

School Songs: Anthemic Colloquies on Independent School Identity

Emma Bryden

Head of Academic Music (Stowe School)

Doctoral Researcher (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire)

Banbury, England

Elizabeth.Bryden@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Abstract

There currently exists a fragmentary corpus of extant Nationalistic Songs from the latter half of the 19th century which evidence the role of educationally situated singing in shaping communal identity within UK Independent Schools. Such songs gained an anthemic status within their respective communities which is still felt today, encapsulating and communicating the ethos and achievements of the school and preserving its history for future generations. There is a lack of discourse within current research regarding the relevance of such nationalistic songs within the identity of Independent Schools and their communities today, and by extension the fate of those songs which are now thematically controversial.

Independent School Directors of Music such as John Farmer, Joseph Barnby and Paul David, with support of their lyricists and Head teachers, produced songs which shaped Independent School music education in the late 19th century and continue to influence pedagogical approaches towards music within Independent Schools today. Through collecting, cataloguing and analysing Independent School Songs I have explored the educational role they fulfilled at their time of composition.

Through interviewing those who teach and perform these songs today, I have been able to examine the current discourse upon their appositeness and my initial research evidences how Independent School communities are currently engaging with themes of nationalism within their school songs. The extent to which this engagement impinges upon the preservation of songs for future generations of school communities and scholars is also addressed. This paper evidences an emergent movement of Independent Schools seeking to re-establish the role of the School Song as an educational vehicle for conveying values which are in line with current thinking.

Key Words

Music, Songs, Identity, Independent Schools, Nationalism, Pedagogy, Eton, Harrow, Uppingham,

Introduction

Independent Schools have played an integral role in shaping the educational history of the United Kingdom and this is especially prevalent in music education. With vocal musical traditions dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries, many of the Clarendon schools (Her Majesty's Commissioners, 1864) and, similarly, other Independent schools are proud of their musical heritage and fiercely loyal to their school community.

It is therefore unsurprising that in the mid and late 19th century, during a period of educational, political and musical turbulence, these schools gave provided a stabilising and unifying force for their communities in the form of the school song (Cox, 1992). In this paper I will explore the ways in which many of these school songs can be considered anthems and outline their shared features with the categories of National anthems as defined by (Boyd, 1994). Five independent school songs will be explored against the wider context of musical nationalism. Furthermore, the identity inherent in the songs at the time of composition will be examined against the suitability of that identity in today's climate of challenging colonialist content in schools.

Government Inspectors

From the 1840s onwards, musicians in governmental positions attempted to steer music education towards their own ideological and pedagogical predilections. These decisions were in large resisted by the Independent schools (Cox, 1992) and so contextualize the school songs and the approaches and intentions. In 1840, John Hullah (1812-1884) became the Music Inspector at the Battersea Training Institute for Teachers and sought to improve the standard of teacher training. Hullah was a disciple of the Wilhem method (Hullah, 1842) a pedagogical style he encountered whilst in Paris (Hullah, 1842) This method utilized a fixed-doh and proved to be efficient in the instruction of large groups of singers and its popularity quickly grew, culminating in Hullah publishing a book on the method (Hullah, 1842). This approach to sight singing, whilst very popular in the training colleges and being integral to the singing-class movement (Rainbow, 1986) was less well received in the independent schools. Winchester College hosted a workshop by Hullah in 1842 only to later abandon the method due to the

loss of interest from the pupils (Green, 1990). Hullah's insistence on promoting the Wilhem method was fiercely opposed by John Curwen, who developed the Tonic Sol-Fa system from the work of Sarah Anne Glover (Cox, 1992). Curwen said "No-one whose name is publicly known as the advocate of a particular method should be made the judge over his educational antagonists" (Curwen in 1872 as cited in Lynch, 2010).

In 1872 Hullah became the first Government Inspector for Music and, supported by the music publisher and antiquarian Chapell (1809-1888) collated and published the book "English Songs for Schools" (Hullah, 1873). Hullah believed the songs taught to school children should be Nationalistic songs and that it was the text which contained the national character of a song (Cox, 1992).

Hullah's successor as Inspector for Music was John Stainer (1840-1901) who sought to bring folk songs to the forefront of music education (Schofield, 2004). Stainer was one of the four founding vice-presidents of the Folk-Song Society in 1898 (Knevett, 2011) and as such was influenced by the Oral tradition of music. Stainer believed "every tune which is thoroughly taught to a child will probably be fixed in his memory for life" (Stainer, 1884). An accomplished musician and academic, Stainer was concerned with the quality of music teaching in state schools and its detrimental effect on the nation's pupils (Lynch, 2010). Stainer's advisor, McNaught (1884) as cited in Lynch (2010) is quoted as saying of the trainee teachers responses to theory questions "Indifferent working of the harmony question by a large number of students invites misgivings as to whether the possible utility of the knowledge gained is likely to be at all commensurate with the pains of time absorbed in learning it, and whether the retention of the subject in the syllabus can be justified" (Lynch, 2010). A year later, the theory component was removed from the requirements for teacher training.

