

# Ralph Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland Folksong Arrangements: A Reappraisal<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In September 1929, Maud Karpeles of the English Folk Song and Dance Society embarked upon the first of two pioneering folk song collecting expeditions in rural Newfoundland. Less than one year later, with guidance from Newfoundland musician and folklore enthusiast Frederick Emerson, more than 200 traditional melodies sung by over 100 singers had been notated in one of the earliest large-scale efforts to document the richness of the island's folk music heritage. Included among the many songs collected was the haunting love lament "She's Like the Swallow," of which Karpeles later remarked that "my life would have been worthwhile if collecting that was all that I had done."

Vaughan Williams, a long-time friend of Karpeles and a kindred spirit in the English folk music renaissance, was asked to arrange 11 of the collected songs for voice and piano. The resulting two-volume set (with further arrangements by Hubert J. Foss, Clive Carey, and Michael Mullinar) was published by Oxford University Press in 1934 and dedicated to Emerson and his wife, Isabel. Vaughan Williams' arrangements included versions of the ballads "Sweet William's Ghost," "The Cruel Mother," "The Gypsy Laddie," "The Bloody Gardener," "The Bonny Banks of Virgie-O," "Earl Brand," "Lord Bateman," and "The Lover's Ghost," and the songs "The Maiden's Lament," "Proud Nancy," "The Morning Dew," "She's Like the Swallow," "Young Florio," and "The Winter's Gone and Past." It was largely through Vaughan Williams' settings that the songs were popularized in Europe (the United Kingdom, in particular). Yet despite this, and despite the fact that his was the first of many arrangements of the iconic "She's Like the Swallow," the Newfoundland folk song arrangements are scarcely mentioned in existing studies of Vaughan Williams' life and music.

This presentation re-examines Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland folk song arrangements with special emphasis on how the timeless beauty of traditional melodies and texts inspired the composer to write arrangements of remarkable depth and imagination. Despite Vaughan Williams' modest claims to the contrary, these arrangements are not merely "piano accompaniments," but rather creative adaptations in which newly composed counter melodies, detailed attention to textual nuances, and expressive harmonies forge a compelling blend of traditional music and compositional craft. The presentation will include live performances of selected songs from the set by Patricia Colton (mezzo-soprano) and Glenn Colton (piano).

## Ralph Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland Folksong Arrangements: A Reappraisal

In September of 1929, the English folksong collector Maud Karpeles (1885-1976) arrived in Newfoundland for the first of two pioneering expeditions aimed at discovering and preserving a living legacy of British traditional song in the New World. A member of the English Folk Dance Society (EFDS), Karpeles was a disciple of Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), a close acquaintance of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and later co-founder of the International Folk Music Council (1947). She had initially planned a Newfoundland expedition with Sharp as early as 1918, however, the trip was cancelled due to insufficient funding. Sharp's untimely death in 1924

foiled plans for an expedition in 1925. Undaunted by her mentor's passing, she undertook the challenge alone and notated 191 songs from 104 singers in 40 outports during separate visits in September and October, 1929 and July and August, 1930. A mere two months prior to her first visit, American song collectors Elizabeth Bristol Greenleaf and Grace Yarrow Mansfield of the Vassar College Folklore Expedition preceded her, although with rare exceptions she explored different locales than her American counterparts. Focusing her efforts on the east and south coasts of Newfoundland (the former in 1929, the latter in 1930), Karpeles visited communities in Conception Bay, Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, Notre Dame Bay, Placentia Bay, Fortune Bay, Hermitage Bay, St. Mary's Bay, and Trepassey Bay. The Newfoundlanders she encountered responded warmly and generously to her inquiries, although not without some good natured scepticism:

The people from whom I gathered the songs were nearly all fisherfolk. My quest seemed a strange one to them, particularly when I had disposed of the idea that I was on the stage or an agent of a gramophone company. They were convinced that I should make a lot of money out of the songs. "If I could do that, I should never have to do another day's fishing," said one singer after I had noted down his song and sung it back to him. However, they did not grudge me any supposed reward or even expect to share it. Once they realized that their songs were appreciated, they were always ready to sing and they would go out of their way to help me to find songs. One day when I was crossing a bay by motorboat, my navigator spent his time studiously writing out songs on scraps of paper. At intervals throughout our journey he shyly handed me the results of his labour asking if they would be of any use to me. Indeed, it would be impossible to find a kindlier or friendlier people than the Newfoundlanders. Wherever I went I was instantly welcome, although I came as a complete stranger without introduction. Everyone was delighted to meet "that girl from England" and to hear what the people "at home" were doing and thinking (Karpeles, 1971, p. 17).

