

SHIFTS IN TONE: THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON CLASSICAL MUSIC

by

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## Abstract

*This paper explores how the First World War affected the lives and compositions of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Maurice Ravel, and Arnold Schoenberg, three well-known twentieth-century composers who fought in the conflict on the British, French, and Austrian sides. The war affected the lives and compositions of these three men in significant, enduring, and divergent ways. The sharp differences in their compositional reactions to the war owe primarily to these authors' previous compositional styles, particularly their prewar approach to tonality, and their divergent wartime experiences, such as the extent of military service and traumatic events that paralleled the war. Despite their differences, a commonality was present; the war prompted these composers to change their view of tonality. More broadly, the war also led to compositions that were characteristically darker, more somber, and dedicated to the injured and deceased.<sup>1</sup>*

In the summer of 1918, at the age of 45, Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote to his friend and fellow English composer, Gustav Holst: "The war has brought me strange jobs, can you imagine me in charge of 200 horses! That's my job at present, I was dumped down on to it straight away, and before I had time to find out which were horses and which were wagons I found myself in the middle of a retreat."<sup>2</sup> Vaughan Williams, like many other soldiers, found himself thrown into unfettered chaos when he arrived at the front.<sup>3</sup> When he wrote to Holst, Vaughan Williams had

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<sup>1</sup> Tonality," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/tonality>. To understand the difference between tonality and atonality as described in this paper, a definition is helpful. "Tonality, in [music](#), (is the) principle of organizing musical [compositions](#) around a central note, the tonic. Generally, any Western or non-Western music periodically returning to a central, or focal, [tone](#) exhibits tonality. More specifically, tonality refers to the particular system of relationships between notes, [chords](#), and keys (sets of notes and chords) that dominated most [Western music](#) from c. 1650 to c. 1900 and that continues to regulate much music." Atonality is the opposite; it is a way of composing music that does not adhere to tonality.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Cobbe, ed. *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 109.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Badsey, "The Western Front and the Birth of Total War," BBC, March 8, 2011 (accessed on April 5, 2019), [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/total\\_war\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/total_war_01.shtml); WWI was especially a scene of

recently completed his training as an officer for the Royal Garrison Artillery combat regiment, and was sent to France to begin his tenure as a newly appointed officer.<sup>4</sup> A volunteer, he was one of many who answered his nation's call for aid and participated in military operations during the First World War. Due to the scale of the war, even artistic elites found themselves on the battlefield. Many went to war with optimistic hopes and thought the war would be over quickly. Vaughan Williams himself wrote in June 1916, soon after he first arrived on the Western Front: "I feel that perhaps after the war England will be a better place for music than before largely because we shan't be able to buy expensive performers etc. like we did before."<sup>5</sup> However, optimistic thoughts were soon replaced with the reality of unprecedented devastation and destruction. In the end an estimated 8.5 million soldiers died due to injury and disease.<sup>6</sup> The war turned out to be something quite different than many, including Vaughan Williams, had anticipated.

According to historian Robert P. Morgan, with emotional and material devastation so high following the war, "conditions were ripe for a cultural reorientation," and artistic expression took new forms.<sup>7</sup> Various new visual art movements emerged out of the period, such as Dadaism and Futurism. In terms of music, many pieces composed after the war sounded quite different from prewar pieces. Music historians classified this period as the beginning of a new era of

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confusion and mayhem because of the scale of the war and the mixture of new and old technologies. As the first large-scale war fought in the industrialized age, the First World War brought millions to the front to fight and added a new technological dimension to warfare in the form of planes, tanks, flamethrowers, and poison gas. These new technologies, paired with old staples of warfare like the use of horses, created scenes of horror like horses being ensnarled in barbed wire.

<sup>4</sup> James Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 108; It is not clear why Vaughan Williams was against expensive performers, but I suspect it correlates with his interest in folk melodies. By being interested in folk melodies, it makes sense that Vaughan Williams would support the common person being at the center of music making, instead of expensive performers who would lead to concerts with expensive ticket prices that the average person could not afford.

<sup>6</sup> "World War I Killed, Wounded, and Missing," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed November 19, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1991), 151.

music, the Modern era, as music written during and after the war frequently disregarded tonal and rhythmic norms.<sup>8</sup> Classical music being written today is still sometimes categorized as modern music, so clearly the transitional period near the First World War had serious long term impacts on art that remain to this day.

To understand how music was impacted by the war, this paper focuses on three of the best-known composers who fought in the First World War, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Maurice Ravel, and Arnold Schoenberg. This essay seeks to understand how the First World War affected both their lives and compositions and how their experiences relate to broader trends. As these three composers are among the most famous early twentieth-century composers who went to war, they serve as ideal subjects to address how the First World War impacted both the composers' lives and their musical output. All three composers represent different countries: England, France, and Austria respectively. This paper shows that to some extent all three composers were impacted by the war in parallel ways. Therefore, war experience was not unique to individual countries, but rather transcended national barriers. To contextualize changes in music, this paper will also discuss broader changes in art and culture. Coping mechanisms of people of the period will also be discussed to contextualize the reactions of composers.

Understanding changes in compositional style, and how these changes are reflective of broader artistic changes, requires that we connect the biographies of composers, work on the early twentieth century by music historians, and cultural history of the First World War. Biographies of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg describe the effects the war had on individuals. By bringing together these different biographies, it is clear that the war's effects were not only universal, but that there were commonalities among individuals in how they

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 152.

reflected on their experiences at war in their music.<sup>9</sup> The music history literature describes music after the war as marked by pathos, characteristically darker, reflective of loss, and reflective of a larger movement in art of rejecting prewar norms.<sup>10</sup> This paper, in addition to confirming that postwar music became more infused with emotion and often rejected prewar standards, argues that the rise in popularity of atonal music and the rejection of tonal norms was in part a product of the war and personal experiences. A strong connection between the war and changes to tonal approach can be seen in the postwar compositions of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the cultural history of the First World War argues that the trench soldier served as a main agent of change following the war as a result of traumatic experiences on the battlefield, a collective memory arose from the war, and the war influenced literary writers, who started placing their characters in a new uncertain postwar world.<sup>12</sup> This paper will argue that shared feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness towards the future prompted many to resort to

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<sup>9</sup> The major biographies I reference detail the lives of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, Schoenberg, and other significant composers of the period and include *Vaughan Williams* by James Day, *Ravel* by Burnett James, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg* by Bryan Simms, and selections from the *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>10</sup> Don Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, American History through Music (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2016); Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4-6; Within historiography, there a key ongoing debate that bears mention, as it debates the connection between atonal music and social context. As music historian Bryan Simms illustrates in the *Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, scholars such as Theodor W. Adorno and Alexander L. Ringer argued there is a connection between atonal music and historical events. Adorno stated that atonal music is a representation of the degradation of capitalistic society. Ringer stated that he believed that atonal music foretold the "dismal outlook for European Jews." A competing school of thought from scholars such as Allen Forte saw the birth of atonal music not as a direct reaction to historical events, but as an abstract way of composing that formed gradually throughout the late Romantic era, when composers relied on increasingly complex approaches to tonality. I agree with the second field of thought. This thesis contributes to the understanding of how social context catalyzed atonal procedures; Barbara L. Kelly, *Ravel, (Joseph) Maurice* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 109, 135, 172. Modris Eksteins argues that the trench soldier was a significant agent of change following the war; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning The Great War in European Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 227. Jay Winter argues that the war produced common experiences and therefore memory between millions that was a byproduct of its size and impact. In addition to confirming that a collective memory arose among those affected by war, this paper discusses how there was a commonality in the way people coped with the war; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 321. Paul Fussell argues that the war prompted authors to create characters who operated in a difficult postwar world.

similar coping mechanisms. Composing pieces which lacked a strong tonal center became one way to express this uneasiness in compositions.

