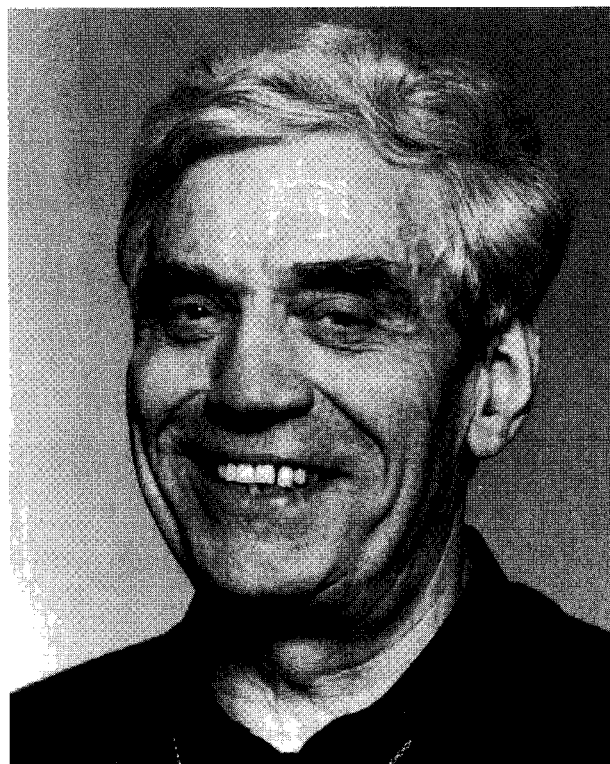


The Eclectic Style of John Gardner

by Robert Jones



John Gardner

Over the course of his five decades in music, John Gardner has proven to be a versatile composer, conductor, teacher, and pianist. He has written more than one hundred choral compositions using sacred and secular texts and ranging from small-scale, unaccompanied settings to multimovement works using piano, organ, and orchestral accompaniments.

Early Years

Gardner was born to musical parents in Manchester, England, on March 2, 1917, and began composing at the age of seven. Both his mother, a graduate of the Royal College of Music, and his father, a doctor, composed music.

My father was actually a good composer, [with an] exquisite sense of harmony, "lightish stuff," very easy on the ear, very polished. I suppose the reason I started composing early was because my mother used to play my father's compositions. Perhaps I wished to emulate him by doing the same thing.¹

Other composers also had a direct influence on Gardner's early musical development, particularly Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and English composer Cyril Scott.² In 1935, Gardner received an organ scholarship to Exeter College, Oxford, where he studied with several influential teachers, including Ernest Walker, Sydney Watson, Thomas Armstrong, Sir Hugh Allen, and R. O. Morris.

World War II

Following a stint in the Royal Air Force during World War II, Gardner joined the Covent Garden Opera staff as a *repetiteur* in

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1946. He even appeared onstage in a production of Berg's *Wozzeck*, stealing the scene as a drunken pianist. His association with opera continued throughout his career, including the composition of six operatic works. The most well-known of these was *The Moon and Sixpence*, based on a novel by Somerset Maugham.

In 1952, Gardner joined the staff at Morley College as a tutor, later serving as Director of Music from 1965 to 1969. In 1956 he assumed the post of Professor of Harmony and Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He also was appointed Director of Music at St. Paul's Girls' School in London, following such distinguished composers in this post as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Herbert Howells. He retired from teaching at the Royal Academy in the spring of 1986. Gardner has accrued several honors in his career: the Bax Society Gold Medal (1958), the Order of the Honorary Royal Academy of Music (1959), the Collard Fellowship from the Worshipful Company of Musicians (1962–64), and Commander of the British Empire (1976).

With an *œuvre* approaching 250 works, Gardner's prolific compositional output is remarkable considering his thirty-year commitment to full-time teaching between 1956 and 1986. Due to his busy schedule, his habit was to rise at 4:45 A.M. when composing a work. He regarded the composing process this way:

Pure pain, really, and then it gets rather nice when one's making full score, because it just becomes craftsmanship and draftsmanship. Writing for instruments is quite different from writing for voices in that the words, to an extent, dictate the progress of vocal music and give you the ideas for it. Though many of my compositions are choral, I've never studied voice personally, but I suppose I've done a lot of work with choirs and perhaps have learned a bit from that. I suppose I have some gift for composing vocal music.³

Currently residing in the London suburb of Epsom with his wife, Jane, Gardner remains an active composer and is enjoying more frequent British performances of his compositions.

