



Vocal Music

Jack Moeran was a prolific writer, collector and arranger of vocal music, almost entirely in the song form. It is a seam which cuts through the middle of his entire life's output, from the early 1920's to the very last year of his life. Of the 97 published works listed in Geoffrey Self's book "The Music of E. J. Moeran" no less than 63 are vocal works, many of which are collections or cycles of several individual songs.

Unlike the instrumental music, much of which has been recorded and can be bought, vast tracts of Moeran's vocal music are unavailable at a store near you today. Yet I would imagine that more people are exposed to Moeran's vocal music, through choirs and amateur singing, than have ever listened to the rest of his output.

Folk Song

Moeran began collecting folk songs whilst still at school at Uppingham. It was a passion which was to endure to the very end of his life, even taking in the Spring of 1948, which he spent living amongst the tents of a group of tinkers in south-west Ireland, prior to completing his [Songs From County Kerry](#), a collection that had begun in 1934.

By 1926 Peter Warlock suggested Moeran had already collected at least 150 songs - a collection of seventeen were published in *The Folk Song Journal* in 1922, notated simply with the tune and words. Of these, six were to form his [Six Folksongs From Norfolk](#), published with piano accompaniment in 1924. Another such collection came from Suffolk in 1932.

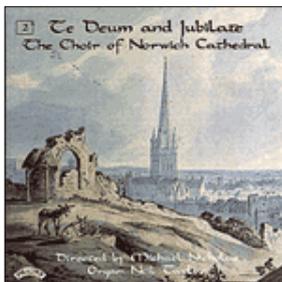
Moeran had an instinctive ear for folk melodies, and much of his instrumental music appears to be shot through with tunes one might imagine he collected in the pubs and inns of rural England and Ireland. Yet in truth Moeran was able to turn his natural melodic gifts to creating new folk-like melodies which would sit easily alongside the best of his collections, and these collected songs rarely appeared outside of his specific folk song arrangements.

See also Moeran's article "[Folk Songs and some Traditional Singers in East Anglia](#)" (1946) and Peter Warlock's article "[E J Moeran](#)" (1924)

Original works for voices

In addition to his folk song arrangements, Moeran wrote a large number of original vocal works, setting the words of several great poets, including, in particular, [A. E. Housman](#), Shakespeare, [James Joyce](#) and [Seamus O'Sullivan](#). His two major works for unaccompanied chorus, [Songs of Springtime](#) (1930) and [Phyllida and Corydon](#) (1939) both take a series of Elizabethan poems from a variety of writers, yet brings them together in quite different styles - the earlier work full of the Delian harmonies of Moeran's earlier output, the later written in the style of the Elizabethan madrigal, albeit reinterpreted with a truly modern sense of chromaticism.

Another important work, neglected more for difficulty in staging than for lack of musical merit is the [Nocturne](#) Moeran wrote following the death of Delius in 1934. This beautiful work, for baritone, chorus and orchestra, lasting around fifteen minutes, is, in the words of Geoffrey Self, "less that or a choral work than of an orchestral tone poem which chorus obligato; much of the chorus, indeed, is wordless". Self suggested it a piece more suited to recording than live performance - perhaps Chandos picked up on this comment when they recorded it in 1990.



Church Music

Moeran wrote a small amount of music for the church. Despite his father, grandfather and brother entering the Anglican priesthood, Jack Moeran was no believer, and described his religious output as "this tripe for the church". It is therefore interesting to note that three of his four published works for the church came out in the same year, 1931 - a time when Moeran was a little strapped for cash. Geoffrey Self suggests Moeran would have seen this as a potentially lucrative market, yet it was one he would only return to one more time. Moeran's opinion of his church music may not have been high, but they were well received and still performed now. A long search may track down recordings of both the [Te Deum and Jubilate](#), (The Choir of Norwich Cathedral on Priory Records) and the [Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis](#) (The Choir of St Edmundsbury Cathedral on

Key

- = Full page available
- = Additional notes available

solo

[Spring goeth all in white](#) (1920) R8

[Twilight](#) (1920) R7

[Ludlow Town](#) (1920) R9

[The Day of Psalms](#) (1922) R18

[When June is Come](#) (1922) R19

[Two Songs](#) (1923) R24

[Two Songs from the Repertoire of John Goss](#) (1924) R29

[The Merry Month of May](#) (1925) R38

[Come Away, Death](#) (1925) R39

[A Dream of Death](#) (1925) R40

[In Youth is Pleasure](#) (1925) R41

[Troll the Bowl](#) (1925) R42

['Tis time, I Think, by Wenlock Town](#) (1925) R43

[Far in a Western Brookland](#) (1925) R44

[Seven Poems of James Joyce](#) (1929) R51

[Rosefrail](#) (1929) R52

[The Sweet O' the Year](#) (1931) R61

[Loveliest of Trees](#) (1931) R62

[Blue Eyed Spring](#) (1931) R63

[Tilly](#) (?) R105

[Four English Lyrics](#) (1934) R69

[Diaphenia](#) (1937) R72

[Rosaline](#) (1937) R73

[Four Shakespeare Songs](#) (1940) R76

[Invitation in Autumn](#) (1944) R84

[Six Poems of Seamus O'Sullivan](#) (1944) R85

[Rahoon](#) (1947) R93

[O Fair Enough are Sky and Plain](#) (?) R100

folksong

I - Voice & Piano

[Six Folksongs from Norfolk](#) (1923) R23

[The Sailor and Young Nancy](#) (1924) R30

[Gaul Song](#) (1924) R31

[The Little Milkmaid](#) (1925)

[evale](#)

[biography](#)

[chronology](#)

[forum](#)

[mailing list](#)

[music: chamber](#)

[music: orchestral](#)

[music: solo](#)

[music: vocal](#)

[people & links](#)

[site map](#)

[what's new](#)

[writing](#)

[home page](#)

Google™

Search WWW
Search Moeran

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com

[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose



Priory Records) - or you can order direct from their [website](#).

R45
[O Sweet Fa's the Eve](#) (1925)

R46

[Six Suffolk Folksongs](#)

(1931) R60

[Parson and Clerk](#) (1947) R93

[Songs from County Kerry](#)
(1950) R97

II - SATB Chorus

[O Sweet Fa's the Eve](#) (?)
R101

[The Sailor and Young](#)

[Nancy](#) (1948-9) R97

[The Jolly Carter](#) (1944) R86

III - Vocal Trio

[I'm Weary, Yes Mother](#)

[Darling](#) (1946) R91

IV - Male Voices

[Sheepshearing](#) (?) R102

[Alsatian Carol](#) (1932) R65

unison

[Under the Broom](#) (1924)

R32

[Commendation of Music](#)

(1924) R33

[Christmas Day in the Morning](#)

(1924) R34

[The Jolly Carter](#) (1924) R35

[Maltworms](#) (1926) R48

two-part

[Green Fire](#) (?) R106

[The Echoing Green](#) (1933)

R68

[Weep You No More, Sad](#)

[Fountains](#) (1934) R20a

[The Lover and his Lass](#) (?)