In addition to the historiography, letters from composers and their compositions will serve as a backbone for this paper. Letters give first hand accounts on how the composers felt the war impacted their lives and music. The compositions serve as aural sources to gauge compositional differences due to the war. The compositions examined in this paper include *A Lark Ascending* and *A Pastoral Symphony* by Vaughan Williams, the *Left Handed Piano Concerto*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *La Valse*, and *Frontispice* by Ravel, and *Die Erwartung* and *5 Pieces for Piano Op. 23* by Schoenberg. These pieces were written either before or directly after the war. The pieces from before the war are representative of the style of other prewar compositions by these composers. Listeners can discern noticeable changes in prewar and postwar compositions more easily when these compositions are placed side by side.

I argue that the First World War significantly impacted art, including classical music. Specifically, the war influenced the lives and compositions of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Maurice Ravel, and Arnold Schoenberg in dramatic, enduring, and individualistic ways. The war led many artists to rethink their style. For those who did not completely reject their postwar style, like Vaughan Williams, wartime moods and experiences are still strongly represented in the art they produced. For revolutionaries like Schoenberg, the war justified to them their prewar innovations. For composers, in addition to personal agency, a number of factors contributed to creating differences in compositional reactions to the war: prior compositional style, type of military service, and traumatic events that paralleled the war and pre- and post-dated it. Despite differences, all three composers similarly responded to the war by changing their prewar conception of tonality in their immediate postwar pieces. However, they broke down tonal

standards in diverse ways, whether through rapidly changing the tonal center of a piece, using polytonality, or structuring atonality as is seen in Schoenberg's twelve-tone method. The weakening of tonal norms was influenced by personal experience and was a tool composers used to relay trauma in compositions.

The body of this essay is broken into five different sections. The first focuses on how the First World War impacted art and culture and how music fits into these wider cultural trends. The second, third, and fourth sections focus on how the war impacted the lives and compositions of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg. These three sections compare pieces composed before and after the war and point out changes in these compositions due to wartime experiences. The fifth section compares the differences in compositional reactions to the war between Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg and discusses why these composers reacted in similar and dissimilar ways.

### **Artistic, Cultural, and Societal Changes from the First World War**

The transformation of classical music during this period was representative of larger cultural changes. Due to the nature of world war, a unified global consciousness formed that was “all encompassing” and “all pervading.”<sup>13</sup> To quote historian Paul Fussell, “Anxiety without end, without purpose, without reward, and without meaning” became fundamental staples of human life and thought.<sup>14</sup> Film, poster art, avant-garde painting, poetry, prose, and music all reflected the sense of grief felt by millions.<sup>15</sup> As so many people were directly impacted by the war, a lasting backward gaze of many “writers, artists, politicians, soldiers, and everyday families” unwaveringly reflected the universality of loss and suffering from 1914 onward and a want to

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<sup>13</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 321.

<sup>14</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 320.

<sup>15</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning The Great War in European Cultural History*, 227.

remember a happier prewar time.<sup>16</sup> The common belief that a prosperous future was built on a foundation of human decency was shattered following the war. As a result, the future seemed limited to many.<sup>17</sup> Artists coped with the losses of war in different ways. Some found enthusiasm in the expression and experimentalism of new art forms that directly rejected the past. Others did the opposite and found refuge in more familiar past art forms. Some sought distraction from the memory of the war all together. Others, resenting the outcomes of the First World War, turned to new ideologies that sought to remold society.<sup>18</sup> As many monarchies were toppled during the war, a competition began between three competing ideologies: liberal democracy, communism and fascism. To quote historian Mark Mazower, "Each saw itself destined to remake society, the continent, and the world in a New Order for mankind."<sup>19</sup> With a need for an alternative to monarchy, people increasingly bought into these ideologies, and certain countries began to adopt them.<sup>20</sup> Many across the world bought into these ideologies which gained popularity following the First World War. Conflict between them the ideologies would lead to the Second World War, the Cold War, and beyond.

Numerous radical art movements developed out of the tumultuous period. This was the case with Dada.<sup>21</sup> Disillusioned by the war and repulsed by its perceived pointlessness, Dadaists thought art could no longer be taken seriously and created works that were purposefully presented as anti-art. These artists sought to promote a negative feeling towards the arts through

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<sup>16</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 229.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Bishop, "Unintended Consequences: Communism, Fascism, Hitler and the Holocaust," July 30, 2014, sec. History, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/inside-first-world-war/part-twelve/10986112/unintended-consequences-hitler-holocaust.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, 1st American ed.. (New York : Distributed by Random House: AAKnopf;, 1999), x.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Russia adopted communism following the Russian Revolution and the fall of the Tsar.

<sup>21</sup> The movement was born in reaction to the war by Swiss artists, such as writers Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, and painter and sculptor Hans Arp.



irrationality and disorder, sometimes lightheartedly.<sup>22</sup> Their anti-art sentiment channeled their disgust towards pre-war art that, in their view, glorified rulers and propagated militarism. Futurism was another art form that developed out of this period. It slightly predated the war, but like Dadaism, reflected the growing trend of creating art that rejected convention. Italian poet and editor Filippo Tommaso Marinetti coined the name futurism to reflect the objective of rejecting past art forms and celebrating the technological innovations in the modern era like the automobile.<sup>23</sup> Although the rejection of past art predated the war as demonstrated by Futurism, the First World War increased the discontent with past Romantic era art forms, as seen by Dadaism that was much more direct in its rejection and alienation towards the past than futurism. The rise in popularity of atonal music reflected the same disillusionment and rejection of norms that Dadaism and Futurism invoked.

Literary characters written during this period often reflected the turmoil of war. Plots of protagonists navigating in a free and prosperous society gave way to characters coping with “wartime bondage, frustration, and absurdity.” Works of literature that were characterized by plausible scenarios and social events were replaced by stories that were characteristically more “ironic,” “outrageous,” “ridiculous” and “murderous.”<sup>24</sup> Thomas Hardy's collection of poems *Satires of Circumstance* exemplifies the sort of ironic writing present in works from this period that conveyed an uneasiness to readers. His use of irony in his poems made readers question the "reliability of the narrator" and "the underlying implications of the story."<sup>25</sup>

Modris Eksteins, in his book *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, comments on the popularization of the irrationality of thought that accompanied the war.

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<sup>22</sup> Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 154.

<sup>23</sup> John White, “Futurism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 19, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 312.

<sup>25</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 3.

