In the Shadow of Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie: Musical Composition studies in the principal London Conservatories from 1918 to 1945

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In the early 20th century, the main British music institutions, which attracted the attention of prospective composers, were the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, both located in London. What is particularly notable is that the early principals of the Royal Academy were almost always prominent composers and the directors of the Royal College were very often composers, too. The history of the founding and the background of these two conservatories gives some understanding of their position and standing by the end of World War I.

In the early 1820s patriotic amateurs promoted ideas for the foundation of a Royal Academy of Music, but this was initially opposed by the music profession, which felt that there were too many musicians anyway. The professionals then tried unsuccessfully to associate the proposed academy with the long-standing Philharmonic Society, which later commissioned Beethoven's Ninth Symphony during the same period. In the end the amateurs, principally John Fane, eleventh Earl of Westmorland (also known as Lord Berghersh) with assistance of royalty, notably King George IV, succeeded in establishing the Academy of Music in 1822 in London, the first of the British conservatories, receiving its royal charter in 1830 to become the Royal Academy of Music.

To create a strong credibility for the institution the founders needed to appoint a distinguished principal, although the choice was perhaps not that difficult. A well-known musical prodigy, William Crotch (1775–1847),

whose credentials were indeed very impressive, was appointed principal of the Academy of Music in 1822. At the age of three and a half he had apparently played the organ at the Chapel Royal in St James's Palace to King George III, had been the organist at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford, gained the degree of Bachelor of Music at a very young age, became Heather Professor of Music at the University of Oxford in 1797, and two years later gained a Doctorate in Music. He was known as a composer of church music and some orchestral pieces, whose quality is competent and sometimes imaginative, but often tiresomely repetitive. For example, an attractive Symphony in F major of 1814 is no match for Beethoven's nearly contemporary Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. In the Royal Academy of Music, Crotch took on the teaching of composition to a number of talented musicians, notably Cipriani Potter (1792–1871) and William Sterndale Bennett (1806–1875), but he was also very active in producing a number of theoretical books that are surprisingly still available today in new reprints. After only ten years, Crotch retired to the country, being succeeded as principal by another composer, his pupil Cipriani Potter, an all-round musician, composer, virtuoso pianist and conductor. As a composer, he wrote nine (or possibly ten) symphonies and three (or possibly four) piano concertos of such a high quality and presence that one wonders at his obvious current neglect.¹ It is reported that on playing one of his concertos in Germany, he was complimented by none other than Robert Schumann. With the retirement of Potter in 1859, the head of the academy passed to a very minor composer, Charles Lucas (1808–1869), who unfortunately resigned in 1866 with the Academy in a financial and academic crisis: the latter concern was that the Academy did not train more than a small proportion of professional musicians, a fact which nearly led to its demise. If it were not for the efforts of the composer and Professor of Music of the University of Cambridge, William Sterndale Bennett, as the new principal from 1869 until his death in 1875, it may even have closed. He had helped to steer the Academy away from political and financial disaster and closure. Part of the problem here was that the operation of the Royal Academy of Music suffered from the interference, not only of amateur musicians, but also a large number of politicians. Indeed, there was a strong feeling among professional musicians that the Academy was educating amateurs only, because there were so few Academy trained performers in the music profession. Bennett was probably

1 At least two of his symphonies and his three piano concertos have been commercially recorded and are currently available at the time of writing.

the best person to undertake this task because of his strong musicality and his long experience. His composing achievement was on a level with Potter's with a very impressive Symphony in G minor and five Piano Concertos in imaginative early romantic style.² Bennett died in 1875, and was succeeded by his pupil, the composer and very able Academy principal, Alexander Macfarren (1813–1887). With the latter's death in 1887, the new principal was another composer, the Scotsman Alexander Mackenzie (1847–1935) who remained until 1924. Thus, it can be seen that the work of this institution was dominated by composers, even if practical instrumental and vocal skills formed the bulk of their teaching.

This was equally important later with the founding of the Royal College of Music in 1883³ and its effect on the teaching of musical composition.