R102

three-part

[To Blossoms](#) (?) R107

church

[Moeran's Church Music](#)

[Magnificat and Nunc](#)

[Dimittis](#) (1930) R55

[Praise the Lord, O](#)

[Jerusalem](#) (1930) R56

[Te Deum and Jubilate](#)

(1930) R57

[Blessed are Those](#)

[Servants](#) (1938) R74

other

Unaccompanied Chorus

I - SATB

[Weep You No More, Sad](#)

[Fountains](#) (1922) R20

[Gather ye Rosebuds](#) (1922)

R21

[Robin Hood Borne on his Bier](#)

(1923) R25

[Songs of Springtime](#)

(1930) R54

[Phyllida and Corydon](#)

(1939) R75

II - Mixed Chorus with Male

Voice or Semi-Chorus

[Blue Eyed Spring](#) (1931) R63

Male Voices

[Ivy and Holly](#) (1932) R66
[Candlemas Eve](#) (1949) R96

Chorus and Orchestra

[Nocturne](#) (1934) R70



Ludlow Town (1920)
R9

Published

OUP, 1924

Recordings

Graham Trew (baritone)
Roger Vignoles (piano)
Meridian E 77032
(LP ★★★★★)

John Shirley-Quirk
(baritone)
Martin Isepp (piano)
Saga EC 3336-2
"A Recital of English
Songs"
(1996, CD ★★★★★)
[excludes 'The Lads in
their Hundreds']

Reviews

[Musical Times,](#)
[Jan 1925](#)

Further Writing

[Complete Lyrics](#)

Audio

[home page](#)

1. When smoke stood up from Ludlow
2. Farewell to barn and stack and tree
3. Say, lad, have you things to do?
4. The lads in their hundreds

Moeran's first settings of [Housman](#) date from 1916, a mid-summer respite from the war. Ludlow Town was composed in 1920 following the resumption of studies at the RCM with [John Ireland](#).

Moeran chose to set Housman's 'Word-music' in closely corresponding terms; compare, for example, the contrasting subtleties and simplicities of "When smoke stood up from Ludlow" with the more grisly "Farewell to barn and stack and tree".

When the text demands a background of colour and suggestion, the 26 year old composer can respond as effectively as any of his contemporaries. If the harmonies of "Say, lad, have you things to do?" betray more than a hint of his teacher, the final song of the cycle points the way ahead. "The lads in their hundreds" describes the bustle Ludlow Fair; fair days always excited Moeran and usually brought out the 'Irishness' in him. The lively jig that we hear would have its apotheosis in the wild Rondo of the [Violin Concerto](#) twenty years later.

Notes by Barry Marsh

"the 26 year old composer
can respond as effectively
as any of his
contemporaries"



Music: vocal

Seven Poems of James Joyce
R51

Published

OUP, 1930

- a - Strings in the Earth and Air
- b - The Merry Greenwood
- c - Brightcap
- d - The Pleasant Valley
- e - Donnellycarney
- f - Rain Has Fallen
- e - Now O Now in this Brown Land

...there's often an almost melancholy reflective wistfulness about them...

Recordings

none known

Reviews

Further Writing

Audio

home page



James Joyce in 1929

out the commonality of a single chord underpinning three of the seven songs - a widely spread G-D-B-A - which he associates with Joyce's idea of '*music of the transient seasons*' underpinning his texts.

1929 saw the start of Moeran's renaissance as a creative composer, following the barren years spent with Warlock in [Eynsford](#) where drinking and partying tended to push musical composition into a rather forgotten corner. It was a series of poems by James Joyce entitled '*Chamber Music*' which finally galvanised Moeran back into action and produced this set, plus a couple of other songs - *Tilly* (R105) and *Rosefrail* (R52). Joyce was apparently delighted with Moeran's settings, though it has been suggested that he was almost always generous with his praise for any composer choosing to set his texts!

That said, without doubt the Moeran settings in the Seven Poems are truly delightful, and despite quite a range of expression and mood - *The Merry Greenwood* and *Bright Cap* are particularly upbeat by contrast to the other songs, which often have an almost melancholy reflective wistfulness about them - there is a real unity holding them together above and beyond the words. Geoffrey Self points

In *The Cool Valley* anyone familiar with Moeran's piano music will immediately recall his 1925 piece [Summer Valley](#) (R37), for here Moeran reworks this as an instrumental prelude to the song. Self even goes as far as to ask whether Moeran did not already have the Joyce poem in mind when writing the original piano piece - perhaps he had had these poems in the back of his mind for several years. It is certainly interesting that the central song is the one which looks back so clearly to a work which came at the tail-end of his previous burst of intense creativity.

Another apparent parallel though turns out to be impossible. When I first heard the opening three notes of *Donnellycarney*, I was immediately reminded of the jazz song '*Misty*' - where the words "*Look at me...*" match so closely in tune and rhythm Moeran's opening "*Oh It was out...*" it is uncanny. But no, Moeran was not secretly tuning into shortwave jazz broadcasts of Billie Holiday from the USA in the '20s - it turns out that Errol Garner wrote the music for *Misty* around 1957, so in this case any likeness is totally coincidental! So there goes another tempting Moeran theory...

The final song of this set, *Now, O Now in this Brown Land*, is by far the longest of the set, more than double the length of any other. Examining the score, Self notes that the opening bars for the piano here appear to predict the opening of Moeran's [Violin Concerto](#). It's one of those things which doesn't necessarily jump out at you when you hear the piece, but listen carefully and you may well hear it. As in all of these cases there is a clear temptation to read hidden meanings into these things, and Self presumes this deliberately implies the Ireland that Joyce appears to be writing about, the same Ireland with which the *Violin Concerto* is associated so strongly. Well, in these instances one can only go on instinct, and I am inclined again to veer towards coincidence. Yes, on the page there is clear similarity, but to the ear they seem quite different and to the majority it's a link which needs careful pointing out. Having been so brazen in his use of *Summer Valley* earlier in this cycle, would Moeran choose to do this more covertly later?

This does in fact raise an important issue with Moeran's music in general. As a composer he often wears his heart on his sleeve, and parallels have been drawn between many different works and those of Moeran, where it is sometimes suggested that Moeran is taking rather too much from those who preceded him. Yet a composer with such a gift for lyricism surely has no need to borrow from anyone else, and his music always makes musical sense regardless of whether a snatch of this or a snippet of that sounds like something else. Recall Bax's quote: "I well remember his perturbation when I pointed out to him that a passage in his [Symphony](#) bore a remarkable resemblance to the famous whirlwind in [Sibelius'] *Tapiola*". There is also a debate about similarities between the first movement of the *Symphony* and that of [Stenhammer's](#) 2nd.

I would suggest that the *Seven Poems of James Joyce* suggests not only that Moeran very occasionally quoted conciously, but also that there are a number of genuinely coincidental similarities between his music and that not only of other composers but also of his own. Moeran is clear where he deliberately quotes. It is little more than unfortunate where he accidentally quotes, but is surely not worth getting worked up about to the extent that it

[redacted] might impair one's enjoyment of his music.

■



music: vocal

Four English Lyrics (1934) R69

Published

Winthrop Rogers, 1934

- 1 - Cherry Ripe (Campion)
- 2 - Willow Song (John Fletcher)
- 3 - The Constant Lover (William Browne)
- 4 - The Passionate Shepherd (Marlowe)

Recordings

Anne Dawson, Roderick Barrand
Hyperion A66103
(LP, 1984 ★★★★★)

Reviews

Further Writing

Audio

home page

...seems to have the sort of sticking quality that makes it hard to get out of your head once heard...