Karpeles was assisted in her endeavours by Newfoundland lawyer, musician, and folklore enthusiast Frederick Emerson. She stayed with the Emerson family for most of her visit, and he was an important liaison who provided introductions to many of the singers who furnished her with songs. While introductions from a prominent Newfoundlander were indispensable given the intricate web of social relations in rural Newfoundland communities, Emerson's opinions on the calibre of the collected songs were deeply valued. As Karpeles noted in a diary entry from October 1929, "Mr. Emerson arrived for lunch, and we had a grand time after lunch going through my tunes. Mr. Emerson is delighted with them, and I realize more than I did what a very high standard they are (Karpeles, 1929)." Among the songs from her two expeditions she held in particular esteem were several deemed to possess superior melodies and "an individual beauty which sets them apart (Karpeles, 1971, p. 19)." Of these, "Sweet William's Ghost," "The Maiden's Lament," and "She's Like the Swallow" are mentioned by name. In October of 1929, Karpeles lectured on her findings to a large gathering of academics and invited guests at Memorial University College, the newly founded precursor of Memorial University of Newfoundland. Emerson assisted by singing several of the songs and it was through his voice that some of Newfoundland's most treasured melodies were first heard outside of the intimate

setting of the outport home and introduced to a wider audience.<sup>2</sup> Years later, he authored a widely read article on Newfoundland Folk Music in Joseph R. Smallwood's encyclopedic *Book of Newfoundland* (including a quotation from "She's Like the Swallow" and commentary on Karpeles' collection), and lectured on the same subject at Memorial University College during the 1940s.

In 1934, 30 of the songs collected were arranged for piano by Ralph Vaughan Williams and his associates Clive Carey, Hubert J. Foss, and Michael Mullinar. Published by Oxford University Press, the resulting collection was edited by Karpeles and dedicated to Emerson and his wife Isabel.<sup>3</sup> All of the arrangers in the 1934 publication shared a close connection to Karpeles, Vaughan Williams, and the British folk music circle. Carey (1883-1968), was a singer, composer, and song collector who collected folk songs from the Surrey and Sussex regions of England during the early years of the last century, while Mullinar (1895-1973) was a pianist and composer who studied composition with Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music. The recipient of the dedication to Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 6 in e minor, he later became a copyist for his mentor. Foss (1899-1953) was a composer, pianist, and concert promoter, but perhaps best known as a publisher and musicologist. In the latter capacity, he acted as the sole publisher of Vaughan Williams' music and authored the first full-length study of the composer.

Vaughan Williams' arrangements, 15 in all, comprise the bulk of the volume (see Appendix). These include arrangements of the ballads "Sweet William's Ghost," "The Cruel Mother," "The Gypsy Laddie," "The Bloody Gardener," "The Bonny Banks of Virgie-o," "Earl Brand," "Lord Akeman" ("Lord Bateman"), and "The Lover's Ghost," and the songs "The Maiden's Lament," "Proud Nancy," "The Morning Dew," "She's Like the Swallow," "Young Floro," "The Cuckoo," and "The Winter's Gone and Past." Of these, seven were classified by Karpeles as Child ballads (after Francis James Child's landmark compilation); one, "The Bloody Gardener," termed a supernatural ballad; four (including "The Maiden's Lament" and "She's Like the Swallow") labelled love laments; while the remaining songs were likewise categorized on the basis of poetic theme. Karpeles places "The Winter's Gone and Past" under the heading of "The Lover's Farewell and Absence," while both "Floro" and "Proud Nancy" fall under the category of "Rejected and False-Hearted Lovers."