Table 1: Principals of the Royal Academy of Music 1822 to 1949

William Crotch	1822–1832
Cipriani Potter	1832–1859
Charles Lucas	1859–1866
William Sterndale Bennett	1866–1875
George Macfarren	1876–1888
Alexander Mackenzie	1888–1924
John McEwan	1924–1936
Stanley Marchant	1936–1949

As an alternative to the Academy, the National Training School of Music, also in London, was formed in 1876 under the composer Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900), the composer of numerous successful, popular light operettas⁴, especially those written to the words of W.S. Gilbert, but was not operated satisfactorily. The same problem that dogged the activities of the Academy was the overwhelming influence of the amateurs. Sullivan's operettas were deservedly popular, and his less well known orchestral works are particularly impressive, but it appears that he was not successful as a principal.⁵ In 1880 Sullivan was replaced by another composer, John Stainer

2 It perhaps an indication of the quality of Bennett's music that there are currently available two commercial recordings of the piano concertos and two of the symphony.

3 See below.

4 Strictly speaking the theatrical works that Sullivan composed to words by W. S. Gilbert were known as 'Savoy Operas' and not operettas, but they fall into the type, style and manner of similar works by Offenbach.

5 David Wright, "The South Kensington Music Schools and the Development of the British Conservatoire in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Royal Musical*

(1840–1901), whose choral work *The Crucifixion* of 1887 is still regularly performed today. His position was only temporary while preparations for the transformation of the National Training School for Music into the professionally established Royal College of Music in 1883, at first under the dynamic direction of George Grove (of dictionary fame). Despite his reputation in musical circles, George Grove was not a professional musician, but as Director of the Royal College, however, he was outstanding, as reported by David Wright:

The other explanation for the College's success was its good fortune in having Grove as its first director. Not only did he have a clear vision for the College, he could also sell its role (he even made the idea of a conservatoire seem a worthy proposition to sceptical industrialists).⁶

Wright also pointed to the general improvements:

The rise of the conservatoires as centres of advanced musical training also formed part of the wider development of higher education in Britain. The realization that Britain could sustain its imperial role only by modernizing itself had a profound effect on society. Fundamental to this process of modernization was recognition of the need to put teaching of technical and professional skills onto a new and more systematic footing and to ensure that these skills were being taught and assessed properly.⁷

One of the most important aspects of this new development was the cultivation of a firm foundation of British music, training the composers who would be able to challenge the dominance of the Germans. The question must now be asked: did the institutions have the right people in post to undertake the task. To begin to answer this question we must examine the achievements, the compositions and the reputations of the important people who would attempt to carry out this task.

Association 130, no. 2 (2005): 236–282. Wright chronicled the difficulties that Sullivan faced, but also gave a clear indication that he was not closely enough involved in his task to ensure the successful establishment of the new institution.

6 Wright, "The South Kensington Music Schools and the Development of the British Conservatoire," 255.

7 *Ibid.*, 257.

The composer Hubert Parry (1848–1918)⁸ followed Grove as director in 1895. Parry’s legacy was considerable, particularly as under his outstanding leadership he brought the Royal College of Music into the 20th century. His reputation as a composer was enormous, with five bold romantic symphonies, as well as many choral works such as the famous *Blest Pair of Sirens*, the anthem *I Was Glad* and *Jerusalem*, his setting of William Blake’s “And did those feet in ancient time,” regularly performed even today at the London Proms. He was also well respected as a teacher of composition: important early students of his were Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), Gustav Holst (1874–1934) and Frank Bridge (1879–1941), all three destined to become as famous as, or more famous than, their teacher. Vaughan Williams was to compose another seven symphonies after World War I, Holst a large variety of works, and Frank Bridge numerous orchestral and chamber works. Holst’s most famous work, the orchestral suite *The Planets*, was first played at a private performance in London in 1918, and publicly in 1920. Vaughan Williams in his long life gained an international reputation, particularly in recent years, while Holst has maintained a modest but distinctive voice in 20th century British music. Frank Bridge received a notably disparaging obituary in 1942 by Wilfrid Mellers,⁹ who described Bridge as “*an artist endowed with talent and facility and yet without the moral backbone to bring his gifts to fruition.*”¹⁰ More recently, however, very perceptive and detailed studies by Anthony Payne¹¹ and Fabian Huss¹² have restored his reputation.