Moeran wrote the Four English Songs in 1934, the same year he restarted work on his [Symphony](#), and after several years of reappraisal which had seen the innovations of the [Sonata for Two Violins](#) and the [String Trio](#) in particular. His most recent song collections prior to this had been the [Seven Poems by James Joyce](#) and the [Songs of Springtime](#), both written 5 years earlier in 1929, and just as Moeran was getting back into the swing of composition after his relatively barren years in [Eynsford](#) with Peter Warlock.

The previous set of solo songs, the Joyce settings, came together as a real masterpiece, perhaps among his finest sets of vocal work, and yet somehow Moeran seems unable to capture that same *je ne sais quoi* here. One senses perhaps a lack of personal engagement in the creation of this set that perhaps he was more inclined to work on when setting the words of his friend Joyce. Indeed, that highly sensitive, personal feeling was to reappear some years later, with the [Six Poems by his friend Seamus O'Sullivan](#).

As Geoffrey Self points out, Moeran was no great fan of singers, and he seems to suggest that these songs were, in a way, 'dumbed down' to find popular appeal amongst those singers who had tended to ignore him in the past. Moeran's mistake, perhaps, was to chose the ballad form, whose heyday had already passed, and to miss his target by trying to hard to conform to what he felt would be popular, rather than follow his own musical instinct and whim.

That is not to say that the songs here are not worth hearing. On the contrary, there is indeed good material here, and good craft. 'Cherry Ripe' in particular seems to have the sort of sticking quality that makes it hard to get out of your head once heard. Self points to close similarities between The Constant Lover and Warlock's 'Passing By', before coming to the robust conclusion that Moeran has taken Warlock's model and improved on it.

And yet... And yet... There seems a lack of overall progression, a lack of coherence which leaves one somewhat unsatisfied. Despite the craftsmanship and experience of 1934 vintage Moeran, there is something lacking which can be found even in his most early song cycle, [Ludlow Town](#) of 1920. The Four English Lyrics do deserve a hearing, but they are unlikely to set your heart on fire.



music: vocal

Six Poems of Seamus O'Sullivan (1944)
R85

Published

1946, Joseph Williams

1. Evening
2. The Poplars
3. The Cottager
4. The Dustman
5. Lullaby
6. The Herdsman

Recordings

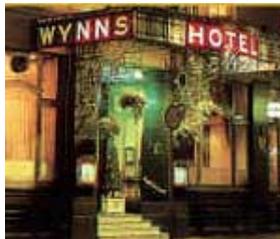
Reviews

[Robin Hull, Penguin Music Magazine, 1947](#)

Further Writing

Audio

home page



"The six Seamus O'Sullivan Poems I did a good bit of in the public lounge of Wynn's Hotel in the centre of Dublin"

(Letter to Leonard Duck)

Seamus O'Sullivan was the pen name for James Sullivan Starkey (1879-1958), the Dublin born writer who founded the 'Dublin Magazine' in 1923 which he edited until the year of his death. He was one of several Irish literary friends of Moeran, and his 1944 setting of six O'Sullivan poems for solo voice and piano is one of the highlights of Moeran's song output.

The Six Poems of Seamus O'Sullivan came at a time when Moeran was at a creative peak - the same year saw his [Sinfonietta](#) and [Overture for a Masque](#), the [Violin Concerto](#) and [Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra](#) were only just behind him, and he was about to scale the heights of his [Concerto](#) and [Sonata](#) for Cello of 1945 and 1947 respectively. These were golden years indeed, and the O'Sullivan songs fit perfectly into this as superb examples of Moeran's songwriting skills.

Moeran did in fact set seven O'Sullivan poems to music at this time, with "[Invitation to Autumn](#)" appearing separately. An eighth, unpublished and undated setting of O'Sullivan's "[If there be any Gods](#)" survives as a pencil manuscript, the first page of which can be seen in Geoffrey Self's book, "[The Music of E J Moeran](#)".

Of the six songs published together there is a definite feeling of wistfulness, or as Self suggests, "*a haunted, fey feeling...autumnal in mood...an imagery of aging and transience*". The piano accompaniment is clean and sparse by comparison to his earlier style (none of the "*mush of Delius-line chords*" he was so keen to purge in 1930) - the opening of *The Cottager*, for example consists of a single, simple chord followed by several bars of unharmonised solo melody before the singer enters, almost unaccompanied.

Letter, 1943

"I think these are my swan songs as far as solo songs are concerned"

Moeran was about to extend his orchestral technique in setting the [Sinfonietta](#) for a Haydn sized orchestra, successfully refining his mastery of orchestration to get the most out of deliberately limited resources. One detects a similar 'less is more' philosophy informing these songs settings, as if at times Moeran is deliberately paring down his earlier tendencies to see how far he could move in the opposite direction. Of the final song, *The Herdsman*, he wrote to Peers Coetmore in 1943:

"The one I have done today is strange; it is called *The Herdsman* and is about slow moving cattle. As the vocal part is largely on one note, it is possible it will not find favour with our brilliantly intelligent English singers!"

It must be said that Moeran did not hold singers in very high regard! Yet Moeran uses a near single note idiom to great effect when performed sensitively, allowing his performer a brief moment central to the song in which to shine - "*Oh happy meadows and trees and rath and hedges*" - as the piano breaks out of its eerie bitonal sparsity to throw a ray of sunlight over the proceedings - a typical Moeran device.

Of the other songs in this collection, *Evening* starts out in a warm sunny major key which drifts in and out of darker tonalities, capturing perfectly in music the onset of the "twilight and the darkening day".

The Poplars seems to recall something of the Norfolk in Moeran's use of melody, whereas *The Dustman*, told from the perspective of one watching through a window at night is a brief musical description, first setting the insomniac wandering through his house to a languid atmosphere, before sparking into life as he spots the dustman, already up and about and doing his work.

Finally, *Lullaby*, the penultimate song, alternates between a gently rocking piano accompaniment and a dream sequence section that is more a depiction of the lyrics - "*dream of the wild winds that wrestle in the night*", while the vocal melody slips in and out of tonalities, its wide leaps contrasting with *The Herdsman* that follows it.

"a haunted, fey feeling...
autumnal in mood...
an imagery of aging and
transience"



music: vocal

Six Folk Songs from Norfolk (1923)
R23

Published

Augener, 1924

Recordings

[Benjamin Luxton \(bar.\)](#)
[David Willison \(piano\)](#)

2 songs only:
The Pressgang,
The Shooting of his
Dear
(1990, CD ★★★★★)

Reviews

Further Writing

Audio

home page

1. Down by the Riverside
2. The Bold Richard
3. Lonely Waters
4. The Pressgang
5. The Shooting of his Dear
6. The Oxford Sporting Blade

"Maybe to the townsman they are bawdy, but to the countryman who sings as he works in the fields, they are just a natural and simple expression of fact", concluded Moeran in a 1947 BBC broadcast. He was well qualified to make such a statement, having been an avid folk-song collector since the age of 15. Starting in his home county of Norfolk, he had collected some 150 songs by 1924. His relaxed manner with the locals soon dispensed with any formality - in contrast to the academic approach of other collectors at the time, it is Moeran's collection that retains something of the spontaneity of the Saturday night "frolics" as they were known locally. "The company...assemble in a low-ceiling'd room, and through a haze of smoke from strong shag tobacco the chairman can be seen presiding over the sing-song. He maintains absolute discipline, talking must cease during the singing of a song....he has such a personality that he succeeds in producing conditions like those of Wigmore Hall during a quartet recital!"

