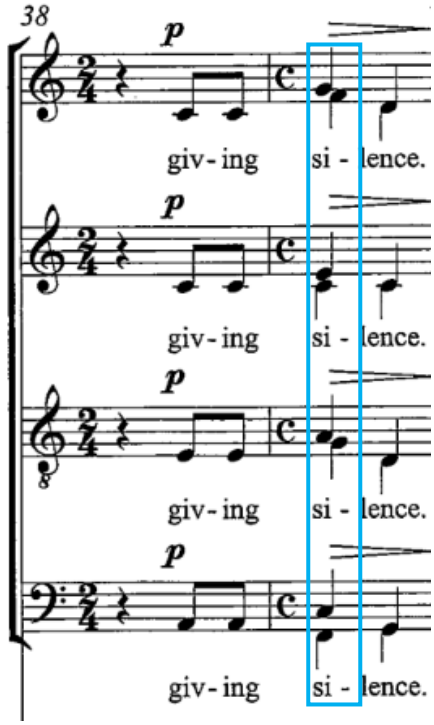


Figure 4.76: An extended chord of IV in Whitacre's *A Boy and a Girl*, bar 39.

Alongside the 'Lauridsen' chord, this discrete construction of the extended chord of IV and its usage at dramatic moments in the narrative arc of a choral work may be considered as a distinguishing feature of New Transcendentalism.

Like other composers examined in this chapter, Garrett's approach to harmony is not always non-functional. In several of his works he adopts familiar chord progressions which he varies in voicing, chordal extensions, and register. In *I Will Stand With You*, the text 'I am truly sorry' is sung over a simple chord progression in E major in bars 46–53. While a melodic line sings 'I am truly sorry', the other voice parts outline the chord progression, singing 'I am sorry' on minim beats. The chord of IV occurs on the metric stress of this phrase, the first syllable of 'sorry.' In each instance of the chord, an added seventh or ninth can be found:

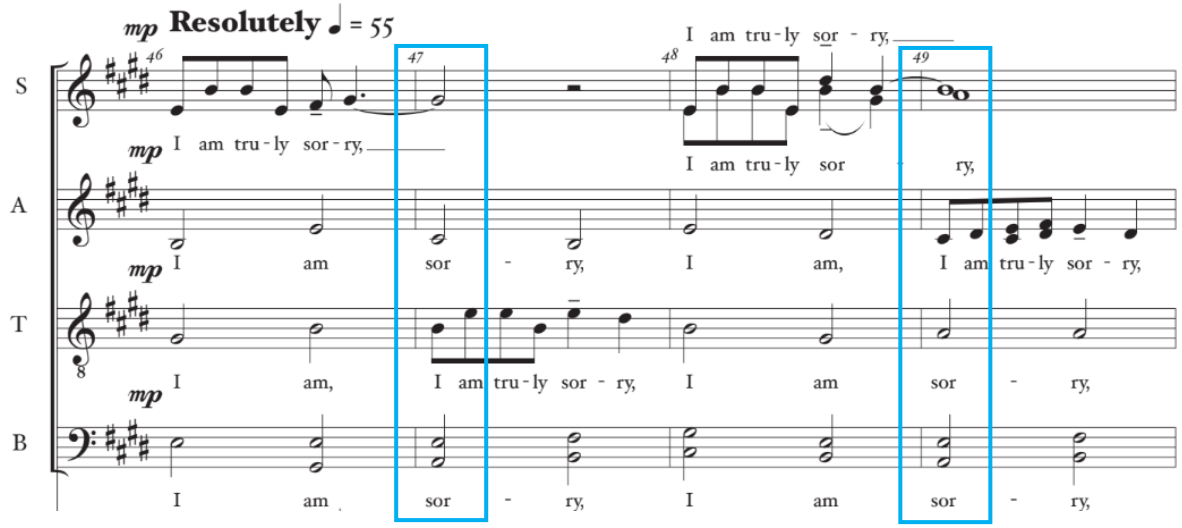


Figure 4.77: Extended chords of IV in Garrett's *I Will Stand With You*, bars 46–49.

Similarly, in *My Heart Be Brave* (2018), the chord progression of IV–V–Ib–IV in A-flat major occurs on the Directional (Increasing) phrase on the text 'Tho' thick the battle and tho' fierce the fight.' This culminates in a climactic, extended IV chord of stacked thirds with the added seventh and ninth (see Figure 4.78):

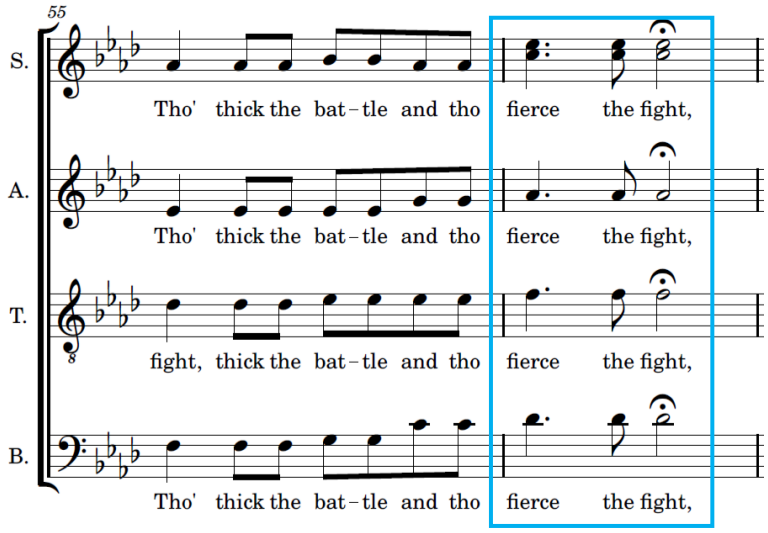


Figure 4.78: An extended IV chord at the climax of Garrett's *My Heart Be Brave*, bar 56.

This extended IV chord in the upper registers of the choir at the end of a lengthy Directional (Increasing) phrase echoes the approach taken by Runestad in *Let My Love Be Heard*, illustrating the utility of the chord of IV with the added seventh and ninth as a dramatic tool in New Transcendentalist music.

Furthering this illustration, the Bridge section of LaBarr's *I Should Be Glad* returns consistently to extended chords of IV, including during a brief third-based modulation from D major to B-flat major (see Figures 4.80 and 4.81 below):

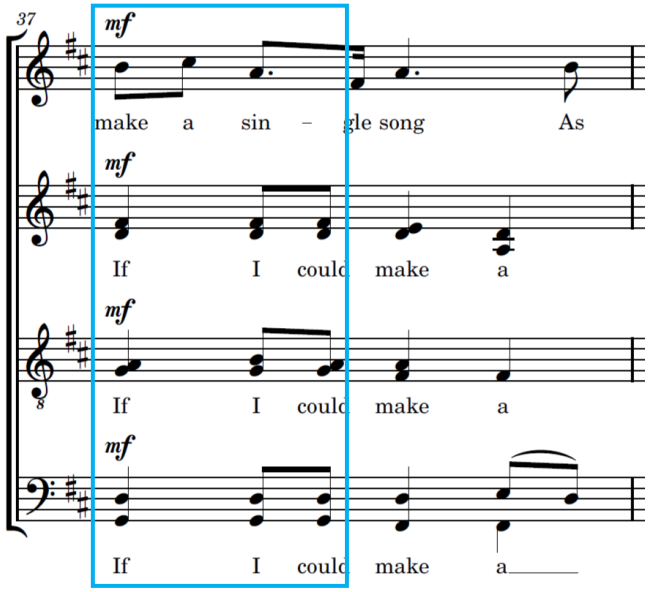


Figure 4.80: An extended chord of IV in D major at the beginning of the 'Bridge' section of LaBarr's *I Should Be Glad*, bar 37.
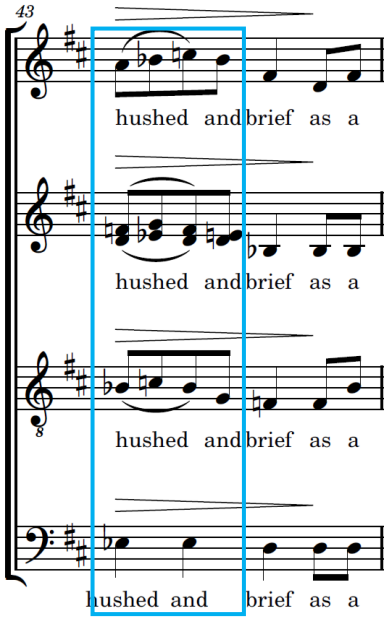


Figure 4.81: An extended chord of IV in B-flat major during a brief third-based modulation in bar 43 of *I Should Be Glad*.

The Bridge section presents a dramatic melodic change from the strophic verses that precede it. It is also the first time in the work where *divisi* is introduced. It is notable that the harmony LaBarr uses to express this dramatic change is the chord of IV with the added seventh and ninth, and that this particular harmony is then explored in another key. This is another example of the use of the subdominant in a more tonal framework as a secondary pole of tonal gravity, as seen in Garrett's *I Will Stand With You*.

In her 2017 work *Like Something Newly Freed*, Trumbore uses an extended chord of IV at a dramatic moment when the titular text appears for the first time in bar 73 (see Figure 4.82), though here she allows the extensions to resolve according to traditional conventions of voice leading, with the eleventh rising to the perfect fifth, and the ninth falling to the perfect octave in the soprano parts:

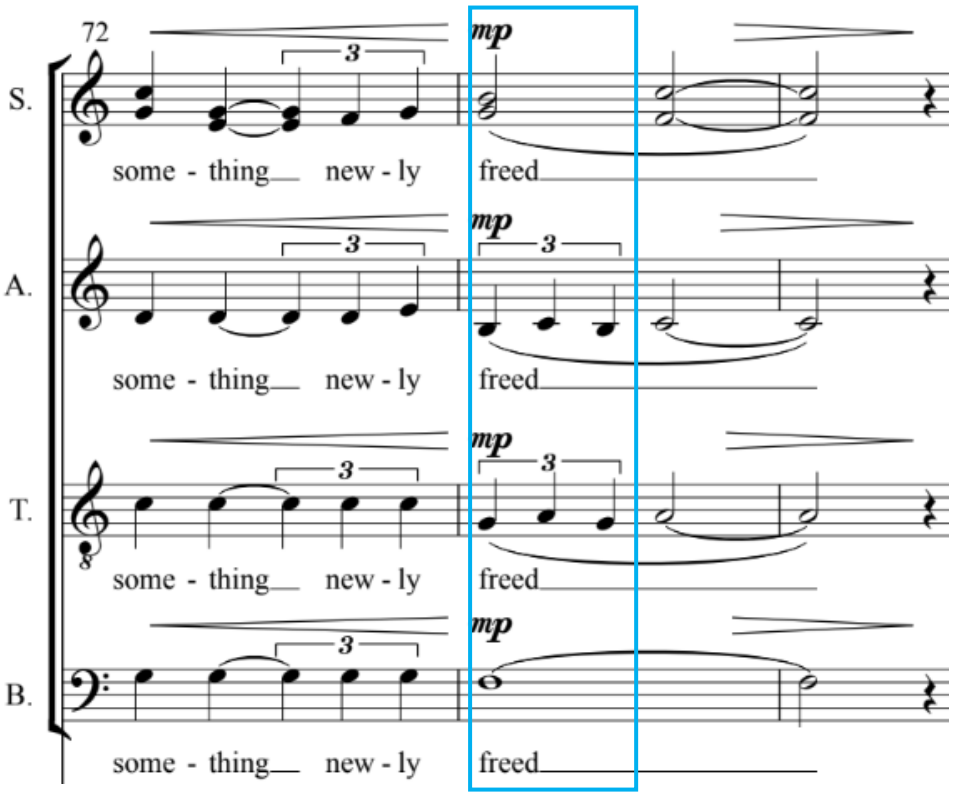


Figure 4.82: An extended chord of IV in Trumbore's *Like Something Newly Freed*, bar 73.

These non-harmony notes are also present an octave below in the alto and tenor parts where they also resolve by step. While the additional notes in this chord resolve to traditional consonance, it is a clear nod towards the non-functional Lydian harmonies of New Transcendentalism.[32]

Another dramatic instance of the extended chord of IV in Trumbore's works is in the modally ambiguous opening of *Light of Late November* (2013). Here, Trumbore establishes the tonal centre of D, using both the raised and flattened seventh while avoiding the third to maintain uncertainty of key or mode. After a brief two-part phrase sung by the soprano and alto parts in bars 1–2, the texture expands to a dramatic extended G chord sung by all voices:

[32] Trumbore may have adopted more conventional harmonic writing in this work as it was a commission for the 2017 California All-State Honor Choir, intended to be performed by high school singers.
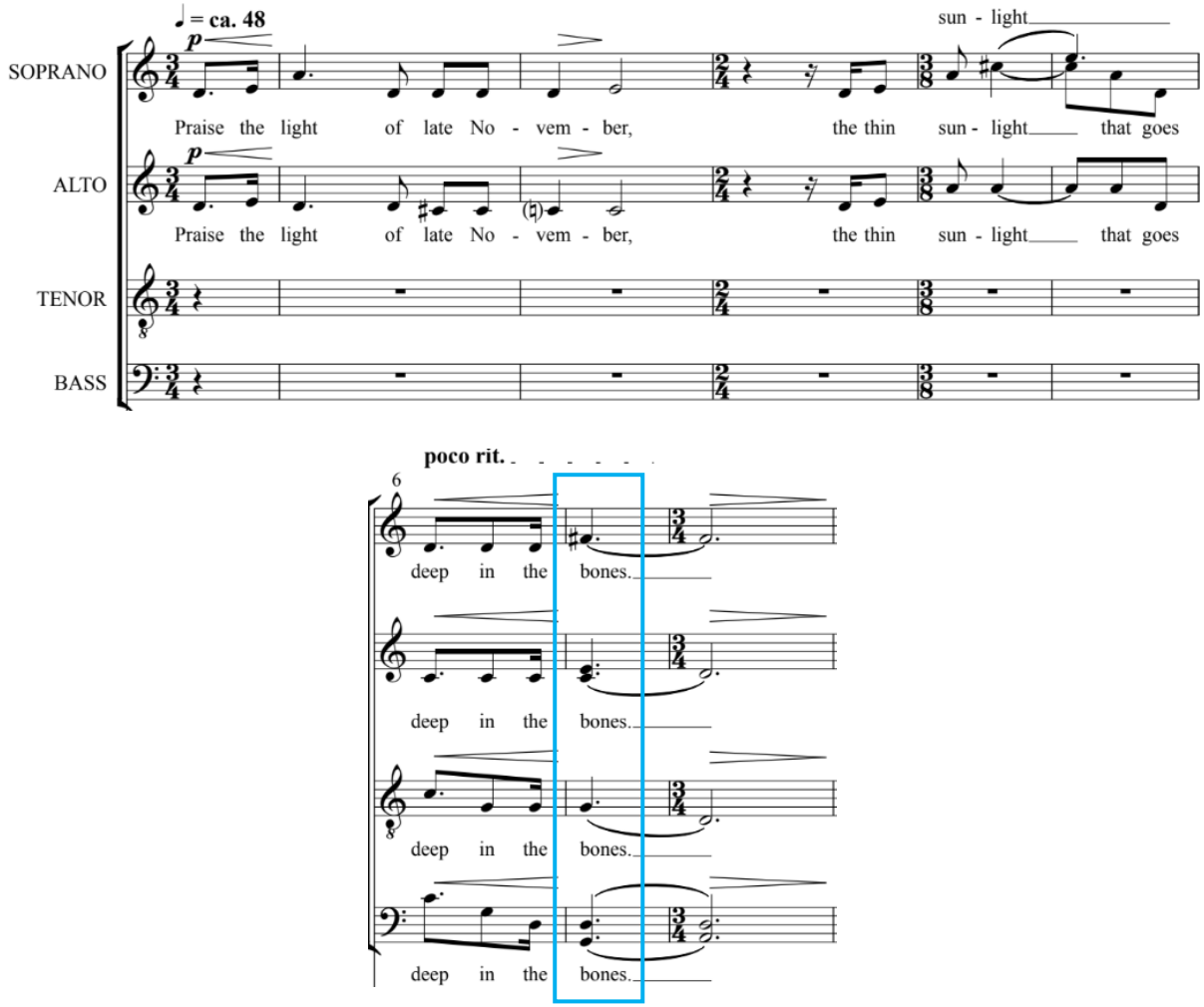


Figure 4.83: A dramatic extended chord of IV in bar 7 of Trumbore's *Light of Late November*.

Though there is no key signature and the modal palette of the piece is still unclear, the chord on G has the strong feeling of a chord of IV after the tonic centre of D was established in the first five bars by the soprano and alto parts. While the chord has no third, its foundation as an extended G chord is strengthened by the root–fifth–root pitches in the bass and tenor parts. The upper parts feature the flattened seventh in D, suggesting the D-mixolydian mode. The pitches in the upper voices in isolation create a C-lydian three-note chord, imparting the distinctive New Transcendentalist effect of the augmented fourth in an extended chord as well as the interval of a major seventh with the root of the chord. By fanning out from an interval of a major second in bar 6 to this ambiguous yet modally and diatonically familiar chord, Trumbore displays her fluency in the harmonic language of New Transcendentalism and signals her soundworld to the audience early in the work.

The analysis presented above demonstrates that not only is the chord of IV given a place of prominence in New Transcendentalist music, but also that particular extensions and voicings

of the chord are given preference, specifically the added seventh and ninth. These added pitches effectively create a polychord of the tonic chord and the subdominant chord (see Figure 4.84):

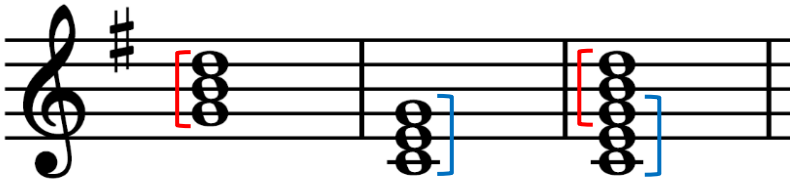


Figure 4.84: The tonic chord (red) and the subdominant chord (blue) in the chord of IV with added seventh and ninth.

By including the pitches of both chords, the chord of IV with the added seventh and ninth embraces the New Transcendentalist fascination with the Lydian mode, juxtaposing the tonal gravity of these two chords in the pandiatonic framework. The tension between these two tonic poles enhances modal ambiguity. Furthermore, the presentation of hanging suspensions of chord extensions without resolution engenders the ethereal, 'transcendental' effect of New Transcendentalist harmony.

New Approaches to Timbre

One final area in which some composers of New Transcendentalist music have expanded upon the style in the 2010s was the inclusion of extended vocal techniques and a greater exploration of vocal timbre. This is particularly true of Jake Runestad and Dale Trumbore. *Nyon Nyon* is an exhibition work, tailored to choirs preparing for competition or for a show-stopping finale to a choral programme. The composer writes in the programme notes of the score:

> *Nyon Nyon* is a lively exploration of the sounds that one can produce with the human voice. The composer created original words to achieve a variety of colors and mixed-and-matched them within the ensemble to produce a diverse sonic landscape. Incorporating effects similar to a flanger, wah-wah pedal, synthesizers, and drum and bass turns the choir into a full-fledged vocal orchestra![33]

The text of the work consists of nonsensical phonemes designed by the composer to explore various vocal effects. The repeated phoneme of the title, 'nyon', comes with the instruction from the composer to quickly close to the final 'n' consonant, which, paired with accents or

[33] Jake Runestad, *Nyon Nyon* (self-published choral score, 2014).

fortepiano markings, creates a punchy attack followed by a resonant sustained pitch. As discussed earlier, Runestad uses this phoneme to create a dramatic cluster chord in the opening bars of the work, combining this approach with New Transcendentalist elements. Later in the work, Runestad uses extended vocal techniques such as whispering, lip pops, and beatboxing to emulate techno music. The work ends with a dramatic extended chord in the B-mixolydian mode on the text 'wow', with the performance instruction '*exaggerated*'. The word 'wow' contains a diphthong from a [u] vowel to a [a] vowel. Runestad's performance instruction, alongside the accent markings and the hairpin dynamics, emphasise this timbral change:

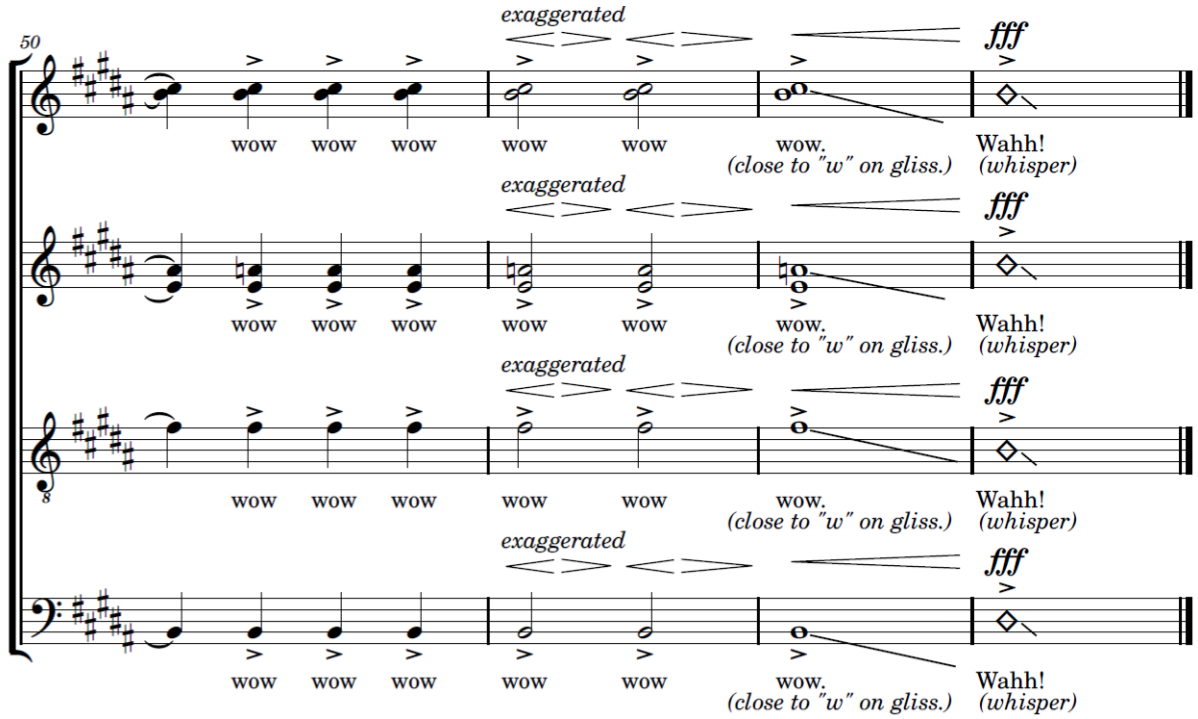


Figure 4.85: Exaggerated diphthongs on the text 'wow' in the final bars of *Nyon Nyon*.

Again, we see Runestad combining this approach to timbre with the New Transcendentalist approach of pandiatonicism, as the final chord is a harmonically ambiguous combination of an unspecified B chord and an A major chord. There is an open fifth on B in the bass and tenor voices, with the root doubled in the soprano 2 voice, while the alto and soprano 1 voices sing an A major chord. By juxtaposing this New Transcendentalist harmony with a timbral exploration of the voice, Runestad introduces a new dimension to New Transcendentalism beyond its well-established harmonic and textural idiosyncrasies.

At various moments in *After the Storm Passes*, Trumbore reinforces voice parts with non-textual vocalisations in one of the solo voice parts through timbral augmentation.[34] This occurs twice early in the work, first with Solo 3 supporting the soprano part with a sung 'nn' consonant sound, followed by Solo 1 and Solo 3 supporting underlying voice parts with a sung 'Oo.'
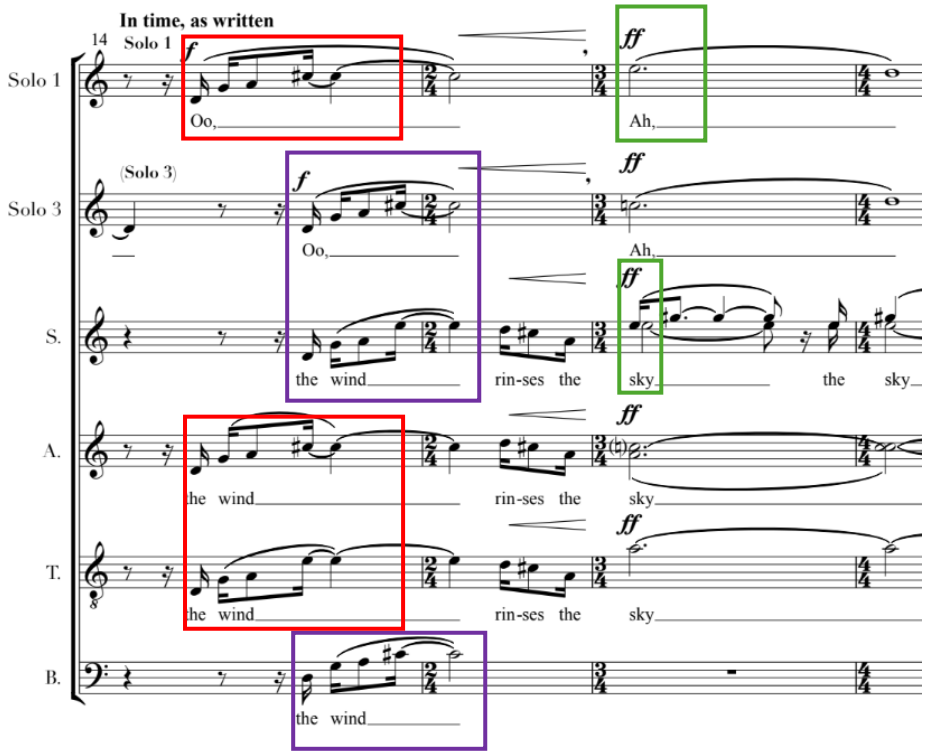


Figure 4.86: Timbral Augmentation in *After the Storm Passes*, bars 14–16.

At some other moments in the work, notes are doubled between a solo part and a voice part. This occurs in Figure 4.86 above between Solo 1 and soprano (shown in green). While these moments strengthen the given pitch, the vowel sounds are usually matched, as with the vowel sounds above in 'Ah' and 'sky', creating a strengthened, unified sound rather than the effect of timbral augmentation. This technique appears only fleetingly in the work, presenting an interesting method for creating richer timbral lines to bolster melodic phrases in a New Transcendentalist context.

As New Transcendentalism develops further in the twenty-first century, it remains to be seen if timbral manipulation will become a regular feature of the style. It is already a common feature in competition and exhibition works, such as Sydney Guillaume's *Kalinda* (2003), Ivo Antognini's *There is another sky* (2009), and Z. Randall Stroope's *Conversion of*

[34] Timbral augmentation refers to multiple parts sounding in unison with different timbral qualities.

Saul (2004). These works also contain extravocal elements, for example, foot stomps, finger clicks, and choreography. Marques L.A. Garrett's recent work, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (2025), commissioned by the University of North Texas A Cappella Choir for their performance at the National ACDA Conference in Dallas, Texas, opens with the choir emulating the sound of wind with whistling and hushing sounds. In his description of the work, Garrett notes that the work was intentionally written as a companion piece for the other works in the choir's set, which included Runestad's *Come to the Woods* (2015) and *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf* (1729) by J. S. Bach.[35] As choir directors continually seek new ideas to freshen their concert programmes and to engage audiences, these techniques may become increasingly important to the New Transcendentalist style.

Conclusion

The research presented in this chapter has uncovered new evidence to suggest that many of the stylistic features discussed above, such as cluster chords and secundal harmonies, are utilised by composers in conjunction with Lydian elements to create the signature soundworld of New Transcendentalism. This finding has not been addressed in scholarly literature on New Transcendentalist composers before now. While some of the compositional techniques discussed in this chapter are strongly linked to the select composers, the emphasis on the Lydian mode and the chord of IV alongside these compositional tools is the clearest signifier that a contemporary choral work is New Transcendentalist.

The comparative analysis presented in this chapter offers a fresh perspective on the breadth of influence that the stylistic elements of New Transcendentalism have had on contemporary *a cappella* choral composition in the United States. While Lauridsen and Whitacre continue as the archetypes of the style, which was built upon stylistic developments in the twentieth century (see Chapter One), New Transcendentalist composition has evolved beyond its foundations. Both Whitacre and Lauridsen have cultivated highly individual soundworlds, leading many composers to not only build upon their compositional innovations, but also to react against their approaches and seek to break the mould of New Transcendentalism that has formed around them. New approaches to texture, harmony and

[35] Marques L. A. Garrett, 'Veni, Sancte Spiritus', online website, <https://www.mlagmusic.com/works/veni-sancte-spiritus> [Accessed 3 June 2025].

timbre have expanded the boundaries of the style, demonstrating how its features may be incorporated into another composer's unique compositional voice. The features of New Transcendentalism can be found in works from Runestad, Trumbore, Forrest, Garrett and LaBarr, combined with each composer's idiosyncratic approach to choral composition. The final chapter of this thesis draws this current research to a close, consolidating findings and addressing some of the previously underexplored aspects of New Transcendentalism, the need for scholarship to examine how the style manifests in the works of other composers, and how it converges with other genres of choral composition beyond the scope of this study.

Chapter Five

Understanding New Transcendentalism: Discussion and Conclusions

> *America is just a collection of individuals, and amazingly different ones at that. The idea that they can be expressed by a standardized national art is of a piece with the idea that they should be cross-bred into a standardized national character, 100 per cent North-American blond. Fortunately, our musical vitality is too great to be much oppressed by standards.*[1]
>
> Virgil Thomson, 1925

This doctoral thesis presents the first large-scale comparative analysis of stylistic developments in New Transcendentalist music by composers whose careers began after Whitacre's.[2] While some scholars have investigated the intersection of stylistic influences in the music of Whitacre, Lauridsen, and Clausen, there has been a paucity of research beyond these figures and beyond Whitacre's early period. Previous studies position Whitacre as the end point in the stylistic evolution of New Transcendentalism, whereas this thesis identifies Whitacre's early compositions as a focal point, examining how the style has evolved beyond his early compositional innovations. The study also identified how Whitacre's own style has evolved as he refined his compositional approach and incorporated elements used by other New Transcendentalist composers, indicating that there is a stylistic dialogue occurring in contemporary American choral music.

This chapter presents a discussion of the main findings of this analysis and their implications, drawing on analytical data from previous chapters alongside information

[1] Virgil Thomson, 'The Cult of Jazz', J*azz In Print (1856–1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History*, ed. by Karl Koenig (New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), pp. 412–14, cited in James John, 'The Evolution of "An American Style" (1890–1950)', *Proceedings of ACDA's National Symposium On American Choral Music: In Search For An American Style*, ed. by William Belan (Oklahoma City: American Choral Directors Association, 2013), pp. 310–18, pp. 314–15.

[2] The only other comparative study of post-Whitacre composers is Theodore Hicks, 'The Influence of Eric Whitacre's Compositional Technique in the Music of Emerging Choral Composers' (unpublished master's thesis, Ball State University, 2019). Hicks' research is limited within the scope of a master's thesis.

gathered through interviews of the composers conducted by the author. Stylistic features identified across the works of these composers are examined, exploring the primary characteristics of New Transcendentalism in the twenty-first century. Environmental factors that have impacted the development and scholarship of New Transcendentalism are addressed, including the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), the experience of the composers as singers, and the commercial/academic divide in American choral composition. Finally, the future of New Transcendentalism among other stylistic trends in the United States are considered, followed by recommendations for further research in the field of New Transcendentalism studies.

The Combinative Approach

It has been shown in detail in this thesis that IPS Analysis is a useful tool for understanding New Transcendentalist works, particularly those in which other structural signifiers, such as melodic and harmonic development, are not present. Analysis of the total effect of parametric increases and decreases can reveal structures and uncover their dramatic trajectories, narrative functions, and formal integrity. Crucial to IPS Analysis is the identification of IPS Groups. The identification of these larger formal units delineates the overarching structure of a work, while revealing relationships among IPSs. This has significant implications not only for future research of this repertoire, but also for interpretation and performance by practitioners. The success of an IPS Analysis may also reveal the degree to which the composer engages with New Transcendentalism, as a key indicator of the style is the obfuscation and undermining of traditional structural signifiers. LaBarr's *I Should Be Glad*, for example, incorporates New Transcendentalist harmonic and textural elements, but is not fully New Transcendentalist in its conception, as the work follows a rigid strophic structure determined by melodic material. Whitacre's *i carry your heart* represents the epitome of New Transcendentalism, in which the obfuscation of tonal gravity and melodic structure creates a weightless, shimmering effect throughout. It is in the context of this repertoire that the importance of the combinative analytical framework presented in this thesis is most vital, as IPS Analysis enables the researcher to identify formal structures, while CSA reveals discrete compositional brushstrokes that imbue the work with its idiosyncratic New Transcendentalist soundworld. The research in this thesis provides future scholars of New Transcendentalism with a model of analysis that is

transferrable across composers and will encourage further investigation of this hitherto underexplored style.

Harmony/Pandiatonicism

One of the essential aspects of New Transcendentalism is its relationship with conventional tonal and modal harmony. The use of familiar tonal and modal harmonic frameworks is a practical consideration in New Transcendentalist composition due to its proximity to amateur singing. Unlike instrumental performance, in which pitches are mostly determined by finger position and virtuosity is an extension of dexterity, a singer must audiate notes—that is, conceptualise the pitch in their mind—before producing them with their vocal apparatus. Singers audiate pitches by their relationship with other previously sung or heard pitches. This reality is underlined by the practice of choristers generally singing from a full score, unlike instrumentalists who often perform from single parts. For this reason, many New Transcendentalist works remain within the confines of a single toneset with occasional accidental notes added.

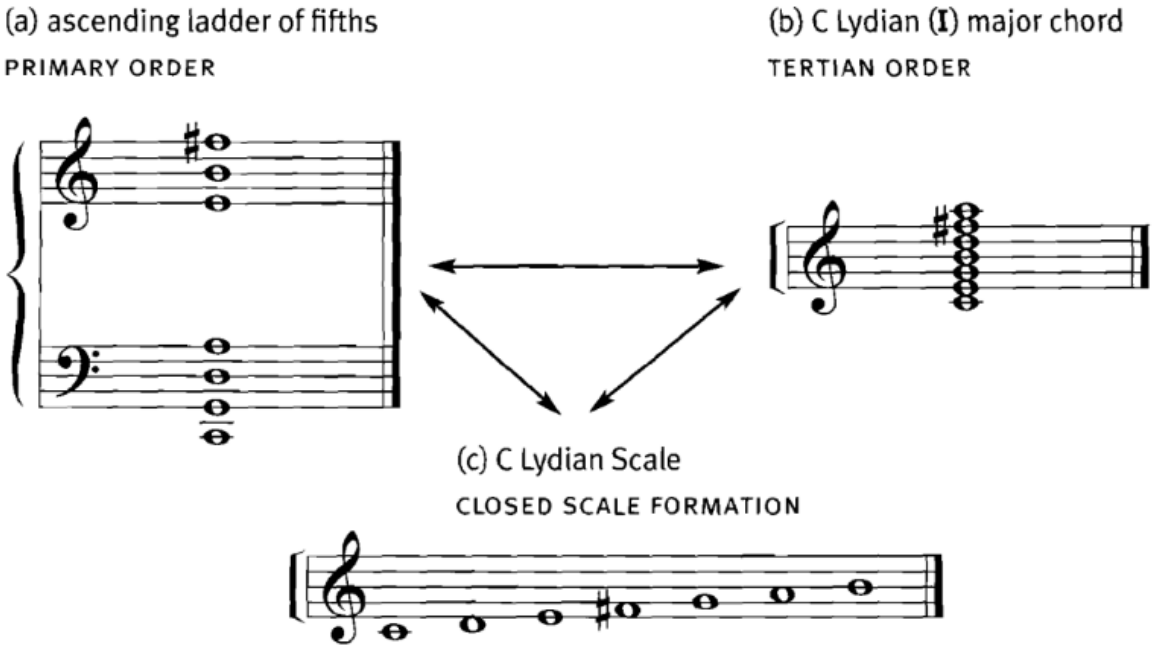
Despite this tendency towards stable tonesets, some New Transcendentalist works like Runestad's *Spirited Light* and Trumbore's *After the Storm Passes* do feature frequent modulation. This is particularly true of the more 'academic' works of a composer's oeuvre, such as Forrest's 'Selah', composed for a competition, and Whitacre's 'i thank You God', composed as a study in polychordal harmony. In the cases of the works by Runestad and Trumbore, the frequent key changes have a programmatic function, mirroring the frenetic atmosphere of the text. While each of these works contain frequent modulations, at no point is a combination of notes outside of a conventional diatonic or modal toneset heard simultaneously (with the exception of Runestad's brief use of the whole tone scale in *Spirited Light*). This demonstrates that these composers avoid straying too far from the soundworld of familiar tonality, even when shifting unpredictability between keys to offset any sense tonal stability.

