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## **A Cappella as Incidental Music: With a Focus on Frederick Delius's Choral Music**

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper, we analyze and study about the incidental music focusing on the Frederick Delius's choral music without instrumental accompaniment. Incidental music refers to music composed for a play, often played between acts or as background music. Typically, incidental music is discussed within the realm of classical music, but historically, it has evolved into background music for various media. Additionally, incidental music is predominantly instrumental rather than vocal or choral. However, Frederick Delius expanded the scope of incidental music to include choral elements. Delius's efforts opened new possibilities for incidental music, enhancing the integration of drama and music. His works transcend mere background music, enriching the atmosphere and emotions of the play. This provides the audience with a more immersive experience and elevates the artistic value of incidental music. Frederick Delius's unaccompanied choral work, "Two songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water" is characterized by their lack of lyrics and melodic and harmonic texture, making them even more suitable as incidental music.*

**Keywords:** Choral Music, Incidental Music, A Cappella, Frederick Delius, Hassan

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Incidental music, composed for plays, combines literary and musical characteristics. It plays an important role in conveying the plot, mood, and dramatic development of the play. Historically, incidental music has evolved into background music for various modern media. Typically, incidental or background music is composed as instrumental pieces, but expanded the realm of incidental music by incorporating unaccompanied choral works.

Frederick Delius (1862-1934), regarded as the last great apostle of romance, emotion, and the beauty of music in the 20th century and he composed notable choral works of incidental music [1]. Delius developed his style through a blend of post-romantic harmony influenced by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), a deep appreciation for Wagnerian emotional expression, elements of French Impressionism, and a touch of African American music. Also, his harmonic idiom has been imitated extensively in popular and film music and attracted the attention of Duke Ellington (1899-1974) in 1930s and lastly.

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These musical characteristics of Delius can also be found in his choral works. Furthermore, by incorporating unaccompanied choral pieces as well as instrumental works into his incidental music, he expanded the scope of this genre and enhanced its dramatic effect. In this paper, We aim to analyze the role of Frederick Delius's unaccompanied choral piece, "Two Songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water," composed for the play "Hassan," as background music. Firstly, the definition and historical development of incidental music and then analyze the characteristics of the choral pieces composed for this purpose.

## **2. INCIDENTAL MUSIC**

### **2.1 HISTORY OF INCIDENTAL MUSIC**

The origin of incidental music dates back as far as Greek Drama. In the Baroque period, particularly in England, the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 brought an end to the republican regime, leading to a flourishing of theatrical performances in London. With the Restoration of King Charles II (1630-1685) in 1660, the cultural life of England underwent a dramatic transformation. The Puritan regime that had previously banned public stage performances was replaced by a more permissive and culturally vibrant monarchy. Theaters in London reopened, and new plays were performed, reflecting the tastes and interests of the time. This resurgence of theatrical activity provided fertile ground for the development of incidental music. Consequently, incidental music for plays developed significantly, with many compositions created to accompany these productions. A notable figure in this domain was Henry Purcell (1659-1695), who composed incidental music for a total of 43 plays from 1680 to 1695. A number of classic composers have written incidental music for various plays including George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826), Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), Edvard Grieg from the period of classic to era of twentieth century [2].

In general, incidental music is music in a play of classical literature. As developments of mass media such as television program, radio program, video game, or some other presentation, incident music has been composed extensively for many kinds of genre nowadays. In fact, the term is less frequently applied to film music, with such music being referred to instead as the film score or soundtrack. Incidental music is often background music, and is intended to add atmosphere. It may take the form of something as simple as a low, ominous tone suggesting an impending startling event or to enhance the depiction of a story-advancing sequence. It may also include pieces such as overtures, music played during scene changes, or at the end of an act, immediately preceding an interlude, as was customary with several nineteenth-century plays. It may also be required in plays that have musicians performing on-stage. Parts of all of these are often performed in concerts outside the context of the play. Vocal incidental music, which is included in the classical scores mentioned above, should never be confused with the score of a film or musical, in which the songs often reveal character and further the storyline. Since the score of film musical is what actually makes the work a musical, it is far more essential to the work than mere incidental music, which nearly always amounts to little more than a background score; indeed, many plays have no incidental music whatsoever.