Eksteins argues that the trench soldier served as one of the biggest agents of modernism. Through experiences of death and destruction on the battlefield, the stereotypical trench soldier's psychology was altered which in turn altered the psychology of Europe more broadly.<sup>26</sup> Soldiers who experienced severe trauma, like those who bayoneted men through the head for example, developed shellshock, or PTSD as it is referred to as today. Shellshock led to unrelenting anxiety, tremors, nightmares, and other complications.<sup>27</sup> Of the three composers this paper focuses on, Ravel is thought to have suffered from shellshock due to traumas from his time at war being compounded by the death of his mother. This is reflected in unsettling pieces like *Frontispice* which is dissonant and which lacks a clear rhythmic pulse.

Composer Alan Berg's opera *Wozzeck* is an example of artwork that depicts a man who is traumatized from his time in the trenches. The mental health of Wozzeck, the main character, becomes worse when he submits himself to medical experiments to make financial ends meet after the war. He loses his mind and kills the mother of his child. The opera was based on Berg's own experiences fighting when he was drafted into the Austrian-Hungarian army and the horrible experiences he had while at war and after.<sup>28</sup> As the next sections of this paper will detail, both Vaughan Williams and Ravel served on the Western Front, and their subsequent experience as trench soldiers is reflected in their postwar compositions.

Although there was a surge of new music written in reaction to the war, some who fought on the battlefield dealt with the war by resorting back to more familiar pieces of art that reminded them of a happier time in their life before the war. Soldiers on the front in particular

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<sup>26</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, 1st ed.. (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 9-16.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Bourke, "Shell Shock During World War One," BBC, March 10, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml).

<sup>28</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 226.

embraced familiar songs and tunes that reminded them of home and boosted morale.<sup>29</sup> Popular tunes included *Keep the Home Fires Burning* and *Pack Up Your Troubles*.<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that postwar compositions were often darker and more somber, soldiers on the front often preferred to fall back on more cheerful tunes. This demonstrates that individuals of the period coped with the war by composing or singing different types of music that resonated with them and helped them cope with their disappointments.

Classical music, similar to other art forms, reflected the collective pain and disillusionment of the period. Historian Robert Morgan characterized a great deal of music from this period as “chaotic, a dark reminder, disturbing, unstructured, and frightening.”<sup>31</sup> Romanticism, the adjective that describes the period of music predating the war, became a foul word to many.<sup>32</sup> Romantic era compositions, which were seen as limitless outpourings of emotion, seemed to promote the same undisciplined passion which brought about the war. In response, some Europeans embraced music that was “more down to earth and less swollen in its ambitions” following the war.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the Neoclassicism movement in music gained popularity. Neoclassicism sought to incorporate aesthetic qualities from the Classical and Baroque Eras into modern music, such as balance, a lack of emotion, and clarity. Similar to Dadaism, Neoclassicism similarly rejected the Romantic Era, but dissimilarly did so by referencing a distant past.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Fiona Maddocks, “The Ten Best: First World War Music,” *The Guardian*, November 7, 2014, sec. Culture, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/nov/07/the-10-best-first-world-war-music>.

<sup>31</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 224.

<sup>32</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 48; Not every composer rejected Romantic Era norms, as demonstrated by the neo-Romantic movement. Neo-Romantic composers like Samuel Barber and Benjamin Britten retained the emotional expression associated with the Romantic era in their compositions.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Taruskin and Christopher Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, College Edition, Instructor’s Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 892; Neoclassicists include Pablo Picasso and composers like Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg.

It would be a gross generalization to think of different artists and everyday common people reacting to the war in the same stereotypical ways. In the following sections of the paper, the different reactions among the three composers in question will highlight this variance in ways of reacting, as seen through compositions. However, there were three general trends in the way people reacted to the war. Firstly, some people were forward looking and hoped to put the plights of war behind them. Artists with this mindset often reflected on the irrational nature of the war with art that condemned the past. The populace at large attempted to find happiness through modern distractions. Dances such as the Charleston and the long-distance flights across the world by Charles Lindbergh became popularized and became huge spectacles at least in part because they helped audiences distract themselves from the memory of trench warfare.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, some people dealt with the war by looking backward. They found solace in remembering a happier time before the war. In art, exemplified by movements like Neoclassicism, artists incorporated art forms from the distant past into modern art. Thirdly, there were many, especially those who fought in the war and who were most affected by it, who were unable to put the war behind them and mourned for a lost generation. Many of those who served at the front suffered conditions like PTSD. As the following sections will detail, some of the compositional responses of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg to the war fit into some of these popular coping trends.

### **Ralph Vaughan Williams: Reflecting Changes in England: At War and Beyond**

Ralph Vaughan Williams serves as the ideal starting point for seeing what life was like on the front for classical composers as he fought in a majority of the First World War and left behind detailed correspondence about his experiences at war. As will be shown in this section, he did not leave his love of music at home. He did not overhaul his style of composing because of

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<sup>35</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, 250-272.

the war, but immediate postwar pieces like *A Pastoral Symphony* do strongly reflect experiences at war, particularly, the death of fallen friends.<sup>36</sup>

Written before the war, the composition *The Lark Ascending* for violin and piano represents the shift in the compositions of Vaughan Williams during this period when juxtaposed with later works.<sup>37</sup> Like pieces postwar, *The Lark Ascending* is a reflection of nature, in this case, the countryside. The solo violin part represents the lark itself, flying and singing carefree, across an English pastoral landscape.<sup>38</sup> According to Stephen Connock, the chairman of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, the happy and innocent nature of *The Lark Ascending* is partially characteristic of the fortunate prewar period Vaughan Williams experienced thanks to his favorable financial position.<sup>39</sup> The composition lacks the somber motives, darkness represented by extreme dynamic shifts, and dissonance which became more reflective of Vaughan Williams's later works. Changes between this piece and post war pieces reflect the idea that Vaughan Williams did not overhaul his compositional style, but simply added his wartime moods and experiences to the pastoral style of music he was composing before the war.

When the First World War broke out, Ralph Vaughan Williams wanted to do his part and contribute to the war effort.<sup>40</sup> Despite being past the age of conscription, he volunteered to help a few weeks before his forty-second birthday in September or October of 1914.<sup>41</sup> Vaughan

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<sup>36</sup> I recommend listening to Vaughan Williams's 1914 piece *A Lark Ascending* and the fourth movement of his 1922 piece *A Pastoral Symphony* before starting this section. It will provide a foundation for how Vaughan Williams's music changed; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Lark Ascending," YouTube video, 0:00-14:54, September 1, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR2JIDnT2I8>; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Pastoral Symphony," YouTube video, 27:11-39:04, August 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAi65Fmbn0A>. Fourth movement.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Lark Ascending," YouTube video, 0:00-14:54, September 1, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR2JIDnT2I8>.

<sup>38</sup> Betsy Schwarm, "The Lark Ascending, Work by Vaughan Williams," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Lark-Ascending>; A poem titled *A Lark Ascending* by the English novelist and poet George Meredith served as inspiration for the piece.

<sup>39</sup> Philharmonia Orchestra, "Vaughan Williams: At War," Youtube, accessed September 18, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 40.