The lack of challenging, non-tonal harmonies, combined with the predominance of homophonic texture in many works, may be contributing factors to the lack of scholarly attention given to New Transcendentalism. Its approachability—a key aspect of its popularity and success with singers, conductors, and audiences—has become a stick with which

scholarship can beat it. This strengthens the rationale for this current research and confirms the necessity of fresh analytical perspectives, as presented through the combinative approach of this research, to fully explore and analyse New Transcendentalist repertoire. While these composers employ a range of diatonic and modal tonesets in their compositions, the recurrence of one particular mode suggests that it is of significant importance and requires particular consideration.

The Lydian Mode

In 1953, jazz composer and theorist George Russell published his pamphlet on *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*.[3] Russell's theory posits that the Lydian scale should be considered the 'Parent Scale' rather than the major scale, based upon the ability to arrange the pitches of the scale in ascending perfect fifths, the strongest interval of the harmonic series (see Figure 5.1):



All three arrangements of the C Lydian Scale sound in the state of unity with the C major chord and its C Lydian Tonic.

[3] This pamphlet was later published as a book (New York: Concept Publishing Co., 1959).

Figure 5.1: Russell's arrangement of the C-lydian scale in primary (quintal), tertian, and scalar formation.[4]

For this reason, Russell argued that the Lydian scale creates a greater sense of unity and tonal gravity for the listener:

> Empowered with ultimate tonical [*sic*] authority, the Lydian Tonic reciprocates by functioning as the center of a self-organized tonal gravity field in which all tonal phenomena are graded on the basis of their close to distant relationship to it. This tonal organization is called a LYDIAN CHROMATIC SCALE. The Lydian Tonic is its "Sun Absolute."[5]

Since its publication, Russell's theory, known in jazz circles simply as 'the Concept', has had a major influence on jazz composition and improvisation, particularly the modal jazz of the late 1950s and early 1960s. While New Transcendentalism primarily takes its influence from pandiatonic and polymodal choral music rather than the chord extensions of jazz, as explored in Chapter One, it may be the case that composers building this New Transcendentalist soundworld have found their own way to concur with Russell's beliefs.

The primacy of the Lydian mode is inseparable from New Transcendentalism. As has been noted previously in this thesis, the first five notes composed by Whitacre were a cluster of the B-lydian pentachord in the opening of 'Go Lovely Rose'. Whitacre recently interpolated these five notes in the fourth movement of *Eternity in an Hour* (2024), manipulating them with live electronics. He described this process as a deep introspection into his artistic identity:

> Those five notes from 'Go Lovely Rose', they're literally the first things I ever wrote as a choral composer, those five notes […] it's like a way of actively trying to take—here's the *Urtext*, this is the core of who I am—and then let's start to break that down, start to devolve that.[6]

For Whitacre, this sonority of stacked whole tones is 'the core' of who he is as a composer. The preponderance of Lydian sonorities throughout his works, demonstrated through the analysis presented in this thesis, reinforces this notion. In Runestad's output, the primacy of the Lydian mode is most obvious in *Alleluia*, which opens with cluster chords based on the whole-tone scale, using five consecutive whole tones. This harmony is challenging for singers and listeners, creating a striking opening to the work. At the end of the work, the final interval of the scale is altered to become a semitone, recapitulating the opening cluster motif but in a more

[4] George Russell, *George Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organisation, Volume One: The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity* (Brookline, MA: Concept Publishing Co., 2001), pp. 1–2.
[5] Russell, p. 3.
[6] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

familiar sonority. ‘Resolving’ the theme in this way implies that Lydian is indeed the base mode, with further ‘resolution’ to the major scale or Ionian mode unnecessary.

The only non-conventional combination of pitches found in Whitacre’s unaccompanied choral music is the major chord with a flattened seventh and a sharpened eleventh. This chord is commonly found in jazz harmony, though it is unlikely that Whitacre borrowed it from the jazz tradition. As shown in Chapter Three, the chord appears in bars 23–24 of *Water Night* (see Figure 5.2):
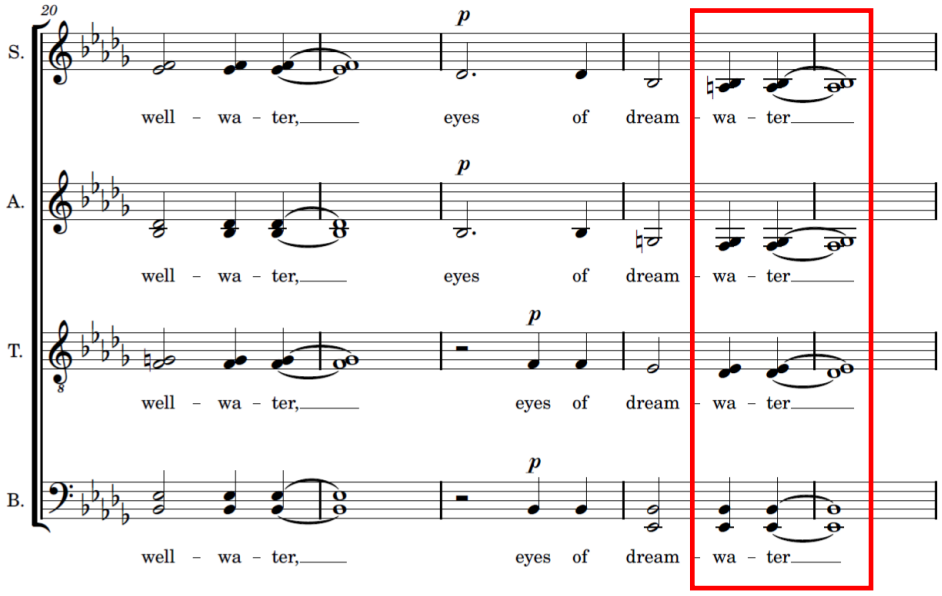


Figure 5.2: An E-flat major chord with a flat seventh and a sharpened eleventh in bars 23–24 of *Water Night*.

While no fixed mode or diatonic scale can produce a chord with this combination of pitches, Whitacre demonstrated in *Cloudburst* (1995) that this chord can be created through use of the ascending melodic minor chord:
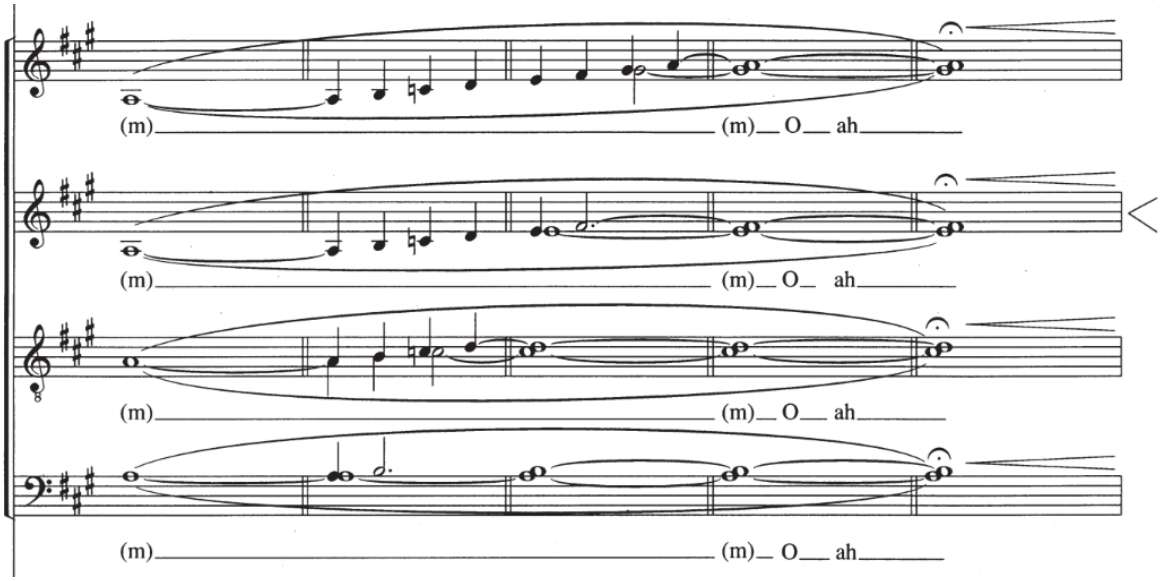


Figure 5.3: A cluster chord on an ascending A melodic minor chord in *Cloudburst*, bars 65–69.

In bars 65–69, the choir sings a cluster chord built with an ascending A melodic minor scale. This creates a D major chord with a flattened seventh and sharpened eleventh in second inversion. While this chord is outside of conventional combinations of pitches, it can be constructed through a familiar diatonic framework. By examining Whitacre's path towards this sonority in this way, we may also determine that Whitacre did not borrow this chord from jazz, but rather, from his own experimentation with cluster chords based on different scales. The reason for the popularity of this chord and its pleasant sound to the ear despite its distance from conventional modal and diatonic tonesets is its relationship with the harmonic series. In the harmonic series, the seventh partial is a slightly flattened compound seventh, and the eleventh partial is a slightly raised compound eleventh. Whitacre's attraction to the chord is likely a case of parallel thinking with jazz musicians whose ears gravitated towards this interesting and pleasing harmony. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Three, this chord features five stacked whole-tone clashes, extending the whole-tone cluster effect of the Lydian mode without fully embracing the post-tonal whole-tone scale.

Part of the allure of the Lydian scale, as argued in Chapter Three, is the distance of a tone between each of the first four pitches of the Lydian cluster. To the modern ear, a clash of a tone sounds far more consonant than it may previously have been when theories of consonance and dissonance were first developed based upon Renaissance counterpoint. This explains why the Lauridsen chord and variations thereof can be found with such frequency as a resolution within a chord sequence in New Transcendentalist works. The added ninth, with

an interval of a tone above and below it, does not sound harshly dissonant to the modern ear. The clash of a semitone, being the closest possible harmonic interval, remains the most dissonant. It is perhaps for this reason that the Lydian scale, with its sequence of whole-tone intervals while rooted in familiar scalar tonesets, is so satisfying to the choral singer and audience.

The use of the Lydian fourth as a coloristic element is not a new concept. For example, Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) utilised Lydian cluster chords in *Chorale after an old French Carol* (1944). This work features four stacked tones on an E-flat (shown in Figure 5.4 in orange) over three stacked tones on F in the lower voices (shown in red):
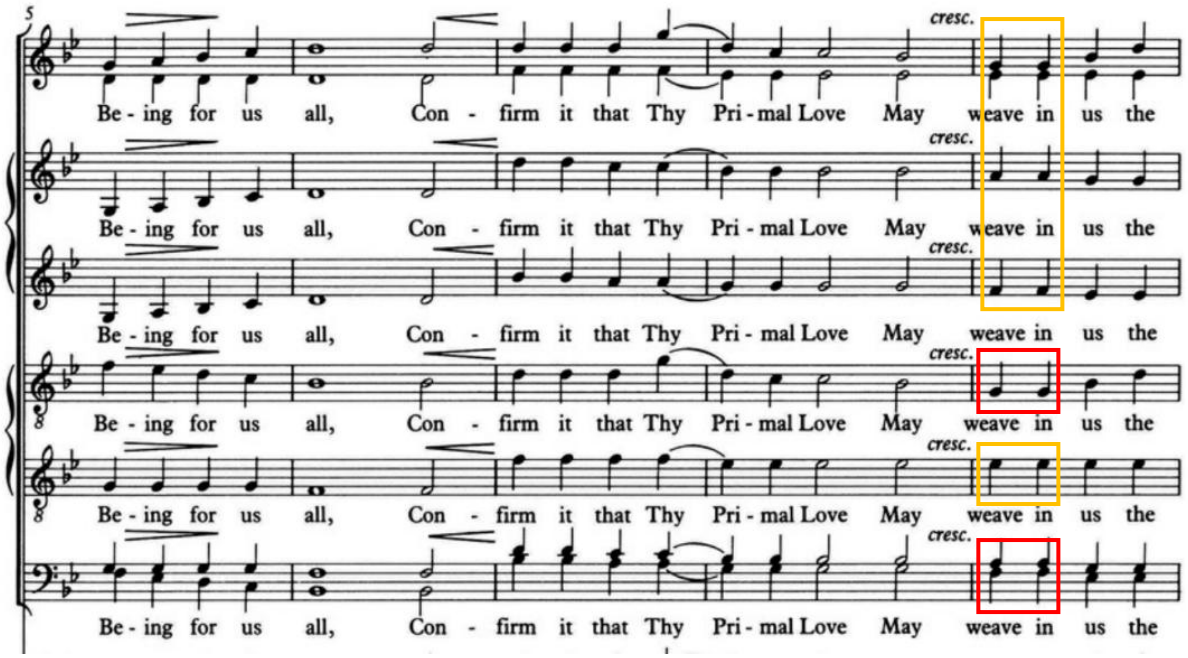


Figure 5.4: A Lydian cluster chord in *Chorale after an old French Carol*, bar 9.

Unlike New Transcendentalist writing, this cluster chord is not treated as a point of arrival; instead it is a passing dissonance between two E-flat major chords. As Peter Tranchell noted in 1953, while critiquing discourse surrounding Britten's use of the sharpened fourth, Western art music has a long history of incorporating this note for colouristic effect, and it does not belong to any one composer:

> But if you remember that Britten got the Lydian fourth from Rutland Boughton, who had got it from Debussy, who had got it from Gounod and Tchaikovsky, who had probably got it from

> Berlioz, then the Lydian fourth loses some of its lustre—it becomes, after all, not so very modish. Why, even Beethoven uses the Lydian fourth in the Pastoral Symphony![7]

While the use of the Lydian mode is not a novel invention of New Transcendentalism, its usage is a central pillar of the style, both as a coloristic element and as a base modality, and secundal and cluster harmonies based on the mode are treated as points of arrival rather than fleeting dissonances. However, some works that engage with other compositional tools of New Transcendentalism without prioritising Lydian mode. For example, Whitacre's most recent *a cappella* work for mixed choir, *All Seems Beautiful to Me* (2022), features no non-functional extended chords of IV with the Lydian fourth.[8] Outliers notwithstanding, the primacy of Lydian harmonic elements is a key indicator of the New Transcendentalist providence of a work. This is also true of New Transcendentalism's other most recognisable idiosyncrasy: cluster chords.

Cluster Chords

The stylistic feature most ubiquitously associated with Whitacre, and with the style which he pioneered, is the use of cluster chords. As mentioned earlier, the very first musical phrase he composed was a cluster chord. Speaking to Jacob Collier in an online interview in 2020, Whitacre described feeling pigeon-holed into an association with this technique:

> So I'm the cluster guy, right? I never wanted to be the cluster guy, or even thought I'd be the cluster guy […] It's a nice label, and it's easy to recognise. I always think, when I look at the whole of my catalogue, looking at everything, it's like the tiniest little bit of what I actually do, but okay, apparently that's the most noticeable bit.[9]

In an interview with the author, Runestad describes 'Whitacre's kind of cluster soundworld, which some people are incorporating still into their music.'[10] Forrest acknowledges that Whitacre has been assigned the 'stereotype [of] the Whitacre cluster chords', though he acknowledges of his harmonic choices that 'some of them are clusters, some of them are not actually clusters.'[11] Speaking of her experience as an editor with the choral publishing house

[7] Peter Tranchell, 'Britten and Brittenites', *Music & Letters*, 34 (1953), 124–132, p. 132.
[8] It is present in some instances as a non-harmonic note with conventional resolution to a harmony note using conventional voice-leading.
[9] Eric Whitacre, 'VC6 Live: Eric Whitacre in conversation with Jacob Collier', online video recording, YouTube, 11 May 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNCNFm17McA> [Accessed 30 April 2020], 1:16:34.
[10] Jake Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.
[11] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.

Walton, LaBarr describes receiving many submissions for publication which were inspired by, if not an attempted simulation of, Whitacre's soundworld: 'For a long time, especially early in my job as an editor, I would see a lot of music like that, where people were trying to do the clustery chords and create the soundworld like what Eric was doing.'[12] The sonority of cluster chords has become intrinsically linked to Whitacre, as if it were his intellectual property. As a result, experimentation with this compositional tool by another composer can seem like imitation. This is particularly true in the case of large clusters of more than five consecutive pitches.

The use of extensive cluster chords as a compositional tool was so innovative and iconic in Whitacre's early compositions that the technique inevitably had a very short shelf life. Whitacre's daring use of cluster chords in this early period of his career was facilitated by his performing context as a singer in a collegiate ensemble, and a flurry of professional commissions in this early period of his career. Firstly, the fact that Whitacre's commissions were from high-achieving collegiate ensembles like his own group in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), or professional ensembles such as the Dale Warland Singers, he was empowered to compose with extensive *divisi*. The singers in these ensembles were capable of maintaining individual lines in works of up to eighteen parts, as in *When David Heard* (1999). For Whitacre, his approach to composition during this period was a 'surrender', as he sought to follow this emerging compositional brushstroke to its logical conclusion:

> But I will say, it was with "Water Night" when I actually had a moment of what felt like surrender. Where I said, you know what, I want a fourteen-part chord and I don't frickin' care if anybody can sing it. It can't be that hard […] I just did it . . . I didn't even think about it. And that was kind of a real opening moment for me, where I said . . . this is what I want to hear so I'm putting it down.[13]

This speaks to the second factor in this early stage in Whitacre's career that precipitated his experimentation with cluster sonorities: his desire to sing these sonorities himself as a member of the UNLV choir. The fun of singing close harmonies with friends in a choir is a key aspect to the popularity of Whitacre and of this repertoire. While this Debussyan system of 'pleasure is the law' informed Whitacre's early compositional style, his approach to texture, and subsequently to cluster sonorities, became more mature later in his career.

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[12] Susan LaBarr, interview with the author, 13 May 2024.
[13] Phillip Allen Swan, 'In his own words: The choral music of Eric Whitacre from 1991-2004' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 2016), p. 142.

The reduction of extensive *divisi* and cluster chords has been an intentional shift in Whitacre's compositional practice. In a public virtual Q&A at Dublin City University, Ireland, in 2022, Whitacre responded to a question on his less frequent usage of extensive *divisi* in his more recent works:

> The process for me is 95% saying, 'what is the most efficient possible way to say the most?' And I love the aesthetic of not trying to dazzle or *gestures* impress, but just, what does it actually take? What does it take for the listener to be transported from here to here? What is required? And oftentimes it's a very simple solution, it doesn't actually require these massive chords. At the same time, those big harmonies were never in my world meant to dazzle. They were always—they came from the deepest part of me. This may sound melodramatic, but they're just the way I sound inside. I think that's how I am. They feel very vulnerable and real to me.[14]

As described in Chapter Two, the frequency and the degree to which Whitacre varies textural density has decreased significantly since Larson wrote in 2006 that textural density variation was a 'defining feature' of his music.[15] Since his early period, during which he composed nearly exclusively for professional, collegiate, and advanced-level choirs, he has composed for children's choirs, amateur groups, and accessible Virtual Choirs, necessitating a refinement of his style without the luxury of extensive *divisi*. As Whitacre tends to use fewer individual lines in his works since this early period, he has fewer voices with which to create expansive cluster chords. For example, *i carry your heart* features several cluster chords of four consecutive pitches, as well as frequent use of secundal harmony, and does not exceed a limit of four pitches. The reduction in the number of voices and refinement of Whitacre's approach to texture has led to Whitacre being more judicious and conservative in his approach to cluster harmony, as his peers have been while incorporating New Transcendentalism into their own works.

It is worth mentioning the frequency with which secundal clashes occur when there are only two voices singing, for example, the soprano and alto clashes in the beginning of the climactic section of *i carry your heart* or the opening of *Light of Late November*. In these circumstances, though they are not technically clusters, the only harmonic interval heard is a

[14] Eric Whitacre, public virtual Q&A, Dublin City University, 7 March 2022.
[15] Andrew Larson, 'Textural Density in the Choral Music of Eric Whitacre', *The Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 22–33, p. 26.

secundal clash, effectively creating a cluster of all sounding voices. This is another indication of the centrality of secundal harmony and cluster sonorities to New Transcendentalism.

The comparative analysis in Chapter Four illuminated a new approach to secundal harmony taken by several composers to incorporate the timbral effects of clustered harmony without resorting to full cluster-writing. Works such as Forrest's 'Holy', Runestad's *Nyon Nyon* and Trumbore's *Light of Late November* contain secundal dyads spaced apart in the choral texture, creating a variety of chords featuring the timbral effects of dense secundal clashes without simply composing a series of clusters. This new compositional technique may represent a post-Whitacre approach to cluster harmony that enables composers to explore these sonorities in new and diverse ways.

Perhaps the reason why cluster chords remain such a ubiquitous hallmark of New Transcendentalism is that they are representative of the style in its purest form. It is the techniques of secundal harmony and obfuscated functional harmony taken to their extreme. They use familiar tonesets in such close proximity that a sense of tonality is obscured, achieving a pandiatonic effect. They are homophonic in texture, creating a thick, wall-of-sound effect. The secundal clashes within them create a satisfying clashing timbre for singers. Finally, their usage in specific modal contexts, particularly the Lydian mode, creates an immediately recognisable sonic icon of New Transcendentalism. It is a striking sonority, but, as a compositional tool, it is quite a blunt instrument. Cluster chords, particularly expansive clusters of more than five consecutive pitches, are the refined sugar of New Transcendentalism. They boil many of its stylistic features down into one essential feature. For this reason, perhaps, composers are hesitant to use it with too much frequency. The technique was introduced in its most unfiltered form when Whitacre burst into the American choral scene, experimenting with the possibilities of choral clusters with no limitations—as Whitacre put it, 'I want a fourteen-part chord and I don't frickin' care if anybody can sing it.'[16] Like Schoenberg's innovation of serialism to create total atonality, a genie had been released from a bottle, and a compositional technique was presented in its final, most extreme form. Once extensive cluster chords had been used several times by Whitacre in *Cloudburst*, *Water Night* and *When David Heard*, their novelty had been exhausted. To follow the metaphor of refined sugar, American choral music had a sugar rush during this early period of New Transcendentalism, after which composers were left with the challenge of incorporating this ingredient into their works without allowing

[16] Swan, p. 142.

them to become overly saccharine. While the comparative analysis in Chapter Four illustrated instances of cluster chords in each composer's work, none surpass six consecutive pitches, and the technique is utilised sparingly. New Transcendentalism has necessarily evolved beyond this highly recognisable stylistic feature from its early years, with composers experimenting with alternative methods of generating lush wall-of-sound sonorities.

The Floating Effect

Descriptions of works in the New Transcendentalist style often use imagery of weightlessness and ethereality. Bond refers to the 'gossamer effect' created by Lauridsen's harmonies in *O magnum mysterium*.[17] Words like 'floating' and 'ethereal' often appear in reviews of Whitacre's music.[18] While it is often attributed to the harmonic choices made by these composers, this is not the only factor responsible for this untethered feeling in New Transcendentalism.

Multiple compositional techniques operating in tandem generate New Transcendentalism's atmosphere of weightlessness. The first is the harmonic framework. As discussed earlier, the frequent use of extended and inverted chords creates a pandiatonic harmonic palate that draws on traditional tonesets while avoiding the conventional, functional relationships of chords that would usually steer the listener's ear. The dichotomy of the Lydian mode and the major scale also contributes to this harmonic discombobulation, as the ear is guided towards two polar tonic centres. These two features alone are not the cause of the ethereality of New Transcendentalism. An underexplored factor that precipitates this gossamer effect is the obfuscation of melodic structures. Melody has the effect of grounding the listener, providing a highly recognisable narrative arc to a work in the form of an identifiable tune. Melodic structures are entirely absent from portions of Whitacre's compositional output. For example, the opening phrase of *Water Night* features homophonic, syllabic text setting on a sequence of block chords. Whitacre extends this approach to undermining melodic primacy in works that do feature more melodic lines, such as 'i thank You God' and *A Boy and a Girl*. In the opening phrases of these works, thick homophonic textures and parallel motion obscure the

[17] James Arthur Bond, '"Thunderstruck by Art": The Interdisciplinary and Interpretive Contexts of Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*', *The Choral Journal*, 59 (2018), 8–21, p. 12.
[18] See Jason Victor Serinus, 'From Light Into Gold: Whitacre Conducts Whitacre', *San Francisco Classical Voice* (online), 2 November 2010 <https://www.sfcv.org/articles/review/light-gold-whitacre-conducts-whitacre> [Accessed 21 August 2025]; David Wordsworth, 'Prom 62: Eric Whitacre, *Classical Source* (online), 29 August, 2012 <https://www.classicalsource.com/prom/prom-62-eric-whitacre/> [Accessed 21 August 2025].

tune in the top soprano line. While some of the composers in this study are more melody-driven than Whitacre, moments absent of melody appear throughout their works creating instances of weightlessness. LaBarr's fanning of secundal harmonies from a central unison pitch in the opening of *I Should Be Glad* achieves this floating, untethered effect (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.24). Moments that are absent of melodic structures appear throughout Trumbore's works, for example, the harmonically ambiguous chord that unfurls from the two-part counterpoint in the opening of *Light of Late November* (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.83). While melody is an important feature of their works, these compositional brushstrokes that place the listener outside of the melodic narrative appear throughout their compositional output.

The absence of melody as a primary structural signifier focuses the attention of the listener on harmonic and textural elements. Since the composers also employ techniques that undermine rigid formal and structural signifiers, including pandiatonicism and wall-of-sound homophonic and bifurcated textures, there are few stabilising elements to anchor the listener. These techniques in combination create the idiosyncratic floating atmosphere that is so strongly linked to New Transcendentalism.

The American Choral Directors Association

When considering stylistic trends in American choral music, an underexplored area is the impact of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) as a commissioning body, a networking organisation, and a locus for cross-pollination of ideas. The organisation, through its annual regional and national conferences, served as a petri dish for New Transcendentalism. From statements made in interviews with composers under review in this study, alongside their public statements, it is clear that the ACDA has played a pivotal role in the growth of New Transcendentalism in the United States. For Runestad, having a work performed at an ACDA conference is a highly important moment in the career development of any American choral composer:

> Those are important moments for composers, because a lot of choir conductors hear the music at those conferences, and then hopefully they're interested enough to program it for their ensembles.[19]

[19] Jake Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.

It is seemingly a rite of passage for a choral composer to attend ACDA conferences to seek opportunities for collaboration with the professionals who choose whether or not to platform their work. The relationship is symbiotic, as conductors attend to discover new and exciting repertoire, and to be a champion of composers who may become trailblazers in the future. The awards and commissions given by the ACDA platform the leading composers and styles in American choral music, setting a benchmark for contemporary choral composition and communicating the values and preferences of the institution.

The ACDA presents composers with networking opportunities that are crucial to their career progression. As discussed in Chapter One, the performance of 'Go Lovely Rose' at the 1992 ACDA Western Region Conference in Hawaii launched Whitacre's career. This mirrors the experience of many American composers who have connected with the ACDA. During his doctoral studies, Garrett gave a presentation at the 2018 ACDA Eastern Region conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at which he met Dr Anthony Trecek-King. Trecek-King invited Garrett to compose a work for Seraphic Fire, a professional choral ensemble in Miami, Florida, with whom he was guest conductor. This work, *My Heart Be Brave*, was subsequently published by Oxford University Press, and led to subsequent collaborations with the publishing house including a commission for the series *Carols for Choirs* and the publication of an anthology of choral music by black composers. For Trumbore, ACDA conferences are a vital opportunity for a composer to build long-term professional relationships: 'collaborative relationships, working friendships. That's been the real blessing of ACDA, I think, just gathering all these people in one place'.[20] This is echoed by Dan Forrest discussing his relationship with his home chapter, ACDA Southern: 'Southern has been so supportive of my work. When I go to Southern ACDA, it's just like a meeting of all these old friends'.[21]

Conductors, as members of the ACDA, are vital contributors to the flourishing of New Transcendentalism. During his keynote speech at the 2022 ACDA Western Conference in Long Beach, California, Whitacre spoke to the significance of his college choir conductor David Weiller programming his debut composition for the UNLV choir's performance at the ACDA Western Region conference in Hawaii in 1992 while he was still an undergraduate student: 'David chose to end his programme in Hawaii with my little piece […] He was giving me this

[20] Dale Trumbore, interview with the author, 7 March 2024.
[21] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April, 2024.

opportunity—it's unspeakable, I can't believe that it happened.'[22] For Whitacre, conductors share the responsibility for the growth of New Transcendentalism alongside composers:

> I firmly believe […] that conductors are creators. That we're building the music of the future. And we do this by commissioning and premiering pieces […] you are making the music that our children and their children will be singing.[23]

The popularity of New Transcendentalism among conductors in the United States has catalysed its development. As the curators of the contemporary choral canon, conductors are the reason New Transcendentalist repertoire is performed, and their advocacy is crucial to its sustainability.

In summary, the ACDA, its national and regional conferences, and its commission awards and prizes have been central to the growth of New Transcendentalism. This is reinforced by statements by the composers on the centrality of the ACDA to their career progression. As mentioned earlier, commercially minded composers and publishers of choral music have identified the broad popularity of New Transcendentalism and have subsumed its stylistic hallmarks into more simple and approachable repertoire suited to liturgical and educational contexts. The ACDA is a crucial locus for assessing these broader trends in American choral music, particularly in identifying the themes and styles that pique the interest of conductors, the programmers of choral ensembles (and, therefore, the purchasers of sheet music). No analysis of the genesis, development, or future of New Transcendentalism can be complete without consideration of the conferences of the ACDA.

The Emic Composer

One of the recurring themes of New Transcendentalist composers is their proximity to the music that they are writing, as performers, singers, and conductors. Each of the composers under review in this thesis have composed for a variety of instrumental forces, but the vast majority of works in their catalogues are choral. The last century has observed a rise in the number of specialist choral composers finding their niche and focusing their attention on the vocal ensemble, in contrast the aesthetic of the polymath composer who can compose music

[22] Eric Whitacre, 'Keynote at ACDA Western Conference, March 2022', online video recording, YouTube, 31 March 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMd_4MIQ06w> [Accessed 14 May 2025].
[23] Ibid.

for any instrument or ensemble which has been prominent in music of the canon since the Baroque period. The success of New Transcendentalism and its rise to prominence is directly related to the relationship between its composers and the choral instrument.

The physical response to the sensation of group-singing is important to many composers of New Transcendentalist repertoire. Whitacre often recounts the story of how he instantly became enthralled with choral singing during his first choral rehearsal:

> They opened their scores, the conductor gave the downbeat, and boom! They launched into the 'Kyrie' from the *Requiem* by Mozart. In my entire life I had seen in black and white and suddenly everything was in shocking technicolour. The most transformative experience I've ever had, in that single moment, hearing dissonance and harmony and people singing.[24]

For Runestad, the physical sensation of singing, alongside the sense of community, drew him toward choral composition:

> I just loved it. I loved singers. I loved the whole choir community. It's such a different community to the instrumental world. And loved the feeling, the sensation, of singing in a group of people like that. So I then started writing choral music and really getting excited about just doing as much as I could within that world.[25]

Forrest's performance background is primarily as a pianist and repetiteur, beginning as an accompanist for his school choir in seventh grade. His experience participating in a workshop with a professional choral practitioner at a festival while in tenth grade piqued his interest in singing: 'that was where I first really got bit by the choir bug.'[26] This continued at university where Forrest immersed himself in the choral culture outside of his studies in piano performance: 'I wanted to be in the room where the singing was, not where the pianists were.'[27] In an email to the author, Forrest explained what makes the timbre of the human voice far more alluring than that of any instrument:

> [T]he impact of the timbre of hearing humans produce their own sound, where human bodies themselves are the instrument, not just some piece of wood and metal that one holds in one's hand or sits down at. My spine tingled far more at hearing truly expressive singing than it ever had at hearing piano-playing. [28]

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[24] TED, 'A virtual choir 2,000 voices strong | Eric Whitacre', online video recording, YouTube, 4 April 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NENlXsW4pM> [Accessed 14 May 2025].
[25] Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.
[26] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Dan Forrest, email to the author, 6 November 2024.

References to the physiology of singing, 'the impact of the timbre', and a tingling spine evoke an innate physical response to choral harmony and timbre. Garrett describes a similar physiological approach to his compositional practice, drawing on his experience as both a singer and a conductor:

> I use that to inform how I'm going to teach my ensembles. And because I'm regularly singing, I'm able to think about the things that I do and how the vowels fit in my mouth, and what I'm doing with my tongue to create consonants and those kinds of things. I then talk about that with the ensemble.[29]

Here, Garrett describes taking a very practical approach, linking his performance practice to his process of choral composition, owing to his experience as both a choral singer and a choral educator alongside his expectation that he will work with ensembles performing his music. The physicality of singing described by each of the composers displays both an intimate knowledge of the voice, and a love of choral singing. These two attributes equip the composers with a deep level of understanding, enabling them to write music that is both singable and satisfying for choristers.

It is notable that for some of the composers examined in this thesis, their first interaction with the ACDA was as a student singer. Whitacre's first ACDA conference was the Western regional conference in Hawaii in 1992 to sing with the UNLV Choir. LaBarr's first conference was ACDA National in Los Angeles in 2005 as a student singer with Missouri State University Concert Chorale. Choral singing, and the participation in choral performances, is the crucial stepping stone towards New Transcendentalist composition. While not all composers of string quartets are string players themselves, it is likely the case that every composer of New Transcendentalist music has a background in choral singing. This dynamic speaks to the anthropological paradigm of the emic. An emic is an individual with an insider perspective with a deep understanding of the customs, beliefs and practices of people within a culture in contrast to the etic, an outside observer. The first-hand experience of singing in choirs is both an impetus for composing New Transcendentalist repertoire, and the means by which composers may write successfully. For some composers, a motivating factor to compose this music may be to sing it themselves. This is particularly true in the case of chords with secundal clashes and close harmony; these are fun for choristers to sing, giving many composers the impetus to compose music that they themselves would like to sing or hear. Furthermore,

[29] Marques L.A. Garrett, interview with the author, 22 September 2023.

knowledge of vocal production and choral singing enables composers of New Transcendentalist music to compose in a way that is accessible for choirs. For LaBarr, her experience as a singer is 'the number one reason why I'm able to compose music that people enjoy singing; because I do understand the voice, because I do it myself.'[30] The approachability of this repertoire is crucial to its success. Choir directors can programme works safe in the knowledge that their students will be able to learn their music efficiently and effectively, creating a sense of achievement in singers while creating music that is satisfying to sing and to hear.

The Commercial/Academic Divide

Contemporary American choral music is currently a battleground of debate on the aesthetics and the standards of excellence in choral music, particularly with regard to amateur choral ensembles and contemporary composition. Choral music is a dedicated subject in many school systems in the United States, and many parishes and church organisations across the country have well-funded choral programmes. This has created a captive market for new, accessible music to fill concert programmes, choral education syllabi, and liturgical services. As a consequence, the choral publishing industry has grown significantly in the United States. These publishers partner with composers in the United States and regularly release new music which is promoted through their social media channels and marketing emails. Large and small publishers pay to run stalls in the exhibition halls at ACDA conferences and host reading sessions in which a facilitator leads conference attendees in a read-through of new releases, often with the composers in attendance. Some publishers partner with leading conductors to develop special series, such as Jo-Michael Scheibe's series with Santa Barbara Music Publishing. As in many genres of composition, the commercialised nature of some choral composition in America has become a controversial issue, with much debate emerging on a dichotomy between commercial and academic approaches. As noted in this thesis, negative attitudes towards these aspects of contemporary American choral music may have stifled scholarly consideration of New Transcendentalism.

