

Dramatic Vocalization in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams

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Several factors, such as performances of Claude Debussy's music, appearances by the *Ballet Russes* in London, and the engagement of Sir Henry Wood as conductor of the first series of Promenade Concerts at the recently opened Queen's Hall, came together during the first two decades of the twentieth century to have a tremendous impact on the next generation of British composers, including Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958). One of the most notable outcomes from this period was the British adoption of dramatic vocalization—wordless singing to express extra-musical elements, and also to signify emotive sentiments within dramatic situations.

No other English composer used this technique as much, and in as many varied genres, as Vaughan Williams. Beginning with the early *Willow-Wood* for solo baritone, female chorus, and orchestra (1903), he continued to turn to dramatic vocalization throughout the rest of his career. Two of his nine symphonies—the *Pastoral Symphony* (1921) and *Sinfonia Antartica* (1952)—include the technique in both their first and last movements, and the suite for solo viola, chorus, and orchestra, *Flos Campi* (1925), includes dramatic vocalization throughout. In addition, the influence of Irish keening—wordless lamentation sung by women—shows itself most notably in the opera *Riders to the Sea* (1937).

In this paper I detail the specific, formative influences on Vaughan Williams and examine the development and individualistic use of dramatic vocalization in the aforementioned works.