

# Many Voices: The New Polyphony in Anglo-American Choral Music of the Twenty-First Century, Part Two

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*composer*

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## Abstract

Part One of this article provided a short history of the earliest vocal polyphony used in the Western church, from organum up to and including the works of John Dunstaple, discussed the rise of imitation and counterpoint, and demonstrated how this past can act as a foil to continuations and developments in the choral music of our times. As the twenty-first century progresses, a number of eminent composers of choral music continue to write in an avowedly polyphonic vein, and several younger exponents of the art of counterpoint have come to the fore. A clear distinction has always existed between polyphony and counterpoint: all counterpoint is polyphonic; but not all polyphony is contrapuntal. Part Two of the article examines choral works written by British composers John McCabe, David Mathews, Alec Roth, and Judith Weir. For want of any stronger criterion, these prominent figures are dealt with in the order of their dates of birth in the hope that some pronounced trends might nevertheless be discerned. All pitch classes are given in Helmholtz.

A sense of excitement is rarely engendered, gentle reader, when the term analytical methodology is encountered at the very outset. Nonetheless, please persevere, be resolute, and dwell awhile on what follows here. In order better to understand the role of voices and voice parts within what we have called the New Polyphony in contemporary choral music, various established compositional techniques have been

extrapolated as parameters with which to measure exactly what is going on within a particular score. These tools are best articulated as a simple list, and are as follows: tension and release arising from suspension techniques, recognisable motifs, motivic variation, melodically rewarding contours, the role of voice-leading, elliptical meaning, dyadic and triadic harmony, wrong-note harmony, dissonance treatment (hierarchy of dissonance, dissonance as an avoidance of monotony, semi-dissonance, eclectic symphonic dissonance), timbral exploration, contrapuntist versus homophonist approaches, canon and heterophony, imitation both free and strict, homage and pastiche, block chord keyboard formations, the new simplicity, and text desynchronisation. Now, there is no need baulk at the one term or the other: most of these categories are either well known, or self-explanatory, or both. As for coinages with which one is not yet familiar, they become clear in the context of the discourse below. Now do read on...

If ever there were a work that demonstrates in the present context to what extent composers write music about music, then it would be *Christ's Nativity* by John McCabe (1939–2015) for SATB double choir and organ. We glimpse here immediately and exactly that which sets the composer apart from many contemporaries: a musical language that is tonal and to some extent serial, but which remains lyrical in its avowed constructivism. The composer describes how he had “spent considerable time listening to much early English church music” and mentions as his mentors, as it were, William Byrd, Thomas Tallis, Christopher Tye and Robert Whyte, adding that this may well have influenced the “texture of the music, notably the contrapuntal aspects”.

John McCabe was a composer of works in many forms, virtuoso pianist, writer, and former Director of the London College of Music. He trained as a musician at Manchester University, the “old” Royal Manchester College of Music, where he was in the next college generation after Birtwistle, Goehr, Ogdon and

Maxwell Davies, and at Munich's Hochschule für Musik und Theater. Early on, it was obvious that here was a composer who was in touch with the major trends of 20th century music, including jazz, but was not bewitched by avant-garde fashions.

In *Christ's Nativity*, McCabe sets two poems by Henry Vaughan that describe the glory of Jesus and its effect on the mortal realm. The composer exhibits no qualms about using bold and dramatic contrasts to achieve direct polyphonic effects. These include the block fortissimo chords at "The Sun" in b. 34, and, in bb. 35-37, the quaver duplet figures in the prevailing 9/8 time at "doth shake": a remarkable example of word painting worthy of Handel.



The musical score for "Christ's Nativity" by John McCabe, measures 31-38, is presented in a multi-staff format. The vocal parts are arranged in four systems, each containing two staves (Soprano and Alto, Tenor and Bass). The piano accompaniment is located at the bottom of the page. The score is written in 3/4 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The vocal parts are labeled S.I., A.I., T.I., B.I., S.II., A.II., T.II., and B.II. The piano part is labeled P. The score includes a variety of note values and rests, with some passages marked "Andante" and "Allegretto".