This self-consciousness of artistry versus amateurism is connected to the 'poor cousin' status afforded to choral music as an artform discussed in Chapter One. The lesser status of

[30] Susan LaBarr, interview with the author, 13 May 2024.

choral music compared with instrumental absolute music, of American music compared with European music, and of accessible music compared with complex music, has created a perfect storm of antipathy towards much contemporary choral music in the United States. This criticism is evident in Alwes' diagnosis of contemporary American choral composition:

> Anyone actively involved in the world of choral music realizes that there is another layer of simplicity; it takes the form of the seemingly unending stream of choral octavos that, DNA-like, seem to replicate each year. That these are important and useful in filling our immediate performance needs is undeniable, yet only a handful of them likely will figure in a future history of today's music. […] At present, this river of mainstream music has spread out to become a vast but shallow estuary. […] **the divide between art music and accessible choral music has never been wider**, with no immediate sign of consolidation.[31]

Alwes further accuses contemporary composers of surveying what is 'commercially popular and marketable' through the internet, resulting in a 'disturbingly monochromatic array of music'.[32] This critique of the artistic value of contemporary choral composition is not entirely fair. Firstly, it posits the unknowable question of what amount of contemporary music will eventually be canonised in choral history books, a question that only time can answer and is not always apparent from contemporary reception. This unanswerable question is accompanied by a value judgement asserting that only a handful are likely to be remembered. Secondly, it presents an comparison between his personal assessment of the value of contemporary choral music—which has not yet been appraised by history—and the choral canon of works and composers that have survived the test of time and have informed choral literature curricula and programmes for decades and centuries. How many composers like Johann Sebastian Bach composed new choral works on a weekly basis for their own churches but were not privileged to the same historical preservation as Bach and his children? How many songs, hymns, improvisations and chants have been lost to history due to a lack of ink and paper? And of those that were lost, how certain can we be that they were not of equal quality to the canon that did prevail? Furthermore, as music literacy and education has expanded and become democratised through the internet, alongside the ever-growing population of the Earth, it can only be expected that the raw number of composers would increase as time progresses. It is not clear that the number of choral composers *per capita* is any different today than it might have been four hundred years ago. The only difference between choral production now and in earlier

[31] Chester Lee Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, volume 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 383 (emphasis added).
[32] Ibid., p. 384.

decades is the degree of preservation. From major publishers such as Hal Leonard and Walton, to small, independent, digital outfits like MusicSpoke and Graphite Publishing, more composers have the ability to print and disseminate their music than ever before. Access to publishers was far more prohibitive in the past, especially during periods when printing materials were more expensive. This critique conflates our access to historical sources, which is subject to survivor bias, and our current access to digitally type-set and distributed choral repertoire. It also highlights the challenges of appraising contemporary music in real time, particularly when making a value judgement on the contribution of a generation of composers to choral music history.

The tension between aesthetics of musical excellence and the social and educational needs of amateur ensembles is a topic that merits further scholarship. Forrest, who also serves as Vice President of Publications and Editor with Beckenhorst Press, describes his own experience of navigating this divide:

> I write all over that spectrum […] some people that love certain types of my music would look at other pieces that I've written and say 'that's too edgy, that's so academic […] come down to our level.' But then I write music for church choirs, […] and the people that love the more solid and high stuff that I do, they look at that stuff and say, 'Why does he do that?'[33]

This is evident in the contrast between two of his works examined in the previous chapter, 'Selah' and *Good Night Dear Heart*. 'Selah' features extensive *divisi*, frequent key changes and modal changes, aleatoricism and dense cluster chords, while *Good Night* remains mostly in four parts with limited *divisi*, features a strophic, hymn-like structure, and stays in the same key throughout. For Forrest, a key lesson he learned from a professor during his doctoral studies became a guiding principle for his approach to composition, and his perspective on what composing contemporary music means:

> [H]e stopped me and said, 'I don't know that there's anything truly new that you're ever going to write. Why don't you stop trying to write something new and just write something timely.' And for me, that difference between the word 'new' and the word 'timely' just freed me up.[34]

Forrest recounts backlash he encountered for taking up his position at Beckenhorst Press, a publishing house known primarily for functional liturgical music rather than concert repertoire:

[33] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.
[34] Ibid.

> A friend of mine […] was sitting behind a couple people [at an ACDA conference], and the one turned to the other and said, 'Oh, did you hear that Dan Forrest took a job with Beckenhorst? Man, I had such high hopes for him.' *laughs* That's how disappointed they were that I had lowered myself to work for a church music publisher.[35]

The disregard of entire corpora of repertoire on the basis of such value judgements has entrenched the divide between choral practice in the United States and musicological scholarship.

Perhaps the separation of Choral Studies from Musicology in the American academy further entrenches this divide. Unlike in Ireland, where this research was conducted, Choral Studies and Musicology are separated in third-level educational institutions in the United States, with choral programmes heavily focused on the practical training of future choral educators. This is a result of the robust choral education programmes in school systems across the United States, with a constant necessity for a well-trained workforce of choral educators. One of the benefits of this system is that trainee teachers are equipped with the specialised pedagogical tools required for choral education at all levels of schooling. An unfortunate consequence of the separation of this subject from Musicology departments is the association of choral music with educational and recreational settings for children and amateur singers, reinforcing a perceived divide between choral studies and musicological research. The findings of this study have uncovered through analytical scrutiny the stylistic trends that have been widely believed to exist in choral practice but have not received sufficient scholarly attention. It is envisioned that this thesis will be an important stepping stone towards a comprehensive history of the genesis and evolution of New Transcendentalism in American choral music.

The Future of New Transcendentalism

New Transcendentalism saw its peak between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s, raising the question of what the future holds for New Transcendentalism, and how lasting of an impact it will have in contemporary American choral composition. Has America now entered a post–New Transcendentalism era? And has Whitacre himself, the pioneer of the style, turned from New Transcendentalism towards new forms of composition?

[35] Ibid.

After returning to the United States in 2015 after his five-year period in England, Whitacre's compositional outputs changed significantly in scope and number. Over the past ten years, he has published just three choral octavos—*i carry your heart*, *Sing Gently*, and *All Seems Beautiful to Me*.[36] During this period, his output of large-scale and multi-movement works has greatly increased, such as *The Sacred Veil* (2018), a twelve-movement work for choir, cello and piano based on texts by the composer, his longtime collaborator Charles Anthony Silvestri, and Silvestri's recently deceased wife, Julie Silvestri. Other large-scale works from this period include *The Gift of the Magi* (2019), a chamber opera for choir, soloists and piano, *Prelude in C* (2022) commissioned by the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, and *Eternity in an Hour* (2024), an hour-long piece for choir, piano, strings and live electronics composed for the 2024 BBC Proms. This shift towards long-form composition may indicate the beginning of a new phase in Whitacre's career. This is reflected in his choice of text and his approach to text-setting, with much of his recent works drawing on more philosophical and transcendental texts. Whitacre acknowledges this shift in thematic material, stating that his earlier works drew on themes that were 'close to the bone […] raw, visceral human experiences', while his recent work is more 'conceptual' and 'philosophical'.[37] This is reflected in his approach to *Eternity in an Hour*, in which a four-line poem by William Blake is used to generate an hour of music which, for Whitacre, is a form of musical meditation.[38]

The shift is also stylistic, with the composer intentionally abandoning familiar methods of composition and finding new ways to convey musical ideas, perhaps stemming from the oversaturation of certain popular sonorities from the early years of New Transcendentalism. The newly composed texts used in *The Sacred Veil* often make explicit references to collaborations and previous works by Whitacre and Silvestri. However, Whitacre purposefully avoided gratuitous musical self-quotation in the work, seeking instead to compose something more 'real and in the moment':

> [T]he real breakaway piece for me was *The Sacred Veil*, where there's all of these places where I'm, you know, quoting pieces that Tony and I did in the text and moments that just cry out for all of this, these lexicon chords and voices that I've built over the years, and I abandoned all of them because I thought that's actually—this is not pastiche […] And I was surprised by the way

[36] This period saw major changes in Whitacre's life, including his relocation from the UK to the US and subsequently to Belgium, the divorce of his first marriage in 2017, his second wedding in 2019, and the birth of his second son in 2020. Furthermore, his departure from The UK was marred by mixed reviews of his 2015 appearance at the BBC Proms.
[37] Interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[38] Ibid.

> the music ended up sounding, which to me, was really stripped down. It became efficient. Music became like, terrifyingly efficient to my ear.[39]

This efficiency speaks to the earlier quote regarding his use of *divisi*, where he asks himself: 'What is the most efficient possible way to say the most?'[40] Whitacre describes his approach to *Eternity in an Hour* as an even greater departure, particularly owing to its use of aleatoricism and live electronic manipulation:

> *Eternity in an Hour*—what it sounds like to my ear is me trying to shed skin. So it doesn't feel at all formed. It's like I have no idea where I'm going with this. I don't know what that piece is exactly, but maybe five pieces from now, it'll be apparent, 'Oh, here's where I'm trying to get to', if that makes sense.[41]

Whitacre's movement toward long-form composition and writing for large-scale and instrumental ensembles may indicate that the composer himself has moved past the New Transcendentalism that he pioneered during the early period of his career. Time will tell if he will further develop New Transcendentalism in these formats, or if he is in the process of transitioning to new modes of composition.

New Directions in America

And what of the future of New Transcendentalism? As discussed above, the classification of New Transcendentalism as a style presents epistemological challenges, however, it may be the final musical style to dominate American choral music for some time given current trends in programming and commissioning in the United States. The peak of New Transcendentalism occurred between the flurry of compositions by Whitacre in the period of 1995–2002, and the rise of the new generation of New Transcendentalist composers in the 2000s and 2010s, including Runestad, LaBarr, Forrest, Garrett and Trumbore. Since this burst of experimentation in the soundworld of New Transcendentalism, American choral composition has become more pluralistic, both stylistically and thematically. For Runestad, the wave of New Transcendentalism inspired by Lauridsen and Whitacre has passed and has been replaced by a more diverse contemporary repertoire:

[39] Ibid.
[40] Eric Whitacre, public virtual Q&A, Dublin City University, 7 March 2022.
[41] Interview with the author, 14 October 2024.

> I think when we're looking at broad trends, of course, I think Morton Lauridsen really brought us into a certain place, and then Eric Whitacre brought us into a certain place. And so I think now we're seeing a great mixture of things, which I think is really wonderful. We're seeing people that are encouraged to be more in touch with lots of different kinds of music, lots of different kinds of musical backgrounds. So there isn't necessarily just one prescribed 'school' of composition, but you can draw from all different styles.[42]

For Runestad, their music has had an indelible impact on American choral music, however, the choral scene in America has naturally progressed and expanded beyond them:

> I think both of them their music will always have a place, at least in the near future. […] But I think it's cool to see that people are engaging in different kinds of soundworlds and styles and I hope that we continue to diversify and engage with lots of different kinds of music from around the world.[43]

It may be that the choral community in America is reaching a point of New Transcendentalism fatigue. As mentioned above in the discussion on cluster chords, New Transcendentalism can be the choral equivalent of refined sugar, and the sugar high may be coming to an end for the style in its purest form as composers seek to break new ground and explore new avenues. Though many composers look to the future to seek new approaches to choral composition, New Transcendentalism has left an indelible mark on the American choral palate.

Following the peak of New Transcendentalism, it may be that some of its stylistic features have been incorporated into the mainstream of American choral composition, particularly in the context of commercially produced liturgical and educational choral music. This is particularly true of non-functional secundal harmonies, the extended chord of IV, and the use of homophonic and bifurcated textures. While Whitacre's compositions represent New Transcendentalism in its purest form, stylistic fingerprints of the style are now hallmarks of the American choral soundscape. For example, Roger Emerson (b. 1950) is one of the most prolific arrangers of popular music for choirs in the United States, with over nine hundred published arrangements. His arrangement of 'Kiss The Sky', originally sung by Maren Morris for the animated film *The Wild Robot* (2024) features non-functional secundal harmony and unprepared secundal dissonances (see Figure 5.5):

[42] Jake Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.
[43] Jake Runestad, interview with the author, 26 September 2023.
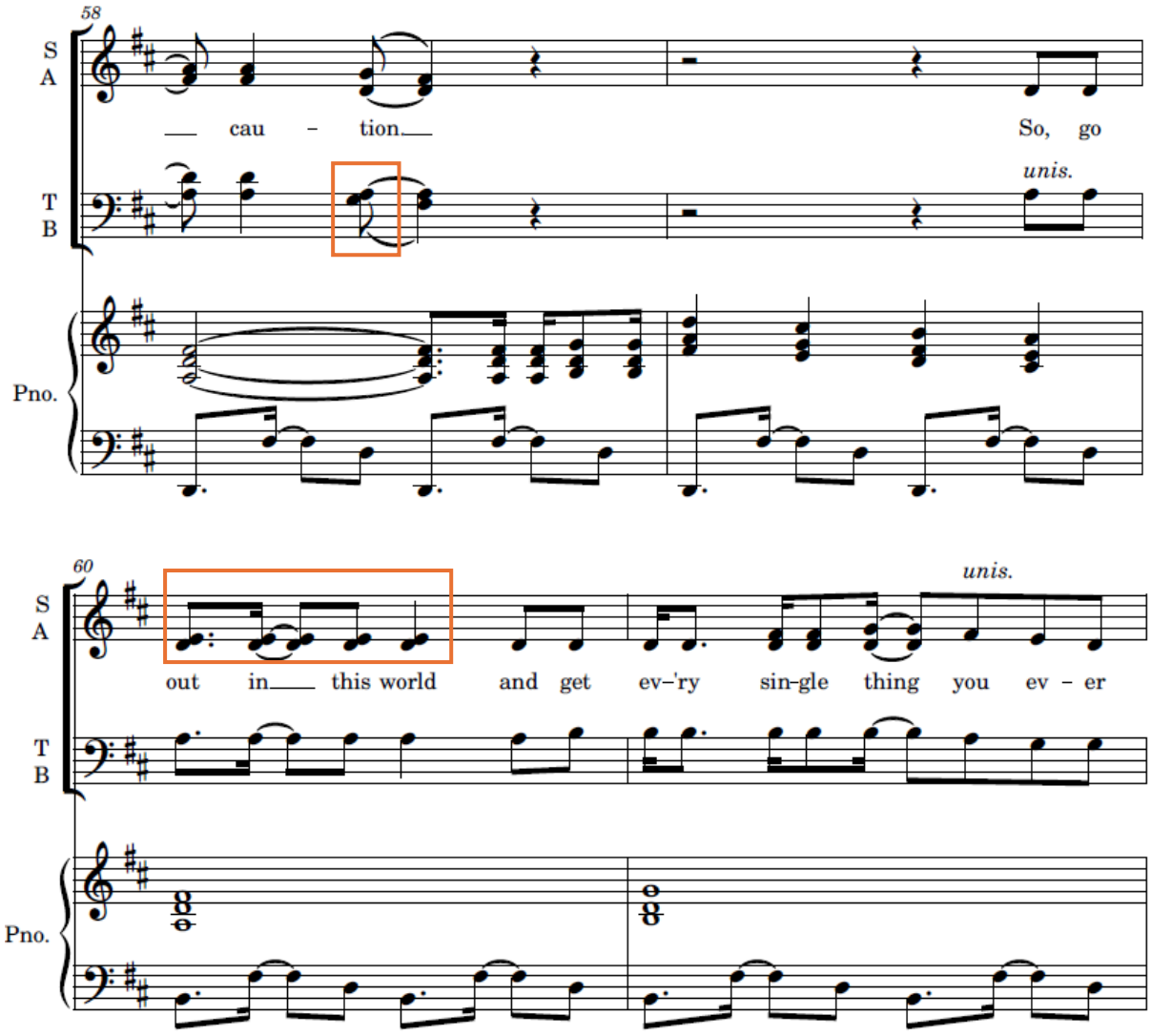


Figure 5.5: Secundal harmony in bars 58 and 60 of Roger Emerson's arrangement of 'Kiss The Sky' (2024).

Other American composers have incorporated New Transcendentalist elements into their accessible repertoire, such as Jennifer Lucy Cook's *Over and Over* (2022) for choir and optional synthesiser. The piece is based on a simple, sixteen-bar canon sung by the upper voices over a chord progression sung by the lower voices to the phoneme 'bohm'. The piece concludes with a notated chord in which each of the upper voice parts concludes on a different note of the melody, while the lower voices hold the chord of IV in C major, F major (see Figure 5.6):
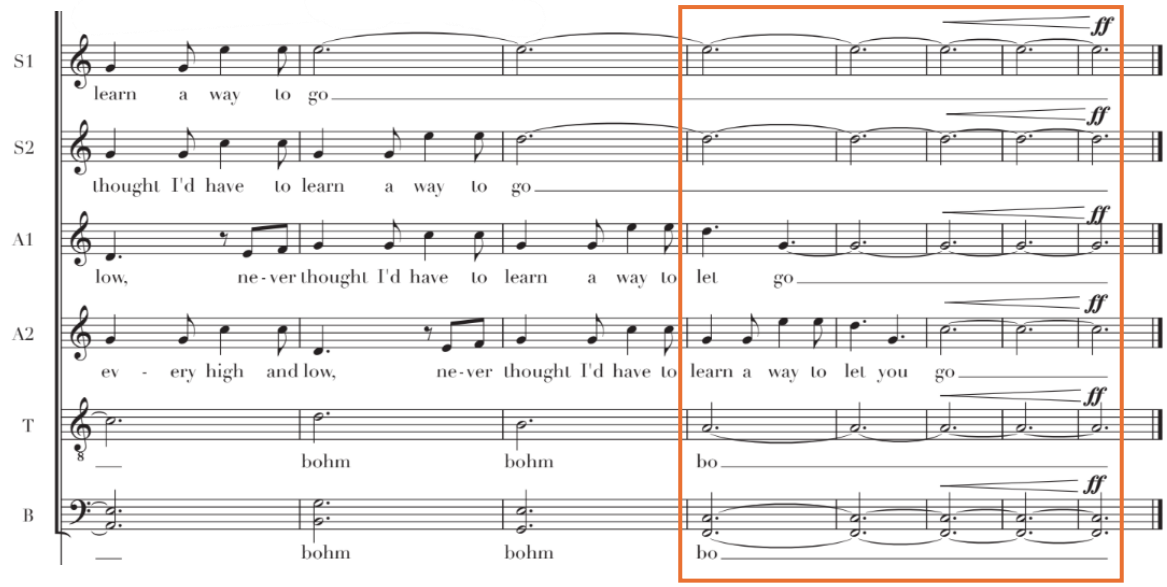


Figure 5.6: An extended chord of IV at the end of Jennifer Lucy Cook's *Over and Over*.

In this final chord, the alto 2 and soprano parts sing three stacked tones over a G in the alto 1, creating a second-inversion C9 chord in the upper voices. This is sung over an F major chord in the lower voices, creating a polychordal harmony. The bifurcation of these two timbral units is reinforced by the bright /o/ vowel of the upper voices singing the word 'go' in contrast with the darker vowel of the lower voices singing the phoneme 'bohm'. The polychord combines to create an extended chord of IV in the key of C major, with an added seventh, ninth, and thirteenth. In this piece, Cook incorporates the New Transcendentalist features of polychordal harmony in a pandiatonic context, bifurcated choral texture, and secundal harmony into a work built upon a simple and easily taught canon suitable for young and amateur singers. While Cook has explored New Transcendentalism further in works such as *For You I Will Be An Island* (2022), *Over and Over* and Emerson's arrangement of 'Kiss the Sky' demonstrate how fluency in the language of New Transcendentalism has become a core element of the contemporary American choral composer's compositional toolkit, just as familiarity with hymn and partsong composition was an integral to composers of the Second New England School.

One of the most prominent emerging trends in contemporary American choral music is programmatic rather than musical, relating to the lyrical content and cultural origin of works. Many composers are creating works on themes of social justice, equality and inclusion, while revival projects highlighting the historical contributions of composers from marginalised backgrounds are receiving increased attention and popularity at national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association. This trend has been identified by Whitacre:

> I would say that there seems to be this new embrace of composers who need their voices lifted, minorities, and women, and world music, and that is so good, so phenomenal. That seems to be a major, major trend. And trend, not a fad, that really seems to be sticking. That's very exciting.[44]

Recent large-scale research includes *The Oxford Book of Choral Music by Black Composers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), edited by Marques L. A. Garrett, and *Choral Repertoire by Women Composers* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2025), edited by Hilary Apfelstadt and Alan Troy Davis. For Garrett, this approach is a reaction to the dominance of white male composers in the choral canon and the contemporary mainstream until recent years:

> [I]n the last four years, in the US […] there's been an almost a tsunami when it comes to diversity initiatives in representation of composers. So we try to limit […] how many white male composers are represented, just because that has been the trend for so long.[45]

These attitudes are reflected in the themes of recent ACDA national conferences, for example, 'Diversity in Music' in 2021 and 'A Place of Belonging' in 2023. Diverse choral concert programmes uplift composers from marginalised backgrounds, provide wholistic and culturally sustaining choral education for choirs, and enable choirs to display their full range of stylistic fluency and competence in concert and competition settings. If this trend endures, as Whitacre asserts, the result may be that a singular musical stylistic trend may never again dominate the American choral landscape as New Transcendentalism did, though this remains to be seen in the coming years and decades.

Dan Forrest served as the Chair of the ACDA National Composition Committee from 2020–24 (now the ACDA Composition Initiatives National Standing Committee). This committee oversees the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission and Awards. For Forrest, his goal during his tenure on this committee was to open the Brock Commission to previously underrepresented genres and styles:

> [W]e want to recognise the whole spectrum of choral contributions […] it's not just the people who win Grammys and get Pulitzers. It's also the people who are known for the very best of children's choir music, or the very best of even church choral music.[46]

[44] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[45] Marques L. A. Garrett, interview with the author, 22 September 2023.
[46] Dan Forrest, interview with the author, 17 April 2024.

This is reflective of recent attitudinal shifts at the ACDA to democratise programming decisions, highlighting composers from marginalised backgrounds, composers of works for amateur and children's ensembles, and composers integrating diverse subject matter and thematic material through their choices of text and musical language.

Further Research

As with all research projects, this doctoral dissertation was limited in scope. The works of six composers were presented in detail, and the appendices contain transcripts of interviews with eight composers. The repertoire selections in the Case Study and Comparative Analysis chapters were restricted to *a cappella* works for mixed voice choir. Works for upper or lower voices and works with piano accompaniment or for choir and instrumental ensemble were not considered. This study presented analysis of original works only, and did not consider arrangements of pre-existing songs. It is envisioned that the combinative approach of IPS Analysis and Critical Score Analysis alongside the analysis and deductions presented in this thesis will empower further scholarship of New Transcendentalism in choral music in the United States and beyond.

Other Composers and Works

Many composers beyond those addressed in this study have experimented with the compositional techniques of New Transcendentalism, and their contribution to the style deserves scholarly critique. Joan Szymko (b. 1957) has written extensively for upper voices and for choir with piano accompaniment, incorporating elements such as cluster chords, homophonic and bifurcated textures, and secundal and pandiatonic harmonies in their works. Elaine Hagenberg (b. 1979) has become one of the most popular composers in American schools and churches. Similar to LaBarr, Hagenberg's music is largely melody-driven, and most of her works feature piano accompaniment. Her works feature added-note harmonies and lyrical melodies combined with the New Transcendentalist techniques of secundal harmonies and bifurcated choral textures. Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978) is a Norwegian composer who has been primarily based in the United States since 2001. His compositions feature lush, homophonic textures with frequent use of extended chords. Kevin Puts (b. 1972), Frank Ticheli (b. 1958), Jennifer Lucy Cook, Caroline Shaw (b. 1982), and other composers whose individual

approaches to composition have contributed to the development of New Transcendentalism in the United States merit further comparative stylistic analysis using the combinative approach presented in this thesis.

The influence of New Transcendentalism has extended beyond North America, as the international community has become more connected through the internet and through the growth of international choral festivals, competitions and conferences. While this study was limited geographically to composers in the United States, further research is needed to establish the breadth of influence of New Transcendentalism on international composers, and indeed the influence of foreign composers on its development within the United States. Two of the international composers most widely associated with New Transcendentalism are Paul Mealor (b. 1975) and Ēriks Ešenvalds (b. 1977). Mealor is a Welsh composer who rose to prominence through the commissions of his works for special occasions of the Royal Family in Britain. His motet *Ubu caritas et amor* (2011) was commissioned for the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton. It opens with a sparse, two-part phrase featuring a soprano melody in counterpoint with an inversion of the melody in the alto starting a fifth below, before the full choir enters on the final note of the phrase with a cluster chord. The work makes frequent use of cluster chords, homophonic textures, and modulations between various modalities. Ešenvalds is a Latvian composer who received the 2022 Brock Commission from the ACDA. He is best-known for his choral works that incorporate tuned glasses of water, such as *Northern Lights* (2012) and *Stars* (2011). These works feature secundal clashes and cluster chords for the voices, the tuned glasses, and occasionally combinations of both. Other international composers whose works merit analysis in the context of New Transcendentalism include Kim André Arnesen (b. 1980) of Norway, Fredrik Sixten (b. 1962) of Sweden, Ko Matsushita (b. 1962) of Japan, Manolo da Rold (b. 1976) of Italy, Javier Busto (b. 1949) of Spain, Michael McGlynn (b. 1964) of Ireland, and Jonathan Dove (b. 1959) of England.[47] International influences outside of those discussed in Chapter One also deserve investigation, particularly the choral music of Scandinavia and the Baltic region.

Additional research is merited on the approach of composers utilising New Transcendentalist compositional techniques when arranging pre-existing melodies. In the case of such works, IPS Analysis may be less effective in identifying structural units, as the structure

[47] So far, the only such analysis is of McGlynn in Seán Doherty, 'Toward "Transcendence": Music and Meditation in Michael McGlynn's O Maria', *The Choral Journal*, 62 (2022), 8–19. Doherty himself is another Irish composer who has experimented with New Transcendentalism in his work *It's Strange About Stars* (2018).

of the work is largely determined by the pre-existing structure of the source melody. Whitacre's arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner* (2018) concludes with a self-quotation, inserting the cluster chord of a major scale with a raised fourth and flattened seventh that first appeared in *Cloudburst* (1995).[48] Whitacre has also composed arrangements of several pop songs: Trent Reznor's *Hurt* (2014); Miley Cyrus' *Wrecking Ball* (unpublished, 2014); and Depeche Mode's *Enjoy the Silence* (2014). Many composers engaged with New Transcendentalism have written arrangements of Christmas carols using secundal harmony, Lydian modal elements, extended chords of IV, and bifurcated choral textures, for example, Forrest's arrangement of Gustav Holst's *In The Bleak Midwinter* (2023) or LaBarr's *The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came* (2018). Arrangements were not examined in this thesis, as the structure is largely predetermined and the presence of pre-composed material places limitations on the expressive capability of the composer. One of the findings of this research is that many composers of New Transcendentalist music undermine traditional melodic functionality in the structuring of choral works. Composers of this style regularly create 'thick melodies' of homophonic chordal declamations, like the parallel chords in the opening of Whitacre's *A Boy And A Girl*, rather than singular melodic lines with accompaniment, with structural features governed through integrated primary and secondary parameters rather than melodic development. For this reason, analysis of arrangements of pre-existing melodic material would be unhelpful in this study for identifying core parameters of New Transcendentalism, and the efficacy of IPS Analysis may be diminished. However, the research presented in this thesis may guide future analysis of New Transcendentalist elements in choral arrangements.

Due to its intrinsic connection to choral timbre and the physical sensation of singing, the soundworld of New Transcendentalism is manifested most effectively in unaccompanied choral music. For this purpose, only *a cappella* works were analysed in this research. Each of the composers examined in this thesis have written for accompanied choir, with accompaniment provided by a piano, organ, harp, or instrumental ensemble. While New Transcendentalist techniques can be observed in these works, the harmonic and textural impact of the accompanying instruments is in tension with the notions of wall-of-sound and bifurcated textures, sustained secundal harmonies, and the floating atmospheric effect of pandiatonic choral harmony. The accompaniment often provides a textural and rhythmic variety to the choral part, piercing through thick homophonic textures. It can also provide harmonic context,

[48] This may be the 'rain chord' referred to by Whitacre in an interview with the author, 14 October, 2024: 'I'll quote that rain chord in other contexts where I want the mystery and wonder of rain.'

with accompanied works often featuring solo or unison melody lines which are uncommon in *a cappella* works that incorporate New Transcendentalist ideas. Some accompanied works, such as Runestad's *Come to the Woods* (2015), juxtapose solo piano passages and unaccompanied New Transcendentalist choral writing. Runestad's *A Silence Haunts Me* (2018) explores a wide range of timbres and styles in the piano accompaniment, from sparse octaves in the upper register, to the interpolation of solo piano repertoire by Beethoven, the inspiration for the programme of the work. While New Transcendentalism is defined in this research as an idiosyncratic approach to *a cappella* choral writing, the findings of this thesis may inform future scholarship of accompanied choral works where New Transcendentalist techniques are incorporated into the choral part.

While this study identifies New Transcendentalism as a choral form, owing to its intrinsic link with the physiology of choral singing, many New Transcendentalist works have been transcribed for instrumental ensembles, particularly for wind band. This includes Whitacre's *Lux Aurumque*, *Sleep*, and *The Star Spangled Banner*.[49] More recently, Whitacre has incorporated live electronics into his work with *Eternity in an Hour* (2024), presenting new timbral possibilities for New Transcendentalist composition. Further research is required to ascertain the boundaries of New Transcendentalism beyond the choral instrument, and its relationship with other forces and instrumentations.

All works examined in this thesis were composed for mixed choir, ensuring that this analysis of New Transcendentalism focused on works in which the full force of the choral instrument was available to the composers. Voicings beyond the SATB mixed choir should be addressed in future scholarship to examine how New Transcendentalism may vary for different choral forces. For example, much of the bifurcation in the choral works examined in this study separated the upper and lower voices, taking advantage of the overtone-rich timbre of lower voices in contrast with the cleaner tone of treble voices. When the fullness of this timbral palate is not available to the composer, new challenges in exploring the harmonic and textural limitations of New Transcendentalism are present. Future research into New Transcendentalism should address compositions for a variety of choral ensembles.

Another suggested line of inquiry is an examination of the regional subcultures that contributed to the development of New Transcendentalism, particularly in areas with strong

[49] Whitacre's transcriptions for wind band have been examined in Daniel James Grassi, 'An analysis of three choral transcriptions for winds by Eric Whitacre' (unpublished master's dissertation, San Jose State University, 2010).

creative and choral ecosystems. This is particularly true of the greater Los Angeles area, where Whitacre spent most of his career. For Whitacre, the sonority of the added ninth in choral harmony conjures images of 'California optimism', adding that it 'sounds like going as far west as you possibly can.'[50] Whitacre's use of the phrase 'going as far west as you possibly can' invokes the Pioneers, situating the exploration of these harmonies as another bold and brave venture in the cultural mythology of America. While only two of the composers in this study, Whitacre and Trumbore, have lived in Los Angeles, further research is merited to identify specific trends unique to this region.

Another region with a strong choral identity is Minnesota. As discussed in Chapter One, institutions such as St Olaf's College and influential conductors like F. Melius Christiansen built lasting and impactful choral infrastructure shaping generations of choral artists. The American Composers Forum was originally founded as the Minnesota Composers Forum in 1973 by Libby Larsen (b. 1950) and Stephen Paulus (1949–2014).[51] Paulus has been linked to the choral style of Lauridsen and Whitacre,[52] while Runestad, who is based in Minneapolis, studied under Larsen. While the advent of the internet has lessened the importance of geographical boundaries in the emergence of musical trends, these centralised hubs of choral creativity deserve greater investigation in the context of the findings of this study.

Influences in Popular Music

As generations of young musicians who were exposed to New Transcendentalist music during their choral education begin to emerge in other genres, future scholarship would benefit from consideration of the degree to which New Transcendentalism is trickling outwards into popular music genres. Two groups have already emerged that fuse popular styles with tight-knit, secundal harmonies evocative of New Transcendentalism: Tiny Habits and säje. Tiny Habits is a folk fusion band formed by three Berklee College of Music students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group gained widespread success with their short-form videos for TikTok and Instagram of their own vocal arrangements of pop songs with acoustic guitar accompaniment. They first went viral on TikTok with their cover of Vanessa Carlton's *A Thousand Miles*.[53]

[50] Eric Whitacre, interview with the author, 14 October 2024.
[51] See Larry Dean Smith, 'The choral music of Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus: An examination and comparison of styles' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 1998).
[52] Alwes, p. 316.
[53] Cinya Khan, 'a thousand miles <3', online video recording, TikTok, @cinyaa, 29 January 2022 <https://www.tiktok.com/@cinyaa/video/7058636524400790830?lang=en> [Accessed 30 April 2025].

Since then they have collaborated with popular artists in the indie-folk/pop scene including Lizzie McAlpine, Laufey, Kacey Musgraves and Noah Kahan. Features of their arrangements include largely homophonic arranging, arpeggiated guitar accompaniment, and juxtapositions of dense, secundal harmonies with unison singing. Säje is a four-part vocal jazz ensemble comprising vocal artists from Washington State and Los Angeles, California. The idea to form the group emerged from performances at a scholastic vocal jazz festival in Seattle, Washington, in 2018, with the concept of creating space for 'the female voice in a context where it had not been previously predominant', taking inspiration from artists like Laura Mvula, Becca Stevens, and Björk.[54] The group won the Grammy Award for Best Arrangement, Instrumental and Vocals in 2024 for their recording of the standard *In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning* by David Mann and Bob Hilliard, featuring Jacob Collier, and again in 2025 for their original composition *Alma*. Jacob Collier is a popular artist who also uses dense vocal harmonies in his work: in 2020 he described himself as a 'fan' of Whitacre during a livestreamed interview with the composer.[55] Säje's 2023 eponymous album is heavily influenced by jazz and features an eclectic variety of vocal and instrumental combinations, from the austere guitar accompaniment on 'Desert Song' and Collier's sparse piano interjections on 'In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning', to the full jazz rhythm section on 'I Can't Help It' and 'Britches'. The choir's most popular release, 'Desert Song' features secundal and clustered harmonies, including Lydian clusters. The song ends with an extended *a cappella* tag with clashing semitones and swiping harmonies under pedal notes in the melody part.

The contributions of these two ensembles have been celebrated by the same choral communities that proliferate New Transcendentalist music, providing evidence of their cross-over appeal. Tiny Habits' short-form *a cappella* arrangement of Belinda Carlisle's 1987 song 'Heaven Is A Place On Earth' garnered hundreds of thousands of views on the Instagram page Daily Choirs, a page dedicated to sharing new choral music to its nearly one million followers.[56] At the 2024 Western Region Conference of the ACDA, säje were the invited headline performers and gave a workshop entitled 'The sound of säje', during which Amanda

[54] Nicky Schrire, 'Interview with vocal quartet säje (Sara Gazarek, Amanda Taylor, Johnaye Kendrick & Erin Bentlage)', *London Jazz News* (online), 29 October 2020 <https://londonjazznews.com/2020/10/29/interview-with-vocal-quartet-saje-sara-gazarek-amanda-taylor-johnaye-kendrick-erin-bentlage/> [Accessed 30 April 2025].
[55] Eric Whitacre, 'VC6 Live: Eric Whitacre in conversation with Jacob Collier', online video recording, YouTube, 11 May 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNCNFm17McA> [Accessed 30 April 2020], 1:21:46.
[56] Tiny Habits, 'When the "They say in Heaven" part comes, my heart stops!', online video recording, Instagram, @dailychoirs, 24 January 2025 <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DFNf14wCQoG> [Accessed 30 April 2025].

Taylor, one of the lead arrangers within the group, credited Whitacre as an inspiration for much of her harmonic palate.[57]

Another genre featuring clustered and secundal vocal harmonies is indie electronica, with songs like 'Hide and Seek' (2005) by Imogen Heap, 'Lay All Your Love On Me' by Zara Larsson (2022), and 'party 4 u' (2020) by Charli xcx utilising a vocoder to create clashing harmonies, though there is no immediately obvious connection between these European artists and New Transcendentalism. Finally, contemporary *a cappella* ensembles, in particular Pentatonix, have become exceedingly popular in recent decades. One of the lead arrangers for Pentatonix, Ben Bram, held a virtual arranging masterclass with Eric Whitacre during the pandemic.[58] Bram's arrangements, such as 'Pure Imagination' (2018) written for the SoCal VoCals, feature secundal harmonies and pandiatonicism. Further research is merited on the impact of New Transcendentalism in popular music genres, particularly in American pop music as more musicians enter the creative space following a choral education infused with New Transcendentalist repertoire.