That the timeless beauty of Newfoundland's rich folk song heritage captured Vaughan Williams' imagination should come as little surprise given the composer's lifelong engagement with traditional music and its pivotal role in his creative process. His first contact with living folk song came in 1903 when he heard and notated the song "Bushes and Briars" in the Essex village of Ingrave. The following year he joined the English Folk Song Society, as did his friend and colleague Cecil Sharp and, not long after, fellow composer Percy Grainger. Vaughan Williams was likewise a founding member of the English Folk Dance Society from its inception in 1911 and was instrumental in bringing about the amalgamation of the two societies into the English Folk Song and Dance Society in 1932. In 1946, he became the society's president, to which he would later add the presidency of the newly founded International Folk Music Council the following year (a position he held until his death in 1958). Of Vaughan Williams' absorption of folk influences into his compositions much has been said and written, however, it must be remembered that, not unlike his Hungarian contemporary Béla Bartók, he was also an active song collector. His height of activity as a collector occurred in the years prior to the First World War, during which some of England's most cherished folk melodies – more than 800 in all – were noted and preserved. Among the many compositions bearing the imprint of Vaughan Williams' immersion in traditional song are the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* for orchestra (1905-1906), the *London Symphony* (1913, rev. 1918, 1933), *Five English Folk Songs* for unaccompanied

chorus (1913), *The Lark Ascending* for violin and orchestra (1914, rev. 1920), the *English Folk Song Suite* for military band (1923), the opera *Sir John in Love* (1924) and, as an offshoot of the opera, the *Fantasia on Greensleeves*, published in close proximity to the Newfoundland folk song arrangements in 1934. Later folk-inspired works include the *Six Studies in English Folk Song* for cello and piano (1926), *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* for strings and harp(s) (1939), and the cantata *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* for women's voices and orchestra (1949). In *Sir John in Love*, Vaughan Williams quotes from several of his favourite folk songs (among them a song entitled "Lovely Joan" that he had collected years prior in Suffolk), and uses folk melodies as leitmotifs to delineate characters. "Greensleeves" appears in the opera as an orchestral interlude at the beginning of Act 3, an adaptation of which was subsequently published under the title *Fantasia on Greensleeves*.

Remarkably, there is scarcely a word of mention of Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland folk song settings in major published studies of the composer's life and music (save for the occasional cursory reference in catalogues of Vaughan Williams' music). The closest thing we have to meaningful commentary on the set comes in an early review of the published collection that appeared in the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* in 1935. Although very brief and general in nature (refraining from commentary on individual song settings altogether), it does offer the following observations on the art of arranging folk songs and a positive critical stance toward Vaughan Williams' contributions to the volume:

The attitude towards accompaniments has traveled a great way since the days when any note in the setting that was not in the tune was looked upon as a dangerous intruder. For there is another and equally important aspect which should be considered, when the attitude of the arranger becomes more akin to that of a composer. A tune, or even a verse, lights up an excitement within him. Here is something with which he wishes to be identified, and which he also wishes to share. It is a creative impulse and out of it can come a perfect fusion and re-creation. The result is not just a setting of a folk song, nor a mis-applied effort at originality. It is a new work, even though we call it a setting by Vaughan Williams... These are of a high level and of fine craftsmanship, a fact which further adds to the unity of the collection (*Review of Folk Songs from Newfoundland*, p. 157).

In considering the collection as a collaborative venture between Karpeles and Vaughan Williams (with additional contributions from their associates), the close personal connection between the tandem cannot be overstated. Their mutual passion for traditional song and shared interest in fostering the growth and development of the English Folk Song and Dance Society and the International Folk Music Council are well known, however the closeness of their personal friendship and the extent to which Vaughan Williams valued her opinions on musical matters bears further comment. In addition to availing of her acknowledged expertise in traditional song, Vaughan Williams had the highest regard for Karpeles' criticism of his music and is known to have made revisions to his scores in response to her reactions. Witness, for example, Vaughan Williams' reply to Karpeles regarding *Sir John in Love*. Karpeles, evidently favourably disposed toward the work as a whole, nonetheless imparted some criticism on aspects of the final act, prompting the composer to reply: "I'm glad you liked most of it – I shall think seriously over Act IV (Vaughan Williams, quoted in Haywood, 1972, p. 7)." Perhaps the

ultimate testament to Vaughan Williams' respect for Karpeles' opinions came in an exchange of letters that followed the world premiere of his ground-breaking Fourth Symphony at Queen's Hall, London, on April 10, 1935. Karpeles, in a tactfully worded but unmistakably critical response to the work, wrote to Vaughan Williams that,

I missed the clue... Someone said it should have been called "Europe 1935" and that is rather what it conveyed to me – the feeling of some huge force at work, driving us to fight and struggle, which may eventually shatter us to pieces, and yet we know in our heart of hearts there is something in life which withstands destruction and brings order out of disorder. The secret of it is to be found in music, but this time I missed it. Do please forgive me for preaching this sort of Easter sermon (Karpeles, quoted in Haywood, 1972, p. 7).