Table 2: Directors of the Royal College of Music 1883–1953

George Grove	1883–1895
Hubert Parry	1895–1918
Hugh Allen	1918–1938
George Dyson	1938–1953

His major colleague in the Royal College of Music and senior composition professor was the Dublin-born and University-trained Charles Villiers

- 8 See Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and Jeremy Dibble, “Parry,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 19, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), 152–57.
- 9 Wilfrid Mellers, “Conservatism and Tradition,” in *Studies in Contemporary Music* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 187–195, especially 193–195.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 193.
- 11 Anthony Payne, *Frank Bridge: Radical and Conservative* (London: Thames, 1999).
- 12 Fabian Huss, *The Music of Frank Bridge* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015).

Stanford (1852–1924),¹³ who from the college's beginnings in the 1880s exerted a great influence on the institution. He was also professor of music in the University of Cambridge from 1887 until his death. His composition pupils at the College included some of Parry's old students, Gustav Holst, Vaughan Williams and Frank Bridge, as well as John Ireland (1879–1962). Like that of Parry, Stanford's output was enormous, with seven Brahmsian symphonies, numerous concertos, and a vast collection of songs and other vocal music and much chamber music. Parry and Stanford were like gods in the Royal College of Music, acting as role models for aspiring composition students. It also seems to have been the case that those students who did not follow these role models were sometimes put at a distinct disadvantage in their progress through the courses that they followed in the Royal College.

The equally capable Scottish composer Alexander Mackenzie (1847–1935) was principal of the Royal Academy of Music from 1888 until 1924. In a less overwhelming way his reputation stood high, in addition to that of his music, for his constant and dedicated improvement in the standards of the Academy's work. His principal composition professor was a fascinating character named Frederick Corder (1852–1932). In the 1870s, Corder had studied composition with George Macfarren at the Academy (at the time under the principal William Sterndale Bennett) and in 1889 became the Professor of Harmony and Composition at the Academy, a post he held until his retirement in 1924.

In 1918, Corder wrote:

*After nearly three-and-a-half years of war it seems reasonable to take stock of the musical situation and see how we stand as regards national art.*¹⁴

The year 1918 formed a major turning point for the two conservatories, both up to then controlled by prominent composers, but there was a crisis, too. The First World War had ended with serious losses. Stanford's pupil Ernest Farrar (1885–1918), who had taught the superb song writer Gerald Finzi (1901–1956), died on the Somme, as did the very talented and promising

13 Paul Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2017); Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford: Man and Musician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Jeremy Dibble, "Stanford," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 24, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), 278–85.

14 Frederick Corder, "Some Plain Words," *The Musical Times* 59, no. 899 (1 January 1918): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/908741>.

George Butterworth (1885–1916),¹⁵ who had studied with Parry at the Royal College and with Vaughan Williams and the folksong collector Cecil Sharp at the University of Cambridge. Denis Browne (1888–1915) who died at Gallipoli, also studied at Cambridge. The Scottish born Cecil Coles (1888–1918) who died on the Somme, shot while recovering casualties, studied at the University of Edinburgh and later was taught and mentored by Gustav Holst. The composer Ivor Gurney (1890–1937), a student of Stanford and others including Vaughan Williams and John Ireland, suffered severe mental illness, possibly even before World War I, but almost certainly exacerbated by a gas attack in 1917 and by the condition known as ‘shell shock’. In addition, Parry died on 7 October 1918, just before the war ended, as a result of the infamous Spanish influenza pandemic. In an obituary, Robin H. Legge deplored the fact that Parry’s administrative duties detracted seriously from his composing, concluding with the statement: “Parry, in spite of all that he achieved, died a *Might-Have-Been!*”¹⁶