Conclusions

This doctoral dissertation was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the stylistic features of New Transcendentalism as exemplified in the choral music of Eric Whitacre?
2. To what extent do other American choral composers beyond Whitacre engage with this compositional language?
3. Do these stylistic trends indicate a new school of compositional thought?

Eric Whitacre was chosen as the case-study composer for the work, as his choral output is almost exclusively New Transcendentalist, and his works have had the widest impact and influence in the twenty first century. By identifying New Transcendentalism as a unique compositional approach, this thesis has furthered the discourse of contemporary American

[57] ACDA Western, 'Schedule At-A-Glance', online, <https://acdawestern.org/2024-conference-schedule/> [Accessed 30 April 2025].
[58] Eric Whitacre, 'Virtual Arranging Masterclass with Ben Bram and Shams Ahmed', online blog post <https://ericwhitacre.com/news/virtual-arranging-masterclass-with-ben-bram-and-shams-ahmed> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

choral music from analysis of the style as the intellectual property of either Whitacre or Lauridsen to an understanding of New Transcendentalism as a living, evolving set of compositional tools. It has been advanced, challenged, dismantled and reappropriated by many American composers engaging with the style while cultivating their own idiosyncratic compositional voices. It also provides a framework for understanding what is not New Transcendentalism. This enables us to analyse American choral compositions, particularly those for amateur singers, without painting all of them with the same, post-Whitacre brush. The combinative approach of IPS Analysis and Critical Score Analysis provides a firmer analytical framework for those seeking to explore New Transcendentalist characteristics in works by other choral composers.

It is envisaged that the research presented in this thesis will have a significant impact on choral practice as well as research. Vocabulary for the choral conductor, singer and audient is presented: this includes the formalisation of the title of New Transcendentalism for the style, informing the development of concert programmes, recordings, playlists, and media commentary. This thesis defines cluster chords in the New Transcendentalist context as containing four or more consecutive pitches, as any fewer number may simply be the result of a chord extension and not a deliberate usage of the compositional tool of clusters. This classification of cluster chords and their identification as key sonic icons of New Transcendentalism will inform conductors when balancing and phrasing chords in performance. Bifurcation is identified as a core aspect of New Transcendentalist choral music, both in the separation of textural units within the choir and the use of polychordal harmony. This fundamental aspect of New Transcendentalism informs pedagogical approaches to teaching repertoire to singers and also presents new possibilities for creative staging of choral performances to highlight the impact of bifurcation in the music. Finally, the combinative approach of Critical Score Analysis alongside IPS Analysis offers conductors a fresh perspective on the formal structures and stylistic elements within New Transcendentalist works. This new framework for understanding structure and form may inform conductors in adopting variations of character between phrases to heighten the articulation of IPSs and IPS groups.

This thesis builds upon the doctoral research of Shane Lynch and Kenneth Lee Owen as foundational research products building the history of New Transcendentalism.[59] Written during the height of New Transcendentalism, Lynch and Owen's DMA theses were completed in 2008 and presented a comparative analysis of works by Whitacre and his predecessors, Lauridsen and Clausen. This current research presents an examination of the legacy of this period of composition, and includes analysis of New Transcendentalism beyond Whitacre and Lauridsen, the two archetypes of the style. It remains to be seen how New Transcendentalism may evolve in the future, or if we are at a moment of decline and on the precipice of new musical languages emerging in the United States. It is clear, however, that the stylistic fingerprints of New Transcendentalism, pioneered by Lauridsen and Whitacre and subsequently expanded and developed by Runestad, Trumbore, Forrest, Garrett, and LaBarr, among others, have left an indelible mark on American choral composition in these early decades of the twenty-first century.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Ethics Committee Approval

Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences
DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
15 May 2023

CONFIRMATION OF RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FOR A PROJECT

Application Reference: **DCU-FHSS-2023-036**

Project Title: **Towards the New Transcendental: Stylistic Trends in Contemporary American Choral Music**

Project contact(s): **kevin.boushel3@mail.dcu.ie**

Let this letter certify that the proposed project identified above has been reviewed by the *Humanities & Social Sciences Faculty Research Ethics Committee* (F-REC) and has been approved as a low-risk project. The application was found to comply with university requirements and best practices for research ethics, and with GDPR guidelines and requirements where personal data is processed in the project.

A copy of the application, including appended documents related to participant consent, is archived under the reference above. Queries about this project's approval may be directed to the F-REC Chair.

Sincerely,

Dr Dónal Mulligan
donal.mulligan@dcu.ie

Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences
Dublin City University

Dámh na nDaonnachtaí agus na nEolaíochtaí Sóisialta
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath

Appendix B: Plain Language Statement

Plain Language Statement

This research project, entitled 'Towards the New Transcendental: Stylistic Trends in Contemporary American Choral Music,' is being undertaken by doctoral candidate Kevin Boushel under the supervision of Dr Barbara Dignam at the Dublin City University School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music, funded by the Irish Research Council. This doctoral research entails an investigation of 'New Transcendentalism,' an evolving style of music for choir in the United States of America that prioritises homophonic textures and extended harmonies based upon traditional tonal and modal scales. Despite its popularity among conductors, singers and audiences, contemporary American choral music that engages with this idiom has been largely overlooked by scholarly research. This research investigates the features of this style of composition and explores the extent to which notable American composers have engaged with it and integrated its features into their own unique compositional languages. By investigating the variety of approaches to this emerging compositional language in the United States, this study will show how New Transcendentalism has impacted the modern choral landscape of the United States. This will be achieved through the examination of interview materials alongside critical score analysis using Patricia Howland's Integrated Parametric System Analysis framework (IPS) of select choral works.

Should you, the participant, agree to be interviewed, you will be invited to an interview with Kevin Boushel either in person, or online via a secure DCU Zoom account. You will be asked questions relating to your compositional approach, your musical background and influences, and your opinions on choral composition and broader trends in contemporary music. Quoted material from the interviews may be featured in the thesis to inform the analysis of musical works, and portions or entire excerpts of interview transcripts may be printed in the appendices of the thesis. Follow-up correspondence related to the interview may also be included in the thesis, with your consent and knowledge. All data collected, including contact information, notes and recordings, will be held in compliance with EU General Data Protection Regulation in a secure DCU Google Drive account with multi-factor authentication, and will be permanently deleted upon completion of the doctoral project, which is projected to be in late 2025/early 2026. This data will be kept confidential, though the data are subject to the legal limitations of subpoena and freedom of information requests. At any time, you may choose to

withdraw from the project. Kevin Boushel will contact you with updates on the project, and you will be informed when the thesis is publicly available to view on the DCU Online Research Access Service website.

For any queries or further information, you may contact Kevin Boushel at kevin.boushel3@mail.dcu.ie, the project supervisor Dr Barbara Dignam at barbara.dignam@dcu.ie, or the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at hss.frec@dcu.ie.

Appendix C: Eric Whitacre Interview Transcript

14 October 2024, Virtual Zoom Call

Kevin Boushel
So, just to check with you then, Eric Whitacre, have you read the plain language statement that I sent out, and do you agree to everything within it?

Eric Whitacre
I have read it, and I do agree.

KB
That's excellent. Thank you very much. So let's get started then. So you've previously spoken about your early influences in your musical life from electronic and pop music, like Duran Duran and Depeche Mode, and you've spoken about the transformative experience then of singing Mozart's *Requiem* when you joined your university choir. Can you speak to me about some of the music and composers that really influenced you around this time when you began immersing yourself in choral music?

EW
Ah that's interesting … boy, it's going back now, so… The major influences that I remember almost immediately was Morton Lauridsen. I was just stunned by the beauty of that music. Also, we were singing the *Madrigali*. They're just so vibrant and cool. And also it was the first time I'd ever seen—the *Requiem* is one thing, it's just so powerful—but the *Madrigali* and then other Lauridsen works was the first time that I'd seen somebody painting words, taking the poetry, and then, you know, doing like a proper Renaissance treatment to the to the poetry. And I look back now, and I think, 'God was I influenced by that.' That this really turned me on. Around that same time then, Tony [Charles Anthony] Silvestri, my longtime collaborator, gave me a disc which was Arvo Pärt *Passio*, and he said, 'I think you're going to like this.' He knew that I was a big fan of dissonance. And I think back now, and I think that's probably the single most life changing piece of music that… that I have ever heard. I think there was me before that piece, and there was me afterwards. And I've been … the last thirty-three, thirty-four years, have been influenced by that very piece, so much so that even the end of *Lux Aurumque* and then several other pieces, but especially *Lux*, is almost a carbon copy of the end of the *Passio*.

It's much softer and smaller, but if you go back and listen to it, the two final chords are exactly the same. So there was that. Then I also remember just being stunned by the music of Samuel Barber. And we sang 'The Coolin' early on in choir, and I thought that was just hauntingly beautiful. And then I just went on this Samuel Barber buffet, I suppose, and every single piece, especially the pieces for orchestra, the *Essay*, the Violin Concerto, *Knoxville Summer of 1915* for soprano and chamber choir, just blew me away. So those are the first pieces that come to mind.

KB
Broadly speaking about your compositional approach and your style, do you feel that you have established and developed your own personal musical language?

EW
Hmm! You mean now or in general? Or…

KB
Yeah, just in general. Do you think that over the course of your career that you have established and developed your own personal musical language?

EW
It's an interesting question. To me, I hear all the influences. I hear just a mix of the stew of influences. The early influences, and then pieces that have influenced me recently, go into the mix of what I've written. So in some ways, I'd say, I don't know if it's an original style, but it seems to me unmistakably me. I feel like, no matter what style or how hard I try to push myself in whatever direction, it always seems to sound like me. Do you know what I mean? But I don't see it from a distance. It's more like, 'yep, that's who I am right there.' That's what it sounds like.

KB
I was listening this morning back over your conversation that you had with Jacob Collier during the pandemic, and you mentioned—Jacob brought it up, and then you agreed with it—this notion of writing something that 'sounds like me,' or 'sounds like something that I would do,' and you said, 'Yes, I tried to avoid just having an idea and putting it through the Eric Whitacre app, and then it pops out sounding like Eric Whitacre.' When you're saying that, and speaking

about sort of what people expect 'Eric Whitacre' to sound like, could you speak to that, and do you agree with the perceptions? Do you think that there's something that people are missing? When you're thinking about that Eric Whitacre app, what's on the Eric Whitacre app?

EW

Yeah, that's the funny thing. So … where to start? What I imagine people think when they load up 'the Eric Whitacre app,' right, are just these dense clustery chords, these kind of shimmery harmonies. And then I think if you go one step further—this is, again, speaking about myself like I'm not me, so it's a little odd—but I imagine it's more than just a collection of clusters. It's like *motions* contraction and expansion, contraction and expansion that I think that seems to be my musical style. I never ever think of music in those terms, and I never even think of terms of clusters. The part that I think sometimes people miss is that for me, it's always, always, always about painting the text and the idea of the text; that's everything to me. So the only time I would ever use some kind of crunchy chord is because the text requires it. It's never because, 'oh, let's just have a hot moment here!' In *A Boy and a Girl*, there's this perfect example where they sing the word 'savoring' their oranges, and on 'savoring' there's, you know, this third and this fourth together. It's not that I thought, 'oh, let's do a major chord plus add the suspension, isn't that a hot chord!' What I thought was, how do you paint the exquisite ache of savouring something? And then that's the tinge of sound that's closest—that I can figure out—closest to the way it is, it feels inside of me. Does that make sense?

KB

Yeah, absolutely. And that does lead me to my next question, which was sort of more broadly about harmony. You mentioned earlier listening to Arvo Pärt, and dissonance. How are you thinking when you're approaching harmony, when you're approaching consonance and dissonance, what are you drawing from? And do you feel that you have a harmonic language that you're working with when you're composing?

EW

Yeah. I mean, the breakthrough for me with Arvo Pärt wasn't just dissonance. It was the idea of resolving to dissonance—that he has a phrase that would soar, and then finish on, let's say, a minor second. I'd never heard anything like this before, and then Morten Lauridsen does a version of that too. But that was so interesting to me that you could just sit and hum on a dissonance, that that could be the end of the phrase. It didn't have to just resolve. And so I

think—when I think of my own personal harmonic language—I don't know if this is true, but this is the way I think about it—in some ways, I think of myself as a film composer without films. And so each new piece is a kind of movie, at least the way I think about it. Not necessarily that it has visuals, but, for instance, if, when I set *The Stolen Child. The Stolen Child*, to me, was this nineteenth century, sort of, Romantic with a capital R, lusty, dark, Gothic kind of piece. So if that were the movie, then I'm going to write in that style. It's going to sound like Wolf and Brahms and, and it's just gonna be lurid. And so then the harmonic language comes from the idea of that world. And then it kind of goes through my 'app,' and then gets its thing. When I did *Deep Field*, *Deep Field* for me, then it would like the movie of that was everything from *2001*, and *Interstellar* to, I mean, every sci-fi movie I can think of, but there's kind of a sound of space, if you will, like almost in the popular consciousness. So that's the film that I'm scoring, and so then my harmonic language gets sort of warped by the story that I'm trying to tell. Does that make sense?

KB

Yeah, absolutely. And I've heard you say in the past the same thing about *Leonardo Dreams*, 'a film score without a film.' And I guess I'm interested then in the visual aspect. The way you speak about music, it's always very visual. And, you know, words like painting, like film scoring. I know you have this process, as well, of drawing and visualizing the structure of your pieces. And I remember when I was a teenager watching your performance at the iTunes Festival where you had this graphic in the background of paint dripping down the walls during *Immortal Bach* [by Edwin London]. And I'm wondering, you know, can you speak to that multidisciplinary side to it, the visual senses and how important they are in your approach to composition?

EW

Yeah, it's—Thank you—I think for me … probably the most impactful art form I know is film. For me, it just changes me. In fact, I think to quote a film, *The Grand Canyon*, Steve Martin's character says, all of life's great questions get answered in the movies. And I really believe that it's sort of my go-to philosophy lessons, my morality tales. And so most of the time, if not all of the time, I think of myself less as a musician and more as a storyteller. And so the music itself is just a vehicle to create this story. Now this story doesn't always have, you know, a character and a beginning and an end, middle and an end, but it's almost always got the arc of a story, at least in the way that I'm thinking about it. And so then it's just very natural for me

to think in visual terms. And then that's why it sort of created this, this idea of emotional architecture, because a lot of times it's abstract. It's not that now is the moment when, you know, well, sometimes literally, here's the moment that Leonardo leaps right, so you actually see that happening. But then sometimes it can be, it can be more abstract that it's… like in *All Seems Beautiful to Me* there's just this gentle little line that Whitman writes, 'the East and the Western mine, and the North and the South are mine.' And I think when I listen to that, it sounds to me like, like a Western. It's like I'm scoring a West—like I'm actually setting these open, vast, open American planes. And I remember writing that thinking, 'oh yeah, this is just how I would score this abstract idea of the expanse of the American experience.'

KB

I'm going to come back to compositional approach, sort of the details. But that sort of leads me to another question then that I had here that I was thinking about a lot in terms of the texts that you select. And I've noticed that lately you have gravitated towards, you know, Walt Whitman, and William Blake, then with eternity in an hour. You also set Marcus Aurelius, with *Time is a River*. You seem to be moving towards these, you know, these transcendentalists, sort of big picture—you use the word expanse—like that, kind of nineteenth century—I know Aurelius is before that—but in terms of the transcendentalist authors, for example, and those, those kind of big notions of space and time in recent years, and then going back to earlier years in your career, it was more twentieth century poets like Octavio Paz and e. e. cummings. I'm wondering, is there a theme there? Am I picking up on something there? Have you sort of… is there something that's been making you gravitate towards these themes?

EW

What's fascinating is, I didn't realize it until you said it, but you're absolutely right. There has been kind of a shift.

long pause

Yeah, it's really interesting that… *pause* all three of those examples, Marcus Aurelius and Whitman and Blake, they're… they're much more philosophical. And… no, I wouldn't say that either. The Whitman is super humanistic, right? It's as humanist as you can be. But it's really, it's about the idea of morality. So I think so many of my earlier pieces, if I think back on it, were like, how to describe it… were close to the bone. They're really human experiences,

like raw, visceral human experiences. And all of these things seem to be just removed from that, more of a more conceptual, if you will, or philosophical. And it's interesting, because I was thinking about *Eternity in an Hour* just the other day when I was thinking about the way that I ended up setting it, where it's so formal in a way that you just take a couple of words and then that becomes the entire movement. So it's like, we're just going to meditate on 'to see a world' for nine minutes. That's it. We're just going to break that up and meditate on this. And so it's not painting anymore, not really anymore, like a single word or an idea. It's more like this, this vast concept, this conceptual thing.

pause

The only—the only answer I have is that I think I'm getting older. Hahaha! I think it's age. It's probably … frankly it's probably lower testosterone, is what's doing it. But… hahaha! Yeah, it's really interesting to point that out.

KB
We might come back to that, but I'll take it back to the compositional approach. And I want to ask, How are you thinking about texture and textures when you approach a choral composition.

EW
In general?

KB
In general, yeah, when you're you know, how do you use textures as a compositional tool? What are you thinking when you are thinking about texture?
EW
Hmm. And when you say texture, what do you mean?

KB
So I think it, yeah, broadly speaking, homophony, polyphony, antiphony, those kind of ideas, combinations of lines like that.

EW

That's really interesting. In terms of those, those pure terms, I never understood the lure [*sic*] of counterpoint. I remember learning about it when I was eighteen, nineteen, twenty, you know, when I just first started learning music and it especially, you can imagine, through a composition degree, everyone is so focused on counterpoint. Okay, on one hand, I can understand it. It's starting with the great grandfather of them all, Bach. And you look at these impossibly intricate machines that he built. It's a kind of abstract thinking that is—It's something to be celebrated. It's the human mind at work at its very best. But for me, musically, it was never so interesting—I can't remember ever hearing counterpoint and thinking, 'Wow, I'm moved *because* of the counterpoint,' right? There's other things at play. So often when I'm setting choral music, I guess I sort of go back to the Council of Trent and what they told Palestrina, which is like 'enough with the counterpoint, we need to hear and understand the poetry.' And so more and more, I find myself reserved for homophony, so that the text can be understood. And only in moments where we decide, okay, now we're going to meditate on this for a moment and then kind of roll with it, then it gets a chance to become polyphonic and sort of lose its moorings and become this thing. Does that make sense?

KB

Yes

EW

Yeah, so, so it's always in service of the of the text itself for me. And then if I have something like the *Alleluia*, which is a single word, and you're painting these long lines, then it could just be about flowing counterpoint. Then we got it. We know that. We know that the only word is alleluia. But if it's like all seems beautiful to me, then then you want to live and die by every word, and only at the very end, when they start to say, you know, when it starts to ramp up, that then it can become a little contrapuntal, but then come back to homophony, so that the poetry is central to the piece.

KB

And on that then in terms of your compositional approach as well, just broadly speaking, how do you—and we've kind of touched on this a little bit already—but how do you structure a work when you're sitting down to compose a new work, how do you start thinking about structure?

EW

It's funny because I'm in the middle of a piece right now, not a choral piece, but a piece for strings, and so I'm the middle of trying to find its structure. When it's a choral work, I have such an advantage with the poetry, right? Because really great poetry has this super inherent structure. What's interesting, like with Marcus Aurelius - and I'm taking texts from all over the place - I built a structure, and it took me a long time where I was, without writing any music, thinking, okay, maybe it could be this, then this, but actually this, but actually, this, philosophically needs to be this and this, and so that, almost like the text itself has an arc, and then the piece can be built around that. And then with *Eternity in an Hour* where it gets super abstract. You know, it's like, I, I actually built the drawing of the thing and said, okay, at this moment in the piece, around minute forty, is where we need to start having a climax. So it just happened to be movement six, 'In the palm of your hand.' Do you know what I mean? So it wasn't like I thought 'In the palm of your hand' is text that requires the loudest bit of this piece.

So what I do is with these drawings, and… I just sit with it a long time and try to imagine, how will this feel, how will this unfold? What's funny is, I think you can go back to almost every work I've written, and I think I'm basically following the hero's journey. So I think I've mapped the hero's journey onto almost every piece that I've written. Sometimes it's got a bit of a song structure so that there's a returning refrain. Or a lot of pieces, *Go Lovely Rose*, *Water Night*, they start and end with—even *All Seems Beautiful to Me*—They start and end with similar material. So it's like you've gone full circle. But in general, I think if you were to map them out, there's this, there's the ordinary world. Here's, you know, it's like *The Little Mermaid*. Here's the ordinary world, and I want to be up there, and what does your hero want? And then there's this series of increasing adventures. And then, finally, the climax, the kind of death of self and ego and saving the village, and then the denouement. And I think most of my pieces in one way or another, can be mapped that way. And I think I get that from film, hahaha, because most films, most films, follow some rough version of that structure.

KB

Yeah, brilliant. So my next question is, then, as we mentioned, sort of you came to choral music, joining your University Choir and having that visceral experience as a singer. And I want to ask, how does your experience as a singer influence your approach to writing for singers.

EW

Well, first I don't think I would be able to compose choral music had I not spent years singing in a choir. I'm not a great singer. I love to sing. But just having boots on the ground, being, being there and seeing so many parts. The first is—and it's the most fundamental thing I think I do when I compose music for choir—is I think about the breath. And I think about what Schoenberg famously said, that 'a phrase is any group of notes that can be sung in one breath.' I think about that all the time, and so I sing through every part I write. And sometimes I'll play with that idea that I'll make lines that are impossibly long to sing, but I'll do it on purpose, knowing that then the audiences, at least this is my theory, is that there's subconsciously tracking how long a person should be able—like the final note at the end of *Lux* where they're holding for 45 seconds. We do it with stagger breathing. But I think the audience hears that, and at some point you think that's actually impossible. At some point, there should be a breath there, and there's not, and it creates this sense of transcendence, like you're listening to something superhuman. And so oftentimes I'll play with that, the length of phrases, knowing that I can use stagger breathing to make them impossibly long. But I'm always, always, always thinking about breath. The other thing I'm always, always, always thinking about with choral music is vowels, having done it myself, and knowing that the vowel is everything. It's it not only should it be placed in terms of the register that you're singing at, and there are good vowels and not great vowels, but also in terms of blend. I think about this kind of thing all the time. For instance, let's say you have a G minor chord. There's one in *Sainte-Chapelle*, and it begins when it begins the 'Dominus Deus sabaoth,' right? So 'Dominus Deus,' it's this low G minor chord, and 'Dominus Deus' never goes to 'ah,' it never opens fully up, right? It's all kind of these closed vowels. Because I believe the moment you've got an 'ah,' bright vowel, what you're going to do is the basses are just naturally going to activate that major third harmonic that 'ah' is going to like, ping that, and it's going to be impossible to tune, because it's supposed to be a minor chord. And now you like the basses that are like ringing this, this… It's oftentimes, I think, why choir directors say, 'Can we cover that sound? Can we darken the tone there?' You're trying to get rid of those competing overtones. And as I'm writing, I'm always, always trying to fix all of that before it gets to the choir, so that there's this sense as you sing, it just unfolds like, 'Oh, wow. This just happens.' That, I never would have known had I, had I not sung in a choir.

Then there's just the *esprit de corps*, which is so important to me, and having spent years not only singing choirs, but now conducting them endlessly. Just how does a choir learn music? How do they engage with their parts? How do they engage with the other parts? So

something as simple as I'm always trying to give every line the best part. I always want them to feel like their part is, is the big moment. I couldn't imagine a piece that had a climax or a place that it was all leading that didn't involve everybody, so that everyone felt a part of a thing, and little games for them to play in back and forth, and so that there's just a sense of this, this living thing in the room. And I'm never just writing notes. I'm always thinking about people in the room holding in their music and reading it, listening to others and enjoying the experience of singing.

And I never would have known that had I not sung. I've had to learn that the hard way with orchestras when I'm writing orchestral music, because I never played in an orchestra. So I've gotta… yeah, I've had to learn it from hours and hours on the podium realising, Oh, this is the weird world of strings. This is how they all talk to each other, in a way.

KB

I'm really interested in what you said there about using stagger breathing then to go beyond the human breath. What do you think that conveys, then when you do that?

EW

It's, it's something—I'm not religious—but it's something celestial. It's something superhuman. I think that it feels transcendent. And I also think that then it—my other half-baked theory—is that secretly, what we're doing is controlling the way the audience breathes. So *Lux Aurumque* is designed to get that that crescendo-decrescendo is a breathing motive, right? That appears over and over. But I think about that all the times, in terms of, terms of even the beginning of *All Seems Beautiful to Me*, right? That it starts 'from this hour I ordained myself loosed of imaginary lines.' There's an inhale to the climax, an exhale, then you rest, then you do it again. So by the end of the second phrase, hopefully the audience says *motions* they're with you. They're breathing slower. And then I think, if done right, you start creating a communal experience. Then not only the singers but the audience themselves are just we're all in this together, literally breathing, *conspirare,* breathing together.

KB

Brilliant. And you mentioned, you know, the that clusters your style is related with that, but you do have a lot of clashes, particularly between the third and fourth degree of the scale and first and second degree of the scale appear frequently in your pieces. And what is in your mind the effect of those tonal and semitonal clashes?

EW

Hmm. Well, believe it or not, they're often different for me. So it's never just like the third and the fourth together. Always mean the same thing. It's always contextual, right? So the two that I think of immediately are at the end of the first page of *Sleep*. 'I know that sleep is coming soon.' There's, I think it's C major with the E and the F there that's got this kind of mystery and… Wait, how to describe it… It's, it's the perfect example of, here's the end of the ordinary world, and then you just know, 'okay, what's the next bit?' It launches to the next that, that dissonance sort of invites the next part of the adventure, then in something like 'savoring.' That's a like I said, that's that exquisite ache, that painful bruise of love, and that's a totally different thing, but it's the same basic voicing, right? In context it means something totally different. So I guess in general, it's got to kind of, yeah. It's… the analogy I always think of is rubbing a bruise, right? And then it hurts and feels good at the same time, you know, just like, 'oh God,' just it… That's what that is, the second, the major second, I think I must have first heard that from Lauridsen. Morten Lauridsen's music is filled with those ninths. And so I can't help but separate—I don't know if it's because of his music or because I… it's independent of that, but it sounds to me like California optimism. It sounds like going as far west as you possibly can. The sun just shines with those ninths, it's just radiant and golden, and so I use them all the time. It's just a way of just painting with light, as opposed to, you know, those dark, dense chords and with a ninth just and shimmer. Yeah, it's funny.

KB

On that, if I can ask a follow up question on the chordal extensions, I remember you did a Q&A few years back with Sing Ireland, which I was at, and I asked about the chordal extensions in *Cloudburst*. And you were telling us that you were messing around with the Lydian scale, and then you found a particular note that you added to it, and it made—it transformed the emotional feeling. So obviously, as you mentioned there, all of your chordal extensions have an emotional basis. And do you find now that you know what chordal extension to add for a particular emotion? Or is it still a process of trial and error, sitting at the piano, experimenting with different chords? Or do you kind of know in your head, 'oh, I know what'll add to this'?

EW

Such a good question. So now we'll really start digging in the dirt. I don't know if you can use any of this, but… I've created this little lexicon, maybe even talked about that then, right? So for instance, oftentimes I'll quote that rain chord in other contexts where I want the mystery

and wonder of rain. But now I've been doing this for so long that I really have to reexamine is that how I actually feel now about rain? and more often than not, no, it's not. it's sentimental, or it's an older version of me, but if I'm being genuine about it, no, it's not. And the real breakaway piece for me was *The Sacred Veil*, where there's all of these places where I'm, you know, quoting pieces that Tony and I did in the text and moments that just cry out for all of this, these lexicon chords and voices that I've built over the years, and I abandoned all of them because I thought that's actually—this is not pastiche. I'm not going to, you know, I'm not, I'm not making a mural full of these cut out photographs. This has to be real and in the moment. And I was surprised by the way the music ended up sounding, which to me, was really stripped down. It became efficient. Music became like, terrifyingly efficient to my ear. And I made a lot of choices that I don't think I would make now, where I just, I didn't adorn it so much with all that stuff. I just… Yeah. So I think as I change, those chords lose their… their relevance to who I am right now.

KB

It's really interesting. And do you feel that your current approach to composition, then, is a development on that earlier approach that you had, or is it a deviation from that earlier approach that you had? And sort of, what is your relationship with, sort of early Whitacre, looking back? I know that you, you… I'll let you answer first.

EW

No, no, no. I was just gonna say that. It's like, it's a kind of accordion, I think I'm trying to grow, I think, and so I'm stumbling around the in the dark, trying to figure out what all of this is. And then so sometimes, like with *All Seems Beautiful to Me*. That hearkens to me way back to like, an earlier style. And then you hear those ninths, you hear those close harmonies. It almost sounds like a cousin to *A Boy and a Girl*, or… you know what I mean? It's in that similar world. And that was written during the height of the pandemic, when I didn't know if we would ever even sing again. And so in some ways, it was like putting on an old pair of jeans or a coat, you know, just like, 'oh, that's comforting to me.' But then, like with this latest one, *Eternity in an Hour*, what it sounds like to my ear is me trying to shed skin. So it doesn't feel at all formed. It's like I have no idea where I'm going with this. I don't know what that piece is exactly, but maybe five pieces from now, it'll be apparent, 'Oh, here's where I'm trying to get to.' If that makes sense

KB

That makes a lot of sense. And it's interesting that you bring that up, because I have a note here that I was going to ask. *Eternity in an Hour*, perhaps, was quite a departure from the standard, but still, in—was it the fourth movement 'In a wildflower'?—you quote your very first composition, 'Go Lovely Rose', that opening Lydian pentachord.

EW

Yeah, I love that you heard this

KB

Yeah, yeah. So was that your thinking with that? Do you see 'Go Lovely Rose'—It's interesting just picking up on what you just said—as perhaps like a transitory work.

EW

Yeah. So those are—Those five notes from 'Go Lovely Rose', they're literally the first things I ever wrote as a choral composer, those five notes. And so those were the places I read intentionally, knowing that what I was going to do is take the electronics and then start disintegrating them. So it's like a way of actively trying to take—here's the *Urtext*, this is the core of who I am—and then let's start to break that down, start to devolve that. At least that was the thinking when I did it. It's funny, isn't it? I'm honoured that you hear that, that you know the reference.

KB

I wanted to ask about 'Go Lovely Rose'. Something that's just really interesting to me, and something that I don't think I've heard you speak on. You've spoken about how when you went to college, you didn't really even read music at the time, and you had no formal music education background. Something that I've always been curious about is, how did you write 'Go Lovely Rose'? What was the process? How did you actually do it, having, you know, at the time, not really reading music or playing piano or anything like that?

EW

So I could play piano okay, you know, self-taught, totally. I've got somewhere—I don't even know if I have a way to play it now—but somewhere I've got an actual tape recording of me singing the parts of 'Go Lovely Rose'. So I had a four-track tape recorder, and I over-dubbed

myself just to hear what it would sound like. And so I used part of that, and then I could play it somewhat on the piano, and then I wrote it down as best I could. There were lots of harmonic spellings, especially because it's just in this horrible key, it's like six and seven sharps. I was so green and so naive that I just, yeah, I didn't think I'm doing this wrong, or I don't know what I'm doing. You know, I just wrestled it to the ground. And I think I can look back at it and see all of these different influences, like, for instance, when they sing 'bid her come forth,' right? So it starts, *sings* 'bid her come forth'—it goes to 3/2 suddenly. I'm certain the only reason it went to 3/2 is probably because that week I had first heard Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, which is all in 3/2 and 4/2 and 5/2 and with those half notes. And I'm like, 'yep!' And then I hear what it does in terms of harmony. And I think probably what I was doing was listening to that and Bartók *Music for Strings, Celeste and Percussion*, the first movement, which is a fugue. They're not at all related, but I could just hear, 'Oh, that's where I got that idea.' So I'll just write 3/2, what do I know? Yeah, so I just, I really took my best guess and then, like—I still do—I did a bunch of rewriting with each performance, you know, and I was in the choir, so I'd say 'altos try this in this measure, and sopranos do this.' And so the version that I initially wrote is a little different from the final published version.

KB

Brilliant. I have a quote here from you from a long time ago, and I just want to see what your reaction is to it now, but because obviously my research is looking at sort of style and approaches to composition. And I have a quote here from an interview that you did with the LA Times in 2000 where you described your style as 'romantic minimalism' or 'dynamic minimalism.' And I was wondering, do you still identify with those terms, and have you had any other term associated with your composition, that you or have you self-identified any term/terminology for your style?

EW

It's funny because I remember where I came up with that phrase, because I wrote a piece called *Equus*, and it was originally for concert band, and they wrote to me, and they said, we really need program notes. And I *hate* program notes. I think that a piece should speak on its own, or I should talk, or the conductor should talk before the piece. I just *hate* reading these dry program notes. And they came back and they were very insistent about it. It was like a real *thing*. So what I said was, it's in a style that I called dynamic minimalism, which just means that I repeat the same thing over and over until it gets boring, and then I move on. I'm almost certain that's

what the program note says. And so this was right around that time I wrote *Equus* in 1999. So I must have thought of myself then as a dynamic minimalist, partly because it was like, All right, you all need a name for this. So here's what I'm going to call it. What makes me smile now is, I think, yeah, actually, like, like, I look at *Deep Field*, the big recent pieces, *Deep Field*, *The Sacred Veil* and *Eternity for an Hour* [*sic*]. And all of those, I would think, fit into the category of minimalism, in a way. It's got all these, and then they're all dynamic, minimalist or romantic minimalist, that they get lush sometimes, they get small. There's still an arc to all of it… So, yeah, I guess if I were called a romantic minimalist, I wouldn't be upset. *laughs*

KB
Do you think that that term could apply to your *a capella* works? To your octavos?

EW
I suppose so. The challenge with those terms is it's so limiting, right? It's… and I always feel like there's like, there's these outlier pieces, like in my catalogue, right? So there's *The City and the Sea*, which I feel is like, totally different. And then something like *Leonardo Dreams*, and then something like, well, like *The Stolen Child* and at some point, there becomes so many outliers that it's like, actually the norm is for things that don't fit. And the dynamic minimalism part is like, eight pieces. Do you know what I mean? Like, there's all these things that flit around it. So I don't know if it applies to everything. Maybe it applies to a kind of aesthetic.

KB
I want to ask one more question then about your compositional style and how you mentioned that maybe five pieces down the line, you look back at *Eternity in an Hour* as you know a starting point of something. And I guess that leads me to my question, where do you see your soundworld going? Where do you feel like you've brought your soundworld to, and where do you see it going from here?

EW
I don't know. I don't know. Isn't that interesting? I really…

KB
But do you feel like it's going somewhere?

EW

I would like to think that what I'm starting to do is embrace a… a kind of… slowness that I've flirted with in the past, but now I'm really starting to ask the audience. 'This is going to be fifteen minutes long, and it's barely going to move. And you know, you can go get popcorn, if you like or not, but here's what I'm—here's what I want to hear.' Do you know what I mean? Just this morning, so I'm, I'm starting to play—We're going to record *Eternity in an Hour*, and so I'm rewriting that whole first movement, and I was just jamming with something. And I, I always put the phone up, you know, so that I can just record all this stuff. And it was a thirty-minute improvisation. Thirty minutes! And it was like, the time flew by. And I at the end of it, I was like, I don't know if that's good, but I would listen to that. Do you know what I mean? And so there's a part of me that I think maybe, because I'm always thinking in terms of film, there's always a sense of like, drama that I feel needs to be in pieces, like, 'Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! Now this, now this.' Not in a showy way, but more just to keep the audience engaged, like keep them with and more and more, I'd like to think that I'm embracing this idea that actually just take a breath and sit back and this is all gonna be okay. We're gonna float down the river for a while. We'll get there eventually, but, but there's, there's no hurry at all, so I'm hoping that's the direction I'm going.

KB

Excellent, brilliant. I want to ask you then just a few other questions, then. The first question is, over the course of your career and your development as a composer, as a professional composer, are there any organizations and institutions that you feel have supported your development over your development of your career?

EW

Oh, my God, you mean like, different than academic institutions, or…

KB

It can be academic institutions. I just mean yeah, just sort of large… or just sort of yeah organizations, institutions that have that have been a support, and beyond individuals.

