Robin in context

Introduction

Robin produced some 115 compositions, among them a symphony, a violin concerto, a ballet, a masque, an opera, two oratorios, chamber music, pieces for piano and for organ, songs and choral works, both small- and large-scale. However, in addition to being the composer's favourite and most personal genre, the songs for solo voice and piano are Robin's largest and most condensed genre. These compositions will now be considered here within the context of early twentieth century English music and later through critical analysis.

By the time Robin commenced song composition, a school of English song was well established through the work and compositions of such 'main' composers as Parry, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, Gurney, Warlock and Finzi. However, in the contextualisation of Robin's songs, other aspects need to be considered in addition to the main composers of song. These include the existence of a twentieth century English musical renaissance and its main composers; Robin's studies at the Royal College of Music; contemporary composition students at the RCM; the 'organ loft' song composers; the friendship with Balfour Gardiner; and the development of music publishing, the British Broadcasting Company (subsequently, Corporation), musical education in schools and amateur music-making (including the many local musical festivals throughout the country).

The twentieth-century English musical renaissance

Howes (1966) and Hughes/Stradling (1993) suggest and have proven the existence of a twentieth century 'English musical renaissance'. Having argued the necessity for such a phenomenon, these writers explain its development, including a revival in the music of the Tudors and Bach, and a systematic preservation of and belief in English folksong. Howes and Hughes/Stradling also highlight the influence of three 'popular' movements which assisted in the 'refertilization of the English soil'[1], the wide-spread adoption of the tonic-sol-fa system of notation for singers by Curwen, the establishment of brass-bands and the formation of competitive festivals. A number of Robin's choral works of the 1920s were set by the OUP in tonic-sol-fa (e.g. *Rain, Wind and Sunshine*, pre-1930). Despite responding to the male-voice choir movement (e.g. *A Benedicite*), Robin did not, surprisingly, compose for brass band.

Although some of Robin's vocal music has been sung at competitive music festivals (e.g. *The Fiddler of Dooney*), there is no evidence to support any theory that he wrote specifically for such festivals. In fact, considering Robin's self-doubts, it is unlikely that the composer would have deemed himself worthy of commissioned compositions. His correspondence certainly supports his involvement with performance festivals (e.g. the Newbury and Leith Hill Festivals) but, even here, his low level of self-esteem is clearly evident, despite the encouragement of Vaughan Williams and Finzi).

In addition to the three popular movements above, Howes and Hughes/Stradling also identify developments in musical education (for example, the establishment of a number of London-based conservatoires, including the Royal College of Music) and other 'post-war' cultural aspects such as the establishment of the Oxford University Press and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

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[1] Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p. 111

Clearly Robin may well have been influenced by a number of these aspects and, in addition, by a number of friends and fellow-musicians (both within and outside the RCM) who were numerous and included mainstream musician and composers. Apart from his mainly London-based circle of friends (such as Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, R O Morris, Henry Ley, Balfour Gardiner, Peter Warlock and Gerald Finzi, there were well-known professionals in other music disciplines such as the conductor, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Hugh Allen, the Director of the Royal College of Music, the organist Richard Latham, the viola player Jean Stewart, and singers including John Goss and Marion Robin. And there were musical friends such as the grandchildren of Sir John Stainer.

Fundamentally, in spite of indications in other directions, Robin's musical style encompasses features from the traditionalist/nationalist and late Romantic schools of English composition. Howes describes the first group as "followers at various distances of Holst and Vaughan Williams … who went to the same sources, the folk-song and the Elizabethan traditions". [2] It is further suggested that Robin's music of the 1920s and 1930s reflects an affinity with the style of the late Romantics and nationalists, while the music of the 1940s and 1950s suggests some degree of influence from the 'Post-War Group''.

A number of Robin's works from the 1920s and 1930s show the influence of English folksong through the use of modal implications, melodic contours, harmonic movement and harmonic 'parallel' movement. These include *The Shoemaker*, the early piano works, early songs, *Suite in D minor, My Lady's Pleasure, The Darkling Thrush, A Prophet in the Land, Rain, Wind and Sunshine/The Passing Year,* and *Idyll*.

[2] Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 247

Robin will now be considered in relation to the early twentieth century English musical renaissance, particularly as a song composer.

Robin and the Royal College of Music

In commencing study at the Royal College of Music, Robin became involved with an educational establishment of which Parry wrote "The Royal College of Music has always been a place with big aims of doing something special to the nation, and it was organised from the start with a view to their attainment." [3] When Robin's temperament is placed within this context, it is instantly realised that Robin was not emotionally equipped for consciously "doing something special" for the nation. His shyness, reticence and humility simply would not have allowed him to participate in such a large-scale aim. However, unconsciously, Robin did contribute to English music.

During the decade before Robin's entry to the RCM, a number of social attitudes prevailed in Britain. Firstly, after German use of poison gas at the front and encouraging the submarine A20 to sink the *Lusitania* during World War 1, anti-German feeling was at a height. Propaganda became charged. Although Ernest Newman warned against "small music" [4] and doubted the philosophy that English music could only revive and thrive through an English folksong foundation, renewed interest in English music developed. British culture became the vogue, including music. Stanford, himself, eventually came to reject German music and its influence on future English music.

English music now had to find new directions. One developed using a 'Celtic' foundation (inspired by the current Irish question), involving such composers as Bantock, Bax, Ireland and Holbrooke (Stanford, of course, led the way in this movement with numerous songs suggesting Irish folk-style, all set in a Brahmsian language). Another

[3] Hughes and Stradling 2001: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 83
[4] Hughes and Stradling 2001: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 84

direction was the development of the 'pastoral' composers now further inspired by the break-up of the Union and the loss of such composers as George Butterworth, Ernest Farrar, W. D Browne and Frederick Kelly during the war.

With Parry's death in 1918 came the end of an era at the RCM. Hugh Allen (the new Director) was deeply rooted in the German school but his specialism lay with Schutz and early German music. He also had loyalties, however, with the 'Pastoral School' through his friendship with Vaughan Williams. Thus Allen's appointment seemed an inspired choice. It was within this environment that Robin made his personal stylistic choices.

Sadly, however, a number of promising students did not return to their studies after service in the First World War. In fact, by 1918 the College had reached its lowest level of students (215), increasing slightly with new autumn term. With the cessation of hostilities, however, the College embarked upon a new and vibrant era, a time which Robin, himself, would experience.