Performances of his choral works in the United States are more frequent as well. His latest sacred composition, Mass

in D, for chorus, contralto, alto sax, and orchestra, was premiered in December 1992 by the Camerata Singers of Spring Lake, Michigan. His *Exsultate Deo*, a motet for choir and wind band, commissioned by the University of Dayton Chorale and Wind Ensemble, was premiered in Dayton, Ohio, in March 1994.

Stylistic Traits

Gardner's style combines a diatonic lyricism, framed in a variety of formal structures, with a rhythmic vitality marked by keen awareness of poetic meter. Although the majority of his choral works are for mixed voices, he has composed four works for male voices and seven for female voices. In each of these genres, Gardner incorporates old and new musical elements.

During his tenure at Exeter, he wrote more than eighty pieces, nearly all of which were withdrawn from publication by the composer. Some of these were reminiscent of the style of William Walton, whom he admired.

Allegro vivo (in one)

Sop. O be joy - ful in the Lord, all

Alto O be joy - ful in the Lord, all

5 ye lands: serve the Lord with glad - ness and

ye lands: serve the Lord with glad - ness

Figure 1. *Jubilate Deo*, op. 37ii, © 1957, Anglo-American Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

On looking back, what I liked about Walton's music was that it wasn't *modern*. I have a great dislike for modern music. It's growing greater as I get older. And Walton, who I think has a similar dislike, managed to find ways of writing music where the old signs and values were still there, but, at the same time, he didn't sound like the old music.⁴

Much of Gardner's writing is influenced by his admiration for Renaissance vocal style. His motet *Jubilate Deo*, op. 37ii, for example, utilizes many compositional techniques found in works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its harmonies result from the overlapping of melodic lines, produced by a tightly imitative style (Figure 1). Hugo Cole, writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, states that Gardner makes use of contrapuntal devices so skillfully that the listener is often unaware that canonic or imitative devices of considerable complexity are at work.⁵

Gardner is an ardent admirer of the Renaissance master Josquin des Prez. Throughout his *Jubilate*, one can observe a rhythmic vitality, pairing of voices, awareness of textual accentuation, balancing of vocal textures and tone colors, and expressiveness in a modal style reminiscent of Josquin.⁶

Ionian, phrygian, lydian, and their related hypomodes are juxtaposed throughout *Jubilate*. Alternation of trochaic and iambic rhythmic modes of the *Ars Antiqua* generate an active rhythmic

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interplay among the voices, and Landini cadences ending with open fifths, unisons, or octaves contribute to the medieval flavor of the work. While the predominantly diatonic vocal lines are mostly syllabic, an occasional melismatic passage is inserted, often for word-painting purposes. Simultaneously, the tonal structure is obscured by numerous cross-relations.

An exciting moment in the work is achieved in a more contemporary manner on the text "and speak good of his name." The chorus vacillates between major-seventh chords a whole step apart, followed by a sequential repetition of the passage a step lower.

Larger Forms

Gardner has written a number of cantatas and other multimovement works. Two of his popular mixed-voice cantatas are *Cantata for Christmas*, op. 82, and *Cantata for Easter*, op. 105. Additional

works in the same category are *Cantiones Sacrae*, op. 12, *Seven Songs for Chorus and Orchestra*, op. 36, *Nine Poems from the Notebook (1793) of William Blake*, op. 138, and *Five Partsongs to Poems of Wallace Stevens*, op. 142. These examples range from unaccompanied works to those requiring large orchestral forces.

An appealing example of Gardner's multimovement works is *A Shakespeare Sequence* (1964), op. 66, for women's voices, piano duet, and optional percussion (glockenspiel, xylophone, triangle, tambourine, sleigh bells, tabor, side drum, bass drum, cymbals, and gong). The themes of the selected Shakespearean texts range from the praise of women to celebrating music as the inspiration of love, to the sorrow of unrequited love. The formal schemes used in the movements include theme and variations, binary, strophic, ternary, and through-composed designs (Figure 2).