A collection of six songs appeared in February 1924 in which singers like Harry Cox, Walter Gales and Robert Miller ('Old Jolt') are acknowledged, in addition to "Mr. George Lincoln, landlord of the 'Windmill', Sutton". Two songs of the set were to provide inspiration for work on a wider canvas - the orchestral piece 'Lonely Waters' and, as Geoffrey Self has pointed out, 'The Shooting of his Dear' became the framework for much of the Symphony in G minor.

Notes by Barry Marsh

"to the countryman who sings as he works in the fields, they are just a natural and simple expression of fact"



music: vocal

Extract from: "E J Moeran's Recollections of Peter Warlock"

Maltworms (1926)
R48

Published

Unpublished

Recordings

Neilson Taylor
(baritone)
Male Chorus
Jennifer Partridge
(piano)
Unicorn UNS 249
(LP ★★★★★)

Reviews

Further Writing

[Moeran in Eynsford](#)
[Complete Lyrics](#)

Audio

home page



This photo was taken on the pavement outside the door to A local dramatic society at Moeran and Warlock's cottage, facing the Five Bells pub, Shoreham was putting on some one-act plays and it had been suggested that Warlock and Moeran should provide the music. Th village boasted a good brass band of from twelve to fifteen players and both composers wanted to make use of it. The band was holding its practise that evening and the two composers therefore went home, harmonized the song and scored the accompaniment. When an accompaniment had been written to the verses, Moeran set to work harmonizing the chorus, while Warlock scored the verses in the next room, writing out the parts in pencil. There was no full score. Moeran then recopied the parts in ink, the composers caught the seven o'clock bus to Shoreham, and the work was rehearsed there and then.

Unfortunately the performance never took place. The bandmaster's wife did not hold with play-acting and, on the night, the band was forbidden to appear. The song, however, was given a piano accompaniment, and in place of a Dowland dance which Warlock had arranged for brass band the two composers played piano duets. All the band parts have since been lost; but it is said that "Maltworms" is still to be heard in the "Crown" at Shoreham, and Moeran had a fine photograph of the three original singers flanked by the composers, each holding a mug of beer.



Warlock, Moeran, members of Shoreham Amateur Dramatic Society, 1928

E J Moeran's Recollections of Peter Warlock
by Gerald Cockshott
Musical Times March 1955

**According to Gwen McIntyre's booklet "Peter Warlock" (Farningham and Eynsford Local History Society) this took place in the Five Bells at Eynsford, just a few yards across the road from the house shared by Moeran and Warlock between 1925 and 1928 - see also "Moeran in Eynsford"*

"Moeran set to work harmonizing the chorus, while Warlock scored the verses in the next room, writing out the parts in pencil"



Music: vocal

Church Music

Published

OUP, 1931
Novello, 1938

Recordings

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis:
St Edmundsbury
Cathedral Choir
Priory PRCD 554
(1996, CD ★★★★★)

Te Deum and Jubilate:
Norwich Cathedral Choir
Priory PRCD 470
(1994, CD ★★★★★)

[Priory Records Online](#)

Reviews

Further Writing

Audio

home page

You also ask about church music: I have a Te Deum and Jubilate at the Oxford Press; this is frequently to be heard on Sundays in cathedrals. Both Westminster Abbey and Southwark do it from time to time.

There is also a Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (temporarily out of print) at the Oxford Press, and an anthem, Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem [R56]. Another short unaccompanied anthem is at Novello, the title of which I forget.

Letter to Lionel Hill
June 12th, 1943



The piece Moeran forgot in his letter to Lionel Hill was a 1938 anthem, Blessed are Those Servants (R74). This piece, written in 1938, was his only return to writing for the church after the brief spurt in 1930 which produced the other pieces he mentions.

From a man surrounded by family clergymen - his grandfather, father and brother were all vicars - it may seem odd that Moeran wrote so little for the church. Yet he was not a religious man, and described his output as 'this tripe for the church'. So why bother at all? The most obvious answer is that he wrote it for the money. By 1930 he was away from the [Eynsford](#) years and re-evaluating his

mainstream output, as well as suffering bouts of ill-health and injury. He'd had very little published for several years, and saw this as a way to make some quick and easy money.

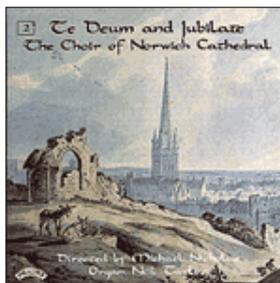
This does not explain his return to the church for the one-off 1938 anthem - perhaps he was asked for the piece - but it is clear that the 1930 work was well received, and both the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis and the Te Deum and Jubilate have made it onto CD as part of the [Priory](#) series.

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in D R55

Geoffrey Self writes: "*It is no mean achievement to write a tune so strong, memorable and singable as the opening statement [of the Magnificat]. The Nunc Dimittis is similarly apt and masterly in its effortless art.*"

Although the distinctive voice of Moeran is barely obvious in the music, and one would not perhaps be inspired to explore his secular output from hearing these works alone, they are well written and not without interest. Mervyn Cousins commented in his 1996 sleeve notes: "*His D major canticles show [lyricism and craftsmanship] within an overall simplicity - there is much two- as well as four-part writing, with canonic structures providing interest.*"

Te Deum and Jubilate in E flat R57



Moeran's morning canticles are quite different in tone. Michael Nicholas wrote in 1993: "*...strongly diatonic unison writing contrasts with the modal flavour of the harmonised passages. The choral writing, often heard over marching bass lines in the organ accompaniment, suggests Vaughan Williams and Holst... However, these movements have characteristics of their own, fitting well into the regular round of Anglican worship.*"

Certainly the longer Te Deum gives greater scope for creativity than any of the other works considered here, and one feels that if he dwelt on any of them it was the Te Deum which captured his imagination and allowed greatest scope for his powers of invention. Indeed, for someone so dismissive of his church output, Moeran was a regular visitor to Hereford Cathedral whenever he had the chance to hear these works performed.

Anthems

Of the two anthems I have managed to find little trace. No commercial recordings appear to exist, and they barely get a mention in Geoffrey Self's book. This is perhaps an interesting corner of Moeran's output for someone to explore in the future.