With the demobilisation of troops, male students sought scholarships to the College. By August 1919, the student numbers had risen to 332 with this number reaching to over 500 by May 1920. Under Allen's Directorship, Robin must have experienced improvements to accommodation and equipment, and the appointment of many new teaching-staff (26 new staff appointments were made between 1919-1920, a number of whom were former students of the College). There was also an expansion in ensemble work such as opera, orchestras and even a jazz band! Colles wrote "Through all these widenings of its bases the College never abandoned its first principles". [5] Other important innovations included visits of eminent musicians (examples include Marcel Duprē and Sibelius [the composer whom Robin greatly admired]), the introduction of

[5] 'The Royal College of Music 1883-1933', H. C. Colles, Macmillan and Co, 1933

ballet and conducting classes, and the reinstating of the Patron's Fund in its resumption of promoting the works of British composers. By this time, Vaughan Williams had also returned from the war to resume his professorship in composition. Henry Ley was still teaching at the College and Ivor Gurney, having just survived his war service, had returned for a second period of study. Such aspects cannot have escaped Robin's notice and sensitive nature.

Records, or rather the lack of records, suggest that Robin did not participate in many musical or social events at the College but, like many shy young students, simply remained aloof and retired to his lodgings, or went home to his relations. He did not allow himself the privilege of retiring to a student meeting venue to discuss his compositions, his style or contemporary ideals. It is worth noting that, apart from a brief reference to Rubbra [6] in a lesson, none of Robin's correspondence and discussions refers to any of his contemporaries, their compositions or their musical style. Marion Robin does not recall the composer discussing any of his peers nor does she remember Kirstie ever mentioning Robin discussing his contemporaries (such a reaction may well have been the result of Humphrey Robin's possible displeasure at his son wishing to take a musical career).

The only academic references to Robin are four-hand written reports by various members of the teaching staff on two compositions for submission to the RCM's Patron's Fund Competition. The handwriting of one of these is unreadable. Of *The Darkling Thrush* (1927-28), Mr. Eric Coates writes, "Very dull. Not good orchestration. Ugly". He does not recommend the work for performance. Of the *Double Fugue for Orchestra* (1925-26), Herbert Howells writes, "should prove very jolly … he might have to hear it". Howells recommended that this work should be recommended for performance at the Patron's Fund

[6] Letter to Kirstie, Newsom, 17 August, 1926

Competition. Sidney Waddington writes less enthusiastically, "Well kept going ... subject not very interesting" but he did suggest the work for "possible" performance.

Robin's shyness and solitariness were prominent influences on both the foundation of his style and its development. Robin's songs were clearly not composed on the structural scale of those by Gurney, Vaughan Williams and Ireland. He, himself, recognised the fact that he was essentially a miniaturist. This is revealed, for example, in his correspondence on the *Double Fugue* with Finzi.

Anne Ridler refers to that fact that Robin (like many sensitive young men) always preferred the company and influence of older people. Thus it was that Robin developed (quite naturally, it seems) a friendship with his teachers and, in particular, Vaughan Williams (who was known in the Robin family as 'uncle Ralph') and Henry Ley. Robin was, on the whole, more influenced by the music of the previous generation (e.g. John Ireland) than any music which was currently in vogue. Robin, in fact, became a musical recluse except for his friendship with Finzi.

Contemporary composers at the Royal College of Music

A number of Robin's contemporaries, entering the Royal College of Music shortly after World War One, developed into eminent musicians and composers, for example, Michael Tippett, Herbert Sumsion, Edmund Rubbra, Constant Lambert, Keith Faulkner and Elizabeth Maconchy. Lesser-known song composers who were contemporaries of Robin include Percy Turnbull and Cecil Armstrong Gibbs. The songs of these three composers are currently experiencing a revival of interest through their respective Trust and Society foundations. The Robin Trust has been in existence since 1986 but is only currently developing knowledge of the composer's songs. The Percy Turnbull Trust was established in 1979 and the Gibbs Society was established during 2004.

Cecil Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960)

Seventeen years older than Robin, Armstrong Gibbs entered the College in 1918 after studying history and music at Trinity College, Cambridge. He studied composition with Vaughan Williams for a year. Gibbs, an already established composer of English 'water colours' songs (similar to those of Robin) returned in 1921 to teach at the College. As an organist, it is quite possible that Robin became acquainted with Gibbs and his songs (for which he was best known) through his organ teacher, Henry Ley.

Parallels between the two men include similarities of style, varied and expansive output, and settings of poetry by Walter de la Mare. Gibbs set de la Mare's poetry as songs for solo voice while Robin's settings were not solo songs but a collection of songs for female chorus and solo voice, comprising a cantata entitled *Days and Moments*. These settings are not merely a collection of English 'water colours' but entire scenes

painted through musical textures. Similarly, like Gibbs, Robin had personal contact with the poet through correspondence.

Similar to Robin, Gibbs composed songs throughout his life. Howes feels that Gibbs' song output "enriched the tradition with a few gems and a large number of admirable songs". [7] He describes Gibbs' settings of Walter de la Mare as his "most notable success". [8] He also identifies Gibbs' harmonic success in terms of the "use of enharmonic, side-slipping and juxtaposed key changes". [9]

Percy Turnbull

Turnbull was a much larger and more confident student at the RCM than Robin. He gained a Foundation Scholarship to the RCM in 1922 and was "steeped in British and French music of the day". [10] As with Robin, Turnbull studied with Holst, Vaughan Williams, Morris and John Ireland. As a student, he was clearly a gifted composer, winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship and Sullivan Prize. Robin successes lay in his performances of compositions at the Patron's Fund concerts and the quiet composition and performances of children's works. Evidence of the regard in which Robin was held at the RCM, however, is demonstrated by the fact that Sir Hugh Allen, Director of the College, travelled down to Epsom for the premiere of Robin's' children's opera entitled *The Shoemaker* in 1924. Turnbull was also an accomplished pianist, giving recitals at the Wigmore Hall. Robin's piano and organ accomplishments were limited in comparison.

Robin's song composition was constant throughout his life and clearly served as a point of emotional stability throughout the composer's personal traumas. Turnbull's songs, on the other hand, date mainly from the 1920s (although some remained

7 Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 309
8 Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 309
9 Ibid
10 Dibble, J. 'The Songs and Part-songs of Percy Turnbull', SOMM CD020, 2000

unpublished until the 1950s, e.g. 'Chloris in the snow' was the first song composed by Turnbull but was not published until 1950). Apart from features influenced by Bach and Romantic composers in Turnbull's songs, Jeremy Dibble (2000) also identifies the influences of neo-Classical and the delicacies of such composers as Fauré and Ravel in Turnbull's songs. Professor Dibble also highlights Turnbull's 'straightforward diatonicism' [11] and the 'scope in the music for humour and satire' [12].

Although Howes identifies particular harmonic features and influences in the songs of Gibbs, he does not focus on the sensitive and successful illumination of, and interaction with, the texts of these composer's songs through such other musical features as melody and textural techniques nor, indeed, the actual development of material within the songs. These aspects are considered to a degree within the critical analysis of Robin's songs in chapters three, four and five of this thesis.