Despite all this, in 1918 London’s Royal Academy of Music was nearly 100 years old and now functioning well, while the younger Royal College of Music was equally firmly established. In that year, the two institutions reached a high point: their status was assured with the important posts filled by the best known musicians. With the models of Parry, even though he had died in 1918, and Mackenzie, who retired in 1924, as well as that of the senior professor at the College, the composer Charles Villiers Stanford, and the well-established but less well known Frederick Corder at the Academy, composition teaching thrived at both conservatories. The work of Stanford from 1918 was now fundamental to the development of the teaching of musical composition in the United Kingdom.¹⁷ It is no exaggeration to say that Stanford, Parry and Mackenzie were in large measure responsible for a revival in music from the British Isles. The rehabilitation of English music, the “English Musical Renaissance” as it has sometimes been called, had

15 Michael Barlow, *Whom the Gods Love* (London: Toccata Press, 1997) gives a clear presentation of the excellent qualities of the very small number of Butterworth’s surviving compositions.

16 Robin H. Legge, *The Musical Times* 59, no. 909 (1 November 1918): 489–91.

17 This is not to ignore the presence of the more recently established conservatories in London, The Guildhall School of Music (1880) and Trinity College of Music (1870s). In the earlier years they both operated on a part-time basis or solely for external examinations, and only later on the basis of full-time attended tuition. While musical composition was offered, there were very few professional composers to emerge from these institutions for many years.

now been achieved, completed partly by these three men, one Englishman (Parry), one Irishman (Stanford) and one Scotsman (Mackenzie).

However, despite this fortunate situation, but because of the enormous reputation of all three musicians, the outlook was solidly conservative. It was almost inevitable that student composition followed the style of their music, taking little notice of the latest developments in Paris and Vienna, a feature which dominated the College and Academy in the following years. It appears that the new director of the Royal College of Music following Parry's death, the University-trained and experienced Hugh Allen (1869–1946) reinforced this traditional attitude. Some composition students would be happy to work within a broadly romantic idiom, of course, achieving success in a conservative musical environment, but some would find this difficult. The next twenty-five years saw numerous instances in the College of this unwillingness to move beyond the style and techniques of the middle of the 19th century.

The situation at the Royal Academy of Music was somewhat different. A number of prospective composers had studied there with Frederick Corder in the first two decades of the 20th century, the most prominent being Granville Bantock (1868–1946), Joseph Holbrooke (1878–1958), Arnold Bax (1883–1953), York Bowen (1884–1961) and Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979). The first four showed little sign of breaking the traditional mould, despite their considerable later achievements. However, some of the music of Clarke, who was influenced by Frank Bridge, displayed features of the music of Debussy and Bartók, influences disparaged by the principal. Writing about Bax's time at the academy, Colin Scott-Sutherland paints a forbidding picture:

*The Academy at that time trembled under the principalship of Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, a fiery Scot whose outspoken criticism of modern tendencies in the work of his students was belied by his liberal-minded policies for their musical education.*¹⁸

Corder, however, was held in considerable respect, shown, for example, in a published tribute in *The Times* newspaper from 1932. In it Arnold Bax wrote: "No professor of composition can ever have taken a more proud and affectionate interest in the achievements of those who came under his sway."¹⁹ About Corder, Scott-Sutherland is similarly forthright:

18 Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Arnold Bax* (London: Dent, 1973), 10.

19 "Obituary: Frederick Corder," *The Musical Times* 73, no. 1076 (1 October 1932): 943.

*At all events Corder's methods would not have been countenanced by Stanford, whose teaching made perpetual war on inessentials and was ruthless in its advocacy of stylistic purity.*²⁰

There was another side to Corder's character, however, for in 1918, he published in *The Musical Times* an article entitled "Some Plain Words," in which he deplored in the most extreme terms the lack of English/British music being published and performed.²¹ He carried on this campaign relentlessly, despite protests from performers and publishers that his information was inaccurate. Much earlier, one of his pupils, Joseph Holbrooke, had already initiated a campaign, sometimes in the most forthright and offensive terms, for the greater representation of English music. The consequence of this was twofold: on the one hand, there was a determined effort to perform and publish new music by British composers, but on the other hand this music must reflect the style advocated by Mackenzie and Corder. It appears that Holbrooke's reputation suffered as a result of this campaign.