Williams originally was part of the Special Constabulary of the Metropolitan Police Force in London, England. He soon realized he wanted more of a challenge, and became a wagon orderly with the Royal Army Medical Corps.<sup>42</sup> Other composers were not enthusiastic at the prospect of Vaughan Williams going to war, and were not as eager to support their nation's call for aid themselves. In a letter written on January 19, 1915, the English composer Hubert Parry relayed his concern to Vaughan Williams. He worried that Vaughan Williams's death would be a huge loss of talent. Parry remarked that Vaughan Williams was not on the same footing as "ordinary folks, who if they are exterminated, are just one individual gone and no more."<sup>43</sup> Parry's words reflect the idea that prior to the war many musicians regarded classical music as an art form created for the elites and their interests. Feeling strongly that he must play a role in aiding his country, Vaughan Williams ignored his privileged elder's advice and went to war anyway.

At the beginning of the war, when Vaughan Williams was still stationed in England, he kept up musical activities and was not yet faced with the realities of the conflict, due to England's distance from the fighting on mainland Europe. He and his friend Harry Steggles formed a musical duo. He played the piano and Steggles played the mouth organ. This transitioned to regular music sessions every Sunday, during which Vaughan Williams, Steggles, a private, and a local bishop and his sons and daughters would play on whatever instruments they could get their hands on, including a trumpet, clarinet, viola, drums, violin, and a piano. Vaughan Williams also formed a choir when stationed at Saffron Walden. Once deployed, Vaughan Williams primarily served in France, and for a short period, was sent to Salonica, Greece on the

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<sup>42</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 96.

<sup>43</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 107.

Eastern Front to help in the fight against the Ottomans. During his short stay in Greece near Mount Olympus, he frequently watched and wrote down local folk songs and dances.<sup>44</sup>

On June 22, 1916, when Vaughan Williams arrived at Ecoivres, France, which was close to the front near Beaumont Hamel, the seriousness and devastation of the war became clear to him. He remarked that he had just arrived when a ten-day barrage began that led to 60,000 British casualties on the first day alone.<sup>45</sup> At war, Vaughan Williams served as an ambulance driver at the front, otherwise known as a wagon orderly. He wrote to Gustav Holst in June 1916 that all parades and niceties of war became nonexistent and that his job was to bring back the wounded and the sick from the front, at night usually.<sup>46</sup> Dealing with the wounded and the dying, he saw some of the worst horrors of war.<sup>47</sup> He experienced some of the newfound aspects of modern warfare, such as poison gas, flamethrowers, and the use of airplanes. Dealing with the dead made him more "solitary" and "austere."<sup>48</sup> While at war, he noted that his living quarters consisted of makeshift buildings with no windows, doors made out of sacks or sheets, and that dealing with the cold was a constant struggle.<sup>49</sup>

Vaughan Williams wrote that it was during this period when *A Pastoral Symphony* began to develop in his mind—he eventually finished the work in 1922.<sup>50</sup> Apart from composing bits of *A Pastoral Symphony*, composing was largely impossible for Vaughan Williams during this period because he was so busy. Vaughan Williams found his ability to compose with the little time he had increasingly difficult when his good friend George Butterworth died on August 5, 1916 during the Battle of the Somme. Butterworth was one of the most promising English

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<sup>44</sup> Cale Wiggins, "Composers At War: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Pt. 2," accessed November 19, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 42-43.

<sup>46</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 109.

<sup>47</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 97.

<sup>48</sup> Philharmonia Orchestra, "Vaughan Williams: At War," Youtube, accessed September 18, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 44.

<sup>50</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 43.

composers of his generation and was considered one of the torch bearers for the future of English music.

George Butterworth's death significantly impacted Vaughan Williams, and as it will be discussed, served as one of the leading contributors to influencing changes present in *A Pastoral Symphony*. Vaughan Williams repeatedly mentioned in letters how big of a loss Butterworth's death was to him. He wrote to George Butterworth's father and expressed how sorry he was for his son's death, and that he viewed the compositions his son was leaving behind as "imperishable."<sup>51</sup> In a later letter to his father, Vaughan Williams expressed how influential Butterworth was on his composing, especially his current project the *Pastoral Symphony*.<sup>52</sup> In a letter to Gustav Holst in October after Butterworth's death, Vaughan Williams expressed dread at returning to normal life one day with so many gaps left by his perished friends. He thanked Holst for his friendship.<sup>53</sup> Butterworth's death was devastating to Vaughan Williams, and he would carry sadness over the loss of his friend to his grave.

Vaughan Williams's life became more chaotic as the war progressed; this chaos would end up being reflected in his music. He mentioned in 1917 that when he was putting bricks in the shape of a cross to ward off enemy attacks on the makeshift building for the wounded he was working at, he felt that his time could be better spent and decided he wanted a change in position. He registered to begin training as an officer in a combat regiment, the Royal Garrison Artillery.

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<sup>51</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 110.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Heffer, "How the First World War Robbed Us of One of Britain's Greatest Young Composers," *The Telegraph*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/what-to-listen-to/how-the-first-world-war-robbed-us-of-one-of-britains-greatest-yo/>. *A Pastoral Symphony* served as an homage to fallen friends. As George Butterworth was Vaughan Williams's closest friend who died in the war, one can assume his loss was particularly influential on *A Pastoral Symphony*. It is clear the friendship between Vaughan Williams and Butterworth was close. The two would be known to tour the countryside together, bribing elderly people in pubs and clubs with beer to sing for them. They recorded hundreds of English folk songs in the process, which they incorporated in their music, and which would have been lost to history if not recorded; Vaughan Williams, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 116.

<sup>53</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 111.



When he returned to France after officer training, he was in charge of 200 horses and their respective horse drawn guns. He returned to chaos in the middle of a retreat.

Vaughan Williams coped with the war by turning to what he knew best: music. During less demanding times, Vaughan Williams organized vocal concerts for and by troops. During his last couple months of service, he was also appointed Director of Music of the First Army of the British Expeditionary Forces, which was the first big recognition by the British Army of his musical capabilities and talents.<sup>54</sup> He travelled across France and encouraged soldiers and officers alike to form musical ensembles, primarily to raise morale and serve as a temporary escape from war.<sup>55</sup> With this job, he organized "choral societies, orchestras, and set up music classes." By the time the war ended, he "organized nine choral societies, three classes, an orchestra, and a band." He even attempted to teach someone how to reconstruct an organ.<sup>56</sup> Once the war was over, Vaughan Williams was considered to be one of the main leaders of English music. In 1919 he accepted a position at the Royal College of Music teaching composition.<sup>57</sup> His popularity increased during this period due to his new teaching positions and the refined nature of his compositions which emerged postwar.

With so much devastation following the war, artists began questioning art's place in society. Rejecting the growing prewar trend of classical music being geared for elites, Vaughan Williams thought art should be for all to enjoy and that folk music and popular culture like jazz should serve as the bedrock for artistic expression. His belief in inclusive art likely stemmed from his long term interest in incorporating English folk melodies into his compositions and signaled his increasingly leftist political beliefs as he aged. More specifically, Vaughan Williams

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<sup>54</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson, *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 235.