The 'organ-loft composers'

Many composers who are primarily known for their organ and church music also composed fine songs during the 1910s and 1920s (e.g. Harold Darke, Walford Davies, Martin Shaw, Geoffrey Shaw and Eric Thiman). It would appear that a degree of snobbery exists regarding these church and organ music composers. Such discrimination increases, however, when solo songs are considered. It is feasible that Henry Ley, moving within this circle of organists, may have introduced Robin to the music of these composers, particularly the songs and church music.

By the time Robin had composed his first song, established organists such as Martin Shaw, John Ireland, Eric Thiman had also published songs. Martin Shaw (1875-) studied at the Royal College of Music with Stanford. He worked with Percy Dearmer and

[11] Ibid
[12] Ibid

Vaughan Williams as an editor for *Songs of Praise* to which Robin also was asked to contribute. Shaw was noted primarily as an organist but composed over one hundred songs. For example, his 'Annabel Lee' (1921) tells its tragic love story through a juxtaposition of differing sections (similar to Robin's late songs of the 1930s, e.g. 'To Sincerity'). It employs a melody which is supported by homophonic texture and sustained harmony; cross-rhythms; syllabic melody in the style of quasi-recitative; sustained harmony; and dramatic quaver writing, all similar to such songs as 'The Moor' and 'I Will Not Let Thee Go'. In some respects, this song looks forward to some of Finzi's writing. 'Cargoes' (1924) employs diatonic harmony, dotted quaver/semiquaver rhythms (similar to those employed by Robin in 'Wessex Heights'), chromaticism and off-beat harmony tell the wonderful story of sea life. 'No' (1931) is quite progressive in style for Shaw. It hovers between descending sustained harmony with gentle dissonance and more stable tonality which sustains broken melodic rhythms.

Although Ireland was an organist, his compositions are not restricted to the confines of the organ loft and church music. The influence of Ireland's 1910s songs can be seen in Robin's early and mature song composition. The melodies of Ireland's 'Sea Fever' and Robin's 'The Moor' employ a contour similarity, in addition to the harmonic support.

Influenced by the "modal influences of folksong"[13], Howes states, "The perspective of history puts John Ireland into the same category of English romantics as Delius and Bax".[14] He continued, "… he seemed more modern in that his harmony was modally flavoured and garnished with added notes, and indeed he seemed to be an English Debussy".[15] Writing of Ireland, Howes identifies the fact that "The likeness to Debussy is not so much in actual sound or reliance on pure sensibility as in the small

[13] Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 222
[14] ibid
[15] ibid

form for the piano to convey visual imagery, suggestions of place and of character without subjective emotion".[16] Clearly, Robin did not employ any such style in his songs. However, the influence of Debussy and Impressionism is instantly recognisable with Robin's mature piano music, including *Three Dances* but, more particularly, in *Diversions* through the use of its piano figuration in terms of swift arpeggios and chords.

On hearing performances of Ireland's Piano Concerto, Robin expresses his thoughts on Ireland:

> I've heard the work, I suppose, four or five times now and find the first half of the slow movement absolutely haunting, indeed I think I'd even use the word exquisite about it and this, frankly, surprises me for I'm not an Ireland fan, though one or two early piano pieces (eg 'The Darkened Valley' and 'Chelsea Reach') I admit that I like very well.[17]

Such miniatures as Ireland's *The Darkened Valley* and *Chelsea Reach* may well have encouraged Robin to compose his piano and other instrumental miniatures, for example *Fishing by Moonlight*.

Balfour Gardiner

As with many young composers in the early 1920s, Robin was introduced to Balfour Gardiner, a musician who took an interest in a number of young composers. Balfour Gardiner arranged performances of their work, gave financial assistance and offered advice.

Robin benefited enormously from Balfour Gardiner's kindness, both musically and financially. Balfour Gardiner was genial and offered hope in all sorts of directions:

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16 ibid

17 Robin letter to Finzi, 21 April, 1945

> Mr. Balfour Gardiner wrote to me today asking me to dine with him at the Princes Grill Room, Piccadilly, tomorrow night before the Philharmonic Choir Concert to which he is going ... He also said he would be delighted to see you if you were going with me, which he thought probable. Dear old man - it will be great fun spending the evening with him, though I shall be very nervous, especially at dinner in that swish place. However he says he doesn't dress and I am not to. Of course at the back of my mind I have the very vague hope that he might have heard of something for me to do.[18]

He writes enthusiastically of all visits to, and all meetings with, Balfour Gardiner at Ashampstead, for example, "We [Robin and two friends - Dick Austin and ? Taylor] are all going down by the same train from Paddington to be met by Mr Balfour Gardiner's car at Pangbourne." [19] Similarly, "Mr Gardiner greeted us as he always does at the gate, fearfully jolly and pleased to see everyone. We then had a joyous dinner … the dinner was jolly good and afterward we smoked cigars." [20]

Robin often played his compositions to Balfour Gardiner. He appreciates Gardiner's opinion:

> I was rather nervous of playing … However, Mr. Gardiner was so nice about mine; he is always really enthusiastic about my music, saying he loves the rhythms so much and is always delighted listening to them. He likes the '3 Piano Pieces' ['My Lady's Pleasure'] very much but says they would be much better for orchestra, anyhow not for the piano.[21]

The older man clearly preached the philosophy of art for art's sake and failed to realise that less wealthy composers also needed to compose for financial reasons. Robin has definite opinions about this:

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[18] Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 10 March, 1926
[19] Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 2 June, 1925
[20] Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 3 June, 1925
[21] Ibid

> But the dear old man never realizes that one must think a little of the money side, and things for piano are published, and things for orchestra aren't. I could not bear to write music to get money unless I really felt I was giving my best music, but when one has written some pieces, which one thinks are worth publishing, then it seems to me that one must try to make them saleable somehow, anyhow while one is young - otherwise no-one will ever know of me, and one will never get any money, and after all musicians have got to live.[22]

Robin finds reassurance in Balfour Gardiner's words:

> Old Balfour told Daddy that he had always thought I should do small compositions well but that, on this last visit, when I brought him my symphony, he had realised I had possibilities of doing big things also, only he considered I had an immense amount to learn in that direction, and seemed to think lessons and general expansion essential.[23]

Nevertheless, he does not agree with Balfour Gardiner totally on his last point and bemoans the fact that time for composition was limited:

> But since I hardly have time to write so much as a madrigal, I don't see how it is to be worked! I don't believe lessons are necessary half so much as time. If only I had time to study and experiment, and have an occasional lesson, I think that would be the thing.[24]

However, Balfour Gardiner gives Robin the encouragement he requires "Your newly published pieces are charming. I read them during breakfast, and Dick Austin, who is with me, played them after. I hope you will be able to come down here soon and play me your latest works".[25]

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22 Ibid
23 Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 22 August, 1926
24 Ibid
25 Gardiner letter to Robin, 16 September, 1925