### **2.2 ROLE OF INCIDENTAL MUSIC**

Incidental music replaces monologues in a play, providing information about the plot and helping the audience better understand the events happening on stage. It is utilized in the four following ways. Firstly, Incidental music emphasizes key events or changes in the plot, making it easier for the audience to follow the story's progression. Incidental music complements the narrative elements of the play, providing additional information or hints to the audience. This helps the audience better understand the background of the story or the motivations of the characters. Secondly, Music is a powerful tool for expressing emotions, effectively conveying the internal states of characters and the mood of scenes. For example, a sorrowful scene may be accompanied by a lyrical melody, while a tense scene may feature fast-paced music. Thirdly, Incidental music enhances the conflicts and tension within the play. Changes in the music's dynamics or intensity can make the audience feel the conflicts between characters or the importance of crucial moments more vividly.

Lastly, Music plays a key role in establishing the atmosphere of specific scenes or locations. For instance, majestic music may be used to depict the grandeur of a palace, while serene music might be used to express the tranquility of nature. The role of incidental music in a play is to replace monologues, providing information about the plot and helping the audience understand the events that unfold. This type of music can be referred to as "handlungsmusick" as it narrates the storyline, explaining the content of the play, the conflicts within the plot, and the realistic aspects of scenes and settings [3].

### 3. FREDERICK DELIUS AND HIS MUSIC

#### 3.1 FREDERICK DELIUS'S MUSIC AND INFLUENCES

Frederick Delius, the son of naturalized German immigrant parents, was born in 1862 in Bradford, England, where he spent the first sixteen years of his life. Despite later travels in America, Scandinavia and Germany, and his more than forty-five-year residence in France until his death in 1934, he never completely lost his North Country accent, nor his memories of the Northern shires. It may not be too fanciful to associate his lifelong interest in music for voices, particularly in choirs, with the region of his youth. Many of his major works, which date from the first decade of the twentieth century, are partially or fully choral; but a chain of minor works for unaccompanied voices threads through most of his working career. These range from early songs written in 1887 during his period of study at the Leipzig Conservatory to one of the last pieces, completed only with this wife's assistance, as paralysis struck him during the mid-1920s [4].

The works of Frederick Delius cover numerous genres, in a style that developed from the early influences of composers, Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849), Edvard Grieg and Richard Wagner (1813-1883) to Claude Debussy (1862-1918) including his own contemporaries Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) and Richard Strauss (1864-1949) into a voice that was uniquely Frederic Delius's [5]. His compositions focused on the dramatic music included the role of incidental music. In addition to this, works of voice are main and definitive catalogue of Frederick Delius's music.

#### 3.2 FREDERIC DELIUS' UNACCOMPANIED CHORAL MUSIC

Frederick Delius wrote twelve unaccompanied part songs. They can be categorized as two groups: the early six-part songs and the late six-part ones. Table 1 shows twelve choral works for unaccompanied voices among his vocal works of music [6]. "Ave Maria" was written in the beginning of 1887 including six German part songs before 1887 and "Two Songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water" in 1917. These choral works are based on simple continuous binary form with German words. "Midsummer Song" is the first of the late part songs to contain extensive wordless passages, a choral technique which seems to have had an early significances for Frederick Delius, as reflected by its conspicuous presence in the choral sections of his first of operas, "Iremlin" (1890-92) and "Koanga" (1895-97).

**Table 1. Choral works of Frederick Delius**

Title	
1. Lorelei	1887 and earlier
2. Oh! Sunshine	
3. By the Forest	
4. Ave Maria	
5. Sunshine Song	
6. The Coming of Spring	
7. On Craig Ddu	1907

8. Wanderer's Song	1908
9. Midsummer Song	1908
10. Two Songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water	1917
11. The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls	1923

After an interval of seven years during which Frederick Delius experienced symptoms of the final stage of his illness, he composed "The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls," the last of the late part songs, aided by his wife Jelka Delius (1868-1935) who transcribed his dictation. It would have been his last choral composition had it not been for the later collaboration with Eric Fenby (1906-1997) which produced "Songs of Farewell." In particular, "The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls" presents a fascinating combination of texted and wordless singing, the effects of which unite to produce the most original and possibly most appealing of Delius's part songs. It is obvious after an examination of the poem that Frederick Delius was most attracted by the refrain motif with its reference to bugles and dying echoes, rather than the total textual import. He set only two of the three stanzas of the poem and over two thirds of the music is devoted to word painting of the refrain highlighted by the stunning wordless horn calls [7].