Music Example One: "Christ's Nativity", John McCabe, bb. 31-38

The dissonance treatment is hierarchical: the second chord in b. 31 (to the “-wake” of “awake”) superimposes perfect fourths  $g\#-c\#'-f\#'$  on the bass  $E$ , the added  $d\#''$  in the soprano being understood by way of ellipsis as a perfect fourth lower than any implicit  $g\#''$ . The bare octave  $a-a'$  at “The” in b. 33 frames a perfect fourth and perfect fifth, the  $d\#''$  shifting its function to become a Lydian augmented fourth against the bass, and at “Sun”, in the following bar, the pure  $E$  minor harmony is symphonic in intent and acts as a foil to the forgoing mixed chords.

The compositional response, then, to the magical imagery of Vaughan's words evinces a sense of immediacy and ensures this 12-minute work resounds in the minds of audiences for a while after. As David Lindley notes in the September 2015 issue of *Organists' Review*, the “harmonic language is...astringent, the vocal lines often rhythmically complex, and melodically angular”. As for the organ, it provides a commentary all its own, and enhances the contrapuntal activity by setting off those duplets in the voices with a relentless brocade of compound time quavers. *Christ's Nativity* was commissioned by the Hallé Choir and premiered in 2014 at Hallé St Peter's with Madeleine Venner conducting.

For readers not familiar with the choral music of David Matthews (b. 1943), a few bare facts will put his music into perspective. He worked from the mid-1960s as an apprentice in the studio of Benjamin Britten, and benefited from an invaluable training, even though he did not feel bold enough to show Britten his own music. Britten did not teach, and nor did Matthews' “real hero at the time”, Michael Tippett, who did at least recommend as a teacher a younger composer, Anthony Milner. Matthews subsequently studied with Nicholas

Maw, whose music he also greatly admired, and explains how he started to gain the confidence to write as he wanted instead of feeling that he should “try to compose like Boulez or Stockhausen, who dominated the musical scene at the time”. He adds that he did not feel “destined to follow the current avant-garde, but to continue along a path similar to that which Britten and Tippett were following, one also rooted in the Viennese Classics, Mahler and the early 20th-century modernists Stravinsky, Schönberg, Berg and Bartók”. Matthews, then, had always known that he should never forsake tonality, but try to reconcile the present with the past. His music, and his choral works in particular, are cast in ripe traditional forms, the musical language mature but not yet starting to rot. He has always maintained a firm commitment to a music that is grounded in song and dance, and is connected to the vernacular.

A fine example of this is his *The Key of the Kingdom*, a setting of the anonymous nursery rhyme ‘This is the Key of the Kingdom’ for SATB Chorus with organ ad libitum and the first poem in Walter de la Mare’s anthology for children called *Come Hither*. This is mysterious verse indeed, and acts as a kind of spell, or mandala; its cumulative lines gradually leading to a discovery at its centre of a moment of stillness, before the spell goes into reverse. Matthew indulges here in weighty blocks of polyphony, here taken to mean many sounds as opposed to the more literal many voices *per se*, pitting in a straightforward 4/4 metre rising triplet crotchet figures in the upper voices, with falling crotchet and two quaver motifs in the lower ones, these ending on long pedal chords, before the sopranos and altos once again take flight.

1

Soprano: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Alto: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Tenor 1: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Tenor 2: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Piano: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

2

Soprano: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Alto: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Tenor 1: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Tenor 2: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Piano: The key of the kingdom is the word of the Lord

Music Example Two: "The Key of the Kingdom", David Matthews, bb. 10-19



What points up the text so effectively is, in polyphonic terms, the use of similar, parallel, and contrary motion in the voices, clearly seen at bars 10, 11, and 12 respectively. And by employing vocalise passages to “ah”, a certain desynchronisation of text is achieved. The work was commissioned by Barbara Wakelyn and given its first performance in 2007 at St Mary of Charity, Faversham, UK by the City of Canterbury Chamber Choir conducted by George Vass.

Lest accusers vent their wrath when a composer other than Olivier Messiaen uses birdsong as an inspiration, allow the present writer to defuse any ‘situation’ regarding another work by David Matthews, his *Dawn Chorus*. As is clear by the title, the composer seeks inspiration here in what humankind has presumably always regarded with awe, the gradually quickening and oft quite tumultuous sound of feathered members of the Aves community that usually starts well before sunrise. But music history is strewn with examples of works based on the sounds, and on occasion clear tunes, uttered by birds, from Clément Janequin’s *Le chant des oiseaux* to the *Swan of Tuonela* by Jean Sibelius (who once commented that the “call of the crane” was the “leitmotif” of his life), to name but two.