The conflict between supporters of Nationalistic music in schools and those who advocated for Folk Music in schools would only begin to resolve itself under the mediation of the third government inspector for music, Arthur Somervell (1863-1937) by which time the independent schools would have forged their own musical and communal identities, distinct from those of state schools and led by the schools Director of Music.

Directors of Music

There are numerous independent school Directors of Music who contributed to the wider musical educational landscape. To include them all in any purposeful depth is beyond the remit of this paper however three who directly contributed to the establishment of the independent school songs will now be discussed.

John Farmer

John Farmer became Director of Music at Harrow School in 1862 where, in collaboration with the Headmaster Edward Bowen, he wrote some many songs for the school (Farmer, 1901). The most famous of these songs is "Forty Years on" and not only is it the school song of Harrow but it has been adopted by many other independent schools in the UK and internationally. The song is unique in that its words speak to not only the current students but also the old boys, calling both to reflect on their time at school and their place within its community. The importance of the song was clearly defined by Edward Graham (Graham, 1933) "[it is] the national anthem of Harrow; wherefore we stand to sing it." One of the most famous Old Harrovians, Sir Winston Churchill, was the focus of two additional verses for the song. One verse was written to commemorate his ninetieth birthday in 1964 and the other was written in 1954. Both verses are only sung once a year only (Graham, 1933).

Farmer introduced an annual House Singing competition to Harrow school which was quickly replicated in other Independent schools, greatly improving pupil's engagement with singing and enhancing the musical life of the school. Regarding the importance of singing in schools, Farmer said "We possessed a heritage of beautiful songs second to no other country in the world, and yet it was seldom that children were made acquainted with this practically inexhaustible source of profitable enjoyment. Children would be better occupied in learning these (national songs) than in singing about buttercups and violets." (Farmer, 1894)

Paul David

Paul David held the position of Director of music at Uppingham from 1865 until 1908. David was prolific in his writing of school songs with "Ho, boys, ho!" (1850) being not only the school song but also providing the six-note motif of the schools Cadet Corps bugle call "Uppingham" (Crotchet, 1906).

At the jubilee of the Music Masters Association, John Dyson said "Dr Thring's ideas of the place of music in his school were both creative and revolutionary, and nothing less than his

unwavering determination could have brought them to the practical success.” (Dyson,1952). Whilst this quote sadly ignores the vital contribution of David in the delivery of this vision it clearly illustrates the importance music had within the school.

Joseph Barnby

Barnby was Precentor and Director of Music at Eton from 1875 until 1892 when he took up the position of Director of the Guildhall School of Music. Barnby’s contribution to the corpus of school songs covers a vast array of themes including sports, founders and perhaps his most well-known song, “Vale” (Barnby, 1890). Although Vale was written some thirteen years after Barnby composed the School song “Carmen Etonense” (Barnby, 1877) the popularity of Vale’s lilting melody and nostalgic prose spread to schools in other countries, including a collection of school songs published in America by (Levermore, 1898) albeit with an altered structure and with different harmonization. In 1908, Barnby’s contribution to musical education in Eton was described in The Musical Times thusly, “In considering the subject of music as part of the curriculum of the school life at Eton, it has to be stated that until forty years ago music had no existence there”.

Anthemic Categorisations

Gavin Ewart identified eight categories of school song in his Anthology “Forty Years On” (Ewart, 1969) and these are clear tools by which to distinguish families of songs amongst the hundreds in existence (Bryden 2021). There is however considerable correlation between Ewart’s categories and the categories of anthem types illustrated by Boyd (1994). Boyd places anthems into the following groups

1. Hymns
2. Marches
3. Operatic Anthems
4. Folk Anthems
5. Fanfares

Drawing upon each these categories in turn and evaluating examples within my collection, it becomes possible to codify these and other school songs as anthems.

Of the songs which I have collected to date, just under 6% are hymns (Bryden, 2021). Amongst these songs two composers in particular, Charles Hubert Hastings Parry and Ralph Vaughan Williams account for 20% of those hymns.

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind – Repton School

Hubert Parry composed the melody which would become “Repton” in 1888. Repton began life as an aria from his oratorio “Judith” (Howes, 1994) and would later become synonymous with the Hymn “Dear Lord and father of Mankind”. Garret Hoarder adapted a poem, “The brewing of Soma”, by the Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier and these words were set to Parry’s melody in 1924 by George Gilbert Stocks, Repton’s Director of Music (Giles, 2018). The hymn is frequently sung at Repton School and is also the school hymn of Downe House School and several others.

The ideals carried in the text of the hymn are those of contemplation and the pursuit of peace amidst the struggles of everyday life, a fitting aspiration for a school community. The melodic shape provides an emotional climax at the penultimate line of each verse before descending to a calm finish which reflects the text.

Jerusalem

It can be argued that there is no more nationalistic and anthemic a hymn than Parry’s Jerusalem. The hymn, whose text is by William Blake, was written in 1916 and orchestrated in 1922 by Edward Elgar. To this day there are continued calls for Jerusalem to become the official national anthem of England and its popularity amongst independent schools in England accounts for 10% of all listed as Hymns currently in my collection (Bryden 2021). Whilst Repton is an evocative and emotionally stirring hymn it pales in comparison to Jerusalem whose introduction supports the initial triadic opening of the vocal melody and whose coda lifts what may otherwise have been a somewhat anti-climactic descending melodic end.