EW

Yeah, well, my God, both, both schools, both University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Juilliard, but especially University of Nevada Las Vegas was… My God, I just got so lucky. Every

teacher I had there was so welcoming and gentle with me, the fact that I didn't know a damn thing, and also, they let me try so many things. I don't think you could get away with that at any other school. I got really lucky there. Then later on… the first thing that pops into my mind, actually, is the LA Master Chorale. It was much, much further down the road, but they were amazing with me. They really Let me stretch my wings. They… the writing of *Sacred Veil* was really tough, and putting it together was ugly, haha, it was a freaking mess! And they could not have been more supportive and more helpful, and I never once felt like… yeah, It just it was always such a warm relationship. Yeah, those are the first things that come to mind. I'm sure if I took even a little bit of time, I could think of a dozen more institutions that have been…

KB

I'm going to bring one up and just see what your reaction is. Can you tell me about your relationship with the ACDA over the years?

EW

Oh, yeah, okay, so I'm so glad—so, yeah, we're… again, if it were not for the ACDA, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing. So, not only on this very personal level, did they… I don't know how many pieces I premiered at ACDA, it was a bunch. And that they gave me a vehicle for that, they gave me a commission super early on in my career that turned into *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine*. So they took a chance on this kid who had really just started composing and… but then also just the institution itself, and going year after year to these festivals, it felt to me like the centre of the universe every time I was there, and I can look back at almost any piece and think of the exact concert and pieces I heard at an ACDA convention that inspired those pieces. Like, for instance, *When David Heard*. I was in 1991 ACDA conference in Phoenix, and I heard Dr Jo-Michael Scheibe's group from Northern Arizona University, sing the Norman Dinerstein, *When David Heard*, and it's imprinted on my mind. Also in that same concert, they did *Chichester Psalms*, but they did it with hand bells. And six months later I wrote *Cloudburst* with handbells. They also did a piece by John Painter called *The Rose*, which, now that I think about it has—*sings lydian pentachord*—it's got that Lydian chord from the beginning of *Go Lovely Rose*. And also it has all of this aleatoric stuff in it that ended up I've been chasing that Dragon for thirty-four, thirty-five years. So there's an example of an ACDA concert that just changed my life. But I could go back and list a dozen of those, that just being in the room, hearing the choir do that, then massively affected me.

KB

Thank you for that.

EW

I can't speak highly enough of them, thanks for asking.

KB

Can I ask, have you noticed, then, any emerging trends in choral music in the United States over the past couple of decades?

EW

Funnily, I am so out of the loop with what everyone else is doing. Haha! It's embarrassing, but I haven't been able to really go to a conference and listen to a concert for a while. And I say this with all the humility in the world, but every time I show up at a choral convention, things just get crazy, and so I can't actually go to the concerts anymore. So it's been years since I've actually heard new music. Occasionally I hear snippets on Instagram. So isn't that crazy? I would say that there seems to be this new embrace of composers who need their voices lifted, minorities, and women, and world music, and that is so good, so phenomenal. That seems to be a major, major trend. And trend, not a fad, that really seems to be sticking. That's very exciting. But yeah, when it comes to music, I will say—this can also sound super cheeky, but I'm aware that sometimes composers use a version of my thing, you know? Not always, but like, I can hear, sometimes, a new piece where it's like, 'Oh! Yeah, okay, I did the same, and continue to do the same with music I hear.' So it's… I think it's great, that's how you become a composer. But the one thing that I often also hear is that what we started with, was I rarely hear it connected to the text, and oftentimes it's just a shiny chord. And to me, it means nothing. Like, who cares? There's very few just chords on their own that are so dazzling. It's when you marry it to a deeper concept that then it becomes, what I aspire to do, is just to have it become a whole brain experience. And weirdly, I find that what often gets taken is just the sound of it. If you know what I mean, like the hot chord.

KB

Can I ask you, what's the difference that you've received with working with choirs in the US and working with choirs in Europe?

EW

Hmm. Well, Europe's a big place.

KB

Yes. Let me ask it specifically in terms of your commissions. So when you've been commissioned to write a work for a US-based choir, versus your commissions for a European-based choir, I know most of them would be UK-based, and then you've had the commission in Basel as well. So when you're writing for choirs in the US versus writing for choirs in the UK, in Europe.

EW

Hmm. I'd like to think that it's, that it's the same. That always in my mind is… I'm always thinking of the commissioning choir, and I try to learn as much about them as I can ,and watch YouTube videos, and be with them, if possible, like with the Master Chorale, so that when I'm writing, I'm thinking of their faces that are singing. But then at the same time, I can't help but think of my group, the Eric Whitacre singers, and these 18 people that I know so well. And just, when I think of altos, yep, there's those, those four. I know them so well. And here's what it'll seem like when they breathe. And this will sound… So in a way, I think I'm writing for the same group in my head, kind of. But… this is going to sound super weird—in general, I think when I'm writing in Europe, I write higher for the tenors. Is that funny? I don't know why. I don't know if there's a tradition over here of singing higher than… You know, Bach writes pretty damn high for the tenors. And I tend to be really conservative with that when I'm writing for American groups—I mean, I say that, but then *When David Heard* has like a high A in it—but most of the time, I never really go above… like, like, *All Seems Beautiful to Me* is a perfect example. It goes up to an F sharp for the tenors. It was an American group. That's, it's like, that's super comfy. But then, if I'm writing for anywhere here, and especially in the UK, it's like, no problem with Gs or G sharps. It's just living up there for a while. I don't know why that is. I don't know if I have more faith in European tenors, or if there's just more of a ping to the sound. I only thought about it just now, when you ask me, I realize I think I do slightly attenuate that.

KB

That's an interesting observation, I must look out for that when I'm looking at the works, take a closer look at the tenor line. My last question then will just be, looking back at the sort of the

trajectory of your career, and in the sort of the late 90s and early 2000s there was just this total boom, where, like, it was just like 'Whitacre, Whitacre, Whitacre,' and it was the hot new thing, and everyone was talking about, and everyone was programming your music. Looking back on that time, and then looking back on, sort of how… looking back on that, I guess. Do you feel that you have changed then, as a person, since then? And do you feel that your approach to your music has changed then since that, since, sort of the boom when your music exploded, and when you exploded all over the world and all over the US, and just looking back then in the career, yeah, how have you changed? And how have things changed? How has your world changed since then?

EW

It's a really, really good question. I've thought some about, like, what happened during those years? Why did it go kaboom? Right? Not the success, but more like the output. You know, half of everything I written, I think, was written in like those four or five years, and also a lot of the pieces that get performed a lot are from that time. And the honest answer, if I'm being super honest, it's because in 1998 I graduated from college. I was finished with school. And up 'til 2002, it was four years where I was trying to become a professional composer, and so I had to make a living, and so I was just taking any piece I possibly could, and I was just writing and writing and writing. And most importantly, I didn't have any kids. And then in 2002 I got this idea that I wanted to write this crazy musical called *Paradise Lost* with electronica. I dropped everything, and for three years, I worked on *Paradise Lost*. And then I had my first son. And I can look back that the time before I had kids, and the amount of time I had, and then, then the time going forward that I had, and it's staggering, what that, what that does so much so that in—I've never talked about this—but in 2017… yeah, 2017, my first wife and I divorced. We separated and divorced, and… it was excruciating, still excruciating. And… my son, at the time, was 12, and so suddenly he was spending half of his week with his mother, and I was half of my week alone. I had this time alone by myself, and I wrote *The Sacred Veil*. It was like the moment I had that that headspace and that free time—*motions an explosion*—this huge piece just came out of me. And now I've got a three year old, and I feel it would be like—*motions a contraction*—it contracts back in again, and he'll graduate from high school in… when I'm 68 so, hahaha! The last dying embers will be just a few years long. But I really think that's what happened. Then, I think for me, those first years, I just was… I was green and I was naive, and I was only writing for myself. It wasn't out loud and wasn't in response to

what people were thinking. And now I can't help but be aware that each new thing I write, there's a kind of buzz around it and an expectation.

KB
And do you think that you're more careful now?

EW
I try to not be like, for instance, with *Eternity in an Hour*, it's like I'm doing synthesizers and things I don't know, and I'm going to push as hard as I can. So I think I'm pushing against it, but at the same time, I'm aware of an expectation, and I'm the kind of person that just doesn't want to disappoint someone. You know that someone shows up, and I really want them to feel like they've had this ecstatic experience every single time, because they've had that in the past. And so I find, as I'm composing, I'm way, way more paralyzed than I was before, where it's like, instead of just thinking, 'I love this' and run, it's like, 'but is that, and is this…' I am so, like… fussy and, and, and, yeah. And then I get these windows where I'm like, 'Run!' And it just flows out of me. And usually those things are predicated by deadlines. The deadline forces me to be like, just, doesn't matter if it's good or not, that's the only idea you've got. And then it always ends up being, you know, maybe not great, but it sounds like music. So, yeah, it's, I think, I think things have changed, and I'm always, always trying to get back to that, like that beginner's mind, where it's just for me and I don't know what I'm doing.

KB
That's brilliant. That's brilliant. Well, we come up to one o'clock. So thank you so much for taking the time. I'll stop the recording here.

Appendix D: Jake Runestad Interview Transcript

26 September 2023, Virtual Zoom Call

Kevin Boushel
Could you describe some of the significant musical influences that you've had over the course of your life? Just broadly speaking.

Jake Runestad
I grew up in a really musical household, and my parents listened to a lot of the great American singer songwriters, Billy Joel, Elton John, and then a lot of like fifties and sixties and seventies music. The Beatles. Joni Mitchell has been a big influence. Earth, Wind and Fire, Jackson 5, you know, all of these kinds of things were a big part of my youth, growing up. And then when I got to be, you know, my ability to choose what I wanted to listen to, the great 90s music, which I think was, was really the final stages of purely acoustic music, without the use of electronic loops or things like that. So there was a different way of creating music back then that I think has changed now. So I think I'm a part of that way of creation, that style of music. So everything from Dave Matthews Band to Ben Folds t, gosh, everything nineties. All the great Disney movies, of course, the Alan Menken scores for those. And then once I really began to study music more seriously—I was a I played saxophone in the wind ensemble, so that was really my main outlet for more classical style music. And so it was a lot of wind ensemble instrumental music. Never really got that much in your into orchestral music when I was younger, not really until college, and then even more so in grad school. So once I moved into that realm—you know, I think, of course, in the choral world, people like Eric Whitacre and Morton Lauridsen are so iconic and have had such a strong influence on everything. So I'm sure I've been influenced by them in some way, but everyone from Bach to Beethoven to a lot of great jazz artists. I played Sax so I was doing a lot of jazz, and so I think that makes its way into my rhythmic use and harmony and appreciation for melody. Yeah, that's kind of a broad swath of influences,

KB
There's a couple of really interesting points I'd love to follow up on there. Just briefly, because I'm not familiar with that side of your output if you've done much of this. But have you composed much for wind ensemble?

JR

Yeah, I have. I've got a few pieces that are out now, but many more that I wrote that I consider student works. So those don't, they'll go into the public now. But yeah, and orchestral stuff and opera and things like that.

KB

And just another question there, you mentioned that you have a particular interest in music from the dawning of the electronic and digital music production era. And have you ever you're as a composer, or as a performer, indeed, worked with electronics and incorporating electronics into performance?

JR

Not for my concert music. When I was in high school, in college, I did a lot of multi-track recording, you know, with digital audio workstation, with like Logic and Garage Band, things like that. So I was experienced—that was more pop style music with a band that I was in. And so I did experiment in that way, but it hasn't made its way into my concert music.

KB

Could you tell me a bit about your experience in singing?

JR

Sure. I don't necessarily consider myself a professional singer. I've sung my whole life, and I sing everything that I write. We sang a lot around my house when I was a kid, and we would harmonise with each other, just listening the radio. I was in some youth choirs, like children's choirs, when I was really young, and probably 'til like grade two or three, which is what age eight or nine or ten, something like that. And then I played piano and sang all the time, so that was my main outlet. So a lot of pop music, writing my own songs. I'd just do that for hours at home and listen to in the radio and teach my myself things that I heard on the radio. So always singing. My mom loves to tell the story that when my parents went to the parent teacher conferences for my kindergarten class, the teacher said, 'Jake, he's a great student, but he hums all the time.' And I still do it to this day. If you're ever around me, you'll hear me humming. So definitely the voice is an important part of who I am.

And so I joined choir my sophomore year of university—I say that I got conned into joining because I'm a bass and I could read music. And I just loved it. I loved singers. I loved

the whole choir community. It's such a different community to the instrumental world. And loved the feeling, the sensation, of singing in a group of people like that. So I then started writing choral music and really getting excited about just doing as much as I could within that world. I started my own choir, and so singing in choirs throughout college, when I got to graduate school, I was conducting, not really singing, but conducting some groups. And then, as I would travel around and watch rehearsals with various people, I would learn a lot more and some vocal technique. And when I first moved to Minneapolis after graduate school, I sang in a choir here for several years. And I sang in some other professional capacities, in choral situations.

KB
Which choir was that?

JR
It's called VocalEssence. And then I also sang with The Singers, which is a Minnesota based group. And then also, Dale Warland, the great conductor, did a summer festival in Winona called the Minnesota Beethoven Festival. So I sang with him in that choir—professional choir—for two or three seasons.

KB
There's a few things there that I'd love to come back to, but one of them is, you mentioned that you enjoyed playing the piano and singing. Did you take piano lessons?

JR
I took for a year in third grade, and another story goes that I play by ear, and so I would hear the teacher play the piece the week before. I'd go home, and I didn't want to practice anything that I was supposed to for the lessons. But I played hours every day. Just creating, fiddling around, playing by ear. So I came into the lesson the next week, put my music up on the piano, played the piece, and she said, 'That was very good, Jake, but you're on the wrong page' because I opened up to the wrong page in the music. So I never really wanted to read music, but yeah, I continue to play, and I've played pretty much my whole life.

KB

When you are composing and you are visualising the piece or imagining the piece as you're writing it. Are you imagining it from the perspective of the singer or from the perspective of the conductor or from the perspective of the listener?

JR

Hmm. I really think it's a mixture of all three. I do kind of a meditative practice when I'm writing in that I close my eyes and I visualise the space where the piece is going to be performed, to try to enter into that place, to hear what's going to be happening. And oftentimes that can give me an answer if I'm stuck in the piece or just need to return to that space. So that's definitely an audience member perspective. [audio connection error]. And then as I'm figuring out notation and releases and things like that, that's always from a conductor perspective, so that the score is as clear as possible. That it's as achievable as possible, without all these weird, you know, sixteenth rests or things like that. So I really, yeah, I think it's a mixture of the three.

KB

How do you feel your experience as a choral singer influences your writing?

JR

I think it's absolutely crucial to the experience of writing. Knowing, like, having some song for a theme, and holding an F for like, four minutes, or whatever it is, it's awful. It's horrendous. And so I know, okay, I will never do that to the singers. Give it to the organ or something. If you're just going to sustain like that it's just brutal. So there are certain aspects of that that I realise, and as I'm singing while I'm creating, you know, I can [audio connection error] just much more enjoyable to sing like I singing what I write, and so for me, that's a really crucial part of the process having been a performer, having known what that's like. I think it really informs everything that I do.

KB

Do you feel that you write in a particular harmonic style, or do you feel that you have a particular harmonic language that you compose within?

JR

It's always hard to answer that from my own perspective, it's usually easier for someone else to say, 'Oh, this is what you're doing.' 'Oh, that's what I'm doing! Oh, I see.' I think I usually begin with a melodic idea or a gestural idea, and then really work harmony around that. Sometimes I will come up with a concept. So, for example, a piece of mine called 'Winter,' which is an excerpt or a movement from *Cello Songs*, a longer piece. The concept for that movement is all about falling. And so there are these descending lines. And so I used that as a way of them creating what the harmony will be and what the line will be, because the harmony just descends. And so sometimes it's moving through like, lots of different keys as we're shifting down the thing. Other times, I have pieces that you know are completely in one key, like *Let My Love Be Heard*, which is kind of intentional, because the speaker of the poem is hoping for comfort and safety, and I think living in that one key centre helps to describe what's going on there. So I think I tend to utilise different approaches depending on what the music or the story or the text needs. And so I try to draw from lots of different kinds of harmonic and musical styles. I think having a jazz background is helpful, because there's a rich, deep harmonic palette to choose from there. And then also, you know, something as simple, you know, as just staying in the same key. So it's nice to have that variety to choose what I need at any given moment.

KB

Could you tell me more about that jazz background?

JR

Well, being a sax player, I've played in big bands and Jazz Combos since middle school, and also some jazz piano stuff too. So you know, that involves listening to a lot of jazz, of course, playing and transcribing jazz solos to learn on my instrument. And then, you know, improvisation is a huge part of my process in all aspects, whether that's on piano or saxophone or singing. And then also, when I'm guest conducting, I often do a lot of improvisation with the groups that I work with. So I think having comfort with improvisation is a hugely important skill as a composer, but for all musicians, I think it should be a part of the training and part of the experience, because it helps us to develop that sense of play, which is where we discover new ideas, which is where we can come up with different concepts, with maybe different phrase shapes, things like that. It's all about play. So for me, improvisation and jazz go hand in hand, which I think has been hugely beneficial as a composer,

KB

Could you describe your approach to choral texture?

JR

I think it's similar to harmony, where I'll use whatever I need depending on what it is that the emotional moment needs you know, for example, in my piece, *We Can Mend the Sky*, which is kind of the story of someone who is leaving their country and immigrating to a new place. And so I specifically use a fugue in one section, because fugue means to flee, and it's a confidential device that can have that hectic character to it, with different voices coming in. And so I'll use that technique as needed, or a canon, to create counterpoint, which I think is a really important thing to have, not just for the sake of interest, but for the sake of performers, to learn how their lines can combine and interact.

And then, you know, something can be just sung in octaves for a simple texture, if the text really needs clarity, or if the texture has been really thick, and then it needs to be thinned out. I love writing Unison lines or octaves in the choir or something as simple as a four part texture or thickened homophonic texture. Again, it just depends on what the moment needs. And I try to be really careful with shaping a piece so that it's not just a thick texture throughout, but that there are shifts in the texture depending on what is needed at any given moment.

KB

How do you structure a choral work? How do you approach structuring choral composition?

JR

A lot of that comes from the text, and for me, the text is the most important part of the piece, and I spend the longest part of my process finding text. I'm really picky with the texts that I choose. Not all texts can and should be set to music. Some are too complex. Some, the wording is wonky or clunky, like too many consonants, depending on what's needed. And so it takes me a long, long, long time to find just the perfect text for a piece. And then I have to go into the process of studying that text. Who wrote it? When did they write it? Why did they write it? What's the historical context of that time? How does that influence what they wrote? And so I inform myself about as much as possible, and that a part of that is the form of the text. Whether it's a poem or it's a letter or it's a tweet or whatever it is that I'm drawing from, a journal writing. I will assess the form from this text. And so sometimes that's just taking it as it is. Other times, I'll do a composite text, which is where I take bits of texts from different places

and combine them into like a *libretto*. And so that's adjusting the form. But really it comes from the words themselves. You usually dictate some sort of emotional journey as well. So I tend to take the direction from the text as far as how to shape a piece and really thinking about a dramatic arc. I tend to work in that sort of narrative format, because I find that it makes sense to me. And I think most humans understand narrative because it's how we make sense of life, right? We have birth and death, we have start and finish. We tend to think about life in this linear way. And so I tend to use that because it makes more sense to me. And I'm kind of a visual composer as well. So those are the ways that I figure out the form

KB
Just to pick up on what you said there at the end where you said that you're a visual composer. Could you expand on that, please?

JR
Yeah, I think I'm both visual and physical, so I tend to have images in mind as I'm creating for any given moment. So whether it's certain colours or it's a specific image of, you know, for my piece *Waves*, you're standing at the ocean, you're looking out on the sea, and what does that feel like? What does it smell like? What does it sound like? And there's a visual involved in that for me. And then also, along with that, I really think about the physical sensation. So for me, music isn't just about sound, but it's about, what does it feel like to hear this or to sing this? What does it feel like to be in rehearsals with it? What does it feel like as an audience member? So is the sound just coming at me from the front? Is the choir surrounding the audience? And I put some of those things into the score. Specifically, if I'm looking for the choir to be in a different place in the hall, because that affects how we engage with the physicality of the sound. And so these are all things that I'm thinking about as I'm creating.

KB
When you're writing, do you find yourself following the sound that you're creating in general, or do you find yourself—and it could be both—do you find yourself really thinking about theoretical concepts in terms of music theory, in terms of compositional theory, in terms of the history of composition? I mean, you mentioned fugues, using a fugue earlier. What's the sort of the balance there between following theoretical concepts and following the sounds as you hear them.

JR

I think it relates to how I prepare texts. So when I engage with all that information about studying the text, when I create the music, it's then filtered through all of those things that I learned, so it's fully informed. So I think music is the same where I've studied so much music, I've studied form, I've studied compositional, contrapuntal techniques, and so when I create, that's all a part of me. And so then those can come out—not really needing to think about them as much. I mean, if I'm going to write a fugue, I definitely have to think about it, because there's a whole process in what it takes to write a fugue, and so I just have to enter into that process. But really, most of the time, I tend to lead with trusting my gut, and trusting the emotions of a moment, and then refining figuring out things from there. So one of the first things that I do when I'm creating is, when I feel like I've studied the text and ready to begin creating music, is I sit down at the piano, I press record on The Voice Memos app on my phone. I've got the text and I just improvise my way through the piece, and whatever happens, happens, and then I've got it recorded. And what's interesting is, most of the time, there's quite a bit that I keep, maybe not you know exactly as I played it and sang it, but there are certain emotional concepts, emotional worlds, gestures, harmonies, shapes, that I keep and that make their way into the piece, because that's the initial emotional response. And so that's a really useful thing for me. So, yes, I think first and foremost, I draw upon that gut reaction, artistic and musical reaction, and then it can be filtered through the more brainy activities of counterpoint and harmony. Or if I discover a certain kind of motive or gesture that can then be used as a *leitmotif* throughout the piece, that can recur. And so that becomes, you know, something that I'll write on my manuscript paper with, like a little box around, like, 'here's the sun motive.' And so whenever the sun is shining and coming back, then that chord or that gesture comes back in. So that's one way I handle that.

KB

Do you feel that there have been any institutions or organisations on a regional, national or international level that have particularly influenced the progress of your career as a composer?

JR

Gosh, there have been so many groups that have supported me and believed in me, and I wish I could name all of them. I mean, truly, so many people have been amazing, and I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing without them. So I'm just hugely grateful. A few I would name are Conspirare and Craig Hella Johnson, who recorded the first full album of my music, which was

a really, really proud moment for me, really exciting moment. I think, as an organisation, ACDA has been wonderful. I received the Brock commission from them in 2019, wrote *A Silence Haunts Me*. Gosh, there are so many more I could go into, but I'll stop there.

KB
I really love that album that Conspirare did. It's really great.

JR
Thanks.

KB
I would love to then ask in particular about the impact of the ACDA, and if you could tell me about your interactions with the ACDA going back through the years as a singer, as a conductor, as a composer.

JR
So my first national ACDA conference was in college. I think it was 2007… Yeah, in Miami. And, you know, it was the first time I got to hear so many amazing choirs. And I got to hear Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* performed by the Atlanta Symphony, Atlanta Choir. And it was just transformational. It was so exciting. And so I know I took a lot from that, and then after I graduated, I think my next one was 2013—was my next national. I think it was Dallas. And so that's really when I was trying to get my career up and running and made connections with people. And then I think it was the next one, maybe Salt Lake City? I think, '15. And that's when I had my first performance at a national ACDA. That was thrilling. And of course, those are important moments for composers, because a lot of choir conductors hear the music at those conferences, and then hopefully they're interested enough to program it for their ensembles. And ACDA conferences are also just a beautiful way to meet people. And there are so many amazing people in the choral community worldwide that come to those conferences. So it really becomes a family, and everyone is like a big family reunion.

KB
Have you observed any broader trends in choral composition in the United States recently?

JR

I think when we're looking at broad trends, of course, I think Morton Lauridsen really brought us into a certain place, and then Eric Whitacre brought us into a certain place. And so I think now we're seeing a great mixture of things, which I think is really wonderful. We're seeing people that are encouraged to be more in touch with lots of different kinds of music, lots of different kinds of musical backgrounds. So there isn't necessarily just one prescribed 'school' of composition, but you can draw from all different styles. And that's one of the great things about choral music. Most choral musicians really appreciate lots of different styles and incorporate them into their programs. You know, everything from a pop song to a jazz ballad to some complex Baroque piece, to chance music, or you know, all of these different things can make their way into our choral program, which is really exciting, and also just the appreciation for new music, which is pretty rare. The Wind Ensemble world is also really into new music, but it's not as common in other kinds of musical forms of concert music anyway, and so I really love that about the choral music world.

I think that we see a lot of people writing music, which is awesome. And I think the advent of having notation software makes it so that more people can write music. I think we're seeing a greater variety of music that maybe is a little bit more simple versus some that's more complex because of that fact, because of how if you're writing the notation software, you don't need the skill of writing things on paper, necessarily, so you can base it on the playback and hear what that sounds like. So I think that's like a double edged sword, where it's great that more people are able to write, but sometimes that can be a crutch and then the music becomes a little bit more mechanical, because it was created for the notation on the computer with the MIDI sounds, versus like with the voice and the body and the breath. And so I think those are some trends that I'm seeing.

KB

I like how you phrase that, that Lauridsen and Whitacre certainly brought us to a certain place. Do you feel like we're still in that place, or do you feel like we're kind of moving away from it, moving away with it, or moving out of it, or moving on with it?

JR

I think both of them—their music will always have a place, at least in the near future. You know, they both are wonderful composers, and I think that there's a lot of benefits to doing their music. I think there are some people who feel like they've had enough of that kind of

music. I'm not necessarily one of them, but I think that there are still some people who incorporate those kinds of musical styles in their music. You know, you can hear a piece that's a first inversion chord with an add nine and be like, 'Oh yeah, that's a Lauridsen chord that someone put in their piece.' Or Whitacre's kind of cluster soundworld, which some people you know, are incorporating still into their music. So I think they're definitely going to stick around. But I think it's cool to see that people are engaging in different kinds of soundworlds and styles and I hope that we continue to diversify and engage with lots of different kinds of music from around the world.

KB
Do you align yourself with any particular cultural or artistic or musical movements?

JR
Hmm. Not necessarily. I tend to not like to categorise myself in any of those ways, because then it puts me into a box, and I would prefer to have the freedom to learn new things, to participate in curiosity and searching for new ideas, not be pigeonholed into something, whether that's a belief system or a musical style or whatever it might be. I tend to prefer to be open to speak to whatever it is that's happening in the world or in my life, and try to create music that's relevant, and be part of ideas that can grow if new information comes along, things like that. So, yeah, I think I tend to not want to kind of peg myself as a specific—part of a specific camp or ideology or musical style or things like that.

KB
And then lastly, do you notice any differences between choirs in the United States compared to in particular choirs in Europe? And I'm thinking now, if you were to write a piece of music for a choir in the United States versus a choir in Europe, might your approach be different?

JR
Absolutely. I think choirs in every country sound different because of the way language is spoken, and language affects the way that we create sound. Culture affects the way we carry our bodies. Culture affects the way that we think about community. What kind of artwork we're interested in, what's especially meaningful to us. There are a lot of similarities, of course, things that unite us as a species, but also, every culture has something different. So if I'm writing a piece for an American choir, even across the USA, there are such differences in sound.

California has such a different sound than Minnesota, for example. So when I'm commissioned to write a piece, I really need to be thinking about the various details of, how does this culture produce sound, what's important to this culture. If I write a piece that has no relevance whatsoever to this group that I'm writing for it might not go over so well. So definitely tonal production, size of ensemble, style of singing that they're used to doing. All these things influence what I need to be aware of, and then what I need to consider as I'm creating.

Appendix E: Dale Trumbore Interview Transcript

7 March 2024, Pasadena, CA.

Kevin Boushel
Could you tell me about your musical influences and your sort of your musical upbringing?

Dale Trumbore
Yeah, so musical upbringing is kind of strange in that simultaneously I have the taking piano lessons, starting at age seven, singing in choirs. Also around that time I started—my mom was sort of dragging me into church choirs, so I sang in choirs from when I was like, seven through twenty-five or so. And at the same time, the weird thing there is my first, true musical love was musical theatre, more so than you know, chamber music or choral music or orchestral music, it was musicals. But I got to know—oh I also love, like singer-songwriters, like Tori Amos and Rufus Wainwright, very much. Those musical loves were happening. And then at same time I went to chamber music camp at high school, and was playing like Telemann and Bach and Schumann and Schubert.

KB
What instrument?

DT
Piano. And harpsichord. But, yeah, piano was my primary instrument. And then also in choirs, was loving like Moses Hogan arrangements. My high school choir teacher loved Moses Hogan. So we did a lot of those spirituals. And what else? I feel like every composer or choral person of a certain generation loves Eric Whitacre, had an Eric Whitacre phase. So, like many composers, I feel, I had one of his albums on repeat, like, 'what is this?'

And, yeah, I can talk more about—I mean, I loved like Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, the greats there. And then I've enjoyed getting to know more contemporary composers, like a lot of my peers, like Reena Esmail and Derrick Skye. And now I like to try and listen more to what's happening now, contemporary.

KB

Could you expand on this; you said every composer had an Eric Whitacre phase.

DT

Just if you're like, maybe like… millennials.

KB

A millennial, yeah, for sure, for sure.

DT

When… now I'm blanking on which album It was…

KB

Light and Gold? With the tree? Or the BYU albums?

DT

No, it was, it was the gold.

KB

Light and Gold.

DT

Yes, yes, it was that. So I was interning, I think it was in college, maybe, but like interning, at my mom's publishing office, and just had my headphones listening to that nonstop for two months or something, and then burnt out on it, because I listened to it so much.

KB

And so then your education after high school.

DT

Undergrad at University of Maryland, College Park. I have a degree in English and a degree in music competition. So technically, two degrees from there. And then grad school at USC, University of Southern California here in LA.

KB
Just masters?

DT
Just masters. Yeah, no doctorate. Because I'm watching a lot of friends get doctorates and not find jobs, and I was like, I might as well skip that part, not find a job and make my own job.

KB
Good idea. And you studied with Morton Lauridsen at USC. Did you choose USC for Morton Lauridsen?

DT
I knew he was there, and I knew that would be a part of going there. So it wasn't like this is the only place I can go. It wasn't like that, but it was very much knowing that it was—I think it's rare to have a university at the undergrad or graduate level where choral music is a priority. I think that's very rare. And so to know that USC was one of those places that was definitely a draw of going there.

KB
Interesting. And what was your engagement with Morton Lauridsen's music before you studied with him? Had you sung it?

DT
Yeah, I'd sung 'Dirait-on' in high school. That was my first introduction to his music. I was just trying to remember the other day if I sang any with the choirs at Maryland, and I don't think I did, but also it seems like I must have. But anyway, knowing that I was going to study with him, I then went and listened to a lot of his catalogue. And also, when you start studying with him—he's retired now, but I don't know if he was still doing this, I assumed it was with every student—he just like, hands a pile of scores and recordings.

KB
Of his music?

DT

Of his music, yeah. So right when I moved to LA for grad school, I was driving around LA, listening to his music, to try to really get to know it.

KB

Then in terms of how you developed your own compositional voice, tell me about that process.

DT

So I feel like a lot of—I think it's like style as figuring out what you love and doing it on purpose. There's some Dolly Parton quote like 'find what you love and do it on purpose' or something. But I think style is, is that too, right? There's some element of noticing very consciously when we're drawn to a certain harmonic progression, or a series of chords, a certain melodic gesture, and not just doing it. Of course, you can just do it unconsciously and let other people analyse it by your style retroactively. But I think there is an element, for me, at least. I'm trying to be conscious. So if I am repeating myself, I'm doing it in a very purposeful way. At the same time, it's my work to compose, right? And it's theorists work to analyse. So I think it's both, right? It's figuring out the conscious elements that I like incorporating into my work very purposefully. To the point where if I'm setting a text and it has a similar phrase, or if there's a reason to repeat in a slightly modified form, something across pieces, I'll do that because I want to create that link to a gesture that always represents water in my work, or like the sky, or love or time, or something, right? I think there's something intriguing about viewing your entire body of work as one long composition, and thinking about motifs within that lifelong piece as like recurring no matter what the composition is, because it's sort of all one big gesture, if that makes sense.

KB

I've never heard that before, and I love that concept.

DT

Really?

KB

I absolutely love that concept. And I haven't heard that before, no, like, the idea that all of your work is one long work is brilliant, because I know of a lot of composers that obviously do self-quotation or stuff like that.

DT

But it has to be on purpose, right? It has to be because you're talking about, you know, they're singing about light again, or something, right? So the light gesture is the same, or the compassion gesture, or whatever the word is, or the image.

KB

I've noticed that a lot of your works are set to a poet that features prominently in your work. That's Barbara Crooker. Tell me about your relationship with her work.

DT

Yeah. So I came to her poetry in, what was that, 2009? I think it was 2009. So I have an aunt who's a poet named Julie Kane, who I think I told you, did I tell you about her? Because I wrote the piece *The Sallow Harp* about Denis Hempson, the Irish harpist. Anyway, I think maybe I mentioned that. Yeah. Anyway, so my aunt was the poet laureate of Louisiana in 2013 and 2014 and she helped me put out a call for poems in 2009 for this fairy tale art song project that ended up being called *Snow White Turned Sixty*, and Barbara was one of the poets who responded to that. She's also friends with my aunt, so that was how she saw this call for poems. And since then I developed my own collaborative relationship with Barbara, and I think I've set her—I just had a 75 minute, like concert-length piece premiere with 20 poems of Barbara's like excerpts from 20, 24, poems. So now I think I've probably set her poems upwards of 35 times, or 40, or something. It's wild. Yeah, but I love her… Her poetry is kind of similar to Mary Oliver—very well-known poet—in that Barbara's work has this reverence for nature and ordinary life at the same time. It holds those two elements as equally sacred in a way that I find really compelling, especially being someone who's not religious. I find Barbara's sort of, like, the way she can find something almost spiritual in daily life, like doing the dishes or something, as well as in her own backyard looking at—she lives in rural Pennsylvania, and so she's measuring the seasons by the changing plants and the trees, and she gardens, and so that finds its way into her poems as well.

KB

You know a poem that you'd love, just that reverence for everyday life and washing dishes, that reminds me of a poem by Seamus Heaney 'While all the others were away at Mass.'

DT

Ok, I don't think I know that one.

KB

I was voted as one of Ireland's favourite poems.

DT

I'm going to write it down.

KB

You should look into it, I think you'd love this poem. It talks about him—It's a memory of him and his mother. It's called 'While all the others were away at Mass,' and it's about him staying at home and washing dishes with his mother while everyone else is away. It's a gorgeous, gorgeous sonnet.

DT

Awesome.

KB

I think it's untitled but that's the first line, you know?

DT

Yeah.

KB

So in terms of, then your compositional process—this might be something that I asked you in our last conversation, but, well, it wasn't recorded and wasn't for the research. Do you think first in terms of melody or harmony or texture? What are your sort of—what's the first thing that you take a stab at when you're looking at something? Are you thinking vertically or horizontally?

DT

So it's actually all of the things at once. But in that sense, it's looking at the words first. So what I do is I print out the poem, and then I mark it up, and I'm simultaneously noting things like rhythms that I hear inherently in the text. I read the text out loud to try and find rhythmic patterns. So I'm like jotting down little rhythmic gestures. I might jot down a melody that I'm hearing just on my first read of the poem, but usually I try and stick with, I think, rhythm before melody, although they kind of happen simultaneously. And then in that scan of the poem too, I'm thinking about the formal structure. So if the poem is already in stanzas with a set rhyme scheme, that makes my job easier. But, maybe, because I don't want that ease, I set a lot of free verse poetry that, of course, has implicit repetition or formal structure, but I'm trying to suss that out. I'm looking for connections, I'm looking for words or images that repeat within the poem, and letting that inform the harmonic structure and the formal structure as well. So I'm jotting all that down, in words, as I'm scanning poem, and I'm like underlying things and drawing lots of arrows. It looks very chaotic. And then when I go to the piano, usually it's melody and harmony at sort of the same time.

KB

You compose at the piano?

DT

I do compose at the piano, yeah.

KB

How does your experience as a singer inform your approach to writing the voice?