"The Nunc Dimittis is apt and masterly in its effortless art"



Music: vocal

Songs of Springtime (1930)
R54

Published

Novello, 1933

Recordings

[The Finzi Singers](#),
(1993, CD ★★★★★)

East London Chorus
(songs 1,3,4,6 only)
Redbridge RRCD 1021
(1990, CD ★★★★★)

Reviews

[Review of first performance - Musical Times, 1934](#)

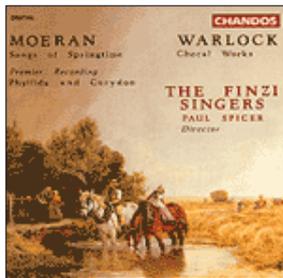
[Disc review from Gramophone Magazine @ Amazon](#)

Further Writing

Audio

[home page](#)

1. Under The Greenwood Tree (Shakespeare)
2. The River-God's Song (John Fletcher)
3. Spring, the Sweet Spring (Samuel Daniel)
4. Love is a Sickness (Thomas Maske)
5. Sigh no More, Ladies (Shakespeare)
6. Good Wine (William Browne)
7. To Daffodils (Herrick)



I was pleasantly surprised recently to be in a conversation with someone I'd just met who, when I mentioned this web site and my interest in matters Moeran, immediately exclaimed: "Oh - he wrote Songs of Springtime, didn't he? We sang that in our choral society!" The choral society in question must be a good one - early reviews question the practicality of the work (see reviews, left)- its difficult chromaticism and awkward jumps from song to song without instrumental pitch assistance giving even the best choirs something to really get their teeth into.

Songs of Springtime was among Moeran's first post-[Warlock](#) pieces, though there seem to be differing opinions as to exactly when it was written - Geoffrey Self has it written in 1929 in his text, but 1930 in his list of works; Barry Marsh's [Chronology](#) dates the first sketches to Spring 1931*, while Malcolm Rudland states in the Chandos sleevenotes that the cycle was "finished in the spring of 1929", going on to say: "He told Hubert Foss (Compositions of E J Moeran Novello 1948) of the importance of keeping the songs in order, especially the last, because by the time of its composition, the daffodils on the Lawns of Lingwood had begun to peer within range of his bedroom."

Which ever way you look at it, though, this was a crucial period in Moeran's musical development, moving away from his Delian 1920's influence towards the mature style of later large scale works, and it's interesting to see where this particular piece draws its main influences from. The words are all poems from the Elizabethan age, yet Moeran's settings do owe more to the influence of Delius than his later song cycle, Phyllida and Corydon, which pastiches (to a degree) the madrigal style. Many of the Elizabethan settings of these words would have been known to Moeran, albeit "filtered through" Warlock, as Self puts it. However, Self finds something of an Ellington blues influence, alongside [Delius](#), in some of these pieces - though you might have to listen quiet hard to hear it!

Malcolm Rudland's notes effectively summarise the seven songs thus: "Under The Greenwood Tree portrays a feeling of irony, whereas The River-God's Song and Love is a Sickness move like Dowland's lute songs, the latter in an intense G minor [notably the key of Moeran's Symphony]. Warlock dedicated his solo song Sigh no more, Ladies to Moeran in 1928. Moeran's part-song reply, although influenced by him, offers a more popular response, as is Spring, the Sweet Spring, (also set by Britten in his Spring Symphony). Good Wine fits the words like a glove... Herrick's To Daffodils cast a shadow over the work, symbolising that all beauty must die."

* In response to this dating question Barry Marsh notes:

"I'm sticking out for 1931 because this was the period when Jack was recuperating from a long illness at Ipswich and had gone to stay with his parents at Lingwood, near Acle. Cyril Pearce, the Norfolk gentleman whom you hear on the documentary [that Barry made for Radio Norfolk], also told us that it was in 1931 that he visited Jack at Lingwood and he was at work on the Songs. Remember that my chronology dates where possible give the date of first sketches/composition, not just the first performance or publication. So first sketches 1931 - yes!!"

"by the time of its composition the daffodils on the Lawns of Lingwood had begun to peer within range of his bedroom"



Music: vocal

Published

Novello, 1939

Recordings

[The Finzi Singers](#)
(1993, CD ★★★★★)

Reviews

[Musical Times, 1939](#)

[Other reviews, 1940-44](#)

Further Writing

[Musical Times, 1939](#)
(analytical descriptive article, June 1939)

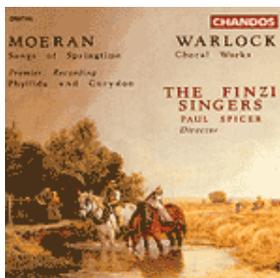
Audio

home page

Phyllida and Corydon (1939)
R75

1. Madrigal - Phyllida and Corydon (Nicholas Breton, 1545-1626)
2. Madrigal - Beauty sat bathing by a stream (Anthony Munday, 1553-1633)
3. Pastoral - On a hill there grows a flower (Nicholas Breton, 1545-1626)
4. Air - Phyllis inamorata (Lancelot Andrews, 1555-1626)
5. Ballet - Said I that Amaryllis (Anon., C16)
6. Canzonet - The treasure of my heart (Sir Philip Sidney, 1554-1586)
7. Air - While she lies sleeping (Anon., C16)
8. Pastoral - Corydon, arise (Anon., C16)
9. Madrigal - To meadows (Robert Herrick, 1591-1674)

"strict Tudor polyphony is set against extreme chromaticism"



Moeran was busy on his [Violin Concerto](#), begun in 1937, and not completed until 1941, when he interrupted his work to write the madrigal suite for unaccompanied SATB chorus, Phyllida and Corydon. Unlike the Concerto, which seems to follow logically and musically on from the [Symphony in G minor](#), there is little to relate either work to this one.

Moeran set exclusively Elizabethan period pastoral poetry, much of it only loosely connected, in a particularly well honed madrigal style. Unlike earlier, Victorian pastiche efforts, Moeran has fully understood and implemented the intricacies of rhythms, accents and melodic shapes of the original English madrigalists, in particular Morley, but also Wilbye and Benet.

But Moeran is not writing straight imitations, and within the established patterns he is able to add his own chromaticisms and modulations from a harmony many centuries forward. Some commentators have found this cross-pollination to be something of a problem, and have expressed unease with chromaticism sitting upon such strict sixteenth century structures.

Geoffrey Self, however, finds value in this: *"The work is highly characteristic of its composer, and valuable therefore precisely because of the stylistic inconsistency. For we are continually made aware, throughout his music, of a kind of divide/dichotomy. Within it lyricism has two faces - major/minor tonality is split in false relation, passages of pastoral diatonicism are dispersed in polytonality: and here, in Phyllida and Corydon strict Tudor polyphony is set against extreme chromaticism."*

He goes on to suggest that some of the most "worrying" examples of this are also the sections of most overwhelming intensity. To my own ears I must admit I find no great problem with this aspect of the work. I do admit it is not a piece I have studied extensively, but to one who has grown up with far more 'difficult' harmony to contend with, Phyllida and Corydon works very well indeed.

Self also picks up on some interested and perhaps unexpected musical relations with other works of the time. Despite my assertion that Phyllida and Corydon bears little relation to contemporaneous works, plucking out the line "so vain desire was hidden" from Beauty sat bathing by a stream and finding almost direct parallel melodic use in both the Symphony and Violin Concerto. From this he speculates on a hidden meaning now illustrated: *"If its use is deliberate, what 'vain desire' is enshrined in the two major works - a desire, a yearning even, for ultimate peace?"*

Yet the conclusion of Phyllida and Corydon fails to find this 'ultimate peace' - Self describes the final madrigal To meadows as an image *"of utter loneliness, bereft of consolation. I know of only one work, Delius' Sea Drift...to compare with its emotional desolation."* Perhaps 1939 was not an ideal year for an injured First World War veteran to be writing particularly optimistic music.