Harmonically, the work has no distinct tonality, but rather employs extensive chromatic accompaniment in bass part to the treble melodies. An obvious exception is found in the horn call sections which are clearly tonal and simplistic by nature. The most distinctive characteristic of the work is its unusual sonorities, especially in the horn call part and coda sections, where Delius has specified an additional group of tenors and basses by indicating *separate chorus to be hummed with a closed mouth imitating horns*. Figure 1 shows tonal horn section and an example of apparent dissonant harmonies which dissipate and create perfectly the enchanting effects described by the text in the coda section of "The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls"

The musical score for "The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls" (mm 66-75) is presented in 6/8 time. It features six vocal parts: Sopranos, Altos, Tenors 1, Basses 1, Tenors 2, and Basses 2. The lyrics are: "Ah dy - ing dy - ing". The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *mf*. A specific instruction for the Tenors 2 and Basses 2 parts reads: "(separate chorus to be hummed with a closed mouth imitating horns)". The music consists of vocal lines with lyrics and accompaniment for the Tenors 2 and Basses 2 parts.

Figure 1. The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls, mm 66-75

#### 4. INCIDENTAL MUSIC OF FREDERICK DELIUS

Frederick Delius composed several music for stage such as operas, lyric dramas including incidental music. His first work of incidental music, "Zanoni" in 1888 has not enough information about play and first premiere and so on since it was one of apprentice works. His second work to the satiric drama "Folkeraadet" in Norsk meaning the people's parliament by Gunnar Heiberg (1857-1929) was composed in 1897 and "Folkeraadet" is entirely instrumental. Frederick Delius employed several chorus works for the play in the last incidental music, "Hassan." The music of "Hassan" arranged between acts of play with both instrumental pieces and choir with many voices. In particular, some of chorus work in "Hassan" is *a cappella* which has not instrumental accompaniment even without text. Table 2 is the list of incidental music of Frederick Delius [8].

**Table 2. The works of Incidental Music by Frederick Delius**

Title	First Performance	Year
Zanoni	None	1888
Folkeraadet (The People's Parliament)	Christiania (Oslo), October	1897
Hassan	London, September	1923

Although Frederick Delius composed only three pieces of incidental music, "Folkeraadet" and "Hassan" exemplify his unique style and musical characteristics. Delius often explored national themes, drawing inspiration from various countries, particularly Norway. One of his most significant influences was Edvard Grieg, a Norwegian composer he befriended after completing his musical studies. In "Folkeraadet," Delius includes a variation of the Norwegian national anthem, giving the work a distinctly funereal tone. In his later work, "Hassan," Delius created both instrumental and choral pieces. Notably, some of the choral works are *a cappella*, featuring no instrumental accompaniment. By expanding incidental music to include vocal pieces without text, Delius effectively conveyed the mood and atmosphere of the play.

#### 5. THE INCIDENTAL MUSIC IN CHORUS WORKS OF DELIUS

"Two Songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water" performed is the chorus from the incidental music to "Hassan", a play written by the English poet James Elroy Flecker (1884-1915). This is one of the Frederic Delius's best wordless choral works. It would seem a natural progression for Delius to eventually write an entire composition for wordless chorus considering his great fascination with that medium, and in the late spring 1917 he composed two such pieces under the collective title *To be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water*. They are dedicated to an English organist, Charles Kennedy Scott (1876-1965) and his Oriana Madrigal Society.

These two compositions, of which the first is a kind of flowing reverie and the second a folk song fantasy, magnificently portray the essence of Delius's vocal art. Their subtlety reveals not only his techniques of motivic development and harmonic manipulation, but also an incredible sensitivity to vocal color and expression. The works are obviously conceived as vocal compositions and not merely instrumental transcriptions. When Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) turned down the theater producer's request that he write this incidental music, Frederick Delius took up that task, although already very ill, composed a supple, sumptuous score, alternately gay and tender, full of "exotic extravaganzas" that in no way reflected the real state of his health. The mystic off-stage unaccompanied chorus from Act I has a quite simple sopranos, altos, tenors and basses (SATB) texture, and is more impressionistic in sound.