DT

I think it absolutely does, and it's inherent for me, but it's been interesting, especially in the work I do—so I don't have any, like, academic position, but sometimes I swoop in, and I do like a little four-day residency at a college, and I'll do guest composition lessons through that. And I also teach at Choral Arts Initiative's Premier Project Festival over the summer. And so working with students there, it's been interesting to see that it's not intuitive for some people. Where I see words stress and inherent prosody and… I feel like rhythms, I would say there's lots of right answers and there's lots of wrong answers. When we're looking at a text and

thinking about how it translates to rhythm in music. It's not like there's one answer and then everything else is wrong, but there are definitely right ways and wrong ways to put stresses on certain syllables in a way that the audience can perceive what's being said. So, for me now, it comes instinctively, because I was a choral singer, I think, for so many years, and so I only have to think about it when I'm trying to explain it to someone else.

KB
Interesting. Okay, very interesting. And then how does your experience as a keyboard player influence your writing?

DT
I think that's harmony for the most part. Of course, I'm composing melodies at the piano too, but it's to the point where sometimes I have to—my left hand will gravitate towards certain harmonies, like I'll catch myself doing too many fifths, or something. I'll have to consciously try and pull away from, even though I'm posing at the piano, what my hands are drawn to do. I have to consciously work against that sometimes pianistic impulse.

KB
And can you tell me now, changing gears a little bit, in terms of your career, the development of your career as a composer. Have there been any institutions or organisations that you feel have sort of supported your professional development and have given you professional opportunities.

DT
Yeah, I mean, I think both colleges I attended. Maryland, was really helpful for letting me make my own path in terms of, like, they didn't require undergrad or graduate recitals there for composition students, but I wanted to do that anyway. So I did a junior year recital and a senior year recital just because I wanted to. And they were always there with assistance towards putting those concerts together. USC, I feel like I met so many conductors there and had a lot of performing opportunities as well with the students. Both of those helped a great deal. And then, in terms of like choirs that have been helpful, I won a composition contest when I was seventeen with Harmonium Choral Society in New Jersey. They're just a community choir, but they were the first. I always cite them and their conductor Anne Matlack as the very first people to treat me like a real composer, even though I was seventeen and relatively inexperienced. To

show me what that the rehearsal process looks like, and then to champion my work as well. I worked with them. I think they've commissioned me like four times now, and over a span of twenty, almost twenty years. So that's really cool. And Choral Arts Initiative has been similar in that. I think I started working with them in, what was it? 2014? And they've premiered, like, maybe five or six of my pieces, and there's one tonight too. So it's exciting, but yeah, just to have like collaborators where, you know—I feel like it's more so than institutions and your question is institutions, but it's more like the conductors, right? That end up being like a champion for your work.

KB
And do you feel like, have you had certain conductors be champions for your work, certain choirs that you really feel like have championed your work like that?

DT
Yeah, yeah. Eliza Rubenstein is another one. Orange County Women's Chorus is her choir, and they've commissioned me twice. But I also know Eliza has recommended my work to others, and also gave me a writing column in the California ACDA journal. So, just has been a friend and maybe not a mentor, but like a champion in that way of just like where you know someone is saying nice things about you with no prompting, it's very kind of them and very generous.

KB
Can you tell me about your engagement, at every stage of your career and of your musical journey, with the ACDA?

DT
Yeah. So, let's see, every stage. I'm trying to think when I first started going to conferences, I don't know when that was, maybe like ten years ago or more.

KB
During undergrad?

DT

Not undergrad, I think it was after grad school. I want to say it was after grad school, maybe the year after grad school. I think I went to Chorus America as my first conference in 2011 or 2012, maybe 2012. And so then I think I also started going to ACDA conferences regularly then. So let's say, yeah, 2012 or 2013

KB

And you were going as a composer or as a singer?

DT

As a composer, I've gone, gosh, I know I've gone to NCCO as a singer in college, but I don't think I've been to ACDA as a singer. I think just NCCO. Yeah, I should know this. It's a long time ago—it feels like a long time ago, it wasn't that long. I should remember. But yeah, so I would always go to ACDA and be ready and hand out perusal scores and things. And I think it has been really helpful in getting to meet conductors and in in meeting people to—I think some composers think like, 'Oh, I'll meet someone and I'll hand them my music, and then they'll commission me.' And that's not how it works. More often I've seen like, I'll meet someone one year and then I'll see them again the next year. It's like, 'Oh, hello,' like we know each other. And then a year later—so now we're on year two or three of knowing them—they'll perform my work. And then maybe, year five of knowing them, they commission me. It's this slow burn, and that makes it work. I think once you accept that about this conference, it's a lot easier to see it as less of this frantic networking that some composers—I'm actually curious if you've encountered when people learn you're a conductor, and they're like, 'here take five perusal scores.' You're like, 'no, no, thank you.' But having those—really looking for long-term relationships and friendships in that way, right? Like collaborative relationships, working friendships. That's been the real blessing of ACDA, I think, just gathering all these people in one place to the point where now I go and I mostly try and do this, just have coffee with people, more so than going to into sessions or concerts, which I still do sometimes. But the real priority for me is just seeing people.

KB

In terms of, then discovering new ideas and new repertoire, how do you discover—do you do much research yourself? Do you do much looking around and discovering new ideas from different places?

DT

Yeah, if I'm feeling really stuck, sometimes I'll go to a wildly different—honestly, if I'm looking for choral things to do differently I'll go way outside of choral music. I was just listening to albums of gamelan music the other day because I felt so stuck in melodic, harmonic… I just wanted something that was more like, 'yes, there's an element of melody, but it's more rhythmic, like rhythmically motivated.' I feel like sometimes I do, again, to be totally honest, get fatigued with the similar sounding choral works. That lush—and, to be fair, I write some of this music too, and I know you're writing about what is it, this style.

KB

I'm investigating whether it exists.

DT

Yeah. But I do think it exists.

KB

You do?

DT

Yeah. I mean, I think there's this very lush, primarily homophonic… I'm always struggling with knowing that singers are somewhat limited in what they can do, just in that all instruments are limited in a certain way, and so the voice is inherently—like it has its limits in range. But also because there's that element of cognition that can help or impair our ability to find notes, like if you're writing for younger singers or amateur singers, the piece is necessarily restrained in what it can do. So bumping up against those restraints, how do I still craft something that is engaging in terms of rhythm and in terms of harmony, where it's not sort of like a wash of sound. That's always my question, where do I incorporate elements of counterpoint? Even if it's minimal. But then again, of course, like choirs are drawn, choirs sound so good with that lush, sort of like, almost Neo-Romantic, like elements of—or that mix with that element… I don't know.

KB

Do you find conductors want that?

DT

That's a good question. The people commissioning me, I hope, for the most part, know my music, and so they want something that sounds like my music. And I love that. And I've gotten to the point finally in my career, where if they want something, that's not me, I'm fine with that. I'm less like, 'pick me!' It's less of that mentality and more like if It's a good fit, they will find me. I'm not going to try and push my music on anyone at this point. Like, if it's going to happen, it will happen organically. Which isn't to say I'm not, like, trying to make new connections with people. Like, of course, I'm always trying to do that, but it's less feeling like everyone should be doing my music. I don't even think that's true. I think it's not for everyone, and that's fine. Every composer is not going to please every conductor, and that's totally okay. And I'm at peace with that now in a way I was not ten years ago.

KB

Do you perceive then, coming back to that question about my research, do you perceive trends in choral composition that are happening at the moment in American choral music?

DT

Yeah. I mean, I think… it's interesting. I do think there was a sort of Eric Whitacre effect of like people trying to copy that sound. And I think now what I'm seeing a lot more of composers playing with aleatory elements of speaking or whispering, or just a small repeated melodic gesture that comes back. I'm saying all this, and my piece tonight has those elements, and I don't usually use those elements in my work, so it's contagious. Yeah, I'm seeing a little bit more experimentation with rhythmic vitality, I would love to see more of it. I'd love to see choral music just kind of like shake free of the primarily homophonic tendencies that it has, personally, and reserve homophony. I'm presenting with Saunder Choi on Saturday, and the presentation is how every conductor should composer for their own ensemble, right? Or should try it once to see if they like it. But we're talking about textures and how, if you're arranging especially, it's really important to think about texture to be like, 'What are you adding? What's new?' And our argument there is, homophony should be reserved for really important texts, where you want the audience to perceive exactly those words at exactly that time, in real time, versus playing with a phrase, or having the text be more muddled and then hearing it, or hearing it once and then playing with it, experimenting with it texturally. But yeah, I would love to see homophony used more sparingly, rather than being the default, personally, this is just my

opinion. This is not every composer's opinion, obviously. Many composers are very, very, very grounded in homophony.

KB
Tell me about the community here in the Los Angeles area and collaborative relationships that you have.

DT
Yeah, it's the reason why I live here is because I came to grad school here and found a community of like-minded composers and singers, I have a lot of singer friends as well, and that's because the singers stay here because there's studio work as well as LA Opera and LA Master Chorale and other paid opportunities. So it is really, it's a place where you can make a living as a professional singer. And because of that, all these other choirs have sprung up in this area. I think we're blessed with just an abundance of choirs that love new music, and that's rare too. Ambitious and adventurous new music. To have a group like the Master Chorale and a group like even the LA Phil, programming contemporary works often and championing those, I think, helps. The ripples of that are felt throughout the choral community here, where new music is very welcome in a way that it's not in more conservative communities. I was just talking to Kira, who you met. She lives Phoenix, Arizona, and she's saying they are way more traditional in what they program, the choirs. There are lots of choirs there, but they're programming very traditionally,

KB
I'm really seeing that this is such a locus, such a hub of creativity, here in Los Angeles and there is such a scene for choral music. There's a lot happening, as opposed to just one composer being here and one choir being there, and all being really spread out. There's a lot happening in the same geographical area here it really seems

DT
Yeah. And it feels like it's not that, one-to-one, like a choir has one composer they work with. It feels like… I've worked with Choral Arts Initiative many times. They've also worked with a lot of composers. It's nice to be one of many. Saunder Choi and I, we didn't overlap at USC, but we got to know each other pretty quickly. I think in let's say 2014 or so, 2015. For some reason, our music is programmed a lot on the same concerts, to the point where we joke that

we're premiere twins. I think we've had five or six premieres on the same concert, which is not like—very often you're the only premiere on concert, right? So to have not only multiple premieres, but with the same person multiple times, is kind of great. And there's maybe some similarities between our music that lends itself to that, the choirs that are drawn to his music maybe are more likely to be drawn to mine, and vice versa. But yeah, it's just funny. Every time that happens, it's like 'it's happening again!'

KB
And so in terms of commissions and premieres, where do you feel people come to your music? Where are the commissioners coming from? How are you, how are they connecting with you?

DT
I mean, I think at this point, it's a mix of people that I've connected with and people that I don't know at all. Hearing my music at a conference or a colleague does it at there's like a nearby school or something, and that's great. I feel like that's what you want as composer is that you want to the point where you don't know everyone who's coming to you about a commission. But at the same time, I mention a lot how Reena Esmail, who I mentioned, she has a—it's not a strict policy, but if she can help it, she loves for a group to program an existing piece of hers before they commission her so she knows what it's like to work with them before they embark on this big, expensive, time-consuming project together. And I think that's so smart, and I've been trying to do that more to the extent where, of course, I need to make a living, because I am this is all I do, right? Like, sometimes, I guess teach but… *waves to people at another table* Hi! That's one of my to my grad school friends, who just happened—they're not here for ACDA—just happened to be having lunch together. But so, what was I saying?

KB
Making a living, commissions…

DT
Yeah. So of course, sometimes I'll accept commissions because I could use the money, right? But it is really wonderful when someone can say, even if I wasn't involved, they could be like, 'Oh yeah, we did *In the Middle* last semester, and here's a recording,' or something, right?

KB

To hear what your music sounds like on their voices?

DT

Yes, or just even—it's also really helpful when someone approaches you about a commission to say, 'here are recordings of my choir.' Not just be like, 'oh yeah the basses can sing a low F,' or something. Like, this is their actual sound, so then I can write to that. But yeah, to answer your question, commissions come, they just appear sporadically, or sometimes I do consortiums… consortia? Consortia.

KB

When you're composing, what are your goals as a composer?

DT

Yeah, I love that. I feel like more composers should ask themselves that question, because sometimes you get so caught up in the nitty gritty details of this piece that we don't think about broader goals. I like to talk about this idea of leaving the listener in a in a better place emotionally than they came to you at the start of a piece. And of course, I can't control anything a listener feels or thinks, but to the extent that I have control over a composition and how it's crafted, and choosing a text that I feel does that to me, where I feel like I'm in a better emotional place at the end of having read that poem, if I can find that quality then I can hope it comes through my music as well.

Appendix F: Dan Forrest Interview Transcript

17 April 2024, Virtual Zoom Call

Kevin Boushel
Thank you very much for agreeing to speak to me about my research and for my research. I guess the first question I'd love to ask you is about your musical upbringing and the sort of music that you were exposed to and listened to throughout your life that sort of brought you to when you began in your professional career.

Dan Forrest
Yeah, can I pause that for one minute and just turn the tables on you and ask you a couple questions?

KB
Absolutely.

DF
Yeah, you're just plunging right in! First, thanks for your patience. This has taken forever to put this together, and I'm sorry it's been so difficult.

KB
No, not at all. Absolutely. Thank you so much.

DF
No, no problem at all. I've had a lot of Zoom requests and just a lot going on, and just, yeah, it's been crazy. So it's been you and a lot of other people that I've been holding off. But thanks for persevering, and I'm totally happy to talk with you.

KB
Excellent. Thank you.

DF
Yeah, remind me what university you're studying.

KB

So I'm studying at Dublin City University, and I'm in the School of Theology, Philosophy and Music. My supervisor is Dr Barbara Dignam, and my project is a PhD entitled 'Towards the New Transcendental: Stylistic Trends in Contemporary American Choral Music.'

DF

Yeah, nice. I love it. I love that they've lumped together theology and music.

KB

Yeah. So it comes from the—Dublin City University, a few years ago, acquired a couple of smaller colleges. DCU used to be mainly known for business and science, but then they acquired these two arts and education colleges, St Patrick's College and Mater Dei College. And they kind of lumped together from particularly from the Mater Dei College, which used to offer a degree in religion and music education, and they basically kept a lot of those sort of courses and lecturers together in the same place, and we ended up with the school that we have. So it's an amalgamation of two music departments from two smaller colleges now under the DCU umbrella.

DF

Yeah, wonderful. For a guy who writes a lot of church music, I like those coming together, ha!

KB

Yeah, yeah. And it's great as well. So we're based on the All Hallows campus in Dublin, which is a former seminary, and we have the gorgeous seminary chapel. So I direct the DCU Chamber Choir and that's where we have our end of semester concerts, it's a gorgeous chapel. And we've had some visiting choir singing in there as well. We had Dr Irene Messoloras with UC Irvine, and then we had the East Tennessee State University Chorale just with us as well, with Dr Alan Stevens. So, yeah, so we have such a great space, and it's great to be able to invite people over to sing for us as well.

DF

Yeah, that's lovely. I've known Irene for many years, and I think my two commissions out, like writing late this summer, I think is for Dr Stevens.

KB
Brilliant. Oh, brilliant.

DF
I think that's who it's for. I'm pretty sure it's ETSU.

KB
Yeah. We just—they were just here on a tour of Ireland, and we were their first stop. They did a joint concert with us. They're a great bunch of singers. They're a really great bunch.

DF
Yeah, that's super. And I love Dublin. Dublin was the first European city I ever visited, and I loved everything about it. And it's where I fell in love with sticky toffee pudding, which is kind of becoming…

KB
Funny you should mention that, because I literally had one yesterday! That's… and it's not, it's not the most Irish thing, but it's definitely, you know… it's definitely a thing here, you know?

DF
Yeah, it's… I mean, I guess anywhere in the British Isles, you can typically find it, right?

KB
I guess so, I guess maybe we got it from there… it comes up every now and then. It's a good dessert. And you also play the concertina. First time I met you—now, I only met you very briefly—was in Cincinnati, when I came up to the céilí on the first night, and I saw yourself and [Charles Anthony] Tony Silvestri jamming out on the concertina. And I said to another friend of mine from Ireland who was there, 'is that Dan Forrest on the concertina?' I was very impressed. How did that come to be?

DF
Tony got me into it. He's played concertina for a long time. And shortly before COVID, I think I was like, You know what? I would love to play an instrument that I can just hold and take

with me, instead of piano. And I think I started getting into it just before COVID, and then once COVID hit, that was the perfect time. So I subscribed to irishconcertinalessons.com with Caitlín… I forget how you pronounce her last name, but yeah, learned a lot, and it came pretty easy for a pianist, so, I'm not great but I'm decent, and it's a lot of fun.

KB
That's all you need to be when you're in a céilí band, it's great! Yeah, that's brilliant, fair play! You know, I was really… I was surprised and impressed and delighted to see it playing with the *céilí* band, that was great. And do you have any other questions for me before we crack into it? And apologies, I don't mean to—I just, I know that you're a very busy man, so I wanted to keep it snappy.

DF
No, that's fine.

KB
But I'm sorry if I launched into it a bit too quickly.

DF
No, don't apologise. You were trying to be very professional, but I just wanted to be a bit personal for a few minutes, so…

KB
I really appreciate that. I do appreciate that. But yeah, if you have, if you're happy to go on and we'll go with the questions.

DF
I don't mean to take up time either. So here we go.

KB
Oh, yeah, no problem at all. No problem. If it's any… I don't know if this makes sense, but you do take up my time with your music. So, you know, it's nice to take up my time with you in person instead. So yes, my question was just a sort of a broad, generic question about your musical upbringing.

DF

Sure. Yeah, I grew up in a home with a lot of music going on, but it's not like my parents were professional musicians or something. My mom actually tried to specialise in organ at university, and flunked out pretty early on. So this kind of a family redemption story with me doing all this stuff that I do, that she never did. She eventually took up flute and has played the flute for many decades. And yeah, in my home, there was lots of music playing, and my mom especially really encouraged us to just explore and try things and read things and listen to things. We would check cassette tapes out of the library, and I remember listening to a Van Cliburn piano recording that had, like everybody's favourite classical piano pieces, and I kind of wore that tape out. And there was a lot of music at church as well, too, not always great music, but certainly music, and that was certainly a source of a lot of musical interest for me as well. Early on, I just found myself fascinated by all that, and I didn't understand that I could be a part of making that music as a performer or as a composer. I just fancied myself somebody who just… like, music just set my brain on fire. And I was like, 'wow, I just want to listen, listen, listen!' I also remember my parents watching TV shows when I was really little, and I would listen for the theme music that would come on at the beginning or at the end. I would actually sneak out of bed and, like, crack my door open and try to listen to some of the shows that I just thought had fantastic music, and then I would jump back in bed before I could get in trouble. So it wasn't until I was in fourth grade, so like, eight years old, that my parents said we better, like, give him some piano lessons or something, because he just won't stop. So that was where it started, actually, with me making music and piano came very easily for me. I didn't have to—it wasn't a struggle. It was just very, very intuitive. It felt like it had been there all along, and I just blazed through all the lesson books and all this stuff. And my teacher had me writing pieces and doing ear training and sight singing and all sorts of general music education stuff. So yeah, a lot of really just immersive musical experiences.

In like seventh through twelfth grade was my first connection with choir, the school I went to needed an accompanist for the choir. So I was always at the piano playing for choir. Our choir was terrible. The choral director was the chemistry teacher, because she sort of knew how to beat a pattern, and we just made do with what we had, and sort of had fun. And I kind of improvised accompaniments when the accompaniments that I was given were boring, and it was, it was just fun. But in tenth grade, we went to a choral festival that was a whole bunch of other schools that had come together, and they had a real choral conductor there who kind of taught us vocal production, and how to sing, and how to just make music, and how to turn a phrase and… and some rubato, and some crescendo and decrescendo. And that was where I

first really got bit by the choir bug. I thought, this is—I want to be in the room where this is happening. So even when I went to university, my undergraduate degree and my master's degree were in piano performance. But the whole time I was sort of writing for the piano, but also writing for choir, because I had just gotten involved with that. And then at university, I heard really fine choirs for the first time too, and just went to all the choir concerts I could go to. By the time I was finishing my master's degree, I was really kind of sick of the piano, and I love what the human voice was capable of, and I wanted to be in the room where the singing was, not where the pianists were. They were kind of a raggedy lot, and the singing was kind of where I wanted to be. So, yeah, it was just kind of a line from very engaged listener to piano lessons to some choir experience, to some really fine choir experience, to my piano improvisation turned more into I want to write for choir, and somehow I ended up writing choral music. And here I am.

KB
I love what you said, there, 'I want to be in the room where this is happening.' Like, that is exactly my experience as well, when I was growing up and I realised what, like you said, what the human voice is capable of. Did you do much singing yourself, then, along the way? Or were you mostly just at the piano for it?

DF
I was always the accompanist. Yeah, the only time I sang was in tenth grade and eleventh grade at that festival. They had a staff accompanist, or pro, who took care of that. So I got to sing those two years, and that was certainly formative, because I got to feel how it felt in my voice to be a part of the choir, and what a beautiful line felt like, and what it felt like to contribute to something bigger from the vocal side, not just from the piano side.

KB
So then can I ask about after school in particular, sort of formal training in particular in terms of composition. Could you tell me about sort of your formal education in terms of composition and how that influenced you?

DF
Yeah, in undergrad, I just did lots of improvising, and I had a couple friends that—we were always kind of sequencing MIDI things in the early versions of Finale, just making up things

and using digital instruments to create music that we knew we would never be able to get performed by real performers. So just kind of a hobbyist at a lot of that. Then eventually I took a course in church improvising, hymn improvising. And that quickly turned to more composition, like, improvisations that were worth repeating, is how compositions came into my life. And so those lessons that I took quickly turn more into my first composition lessons in undergrad. And then towards the end of undergrad, I took a couple actual composition classes. I had a class in counterpoint that was required for my piano degree, and I took some elective classes with private composition lessons. And then in my master's degree, that was still piano performance, but I was still just with all my electives that I could I was taking those kind of creative composition classes along the way as well, and my first published choral piece was towards the end of my master's degree there too. Even though I was still doing piano. After that, it was kind of a question whether I wanted to focus on piano performing and teaching, or whether I wanted to go the composition route. And the head of composition at the school I was at was retiring soon, and the school wanted someone to get a terminal degree and come back to, like, hold that position that he held. So they were the ones that encouraged me, like, 'Hey, would you want to do this?' And by that point, I really was more interested in composing than just doing another piano degree anyway.

So that was when I went off and did my first actual degree in composition instead of piano at the University of Kansas. My teacher there was James Barnes, who is not a choral composer at all. He's written just like three or four choral pieces, and they're terrible, *laughs* and he would admit it, he's a really well-known wind band composer. So he knows how to score for instrumental ensembles all day long, which was a big weakness of mine. And he was also just so innately musical that he could look at my choral pieces. And he wasn't thinking of, like, 'is this a good vowel for this high note,' or 'are we sitting on the break too long?' But he was just judging them musically. Like, 'is this satisfying? Does this line go where it wants to? Did you take too long to get where you're going,' or 'does this kind of feel abrupt,' or, you know, so he would judge my pieces on those terms. And I had had enough training elsewhere for the vocal part to put that together, but he's the one who taught me how to score for orchestras, and wind bands, and chamber ensembles, and all that. So it was, it was kind of the missing piece of the puzzle for me. So at that point, I had piano skills, and I'd had a lot of choral experience and some training in undergrad and master's, and then he kind of plugged in the instrumental part, and that's—I feel like I couldn't write things like my major works that are chorus and orchestra, if all those hadn't come together.

KB

Can you tell me about your early, success stories that were sort of milestones for you, going down the professional route? And maybe some of your early commissions that were big?

DF

Yeah… have to think about that one a bit. Most of my early writing wasn't on commission, it was just trying to write things to get performances and then send to publishers to see if I could get something accepted.

KB

I guess, I'm not asking about them being sort of simultaneous. I just mean in terms of sort of the journey that, like, you know, the early compositions. And then when did you get your first commission? And what was that like, and how did that come about?

DF

Yeah, sure. So, yeah, I was just writing pieces to try to get published, and then my first published piece was 2001, I think. And at that point—that piece got published, and a lot of people purchased it and sang it, and that was really encouraging, and I thought, 'Hey, maybe I can do this.' So I kept writing more pieces and started kind of honing in on what kind of choral pieces could get published, and people would want to sing. And then after probably four or five of those, then somewhere along the way, people had seen my name on printed music and then said, 'Oh, we should ask him to write us a piece,' you know. So that was where commissions began.

I'm honestly not sure what my first significant commission was, I haven't thought about that. I have to kind of go back and look. There were a few little things along the way, like, 'Hey, would you rearrange this? We'll pay you to do it,' or whatever. Yeah, early on, it was just whatever. Anybody, if somebody was willing to give me some money to write some notes, I was all in! And then that just kind of increased over the years and the last couple decades. I think the first kind of significant break that I had was, was like 2005 or so, that I had written some pieces for my doctoral work, and one of them got a big prize from the American Choral Directors Association, kind of a national-level recognition. And then a couple other movements of that same set of pieces that I had written won a big award from ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Arrangers and Poets, or whatever… whatever ASCAP stands for. So yeah, those got me kind of some more national recognition, and then it was 'okay, he's

publishing some stuff and he's getting some commissions, but he's all—like, people are looking at his stuff and like, saying, "Oh, this is worthwhile. This is good stuff."' So I think those kind of triangulated and work together, and things just kind of snowballed from there.

KB

You mentioned honing in on what could get published and what people wanted to sing. What did you find worked? What did you find resonated?

DF

That's a probably few hours long discussion. How can I pull that down… I was listening to everything from church anthems to… like John Tavener. And as I was assimilating all that it was all just one for me. I wasn't thinking in terms of what kind of choir and what kind of repertoire do they want to sing, and what is going to be attractive to a conductor, because they think it will be attractive to their audience. So there were times when I was writing, there was a little too much John Tavener with, like, maybe some heavy *divisi* or really high notes or low bass pedals that were held for the whole piece, or for half the piece, or something. It was just kind of a mishmash of all these different sub genres of choir. And I had this kind of sort out what it meant to 'oh, I'm going to write for a University Choir or a professional choir, and they really want this challenge,' versus 'I'm going to write for this church choir that's all volunteers, and they have one hour a week to rehearse, and then it's got to work well on Sunday.' So, just, kind of figuring out the categories of difficulty there, and in terms of style too, like, there were times when my artsiness was showing up in pieces that had very sacred texts, and it was just too hard for the church choir, but too sacred for your general American community choir, or whatever. So I had to kind of learn how to just know who I was writing for, or what type of choir I was writing for, in terms of text and genre and style and difficulty. And then even within, like church music, which is where my publishing started. Even like denominationally, there are certain pieces, at least here in the States, that just sort of… 'this feels Lutheran,' or 'this feels very Catholic', or 'this feels like the Methodists and the Presbyterians are going to like it.' And it's not just like theological differences. There's a certain kind of music that works well for some of those different groups. So I just kind of had to get some experience and some knowledge about who wanted to sing what.

KB

So my next question is about how your performance experience has influenced your writing, and how your background has influenced your writing. So the first question is how does your piano experience impact your composition?

DF

Hmmm. Well, there's probably two answers to that. One is how it affects the piano part of what I do, and one is how it affects the rest. Pianistically, I just know what I'm doing at the piano. I know what fits well in the hand, what's challenging, what's risky, what's safe, and what's satisfying to the pianist as well. My piano parts are often more difficult than a lot of my other choral colleague friends, not all of them, but a lot of them. But I try to write parts that have only necessary difficulty but have maximum enjoyment and satisfaction and payoff. And I definitely use the piano as kind of an equal player in my choral accompaniment. I don't typically just write kind of a functional piano part that takes up some space and gives them some harmony and helps them find their pitch. I tend to write more like Romantic art song where the two are equal players. The choir is contributing something, and the accompaniment is contributing just as much, and we work together in that sense. And I think that's helped me write pieces that are more artistic and maybe impactful for choirs and audiences, I think, for the voice, partly because I know what the piano can't do. I'm always, we always mark our piano lines *cantabile*, you know? If there's this beautiful lyric line and we want it to sing, you know? Nobody ever told a singer, would you please sing this like a pianist? It doesn't work that direction. It only works the other so there are a lot of things that I've often been trying to do at the piano, especially earlier on in my life, that it was just such a joy to write for the voice and listen to how it can connect pitches and how it can crescendo on a note or control the rate of its decrescendo, or in terms of voicing, or, like, balance between parts. That's something pianists are always trying to do, but it's you're manipulating fingers, whereas singers are just different instruments, different brains. And the way that even colour is available in the voice. Pianists talk about like, 'Oh, this is just such colour'. And, 'oh, there was completely different colour for that section.' We sort of overuse the term colour as pianist, no matter what I mean, you got a hammer hitting three strings, and it's not going to hit in a different place, and it's not going to hit different strings, and you can't change the hammer. Really, the only thing you can do is use the soft pedal to shift the hammers a little, and then maybe you're hitting a slightly different part of the string with a different part of the hammer. Other than that, it's just controlling the speed with which it hits, and then you create the illusion of colour. So we like

have all these magic tricks that we do to try to make people think that it was a different colour, but really it's probably not. So it's just kind of a technicolour, beautiful, wonderful colour, colourful world for me to write for voices that are capable of so much.

I think lastly, I have—as I try to be a musician at the piano that involves a lot of never playing two notes equally, or always shaping a line, or always making sure the line has destination, goal, and then phrase shape and all that kind of thing. And sometimes perhaps instrumentalists think more in those terms than choral singers. I mean, everybody should, but it's not uncommon for us to say to the tenors, would you please sing this the way a section of cellos would play it, you know? And that, that mental image says, 'oh, yeah, like this beautiful cello line.' Like, 'well, yeah, just sing a beautiful tenor line the same way.' So I think at the piano, because there is that emphasis on phrase shape, because it's one of the few things that we can try to do, you know, change the intensity of the next note compared to the previous one, to create the illusion of a crescendo. I think that influences how I write for choirs and what I ask of them interpretively to—most of my especially lyric pieces have some sort of phrase shape always marked at the beginning, and then *simile*, somewhere that says, like, 'please keep doing this', you know? So I think where piano can be a big pitfall is when choral composers, especially in the 'New Transcendentalism', and in the twenty-first century, is we take ten fingers and then just plop them down and say *motions playing a chord at the piano* 'okay, bass two, bass one, tenor two, tenor, alto, alto, ooh, alto three, soprano…' we just end up taking our ten fingers with some cool chord that we found at the piano and then just trying to assign them to all these vocal parts. And you can tell when someone is thinking about the line that a singer has to sing, versus when they just came up with a bunch of cool chords and tried to assign the parts, you know? And I mean that that kind of music can be nice sometimes, but it gets old in a hurry, and the singers often aren't very fond of it, because they're either stuck on a common tone for so long, or else they're just leaping from note to note, the way the pianist hands would shift around. So in that sense, the contrarian answer to your question is that sometimes I'm having to put my pianism away when I'm writing for the voice, and make sure that I'm really writing an innately vocal line and not just something that felt good under my fingers. It's got to feel good in the singer's voice, not in my fingers. So when I'm writing at the piano, which I usually do, but I'm not thinking about how good my fingers feel. I'm always thinking in terms of what is this going to be like in the voice. Long answer, sorry.

KB

No, I really appreciate it. And it brought up an interesting point as well. So you mentioned my research as well. And so what I'm trying to do with my research is I'm trying to—I'm coming at it as a question rather than sort of a fishing expedition. So what I'm doing is—we often hear talk about how that, you know… well, I won't say anything because I don't influence your answer. But basically, the purpose of my research is to try and investigate if there are any stylistic trends, or if there are any trends at all in contemporary American choral music and in the American choral scene over the past three decades in particular, sort of going back to the early 90s until now. So the question I have for you is, do you perceive any stylistic trends in choral music from the time that you started publishing in particular and then up until today?

DF

Yeah, I don't know that I'm the best person to answer those questions, but I will try. I purposely don't think a lot about—this is just my disclaimer—I don't think a lot about like, stylistic generalities, because—especially for myself—if I try to nail down what my voice is, or how I write, or what my sound is, then that just becomes sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy, and I feel like all my music will just start to sound the same, and I'll just rely on the same tricks for the next text that I'm setting, as I did for the previous text, or the previous one hundred texts that I set. So I really want to approach each text with a new eye and a new ear and find a new way into each text, so that I don't just plagiarise myself, to put it bluntly. And I think if I focus—I've just learned by experience—if I think too much about, like, 'what is my voice, and I have to make sure this is my voice and that I sound like me.' I had teachers who encourage that, and I think that is some of the most self-destructive advice that you can give a composer, because it becomes just a gateway to just like, spiralling downward into sameness and becoming your own cliche. So I really—and I encourage other composers—you don't have to think about what your voice is. You just write the things that inspire you and move that you feel excited about, the things that fire your neurons, that make you say, 'oh, I want a piece that sounds like this, because I love it when this happens,' you know? So at that moment you are speaking in your voice, but if you stop to think about it, it kind of messes up the all the magic. So whether it's for myself or for other people, I try not to think too much in terms of generalities and stylistic norms and whatever, because I just want to write the next piece in its own way.

So having said all that, the piece that influenced me more than any other was Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, and there are so many other choral composers who would say the same thing, I think. That piece—it was triadic, it was somewhat tonal even though it

sounded timely and current. It was fairly homophonic, although there's certainly some imitation, and Lauridsen is a master and a great lover of counterpoint. He's not just a guy who plunks out chords the way he's sometimes accused of. But I think so many people heard that sound, and there was some *divisi* in it, and just really rich, beautiful harmonies. And I think that sort of—I might be projecting—it certainly inspired me to want to write choral music that was that deeply moving. And I suspect that it did that for hundreds, or maybe even thousands of other people as well. So for me, I think that's a bit of the starting point where lots of people just wanted to write really beautiful chords. And I think that got—I don't think it's entirely fair to Lauridsen. And I've spoken with him, I've had private lessons with him, I have a picture of me and him on my wall back there. I'm not his best friend or anything, but I have had time to pick his brain and sit under his teaching. And his favourite thing in the world is just beautiful counterpoint, not necessarily harmony, but in that piece people gravitated toward the harmonic aspect.

And of course, Eric Whitacre in the American scene is kind of the most ubiquitous composer, and for better or for worse he's kind of been assigned the same sort of stereotype of like, 'oh yeah, the Whitacre cluster chords', and, like, some of them are clusters, some of them are not actually clusters. And some of his pieces are very harmonically driven, and others certainly have their share of imitation and polyphony going on too. So I try not to take pot shots at any composer, or be critical. The world doesn't need that. Composers need encouragement. They don't need to be beaten down, goodness! But he takes some flak from some people for 'always writing the same thing.' And I don't think that's entirely fair, but there certainly is an aspect to his music where there was a lot of that. So I think, and he would say that—I've heard it, I've heard Lauridsen tell the story that at Lauridsen's, I think, sixtieth birthday party, Eric Whitacre was invited and was there, and Eric either said to him or gave him a card or something that said, 'you're still my favourite composer to steal chords from.' So I think even Whitacre would say like, 'yeah, Lauridsen is kind of my muse on this, this is where a lot of this came from.' And Lauridsen would point to Arvo Pärt too. But Pärt certainly has his own sound that isn't exactly what most American composers are modelling after. But somewhere in there, I think all the younger composers heard *O magnum mysterium* and a few other pieces by Lauridsen and they kind of—this is just my opinion—I think they skipped the contrapuntal aspect. They leaned away from the polyphony that was actually there, because probably they didn't have the privilege of some training in counterpoint, and it's much more difficult to write music that has imitation and two, or three, or four, or five different independent lines going on

at the same time. It's much easier to just sit down at the piano and come up with some cool chords and then assign them to the voice parts, like I kind of tongue-in-cheek said earlier.

So I think that's kind of where it all got launched. And so there's just a lot of very homophonic, harmonically based music that's happened over the last two or three decades, I think, in American choral music, and some of it is for the better. And then at some point, in my opinion, and probably a lot of other opinions, it's kind of gotten to be a lot, and things have just gotten kind of lopsided to where I've really been for the last, I don't know, ten/fifteen, years, I've been trying to not just write chords all the time, but find beautiful lines. If it is a homophonic kind of piece and it sounds like chords, I still want it to be the result of beautiful lines. I don't want the lines to be the result of the harmony. I want the lines to be carefully chosen so that even if we're in a homophonic texture, the lines have great independence and beauty and shape. And the altos are going to love singing their alto line, instead of just getting stuck on some sacrificial lamb kind of, 'okay, we'll suffer here' while everybody else says, 'well, the sopranos have fun, and maybe the tenors get a moment too.' And I've encouraged other composers to do the same, even if it's just breaking up a texture a little bit with just a little bit of offsetting text or something. For a few hundred years, that's been kind of the essence of what it is to write choral music. It's madrigals and fugues and motets and all this sort of polyphony. And even like the Mozart *Requiem*. We think of Mozart in his instrumental works as very simple and refined and powdered-wig elegance and delicate and whatever. But I mean the *Requiem*, or the Beethoven *Mass*, or any of those things, there's just so much counterpoint, they're just always going to resort to writing a motet or writing a fugue. So whether, whether composers these days are going to write like formal fugues, or at least just kind of have a contrapuntal sense about it, I think some of that is needed to balance out. I'm really giving you a crazy long answer, I'm sorry. But I think that harmonic approach could use some balance, and I try to contribute to that.