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Title	Form/Keys	Compositional Techniques
"It Was a Lover and His Lass" SSA, SSAA; 22 mm.; $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, occasional $\frac{3}{8}$	Strophic E-flat major	Pedal tones Lowered seventh and raised fourth Tone clusters
"Who Is Silvia?" SSA, SSAA; 109 mm.; $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, occasional $\frac{2}{4}$	Theme and variation B-flat major	Piano obbligato Melodic inversion
"O Mistress Mine" Unison, SSA, and solo; 38 mm.; $\frac{3}{2}$ meter	Binary D (tonal center)	Syncopation Chromaticism
"If Music Be the Food of Love" SA; 52 mm.; $\frac{3}{2}$ meter	Ternary C major, G minor, F-sharp minor	Diatonic canon
"Take, O Take Those Lips Away" SSA; 32 mm.; $\frac{4}{4}$ meter	Ternary A-flat major	Sequence Chromaticism
"Full Fathom Five" Unison-SSSAA; 43 mm.; $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{5}{8}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$ meters	Through-composed F minor	Tone clusters Angular melody Five-part canon
"Orpheus with His Lute" Unison; 70 mm.; $\frac{3}{8}$ meter	Through-composed D major, B minor	Mixed modality Guitarlike accompaniment
"Under the Greenwood Tree" Unison; 68 mm.; $\frac{4}{4}$ meter	Theme and variation G major, G minor	$\frac{4}{4}$ meter divides into 3+3+2 eighth-note groupings Lowered seventh and raised fourth Two-part canon

Figure 2. *A Shakespeare Sequence*, formal design

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *A Shakespeare Sequence* is its harmonic language, which juxtaposes popular and contemporary elements in contrast to the more modal *Jubilate*. Although Gardner uses traditional techniques, such as mixed modalities, cross-relations, pedal tones, and chromaticism, he also employs contemporary devices, such as tone clusters and jazz-influenced harmonies (specifically, quartal/quintal structures and vertical use of minor seconds, lowered sevenths, and raised fourths).

Rhythmic devices commonly found in contemporary music and dance also appear in this work, including frequent use of syncopation and hemiola. Moreover, individual movements often include numerous meter changes. The final movement, “Under the Greenwood Tree,” is possibly the most demanding to perform, featuring 3+3+2 groupings of eighths in the accompaniment under a two-part vocal canon marked *allegro* (Figure 3).

Perhaps one of Gardner’s most overlooked qualities is what English composer

Geoffrey Bush referred to as “his unaffected lyricism.”⁷ In *A Shakespeare Sequence*, one can see the range of Gardner’s melodic writing: the soaring melodies of “Orpheus with His Lute” (Figure 4), the lilting melodies of “Who Is Silvia” (Figure 5), and the angular, almost percussive melodies of “It Was a Lover and His Lass” (Figure 6) and “Full Fathom Five.”

One of the composer’s favorite works is his *Herrick Cantata* (1960), a ten-movement composition for double chorus, tenor soloist, and large orchestra, based on epigrams of the sixteenth-century English poet Robert Herrick. These epigrams include eight love lyrics and paens to music from *Hesperides*, a complete collection of the poet’s works.

Much of the orchestral writing in the *Herrick Cantata* is in a post-Romantic style. Gardner’s choice of solo instruments adds to the variety of textures and tonal colors. The violin and oboe reflect the pastoral nature of movement 1, “Music: A Song,” and movement 3, “A Dialogue Betwixt Himself and Mistress Eliza Wheeler, under the Name of Amarillis.” Movement 5, “Love: What It Is,” features the trumpet prominently as a fifth-voice in a climactic stretto passage. In this same movement, the jazz-influenced writing of the celeste accompanying a semichorus in parallel ninth chords is a vivid example of text painting (Figure 7).

Four movements feature a tenor soloist. Two of these, movements 6 and 9, demonstrate the composer’s flair for dramatic recitative. On the other hand, movement 7, “Corinna’s Going a-Maying,” pairs the tenor with the French horn in a dialogue that shifts cleverly between a rollicking romp and a pensive reflection on love and the brevity of life.

Often, for purposes of text painting or special effects, Gardner composes an evocative vocal line or accompanimental pattern. Movement 2 (“Godly Girzie”) from *Four Wanton Ballads*, op. 81, is based on a Robert Burns poem. Here, the composer separately assigns female and male voices a drone, bagpipelike, accompaniment under the soprano solo. “The Sandgate Girl’s Lamentation,” from the same work, portrays a young girl musing about what her life would be like if she had married a man with a vocation other than that of her mate. When she considers life with a sailor,

Figure 3. *A Shakespeare Sequence*, “Under the Greenwood Tree,” © 1964, Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Figure 4. *A Shakespeare Sequence*, “Orpheus with His Lute,” © 1964, Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Gardner humorously inserts swinging rhythms alternating between duple and triple groupings colored by jazz-influenced harmonies (Figure 8).