In a statement that speaks volumes, Vaughan replied with characteristic humility and good humour: "I loved your Easter sermon – write me an Ascension, Whitsun and Trinity sermon also. I like you to like my music – and when you don't I think you are probably right (Vaughan Williams, quoted in Haywood, 1972, p. 7)."

In addressing their respective contributions to the twentieth-century folk song movement, one cannot overlook the strong vein of British romantic nationalism informing both Karpeles' and Vaughan Williams' views. As song collectors, both prized modal tunes over tonal ones, older songs over newer ones, and this selective attitude had direct implications on the published results of their findings. During her song collecting in Newfoundland, Karpeles expressed disdain for hearing newly composed songs in a "popular style" from her informants (that is, tonal, locally composed music), often neglecting to notate such songs altogether in favour of modal melodies of British origin. Vaughan Williams, in turn, published a far greater number of modal melodies than tonal ones from his song collecting days in England, even though the vast majority of songs he collected in the field were tonal. The composer's well-known views on English folk music as the potential impetus for a national musical style are eloquently expressed in his *National Music and Other Essays* (published, interestingly, in 1934, the same year as the Newfoundland folk song arrangements). While time precludes further discussion of this complex topic here, suffice it to say that Vaughan Williams' enduring attraction to English folksongs was partly conditioned by what he and his generation regarded as their distinctly "English" qualities. Through his passionate advocacy of this heritage, Vaughan Williams believed that English composers might one day free themselves from the hegemony of foreign influence (German influence in particular) and establish a national style independent from the still dominant idioms of Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss.

Vaughan Williams' nationalistic tendencies aside, there can be no disputing the fact that collecting and arranging traditional music were lifelong labours of love. How else can one explain the years he painstakingly devoted to song collecting (even when the published collections of others were readily available to him), or the fact that his first published and performed folk song arrangements were of German and French songs? He viewed folk songs as both "supremely beautiful" and "supremely important" to all musicians and valued traditional and classical music as equally valid forms of expression. (Kennedy, 1980, p. 34). Witness, for example, the following excerpt from an early lecture delivered to students of Oxford University in 1902:

To those of you who say that you like country tunes but do not care about classical music – whatever that might mean – I would ask you to remember that there is absolutely no difference between the two. If a piece of music is good, sincere and beautiful then it does not matter if it is sung in an out-of-the-way part of Sussex, or Hampshire, or performed at a Queen's Hall concert... (Vaughan Williams, quoted in Kennedy, 1980, p. 31)

It was this same genuine affection that informed Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland folk song arrangements. He immediately recognized the inherent quality, sincerity, and beauty of the songs Karpeles sent him, and set about with steadfast determination to aid in their dissemination. In a letter to Frederick Emerson shortly following the completion of the Newfoundland settings, he offered the following comments on Newfoundland's folksong heritage and his hopes for the published arrangements:

Dear Mr. Emerson,

Thank you for your kind and appreciative letter. You have indeed some beautiful folk songs in your country and we all owe a great debt of gratitude to Maud Karpeles for recovering them.

If my and my colleagues accompaniments can help to make them better known we shall be amply rewarded.

I fear that it is not likely that fate will ever lead me to Newfoundland, but it would be a great pleasure if so ever it did come (Vaughan Williams, 1934).

No doubt inspired by his illustrious contemporary, Emerson began to explore his own compositional ideas with increasing rigour in the ensuing years and it is surely no coincidence that two of his large-scale mature works, the evocative *Newfoundland Scene* for solo harp (1963) and the folk-inspired *Newfoundland Rhapsody* for orchestra (1964), bear the imprint of Vaughan Williams' influence.

While Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland song settings are clearly not fantasias in the mould of the *Five English Folk Songs* or other works by the composer in which the folk melody serves more as a point of departure for the composer's invention than a musical artifact to be preserved, they are far from mere functional arrangements either. Kallmann and Willis (1992) remarked that Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland settings are "worthy of special note" amongst folk-inspired works of Canadian origin composed during the early decades of the twentieth century. For them, Vaughan Williams' settings formed an important part of an emerging canon of repertoire that also included music by Canadian composers of the same era, such as Claude Champagne's *Suite canadienne* (1927) and *Danse villageoise* (1929), and Ernest MacMillan's *Two Sketches for Strings, based on French Canadian Airs* (1927). While Newfoundlanders would be careful to point out the historical inaccuracy of inferring that Newfoundland folk songs collected prior to 1949 were "Canadian" in origin, we can readily agree with the assertion that the Vaughan Williams settings are in fact *compositions* inspired by traditional sources. The distinction is a subtle but important one. While the arrangements of Carey, Foss, and Mullinar in the volume are by no means insignificant, there is a discernible difference in the quality and sophistication of those of Vaughan Williams and the capacity of the music to evoke both the meaning and spirit of the folk singer's words.