Music Publishing

Robin only infrequently comments on financial aspects and, on such occasions, he relates more to the compositions than to finance, "I have sold 98 copies of 'The Moor' since publication - not bad; and far more wonderful, 30 of the 'Suite for Small Orchestra' with 94 parts sold (which shows it must have been played). That was only out last February, I think. Altogether I get £4-7-1 in royalties."[26]

Robin clearly recognises and acknowledges his debt to his editors and expressed his delight in publication. By the time he composed his first serious compositions, W. G. Whittaker and Hubert Foss had been appointed to the Oxford University Press as music editors. Their appointments in 1921 were highly influential to the many aspiring young composers of the day. It was from this date that the music department of the OUP developed. Under the auspices of Whittaker (a Bach specialist) OUP started the publication of sheet music. June 1923, for example, heralded the first publication of the influential 'Oxford Choral Songs' and the 'Oxford Church Music' series. A quantity of Robin's music was printed within these series. In view of the fact that both men were scholars in their own right, their decisions on publications may have been artistic rather than commercial even though within the first decade Foss was responsible for publishing over 200 contemporary compositions.

However, the only reference Robin makes to Whittaker at the Oxford University Press is:

> The Oxford University Press has accepted my Suite for Small Orchestra, Op. 5 on Dr. Whittaker's recommendation. It is to come out in a limited edition to start with, I being a comparatively unknown composer, and if it should be very successful by any chance, it will be photographed and reprinted. I am very pleased about this as

[26] Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 18 August, 1926

> it is not often one is fortunate enough to get orchestral music taken at my age. This will be my fifth complete work to be accepted (not counting 'The Fiddler of Dooney' and the Hymn entitled 'God, who created me') and 'My Lady's Pleasure', if accepted, will be the sixth.[27]

Little influence of Whittaker's musical style can be found in Robin's music as the music of the former 'anticipated the musical languages of composers like Frank Bridge and Benjamin Britten and, to an extent, Michael Tippett'.[28]

Hubert Foss

As an extension of Oxford University, the music department was founded in terms of 'charitable status' and as an 'annexe' of the main Press. Unlike other publishing houses it was not established for financial purposes. On his appointment, Hubert Foss' official title was the 'Founding Editor and First Manager'[29]. He is reputed to have been a most charming and kind gentleman who was a composer, performer, broadcaster and much sought after musician. His enthusiasm for English music was such that he accepted the music of every English composer he met. Of course the music of the 'large' composers was already being published by the Press (e.g. Vaughan Williams and Walton) but whether or not the music of 'lesser-known' composers was commercially viable or not, failed to be an issue with Foss. Sir Humphrey Robin's enthusiasm for English music was also such that, on many occasions, he approached the delegates of the OUP for money for the music department. Some of the music by Foss' 'lesser-known' composers, in fact, never sold a single copy. Clearly this cannot be said of Robin as letters show that his works did actually sell (thus dispersing the cynical theory of some people who

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27 Robin letter to Kirstie Newsom, 14 June, 1925
28 Michael Brown, *William Giles Whittaker*, Oxford Articles, 2007
29 Adrian Self, member of the OUP staff 1987 to 1989

suggest that Robin was only part of OUP publications because of his father). Deletions of Robin's compositions by the OUP only commenced in the 1950s (continuing through to the 1960s) by which time other works were being published by other houses (e.g. *Fishing by Moonlight* with Hinrichsen).

Hubert Foss was well positioned to consider the volume of songs which must have been presented to him by the young aspiring composers of the 1920s. He published over fifty songs and had a close affinity with the music and ideals of Peter Warlock. In addition to contemporary song, he was particularly, interested in the revival of Elizabthan music. He may well have influenced Robin in his style of writing reflecting the ayre, (e.g. 'Daybreak', Love On My Heart' and 'So Sweet Love Seemed') although 'Daybreak' was the only song to be published by the OUP, the other being published by Novello & Co. Referring to Foss' fifty songs, Hinnells states, "Of these, songs such as 'Clouds', 'As I walked forth', 'Infant Joy' and the Seven Poems by Thomas Hardy seem to be most characteristic". [30] Robin shows his respects for and gratitude to Foss by dedicating his *Lullaby* for piano (1940) to him.

Norman Peterkin

In 1925, Norman Peterkin was appointed to the role of 'Sales Manager' in the music department of the Oxford University Press which had already published seven of his songs. Scott-Sutherland states, 'To this job Norman Peterkin brought his undoubted abilities as manager and organiser … he was familiar with most of the young musicians of the day, and with an artistic discernment'. [31] Coupled to the work achieved by Foss and Whittaker, this last point is of paramount importance in

[30] www. Oxforddnb.com
[31] Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 19

the development of English composition, especially in terms of the lesser known composers.

Peterkin wrote some forty-two songs. His output employs Far Eastern rhythms (he served as the Far Eastern representative of Rushworth and Draper), Warlock harmony, and harmonic/textural colours and figuration which suggest a 'fairyland' image. It is clearly in these latter aspects that Robin and Peterkin show some similarities as it is through harmonic, textural colouration that Robin supports many of his texts. Like Armstrong Gibbs and, indeed, Robin, Peterkin made arrangements of Walter de la Mare song (particularly for voice and string quartet).

Peterkin's early song, 'A little wind came blowing' (published by OUP in 1953), employs an 'Irish' melody but, unlike 'The Fiddler of Dooney', has an accompaniment influenced by the harmony of both Warlock and Delius. 'I Heard a Piper Piping' (written about 1918 and published in 1924 – before Peterkin joined the staff of the Oxford University Press), however, uses a much simpler form of treatment without the 'Warlockian twists of harmony and the Delian lushness.' [32] Peterkin's piper is similar to Robin's fiddler in 'The Fiddler of Dooney' in being a bright and charming individual. Through his acquaintance with 'I Heard a Piper Piping', Scott-Sutherland felt he had identified a 'typical Peterkin fingerprint … the gesture of a man, a man of great humanity'. [33] Here was a musician, similar in disposition to Robin, to whom Robin paid tribute in 1941 on the retirement of Sir Humphrey and also Foss in 1941. Indeed, Robin dedicates his *Easter Meditation* No. 1 for organ to Peterkin, showing his obvious acquaintance with the editor.