<sup>56</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 51-52.

thought art should be "rooted in the moods, traditions, and the culture of the artist's native country," evidence of the nationalism still present across Europe.<sup>58</sup>

Instead of completely changing his compositional style as Schoenberg did, music historians believe that Vaughan Williams "broadened and deepened" his compositions due to the war by adding more complex harmonies and orchestration. Postwar works like *A Pastoral Symphony*, *Sancta Civitas*, and *Flos Campi* revealed "bold developments of new forms, approaches, and textures."<sup>59</sup> The *Pastoral Symphony* is widely considered the most "individual and personal" of the compositions by Vaughan Williams. This piece portrays peace and tranquility instead of the violence and destruction of war. At the same time, the piece makes reference to the unsettling and eerie landscape Vaughan Williams experienced while at the Western and Eastern Front.<sup>60</sup>

The feelings of uneasiness present in *A Pastoral Symphony* are reflective of Vaughan Williams's remorse over the loss of his friend and the war more generally. According to Stephen Connock MBE who is the chairman of the Ralph Vaughan Williams society, the fourth movement of the *Pastoral Symphony* is a reflection of the friends like George Butterworth that Vaughan Williams lost during the war.<sup>61</sup> Each of the four movements of the piece are unusually "slow, lyrical and strange" for Vaughan Williams. The piece promotes an uneasy feeling in listeners due to a consistently moving tonal center.<sup>62</sup> English writer Tom Service wrote, while referring to the symphony, "Vaughan Williams makes the ground slide beneath your ears." The two solos in the last movement of the piece are especially reflective Vaughan Williams's inner

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<sup>58</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 48-49.

<sup>59</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 48-49.

<sup>60</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Philharmonia Orchestra, "Vaughan Williams: At War," Youtube, accessed September 18, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> The tonal center is the first note in a scale. When it occurs in music, listeners feel a sense of resolution. Essentially, Vaughan Williams creates uneasiness by frequently changing key, so a satisfying resolution to the first scale degree is not often heard.

turmoil from the war. The music is especially slow, and the wordless soprano's part is marked "distant" in the score. According to Professor of Music Tom Service, the solo line is reflective of Vaughan Williams's inner agitation from the war. The movement moves from "relative stability to complete harmonic ambiguity."<sup>63</sup>

Vaughan Williams makes direct references to war in *A Pastoral Symphony*. This shows how particular aspects of war influenced and were reflected in his music. The most direct reference to his war time experiences is found in the trumpet cadenza in the second movement of the piece.<sup>64</sup> Buglers were an integral part of life at the front; the sound of the bugle woke men up, announced meal times, and relayed command signals during battle.<sup>65</sup> Vaughan Williams stated, "A bugler used to practise and this sound became part of that evening landscape and is the genesis of the long trumpet cadenza in the second movement of the symphony." Vaughan Williams said that hearing the bugler was when the *Pastoral Symphony* first began to develop in his mind.<sup>66</sup> The reference of a bugler is a unique way Vaughan Williams represented the war in his music.

*A Pastoral Symphony* has been often misunderstood due to its title, as pastoral often invokes images of harmony and serenity, not a barren war torn landscape. When asked about the piece himself, Vaughan Williams said: "It's really wartime music – a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night in the ambulance wagon at Ecoivres and we went up a

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<sup>63</sup> Tom Service, "Symphony Guide: Vaughan Williams's A Pastoral Symphony," *The Guardian*, August 11, 2014, sec. Music, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2014/aug/11/symphony-guide-vaughan-williams-pastoral-symphony>; Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Pastoral Symphony," YouTube video, 27:11-39:04, August 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAi65Fmbn0A>. Fourth movement.

<sup>64</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A Pastoral Symphony," YouTube video, 14:43-16:00, August 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAi65Fmbn0A>. Second movement, trumpet (bugle) cadenza; Vaughan Williams substituted a bugle for a trumpet in his piece; but the trumpet is still supposed to be directly referencing a bugle.

<sup>65</sup> "Bugler George Bissett," National Army Museum, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.armymuseum.co.nz/kiwis-at-war/voices-from-the-past/bugler-george-bissett-2/>.

<sup>66</sup> Tom Service, "Symphony Guide: Vaughan Williams's A Pastoral Symphony."

steep hill and there was wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset. It's not really lambkins frisking at all, as most people take for granted." Tom Service wrote, "The pastoral title is, I think, almost ironic, since what Vaughan Williams is doing in this piece is turning the idea on its head, so that instead of being a source of comfort, this pastoral is instead a confrontation with loss, with lament, with death." Similar to Vaughan Williams's other compositions however, *A Pastoral Symphony* is written in an "English-landscape mood," although the landscape of war is seemingly more grey in this composition.<sup>67</sup> Referencing the pastoral was common among English artists. Seen as the antithesis of a war torn landscape, the idyllic image of a pastoral landscape brought artists like Vaughan Williams comfort by invoking the familiar.<sup>68</sup> Symphonies written by Vaughan Williams that followed *A Pastoral Symphony* took different approaches, but were all influenced by the war. The fourth is characteristically dark and angry, the fifth is "other worldly," and the sixth is incredibly "bleak."<sup>69</sup>

The ways Vaughan Williams coped with the war are correlated to how other Europeans coped with the war. As represented by his pursuit of organizing music ensembles, performing, and composing on the front, Vaughan Williams found solace in what he knew best: composing. Not abandoning composing, Vaughan Williams used the familiarity of composing to sort through his changed prewar self, as showcased by distinctive elements found in *A Pastoral Symphony*. Furthermore, his continued interest in English folk music represents the same nostalgic backward gaze many Europeans had following the war. His immediate postwar music, which was seemingly darker, also reflected the collective sense of loss felt by millions. However, it should be noted that the sense of loss and reflection in his music strongly represents his unique wartime experiences. References to particular experiences, like the bugler referenced in *A Pastoral*

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<sup>67</sup> Tom Service, "Symphony Guide: Vaughan Williams's A Pastoral Symphony."

<sup>68</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 235.

<sup>69</sup> Philharmonia Orchestra, "Vaughan Williams: At War," Youtube, accessed September 18, 2018.

*Symphony*, add a personal dimension to the way in which Vaughan Williams reflected on the war.

### **Maurice Ravel: War's Enduring Legacy**

Maurice Ravel's first postwar piece, *Frontispice*, was unlike anything Ravel had written previously.<sup>70</sup> The piece guides listeners into chaos which then fades away into silence at the end of the piece. As this section shows, the innovative features of the work are connected to intense dissonance, lack of clear rhythmic pulse, and layered polytonality.<sup>71</sup> These developments were likely related to Ravel's inner trauma following the war and the death of his mother. Following the war, his health never recovered and his postwar compositions all reflect a man forever traumatized by his experiences at war.<sup>72</sup> Ravel wrote multiple pieces in honor of dead and wounded friends and in reaction to war. These compositions serve as an excellent portrait of the different ways composers paid tribute to fallen soldiers in their compositions.

There were a number of similarities between Ravel and Vaughan Williams on the onset of the war. Both were older when the war began—Ravel was 39—and therefore were not at risk to be drafted. However, as they both wanted to contribute to the war effort, they went out of their way to volunteer, despite pleas from friends not to enlist.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Maurice Ravel, "Frontispice," YouTube video, 0:00-2:10, May 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATT-1vmZZAk>.

<sup>71</sup> Polytonality is when multiple keys operate simultaneously. It is a similar alternative to atonal writing. Similar to the frequent changing of a tonal center in *A Pastoral Symphony*, polytonality promotes a sense of uneasiness in listeners due to the lack of a clear tonic and therefore lack of a feeling of resolution and satisfaction.