Gardner confesses his works include a few compositions and arrangements which employ lighter elements and tunes which are “easier on the ear.”

As far as composing in a more popular vein, yes, I have a great nostalgia, a great longing to be loved, you know. . . . and perhaps I’m disappointed that [my music] isn’t loved more. But you know if one tries to be popular, one, I think, will do it badly. The truly popular composers—Paul McCartney or, shall we say, the Gershwins—they were naturally popular. I don’t think I am.⁸

Musical Eclecticism

Gardner’s style combines old and new musical elements into a personal compositional language. Although some observers may not find the depth of expression the same as that felt in Benjamin Britten’s work, an attractive, positive, human, often humorous quality pervades much of Gardner’s music. His works are well-structured and economical rather than long-winded; notably absent are large choral forms such as oratorios and requiems. His output varies widely in difficulty for performers but rarely fails to engage an audience.

The composer speaks aptly concerning his philosophy of music. In reference to his *Herrick Cantata* and to music in general, Gardner provides these comments:

In composing *Herrick Cantata*, I have been motivated by no grand structural purpose beyond my wish to give performers and listeners a variety (and unity) of mood and key. The poems I have chosen are all in *Hesperides*, which was published under the poet’s supervision in 1648. Several of my choices are old war-horses (e.g., *Cherry Ripe*, *Corinna*, *Anthea*). One or two of them, if set before, have certainly never reached my ears in musical guise. At least one (*To Music, to Be calm His Fever*) exists in a little-known but consummate setting, that of David Oppenheimer, and I was very aware of the risk I

Figure 5. *A Shakespeare Sequence*, “Who Is Silvia?,” © 1964, Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Figure 6. *A Shakespeare Sequence*, “It Was a Lover and His Lass,” © 1964, Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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was taking in trying to emulate his achievement. I was, however, unable to resist my intense desire to include this poem in the cantata, for its depiction of music as healer, pain-killer, and soporific, as heaven-sent refreshment, is one that lies near to my own view of art.⁹

NOTES

- ¹ John Gardner, taped answers to author's questionnaire, March 12, 1990.
- ² John Gardner, "Composer's Anthology," *Journal of the British Institute of Recorded Sound* 44 (October 1971): 798-99.
- ³ Gardner questionnaire.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Hugo Cole, "Gardner, John Linton" in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (1980).
- ⁶ The composer's knowledge of counterpoint is demonstrated in two of his articles: "A Russian Contrapuntist," *Composer* 17 (October 1965): 6-7, and "The Slopes of Parnassus," *Composer* 21 (Autumn 1966): 11-12.

⁷ Geoffrey Bush, "Composer's Anthology," *Journal of the British Institute of Recorded Sound* 40 (October 1970): 690.

⁸ Gardner questionnaire.

⁹ Gardner, "Composer's Anthology," 802.

—CJ—

Figure 7. *Herrick Cantata*, "Love: What It Is," © 1960, Galaxy Music. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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Figure 8. *Four Wanton Ballads*, "The Sandgate Girl's Lamentation," © 1966, Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Published Choral Works of John Gardner

The composer has provided the following complete listing of his published choral compositions up to 1994.

*	Out of print
AA	Anglo-American
BH	Boosey & Hawkes
Cha	Chappell
Con	Constable
CUP	Cambridge University Press
Gal	Galaxy
Hin	Hinshaw
JE	Junior Education
Lor	Lorenz
Nov	Novello
OUP	Oxford University Press
SB	Stainer and Bell