The individual arrangements show a variety of compositional approaches and differing levels of engagement with the folk melodies and texts. In Vaughan Williams' settings of "Proud Nancy" and "The Morning Dew," for example, we have relatively straightforward accompaniments that support the melodies and enhance the moods suggested by the poetry without any pretence of recomposition. The former features sparse textures and staccato figuration well suited to the lively 6/8 metre of the original tune, while the latter is arguably the most uniformly chordal setting of the entire set in a style reminiscent of hymnody (an approach doubtless informed by the composer's earlier setting of traditional English melodies to hymn texts). A similar approach is evident in his regal, hymn-like setting of "Earl Brand," in which repeated dotted rhythms in the bass line accompany the words "Lord Robert he mounted his milk white steed" in an explicit (and, critics might argue, obvious) gesture of word painting.

One style feature remaining remarkably constant throughout the set is Vaughan Williams' fidelity to the original folk song melodies. There are subtle rhythmic alterations to the melodic line in a number of the songs, such as "Sweet William's Ghost," "Lord Akeman," and "Earl Brand," to name just a few, however these are typically simple gestures of augmentation or diminution that occur as subsequent verses of a multi-verse poem are sung. With rare exceptions, the original melodies are preserved with an ethnomusicologist's attention to detail and a composer's regard for *urtext* authenticity. This is entirely consistent with Vaughan Williams' philosophy toward arranging folk songs and a fundamental belief in the importance of letting the melodies speak for themselves. In praising the folk song arrangements of his friend and colleague Cecil Sharp, for example, he once commented that

his creative impulse came from the tune he was setting. That is why his settings are often better than those of more technically gifted arrangers because they come to the task as composers and let the suggestions started by the tune run away with them and so forget the tune itself... In all the best of Sharp's accompaniments it is the tune that counts and the arrangement falls into its proper background. In some cases his accompaniments look wrong, and sometimes even when played by themselves seem awkward, but they stand the important test that they make the tune sound right... (Vaughan Williams, quoted in Kennedy, 1980, pp. 120-1).

The majority of Vaughan Williams' Newfoundland settings are characterized by detailed attention to the nuances of the poetry and a creative interweaving of vocal melody and piano accompaniment. Through this process the piano anticipates, echoes, and comments upon the vocal melody, while newly composed counter melodies, expressive harmonies, and rhythmic intensification dramatize the story. For an illustration we turn to the song "Young Floro" from Volume 2 of the collection. In this tale of unrequited love, the poet tells of his buoyant optimism as he seeks to marry the lovely young Floro (only to be rejected in the end). A brief, descending motive in the piano establishes the mood and tonality, and returns as transitional material linking successive verses. As with other songs in the collection, the accompanimental texture becomes richer as the plot thickens and Vaughan Williams weaves a seamless web of counterpoint around the folk song melody. The second verse ("Was there ever a young man so happy as I") is introduced by a modified version of the introductory motive and set to an accompaniment first stated in contrary motion to the vocal melody (mm. 10-12), followed by imitative entries in the soprano and tenor registers of the piano part (mm. 12-13). The texture

evolves into an increasingly rich web of counter-melodies as Vaughan Williams' creative impulse, set in motion by the timeless beauty of the folk melody, produces three distinct textural layers (mm. 15-16).