<sup>72</sup> I recommend listening to and comparing Ravel's 1899 piece *Pavane* to his immediate 1918 postwar piece *Frontispice*. It is enlightening to how Ravel's music changed; Maurice Ravel, "Pavane pour une infante défunte," YouTube video, 0:00-6:24, January 18, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPHSHZssOLs>; Maurice Ravel, "Frontispice," YouTube video, 0:00-2:10, May 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATT-1vmZZAk>.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2016), 1.

Ravel initially had difficulty joining the war effort due to health issues including general weakness and a hernia.<sup>74</sup> Ravel first tried to join the French Infantry, but was denied because his weight was too low.<sup>75</sup> He then tried multiple times to become a pilot in France's air force, but was also denied.<sup>76</sup> In his correspondence to fellow composer Maurice Delage in 1914, Ravel wrote "my physical condition will prevent me from experiencing the splendid moments of this holy war, and taking part in the most grandiose, the noblest action which has ever been seen in the history of humanity."<sup>77</sup> Especially determined to help, Ravel did not give up. After learning how to drive, he was accepted to be a driver in the military supply department in Paris at the beginning of the war. In March of 1916, Ravel went to the Western Front at Verdun. His main duties were to deliver oil supplies to the front and to rescue abandoned trucks in no man's land.<sup>78</sup> He named his truck Adélaïde after his ballet.

The war was very damaging to Ravel's physical and mental state. In 1916 he got dysentery and became ill. In 1917 his mother, widely considered the person closest to him, died. In a letter on January 5, 1917, Ravel expressed to his friend that he did not imagine his mother would die so quickly and that he was haunted by the fact that he was not there when she died.<sup>79</sup> Due to the war and his mother's passing, Ravel found it very difficult to compose during this period, and became frustrated. Both war and the death of his mother severely hampered his creativity.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 71.

<sup>75</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 225.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, *Ravel, (Joseph) Maurice*.

<sup>77</sup> Maurice Ravel, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 155.

<sup>78</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 225.

<sup>79</sup> Ravel, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, 180; Maurice Ravel, "Frontispice," YouTube video, 0:00-2:10, May 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATT-1vmZZAk>.

<sup>80</sup> Barbara L. Kelly, *Ravel*.

In the time Ravel did find to compose at war, he wrote *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a piano suite with 6 movements each dedicated to a different friend who died in the war.<sup>81</sup> This piece is characteristically more cheerful sounding and is reflective of one of the common ways of coping: looking back in time to a happier prewar past as a means of escapism. The nature of the piece seems contradictory as Ravel wrote it primarily while at war. Musicologist Gerard McBurney, while referring to the irony of the situation, said “Le Tombeau does not talk directly about the war; it talks about eternal values: it talks about beauty and elegance, the things we want to preserve. In other words, the opposite of war.”<sup>82</sup> When asked about this subject, Ravel himself said “the dead are sad enough in their eternal sadness.”<sup>83</sup> This approach to reflecting on the war parallels one of the general coping practices I mentioned earlier in the paper. In *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Ravel remarked on the death of his friends by honoring a happier prewar conception of their lives. In this instance, after one understands how damaging the war was to Ravel's mental state long term, Ravel seems to deal with loss by gilding over present day traumas with happier past memories.

After the war, Ravel's ill-health continued and Ravel frequently noted chronic insomnia, general depression, shattered nerves, and difficulty fitting back into civilian society that stemmed from the war.<sup>84</sup> He began chain-smoking after the war.<sup>85</sup> According to Musicologist Matthew

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<sup>81</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 225; Maurice Ravel, "Le Tombeau De Couperin," YouTube video, 0:00-21:02, February 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NA4j3VhGY4>; Tombeau refers to a piece written as a memorial. Couperin refers to Francois Couperin, a Baroque era composer. By evoking the Baroque era in the piece, Ravel was referring back to a time before the Romantic Era. This is representative of Neoclassicism.

<sup>82</sup> This idea is similar to Paul Fussell's interpretation of British artists invoking the pastoral as a response to the war. Both cases involve promoting a perceived antithesis of war: whether that be an idyllic landscape or an idyllic memory of friends. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 235.

<sup>83</sup> Marianne Williams Tobias, “Le Tombeau de Couperin,” Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, 2017, <https://www.indianapolissymphony.org/about/archive/program-notes/maurice-ravel/le-tombeau-de-couperin>.

<sup>84</sup> Victor Seroff, *Maurice Ravel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 205; Here is a bit of information about Ravel's relationship with the French government during the war: for a couple of years during the war, Ravel's music was blacklisted and prohibited to be played by the French government due to his refusal to support a ban on foreign music by the French government. However following the war, the French state offered him the Legion d'Honneur in 1920. Ravel refused the honor, likely due to discontent with the patriotism the conservative French

Callahan, Ravel suffered from shellshock, or PTSD, as it is referred to today.<sup>86</sup> In a letter to his friend Manuel de Falla on September 19, 1919, Ravel wrote that since the war, his life had been forever changed. In reference to life, he wrote, "one can still feel its joys and emotions, but no longer in the same way; a bit like when one hasn't slept, or when one has a fever. I still haven't pulled myself together... I still haven't been able to resume work. And yet I feel that doing so would in any case be the best consolation, rather than forgetting, which I do not desire."<sup>87</sup>

Musicologist James Burnett suggested that the strains of war led to Ravel's ill health that led to his eventual death.<sup>88</sup> Ravel's damaged psychological state is also reflective of Europeans more broadly, who commonly found themselves facing unrelenting anxiety and stress postwar. They wanted to move on with their lives, but mentally could not.

Ravel's postwar works are noticeably different from his prewar compositions. Ravel began incorporating eighteenth-century influences such as classicism from Mozart into his works more significantly, embraced American jazz and dance music, wrote music that lacked the grandeur and scale of his prewar works, and gave insights into his wartime traumas through compositions that were less tonal, more dissonant, and extreme in dynamic shifts.<sup>89</sup> His music lacked the harmonic richness of his earlier works.<sup>90</sup> For Ravel, the First World War serves as a "demarcation point in his personal and musical life." Ravel's postwar music "laments the traumas

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government promoted during the war to serve its military recruitment interests. Mark Carroll and Jane Fulcher, *Music and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 210.

<sup>85</sup> Madeleine Goss, *Bolero: The Life of Maurice Ravel* (Holt and Company, 1940), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3757457>, 185.

<sup>86</sup> Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 72.

<sup>87</sup> Ravel, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, 193.

<sup>88</sup> Burnett James, *Ravel*, *Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 131.

<sup>89</sup> Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 45-46.

<sup>90</sup> "Did WW1 Change French Composer Maurice Ravel and His Music?," BBC Guides, accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z2nk6sg>.



he has undergone."<sup>91</sup> Ravel wrote some of his most famous pieces following the war, including *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *La Valse*, and the *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*.

Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* represents music that was written after the war that catered to the needs of those disabled by the war, like amputees.<sup>92</sup> Ravel wrote this piece for the famous Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein who lost his right arm fighting in the war. Not wanting to give up his career as a pianist, Wittgenstein commissioned piano works written only for left hand from Hindemith, Prokofiev, Strauss, Britten, and of course Ravel. The left handed concerto is "a dark, powerful work with clearly defined tragic overtones." This piece is reflective of formal changes to art during the period. Ravel also incorporated some jazz inspired rhythms into the piece.<sup>93</sup> The incorporation of jazz in classical music is a byproduct of the interest, especially among Parisian intellectuals, in African culture in the 1920s. Following the war, "African culture seemed to embody a lush, naive sensuality and spirituality that cold, rational Europeans had lost." By incorporating this African American and popular genre of music into their music, classical composers like Ravel made their music more soulful and were able to appeal to a wider audience.<sup>94</sup>

Ravel's war-induced changes to his compositional style was not only reflected in the challenge of Wittgenstein's commission, but also in self-initiated compositions. Directly following the war, Ravel composed a short piano work titled *Frontispice*.<sup>95</sup> This composition reflected Ravel's confused creative and emotional state due to its lack of tonality and rhythmic

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<sup>91</sup> Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 45-46.

<sup>92</sup> Maurice Ravel, "Left Hand Piano Concerto," YouTube video, 0:22-18:10, January 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbEtk1kdYx4>. Solo piano part begins at 2:25.

<sup>93</sup> James, *Ravel*, 124-125.

<sup>94</sup> Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 31-32.

<sup>95</sup> Maurice Ravel, "Frontispice," YouTube video, 0:00-2:10, May 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATT-1vmZZAk>.

pulse.<sup>96</sup> *Frontispice* suggests a connection between the weakening of tonality and the war, considering this piece was written directly after the war. The contrast between *Frontispice* and Ravel's prewar pieces is stark, and similar to other composers like Vaughan Williams, Ravel suddenly chose to compose a piece which strongly broke tonal norms in his immediate postwar composition. It seems extremely unlikely that coincidence rather than war prompted this change.

Although the other postwar pieces Ravel wrote lacked the dissonance and loose structure of *Frontispice*, Ravel's postwar pieces in general do demonstrate the composer's trauma from the war and the death of his mother. In the case of *La Valse*, one of Ravel's postwar pieces, American composer and musicologist Bryon Adams said *La Valse* "brought the battlefield into the concert hall."<sup>97</sup> According to Musicologist Matthew Callahan, the disjointed waltzes which gradually seem to be breaking apart into madness in *La Valse* demonstrate Ravel's hampered emotional state following the war. Ravel's feelings of "violence and chaos" from the interwar period are also apparent in the composition.<sup>98</sup> By breaking down the formal conception of the waltz in *La Valse*, Ravel was able to represent the destruction of both Europe and his psychological state.

In conclusion, following the war, Ravel was a very different man. Letters he wrote, especially immediately after the war, show that he never recovered from the traumas of war and the passing of his mother. On December 27, 1919, Ravel wrote to his friend Ida Godebska, "I'm thinking of those in former years, in the charming apartment on Avenue Carnot, where I was so happy. I'm thinking that soon it will be three years since she (his mother) has departed, and my despair increases daily. I'm thinking about it even more, since I have resumed work, that I no

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<sup>96</sup> Barbara L. Kelly, *Ravel*.

<sup>97</sup> Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 10; Maurice Ravel, "La Valse," YouTube video, 0:00-12:55, August 14, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMSgWhIENSk>.

<sup>98</sup> Callahan, "Maurice Ravel and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 14.

longer have this dear silent presence enveloping me with her infinite tenderness, which was, I see it now more than ever, my only reason for living."<sup>99</sup> This quotation represents, that even years later, Ravel was still very much affected by his wartime traumas. His damaged psychological state is represented in his compositions, which reflect an array of emotions, from disoriented polytonal and dissonant writing to lighter music which allowed Ravel to escape into a happier prewar time. This reference to the past strongly corresponds to one of the main ways Europeans coped with the war, by thinking backward to a happier prewar past. However, for Ravel, no degree of coping could find him peace.

### **Arnold Schoenberg: War Validates Atonality**

Arnold Schoenberg was an Austrian composer, who like Vaughan Williams and Ravel, fought in the First World War. His compositions between 1908 and 1914 were classified as Expressionist as they were dramatic displays of emotion.<sup>100</sup> However, war brought hardship to Schoenberg, and led him to rethink his compositional style. It also led Schoenberg to devise his twelve-tone method.<sup>101</sup> This method, by giving rules and structure to atonal writing, purposely curbed the Expressionist nature of Schoenberg's compositions. According to musicologist Hans Mersmann, Schoenberg became the leader of a revolution against Romanticism and its

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<sup>99</sup> Maurice Ravel, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 195.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Taruskin and Christopher Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, College Edition, Instructor's Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 808. Expressionism is defined as "expressing one's unconscious through art" and was driven by "emotions, drives, and wishes of which the human subject is unaware." This kind of composing was revolutionary for its time and was not common.

<sup>101</sup> Before you begin listening to this section, compare Schoenberg's 1909 piece *Die Erwartung* to his 1923 twelve-tone piece *5 Pieces for Piano Op. 23*. *Die Erwartung* is representative of Schoenberg's Expressionist and more emotion-infused style. The piece is about a woman wandering a forest at night until she finds the blood stained body of her lover. *5 Pieces for Piano Op. 23* does not have a back-story like this. Arnold Schoenberg, "Erwartung," YouTube video, 0:00-29:21, November 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIQssywUirE&t=421s>; Arnold Schoenberg, "5 Pieces for Piano Op. 23," YouTube video, 0:00-14:55, August 6, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A9HSlgDIQE>.

associated forms of art.<sup>102</sup> Unlike Vaughan Williams and Ravel, following the war, Schoenberg's music became less filled with emotion. Considering Schoenberg's primary duty at war was playing in a military band rather than being a stretcher bearer or ambulance driver like Vaughan Williams and Ravel, his wartime hardships were not reflective of emotional traumas from war. Because of this, Schoenberg's postwar music lacks direct references to wartime experiences and does not incorporate emotional reflections of the battlefield.

Traumatic events in Schoenberg's life led to reorientations in his style. During his early years, his family was financially strapped, and when Schoenberg was 16, his father, who supported his family through his shoe shop, died. Schoenberg was forced to drop out of school and take up work as a clerk at a local bank. Lacking sufficient formal training, Schoenberg taught himself how to compose. In 1906, his wife had an affair and left him and their two infant children for Schoenberg's friend, Richard Gerstl, a Viennese painter. Eventually his wife did return, and Gerstl committed suicide in response in 1908. During this period, Schoenberg went through a depression, and was unable to compose between 1906-1907.<sup>103</sup> When he started composing again in 1908, he decided to abandon tonality in his compositions, as shown by the last movement of his second string quartet *Op. 10* with soprano.<sup>104</sup> He did so for the rest of his life and was the first composer to permanently move to atonalism.<sup>105</sup> As will be discussed later in this section, Schoenberg's 1906-1907 compositional drought being ended in 1908 by a reorientation in style parallels his composing situation during the war.

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<sup>102</sup> Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>103</sup> Taruskin and Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 809.

<sup>104</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, "String Quartet No. 2," YouTube video, 19:50-30:34, December 2, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB5I5iU0OoE&t=1205s>.