Opus	Title	Voicing	Date	Publisher
lii	<i>Phyllis and Corydon</i>	SSA, piano	1946	OUP*
liii	<i>The Baffled Knight</i>	SSA or TTBB, piano	1946	OUP*
5	<i>O Sing unto My Roundelay</i>	SSAATTBB	1950	OUP*
10	<i>The Argument of His Book</i>	Massed voices, piano	1950	OUP*
12	<i>Cantiones Sacrae</i>	SATB, S solo	1951-52	OUP*
15	<i>O Clap Your Hands</i>	SATB, organ	1954	OUP*
24	<i>Hail the Day that Sees His Rise</i>	SATB, organ	1954	OUP*
35	<i>Spring, the Sweet Spring</i>	SATB	1956	BH
36	<i>Seven Songs for Chorus and Orchestra</i>	SATB	1956	OUP
37ii	<i>Jubilate Deo</i>	SATB	1957	AA
40	<i>The Ballad of the White Horse</i>	SATB, Bar. solo, orch.	1958-59	SB
49	<i>Herrick Cantata</i>	SATB, T solo., orch.	1960	Gal
50	<i>Welcome Yule</i>	Equal voices	1961	Con
51	<i>A Latter Day Athenian Speaks</i>	SSAATTBB	1961	OUP*
54	<i>Five Hymns in Popular Style</i>	SATB, orch.	1962	OUP
55i	<i>When Christ Was Born of Mary Free</i>	Equal voices	1962	Nov
55ii	<i>The First Nowell</i>	SATB, organ	1962	Nov
56	<i>Psalm 46</i>	SSATTB	1963	OUP
57	<i>Two Tunes for Unaccompanied Voices</i>	SATB	1963	OUP
58i	<i>Angels from the Realms</i>	Equal voices	1963	OUP*
58ii	<i>The Holly and the Ivy</i>	SATB, organ	1963	OUP
59	<i>The Noble Heart</i>	SATB, S and Bar. soli, orch.	1963-64	OUP
62	<i>We Have a Strong City</i>	SATB, organ	1964	AA
no op.	<i>We Wish You a Merry Christmas</i>	SATB, piano	1964	Nov
63	<i>I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes</i>	SSA	1964	AA
64	<i>Danny</i>	Equal voices	1964	OUP
66	<i>A Shakespeare Sequence</i>	SSA, piano, perc.	1964	OUP
67	<i>The Shout</i>	SATB	1964	OUP
68	<i>Cantor popularis vocis</i>	SATB	1964	OUP*
70	<i>Mass in C</i>	SATB	1965	OUP*
71	<i>Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun</i>	SATB	1965	Nov*

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72i	<i>Versicles and Responses</i>	SATB	1965	Nov*
72ii	<i>Magnificat</i>	SATB	1965	OUP*
72iii	<i>Nunc Dimittis</i>	SATB	1965	OUP*
74	<i>Our Captain Calls All Hands</i>	SATB, piano	1965	OUP
75i	<i>Good King Wenceslas</i>	SATB, organ	1965	OUP*
75ii	<i>Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day</i>	SATB, piano, perc.	1965	OUP
76i	<i>Robin Adair</i>	Equal voices	1965	OUP
76ii	<i>Ver the Spring</i>	Equal voices	1965	OUP
81	<i>Four Wanton Ballads</i>	SATB	1966	OUP
82	<i>Cantata for Christmas</i>	SATB, orch.	1966	OUP
84	<i>The End Is the Beginning</i>	SATB	1967	AA
104	<i>Three Amorous Airs</i>	SSA, piano	1971	OUP
105	<i>Cantata for Easter</i>	SATB, organ	1970	OUP
109	<i>Four Carols</i>	SATB, perc., organ	1970	OUP
115	<i>Solstice Carol</i>	Equal voices	1972	Cha
119	<i>A Song for St. Cecilia's Day</i>	SATB, organ	1973	OUP
120	<i>Bel and the Dragon</i>	Children's opera	1973	OUP
125	<i>Five Philanders</i>	SATB	1975	OUP
130	<i>The Gypsy Davey</i>	SATB	1975	OUP
133	<i>Four Rounds to Shakespeare</i>	Equal voices	1976	OUP
135	<i>Ca' the Yowes</i>	SATB	1976	OUP
141	<i>Sunny Bank Carol</i>	SATB	1977	OUP
142	<i>Five Parisons to Poems</i>	SATB	1977	OUP
145	<i>Two Seasonal Songs</i>	SATB, brass, organ, perc.	1978	OUP
146	<i>Lone Dog</i>	Unison children's voices, piano	1978	JE
147	<i>Six American Hymns in Free Style</i>	SATB, piano	1978	Hin
149	<i>O Little Town of Bethlehem</i>	SATB, piano	1980	Hin
152	<i>Room in the Inn</i>	SATB, four instruments	1981	OUP
154	<i>Mass in D</i>	SATB, contralto, alto sax, orch.	1983	OUP
160	<i>Praise Him</i>	SATB, piano	1983	Lor
178	<i>Everybody Sing</i>	SATB	1991	Hin
213	<i>A Burns Sequence</i>	SATB, orch.	1994	OUP

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