In the Matthews work, scored for mixed voice choir SATB with soloists a cappella, it is tempting to see the extended tenuto chords – note that these are marked *pp*– in the chorus as an imaginary landscape, over which are projected solo bird songs, an almost Ivesian technique. These fragmentary calls are not exact transcriptions à la Messiaen, but approximations that use precise pitches, the composer’s aim being merely to conjure up each particular species in the mind’s ear. The first solo soprano three bars after letter ‘C’ in the score is a clear example, and note must be made of the falling perfect

fourths (which surely would be closer to tritones in the natural environment), as well as the rising perfect fifths enclosing a diminished fifth and major third.

Harmonically, the chord at letter 'C' defies meaningful intervallic analysis and therefore must be understood as non-functional. What can be said, however, is that it combines E minor and A major in some type of tonic/dominant or tonic/subdominant relationship. To add rhythmic edge to the bird song, acciaccature are used (e.g. at six bars after 'C') and precede each insistent, main pitch class. Some sections in *Dawn Chorus*, we note, are if not aleatoric, then at least allow repeats of material ad libitum.

Dissonance treatment admits two discrete scopes, local and global. The birdsongs are sporadic: hardly has a soloist uttered a call than the next one is audible, there being little chance to perceive clangour or concord; whereas the eight-part chords are so attenuated that specific internal frictions may be heard out at will along a time line as the score is realised as choral sound. This is of course a quite direct mimetic response to the natural sound-world, but the polyphony must be understood as not the bird calls *in campo aperto*, but their abstract relationship to the almost stationary background harmonies.

1

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

2

5 6 7 8

5 6 7 8

5 6 7 8

5 6 7 8

5 6 7 8

5 6 7 8

3

9 10 11 12

9 10 11 12

9 10 11 12

9 10 11 12

9 10 11 12

9 10 11 12

The image displays two pages of a musical score for "Dawn Chorus" by David Matthews. The score is written for a string quartet, with four staves for each part (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The notation is highly complex, featuring overlapping melodic lines and intricate rhythmic patterns. The first page (pp. 2 & 7) shows the beginning of the piece, with the strings entering in a dense, textured manner. The second page continues the development of these themes, with the strings playing in a more active, rhythmic fashion. The score includes various musical symbols, such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). The overall style is characteristic of contemporary classical music, emphasizing texture and timbre over traditional harmonic structures.

Music Example Three: "Dawn Chorus", David Matthews, pp. 2 & 7

For *Dawn Chorus*, Matthews recorded “many calls during the spring, particularly blackbirds and song thrushes” from his house in North London, deriving “singable phrases” from it. Nine soloists are spread around the performance space, their vocal material based on the calls of a song thrush, blackcap, great tit, blackbirds, woodpigeon, collared dove, and finally a cuckoo. The song thrush begins the piece with a lone solo, and Matthews relates how “on a number of May mornings” he was constantly “woken up at 4 a.m.” As he explains, at the close of this short piece redolent with the sonance of the natural word, “all the birds, before they are cut off to leave a final quiet chord from the chorus, sing together for about a minute”. These are many voices indeed.

Richard Bratby, writing in the May 2018 issue of *The Spectator* claims that this is “four minutes of the art that conceals art, in which human voices imitate birdsong with hallucinatory precision.” The work was commissioned by the Lichfield Festival and Arts Council England, receiving its first performance in 2015 by Ex Cathedra under Jeffrey Skidmore at Lichfield Cathedral.

Eclectic is the best way to describe the heritage and musical education of Alec Roth (b. 1948). Born near Manchester, he is of German/Irish descent and studied music at the University of Durham, conducting with Diego Masson and Rafael Kubelik. He also studied gamelan at the Academy of Indonesian Performing Arts in Surakarta, Central Java. His collaborations with the Indian writer Vikram Seth include the song cycles *Chinese Gardens* (Chester Festival commission 1998) and *Romantic Residues* (Bury St Edmunds Festival commission 2003).