It should be noted that Parry was no stranger to writing national anthems, having composed the national anthem for Newfoundland and Labrador in 1904 (Unknown, 2021). This anthem was used from 1904 until 1949 when Newfoundland became part of Canada. However, due to its unwavering popularity amongst its people, it was re-instated in 1980 as the official provincial anthem and continues to be proudly sung by the community today.

Harrow Marches Onward

Marches raise immediate images of military presence and with them a sense of protection, pride and courage. It is therefore of no surprise that independent schools will utilize elements of marches, both subtly and explicitly in their school songs.

The most commonly identifiable feature of any march is its metre, either 4/4 or common time. Of the songs which I have collected and whose metre I have identified, this accounts for 60%. The serious yet hopeful spirit of a march is often presented through major tonalities and this is a common feature of the aforementioned school songs. Here only 4% use a minor key and these anomalies are in each case isolated to the verse of verse-chorus structure. The chorus of each example is then in a major key.

Whilst not all of the songs mentioned above should be identified as Marches, one which is undeniably a March is John Farmer's "Harrow Marches Onwards" (Farmer, 1884). The melody begins with a recognizably militaristic rhythm on one note. This rhythmic motif appears seven times throughout the song, the remaining eighth phrase is only marginally different. Unlike other songs by Farmer, the score to Harrow Marches Onwards features a single melodic line to enhance the feel of all present being part of the same "unit" as referenced in the song. The melody is written in E major, a key suited to male voices, and spans the range of a 9th. This melody is supported homophonically by the accompaniment, again, reinforcing a sense of unity.

The word painting of the text written by E E Bowen is less than subtle, the leap up a fourth on the word "up" in bar 9 and again for the word "height" in the second verse being two examples. Similarly, the brief modulation to the tonic minor of E minor in bar 11 for the words "bearing all the old, while they mount toward the new" of the first verse, along with a *rallentando*, heavily illustrates the struggle against being tied to the past before the original tempo is again set in bar 13 as the Key of E major returns.

Operatic Anthem – Floreat Domus – Warwick School

An operatic Anthem should have an unmistakable sense of opulence and "Floreat Domus" of Warwick school is an excellent example of such a composition. Written in 1906, the score shows heavy influences of Romanticism in the use of chromatic chords during the introduction, frequent accidentals for colour and contrast throughout the song and a closing accompaniment written above the pitch of the melody. The melodic line requires agility of

voice to engage with not only the range of an 11th but the frequent octave leaps. The interjection of the bare octave accompaniment response to the singing of “Floreat” in each verses refrain would not seem out of place in a brass section should the accompaniment have been orchestrated. The lyrics themselves speak of Earls, kings and Queens and the song would not seem amiss in an early opera by Wagner.

Folk Anthem - Rodean

In contrast to the pomp of operatic anthems, folk anthems draw upon stylistic elements which are intrinsic of the folk music of their nation. One such song in my collection is that of Rodean which is unfortunately no longer sung (DoM, 2021). Only the melody line now exists, written by hand on the top of the typed lyrics but the folk influences are clear to see. The song is written in 6/8 and features arpeggiated melodic shapes which enable a mostly syllabic word setting of the humorous and, on times, irreverent lyrics. The diatonic melody could be successfully harmonised with little need to move outside of primary chords and is highly memorable due to its repetitive and somewhat predictable nature. It is a shame then that the song is no longer sung and has fallen into obscurity.

Fanfare

As well as the popularity of his seafaring Hymn “He who would Valiant Be” amongst UK independent schools, Ralph Vaughan-Williams also contributed a fanfare composition to Bryanston School in 1953 for the laying of the Music School foundation stone (Vaughan-Williams, 1953). Whilst the school does not have an official school song, this fanfare was revived and performed again when the new Music School building was opened in 2014. The fanfare clearly holds a special place in the musical life of the school. It should be mentioned that it was also in 1953 that Vaughan Williams arranged “Old Hundredth” for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, skillfully incorporating fanfare aspects against the original Genevian Psalter melody.

Conclusion

As has been shown, there are examples of each of the anthem category types within the current corpus of school songs. Indeed, there are far more examples than could be included meaningfully within this paper. The preservation of these school songs is essential. With Independent schools closing due to financial impact of COVID19 and Brexit, many songs are at risk of being lost and it is entirely possible that many have already been lost. When the

song are no longer sung, schools merge, close and change status, the academic community is deprived of the unique commentary these songs provide on the schools, their history, identity and pedagogical practice.

It must be acknowledged that the potential loss of songs through disinterest and neglect is only second to the risk of songs being destroyed by their own communities because of the colonialist or overtly nationalistic textual content. My research seeks to include not only the preservation and study of independent school songs, be they anthemic or not, but to facilitate dialogue with schools whose songs no longer accurately represent their identity.

Through acknowledging the uncomfortable and problematic content of some school songs it is then possible to look beyond that and see them for the valuable contribution they can make to our understanding of their role in creating collective identity through shared musical experience.

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