Music: vocal

Nocturne (1934)
R70

Published

Greuz-sur-Loing 3.1.1935

Novello, 1935

My Dear Moeran,

The poem is beautiful and I am sure it must have inspired you to give the best and most intimate and tender...you have in your heart. Please dedicate it to the memory of Frederick, it is a tribute which I know would have given him great pleasure.

Recordings

Jelka Delius.

[Hugh Mackey,](#)
[Ulster Orch.,](#)
[Renaissance Singers,](#)
[Vernon Handley](#)
(1990, CD ★★★★★)



The *Nocturne* stands at a crossroads in Moeran's career as a composer. Before [Delius](#) died in 1934 Moeran had already accepted a commission from the Norwich Philharmonic Society, but seems to have been stuck for an idea until the poet Robert Nichols gave him some lines from an unfinished verse drama entitled 'Don Juan Tenorio, the Great'. Why this should have happened remains unclear, unless it is reasonable to speculate that within the framework of Don Juan's 'Address to the Sunset' lies Nichols's own eulogy for Delius - he knew Delius well. It is essentially a poem of twilight, evoking much of the atmosphere that is to be found in Delius's own settings of texts by Nietzsche and Walt Whitman. But how did Nichols want Moeran to respond? It is indeed rare that any composer should so quickly put aside work on a symphony in order to satisfy the plea of a

Reviews

poet to set his words to music; yet throughout the late summer and autumn of 1934 Moeran took up residence in Nichols's own Sussex home so that he might complete the *Nocturne*. Once finished, he sent the piece to Delius's wife Jelka, receiving in turn what seemed to be the ultimate approval.

Further Writing

There is evidence to support the fact that it was much needed. From his student days at the Royal College of Music Moeran had fallen in love with with the music of Delius and, in the company of Philip Heseltine [AKA *Peter Warlock*], himself a Delius 'disciple', he had the opportunity of visiting Grez on at least two occasions. It is, perhaps, a telling reflection on Heseltine's relationship with his friend that Moeran, always the less dominant of the two but probably the one with more humility, was left to be 'misaid' (Heseltine's own word) in a taxi and so never got to meet his idol. Fate was to deal a crueler blow in 1929, when, with the invitation to meet Delius at Beecham's Delius Festival in London accepted, Moeran suffered an injury which was to confine him to bed for the next eighteen months. It became a time of self-appraisal, of realising that the years spent with Heseltine, although fun, had rendered him creatively sterile.

Audio

The sudden death of Heseltine in 1930 was a bitter blow, but, in retrospect, the answer to Moeran's dilemma - how to go about re-establishing the reputation that he had made over six years earlier on the British musical scene.

home page

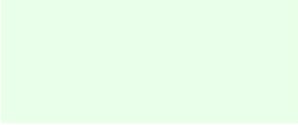
"Delius would have loved to set Robert Nichols's poem. Moeran does not, however, try to tell us how Delius would have done it", wrote the critic Basil Maine after the first performance of the *Nocturne* in 1935. In the 1933 [Songs of Springtime](#) Moeran had already written a kind of 'choral chamber music' but here the treatment is broader, the canvas a larger one. Although the work is short, it encapsulates much of what was to come - the [Symphony](#), the two [concertos](#) and the 1939 choral suite [Phyllida and Corydon](#).

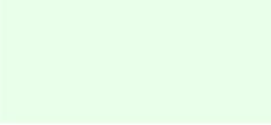
In Moeran's words, "*The Nocturne should be regarded as a kind of tone poem evolved around Nichols's lines, from which both its form and inspiration have been derived. As a preliminary to hearing this music, the listener is advised to read the poem carefully through, allowing its mood and meaning to sink in, rather than to attempt to follow it in performance as a literal line by line "setting" of the words.*"

Exquisite stillness! What serenities
Of earth and air! How bright atop the wall
The stonecrop's fire and beyond the precipice
How huge, how hushed the primrose evenfall!
How softly, too, the white crane voyages
Yon honeyed height of warmth and silence,
whence
He can look down on islet, lake and shore
And crowding woods and voiceless promontories
Or, further gazing, view the magnificence
Of cloud- like mountains and of mountainous cloud
Or ghostly wrack below the horizon rim
Not even his eye has vantage to explore.
Now, spirit, find out wings and mount to him,
Wheel where he wheels, where he is soaring soar.
Hang where now he hangs in the planisphere -
Evening's first star and golden as a bee
In the sun's hair - for happiness is here!

"It is essentially a poem of twilight, evoking much of the atmosphere that is to be found in Delius's own settings of texts by Nietzsche and Walt Whitman"

Robert Nichols

(Address to the Sunset,
from '*Don Juan Tenorio, the Great*')


 Notes by Barry Marsh

▪



- [audio](#)
 - [biography](#)
 - [chronology](#)
 - [forum](#)
 - [mailing list](#)
 - [music: chamber](#)
 - [music: orchestral](#)
 - [music: solo](#)
 - [music: vocal](#)
 - [people & links](#)
 - [site map](#)
 - [what's new](#)
 - [writing](#)
-
- [home page](#)

Review from the Musical Times

Ludlow Town

'A Shropshire Lad' still draws composers like a magnet. E. J. Moeran has set four of the poems, and issued them as a cycle under the title 'Ludlow Town'. The four are: 'When smoke stood up from Ludlow', 'Farewell to barn and stack and tree', 'Say, lad, have you things to do?' and 'The lads in their hundreds'.

Mr. Moeran need not fear the inevitable comparison between this cycle and previous 'Shropshire Lad' essays. I can spare space for the mention of only one of the admirable qualities it shows, and I choose one that is least often shown by song composers today, especially the young ones. Mr. Moeran has acquired thus early the knowledge of what to leave out.

There are several pages - especially in 'The lads in their hundreds' - where the accompaniment suggests Stanford in its successful reliance on a few detached chords. But when the text demands the setting up of a background full of colour and suggestion, he can do it as clinchingly as anybody. See, as two widely different examples, the pianoforte to the grisly 'Farewell to barn', and the subtleties and simplicities of that in 'When smoke stood up'.

Baritones who are also musicians, and who have a liking for the grey and earthy melancholy of 'A Shropshire Lad', should make a note of 'Ludlow Town'. It places Mr. Moeran at once among the pick of our song-writers. (But I hope his publishers will not advertise him as such à la Warlock.)

"H.G." - Musical Times, January 1925

...when the text demands the setting up of a background full of colour and suggestion, he can do it as clinchingly as anybody...

Google™

Search WWW
Search Moeran

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com
[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose



Extract from 'New Music'
by Robin Hull

A cordial welcome is deserved by E. J. Moeran's Six Poems (Joseph Williams, 4s.), for voice and piano, set to the verses of Seumas O'Sullivan. The verses themselves are precisely of the kind to invite sensitive and imaginative music, and one could scarcely wish for anything more apt than Moeran's response to this invitation. It is true that his own individuality becomes subdued at times, and appears at variable strength, but this is patently the outcome of a desire fully to preserve the simplicity of the words. Thus the first song, Evening, can strike one as belonging to the world of folk-song at its best, rather than the realm of Moeran's personal style, yet the result is so beautiful that one could hardly wish the case to be altered. The personal note is altogether stronger in Moeran's very remarkable setting of The Herdsman. This reflective, poignant song strikes to great depth, and can be worthily compared with the finest since the time of Peter Warlock. The Six Poems as a whole are to be cherished by all who recognise the richness of Moeran's inventiveness, and ought on no account to be missed by others who have yet to make a full acquaintance with the art of this outstanding composer. The songs are wholly reasonable in their demands on executants, but require, of course, an interpretation which does justice to Moeran's sensitivity.