In *Night Prayer* (*Te lucis ante terminum*) for SSATBB voices a

cappella, Roth sets the venerable 7th century Ambrosian hymn for the close of day at Compline, a text which has inspired so many composers, from Thomas Tallis to Peter Maxwell Davies. According to Alec Roth, the Tallis setting held him “under its spell” since he first sang it in his youth, adding that its “plainsong melody has been a recurring obsession” and appears in many of his works, “usually hidden beneath the surface”. A monophonic chant can be a blessing in disguise: it is remarkably resilient melodically and remains immediately recognizable however arcane any cantus firmus treatment might be; but it will prove a stubborn beast when attempts are made to tease out new harmonic implications. Assuming one adheres to the Solesemes rather than the mensural school of plainsong interpretation, *Te lucis ante terminum* offers in its quiet beauty but little scope for rhythmic development. Roth solves these issues by drawing – fairly obviously, one could argue – on his gamelan training (he held the post as Artistic Director of the Royal Festival Hall Gamelan Programme 1987-91). In bb. 10-11 of *Night Prayer* the polyrhythms between the upper voices and the lower ones are strongly reminiscent of gamelan music, proving to be similar melodic motifs rendered in different tempi: at b. 11, the four dotted quavers in 3/4 time in the sopranos and altos could of course be notated as a crotchet quadruplet 4:3, if perhaps not quite as effectively in visual terms. The motifs are recognisable, and admit strict imitation, even if this borders on simple heterophony, as at bb. 16-17 and bb. 18-19. The practice is inverted at b. 25, with the dotted values in the tenors and bases, and regular quavers in the two alto voices. A strong sense of contrapuntal activity is engendered in performance, but remains within a tight harmonic framework that wilfully borders on stasis. *Night Prayer* was commissioned by ORA100 for Suzi Digby and her ORA Singers, who gave the first public performance at Cutty Sark, Greenwich, in 2017.

**1st Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**2nd Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**3rd Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**4th Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**5th Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**1st Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**2nd Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**3rd Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**4th Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

**5th Part**

musical for you - joyful and happy as - ever - I - love  
 when you are - not in the air - the -

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Star-Spangled Banner." It includes five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) and one piano accompaniment staff at the bottom. The music is in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the vocal staves, and the piano part provides harmonic support. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format.

Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

*Music Example Four: "Night Prayer", Alec Roth, bb. 10-27*



The music of Judith Weir (b. 1954) will hopefully need no lengthy introduction. Born to Scottish parents in Cambridge, England, she studied composition with John Tavener, Robin Holloway, and Gunther Schuller. In the mid-1990s she became Associate Composer with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Artistic Director of the Spitalfields Festival, and was later a Visiting Professor at Princeton, Harvard, and Cardiff universities. In 2014 Weir was appointed Master of the Queen's Music, the first female composer to hold the post. She is the composer of several operas, most notably *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987) and *Blond Eckbert* (1993). Her *Two Human Hymns* are a mainstay of many a choir around the world.

"Sing" from *The Song Sung True*, for chorus SSAATBB a cappella, is No.1 of "four songs about singing". It is marked "direct and forthright". The work is a bequest of the late Helen Sibthorp, apparently a rather direct and lively person who would have wished any memorial made to her to be spirited and unusual. Although Weir never knew her personally, the composer felt that the "link between us all is the life-giving activity of singing", and so all four movements of *The Song Sung True* are "about singing, and lay particular musical emphasis on the words 'sing', 'sang' and 'song'".

From the very outset, "Sing" does prove immensely singable. The triplet motif in b. 1 presented as octave unisons moves off its final note immediately to form major seconds, thus creating a level of semi-dissonance and a moment of micro-polyphony. In b. 2 it is repeated a perfect fifth higher, before falling by a descending minor third. This archetypal interval is found in children's songs around the world and is a kind of universal chant of "Ur-Song" that lies somewhere

between speech and song and which is strongly imitative of nature sounds such as birdsong and animal calls. There follows some canny motivic variation with melodically rewarding contours, the leading voice of which is characterised by, for example, the strongly denoted Lydian mode moving  $b'-c''$  for the sopranos and  $b-c'$  for the tenors in b. 5.