After Mackenzie's death and Corder's retirement, the elevation in 1924 to principal of the Academy of the composer John Blackwood McEwan (1868–1948), who had studied with Corder at the Academy from 1893 and who was currently a professor of composition, was fairly smooth. He earned great respect and loyalty in his twelve years in the post. Two of the former's pupils were William Alwyn (1905–1985) and Priaulx Rainier (1903–1986) from South Africa. William Alwyn, who developed into a very interesting and adventurous and imaginative composer, especially in his symphonies, became a professor of composition at the Royal Academy in 1926 with a long career in this post until 1955. During this period, however, there were remarkably few student musicians who progressed from the Academy into the music profession as composers. Certainly, there were very few recognised composers trained at the Royal Academy of Music from 1925 to 1945. One wonders how much the lasting effect of Mackenzie and Corder had on the outlook and perspective of aspiring composers, and even if this deterred prospective composers from applying to the Royal Academy of Music in the first place. This period must have been a difficult period for British musicians who wanted to be composers, with a distinct lack of enthusiasm for attending the Royal Academy of Music. In 1946, the composer Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989) who had studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger joined the Academy as composition professor with a significant rise

20 Scott-Sutherland, *Arnold Bax*, 11.

21 Corder, "Some Plain Words," 7–10.

in the number of acknowledged composers emerging from the Academy in the years after World War II.

A number of successful composers chose the University route. One important example was William Walton (1902–1983) who became a boy chorister at Christ Church, Oxford in 1912 at the age of ten and an undergraduate four years later. Although his musical studies were successful, he failed the examinations in his other studies and left University. He was almost immediately taken under the wing of the literary Sitwell family, gaining immediate popularity with his music to accompany musical recitations with a small ensemble of the poet Edith Sitwell in *Façade*, a provocative setting of 21 poems, possibly mocking Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. The enormous success of his choral and orchestral setting of *Belshazzar's Feast* in 1931 ensured his continued popularity both in performance and publication. Other important composers like Edward Elgar were virtually self-taught.

Returning to the Royal College of Music, after the death of Stanford in 1924, the teaching of musical composition was now in the hands of his pupils, in general also ones who held the same views as Stanford himself. One composer at the College who is barely known today was R. O. Morris [Reginald Owen Morris] (1886–1948), the author of a number of standard textbooks, principally on harmony, figured harmony at the keyboard, counterpoint and contrapuntal technique in the sixteenth century,²² very much the hallmarks of Stanford's methods. At the College his students included the master song composer Gerald Finzi and the traditionalist Anthony Milner (1925–2002). Another composition tutor at the College was C. H. Kitson (1874–1944)²³, described by David Matthews as “*an impeccably respectable composer who cast a cautious eye on [Michael] Tippett's somewhat undisciplined attempts at academic exercises.*”²⁴ Later Morris contributed substantially as a private teacher to Michael Tippett's musical development with a strict attention to the basic techniques. In the years before World War II, Peter Racine Fricker (1920–1988) studied at the College with

22 Reginald Owen Morris, *The Oxford Harmony*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); *Introduction to Counterpoint* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1944); *Figured Harmony at the Keyboard*, parts 1 and 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); *Contrapuntal Technique in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922).

23 C. H. Kitson [Charles Herbert Kitson] was the author of numerous practical textbooks and a wide range of short vocal pieces, some instrumental music and three settings of the Mass for SATB and organ.

24 David Matthews, *Michael Tippett* (London: Faber, 1980), 20.

R. O. Morris, before embarking, after World War II, on a more adventurous line of exploration under the guidance of the Hungarian émigré, Mátyás Seiber (1905–1960).²⁵

Another composer who assumed an important role in the Royal College of Music in the years after Stanford's death was John Ireland (1879–1962), who had studied with Stanford after completing his basic work on techniques with thorough but less well-known teachers. He said of Stanford: *"I think the best quality that Stanford possessed as a teacher was that he made you feel nothing but the best would do"* and *"He could be severely critical, almost cruel at times."*²⁶ Perhaps the most revealing remark that Ireland made about Stanford was: *"In his later years Stanford thought all his students had gone mad."*²⁷ Ireland played an important role in the teaching of future composers at the Royal College.