...the finest since the time of
Peter Warlock...

taken from Penguin Music Magazine
Volume III (1947) P.59

- [audio](#)
- [biography](#)
- [chronology](#)
- [forum](#)
- [mailing list](#)
- [music: chamber](#)
- [music: orchestral](#)
- [music: solo](#)
- [music: vocal](#)
- [people & links](#)
- [site map](#)
- [what's new](#)
- [writing](#)
- [home page](#)

Google™

Search WWW
Search Moeran

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com
[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose



Moeran in Eynsford

"I lost faith in myself round 1926 and composed nothing for several years. I even nearly became a garage proprietor in partnership with Cockerill the ex-air ace...I had an awfully lazy period in Eynsford. If you knock off for a long time, it is frightfully hard to get going."

Letter to Peers Coetmore, 1948(?)

Once Jack Moeran came home alone and drove his car through a hawthorn hedge and damaged his face...

The village of Eynsford lies to the south east of London, just outside the M25 orbital motorway, in the county of Kent. No longer, perhaps, the sleepy idyll it might once have been, with a fair amount of traffic passing through its main road, the setting is peaceful enough, managing to be engagingly rural without frightening off the affluent commuters able to afford the relatively high house prices there. It is a village that has seen a fair amount of history, and there is a brief if mildly interesting visit to be paid to the ruins of its small castle.



Eynsford lies to the south east of London

One thing the local historians don't mention too often is a notorious set of residents who lived there between 1925 and 1928. It was during these years that Jack Moeran, [Peter Warlock](#) and Warlock's manservant, Hal Collins, took up residence in a small house in the centre of the village, next door to a chapel, a few yards across the road from the pub. To say that these three lived eccentrically would be an understatement.

- [audio](#)
 - [biography](#)
 - [chronology](#)
 - [forum](#)
 - [mailing list](#)
 - [music: chamber](#)
 - [music: orchestral](#)
 - [music: solo](#)
 - [music: vocal](#)
 - [people & links](#)
 - [site map](#)
 - [what's new](#)
 - [writing](#)
- [home page](#)



Search WWW
Search Moeran

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com

[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose



The Five Bells pub

which to write her text, and there is plenty there too for the Moeran detective.

Little has thus far been written about this time - the lack of musical output puts it somewhat outside Self's remit (though do see the page on ['Maltworms'](#)), and Lionel Hill's book begins almost twenty years later. So I am glad to report that, from a pamphlet written by Gwen McIntyre of the Farningham and Eynsford Local History Society a few pieces of the Moeran jigsaw may be reassembled.

McIntyre's primary interest is in Warlock, but she had unique access to long local memories as well as musical history books with

In addition to Moeran, Warlock and Collins (a Maori also known as Te Akua, of whom it is said that he "consumed vast amount of stout and would sometimes perform Maori war dances with terrifying realism") there was a fourth member of the household, Warlock's girlfriend, Barbara Peache. With frequent visitors filling up the small house, it was not unusual for Warlock and Peache to share their bed with a third girl. That this gossip should have escaped the cottage is perhaps an indication of the scandal brought on the village by the household. Other shocks for the locals included public nudity - Warlock riding his motorcycle around the village



In the garden of the Five Bells (L-R):

naked, a visitor collecting fish and chips in the buff, and a strange young man playing the piano with no clothes on. It seems even when clothed, Warlock and Peache always walked around barefoot indoors, which in itself was enough to cause shocked comment.

Their capacity for drink was legendary - "they would full up big urns at the Five Bells and take them back...the kitchen [was] swimming in beer." At the time Moeran had a "big Renault car", which they often took (if not riding a penny farthing bicycle) to The Peacock, a pub in a neighbouring village. "Once Jack Moeran came home alone and drove his car through a hawthorn hedge and damaged his face."



Moeran in the late 1920's

From a friend, Jack Lindsay, comes this evidence: "We drank up all the beer and hurried across to the Five Bells where we sat at the back on the garden seats by the rickety table, with the leaves of the trees brushing the sweat from our brows...then we carried a beer-supply home in a large earthenware jug."

McIntyre relates: "Once a party of them left the Five Bells and went towards Shoreham in Moeran's car. They ended up in a ditch but without much damage to the car or themselves, fortunately.

"...they were very generous to the clientele of the Five Bells and popular with them. During a convivial session, they were joined by a little old man who had made his way to Eynsford from Dartford where he was living in the workhouse attached to Dartford Hospital. Subsequently they had him to stay in the cottage for a week or two and his little figure, which they wrapped in a blanket, was part of the party crossing the road to the pub. They also put him in Jack Moeran's car, wrapped in his blanket, and took him on jaunts round the countryside - no doubt to other pubs." The other main form of transport appears to have been a wheelbarrow, used to carry Warlock home from the station (where the local station master had instructions to haul him out of the train...), and

to transport assorted guests and interlopers to and from the Five Bells and various local parties.

Geoffrey Self mentions the household's habit of singing uproarious sea shanties on Sunday mornings to try and drown out the church services next door, for which they received the God-fearing villagers' prayers. They also managed to outrage the Sunday School superintendent once, when Warlock walked over from the Five Bells to talk to some children standing by the church railings, saying to them "I'll be your Jesus." But there must have been a kind of resigned tolerance too, as Warlock played for the children in the church's schoolroom, a musical performance "somewhat marred by his pulling faces as he played...one girl was so taken with the giggles she had to rush from the room." The local children nick-named him "Gentleman Jesus".



Warlock

But in all of this, while Moeran developed a complexion which earned him the affectionate moniker "Raspberry" or "Old Raspberry" and did very little work, Warlock was productive, though plagued with bouts of depression, as Moeran later recalled: "When the black mood passed he would write a song a day for a week, fumbling about with chords and whistling...All his work was done in this way - quickly, at the piano and often in an atmosphere that was far from quiet."



The cottage in Eynsford

There were many regular visitors to the house - assorted artists and musicians, including John Goss, Cecil Gray, Bernard van Dieren, Lord

Berners, Hubert Foss and Constant Lambert - plus Moeran's 'girlfriend' of the time, Nina Hamnett. "She tells of the large, important lunch that was cooked on Sunday with everyone in the house helping. Some serious beer-drinking was done in the garden of the pub opposite while the food cooked...[Warlock] loved to have large bonfires [which used to] smoulder and smoke at night."

During this time Moeran's previously prolific output petered out, and all we have is a handful of songs and short piano pieces. The time probably also sowed the seeds of his alcohol problems. And yet, coming out of the other side of this manic 'time out' Moeran was to reappraise his work and develop his technique into the mature style which was to prove so fruitful in the 1930's and 1940's.