[32] Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 6
[33] Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 7

Of Peterkin, Scott-Sutherland writes, "Many of the younger composers whose work featured in the series of Oxford Solo Songs, had reason to be grateful to him." [34] Robin, most certainly, would have benefited from Peterkin's magnanimous editorial approach. For example, during the early 1920s, OUP published *Three Songs of the Moor* (including 'The Moor'), 'The Fiddler of Dooney', 'On His Mistress' and 'Old Age' under the 'Oxford Solo Song' series. Scott-Sutherland continued, "Over the years the Oxford Solo Songs published some 36 Warlock, 7 Delius, 43 Gurney, 44 Vaughan Williams, 16 Walton – as well as Armstrong Gibbs, John Ireland and Herbert Howells." [35]

Given Robin's number of unpublished songs and his professional relationship with Peterkin (not to mention Peterkin's musical disposition and own song output), it is remarkable that Robin makes no reference to showing these songs to the publisher. It seems certain that he would have discussed with Finzi in his correspondence any approach to Peterkin and its outcome.

Robin, however, discusses Peterkin during the 1940s with Finzi in relation to the possible publication of his Delius notes and his violin sonata. Of the former Robin writes, "I'm about to fire off my Delius notes to Balfour (who very kindly says he'll look at them); then, if he passes them, I shall take you at your (kind) word and send them on to you. Then, if (again) you pass them, well, then I'll try Peterkin [the publisher] with them." [36] Regarding his violin sonata Robin stated, "I could … also go through my violin sonata with you, which you kindly said you would look over with me before I send it to Peterkin (who kindly says he'd like to see it), as I do want to get it as good as possible." [37] Robin also displays his high opinion of Peterkin after the appointment of the new editor

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[34] Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 19
[35] Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 19
[36] Robin letter to Finzi, 30 November, 1946
[37] Robin letter to Finzi, ?, December, 1946

(Straker) to the OUP when Peterkin was starting so stand more in the background. [38]

In discussion with Finzi of his cantata *This Year: Next Year* (a setting of words by Walter De La Mare), Robin gives a further example of Peterkin's influence, "This, I think, will be the last of the rather large number of such works for young people that I've written – the title 'for female voices ' was Norman's idea, that the poems might be said to appeal to 'young people of all ages' – I hope he's right!" [39]

Peterkin's song output shows diversity in musical style. Scott-Sutherland states, 'One young friend, himself a composer, told me he found it difficult to believe that these differing songs were by the same composer'. [40] Robin's songs also show a diversity of musical styles but yet remaining in the same parameters. Scott-Sutherland goes on to highlight the influence of oriental music on Peterkin's style. He also commented on the influence of poetry on Peterkin, highlighting Irish/Celtic texts and also the "shrouded realms of de la Mare to whose poetic imagery Norman Peterkin was as susceptible as Armstrong Gibbs". [41] (Herein lies an important influence on Robin, although such influence if found not in solo song but compositions for choruses.) Unlike Robin, Peterkin only set the words of one Georgian poet, Wilfred Gibson and, unlike Warlock, only one Elizabethan text, Ford's 'There is a Lady Sweet and Kind'.

The British Broadcasting Corporation

The British Broadcasting Corporation first starting broadcasting in 1922, the year of the first performances of Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* and *A Pastoral Symphony*. This established a quasi-foundation of English music which

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38 Ch. 3, pp. 110-111
39 Robin letter to Finzi, 10 September, 1948
40 Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 20
41 Colin Scott-Sutherland, *Peterkin and his music'*, BMS Journal, Volume 16, 1994, p. 20

became epitomised as a 'pastoral' style. Indeed, of Vaughan Williams, the British Council states " 'Here is the authentic voice of England' ". [42] This was the age in which the young Robin commenced his career as a composer.

Robin's professional relationship with the BBC is somewhat unclear. One of his earliest comments to Finzi regarding the BBC dates from 1946:

> I was so pleased to get your letter and it quite cheered me up. I've been in bed since the Festival, and so has Kirstie, and now I'm badly behind with a whole lot of urgent work for Downe and the BBC . . . I wish these Festivals and things didn't worry me so much; I get quite distraught really and then become incapable for a time – rather silly really, but there it is.[43]

Even though Robin saw himself as a 'minor' composer, he clearly retains a tenuous connection the BBC:

> This week I seem to be meeting all the musicians in my small world – Reginald Redman of the BBC down here, and others, on Wednesday, and Jean Stewart and Co on Thursday. I dread it all, as I don't somehow seem to have quite the sustained heartiness that appears generally to be expected of one – I can do it for a bit, but after that![44]

Modestly, Robin continues, 'However, they are generally pleasant and agreeable people, and are often willing to take a surprisingly and even touching amount of trouble over one's music.' [45]

Happily, though still with some degree of hesitation, Robin is able to make an optimistic request to Finzi in relation to the BBC, '… could you please send along those parts of my 'Monmouth Elegy' … as I think there is quite a possibility that Reginald Redman will do it, in which case I'd like to have the parts quite ready for him? He is at

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42 Hughes and Stradling 1993: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 165
43 Robin letter to Finzi, 23 May, 1946
44 Robin letter to Finzi, 2 March, 1947
45 Ibid

present brooding on the score; he seems an extremely pleasant person … and I should say, a useful and experienced musician into the bargain.' [46]

Robin enjoyed BBC Third Programme broadcasts. He has definite thoughts in this area and, indeed, shows his respect for music of the twentieth century (referring, however, to Vaughan Williams, Sibelius and Finzi), "I do wish that more acceptable and truly 'musical' works could be more often chosen by the BBC, on the rare occasions when they do 20th century music . . .". [47] (This was with particular reference to encouraging Finzi to have *New Year* performed.)

Throughout the centuries, composers have relied on patronage and commissions. Robin clearly relies on such encouragement, including the BBC:

> So otherwise I think I must do chiefly 'job' music as hard as I can for Lsd, to keep Kirstie and myself alive, and to get money to go to Enborne next year! So far I've got the promise (unconfirmed) of one 'feature' programme here with the BBC, and a suggestion (unconfirmed) of scoring a ballad opera of dear old Geoffrey Shaw for Television. 'All offers thankfully received'.[48]

Robin's main BBC work was with BBC Bristol. Of London, he writes, "I've reason to think the London BBC don't care for me much.[49] However, the BBC did assist with the composer's declining self-esteem:

> I do feel this is the best place for a minor musician like myself to be; I am not so lost as I would be nearer the nub of things, and it's gratifying and encouraging to my rather shrinking spirit to find quite a bit of notice taken of me here at the BBC (Rex Redman has been consistently nice).[50]

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46 Robin letter to Finzi, 2 March, 1947
47 Robin letter to Finzi, 27 November, 1945
48 Ibid
49 Robin letter to Finzi, 17 March, 1952
50 Robin letter to Finzi, 13 May, 1952

His last reference to the BBC involves *A Mass for Christmas Morning*, "There's a chance of it's being repeated in a programme on the 'West' next year, organised by Bruce Montgomery, if he can make the necessary arrangements with Dick and the BBC".[51]

Other musical innovations and developments

Howes describes how, after the First World War, "England set about re-establishing the patterns of its musical life … ." [52] This was also the case after the Second World War.