1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134, 2135, 2136, 2137, 2138, 2139, 2140, 2141, 2142, 2143, 2144, 2145, 2146, 2147, 2148, 2149, 2150, 2151, 2152, 2153, 2154, 2155, 2156, 2157, 2158, 2159, 2160, 2161, 2162, 2163, 2164, 2165, 2166, 2167, 2168, 2169, 2170, 2171, 2172, 2173, 2174, 2175, 2176, 2177, 2178, 2179, 2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185, 2186, 2187, 2188, 2189, 2190, 2191, 2192, 2193, 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198, 2199, 2200, 2201, 2202, 2203, 2204, 2205, 2206, 2207, 2208, 2209, 2210, 2211, 2212, 2213, 2214, 2215, 2216, 2217, 2218, 2219, 2220, 2221, 2222, 2223, 2224, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2228, 2229, 2230, 2231, 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2238, 2239, 2240, 2241, 2242, 2243, 2244, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2248, 2249, 2250, 2251, 2252, 2253, 2254, 2255, 2256, 2257, 2258, 2259, 2260, 2261, 2262, 2263, 2264, 2265, 2266, 2267, 2268, 2269, 2270, 2271, 2272, 2273, 2274, 2275, 2276, 2277, 2278, 2279, 2280, 2281, 2282, 2283, 2284, 2285, 2286, 2287, 2288, 2289, 2290, 2291, 2292, 2293, 2294, 2295, 2296, 2297, 2298, 2299, 2300, 2301, 2302, 2303, 2304, 2305, 2306, 2307, 2308, 2309, 2310, 2311, 2312, 2313, 2314, 2315, 2316, 2317, 2318, 2319, 2320, 2321, 2322, 2323, 2324, 2325, 2326, 2327, 2328, 2329, 2330, 2331, 2332, 2333, 2334, 2335, 2336, 2337, 2338, 2339, 2340, 2341, 2342, 2343, 2344, 2345, 2346, 2347, 2348, 2349, 2350, 2351, 2352, 2353, 2354, 2355, 2356, 2357, 2358, 2359, 2360, 2361, 2362, 2363, 2364, 2365, 2366, 2367, 2368, 2369, 2370, 2371, 2372, 2373, 2374, 2375, 2376, 2377, 2378, 2379, 2380, 2381, 2382, 2383, 2384, 2385, 2386, 2387, 2388, 2389, 2390, 2391, 2392, 2393, 2394, 2395, 2396, 2397, 2398, 2399, 2400, 2401, 2402, 2403, 2404, 2405, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2409, 2410, 2411, 2412, 2413, 2414, 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2426, 2427, 2428, 2429, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2434, 2435, 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449, 2450, 2451, 2452, 2453, 2454, 2455, 2456, 2457, 2458, 2459, 2460, 2461, 2462, 2463, 2464, 2465, 2466, 2467, 2468, 2469, 2470, 2471, 2472, 2473, 2474, 2475, 2476, 2477, 2478, 2479, 2480, 2481, 2482, 2483, 2484, 2485, 2486, 2487, 2488, 2489, 2490, 2491, 2492, 2493, 2494, 2495, 2496, 2497, 2498, 2499, 2500, 2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508, 2509, 2510, 2511, 2512, 2513, 2514, 2515, 2516, 2517, 2518, 2519, 2520, 2521, 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528, 2529, 2530, 2531, 2532, 2533, 2534, 2535, 2536, 2537, 2538, 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2543, 2544, 2545, 2546, 2547, 2548, 2549, 2550, 2551, 2552, 2553, 2554, 2555, 2556, 2557, 2558, 2559, 2560, 2561, 2562, 2563, 2564, 2565, 2566, 2567, 2568, 2569, 2570, 2571, 2572, 2573, 2574, 2575, 2576, 2577, 2578, 2579, 2580, 2581, 2582, 2583, 2584, 2585, 2586, 2587, 2588, 2589, 2590, 2591, 2592, 2593, 2594, 2595, 2596, 2597, 2598, 2599, 2600, 2601, 2602, 2603, 2604, 2605, 2606, 2607, 2608, 2609, 2610, 2611, 2612, 2613, 2614, 2615, 2616, 2617, 2618, 2619, 2620, 2621, 2622, 2623, 2624, 2625, 2626, 2627, 2628, 2629, 2630, 2631, 2632, 2633, 2634, 2635, 2636, 2637, 2638, 2639, 2640, 2641, 2642, 2643, 2644, 2645, 2646, 2647, 2648, 2649, 2650, 2651, 2652, 2653, 2654, 2655, 2656, 2657, 2658, 2659, 2660, 2661, 2662, 2663, 2664, 2665, 2666, 2667, 2668, 2669, 2670, 2671, 2672, 2673, 2674, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2678, 2679, 26

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### 4. The Effect of the Number of Nodes