Many students were happy working within the traditional model, but there were a number of exceptions. In the Royal Academy of Music there appear to have been few students who openly disagreed with the régime, but in the Royal College of Music between the wars, there were a small number of more adventurous students who did not fit the mould and caused some consternation amongst the staff. Three students of composition (Benjamin Britten, Elisabeth Lutyens and Humphrey Searle) and one prospective student (Daphne Oram) illustrate the potential problems that could arise during this period.

In the summer of 1930 Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) was advised by his two teachers, the pianist Harold Samuel (1879–1937) and the composer Frank Bridge, to apply for admission to the Royal College of Music to study piano and composition. On gaining entry with a recommendation for a scholarship, Britten was to be taught piano by Arthur Benjamin who helped him *"very gently through a very, very difficult musical adolescence,"* but for composition Samuel recommended the extremely conservative R. O. Morris, while Bridge advised the more adventurous and forward looking John Ireland. Britten was very successful on the piano with Benjamin, but for composition Morris proved completely unsatisfactory as expressed by Britten's biographer Neil Powell: *"Morris was incurably wedded to English musical conservatism."*²⁸ Ireland, who replaced Morris as Britten's com-

25 Murray Schafer, *British Composers in Interview* (London: Faber, 1963), 137–146.

26 Ibid., 27.

27 Ibid., 28.

28 Neil Powell, *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* (London: Hutchinson, 2013), 45.

position teacher and admired Britten's ability, was very unreliable because of personal problems. Although Britten composed many new works and won college prizes, virtually nothing of his was performed at the College, probably because his music was too 'advanced'. The performance of two of his choral works was reportedly abandoned because the choir was allegedly not good enough. Pointing to this example Britten wrote:

Bridge intervened angrily when I couldn't get a performance of two choral psalms I had written (I heard practically nothing of the reams of music I was writing then). He said I ought to hear them because without aural experience it was difficult to link notes and sounds. Vaughan Williams claimed that the singers weren't good enough, to which Bridge retorted that it was up to the R. C. M. [Royal College of Music] to have a chorus good enough and that he ought to use his influence.²⁹

Britten showed great interest in Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony and appeared to use it as a model for his first major work, the *Sinfonietta* for ten instruments.³⁰ In the end this was to be first performed *outside* the college at the public Macnaughten-Lemare concerts, while another later performance in the College had to be delayed because the performers were not able to cope with the difficulties. When it came to postgraduate study Britten wanted to study with Alban Berg, but someone in authority in the college (rumoured to be the director Hugh Allen) ensured that this was not going to take place. Bridge also became involved with Britten's future plans after he had finished his studies at the Royal College of Music. Britten was explicit about the situation:

He [Bridge] intervened, with no greater success, when the question arose of my going on to study with Berg. I had finished at the College with a small travelling scholarship and wanted to go to Vienna. Bridge greatly admired Berg (he later, after Berg's death, introduced me to Schoenberg). But, when the College was told, coolness arose. I think, but cannot be sure, that the Director, Sir Hugh Allen, put a spoke in the wheel. At any rate, when I said at home during

29 Benjamin Britten, "Early influences: a tribute to Frank Bridge (1879–1941)," (London: BBC Broadcast Talk, 9 January 1966). My thanks to Dr Nicholas Clark of the Britten-Pears Foundation for providing a copy of this text.

30 Erwin Stein, "The Symphonies", in *Benjamin Britten, a commentary on his works from a group of specialists*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Rockliff, 1952), 247; Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: Dent, 1979), 15–21.

*the holidays, 'I am going to study with Berg, aren't I?' the answer was a firm 'No dear.' Pressed, my mother said, 'He's not a good influence,' which I suspected came from Allen.*³¹

Britten's private studies with Frank Bridge proved far more profitable. In the end he felt that much of his time at the college was a waste of time.