There is much use of parallelism which is 5<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup>, continuous chromaticism and unresolved dissonance. Excellent examples appear in bar 6 and 7; Eb11 chord to G9 chord. This first piece admirably demonstrates Delius's use of sonority. The melody reveals an obvious sensitivity to vocal color and intensity as illustrated by the presence of the tenor in its highest range and by parallel employment of the Soprano in a descant function. In particular, Figure 2 shows idiomatic characteristic of Delius's choral music. These

tritones are the unique sound for the characteristic affect of Delius's music although these tones are difficult for the vocalists in choir to sing [9].

The image shows a musical score for six voices: Sopranos, Contraltos, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The music is in 4/4 time and features a chromatic harmonic progression. The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). The score consists of six staves, each with a vocal line. The Soprano and Contralto parts have a more active, melodic line, while the Tenor and Bass parts provide a more harmonic, supporting texture. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, characteristic of Delius's style.

Figure 2. To be Sung of a Summer Night on The Water I, mm 5-12

The chromatic harmonic progression is one of the important features that reveals a unique color in Delius's choral music. It can be observed that the accompaniment harmonies of the other voices are very chromatic alongside the melody in the upper voice. In the result of reducing the choral Figure 3 for piano, the chromatic descending progressions of the other voices, in addition to the melody, are prominently highlighted.

The image shows a piano reduction of the musical score for six voices. The piano part is written in 4/4 time and features a chromatic descending progression. The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). The score consists of two staves, each with a piano line. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, characteristic of Delius's style.

Figure 3. To be Sung of a Summer Night on The Water I, mm 5-8

In contrast to the placidity of the first setting in the second song, Frederick Delius presents a lively folk song fantasy for tenor solo and six part chorus. Considerably more complicated the basic melodic unit is a two phrase, as show in Figure 4 answered by second idea which is derived from the first. Both motifs undergo variation during the piece, which appears in inversion, augmentation. In total these ideas combine to create as in the first setting, a basic tripartite form, again supported harmonically. Initially impressive in the work is the tremendous complexity in dynamics, counterpoint, chromaticism, and of course color and chord spacing. In the first seven bars, all the principal motifs are presented. The solo material easily dominates the music from bar 1 through 5, stating the various motifs and including a catchy echo effect. In the final two bars the chorus swells into importance as the solo and soprano lines merge, creating the first climax of the

work. Figure 4 shows six parts choir with tenor solo in the second song, "To be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water " .

Gaily but not quick

The musical score consists of seven staves. The top staff is for Soprano, followed by Alto, Tenor solo, Tenor I, Tenor II, Bass I, and Bass II. The Tenor solo part includes the lyrics: *mf* Luh lah lah lah lah lah lah, lah lah lah lah lah, lah lah lah lah, la ha hah, la ha lah, la ha hah *f*ah. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *f* across the different parts.

**Figure 4. To be Sung of a Summer Night on The Water II, mm 1-7**

Using vocal music instead of instrumental music in incidental music can certainly be seen as an approach that broadens the scope of incidental music. Delius minimized or completely omitted lyrics in his works to emphasize the emotions and essence that music can convey. This clearly demonstrates his intention to express the inherent sounds of humanity. Delius's approach suggests that music transcends mere language delivery and can serve as a medium for directly conveying emotions and feelings. The score of Figure 2 and Figure 4 shows that there are no lyrics. The choral work sung without lyrics serves as background music, playing an important role in effectively conveying the scenes and storyline within the play.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Delius's music has impressionistic characteristics and he used rich colors and a composition technique that emphasizes atmosphere and emotion, which is well reflected in his choral works. He was also one of the first European composers to recognize the uniqueness of the American Negro musical idiom, incorporating it in "Florida Suite", "Koanga" and "Appalachia"; he made use of wordless chorus to an extent unparalleled among his contemporaries -the technique appearing in his early operas before its use by Debussy.

The overview of the two songs illustrates the tremendous variety and imagination to be founded in their composition. They contain not only definitive examples of Delius's harmonious palette and motivic manipulations but more significantly reveal his creative use of vocal color and sonority. These two songs are characterized by their use of unaccompanied choral music to expand incidental music into vocal expression, minimizing or omitting lyrics to enhance the dramatic effect of the drama. Additionally, they employ chromatic harmonic progressions and impressionistic color to further emphasize the dramatic atmosphere.

Delius's choral works must take their rightful place among those of Debussy and Ravel to which they are

akin in the spirit of impressionism. It is hoped that a valuable scholarly analysis of his incidental music will elevate Delius's music to a higher artistic status.

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