KB

I really appreciate that answer, and I guess it leads me then to my next question, which is then sort of your approach to texture in your own writing, and how do you decide when to employ certain textures?

DF

This is getting really down into my muse, where I find creative ideas. And it may not be helpful for others. I can only speak for myself. But for me—the same way it's counterproductive to try

to find my voice or make stylistic generalisations that I'm writing as me, I also find it does more harm than good for my creative process if I look back at the last five pieces, or the last ten pieces that I've written, and say 'oh, what textures have I used, so what does my next piece need to have?' As soon as I start doing that kind of thing, I'm forcing something from outside the text onto the text, and it may or may not be what that text really needs. So when I sit down with a new piece, it's less that I think, 'okay, how can I prove a point about texture right now,' contrary to what I may have sounded like a minute ago. It's not that I think, 'Oh, I have to write a contrapuntal moment in this piece to make sure I prove a point that I'm not just one of those harmonic composers.' No, it's less that I want to dig into that text deeply enough and find some angle and some voice that that text needs so that it feels like I found music that was already in the text. That's my favourite way of putting it. I want it to not feel like I brought some musical constraint and forced it onto the text, or like merged these two disparate things together. I want it to feel like I got deep enough into the text that I could just kind of pull away a curtain and find some music that was already in the text there just waiting to happen to begin with. And I feel like I've done my job well when I have that feeling about a setting that I've created. So all that to say, I sort of have this this palette of textures that I can use. And it's not like I have a list that I refer to and think 'which one am I going to use?' No, it's just that, as a composer, I'm aware all these things are always just kind of spinning in my head, and I just try to choose whatever option best helps me give that text a voice that hadn't been heard but felt like it was in that text all along. And so that may be some moments of homophony, and it may be even, you know, eight part *divisi* or something. There's a time for that. But I try to just make sure that my textural palette is broad enough so that I don't just resort to the same kind of 'chords, chords, chords,' all the time.

And I also listen very broadly outside of choral music. I really don't listen to a whole lot of new choral music, partly because I don't want to be want to be accused of plagiarism. So if some choral composer has some great new piece, a lot of times I'm like, 'Oh, I really wonder what that's like.' But a lot of times I don't go listen to it, because I don't want to hear it and become infatuated with it and then have it come out in my own writing. I kind of need it—I need to stay 'me', whatever that is. So I listen to all sorts of instrumental or electronic or experimental or whatever, just all over the place. And I'm always thinking about all the parameters of music, not just like melody, even though I think that's primary. I'm also thinking harmonically and thinking rhythmically and thinking texturally, and timbre and blend and all these other things too, so that hopefully, I just kind of keep my palette fresh, and I have a lot of possibilities to pull from, including texture.

KB

Having spoken now about your textural palette, could you tell me a bit about your harmonic palette? And a bit about your approach to harmony, tonality, consonance, dissonance. Could you speak a bit about your approach in that sort of aspect?

DF

Yeah, sure. Piano is definitely an underlying factor in my harmonic sense. I try not to be limited to only harmonies that I'm familiar with, with my hands on the keyboard, or that fit nicely under my hands when I'm playing. I try to think in in choral terms as well, and not be shackled to the shape of my hand in my in my choral voicings. But I have to work at that, because I am innately a pianist. I'm always listening for some harmonic approach that maybe I could use in a choral piece somewhere that may not be something I've used before, or something that I'm less familiar with, that I can just try and experiment with a bit.

I don't mind being tonal. And I think there are ways to be modern and be timely without necessarily, like, ruling out a triad, like, 'Oh man, that's been done. You can't do that anymore.' But it took me a long time to get to that place. Arvo Pärt had a similar process where he wrote these pieces that were just massive and huge and just really just grating and angsty and thick. And then in 1978 when he wrote *Für Alina*, he said, 'I have discovered that it is enough for one note to be beautifully played.' So it sort of came full circle for him—and I'm not Arvo Pärt, but it was sort of a similar process for me, in that I grew up very tonal in church music, everything was very consonant and triadic and maybe even kind of old fashioned sounding a lot of times. And then when I got to university, there were all these things to explore, both pre-tonal and post-tonal. Then I was fascinated with organum and chant and early music. And then in post-tonality as well, like just exploring all these things that were beyond the bounds of what I had had. And I loved all that pre-tonality and post-tonality on either side of the tonality.

Then when I was going to apply for doctoral work, there's kind of this stereotype in academia, and it's probably true, that you just have to be kind of edgy if you're going to get accepted into a program somewhere. You have to like prove that you're not just old-fashioned or whatever. So I started writing pieces that weren't necessarily something I loved, but something that I thought other people wanted to hear from me, which really wasn't a very healthy way to write. I think there's a place for that, and in my composition teaching, I do sometimes ask my students to write things beyond their comfort zone. That's how you grow and how you learn. But I would never rule out triads or rule out like some form of tonality. I think, like, functional tonality, like dominants always resolving to tonics, *sings* 'Five-One'

Yeah. You know, we probably don't need more of that. That's a little predictable. But the problem isn't the fact that you used a triad. The problem is just like the way you use them is the same way that people have done them for a long time. We probably want something a little more current than that, so sure, use your triads, but let's find a way to make it feel more current.

In my doctoral auditions, I kept talking about dissonance and the fact that I needed to just get—because I was trying to impress the professor I was working with. I was afraid he was going to think I was just too old fashioned and not want to work with me. I was trying to show him I really was open-minded and wanted to try new things. And I think I must have just overdone it, because at some point he just kind of stopped and put his pen down and looked at me and said, 'you seem to have this hang-up with dissonance.' And I was thinking like, 'Oh, I thought I was supposed to,' *laughs* and that wasn't what he was looking for, you know, and he had music that was more triadic and not angsty and crunchy, alongside music that he had that was very angsty and crunchy and all those things, but it was just a broader palette for him. So that was kind of the beginning of where I thought, 'maybe I don't have to try to be something I'm not.' And then during my doctoral work at the University of Kansas, my professors consistently espoused a value of 'we're not going to tell you what to write. We're going to find what path you're on with your voice and just propel you as far as possible on that path. And we're going to try to broaden that as we go, but we're not going to say "you're on this path, but you need to get on this one instead."' And that was a very significant watershed, I think, at least in American academia, because there are schools where, if you go there, you're going to be this kind of composer. There's schools of minimalism. If you go study with this person, you've got to write minimalism. If you go here, you've got to do electronic music, because that's what they do. You know, for them to just say, like, 'we're not going to put our hand on the steering wheel and swerve you over in a new direction. We're just going to strengthen your vehicle so you can go far and broaden along the way as well, not be narrow and only do one thing.' But that was just so healthy, and it kind of freed me up to do a lot of things that I think were more successful than if I was trying to be something I'm not.

The last thing is that I had an electronic music professor, and he was probably the professor I had who wrote the most out-there kind of music. He had a piece that he had written using only recorded sounds from bubbling mud pots in Yellowstone National Park. *laughs* He did all this crazy—and it was really cool! He could find music in any found object, found sound. He could turn it into something musical. It was really neat. Well, I went to him once at a lesson and just said, 'I'm really struggling to just find something new. It's really hard for me to find something new to say, and just keep trying to find something new, but nothing really

feels'—and he stopped me and said, 'I don't know that there's anything truly new that you're ever going to write. Why don't you stop trying to write something new and just write something timely.' And for me, that difference between the word 'new' and the word 'timely' just freed me up. And that was the other, like, key moment where I thought, 'okay, I don't have to try to impress people, or whoever it is that I think I need to show something to by writing what they think I want to write, or what they might think is actually new.' That's not really a great ideal to shoot for. The idea of just sounding timely, being like, 'Yeah, this is the year I wrote this, and for that time, it felt appropriate, and it felt kind of fresh, and we're writing in the twenty-first century, not the nineteenth.' It was just kind of a subtle shift that freed me up from trying to be something I'm not, to trying to be the best version of myself.

So I think from that point on, I use dissonance that I like, and there is some dissonance that I like, and sometimes I even raise people's eyebrows a little like, 'is that the right note?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, do you see how this voice is and this fits in there? I think that's kind of cool!' But I also write plenty of consonance as well, and I try to make sure it's timely and sounds like the twenty-first century, not the nineteenth. If I write something that feels very functional, tonal, common practice, I'm usually trying to find some way to pull it ahead a couple hundred years. But I no longer obsess about 'am I dissonant enough,' or 'am I new enough?' I just, I write the things that, really—the things that I want to say, and just try to keep them timely. I don't know if that answered your question. It was a long ramble.

KB

No, everything that you're saying. I really, really appreciate and I love that distinction between timely and new. I think that's a phenomenal piece of advice that you got, and I did pick up on you using that term a couple of times already. So it's interesting to hear how that word came into your understanding of composition and your approach. I think about it like—talking about dissonance and making it sound new, I mean, atonality happened a hundred years ago. So, I often think that music is kind of a funny one, where we're the only discipline in the arts that something that happened a hundred years ago is still considered modern. You know? I mean, you wouldn't read James Joyce and think, 'wow, that's so modern and edgy,' you know, it's a funny one, or cinema or painting from a hundred years ago, like no one's trying to replicate that today, but we still have this hang-up in composition and in music and then academia, as you mentioned. I know we're coming up to an hour, I might just ask just a couple of quick questions.

DF

I started late, and I asked you some questions at the front so take the time you need. It's fine.

KB

Okay, thank you very much. It's interesting you bring up your experience with academia and going through the doctoral process. Can you tell me if you perceive an academic-commercial divide in choral music in America.

DF

Ooh *laughs* that's a big one, and it's one that you can get in trouble if you answer the wrong way.

KB

You don't—we don't have to go to get into it. If you don't…

DF

No, no, I'm happy to get into it. It's great. I love that you asked it. *Sighs* academic versus commercial in choral music. Yeah, those terms can mean so many things to so many people, and I'm going to agree with you and say yes—you didn't say anything. I'm going to answer the question 'Yes,' but I'm going to give the 'No' answer first. So the disclaimer that I want to be careful of is that I write all over that spectrum, and I write music that some assert—some people that love certain types of my music would look at other pieces that I've written and say 'that's too edgy, that's so academic, that's so weird. Why do you have to do this stuff? Why don't you pull it back to within reach? That's just too hard. It's too out there,' you know? So they're positioning themselves kind of, if I can say it this way, 'below' that music, and saying 'you're up there, too far, come down to our level.' But then I write music for church choirs, for instance, that is aimed at a volunteer choir with very limited rehearsal. And sometimes it's just arrangements, it's a new arrangement of an existing hymn. And the people that love the more solid and high stuff that I do, they look at that stuff and say, 'Why does he do that?' A friend of mine was at an American Choral Directors convention once, shortly after I had taken a job with Beckenhorst, where I work as editor, and which is primarily a church music publisher. And he was sitting behind a couple people, and the one turned to the other and said, 'Oh, did you hear that Dan Forrest took a job with Beckenhorst? Man, I had such high hopes for him.' *laughs* That's how disappointed they were that I had lowered myself to work for a church

music publisher. Now, truth be told, in the American church choral scene, Beckenhorst is one of the most, by far, one of the most artistic and progressive and challenging church music publishers. We publish things that are way harder than a lot of our colleague publishers. And I think of it as a really good meeting point between artistry and accessibility, and even between like church music and concert music. I feel like we span that gamut. But here are these people saying, 'Oh, I'm so disappointed in that Forrest guy, because look what—he's sunk to this. He's just pandering to the church choirs now, and he's not actually…' you know. So I'm the kind of guy that that writes all over that spectrum, and I just recognise that no matter where I am on that spectrum, there's always going to be someone who positions themselves lower and says, 'Why do you have to make it so hard? Why don't you come down to our level?' And there's always going to be someone who positions themselves higher and say, 'Why are you sinking to that level? Why are you pandering? Why don't you come up here and do these better things that we wish you would do?'

And I tell composers that in workshops. Like, you need to be self-aware and self-critical and self-evaluate and say, 'am I writing where I really want to write on the spectrum?' And if somebody says, like, 'why is this always so boring and predictable?' Are they right? Like, you got to ask yourself the hard questions and not just put up your defences and be like, 'No, you're just one of those people that wants me to write harder music. I'm not listening to you!' They could be right. So you have to be willing to listen a little in case there's something that needs to change. But at some point you just have to write the music that you are called to write, and not listen too much to those people that wish you would write a little lower, wish you would write a little higher. So with that said, I think the healthiest way to view the commercial and academic divide is just to recognise that there's a place for all of us, and it's perfectly fine for any composer to write wherever on that spectrum they fall, if we can call it a spectrum, that whatever their voice is, they need to do that. Also, whatever helps pay their bills, they need to do that. So there are composers that write very, I would say, kind of market-driven music. Like, this is a piece that there's a certain type of choir, and they're going to be looking for a piece like this, and it's not the most creative or artistic or boundary-extending, it's not going to end up in the history books, you know, but there are choirs who are looking for this, and they need music like that. And we need composers who will write that music for those people, and that's fine, and just because you're called to write something that's higher up on the spectrum doesn't mean you're allowed to be judgy and denigrate that and vice versa, you know. So you just have to figure out where you're going to be.

What disappoints me, and where I think that divide starts to happen in an unhealthy way, is when composers who are capable of more hear, kind of, the siren song of the market and of a pay check from some publisher that want that says, 'Hey, will you write six new pieces for us this year?' And you just start cranking them out, and that's where they start self-plagiarising, and they start writing pieces that all sound the same, and they start to lose their sense of artistry. And it's not just that they've chosen to write for a different type of choir, but that they're just kind of cranking out too many pieces too fast that don't really contribute something worthwhile even to that specific piece of the market, that it's just, it's self-plagiarising, and it often is driven by money or deadlines or, you know, requirements from whoever is kind of funding them. I think that starts to get unhealthy. And I wish that didn't happen. I do know of composers that I feel have had more creative potential than they ended up really exploring with the last whatever twenty years of their career, or I feel like I've seen them just kind of sink to something that becomes more commercialised. So to wrap up that question, I don't think there's anything wrong with writing the music that helps you make money. And I don't think there's any place on that spectrum that composers should not write. That that would be really elitist and gross. I don't think anybody should be critical of another composer that way, but I do think composers need to be careful to maintain their—we would call this artistic integrity. I think you need to be writing the very best music that you can, and not just sinking to something that's less meaningful or profound or beautiful or creative or that contributes more. Don't let go of that just because there's some market constraint that is just clamouring for you to crank out too many pieces too fast. That's the tension that I have to maintain in my own writing. So I end up saying no to most of the commission requests I get, because if I start trying to crank out too much music too fast, it will sound the same, and I will become a cliché of myself, and people will be like, 'Oh yeah, I feel like I've heard that two or three times before in the last couple years from Forrest.' So I keep my commission rates high, and I keep the number of commissions that I accept limited so that hopefully I can do what I described earlier, like digging deep, pulling back a curtain and finding a voice for this text that we really haven't heard before. I'm not always equally successful at that. There are times when I finish a piece and even put it in print that I'm like, 'eh, I don't know if I really loved that,' but then there are others that I think come out better, but I'm always trying. I'm always trying to write a new piece and contribute something worthwhile. Is that where you were headed with that question?

KB

No, I wasn't necessarily heading anywhere. I was very interested to hear your opinion on that, because it's a theme that's come up a bit in my research, this notion of 'give the people what they want,' leading towards self-plagiarism as you mentioned, or something like that. And it's just a theme that's popped up. So it's interesting to hear your opinion on that. And if I ask another question –

DF

Can I give you one more thought on that?

KB

Sure.

DF

And I'll keep it short, I promise. I don't want to keep you longer than you want to be kept. With the American Choral Directors Association, we give the Raymond Brock Commission—the Raymond Brock prize for students and the Raymond Brock prize for professionals. And for the last four years, I've chaired the committee that oversees all those awards. And there has been a real strong dichotomy in the past of whoever is giving out those awards—that that process has changed over the years—but sometimes, depending on who was making those decisions, it was the kind of person who only wants to award the people that are like pressing boundaries and pressing the edges and doing new things, and 'look how edgy they are,' and 'if you wouldn't be considered for a Pulitzer Prize or a Grammy Award, then we don't want to consider you for Raymond Brock.' You know, those are the kind of people that we're trying to nurture.

But when I took that committee over—well, I'm sorry, back up. There are other times, depending on who was giving the award, the award was given to people that it didn't really seem were contributing really unique and profound and strong artistic contributions. It felt a little more like, 'well, here's this person who's cranked out five hundred pieces in the last thirty years of their career. So let's give them a commission for their like…' Yeah, but are they writing anything that's like, truly great? So there's a big dichotomy there. But in recent years, it really tipped toward the more academic and high and out there kind of stuff. And so when I took that committee over, I kind of codified with the national leadership that we want to recognise the whole spectrum of choral contributions and excellence within any of those fields.

So it's not just the people who win Grammys and get Pulitzers. It's also the people who are known for the very best of children's choir music, or the very best of even church choral music, like who is, who is really leading the pack, who's at the front of this, and showing that it can be done really well. Not necessarily that they've cranked out tons and become market driven. Even there, like we've had to wrestle through this tension of what is excellence, and can we make sure we apply excellence to any part of this choral field, not just one part of it?

KB
Yeah, brilliant. And did I see that there was an announcement recently that the next one is going to be Rosephanye Powell? Is it?

DF
Yeah, Rosephanye is the next Brock commission recipient.

KB
Brilliant. I'm really excited. I'm excited to hear that in Dallas.

DF
There was a time when she wouldn't have been considered for that, because she's not writing like, whatever, the Caroline Shaw *Partita for Voices*, which I think won a Pulitzer, you know, she's not writing that kind of thing, but she has written so much music that has influenced so many people, and has really had a profound and lasting influence on choral repertoire. She should be considered for that kind of thing.

KB
Absolutely. So I wanted to ask you, are there any institutions or organisations that you feel have supported you in your development as a composer and in your professional career?

DF
Do you have a specific type of organisation in mind?

KB
I don't. I'm leaving it purposefully open-ended.

DF

So you're just asking, like, who has been really supportive and helped me get where I am further?

KB

I'm not necessarily talking about individuals. I'm talking more so about sort of like structural, you know, support systems and organisations and networks and such.

DF

Yeah, that's great. ACDA—in no particular order. ACDA, because of that very—I won the Raymond Brock student prize in 2004 or 2005, somewhere in there. And that helped me find some visibility, and that's part of why I work for them now. I volunteered for the last four years, giving back something and trying to perpetuate that for others, since I've been given so much from that. Southern ACDA, at the regional level. Southern has been so supportive of my work. When I go to Southern ACDA, it's just like a meeting of all these old friends and so many people, 'Oh, we did this and that and the other and…' it's just a non-stop stream of people who are so supportive and encouraging and as a regional organisation, they have, they performed my *Jubilate Deo* two Southerns ago, I think. I mean, they programmed a major work of a living composer at that, which is no small thing. To say we believe in that enough—and also, for it to be my home region. A lot of times, regions will try to pull in somebody exotic, you know, from far, far away, like, 'Oh, look how cool we are. We got them to come to us'. In this case, they believed in, like, one of their own's work enough to say, 'we want to hold this up. This is our guy, one of our guys.' So that was a really big honour. I was super thankful for that.

ASCAP has been very, very helpful to me in terms of financial support with standard awards for many years and the performance royalties that they pull in. I could get into too many details about specific ways that they have really supported my work, looked for ways to raise the amount of revenue that they can send my way, even during the pandemic they started distributing—when choirs stopped singing ASCAP made distributions of performance royalties based on what had happened the previous year when there was no COVID. Instead of saying, 'oh, well, this is all that happened, so here's your tiny check,' they're like, 'well, this is what we did last year, and this is probably similar to what would have happened to you this year if there weren't COVID, so we're just going to send you the same amount.' They could have just ordered all that money that they took in, and they're like, 'No, our job is to distribute

this, so here you go, everybody! You know, you probably need this now more than ever.' Occasionally people crab about ASCAP and say that they're, you know—they say negative things, and I won't have it. ASCAP has supported me so strongly, I will always be appreciative and thankful to them.

Beckenhorst Press, where I work now. They were the first publisher that accepted a piece of mine and have really helped me get out there and get visible. Hinshaw Music, too, was the first concert music publisher that I worked with. They published my *Requiem* and my *Jubilate Deo*, and a bunch of other smaller pieces—*Goodnight, Dear Heart*, *Music of Living*. I won't start naming other pieces, but they were the first concert music publisher that said, 'yeah, we'd like to do something here.' Their ownership has changed, and I don't really publish with them any new pieces with them anymore. I self-publish instead. But especially the previous generation of Hinshaw, people that I worked with for probably fifteen years really helped me get on the map as well.

Lastly, Alice Parker's organisation, Melodious Accord, her work is just legendary, and was so formative. She hasn't come up in this conversation and should have somewhere, because of the way that she got me thinking about melody and the human voice, and what it is to be human and sing about our experience, and how to write lines that just really work well in the voice. She's the one that taught me to ask my melody what note should come next. *laughs* I love that idea of, instead of me pushing it somewhere, ask your melody where it wants to go. That was a beautiful concept that is a key part of how I write any melody to this day. I could probably think of five more if I tried, but that's a decent list.

KB

No, that's really brilliant. That's really great. And that is, I think, the last question.

Appendix G: Email Correspondence with Dan Forrest

Kevin Boushel <[redacted]> 6 Samhain 2024 ag 12:05

Chuig: Dan Forrest <[redacted]>

Dan, a chara,

I hope this email finds you in good form and that preparations for the festive season are going well. I have been going back over our Zoom interview and I just wanted to ask a follow-up question to something that cropped up in the interview. You spoke about the influence of attending your first choral festival in tenth grade and said: 'that was where I first really got bit by the choir bug. I thought... I want to be in the room where this is happening.' I just wanted to ask you, what was it about choral singing and choral music that grabbed you so much in that moment? And what is it about choral music that has maintained your passion for the genre throughout your life and career?

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Kevin

Dan Forrest <[redacted]> 6 Samhain 2024 ag 13:27

Chuig: Kevin Boushel <[redacted]>

It's the expressive capability of the voice- its musical capabilities (every other instrument is trying to "sing" the way the voice does), and also the impact of the timbre of hearing humans produce their own sound, where human bodies themselves are the instrument, not just some piece of wood and metal that one holds in one's hand or sits down at. My spine tingled far more at hearing truly expressive singing than it ever had at hearing piano-playing. :)

Appendix H: Marques L.A. Garrett Interview Transcript

22 September 2023, Virtual Zoom Call

Kevin Boushel
What would you say some of your musical influences have been throughout your life?

Marques L.A. Garrett
Throughout my life, it started off singing in choirs at contemporary Christian predominantly black churches. They were non-denominational, but we primarily sang gospel and contemporary Christian music. That's where I would say I got the most experience, even though it wasn't more singing than I did in school, but my school experience was—it paled in comparison. However, my junior year of high school, I do believe, that was the year we learned the Christmas portion of Handel's Messiah. So that kind of gave me a little taste of classical music, and what some would say, 'serious classical music. I don't really remember any of the other pieces that I did in high school, from the public high school choir. And then I went to Hampton University for undergrad, and it was really my choir director, Royzell Dillard. He was a huge influence on not only the music that I started choosing once I had my own choirs, and even some still, but also the music that I have been researching and how I interpret music. I got a lot of my foundation from him. Carl Harris was my advanced conducting teacher, and he taught me—he was my last piano teacher at Hampton, and graciously, even though I only had to have four semesters of piano, he gave me—for free—two more years of piano lessons, because he said that he knew I would need to be playing piano for my career, he knew that I was going to be conducting before I did, and so he just gave that to me, and I'm very grateful to him. And then, honestly, the composers that I sang their music, they had an influence on the type of music that that I wrote. So I would say that, I mean, the early experience, like through undergrad, it would be, yeah, it would be that church and my teachers and undergrad.

KB
Thank you. It's always interesting to me as well, that the mind first jumps to singing and practical experience as well as opposed to just listing composers in the sort of the abstract, but the practical singing experience. I'd love to know what composers that you have had experience singing, conducting and researching and studying that had a profound impact on you.

MG

Roman Carter would be one of the first because when I was a freshman—it was my first year. I think that's what y'all say? Yeah! I'm trying to get that language right. So he was my choir director's choir director in undergrad, and he went to Hampton and we sang his *Give me Jesus*. And I remembered Mr. Dillard saying, 'Well, Roland wrote this piece when he was a senior at Hampton,' so I said, 'I will have a piece done by these choirs before I graduate.' And my sophomore year, all the choirs did one of my pieces for an opening convocation, so that—not necessarily how I wrote, that wasn't the influence, it was just the inspiration. But later on, Roland Carter's music did have an influence on me. We did sing a lot of Moses Hogan. Undine Smith Moore was another huge influence. And the fourth who has probably lasted the most, and not just in composition, but really in other ways, is R. Nathaniel Dett. So I eventually did my dissertation on his short choral works, and that has helped me to be able to do a few things. I actually have a trip next week; I leave on Wednesday to give a little talk about him and his music.

KB

I remember you talking so passionately about him at the ACDA at your talk as well. Has your experience as a singer influenced the way that you compose? And specifically, physically, as a singer?

MG

Yes. Actually, yesterday, I was chatting with a colleague who's a composer here, and she asked me if I sing all of the parts to my music. And I said, not all of them, because sometimes I try to just see if it's in my head, or just what I know about theory, if it will sound good, I just try stuff, and sometimes it works. But there are, I mean, more times than not where, because I enjoy to sing, that it helps. Especially with the solo music that I've written. I haven't written any solo music in a long time, but any of those solo art songs that I wrote, I sang them all. I mean, literally saying every pitch of it, and that's how I made that all happen. And with the choral music, yes, for sure, it has influenced my composition. But also, I don't know if this is one of your questions, but definitely for conducting. I mean, I think about all of the—because I sing with a few choirs, whether it's on a regular basis, back when I lived in Nebraska, it was a fairly regular basis at a church. And then there are a couple choirs that are more project-based that I sing with. And now that I'm in Texas, I'll be subbing for a few but I use that to inform how I'm going to teach my ensembles. And because I'm regularly singing, I'm able to think

about the things that I do and how the vowels fit in my mouth, and what I'm doing with my tongue to create consonants and those kinds of things. I then talk about that with the ensemble.

KB

What was your first experience composing, and what was your first time having your compositions performed?

MG

Wow, so… I was not officially a composer in, like, middle school or high school, but I was writing music. I just didn't consider myself a composer yet. When I was a freshman, I was really trying to model my music after other composers. So I remember two, at least two pieces that I had written shortly after I learned Rosephanye Powell's *Non nobis Domine*, which has this layering technique. And I said, 'Oh, I can come up with the bass part and then come up with a centre part and then add Alto and then soprano.' And so I have a few pieces in that style. And let's see there. Oh, but I fell in love with theory when I was an undergrad. I still remember being in high school. And my high school was actually in the same city as Hampton University, but I didn't really know anything about Hampton, because I was always at church, that's all we did, it was church and home and school, that was it. But someone who was a year ahead of me went to Hampton University for undergrad. He was coming back to work with the Gospel Choir, which was an after school choir, and I told him, I'm planning to go to Hampton for music. And he said, 'Okay, good. How are you with music theory?' Now, I had never heard that term before, so I'm thinking it's like the scientific method or something like that. Because I love science, I love math. And I was like, 'Oh, good, but then I can figure that stuff out easily.' *laughs* But I think I planted a seed in myself, because when I got to Hampton, even though I only knew bass clef, treble clef—couldn't tell you really what they meant, but I knew what they looked like. I knew note names. I knew eighth notes through whole notes and the rests, and I knew what a sharp and flat looked like, but that was pretty much it. I didn't know tonic dominant. I didn't know *doh*. I didn't know *solfège*, like so much that I didn't know. But I knew enough to be able to still be in the first semester theory class. And then it all just clicked. And after my freshman year I started… I think I still have—oh, I have it right here *holds up copy of Kostka, Stefan, Dorothy Payne, and Byron Almén, *Tonal Harmony with an Introduction to Post-Tonal Harmony* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1984)*. I will always keep this tonal harmony book, because this book was what we used. And, I want to say, it was with the diatonic triads and, yeah, some of these suspensions. And over the course of the

summer prior to my sophomore year, I taught myself four or five chapters out of that. I taught myself common chord, common tone modulations, augmented six chords, like all that kind of stuff. It just made sense to me. So I started writing pieces that use that. And actually that first piece that was performed at Hampton actually had a lot of that stuff that I had taught myself. I just put it in there, and it mostly worked. I mean, mode mixture, all that kind of stuff, I taught myself and then wrote a song based on that. It was an arrangement of a spiritual *Little David Play on your Harp*, and it was great. So really, that piece was all about theory and just the fun that I had with that.

KB
Would you consider yourself to have a harmonic language, and how would you describe your harmonic language?

MG
I kind of have one. In the last four—let's see, this is 2023, so in the last four years, I've really, honestly, I've struggled—and I've not had a problem telling people this—I've struggled with figuring out who am I as a composer, because at first I was just writing music because I wanted to. Now I'm writing on commission which has a different set of pressure to it. Because I'm not a full-time composer trying to make a living off of this, there's a little less pressure, but I still feel that people have asked me to write music because they like something else and I don't want to let them down. I did have a friend who gave me some wonderful advice. He was like, 'Marcus, you don't have to then try to do other things.' I was trying to make my music sound different. Because I was like, 'Well, my music doesn't sound like Tõnu Kõrvits, or Jake Runestad, or all these other composers that I've enjoyed their music. But he's like, 'Yeah, but they're asking you to write music because they liked a piece or two that they already heard, which was you. So just stay with that.' And so I'm like, 'You know what? It's okay for me to just go from an F major chord to B flat major. It doesn't matter that a lot of composers do that. If that's what works for me, that's what works for me, and I'm going to keep going with that.' So when I sit down, I still struggle sometimes with it, because that imposter syndrome is very real. And I'm just like, 'is this going to be a thing that people will like?' And it is one of those things where, I mean composing is one of probably the most solitary musical professions when it comes to performance, I should say performance wise. Theory, history, those kinds of things, they're also solitary, sitting there writing a lot and analysing. But as far as performing, it's isolating, and sometimes it's depressing. I'm just sitting at a piano, or sometimes I'm at a

computer writing. It's just me. I can't have anybody else around because I'll be distracted. So yeah, did that answer your question.

KB

It did definitely. I would like to ask then another question as well. So that was more so sort of your approach towards harmonies, and I wonder, do you have an approach then towards texture, or are there different sort of elements of texture that you like to play with in your compositions?

MG

I have only recently scratched the surface of texture. For the longest time, because I loved theory, and I would analyse pieces like, I mean, the harmonic progressions, the four, six and the third inversions, like, all the stuff I loved, loved doing. And I think I still have some scores in my library where—there's a Moses Hogan, his *Abide With Me*. I was like, 'what did he do?' And I'm literally analysing every chord, suspensions and all that kind of stuff. Loved it. Before I learned theory, when I was in high school, I would write a line and then write another line. Now they did not go together at all, but they were line. And then I learned theory, so then I'm now doing all of these columns, and it took a long time for me to get out of that column and that column mindset, and it wasn't really until I wrote *My Heart Be Brave* in early, or late 2018, I think, is when I finished that piece, that I finally started doing more, and I had some other things. Everything wasn't homophonic, because I had a lot of homophonic music, aside from, like the layering things, like those things, but it was still just, it's always the same thing. So I've been exploring a little bit more of that, but I'm never really thinking of the colours that a choir could do. It's really all about what does this line do for me as a singer and composer, but really I'm singing it first, so what does that do for me? And harmonically, how was this going to move from here to there? And then just filling in the gaps. It's kind of like with Bach, when you sing any of his chorales, I'd say half of his chorales, it was like, okay, I got the soprano, and because he has great footwork bass part is then done. Alto was the next one, and the tenor just fills in the gaps. And so all the tenor parts are leaping. My choir reads a Bach chorale every day, the number of times that they go *sings* *ti-mi* like at the end, it's because he's like, 'Oh crap, I have to get from this to the next,' just filling in the gap.

KB

And that's an interesting sort of issue for me as well, is that idea of, I guess, cognition and music cognition, and how do we listen to the music? And how are you, as a composer, visualising how the music will sound? And are you visualising the music vertically or horizontally? Are you thinking in terms of inner processes, or are you thinking of the combined effect of the sonorities from second to second as they happen?

MG

The next song that I'm writing is a commission, and I have heard that choir a few times, and I actually went to a performance in Nebraska specifically so I could hear them and write a piece very much for them. And I know there are other composers who do that kind of stuff all the time, and I try not to do that because I then fear that I'm going to mimic pieces that they've done, and I want to do the sound. So this is going to be very different for me, but I think I have some really good ideas, and I've got to write this piece very quickly, but that one is definitely going to be mostly about sound and texture. So fingers crossed that that one works.

KB

How do you conceptualise structure in a piece of music when you sit down to write it?

MG

If it's an original piece, and that's mostly what I've been asked to do recently—just, so you know, I started off pretty much with spiritual arrangements. That was the bulk of my output. There were a few original pieces here and there, but the bulk were spiritual arrangements, a couple hymn arrangements, but a lot of spirituals. So that kind of already had its own structure. It was either just one melody, like, *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* That's it. Other pieces were like chorus or refrain and verses, and that has its own idea. With the original pieces for me, usually—not usually—it's always based on the text. With *My Heart Be Brave*, I read through the text, and I figured out that there were, for me, three sections based on emotions or ideas that Johnson was trying to get out. Other pieces like *Sing Out My Soul*, that one was for a middle school honour choir, so I wanted it to not be too difficult, so a good ABA [structure], but with a little vamp at the end based off of the A, was what I did for that one. When I have a poem or some existing text, it's based on the structure of that text, and if there is something in the text, so Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, 'Invitation to Love,' he already says 'Come to me.' Like, 'I need you to be here with me.' I didn't have to repeat any of the text, but

he kind of already did that based on how he wrote it. So the text and the form of the text really drives a lot of what I do. A piece that I did for Seattle Pro Musica was four stanzas, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. And a friend of mine was like, 'Marcus, you don't have—nothing ever comes back. You don't have any recurring themes from the beginning,' I was like, 'because each stanza was completely different.' There was nothing textually that gave me the idea that this is all—I mean, yes, it was connected, but nothing was really referring back to—at least the way I read the poem. Now, others can see it differently. And so that's why I really wrote it, almost like four separate songs happening back to back. That kind of sums up how I write.

KB
Do you feel that there is a difference in your approach to composing accompanied versus unaccompanied choral music?

MG
Oh, so I haven't done a ton of accompanied but I used to write all of the accompanied music, voices and accompaniment together for the most part. I did have a commission last year where I wrote all of the vocal parts, almost all the vocal parts first. There were—I mean, there's never a time when it's like only voices. I will always hear some piano lick that needs to happen, and so I'll sketch that. But with that piece, *Your Hand in Mine*, I wrote out all of the voices, the few accompanimental figures that I had worked out, I put that into Finale, and then I actually used like blank rests, and then notated the accompaniment in that score. And so this most recent piece that I just finished, the choral organ score on Monday, I did the same thing. I had some sketches of the organ part, but the voices were done. The issue came up, though, for me was as I was writing, because I was writing voices only, after I finished, I was like, 'This sounds like an unaccompanied piece,' but they had to have organ *laughs* so then I was like, 'oh, yikes. What am I going to do now? How am I going to make this work?' But I felt like it all worked out now, just today and tomorrow. I'll add the brass parts in for that. So let's see, the next two pieces are unaccompanied, praise Jehovah, so I don't have to worry about that. It'll just all be what I hear, and then I'm done. And that's fun for me, because now—I mean, if I do the vocals only, I feel accomplished, but then it's like, oh no, you've got another whole section, a whole thing you have to do. There's a task that's not completed, versus unaccompanied. Once it's done, it's done.