Similar in approach but entirely different in temperament is the brooding ballad "The Bloody Gardener" from Volume 1. In a scene that could have been scripted in a television crime scene drama, the heroine arrives in a garden to meet her beloved, only to discover a bloody gardener instead (unbeknownst to her, the young man's mother had plotted the entire affair, luring her with false letters allegedly from her son). In some of the most gruesome verses in the Newfoundland folk song literature, the gardener brutally murders the young woman, laying her "virtuous body to bleed in the ground," after which her forlorn lover arrives on the scene to discover the crime. Introduced by a brief descending motive in the piano part, the first two verses narrate the scene to a chordal accompaniment as the young lady is lured to the garden under false pretences. It is in the middle verses that the real drama – both poetic and musical – unfolds. As the bloody gardener addresses the young lady with ominous intent (Verse 3), Vaughan Williams reworks the introductory piano motive into an ostinato pattern on E. Underpinned by tension-inducing minor seconds in the left hand (mm. 10-11), the ostinato is repeated with rhythmic modifications (triplet eighth notes at m. 11) and an enriched harmonic texture (m. 13), before evolving into a fully developed counter-melody as the tragic events unfold (mm. 14-17). A piercing G-sharp in the piano part (as the singer tells of the heroine crying) signals the onset of the counter-melody. The young lady's beloved arrives on the scene in Verse 6 (m. 18), at which point the piano ostinato continues to evolve with melodic interest shifting from the right hand to the left (mm. 18-20). The song culminates at the end of Verse 6 as the distraught young man, unable to find his beloved, is left to mourn with "the groves and valleys." In an effective gesture of musical closure that closely mirrors the story, Vaughan Williams' counter-melody seamlessly merges with the original folk song tune at m. 23 as the pianist momentarily accompanies the singer in unison. It is as if the folk song melody represented the completion of the composer's musical thought, just as the folk song idiom embodied the ultimate fulfillment of Vaughan Williams' musical philosophy.

In the poignant "Maiden's Lament," we enter a fundamentally different musical world as Vaughan Williams evokes the timeless beauty of a melody that Karpeles once identified as one of the most striking of her entire collection. The same could not be said of her opinions on the text sung by her informant. In the explanatory notes to the collection, she states that she "omitted three corrupt stanzas, which tell of the intervention of the maiden's hard-hearted parents," but reassuringly adds that "otherwise the text is practically unaltered (Karpeles, 1934, p. 75)." Why she viewed these three stanzas as "corrupt" is a matter of conjecture, however, we must dispute the latter assertion as there is yet another verse omitted not accounted for in her explanatory notes (the verse in which the heroine bids farewell to her friends and family). The editorial notes to the 1971 edition of the original songs shed a little light on this question. In a statement that appears aimed at retrospectively justifying her previous revisions, she acknowledges that "The Maiden's Lament"

may be part of a longer song in which more detailed circumstances of the maiden's tragedy are related, but the tune is so essentially lyrical in character that it would not lend itself to the accompaniment of a long ballad (Karpeles, 1971, p. 289).

As if to provide further justification, she goes on to suggest that her informant's memory may not have been entirely reliable, adding that the individual was "an old man [who] had not sung the song for many years (Karpeles, 1971, p. 289)." Disclaimers aside, Karpeles appears to have shortened the song from seven verses to three to suit her own musical tastes. Although her editorial changes were rarely of this magnitude, they are manifest frequently throughout collection by a recurring tendency to combine the melody of one informant with the text of another (such as "Sweet William's Ghost," among many others), or in selected instances, the omission and/or modification of existing verses and the substitution of others. In the case of one song, "The Gypsy Laddie," she combined texts collected from four different Newfoundland singers.

In sharp contrast to the thematic treatment of the preceding two songs, Vaughan Williams' primary focus in "The Maiden's Lament" is on rhythmic tension and the selective use of harmonic colour. This may be partly attributed to the relative brevity of Karpeles' revised text in comparison with the much lengthier ballad texts found elsewhere in the collection. Evidently captivated by the song's metrical irregularity, Vaughan Williams establishes an atmosphere of rhythmic freedom from the outset with a monophonic piano introduction emphasizing syncopation and a descending triplet pattern. The introduction cadences on G (the singer's opening pitch), at which point varied restatements of the introductory motive are heard against a G pedal. Rhythmic tension derives from the superimposed duplets and triplets of the vocal and piano lines, respectively. The opening verse culminates with the maiden's heartfelt proclamation "I have lost my love," at which point harmonic stasis gives way to a chordal texture marked by an 9<sup>th</sup> chord on A-flat (accompanied by a crescendo and resolving to a g minor triad to form an elided cadence linking the two verses). A chordal texture persists as the climactic second verse ensues ("O love is like an unquenching fire"), after which the descending triplet motive is distributed between right and left hands. In an affective gesture not unlike that of another notable lament, "When I am laid in earth" from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the stepwise melodic descent is continuously repeated for the duration of the song (with slight rhythmic modifications) as a mournful undercurrent mirroring the poet's dire words ("Unto my cold grave I will retire"). Octave G pedals (this time in the right hand of the piano part), recall verse one and bring the song to a poignant close.