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2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033 2034 2035 2036 2037 2038 2039 2040 2041 2042 2043 2044 2045 2046 2047 2048 2049 2050 2051 2052 2053 2054 2055 2056 2057 2058 2059 2060 2061 2062 2063 2064 2065 2066 2067 2068 2069 2070 2071 2072 2073 2074 2075 2076 2077 2078 2079 2080 2081 2082 2083 2084 2085 2086 2087 2088 2089 2090 2091 2092 2093 2094 2095 2096 2097 2098 2099 2100 2101 2102 2103 2104 2105 2106 2107 2108 2109 2110 2111 2112 2113 2114 2115 2116 2117 2118 2119 2120 2121 2122 2123 2124 2125 2126 2127 2128 2129 2130 2131 2132 2133 2134 2135 2136 2137 2138 2139 2140 2141 2142 2143 2144 2145 2146 2147 2148 2149 2150 2151 2152 2153 2154 2155 2156 2157 2158 2159 2160 2161 2162 2163 2164 2165 2166 2167 2168 2169 2170 2171 2172 2173 2174 2175 2176 2177 2178 2179 2180 2181 2182 2183 2184 2185 2186 2187 2188 2189 2190 2191 2192 2193 2194 2195 2196 2197 2198 2199 2200 2201 2202 2203 2204 2205 2206 2207 2208 2209 2210 2211 2212 2213 2214 2215 2216 2217 2218 2219 2220 2221 2222 2223 2224 2225 2226 2227 2228 2229 2230 2231 2232 2233 2234 2235 2236 2237 2238 2239 2240 2241 2242 2243 2244 2245 2246 2247 2248 2249 2250 2251 2252 2253 2254 2255 2256 2257 2258 2259 2260 2261 2262 2263 2264 2265 2266 2267 2268 2269 2270 2271 2272 2273 2274 2275 2276 2277 2278 2279 2280 2281 2282 2283 2284 2285 2286 2287 2288 2289 2290 2291 2292 2293 2294 2295 2296 2297 2298 2299 2300 2301 2302 2303 2304 2305 2306 2307 2308 2309 2310 2311 2312 2313 2314 2315 2316 2317 2318 2319 2320 2321 2322 2323 2324 2325 2326 2327 2328 2329 2330 2331 2332 2333 2334 2335 2336 2337 2338 2339 2340 2341 2342 2343 2344 2345 2346 2347 2348 2349 2350 2351 2352 2353 2354 2355 2356 2357 2358 2359 2360 2361 2362 2363 2364 2365 2366 2367 2368 2369 2370 2371 2372 2373 2374 2375 2376 2377 2378 2379 2380 2381 2382 2383 2384 2385 2386 2387 2388 2389 2390 2391 2392 2393 2394 2395 2396 2397 2398 2399 2400 2401 2402 2403 2404 2405 2406 2407 2408 2409 2410 2411 2412 2413 2414 2415 2416 2417 2418 2419 2420 2421 2422 2423 2424 2425 2426 2427 2428 2429 2430 2431 2432 2433 2434 2435 2436 2437 2438 2439 2440 2441 2442 2443 2444 2445 2446 2447 2448 2449 2450 2451 2452 2453 2454 2455 2456 2457 2458 2459 2460 2461 2462 2463 2464 2465 2466 2467 2468 2469 2470 2471 2472 2473 2474 2475 2476 2477 2478 2479 2480 2481 2482 2483 2484 2485 2486 2487 2488 2489 2490 2491 2492 2493 2494 2495 2496 2497 2498 2499 2500 2501 2502 2503 2504 2505 2506 2507 2508 2509 2510 2511 2512 2513 2514 2515 2516 2517 2518 2519 2520 2521 2522 2523 2524 2525 2526 2527 2528 2529 2530 2531 2532 2533 2534 2535 2536 2537 2538 2539 2540 2541 2542 2543 2544 2545 2546 2547 2548 2549 2550 2551 2552 2553 2554 2555 2556 2557 2558 2559 2560 2561 2562 2563 2564 2565 2566 2567 2568 2569 2570 2571 2572 2573 2574 2575 2576 2577 2578 2579 2580 2581 2582 2583 2584 2585 2586 2587 2588 2589 2590 2591 2592 2593 2594 2595 2596 2597 2598 2599 2600 2601 2602 2603 2604 2605 2606 2607 2608 2609 2610 2611 2612 2613 2614 2615 2616 2617 2618 2619 2620 2621 2622 2623 2624 2625 2626 2627 2628 2629 2630 2631 2632 2633 2634 2635 2636 2637 2638 2639 2640 2641 2642 2643 2644 2645 2646 2647 2648 2649 2650 2651 2652 2653 2654 2655 2656 2657 2658 2659 2660 2661 2662 2663 2664 2665 2666 2667 2668 2669 2670 2671 2672 2673 2674 2675 2676 2677 2678 2679 2680 2681 2682 2683 2684 2685 2686 2687 2688 2689 2690 2691 2692 2693 2694 2695 2696 2697 2698 2699 2700 2701 2702 2703 2704 2705 2706 2707 2708 2709 2710 2711 2712 2713 2714 2715 2716 2717 2718 2719 2720 2721 2722 2723 2724 2725 2726 2727 2728 2729 2730 2731 2732 2733 2734 2735 2736 2737 2738 2739 2740 2741 2742 2743 2744 2745 2746 2747 2748 2749 2750 2751 2752 2753 2754 2755 2756 2757 2758 2759 2760 2761 2762 2763 2764 2765 2766 2767 2768 2769 2770 2771 2772 2773 2774 2775 2776 2777 2778 2779 2780 2781 2782 2783 2784 2785 2786 2787 2788 2789 2790 2791 2792 2793 2794 2795 2796 2797 2798 2799 2800 2801 2802 2803 2804 2805 2806 2807 2808 2809 2810 2811 2812 2813 2814 2815 2816 2817 2818