KB

Do you have much experience or training in piano or organ or keyboard?

MG

I had piano lessons for four years in undergrad. I had a year in like, the third grade, I think of piano, and that was it. Nothing with organ. That scared the crap out of me, but I've sung in enough churches that I either said to a couple of my organ friends, I was like, 'Y'all, I don't know how I feel about writing for organ.' One said, 'you know enough organists so you'll be fine.' The other was like, 'you've sung enough stuff with organ.' And I did go, thankfully, in forScore on my iPad, I have tagged most pieces with instrumentation. So then I just went to 'organ,' and I looked, I was like, 'Okay, this is a fast piece, so I don't need, like, John Ireland's *Greater love hath no man*, that's not matching what I'm doing right now.' So I looked at John Rutter's *Gloria* and the William Mathias *Let all the People Praise Thee, O God*, those were two of the things that I was like, 'okay, yeah, this has the little, basically, the bop, the rhythm that I'm going for, and the feel.' So I use those as inspiration, because Samuel Coleridge Taylor, his organ stuff, all of that stuff was just too… I'm going to say Ecclesiastical, Anglican, where it just didn't have the jubilance that I was looking for. So I tell everybody, I'm not a pianist. I'm not a keyboardist at all. I can fuddle my way through some stuff at the piano. There was a time when I was very regularly playing through stuff, and when I had a two or three pieces that I had to write with piano, I would always play through two or three songs, sometimes the same pieces, but I would play through those things so I could just see how things felt under my fingers, even if ''m not using the right fingerings, but trying to do that so that it would work. And then I share it, typically, with somebody to say, does this work for you? But if I'm past the deadline, I don't have time for them to then look at it. We go with it, and we'll see what happens.

KB

And do you compose at the piano?

MG

Yes and no. It depends on time and availability. I mean, I had a keyboard at my apartment, but I don't really like writing on that. I always have a piano in my university office, but there have been times that I have written on a plane and not with one of those—I have a mini keyboard that I can travel with, but I don't—I haven't used it yet. So it's, yeah, it's based on where I'm

going. I do love technology. So there have been plenty of times where I pull up voice memos, and I'll sing stuff, and I would say almost all the times, I then end up using that stuff. But there are sometimes I'm like 'that does not sound good anymore.' It sounded great when I sang it, but it doesn't sound good anymore. So I do use technology. So forScore, they have manuscript paper in there. So I have written so many things, so many, like almost every piece that I have done in the last four years has been—maybe even five—has been on my iPad.

KB

My next question is to do with organisations, institutions, infrastructure. Are there any international, national, regional or local organisations that you really feel have helped to support and facilitate the development of your career?

MG

When you say, my career is that just as a composer, or…

KB

Sorry, yes, as a composer.

MG

Okay. As a composer… no, not one organisation… although ACDA, while not directly, they have, through reading sessions on the state, regional and national levels, just because other people have liked certain pieces of mine, or publishers or just like 'this, must be in a reading session,' then those things have helped. I mean, this most recent ACDA national conference in Cincinnati, I was blessed, and it was almost unreal to think of when I saw not only did I have two premieres of commissions for that conference, which I don't think anybody else had, I also had one song that I think was performed by two choirs. Yeah, one song was performed by two choirs, and then I think another two songs that had been used in concerts, and then another song was in someone's session. And so I was definitely grateful for those opportunities. But it wasn't because ACDA specifically did anything. It was because the event was organised by them. So ACDA, if I had to say that there was an organisation, that would be the one.

KB

Yeah, brilliant. I was my follow up then was going to be to do with the ACDA and your experience throughout the years as a composer, conductor and singer, of your interaction, of your interactions with the ACDA. If you could let me know about that?

MG

Yes, I recently completed a survey. They reached out to, I think, collegiate members, whether students or faculty, and they asked 'why did you join ACDA?' And I'd say, networking and the opportunity to learn, and so many times I've gone to the conferences—I mean, that so many of the things that I'm doing now are because when I was working on my doctorate, I did a session at Eastern Region ACDA, met a conductor [Anthony Trecek-King] there who asked me to write a piece for a guest conducting gig that he had, and that piece has served me very well. Got me in with Oxford University Press. Had he not asked me to write that song—and honestly—I did it for free, because he was just like, 'look, I think it'd be a good opportunity for you.' And so I wrote it. It was for his performance with Seraphic Fire. He liked the piece. He posted a recording or two of it, and I didn't really say much about the song, because I didn't like it at first. I wrote it, I didn't like it for like, a year and a half, and then people started doing it. Robyn Elton with Oxford [University Press] reached out to me and said, 'Hey, I want to have a chat with you.' She wasn't able to get to my virtual national ACDA conference session in 2021, but we ended up having a meeting. She was like, 'I would like to publish this piece. We have *Carols for Choirs*, the next one is coming out. It's volume six.' And I said no to her twice, but eventually I said yes, and got a piece in there. I have a piece in their solo secular collection, and that meeting is the reason that my anthology came out [The Oxford Book of Choral Music by Black Composers]. Because I said, 'while I have you, does this sound like something y'all would be interested in, since y'all have done these other anthologies,' and it's honestly because of Anthony Trecek-King asking me to do that piece. But I can backtrack all of the other connections that I had, but ACDA Eastern Region conference was the meeting place for that. But the other piece, *Sing out my Soul*, I got to meet the conductor of the commission for eastern region, ACDA, by going to that conference. She came to that exact same session. So I met two people who—I mean, she didn't have anything to do with the commission, but she was the conductor for it. So yeah, ACDA has done me very well.

KB

Have you observed any trends, broader trends, in choral music in the United States on a national level or regionally? Have you noticed any particular emerging trends in choral composition or choral performance?

MG

I'll say that we see most of the performances on social media from professional choirs, big community courses and colleges and universities. Why? Because they have the resources to put that kind of stuff out. They can pay for licensing and also the quality. Like UNT—we have some of the best videos of performances of anything. Even if the stuff sounded bad, it just looked good. I mean, none of it sounds bad, but it all looks amazing, which helps with the promotion of that kind of stuff. So when people see what we do, it informs. Many institutions of higher education in the US perform a good amount, I'm not going to say it's an overwhelming majority, but a good amount of the canon, for many reasons. But our high schools, they don't do as much of it because, for practical reasons, that music wasn't written for those voices. Even more so our middle schools. They're not going to be doing a lot of Haydn's music as he wrote it. Now there are plenty of arrangements of Haydn and Mozart and Bach and Mendelssohn even, whether it's the choruses from their oratorios, or it could be solo duets that have been arranged for choirs. But so many of—I'm trying to figure out how to—so many things have just hit my brain. A lot of the composers who want a name in classical music or in the choral world, they get a name because of the big organisations, and so they're writing music that fits them. But so many of the composers who make a ton of money are writing for the middle schools and the high schools. So it's not the music that necessarily the Academy, which I'm a part of, is really touting, but it is one of the conversations that I have no problem being public about. When I was in Nebraska, I would talk to my composition colleague and say, 'hey, you know, it'd be nice if y'all talked about how to write for middle school and high school choirs,' you know? Don't complain about that music sounding like garbage if you won't teach people how to write music for that level. If you only teach how to write for the big, you can't get upset that nothing is being performed well for these groups.

So there probably are some places where that kind of stuff is being done. I'm not in the composition, the professional composition world and in the academy for that to know. So I'm not trying to say—this is on record, and people probably can hear me, because this [office] is not sound proof. They can hear me saying this kind of stuff. I'm not trying to say that it doesn't happen. I just haven't had the conversations with people. But I'm very open to talking about

how to make that kind of stuff work. So the trends that are happening, yeah, I mean, when it comes to middle school and high school, there is a lot of music, as my colleague would say, is of the times. I mean, we hear in so much choral music, *sings* *fa-mi-doh*, you hear a lot of that in a lot of pieces. I've got it in at least three of mine, and I don't—I'm not ashamed of it. It lets you know that this music was written in the first part of the twenty-first century. And if somebody chooses to you know, talk about—in the twenty-second century they're going to talk about trends from the twenty-first century. They'll do *sings* *fa-mi-doh*, and they may come up on one of my pieces and say, 'Well, you know, this *Marquise* Garrett,'—because they're not going to pronounce my name—they're going to say 'this *Marquise* Garrett. He wrote a piece that does just like this other composer, and this other composer, and this other composer,' all that kind of stuff. And then we do get the more advanced, academic music when we have the groups who can perform that type of stuff. Long answer.

KB

Do you align yourself with any broader cultural or artistic movements?

MG

Yes. Because I went to a historically black college for undergrad, that was where I learned about black composers. And in the last four years, in the US we have—there's been an almost a tsunami when it comes to diversity initiatives in representation of composers. So we try to limit—to the detriment at some people say, to the detriment of a particular group—we try to limit how many white male composers are represented, just because that has been the trend for so long. And so you got a lot of people who will do more music by women and composers of colour, and some, they'll go the LGBTQ route as well. And people choose whatever they want to do. And I'm okay with that. Because of my love and passion for the choral music of black composers, I do have a little bit more of that than others. I had to tell my students in Nebraska—I haven't told my students here yet that it'll happen eventually—I told my students in Nebraska, you will see other conductors, other programs, they'll have, what some will say, a more eclectic mix, a more diverse representation of composers. I said, what you have to know about me is because you are at a large institution, a Research Institution where the faculty are expected to do certain things, I choose to talk about and look at the choral music of black composers. If I go off and talk about that with conferences, if I do webinars or chats with other institutions about that, they need to see that I'm also doing it. So this concert that my University Singers is doing, it has probably the most spirituals that I've ever done with a product with a non-

predominantly black choir. I've got three spirituals. But then my piece that I'm doing is actually based on the spiritual. So four of our eight pieces have some influence of the spiritual on them. Four of the eight pieces are by black composer. And next semester, I think I've got, like three. And so some might say it's not balanced to represent, and I'm just like, 'Y'all, you just have to understand this is who I am, and I'm not going to apologise for it.' But I also want to make sure that the music that I perform, like I say, represents my research. It also represents or creates archival footage for other people. And the number of students and other conductors who are like, 'Hey, I heard you do this piece, so now I'm doing it.' I'm like, 'Yay, I have done my job so that you know that this great music exists.' Did that answer the question? I don't know if I even remember the question, oh, did I follow trends? Yeah, okay, so I try to diversify my music as much as possible. So yes, I go with many US trends *laughs*.

Appendix I: Susan LaBarr Interview Transcript

13 May 2024, Virtual Zoom Call

Kevin Boushel
So the first question I have is just a general question about your musical upbringing. If you could tell me a little bit about sort of music, growing up and then through your education, leading towards your professional career.

Susan LaBarr
Yes, so when I was young, my parents put me into a church choir, probably when I was in second grade, so maybe I was seven or eight years old. And my mother was a musician, is a musician still, she played flute and guitar and has a good singing voice. My father did not grow up doing music, but he—being at church, singing hymns or whatever, with him, I could hear. He had a good voice. So they put me into music. I guess I had an interest in it. I don't really remember, but they quickly put me into piano lessons too, because I was enjoying being in a choir. And so I've had piano lessons from third grade or about eight, nine years old. I took them up through my graduate degree in college, and that was really my main instrument. And then when I was in middle school and high school here in the US, I was in choirs and did musical theatre things around town, and those were kind of my main musical ventures at that age. Then I knew I wanted to go to school for music, for college, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do, though, because I wasn't really interested in performing, like being a performer, as a profession anyway. I didn't really want to be a teacher. So I just went to school, started in a piano performance degree, just to get going, and then talked with my piano professor about the fact that I didn't want to accompany or teach or perform piano, so he suggested I get a really general music degree. And so I have a Bachelor of Arts, which is what we call it in music. And so it's just a very kind of rounded general degree that explores all different kinds of things in music, and included things like commercial music and composition and arranging, along with everything else.

Then I graduated—all through that time, I took piano lessons and also sang in the choir at the university—and then graduated. Still didn't know what I wanted to do, so I went straight on into my master's degree. I was really interested in music theory, and really loved my music theory classes in college, so I decided to do my master's degree in music theory. I was also interested in music history, but there wasn't a degree at my university in music history, and I

didn't want to move because I had met my now husband and just wasn't the right time to move away. So, decided on music theory. Really happy that's what I did, because I found it to be just a wonderful time, and it was a new degree at the university, so I was one of the first people to do it, so it was still being tested out, and it was really fun to be part of that first class that got to help shape what the degree is, and that included some more composition and arranging and singing in choir. And took carillon lessons those years, because we had a new carillon at our university and a professor, and I thought, When will I get to take carillon lessons in my life? So, did that as well, just kind of exploring what there is out there. And then during all that time, I was in groups, like *a cappella* groups, I was in a band that played around town, and also in my piano lessons. In all of those things I was doing some arranging and composing just because they were requirements of the situation or of the teacher. And I look back now and I see, oh, I was kind of doing composition for a really long time in my life, and didn't really think much of it at the time.

So then I graduated from my master's degree, and then ended up move—we moved to Texas for my husband to start his graduate work, and he's a musician too, conductor, choral conductor. And so when we moved there, I had a job, found a job at a music publishing company that was located in Dallas, Texas, and that job was really just an office manager, administrative type of job, but in my mind, I was like 'music publishing! That's something I didn't think about, or no one really told me about, or I didn't know it was an option, and I would at least be working with musicians and music around me,' and all of that. So started working at that company, which is called Choristers Guild, and it's still around today. It's largely a publisher for children's choirs and youth choirs and hand bell choirs in churches, and has expanded to be all church music in the Protestant American tradition. And then after working there for about three years, the opportunity came up to work at Walton as the choral editor. Oh, I did work as the choral editor for Choristers Guild. So I was already working there when that job came open. So I transitioned into that job, then had the opportunity arise to work in that same type of position at Walton. So then I've been here for ten years, and then all the while composing and arranging and publishing my own music too.

KB

Brilliant, excellent. And can I just ask? I haven't heard this before. You said you took carillon lessons? What's that?

SL

Yes, carillon, so it's a bell tower. So they're like a bell tower. A lot of times they're in churches or city buildings across the world, probably more common in Europe, really, you probably have some in Dublin. I would think, I don't know.

KB

How do you spell it?

SL

C, A R, I, L, L O, N. So the bells are at the top of a tower, and they're attached by wires down to a console that kind of looks like an organ. It's set up like a piano or organ, but you play it by—you kind of hold your hand and fists, and you hit the pegs down in this certain way so that it doesn't create bounce on the bells. So that sounds clear and… super interesting. You have to climb all the way up to the console, many stories up to the console, and then the bells are even above it, and you have to open the window so you can hear the bells clearly.

KB

It's fascinating. I just googled it there. There seems to be one that I was able to find popped up in the first search terms. I'm sure there'll be plenty more. Fascinating. So you've been singing in choirs for most of your life. How does your experience as a singer influence your approach to composing.

SL

I think it's the number one reason why I'm able to compose music that people enjoy singing; because I do understand the voice, because I do it myself. So any piece that I write, I'm constantly thinking about the voice-leading, and will this entrance be doable, or easy to find, or depending on the age of the choir I'm writing for, especially. If it's for a younger choir, what can I do to make their entrance note easier to find, so that it's just successful from the get-go? And what can I do with these intervals or the part-writing, to give the singer something interesting to do, but also to make it really singable and—really to be able to start making music quickly. I write, as you know, really tonal music. So there's definitely a place and time for, like, crazy, wacky stuff. But for what I do, it's all about the ease of finding the thing that makes sense and having success quickly for the singer. So I think it's huge. I think I also—with text setting, text to music, or text to the voice, that's huge, too. Just thinking about what is a natural

way to set this so that it really makes like so that it's understandable by the singer or an audience, so making sure that the rhythms of the text in the vocal lines are set in a really natural way, in a way that you might speak them. And sometimes, if it's not set that way, that's a place where choirs can tend to stumble over. If you look in rehearsals, if you look back at what the text is doing, sometimes it's that it's not quite the syllables aren't quite the right, natural way to say or sing them. It influences probably everything off the bat first, and then everything comes after that.

KB
Brilliant. And then can I ask, how does your—or does your experience as a pianist influence your writing as well?

SL
I think it does, mostly in, well, I guess I would say in two ways. One is that I think, because I took piano from such a young age, and my teachers were always incorporating music theory and modes and harmonic progression and naming that to me—like I might be playing something, and they have me sort of really investigate what the harm harmonic movement was, and really, you know, go in and put I-IV-V-I, or whatever. So I've been hearing tonic, dominant, sub dominant, I-IV-V-I, you know, all those things and all the mode names since I was in third grade, so I think that just makes—I understand the natural harmonic progressions that are possible. And almost—someone just asked me the other day, 'when you're writing a song, is it kind of just like English, like where you just you don't even have to think twice about it.' And I was like, 'it kind of is.' I'm not thinking, 'Okay, I'll do this, and then this, and then this.' I'm just kind of like doing the thing that makes sense and sounds good. So that's one way. And then I'm always really concerned with my piano accompaniments that I write. Again, there's a place in time for crazy, wacky piano accompaniments. That's just not the type of music I write. In the type I write, I always want the piano to simultaneously have its own voice and purpose, but also be supportive of the what the vocals are doing as needed. So I think having all that experience playing piano and really just experiencing lots of other composers and how they wrote for piano helps me to know kind of just what is possible, I guess. And then I also don't want my piano accompaniments to ever sound mundane or always the same. As an editor, I see a lot of music, and a lot of the piano accompaniments I see might have lots of chordal things happening in the right hand with lots of arpeggios in the left hand. And I'm like, I just—I don't want that all the time. I might incorporate that for part of the song, but then I

want to always make sure that there's variety in the accompaniment and that it's not too much and not too little. And so yeah, I think singing lots of choir music has helped me be a better choir composer, and then playing lots of piano music does the same thing for the accompaniments that I write. If I write an accompaniment for a piece.

KB

You've mentioned now a couple of times about sort of the 'type of music that you write.' Can you give me a little bit of information about how you sort of found your compositional language and how you settled on us, on a sort of a and do you feel that you have settled on a type, as you say, a language that you return to?

SL

It's very melody driven. So a lot of times when I'll write a new piece, I'll write the entire song as if it's a solo, and get the whole structure and form of the melody first and foremost, and then I'll go back in and figure out, okay, who's going to sing that when? When's it going to be in unison? When's it going to be in four parts, or whatever it might be. So super melody driven, definitely very lyrical and, like I said, tonal, very text driven. So the text is of utmost importance for me. I'm not really interested in writing a 'Kyrie' because that's been done so many times. It's very great to have all the Kyries that we have out there from all the different works and master composers and all of these things. But to me, I want to make sure the text is always super meaningful for today and for the singer of today, and hopefully they're also texts that will last throughout time, because they're meaningful and important enough messages that they'll last. And I would say in my early compositions, I was writing in a very homophonic way, almost more like if you're playing chords on a piano with lots of *divisi* and not a real concern for each individual vocal line and giving them something linear to do. But as I've studied more after college and been influenced by other composers and teachers, I've definitely been writing more using counterpoint. So where I am concerned with—I'm an alto, so I want the Alto part to be interesting, and so should the tenor and the bass part, not just the soprano part. So making sure that there's a linear sense, and also texture variation by using counterpoint, but then sometimes using homophony when that's needed.

I use a lot of structure that's similar to pop music structure. So a lot of almost always depending on the piece, but a lot of times, especially my original pieces, it'll be very structured in a way that's like a verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge. I really think in those terms. And I

think that's because I grew up listening to lots of music like that, pop and rock and folk and bluegrass and all those things.

KB

Can I ask how you settled on your tonal language, on your harmonic language? Was there sort of a trial and error phase? Were you experimenting with other tonalities before settling on your approach to harmony? Or was it sort of a natural progression, if you could speak to that?

SL

Yeah, I was really influenced in some of my very first compositions, or really arrangements, is probably what I started with in college, influenced by Craig Hella Johnson, if you know that name. He conducts Conspirare, but he's an arranger in his own right. Our choir had done a few of his pieces, and I was just so inspired by the soundscapes that he created by using interesting vocal textures and repeating words sometimes in a way that like evoked a feeling, or even painted a picture in a way, instead of just the text straight through. So a lot of my earlier pieces, I was experimenting with stuff like that. I would love to do that more, but I just kind of… As you, I'm sure, know, when we're young, we'll just do it because we're not afraid to, and we just go for it. And then as you learn more, you're like, 'Oh no, I shouldn't have done that.' And then kind of become a little less, you know, willing to, just put the thing out there. So, yeah, maybe one these days. I'll get back to doing some more of that stuff. But I kind of moved into more melody-focused and counterpoint vocal writing because of studying with Alice Parker, which I did in 2013 and 2014, and learning her technique for how she writes music.

Then as I kind of incorporated that I kind of have, as we all do, like some imposter syndrome where I'm like, 'this isn't interesting enough. I need to add some more interesting sounds or chords into this piece.' So there was definitely a trial and error period where I would write a song, and I would have some moments where it was just kind of a chord out of left field that would come in, or some sort of melodic thing that was also out of left field. And I'm lucky because I have a conductor who lives in my house. So I almost—especially in those early days—I would show him, I would finish the piece, and I would send it to him, or show it to him, and he would come back and be like, 'what's this chord? This doesn't really match everything else you've done. It just all of a sudden comes out of nowhere.' And I almost always took them out eventually, because I was like, 'you're totally right. I was just feeling like what I was doing wasn't enough, or wasn't scholarly enough,' or whatever it might be. But I've just accepted that there's a need, and there's a place for really melodic music, and that is what I do

well, so that's okay. I wish that I knew more about jazz and jazz construction, to be able to put some of that into my pieces. But maybe that's something that will come someday, or maybe that's just not meant to be me. So I think how I ended up with my real tonal language, is that influence from the types of music I listen to and my love for folk music of many countries, and that folk music is always tonal and always follows the normal, the 'normal' sort of harmonic ideas, and that's what really lasts. That's why folk music lasts, is because anyone can hear it or latch on to it or sing it or play it, and that's why those things exist for hundreds or thousands of years. And so that's a lot of rambling to get to that point.

KB
Are there any institutions or organisations that you feel have supported your development and your professional career as a composer throughout your career?

SL
So I would definitely say my university, but it's almost even just more particular individuals in the university. But I did go to a very, you know, public liberal arts school, so there's just a lot of room for creativity and trying new things. And my arranging and composition teacher—he actually just retired literally last week, his name is John Prescott, and he is—I actually have a Beatles shirt on today, and he is a Beatles scholar, obsessed scholar. And so he was really supportive of the fact that I wanted to write music that followed the structure of pop songs and music that was very melodic and tonal. And I think at some universities and some composition degrees that would not be the case. In fact, probably in many that wouldn't be the case where there would be a teacher there who would just kind of let me run with that. But he loved that kind of music too, so that was great. And then my choir director. My composition teacher said, 'You should give this piece to the choir director,' the choir that was in at the university, 'because I think he might like it. He might like to do it with the choir.' And so I did, and he liked it. He did it with the choir. We toured in Europe with the piece. And it was the piece that was my first piece published. So I think having—I would credit it to the university itself, which was Missouri State University, which is where my husband now teaches, which is just crazy to be back here. But I think that because it was just such a liberal arts open… you know, the sky was the limit, in a way, there weren't rigid rules for how this needed to go. So that was really huge.

Who else? Organisations? I mean, now I'm involved with more involved with things like the American Choral Directors Association, but then I wasn't really, but I would say that

I wish I would have been, because they're really supportive of composers, and like composition, and composers are a huge part of that organisation, and so I felt that support as I've been later in my career for sure. Yeah, that's probably, yeah, I wouldn't say, like, there are a lot of institutions or organisations that really were a part of all of that that I can think of otherwise.

KB
Could you tell me more about your relationship with the ACDA?

SL
Yes. Early on—so I'm trying to think when I would have first, I guess when I was in college, singing in choir, we performed at one of the national ACDA conferences that was in Los Angeles, and it would have been around 2005-ish or so. And that was my first time at a conference like that. And it really was very eye opening of how much there is going on, not only in the United States, but these choirs that came from other countries too. We had a concert, and there was a choir from another country, and I can't remember where, but I think it was a men's choir from maybe in Asia somewhere. And it was like, 'Wait, this whole thing is happening everywhere, and they're doing this really cool music that's so different from ours.' So that was huge, just like kind of feeling connected to the larger world, I guess, because as young people, we're in our own little bubble.

And then working with the publishing companies that I've been working with early on in my work with Choristers Guild, the ACDA has—well, they have an industry segment so that could include publishers and choir robe people who sell choir robes or acquire uniforms or tour companies, things like that, fundraising companies. So the head of the ACDA industry group, was a publisher at the time, the head of a publisher, and so he brought in all of the other publishers to meet and figure out, what can we do with ACDA, for them to support publishers and for us to support the conductors and the organisation as a whole, and really came up with some cool things that are still used today. And so that's been interesting to be, with my full time job as an editor, be a part of the organisation that way. And then I can't remember what year it was, but maybe about five years ago ACDA started some committees that were based around different important ideas and needs for the organisation, and one was composition and how to engage more composers, or how to partner with composers and ACDA and choirs, and just make more of a space for composers. Because it is the American Choral Directors Association, but composition is such a huge part of that. So I was on the composition and

initiatives committee for four years, I think, and was on the first board of that, and we started some good projects, and that's been interesting to advocate for composition and composers in that way,

KB
You spoke about the sort of professional relationship that you have as well with your husband as a conductor who can give you feedback on your compositions. And have you had sort of working relationships with other conductors and worked collaboratively with other conductors?

SL
Definitely, and that's just the biggest part of it, I think, is having conductors who want to perform your music. So one of the earliest supporters, I remember—I had gotten some commissions, but they were all from people I knew personally, which was also amazing. My high school choir director was one of the first people to—I think he was the first person to commission me to write original music. I had only really done arrangements before that, but then the first person I didn't know personally who commissioned me was Andy Crane, Andrew Crane. At the time he was at East Carolina University. He's now at Brigham Young University, which is one of the top choir programs in the world, probably. And he had seen one of my pieces somewhere, and did it with this choir, and then asked me to write a piece for his choir at ECU and he has been such a huge support throughout all of these years. And at Walton, we started a choral series under his name. So now he brings music to me to publish, and it's just been a great relationship. He's made recordings of my pieces and programs them all the time at honour choirs all around the world. He sang—his choir used one of my pieces at the Tolosa choral contest in Spain several years ago, and that was, I think, probably one of the first times that my music had been done outside of the United States, and was definitely a launching point for more people doing my music in other parts of the world. So that's been huge.

There are a couple of other directors who I've received several, multiple commissions from. One is John McDonald, who was a student of Andy Crane's, and he has been at a couple of different universities and has commissioned me three times now, I think. And then also Douglas Boyer, he's at Texas Lutheran University, and he's also commissioned me three times. So it's that support of people who like my music, and then also will support me financially through a commission, and then tell other people about the piece, or about commissioning me. It's that whole snowball effect of all of that. And honestly, my husband, I don't think that he's

commissioned me to write a piece, but that's okay, because that might be a little too much in the family, but it's mostly been these other people out in the world doing my pieces. Anton Armstrong at St Olaf [College, Minnesota], he, many years ago, just really became a fan of my setting of *Hold Fast to Dreams*, a Langston Hughes text. And he, to this day, performs it at almost every honour choir he does. And that sort of thing is just… Anton Armstrong being my champion is just mind-blowing. Those types of people who are out, you know, doing this and spreading the word, it's huge.

KB

I'm going to ask you a question, sort of about choral music in the United States in general, and that is, have you observed in the past, let's say, few decades, couple of decades, some trends in choral music in the United States? Particular trends in composition or in choral performances?

SL

Yes, definitely. I think one of the earliest, if we're going back, you know, 25 years or so, would be Eric Whitacre. He really, with some of his pieces like *Lux aurumque* and *Sleep*, which are published by Walton, who I now work for, so I get to care for those pieces and more of his, which is really cool. Those pieces were, I think, groundbreaking. I don't think anyone had done anything like that before with the clustery chords. I mean, maybe they did in some kinds of music, but not the way that Eric was doing it, and still does it. And so, people immediately were like, 'wow, this is beautiful. This is so different. This is so interesting.' And then many people have tried to do what he does, whether or not they mean to. But for a long time, especially early in my job as an editor, I would see a lot of music like that, where people were trying to do the clustery chords and create the soundworld like what Eric was doing. And sometimes it was successful and sometimes it wasn't. And usually when it was successful is when it was used really sparingly, because people who tried to do exactly what he was doing, they just couldn't do it like he did. He has some genius inside, that just was able to be the pioneer of that sound. I think he created, almost like a—where there was a lot of homophony. I saw that in your [DCU Research Ethics] letter, you know, a lot of the homophonic kind of thing, where everyone's in chords. That's what a lot of people have been doing. Some successfully, lots, not successfully. And so that was a big thing.

I think that there's a really big thing—I might jump around, just as stuff comes to me—but a really big thing lately, and I see this from being a publisher, is the types of texts that are

at least selling really well, and so that choirs are wanting more of are really meaningful texts that either touch on a really important social justice topic or social justice event, even like getting more specific into actual, true things that have happened, and telling the story of that, or it might be something that is hopeful or uplifting, or… you know, things about mental health and acceptance and inclusion. Those are really important, at least in the United States, I would say, in the United States, might be different elsewhere. So that's been really huge.

I think that there's some new styles arising that I'm seeing a lot that come through our submissions and that are doing well once they're published. And they're kind of like Broadway style, almost, like *Dear Evan Hansen*-ish and stuff like that, where it's like, really pop influenced, but really—also the melody and the text is so important and the story is so important. That's a really big one.

I think also in the United States, at least using music, exploring music from other countries and cultures, religions, all those things, has become very important. You can't really get away... well, you can. There's a lot of people doing, you know, they're more willing these days to sing music in the Basque language of Spain, or to sing in Korean, or to explore South African languages. There's a, I think, a connection people are wanting to have with the greater world. I think here, there's absolutely an importance of making sure that the programs that people are putting together are diverse, so that it's diverse backgrounds, races, genders, all of those things. That's really, really important. Musically, I'm trying to think what other trends there might be. No, I'll stop there, and then, if that sparks any more questions from you.

I do think we will look back on music history, and there's going to be—in the contemporary era, there's going to be, in choral music anyway, a Whitacre—Whitacre is going to be the point of where we changed from this to this. You know what I mean? When we look back a hundred years from now.

KB

I'm inclined to agree. Can I ask you about your own engagement with the music of Eric Whitacre? Did your choir sing that music at the time? I know you're saying you did the ACDA around those early 2000s, mid 2000s. Did you sing any music by Whitacre or by Morton Lauridsen or these other composers?

SL

We did sing music by Eric Whitacre. I don't think that I sang anything by Morton Lauridsen when I was in college. I don't remember singing anything by him, but I knew of his music, and

especially the ‘Sure on this shining night’ and various others, especially with piano. And so that is a really good name to bring up, that I think, when it comes to, maybe, a little more avant-garde—he’s not really avant-garde, but he kind of is, you know, it’s still very, very melodic. But the way he writes for piano is just in some of his more multi-movement works. It’s so cool and so influenced by what sounds to me like jazz and twentieth-century classical music and things like that. So I think that just hearing that type of music when I was in those early years, yeah, I heard it a lot, didn’t sing any of it. But, big fan.

KB
I have another question here, and you can answer yes or no, or expand on it. Do you align yourself with any particular movements or artistic movements, or other types of movements?

SL
Yes, but perhaps the movement was before my time, which would be folk song. And not just American folk song, but just kind of the tradition of folk song.

KB
And when you say that, do you mean sort of folk song revivalism, or folk song performance?

SL
I think it’s more like the construction of a folk song where the melody, like I was talking about earlier, is timeless, because there’s such an attention to the natural rhythms of how that sentence or line would be spoken, and then that’s how you said it, rhythmically and melodically. So when I’m writing a new piece today, that’s what I do, is I read through the text without any music, and think, ‘Okay, what are those rhythms? What words, what syllables are important, what words they’re important? Where’s the rise and fall of that sentence?’ Then I set actual rhythms on the page. That’s what I do. I mean, it’s so you can literally notate it rhythmically first and then add music to it. And I try not to—Alice Parker would always say, ‘don’t try to force the song onto a text, just find the music that’s already there,’ and that has stayed with me. I might think, ‘oh, I need to do, like, some crazy interval to make it more interesting.’ But what, what is going to be timeless, and what’s going to be more fun for people to sing is when it's really just the thing they would sing anyway, even if it’s something they’ve never seen before. So it’s more like the creation of original folk songs. And I don’t claim to like be that, but I think that’s what I’m striving for.

KB

Do you perceive an academic and commercial divide in choral music?

SL

Absolutely, and I think that's in all music, and that's just the nature of any industry. There are going to be things that artists create that are not commercially viable, but they are so important. And those things, I think, can exist side by side. So a lot of times, I tell people all the time at Walton, with all the music that I see, all the submissions that we get, I rarely see bad music. Like, there's hardly anything I would say 'that's just terrible. That's just this person doesn't know what they're doing.' It's mostly that it's either stuff that, you know, we have too many, the market's saturated with similar things already, or it's just that this is a really cool piece, but only five choirs in the world could do it because it's so hard, or so specific, or whatever it might be, that we just can't invest money in putting it out onto the market, because we would never make the money back. That does not mean—and I tell this to composers when I have to reject a submission that they've sent in. This is no by no means declaring the value of your art, artistry and your art in this song. It's a great piece, we just can't invest money into it. Which has made self-publishing, I think, so great is that composers can have a place to make those things available that won't sell on a larger market, but can still be available to people who want to do them.

So I think in academics, a lot of people I know who are working at universities, they… there's not a big… this is, like, a very general statement, but I think, at least in the US, but I would assume it's probably similar in Europe, if you're going to university to study composition, you're going to be writing things that are so different, usually from what is commercial and publishable. And that's okay. That's okay. You're not going to school for publishing your music. You're going to learn about composition. But I think a lot of composition teachers, you know, it's rare to find a composition teacher who will really support a choral composer who's writing tonal, melodic music. They're going to want you to write chamber music and orchestra and symphony and wind band and some choir.

KB

Why do you think there's an instrumental focus?

SL

I don't know. That's something I wonder about. It's almost like—again, all of this is very general—but it's almost like choral music isn't thought of as highly as instrumental music. And I really don't know why that is. Is it because every single person in the entire world has a voice, and so therefore it's not as special as being able to play a flute?

KB

I think that has something to do with—I think the fact that if you're in an orchestra or a chamber ensemble, you've taken one-to-one lessons, and for years, whereas anyone can join a choir. There's an inherent sort of perception of amateurism, I think, sometimes with choirs, and I think that that bleeds into the perception of writing for choirs.

SL

And it's this whole thing of, no one blinks an eye at buying an expensive ticket to the symphony. But if you try to charge for a choir concert, it takes a lot more convincing to help people understand we need to pay these musicians. Or even, I know of a lot of occasions where a city symphony might use singers from all the choirs in the area, and they expect the choirs to come and just do it because they get to come and sing with the symphony. And it's like the moment you try to say, 'okay, yeah, sure, we charge this much to come and sing with you,' then that becomes a much more difficult conversation. So, yeah, why is… I don't know why that is, but, I mean, I tend to think it's because of that long, long, inherent thought of 'everyone has a voice'. But isn't that what makes choir so great, too? You know, just that anyone can do it, and you can do it at any moment, and there's all this… maybe it's also because singing, you know, when you look at especially African people, and the times I've been over to South Africa and literally seen people, you know, we were somewhere, and all of the people who were cleaning the hotel that we were staying at, we're singing a song together in harmony and rhythms and dancing, and while they're working. They have these songs for everything, for every occasion, for every moment. And many cultures are like that. So maybe also in church. You know, church started with only vocal music. So is it something that people feel is entitled to them to have the voice, to hear the voice?

KB

Perhaps the absolute music bias, that only instrumental music can be absolute music, except for, you know, extended technique choral or vocal music.

SL

Yeah, opera or whatever. Yeah, it's kind of interesting. I found that a lot of college students who are composing choral music get better instruction and help from their choir director than from a composition teacher. I just have to state, again, that's a very general statement. It is not always true, but, you know, my husband is supporting these student composers in a way that maybe composition teachers just don't, just can't. They're not singers. They've never been in choirs, so they don't really know how to support a choral composer, and especially a choral composer who doesn't want to write instrumental music. So that's been great to see is all the mentorship that's happening with choir directors and their students who are choral composers. And I think that's happening more and more, which is really good to have available at the university level.