Robin contributed to the growth of English orchestral music in and outside London which was now firmly developing (e.g. the BBC Symphony Orchestra was formed under Dr. Adrian Boult in 1930) through his extensive orchestral output. This includes *Suite for Chamber Orchestra* (pre-1925), *Suite in D minor* for oboe and strings (pre-1924), *Double Fugue* for orchestra (1926), Symphony No. 1 (unknown date), *The Darkling Thrush* for solo violin and orchestra (1928), a *Pastoral Fantasy* for violin and small orchestra (1930), *Prelude and Fugue* for solo piano and string orchestra and timpani (1930), *Sir Walter's Overture* (pre-1930), *First Symphony* (1933), *Concerto Grosso* (1936), *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1937), *Elegy for James Scott* for string orchestra (1939), *Ariel – Prelude* (for small orchestra, 1940), *Two Pieces for Cello and Orchestra* (1945-46), *Elegiac Meditation* for solo viola and orchestra (1946-47), *Badminton Pavan* (1947-48), *Fishing By Moonlight* for piano and strings (1952), *Festival Suite* for string orchestra (1950), *Overture for a Celebration* (1952), *A Three Piece Suite* for piano & string orchestra or piano quintet (1952), *Concertino in E* for piano and string orchestra (1955), *Shakespearian Studies* – Four pieces for orchestra (1956), and *Rhapsody in A Minor* for solo violin and string orchestra (1959).

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[51] Ibid

[52] Howes 1966: 'The English Musical Renaissance' p 286

Robin also contributed to the growth of English chamber music with such works as *Miniature String Quartet in A* (unknown date) and *Idyll* – 'Under the Greenwood Tree' for violin and piano (1941), to English choral festivals (e.g. *Summer Twilight*, composed for the Richard Latham and the St Paul's, Knightsbridge, Festival Choir, 1954) and composed various works for the Leith Festival (as with Vaughan Williams and Finzi).

As an Anglo-Catholic, Robin composed such works as *Two Carols* for choir and piano (1940), *Psalm 121* for SATB soloists or semi-chorus and SATB choir (1945) *, *A Litany to the Holy Spirit* (1947), anthems, carols and Services for the Anglican choral tradition and *A Mass for Christmas Morning* (1945-47) and *A Mass for Children's Voices* (1941-42) for the 'High Church Movement'.

Robin also contributed to English oratorio with such works as *A Prophet in the Land* for baritone soprano and tenor soli, chorus and orchestra (written in 1929 and first performed at the Three Choirs Festival of 1931 in Gloucester) , *Evening Cantata* for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra (pre-1931) and *The Pilgrim's Progress* for tenor, baritone and treble solo, chorus and orchestra (1931). In these works, the composer's use of children's voices looks ahead to Britten.

In addition to the songs for solo voice and piano (discussed in chapters three, four and five) Robin also composed orchestral songs, *Two Songs and an Interlude* for baritone (pre-1929) and *Go Little Book* for soprano (1928).

Robin also contributed to the development of English opera, musical drama, incidental music, ballet through *Vertue* (an opera, 1927), *The Scarlet Letter* (opera, 1958), *The Summer Stars* (a masque, 1946-57), *The Jackdaws Of Rheims* (ballet, 1945) and *The Hour Strikes* (incidental music for the play by Jean Rowntree, 1957-58).

Choral music forms a large genre amongst Robin's contemporaries. The composer contributed to the early twentieth century English choral repertoire through such works as *It was a lover and his lass* (1940), *Two Songs* (1942-43) [1. 'Spring goeth all in white – A Ballet; 2. 'Larks', *Autumn and Spring*, four part-songs (1936-44)] and *Two Songs for Voices and Organ* (date uncertain). Robin also composed a number of works for ladies voices. Examples include *This Year, Next Year*, a song-cycle (1943-46), and *Two Short Cantatas* (1932). He also composed works for male voice choirs, including *Two Anthems*(1940-1944 [1. 'By the waters of Babylon'; 2. 'Up to those bright and gladsome hills'], *Great Things* (1945) and *Days and Moments* (1951).

Robin's contribution to the BBC 'Third Programme' included *Incidental Music to 'The Mask'* (a play for radio by Anne Ridler, broadcast 1946) and *Incidental Music to 'The Golden Bird'* (a play for radio by Anne Ridler, broadcast 1951). His contribution to musical education in schools is more substantial, involving his teaching at Downe House and Ludgrove with such compositions as *Incidental Music to 'Peter, the Pied Piper'* – Downe House ballet (pre-1926), *Te Deum* (Downe House Chapel), *A Mass for Children's Voices* (1941-42, Downe House Chapel), *A Benedicite* (for the Bristol University Men's Choir, pre-1929), *Two Easy Duets* (Ludgrove School, pre-1930), *Mr Ben Jonson's Pleasure* (Ludgrove School, pre-1930), *The Forsaken Merman* (Ludgrove, 1938-1951) and *Hear Me, O God* (Miss Willis and Downe House Chapel, 1941). Specific works for children include *Three Sea Pictures* for piano (1924), *A Fairy Revel in a Forest* for piano (pre-1924), *The Shoemaker* – A Children's Christmas Opera (1923), *Rain, Wind and Sunshine* (cantata, pre-1930), *Songs of the Open* (four songs for children, 1936), *Joy and Memory* for children's voices and piano (1940-43), *A Mass for Children's Voices* (1941-1942), *Comfort Ye* for treble voices (1941), *Te Deum* for treble voices (1944) and *Song of the Ship* for unison voices and piano (1944).

Similar to Vaughan Williams, Robin also composed works for 'minority instruments'. These include *Three Recorder* Pieces, the pan pipes movements in *A Prophet in the Land, Concertino for Harpsichord and String Orchestra* (pre-1930)*, Suite in D* for bamboo pipes (1949)*, Fishing By Moonlight ('Nightpiece')* for two harpsichords (1949)*, Sonatina in F* for treble recorder and piano (1956)*, Three Airs* for treble recorder and piano (1956), and *Christmas Pastoral* for treble recorder and piano (1957).

Robin composed works for both piano and organ. For the former he wrote *My Lady's Pleasure* – a suite (pre-1925), *Three Christmas Pieces* (pre-1930), *Various Pieces for Piano* [Sets 1 and 2 (pre-1930)], *Jenifer's Jingle* (pre-1930), *Prelude, Air and Finale* (1935), *Reputation Square* (1937), *Waltz* (1937), *Diversions* (1938), *Little Joy* (suite for piano, 1939-40), *Lullaby* (1940), *The Yellow Leaves* (1945-47), *Winter Sketches* (1948-49) and *Sarabande and Fugato* for two pianos (1948). For organ he composes a large selection of works, including *Two Choral Preludes* (pre-1928), *Three Pastorals* (1941-42), *Easter Meditation* No. 1 (1943-44), *Easter Meditation* No. 2 (1944), *Two Easter Meditations* Nos. 3 & 4 (1945), *A Christmas Tune* (1945), *Prelude in the Manner of a Passacaglia* (1946), *Two Easter Meditations* Nos. 5 & 6 (1946), *Two Harvest Meditations* Nos. 1 & 2 (1947), *Seven Seasonable Sketches* (1956-57), *Prelude on 'O Filii et Filliae'* (1959), *Chorale Preludes* [1. 'Veni Emmanuel'; 2. 'In Dulci Jubilo'; 3. 'Forty Days and Forty Nights'; 4. 'O Sacred Head'] (1959) and *Chorale Prelude on 'Rockingham'* (1959).