The second major composer to have difficulties on account of not fitting the college formula was Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–1983), the daughter of the distinguished architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. From 1922, she had studied in Paris, staying with a pupil of Nadia Boulanger and attending the Ecole Normale for harmony, counterpoint and solfège,³² at the same time taking a great interest in the music of Debussy. In 1926, she gained a place at the Royal College of Music to study composition. She had shown an early interest in the work of Schoenberg and Webern, which did not ingratiate her to the college authorities. As Lutyens herself admitted,

*the tradition of German romanticism was still firmly entrenched at the Royal College of Music, where [...] Brahms was considered a great modern.*³³

She alleged that “*the shades of Stanford and Parry hung like a pall over the College in 1926.*”³⁴ Also reported was the view that, “*Excluded from the curriculum were any composers before Haydn or after Sibelius, beyond the pale lay progressives like Schoenberg.*”

Because he did not believe she had the talent for serious composition, the College's director Hugh Allen imposed the choice of teacher on her, deliberately excluding Lutyens from being taught by such figures as the more famous Vaughan Williams or John Ireland. Instead she was assigned a place with Harold Darke, the composer of the popular Christmas carol, *In the Bleak Midwinter*,³⁵ and a conservative organist and teacher of harmony and counterpoint. Despite his strongly conservative leanings, Darke was hugely supportive of his new student, even with her great interest in Schoenberg's music, ensuring that, unlike Britten, almost all of the music she composed

31 Britten, “Early influences”. See note 29.

32 Meirion and Susie Harries, *A Pilgrim Soul. The Life and Work of Elisabeth Lutyens* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 37–38.

33 *Ibid.*, 54.

34 *Ibid.*

35 This setting of poetry by Christina Rossetti was composed in 1909 a few years after another version of the same poem by Gustav Holst. Both are still regularly performed today.

during her time at the Royal College was performed, mostly in public.³⁶ In fact, Allen was very much mistaken in his assessment of Lutyens's ability as she developed into a respected composer of some considerable standing. Lutyens was the first British composer to implement any of the principles of Schoenberg and his pupils, albeit in her own way, and for this, she gained a notorious reputation. Her first important composition that set her on the serial road was the Chamber Concerto No. 1, which was written in the years 1939–1940. After her compositions became better known, she commented: “One was hardly ever performed; one was jeered at by the players, if silently; one was considered ‘dotty’ [mad] and, the chief thing, one was considered un-English.” Later she said: “The critics can no longer ignore it [serial music] or treat it as a mental aberration.” “Critics always lag behind composers, even behind the public at large.”³⁷

The other composer who also adopted some of Schoenberg's techniques was the younger Humphrey Searle (1915–1982). He studied at the Royal College of Music with John Ireland, who was very complimentary about him:

*Humphrey Searle was also very clever and individual. He wasn't with me for very long though. He went and studied with Webern in Vienna and that influenced him a lot.*³⁸

Although Searle did not specifically study twelve-note music with Webern, but rather Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre*, his contact with Webern's music at first hand was really important, with works that he mentioned include the Variations for piano op. 27, for which Webern provided a detailed analysis. Searle's music, however, is not at all like Webern's; it has bold romantic textures perhaps more like those of Alban Berg. This can be explained by the fact that in addition to his interest in twelve-note techniques, Searle was also enthusiastic about the music of Franz Liszt. One can also note that Searle wanted to make known the music of Webern by translating into English books on Webern by Walter Kolneder and Friedrich Wildgans³⁹ very clearly and concisely, a book on Schoenberg by H. H. Stuckenschmidt

36 Harries, *A Pilgrim Soul*, 54.

37 Schafer, *British Composers in Interview*, 105.

38 Ibid., 30.

39 Humphrey Searle's translations into English of books on Webern are Walter Kolneder, *Anton Webern: an Introduction to his Works* (London: Faber, 1968) and (with Edith Temple Roberts) Friedrich Wildgans, *Anton Webern* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966).

as well as Josef Rufer's composing tutor. He also wrote the book *The Music of Liszt*.⁴⁰

The most bizarre case is that of Daphne Oram (1925–2003), who in 1942 turned down a traditional place which had been offered to her at the Royal College of Music to study piano and composition, choosing instead to study electronics and composition privately, working in the BBC sound department and eventually co-founding the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in 1958, the precursor to electronic music in the United Kingdom.⁴¹ None of the work that she did at the BBC would have been remotely possible at the Royal College of Music, even if the equipment had been available, because of the violently negative attitudes that were then the norm.