Vaughan Williams' arrangement of the love lament "She's Like the Swallow" offers a compelling synthesis of his folk song arranging techniques. As with "The Maiden's Lament," Karpeles made a significant textual alteration to the version collected from John Hunt of Placentia Bay, Newfoundland on July 8, 1930. Conspicuous by its absence is the pivotal fourth verse of the collected song text, the suggestive imagery telling of the circumstances that led to the heroine's broken heart.<sup>4</sup> In its place, she substituted a literal repetition of the opening verse. Karpeles, in her explanatory notes, tells us only that the changes were intended to address certain aspects of the original text that were "irregular" and "unintelligible" (Karpeles, 1934, p. 143), although in hindsight they appear closer akin to censorship than editorial proofreading. While Karpeles may have edited for sexual content, she apparently had no reservations about gruesome murder as the text of "The Bloody Gardener" was preserved with every vivid detail intact!

A two-measure piano introduction establishes the mood and tonality (c minor), while an elided cadence flows breathlessly into the vocal melody. Here, as in other songs (such as "The Bloody Gardener"), the folk song melody represents the completion of Vaughan Williams' musical thought as the C - G melodic progression at mm. 2-3 serves as both the conclusion of the piano introduction and the beginning of the vocal melody (a tendency repeated both during

and at the end of the first vocal phrase as a counter-melody in the piano part merges into a unison doubling of the vocal line at m. 3 (G - F - G in the bass register), and m. 6 (G - A-natural - B-flat in the soprano register). Once again Vaughan Williams weaves a seamless web of counterpoint around the “Swallow” tune in which contrary motion (m. 7), retrograde treatment (m. 4), and counter-melodies (m. 5) create new expressive possibilities for the folk singer’s poignant words. More richly textured than “The Maiden’s Lament,” the persistence of suspensions throughout adds an additional level of emotional tension and release. As Zoltan Kodaly (1959) once wrote, Vaughan Williams “enobled folk song with his marvelous settings; he enobled his own style with the spirit of folk song.” To which we might add that he could have found no better specimen with which to “enoble” his style than the timeless beauty of “She’s Like the Swallow.”

In the ensuing decades, “She’s Like the Swallow” would become one of the most widely recognized folk songs in all of North America, a “cultural icon” as Neil Rosenberg (2007) aptly described it. Following Vaughan Williams’ 1934 arrangement and Emerson’s 1937 article (in which the song is quoted), it entered the mainstream of Canadian culture in the post-Confederation era through its inclusion in Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston’s 1954 collection *Folksongs of Canada* (reprinted from Karpeles’ collection) and a similar version collected by Kenneth Peacock and published in his *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (1965). The song has since inspired innumerable arrangements and musical compositions across a wide spectrum of styles and genres. Among the many versions are arrangements for solo voice and piano by Godfrey Ridout, Keith Bissell, and Benjamin Britten (the second of Britten’s *Eight Folk Song Arrangements* (1976), Harry Somers’ oft-performed choral arrangement (the fourth of his *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, 1968), Michael Parker’s *The Maiden’s Lament*, for soprano, clarinet, and piano (in which “She’s Like the Swallow” forms the basis of the fifth movement), contemporary pop versions by Melanie Doan and Jane Siberry, and a captivating folk revival arrangement by Pamela Morgan.<sup>5</sup> Vaughan Williams’ hopes for the song’s wider dissemination had been realized in ways that he could not possibly have predicted.

Although seldom heard today and scarcely mentioned in existing studies of Vaughan Williams’ music, the Newfoundland folk song settings offer a unique opportunity to witness one of the greatest musical minds of the twentieth century respond creatively to one of the richest repositories of traditional music in the New World. A passionate advocate for the living tradition of folk singing, Vaughan Williams recognized that each Newfoundland singer imbued the songs with the imprint of his/her own personality and, through his settings, this is precisely what he strove to achieve (always mindful, nonetheless, of revealing the intrinsic beauty of the original songs in what Kodaly (1959) termed “the true humility of greatness”). He could not, in the manner of the folk singer, vary the intensity of his voice or cast a reflective glance to convey the meaning of the stories. In his imaginative arrangements, however, he placed himself in the mindset of folk singer and storyteller and, using the tools of the composer’s craft – melodic development, harmonic colour, rhythmic intensification – added his own creative voice to the songs’ ever evolving histories. In his inspired settings, Vaughan Williams held up a mirror to Newfoundland folksongs and saw in them reflections of himself.