Robin's contribution to twentieth century English chamber music is equally impressive. It includes *Phantasy Quintet* for clarinet and string quartet (1933), *Miniature String Quartet in G* 1933), *Sonata in C for Flute and Piano* (1944), *Fantasia in B Minor* for string quartet (1945), *Sonata in D* for violin and piano (1945), *Threne* for cello and piano (1946-47), *Trio in F Major* for clarinet, cello and piano (1948), *Lyrical Movement*

for clarinet and piano (1948), *Prelude* for violin, cello and piano (1948), *Trio in E Minor* for two violins and piano (1948-49), *Suite* for flute and piano (1952) and *A Three Piece Suite* for piano & string orchestra or piano quintet (1952).

Dedications to eminent musicians and establishments include: "A S Warrell and the Bristol University Men's Choir" in *A Benedicite* (192); Ludgrove School" in *Two Easy Duets*, (pre-1930), ;"For my wife, my mother and my father, Christmas 1931" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1931); "To the memory of my friend" ('Charles Williams' added in RHM's hand on printed copy) in *Psalm 121* for SATB soloists or semi-chorus and SATB choir (1945); "For Vaughan Williams on his 60th birthday" in *Four Heavenly Songs* (1945); "Miss Willis and Downe House" in *Fifteen Christmas Carols"* (1935); "Hubert Foss" in *Lullaby* (1940 and 1947); "Miss Willis and Downe House Chapel" in *Hear Me, O God"* (1939); "Gustav Holst" in *Two Anthems* (1940-44); "Norman Peterkin" in *Easter Meditation* (1943-44); "Downe House Chapel in *Te Deum* (1944); "R O Morris" in *Easter Meditations, No. 3* (1945); "Bryan Hesford" in *Prelude in the Manner of a Passacaglia* (1946); "Kathleen Moorhouse and Maurice Jaconson" in *Threne* (1946-47); "Jean Stewart" in *Elegiac Meditation* (1946-47); "Charles Williams and the Order of Coinherence" in *A Mass for Christmas Morning* (1945-47); "Herbert Howells" in *Two Harvest Meditations, No. 2* (1949); "For R Vaughan Williams on his 85th birthday" in *Prelude* for violin, cello and piano (1948); "Nora Ford, Catherine Kirkland and Henry Ley in *Trio in in E Minor* (1948-49); "Pipers' Guild Quartet" in *Suite in D* (1949); "Reginald Jacques and his orchestra" in *Festival Suite* (1950); "Marion Robin" in *Aubade* (1952); "Sir John Barbirolli and the Halle Orchestra" in *Overture for a Celebration* (1952-54); "Richard Latham and the St. Paul's (Knightsbridge) Fesitival Choir (1954); and "Gerald Finzi in *Shakesper*ian S*tudies (Four Pieces for Orchestra), No. 3* (1956).

In addition to composition, Robin also contributed to musicology and 'musical appreciation' classes for adults. In his talks and articles within these areas, Robin was greatly encouraged by Finzi.

Robin, Vaughan Williams, Finzi and Warlock

Born in 1903, Robin was the youngest of that set of song writers which included Gerald Finzi, Ivor Gurney, Roger Quilter and Peter Warlock, a group which followed after such composers as Stanford, Parry, Vaughan Williams and Holst. By this time Vaughan Williams had published such songs as *Linden Lea* and those contained in the cycles *The House of Life* and *Songs of Travel*. The twentieth-century English music renaissance was well under way in its various guises, including the German-English style of Stanford, the public school voice of Parry, the classical individualism of Elgar, the impressionism of Delius, the voices of English folk-song, and the quasi-sixteenth-century polyphonic style of Vaughan Williams, together with those differing forms of Englishness as represented by Quilter, Gurney, Warlock and Finzi.

There is no evidence whatsoever, however, of Robin being acquainted with his fellow students at the RCM, either personally or musically. In particular, there is no suggestion of Robin being acquainted with the songs of his contemporary students. There is evidence, however, of Robin being acquainted with the songs of Vaughan Williams, Warlock and Finzi, and, possibly, Gurney through his profound friendship with Finzi..

Correspondence between Robin and Finzi reveals discussions of songs by Vaughan Williams, Gurney, Warlock and Finzi. This demonstrates that, although these are individual composers, there is an affinity between them, making it an important reason for considering Robin's songs alongside, in particular, those four composers.

Because of stylistic affinity and the fact that Vaughan Williams was Robin's teacher, there can be little doubt that Robin was acquainted with the songs of Vaughan Williams. Hold (2002) identifies four stages in the musical style of Vaughan Williams.[53]. The first shows the influence of Stanford, Parry and the German school before the experience of folk-song, as seen in the early songs up to 1904, e.g. *The House of Life*. The second stage consists of the period 1904-1914 when Vaughan Williams' composition was influenced by the discovery of English folk-song and his editing of *The English Hymnal* (as reflected in *Songs of Travel*).. The period 1920-1927 forms the third stage when Vaughan Williams employed a new post-war style involving radical alteration of style, demonstrated by such works as the *Pastoral Symphony, Flos Campi* and *Sancta Civitas*. The final stage involves the period latter years 1950-1955 with such works as *Three Shakespeare Songs* and the *Ninth Symphony*.

It is, however, in relation to the songs of Warlock and Finzi that Robin's published songs require the greatest consideration because of Robin's acquaintance with both composers, knowledge of their songs and the possible influence of their songs upon those of Robin. Writing on this aspect, Banfield states "Robin's songs are closer to Warlock's idiom than to Finzi's . . .".[54] Robin himself referred to and clearly recognised the genius of Warlock's songs, "… Warlock (who I do feel is going to be one of the world's *great* song-writers)".[55]

Robin became acquainted both with Warlock and his songs through his attendance at the gatherings of musicians in the home of Balfour Gardiner at Ashampstead during the 1920s. These gatherings were held so that young composers of the day could openly discuss their compositions with Balfour Gardiner and one another.