[Download this article as an Adobe Acrobat pdf file \(250 KB\)](#)



- [audio](#)
 - [biography](#)
 - [chronology](#)
 - [forum](#)
 - [mailing list](#)
 - [music: chamber](#)
 - [music: orchestral](#)
 - [music: solo](#)
 - [music: vocal](#)
 - [people & links](#)
 - [site map](#)
 - [what's new](#)
 - [writing](#)
-
- [home page](#)

Review of First Performance

Moeran's 'Songs of Springtime'

At their Aeolian Hall concert on March 13th [1934], Mr C. Kennedy Scott and the Oriana Madrigal Society gave the first performance of Moeran's seven 'Songs of Springtime', hereby fitting a double feather into their cap. They not only did the songs first, they did them all.

This example of singing the series straight through is not likely to become the rule. The songs are not a connected whole that becomes greater than the sum of its parts when treated whole. Mr. Scott even made his choir pass from one song to the next without a chord or cue from the pianoforte to make or rectify pitch. This was unquestionable as etiquette and as an indulgence to the aesthetic ear; but was it practical? 'Sigh no more, Ladies' ends in F, and 'Good Wine' begins in E. Only a heavenly choir could be sure of making an exact transition; and the Oriana, being at least one stage lower, failed to make a true anchorage in the new key till a dozen bars had passed. Again, the chromatic writing throughout the seven songs is an invitation to flattening. The Oriana, it is true, held their pitch until near the end, but not many choirs would be as successful.

This by the way. The songs made an even better impression in tone than they do in print. Harmonic complexities that had threatened a slight vexation of the ear were carried into it smoothly and with no more than an agreeable piquancy by the well-managed vocal movement. The performance also established the unity that comprehended the Tudor suggestion on the one hand and the modern harmonic feeling on the other. The total effect was that of something singularly fresh and pleasant and stimulating in vocal music, and we hope that the Oriana will do the songs again.

McN. Musical Times, April 1934

The total effect was that of something singularly fresh and pleasant and stimulating in vocal music...



Search WWW
Search Moeran

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com
[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose



- [audio](#)
 - [biography](#)
 - [chronology](#)
 - [forum](#)
 - [mailing list](#)
 - [music: chamber](#)
 - [music: orchestral](#)
 - [music: solo](#)
 - [music: vocal](#)
 - [people & links](#)
 - [site map](#)
 - [what's new](#)
 - [writing](#)
-
- [home page](#)

Moeran's Phyllida and Corydon

The BBC Singers gave the first performance* of this suite of nine unaccompanied pieces on October 30th 1939. I admired the choir's manipulation of the material, as it was directed by Leslie Woodgate. The male singers still sound a bit etiolated through over-refinement; such slight stroking sometimes fails to make us feel the chordal nerve of swiftly-changing harmonic passages. The choir's verve was happy, its pointing (as in 'fa-la's) often pretty, and its spirit, at the best, truly evocative.

The first impression about the music is that it stands in a clear succession, finely following an ancient convention with a revived sensitiveness; the twentieth century mating with the sixteenth (Breton, Munday, Sidney, and the like poets). This composer subtly individualises certain procedures of modality and harmonic strangeness which few besides Warlock have satisfactorily bent to their use. The modal convention has sometimes weakened Moeran's art; here its use is almost entirely congenial; his fresh air can disperse the mists that enrap some of his brethren when they "go modal". That is the considerable achievement of a rich imagination. In harmonic suggestiveness he is at his best, finding appropriate inflections for the subtlety of a vocal caress. Now and again he over-subtilizes, I think, as in 'weep you no more' (No. 7). To match in music the curious blend of simplicity in subject and exquisite fragility of poetic expression is an almost impossible task for any musician. The moment he forsakes the shore of period-style, as we know it in ayre or madrigal, he braves an ocean of harmonic currents which may carry him to ports he seeks not - or even to over-emotional shipwreck. Moeran navigates with high wisdom; the seamanship is as admirable as the ship is beautiful.

W.R.A. (1)

Musical Times November 1939.

* Note: The reviewer is probably referring to the first broadcast performance - see below 1 - W.R. Andersen.

"The first performance of Moeran's Choral Suite 'Phyllida and Corydon' will be given by Kennedy Schott's A Capella Choir at Aeolian Hall on October 24th 1939" - (footnote in M/T July 1939)

"Moeran navigates with high wisdom; the seamanship is as admirable as the ship is beautiful"

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com
[Mailing List Archive](#)



- [audio](#)
- [biography](#)
- [chronology](#)
- [forum](#)
- [mailing list](#)
- [music: chamber](#)
- [music: orchestral](#)
- [music: solo](#)
- [music: vocal](#)
- [people & links](#)
- [site map](#)
- [what's new](#)
- [writing](#)
- [home page](#)

Phyllida and Corydon - assorted reviews

As to be expected, Moeran's nine songs were most successful in practice when they depended most upon play of rhythm and word among diatonic harmonies; that is, when their Elizabethan dress had the most reality in its texture. Modern madrigalianism has nothing happier to its credit than 'Phyllis inamorata,' 'I said that Amaryllis,' and 'Corydon, arise'. Other parts of the Suite involved the choir in a tussle that could not always be watched in comfort; the case is an extreme on when Mr Lawrence's choir drops a whole tone. The music of these pages may be of the best, and embody all the virtues of free part-writing and harmonic and melodic thought; but in giving rein to his gifts as a composer Mr. Moeran has called for a high degree of specialist talent on the part of his singers, a technique that is no more prevalent in Fleet Street than in Kensington or a cotton-mill.

...The concert was a seasonable example of courage and determination on the part of the choir.

Music Times, June 1940

review: The Fleet Street Choir, Wigmore Hall, May 27th 1940

This series continues to offer attractive programmes to the promoter's patrons. On February 13 the Fleet Street Choir conducted by T. B. Lawrence sang Benjamin Britten's 'Ceremony of Carols' and 'Hymn to St. Cecilia' together with E J Moeran's three movement [sic] "Phyllida and Corydon" and 'Alleluia' by Randall Thompson. Britten's 'Ceremony' is now familiar. His 'Hymn to St. Cecilia', if less striking, has the same richness and resource. Moeran is not afraid of showing his indebtedness to great masters of the English choral age, which he does, not because of a lack of musical ideas, but because he knows their art intimately and appreciates their genius...

Musical Times, April 1943

review: Gerald Cooper Concerts



Search WWW
Search Moeran

The most enjoyable programme this month was provided by the B.B.C. Chorus, in Moeran's suite 'Phyllida and Corydon', the first being pronounced with a redundant 'r'. This very subtle harmony beat the choir once or twice, but not badly. I am apt to be lost in admiration of the B.B.C. Singers' intonation skill, even when I cannot feel that musical intuition keeps pace with it. Moeran's suite is a glorious test for both powers. The composer has the craftsmanship of a Parry, a Stanford, a Delius, and a beautifully refined creative spirit. We have now no finer songsmith for the choir.

Round about Radio by W R Anderson
Musical Times, August 1944

Moeran is not afraid of showing his indebtedness to great masters of the English choral age because he knows their art intimately and appreciates their genius...

E-Mail me:
andrew@moeran.com
[Mailing List Archive](#)

The Worldwide Moeran Database
©2001 Andrew Rose