This steady but somewhat uncomfortable educational procession was due to be shattered by a unique situation in the city of Manchester. In 1953 Peter Maxwell Davies (1934–2016) had begun a joint course between the Music Department of the University of Manchester (formed in 1936) and the Royal Manchester College of Music (founded in 1893).⁴² His University tutor was the head of the Music Department, the composer Humphrey Procter-Gregg (1895–1980), who surprisingly believed that music should not progress beyond that of Frederick Delius. Procter-Gregg himself was only a minor composer, who had studied at the Royal College of Music with Stanford, but seemed to hold the view that his views on music should be shared by all his students. Davies made himself very unpopular with his tutor by advocating the music of Stravinsky and Bartók so much so that he was removed from Procter-Gregg's class. He further antagonised his tutor by presenting a concert in the University including some of his own music without seeking the permission and approval of the head of department, as was required by the institution. As Davies said in an interview with Nicholas Jones:

We did the Trumpet Sonata first at a concert in the Arthur Worthington Hall at the University at Manchester - John Ogdon played

40 Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg* (London: John Calder, 1959); Josef Rufer, *Composition with Twelve Notes related only to one another* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1959) and Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1954).

41 Daphne Oram, *An Individual Note of Music, Sound and Electronics* (London: Galliard, 1972; [Wakefield:] Anomie, 2016) gives a detailed survey of her work, especially at the BBC, but glosses over the possibilities that may have been available at the Royal College of Music.

42 The Royal Manchester College of Music, founded in 1893, merged with the smaller Northern School of Music in 1973 to become the Royal Northern College of Music.

*the piano and Gary [Elgar] Howarth the trumpet - and I had quite a row with our professor, Humphrey Procter-Gregg. I was not studying composition with him any more - I had been kicked out of his composition class - and I had a postcard from him saying (and I still have this): 'What is this I hear about a piece by you being performed in the Arthur Worthington Hall? I've not been asked for permission!' And so I probably almost destroyed my chances ever of having a degree from Manchester University - I went storming into his office saying: 'You're not my composition teacher, this is nothing to do with you, and we're going to play it.' And I remember Procter-Gregg announcing to the University choir: There's a concert tomorrow night at the Arthur Worthington Hall, but it's a very poor prospect for your degree if you're seen attending it.'*⁴³

The limitations of Procter-Gregg's view of music was spelled out clearly by Maxwell Davies:

*He [Procter-Gregg] used to say: 'Don't take any notice of music written before 1550, it's dangerous.' And when it came to my degree Procter-Gregg did his damndest to stop it, but fortunately there was an external examiner there, Dr Andrews from Oxford, who insisted that I got an Honours degree. God, that man [Procter-Gregg] loathed me! I don't blame him - I hated everything he stood for.'*⁴⁴

Maxwell Davies later informally attached himself to the College composition class of the composer Richard Hall (1903–1982), which included his colleagues Harrison Birtwistle (b1934) and Alexander Goehr (b1932). This made one of the most astonishing groupings of teacher and students in higher education in music in the United Kingdom. These three composition students, together with the pianist John Ogdon (1937–1989) and trumpeter Elgar Howarth (b1935)⁴⁵, formed a performing group for advanced contemporary music. Their influence was to change the whole outlook of British music for decades, by challenging the then accepted norms in the conservatories. It took many years for the Royal College of Music and the Royal

43 Nicholas Jones, "Peter Maxwell Davies in the 1950s: a conversation with the composer," *Tempo* 64, no. 254 (October 2010): 12.

44 *Ibid.*, 13.

45 Howarth later became an excellent conductor of contemporary music, often but not exclusively that of his contemporaries Harrison Birtwistle and Peter Maxwell Davies.

Academy of Music to equip themselves properly with sympathetic staff who were capable of presenting the now commonly accepted face of European modernism. Eventually Peter Maxwell Davies became part of the British musical establishment, being appointed to be the Master of the Queen's Music for ten years from 2004, an honour that could hardly have been expected when he was a student himself of one of Stanford's own students.

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