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53 Hold 2002: 'Parry to Finzi' p102
54 Banfield 1997: 'Gerald Finzi – An English Composer' p227
55 Copley 1984: 'Robin Robin' p60

It is the Warlock songs written before 1930 with which Robin would have been best acquainted while composing his 1930s songs and can, therefore, be considered as possibly exerting some influence on Robin's own song syntax. Despite the close friendship between Warlock and Moeran (and the fact that both composers frequently composed in the same room in Eynsford, Kent, even writing the song 'Maltworms' together) this consideration is focusing on Warlock alone.

The story of Robin's tragic life reveals frequent discussions between Robin and Finzi regarding their own songs and, to a lesser extent, those of Ivor Gurney. Finzi greatly admired Gurney's songs and, with Herbert Howells, was involved in the editing and publication of Gurney's songs. The influence of Gurney on Robin is considered to be slight because of Gurney's extensive use of chromaticism, complex and thick textures and overall large scale. In comparison to the songs of Gurney, Warlock and Finzi, Robin's songs are all small-scale concepts.

With reference to the effect of the friendship between Robin and Finzi, attention has already been drawn to the fact that Robin was acquainted with Finzi since 1926 when Finzi wrote regarding LSO performance of Robin's *Double Fugue for Orchestra* conducted by Adrian Boult.[56] By this time Robin had written 'The Moor' (pre-1924), 'The Fiddler of Dooney' (pre-1925), 'On His Mistress' (1925) and 'Old Age' (pre-1928). By this stage Finzi had only written 'As I lay in the early sun' (1921) and 'Only the wanderer' (1925) so, presumably, Robin was not acquainted with Finzi's output when he composed his first songs.

Finzi, on the other hand, confessed to being acquainted and delighted with Robin's songs as early as the publication of 'The Moor', "I knew your work from the

[56] Chapter one

days of 'The Moor' & the 'Double Fugue' – long before I knew you, or anything about you, and I don't think you have any idea of the number of people that love your work".[57]

Following the development of the friendship between the two composers, Robin's later admiration for Finzi's songs (particularly his settings of Hardy) is shown by the dedication: 'For Gerald Finzi, whose own settings of Hardy are at once my delight and my despair'.[58]

School Teaching

Ludgrove School

Robin commenced teaching at Ludgrove (a boy's preparatory school at Cockfosters in Middlesex) shortly after his marriage to Kirstie. He was the fourth music master at Ludgrove School, succeeding such eminent masters as Cecil Sharp, Balfour Gardiner and Charles Kennedy-Scott.

It seems possible that such a lineage may well have influenced Robin's professional outlook both in terms of performance and composition. Cecil Sharp, of course, was renowned for his folk-song collections and arrangements. English folk-song certainly had a profound influence on Robin's musical style in terms of melodic construction and contours, and in terms of the harmonic accompaniments employed by the 'Pastoral' school. Balfour-Gardiner wrote miniatures reflecting the influence of Germanic style. Kennedy-Scott's influence can be viewed in terms of his published collections of songs and carols (for example, *The Chelsea Song Book* and *Motherland Songs. Eight English Traditional Carols*). Robin also published collections of songs and carols.

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[57] Finzi letter to Robin 22 June, 1938

[58] *The Book of Songs*, OUP, 1942, p33

Barber (2004) writes, 'When Robin came to Ludgrove he was already a composer of some importance, of whom none other than Ralph Vaughan Williams once wrote, "If I wanted to show an intelligent foreigner something worth doing which could only possibly come out of England, I think I would show him some of the work of Robin Robin". [59]

Downe House

Composition currently forms a substantial part of the music curriculum in British schools. However, Robin was an educational innovator, well ahead of his time. He taught composition to the pupils of Downe House as early as 1932. The teaching of this element is clearly, then, not the thought process of modern educationalists as generally perceived.

Robin commenced as a visiting music-master at Downe House in 1932. The composer was the godson of Miss Olive Willis, founder of the school and headmistress from 1907-1946. Copley states that Robin and Kirstie moved to the area of Newbury in 1932, living, firstly, at Cold Ash, to "partly escape the rigours of life in London and partly to be within closer proximity to Finzi and another friend, the composer and organ enthusiast Anthony Scott". [60] He highlights the fact that this move was possible through the kindness of Olive Willis (who was also Lady Robin's closest friend). Of Miss Willis, Copley quotes from Kirstie, " 'She was always eager to appoint people of originality and distinction to her staff and she particularly wanted Robin to come and teach composition (from time to time I have letters from old girls from Downe House, saying how much these lessons had meant to them). Miss Willis gave us land on which to build, and an unexpected legacy enabled us to pay off the building society' " [61]

Extracts from *Downe House - A Mystery and a Miracle* (2006) shed further light on the school's approach to music and Robin the composer and man:

[59] Barber 2004: 'The Story of Ludgrove' p 109
[60] Copley, pp 20-21
[61] Ibid

"Throughout the entire first hundred years Downe House has been renowned for its music. Inspirational teachers, highly gifted pupils, top-class visiting musicians, and excellent facilities have combined to ensure that music has always been at the centre of life at Downe … An early initiative in teaching composition at the school was due to the presence on the staff of Robin Robin, Olive Willis' godson, whose gentle but effective teaching enabled the girls to give several concerts of their own compositions. His own compositions were often given their first performance at Downe House, and he also wrote most of the music for the plays and dance-dramas performed during those years (pre-1950s but not known specifically). One of his songs, a setting of Robert Bridges' 'I love all beauteous things' became a staple item in Choral's repertoire ('Choral' is the name given to the Senior Choir)." Similarly, the following statement emphasises Robin's well-known temperament, "There were the special occasions, like the singing for dear gentle Robin Robin". [62]

The School Log of musical events shows the following entries regarding Robin:

1. 1926, Choral performed *The Shoemaker* by RM
2. 1936, *Revolution in Patagonia* by J Rowntree (History Mistress) with music by RM
3. 1942, *Mass* composed by RM, first sung by Choral in St. Mary's Church, Oxford
4. 1943, RM conducted *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* by Ralph Vaughan Williams
5. 1945, RM composed and conducted a ballet *The Jackdaws of Rheims*
6. 1945, Conducted Schutz – *St. Matthew Passion*
7. 1948, *The Miller's Daughter* by RM – acted and sung
8. 1949, RM's *Mass* sung in Chapel
9. 1951, First performance of *The Forsaken Merman* by Robin Robin with the Newbury String Players under Gerald Finzi and the school Choral.

[62] 'Jubilee Scrapbook', 1957

Perhaps the finest insight to Robin's temperament comes from Anne Ridler, "Robin Robin's self distrust forbade him to accept any but the most elementary piano pupils, and once, when he had been assigned one rather better than the rest, he walked straight out of the music room and up to Olive's study, where he protested that she was much too good for him. Olive, however, soothed him and persuaded him to return …". [63]

[63] Extract from *Olive Willis and Downe House*, Anne Ridler