The simple verse by Alan Spence (b. 1947) – a Scottish writer who has crossed genres and covered many themes, his output often falling somewhere between literature and philosophy, but always shot through with ideas of Zen and contemplative meditation – is married to straightforward music, which is no less effective thanks to telling imitative effects that lie somewhere between canon and heterophony, bb. 26-30 being a case in point. The word painting at “tell the bell”, with a new motif built from two descending perfect fourths, produces a resounding choral, quasi-campanological sound, the whole being greater than the sum of its four simple parts. (Weir is not a fan of *divisi*, it would seem.)



Clearly then, it is not only the voice pairing but also the urgency of the entries –first at two beats’ distance, and then at just one – that creates such a robust polyphony. This is a self-assured contrapuntist at work. The premiere of the cycle *The Song Sung True* was in 2013 at St Lawrence Jewry, London by the London Lawyers’ Chorus under Christopher Oakley.

*Part Three of the present article will be a discussion of the choral music of Francis Pott, Gabriel Jackson, Howard Moody, Roxanna Panufnik, Matthew Martin, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Owain Park, and Rhiannon Randle, with observations on the music of Thea Musgrave and Nico Muhly.*



**Graham Lack** studied composition and musicology at King’s College and Goldsmiths College (University of London), the University of Chichester, and the Technical University of Berlin. From 1982–1994 he was Lecturer in Music at the University of Maryland. His breakthrough was with the 12-part *Sanctus*, commissioned by Queens’ College Cambridge in 1998 and broadcast live on German Radio from

Cologne. His *Two Madrigals for High Summer* (SSATB) have been performed worldwide. In 2008, *REFUGIUM*, based on texts by the Croatian poet Peter Hektorović, for choir, organ and three percussionists was premiered in London. Commissions include *Estraines* for The King’s Singers, *Lullabies* for VOCES8,

*Demesnes* for Quartonal, *A Sphere of Ether* for the Young Voices of Colorado, and *Wondrous Machine* for the multi-percussionist Martin Grubinger. The string trio *The Pencil of Nature* was premiered at musica viva in Munich. Orchestral works include *Nine Moons Dark* and *Five Inscapes*. The *Preludes* for piano solo were premiered by Lukáš Vondráček at the Queen Elizabeth Hall London, and the orchestral work *Sitherwood* by the Monteverdichor Würzburg. He is currently working on a violin concerto and orchestra for Benjamin Schmid, *The Windhover*. Winner of the 2015 Ortus International New Music Competition. *The Legend of Saint Wite* (SAA voices and string quartet) prize-winner BBC Music Magazine Competition 2009. CD *Missa Dominica* (with Candlemas) Gramophone Recording of the Month December 2017. American Record Guide Critic's Choice 2018, CD *REFUGIUM*. Since 2018, Composer Fellow Trinity Boys Choir London. graham-lack@t-online.de – www.graham-lack.com (Photo © Astrid Ackermann)

*Edited by Karen Bradberry, Australia*