**Appendix: Maud Karpeles, coll. and ed., *Folksongs from Newfoundland* (1934):** Songs listed by title, classification (as noted in Karpeles, 1971), and arranger

#### VOLUME I - BALLADS

*Song Title*

*Classification (Karpeles 1971)*

*Arranger*

<b>Sweet William's Ghost</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>The Cruel Mother</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>The Gypsy Laddie</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
Lamkin	Child Ballads	Hubert J. Foss
Willie of Winsbury	Child Ballads	Hubert J. Foss
The Sea Captain, 1 <sup>st</sup> version	Ballads – Supernatural	Michael Mullinar
The Sea Captain, 2 <sup>nd</sup> version	Ballads – Supernatural	Michael Mullinar
<b>The Bloody Gardener</b>	<b>Ballads – Supernatural</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>

**VOLUME I – SONGS**

<b>The Maiden's Lament</b>	<b>Love Laments and Lyrics</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>Proud Nancy</b>	<b>Rejected and False-hearted Lovers</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>The Morning Dew</b>	<b>Love Laments and Lyrics</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
Time to be made a Wife	*Omitted in 1971 collection	Michael Mullinar
Sweet William	The Drowned Lover	Michael Mullinar
The Discharged Drummer	Wooring and Courtship	Michael Mullinar
Reilly the Fisherman	The Drowned Lover	Hubert J. Foss
The Tree in the Wood	Cumulative Songs	Hubert J. Foss

**VOLUME II – BALLADS**

<b>The Bonnie Banks of Virgie-o</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>Earl Brand</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>Lord Akeman (Lord Bateman)</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
Fair Margaret and Sweet William	Child Ballads	Clive Carey
Hind Horn	Child Ballads	Clive Carey
Henry Martin	Child Ballads	Clive Carey
<b>The Lover's Ghost</b>	<b>Child Ballads</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>

**VOLUME II – SONGS**

<b>She's Like the Swallow</b>	<b>Love Laments and Lyrics</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>Young Floro</b>	<b>Rejected and False Hearted Lovers</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>The Winter's Gone and Past</b>	<b>The Lover's Farewell and Absence</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
<b>The Cuckoo</b>	<b>Love Laments and Lyrics</b>	<b>Ralph Vaughan Williams</b>
William Taylor	The Female Sailor Boy	Clive Carey
Kind Fortune	Wooring and Courtship	Clive Carey
The Nobleman's Wedding	Ballads and Narrative	Clive Carey
	Songs – Various	

Soldier, will you Marry  
me?

Wooring and Courtship

Clive Carey

## Endnotes

1. I wish to extend a special thank to Mrs. Carla Emerson Furlong for granting me access to documents pertaining to Frederick Emerson, Maud Karpeles, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and the Newfoundland Folk Song arrangements, and for consenting to numerous interviews pertaining to my forthcoming volume on Emerson's life and contributions. Last, but certainly not least, I wish to thank mezzo soprano, Patricia Cotton for sharing her voice in this presentation so that the true meaning of the settings can be expressed as they were meant to be.
2. Emerson's efforts to bring Newfoundland folk music to a wider audience invite comparison to the contributions of Newfoundland contemporaries Gerald S. Doyle, Robert MacLeod, and Ignatius Rumboldt. Doyle, with the assistance of MacLeod, compiled the first locally produced collection of Newfoundland folksongs, Rumboldt pioneered the performance and recording of choral arrangements of Newfoundland folksongs, while MacLeod continued to popularize local songs through live performances and radio broadcasts.
3. Decades later, in 1971, close to one hundred of the folk song melodies Karpeles collected were published by Faber and Faber of London.
4. Hunt's version of the fourth stanza was sung as follows:

There are a man on yonder hill,  
He got a heart as hard as stone.  
He have two hearts instead of one.  
How foolish must that girl be  
For to think I love no other but she.

5. Among the many other versions of "She's Like the Swallow" are choral arrangements by Edward Chapman, Steven Chatman, Lori-Anne Dolloff, Richard Johnston, Stephen Smith, Judy Specht, and Carl Strommen, a student piano piece by Nancy Telfer, an organ arrangement by Timothy Cooper, a version for accordion and piano by Andrew Hugget, and an arrangement for carillon by Gordon Slater, Dominion Carillonneur at the Peace Tower in Ottawa.

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