<sup>105</sup> O. W. Neighbour, Schoenberg [Schönberg], Arnold (Oxford University Press, 2001), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000025024>; According to philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, atonal music is representative of the degradation of capitalist society that grew out of a senseless world. Adorno said atonal music awakens audiences to the brutality of the world and "demonstrates the loneliness and alienation of humanity as clearly as possible."

When the war began, Schoenberg supported Austria and Germany against the Allies. Schoenberg particularly did not like what he saw as French bourgeoisie culture; he saw German culture, representing German and Austrian culture collectively, as superior.<sup>106</sup> He felt that Germany's assault on France could play a role in showcasing German superiority in music.<sup>107</sup> However as Schoenberg's personal life became bogged down by the war, his enthusiasm about the war soured. As the war progressed, many of Schoenberg's compositional students were drafted to fight in the war. As a result, his teaching of composition ceased entirely soon after the war began. In 1915, he was called to fight himself at the age of 42. The Austro-Hungarian Army desperately needed more men. By December 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Army had already lost nearly half of its men and two-thirds of its soldiers it had enlisted since the war began from early losses against Russia and Serbia.<sup>108</sup> However, the army rejected Schoenberg from service following a medical examination that discovered goiter. After a second examination however, the army drafted him to be a one-year member in the army. He served in the army as a musician in a military ensemble. Following intensive training at Bruck an der Leitha, he suffered health complications such as asthma attacks made worse by training. Some of Schoenberg's friends were able to get him released from service in October 1916. He barely composed during the war, and suffered from a lack of resources such as food and coal. In September of 1917, he was called to fight in the army again. However, as his fitness and health were poor, his duties were less intense and he was able to return home at times.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The thought of German/Austrian composers being superior was not a new idea. Many of the great composers throughout history were German/Austrian, including Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach. Schoenberg wanted to continue this tradition. Taruskin and Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 805.

<sup>107</sup> Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed.. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 60.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Lein, "Between Acceptance and Refusal- Soldiers' Attitudes Towards War (Austria-Hungary)," International Encyclopedia of the First World War, October 8, 2014, [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/between\\_acceptance\\_and\\_refusal\\_-\\_soldiers\\_attitudes\\_towards\\_war\\_austria-hungary](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/between_acceptance_and_refusal_-_soldiers_attitudes_towards_war_austria-hungary).

<sup>109</sup> Neighbour, *Schoenberg [Schönberg]*, Arnold.

These hardships made composing difficult for Schoenberg during the war. According to Jeffrey Prater, Schoenberg's minimal composing during the war and after can be connected to three factors, including the hardships of war that made anything other than survival difficult, the call to service in the Austrian Army twice, and time spent creating the Society for Private Musical Performances in the immediate postwar years, which opened up concerts for new music to be performed for members of the Society.<sup>110</sup> As a result, Schoenberg barely composed during the war and he published no new compositions between 1914 and 1922.<sup>111</sup>

Even though Schoenberg, Vaughan Williams, and Ravel all composed less during the war, the impacts the war had on Schoenberg's music was dissimilar compared to the other two. For Schoenberg, the war most significantly gave him time to think about and reformulate his compositional style. Unlike the other two composers, direct wartime experiences and traumas do not appear to be directly referenced in his music. According to Prater, the war gave Schoenberg "time to think, in great detail, about the theoretical implications of atonality in broader terms than is required for the writing of a single piece or set of works." Prater argued that "like a sore that had festered and finally ruptured, World War I consummated a long period of decay and instability in Europe. The war did not cause Schoenberg's search for a systematic atonality, but it confirmed the righteousness of that search."<sup>112</sup> In other words, the war validated to Schoenberg that his 1908 move to atonality was on the right path. With war breaking out and Europe being consumed by chaos, his move to atonality seemed further justified.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Prater, "The Great War's Effect on Schönberg's Development of the Twelve-Tone System," 107.

<sup>111</sup> Schoenberg only finished working on a short piece he started in 1913 before the war called *Vier Lieder für Gesang und Orchester* and two movements of an oratorio he never completed called *Die Jakobsleiter*. Jeffrey Prater, "The Great War's Effect on Schönberg's Development of the Twelve-Tone System," *College Music Symposium* 26 (1986), 106.

<sup>112</sup> Prater, "The Great War's Effect on Schönberg's Development of the Twelve-Tone System," 111.

<sup>113</sup> The feeling of validation demonstrates the connection between Schoenberg's 1908 move to atonality and the First World War. The argument that atonality is not connected to the war because it predates it is therefore refuted. As the

Schoenberg's compositional drought between 1914 and 1922 parallels his depression in 1906-1907 that led him to permanently compose in atonality starting in 1908. Similar to before, following the drought, a reorientation took place. When Schoenberg finally did finish a composition after the war in 1923 titled Piano Suite, *Op. 25*, the piece was composed using a new method of composing he personally devised and which he called the twelve-tone method. The method structured atonal pieces and required a composer to base an entire composition on a particular sequence of the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale with various permutations. This expanded on the direction he had been going with his compositions by adding a new dimension to atonal composing by structuring it. According to Historian Richard Taruskin, Schoenberg saw his twelve-tone method as a superior alternative to tonality, considering tonality had been weakening in compositions for years and therefore was fundamentally broken in his eyes. Taruskin remarked that Schoenberg felt that the twelve-tone method was "another stage in German composers' quest to write and rule the music of the future" and would secure German music at the forefront of the classical music world for the next 100 years.<sup>114</sup>

By using the twelve-tone method, Schoenberg composed pieces that were in stark contrast with his prewar compositions like the 1909 piece *Die Erwartung*. The piece is atonal, but is still characteristic of the unrestrained emotion of Expressionism and Romanticism. *Die Erwartung* is about a woman who wanders around a forest at night, looking for her lover. In the end she finds his blood-stained body, but it is unclear what happened. One reviewer called it a "psychologically wracked fable."<sup>115</sup> In the first 30 measures alone, the meter changes 9 times and the tempo changes 16 times. Following the war, the structured twelve-tone system was much

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war made Schoenberg feel like he was ahead of his time in moving to atonality, clearly the same forces that brought on the war led Schoenberg to move to atonality in 1908.

<sup>114</sup> Taruskin and Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 805, 903.

<sup>115</sup> Andrew Clements, "Schoenberg: Erwartung," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2002, sec. Music, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/feb/01/artsfeatures.classicalmusicandopera>.

opposite to the emotional drama and madness represented in pieces like *Die Erwartung*.<sup>116</sup> As playing in a military band was the extent of Schoenberg's military duties, he did not see the horrors of the battlefield as directly, and so his trauma from the war was less compared to Vaughan Williams and Ravel.

The origins of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method are not entirely clear and are fiercely debated in music historiography.<sup>117</sup> Schoenberg never explicitly remarked on any inspirations he had that prompted the creation of the method, he just remarked in a letter that he saw his later music, which was entirely twelve-tone, as a natural progression of his earlier works.<sup>118</sup> In the late nineteenth century, late Romantic era composers, such as Debussy, Mahler, Strauss, and Wagner had gradually been pulling music further away from tonality within their compositions. Some scholars point to Schoenberg's formalism, stating that he was a proponent of order and form in music, and that as a result, he felt the next logical step was to devise a new way of composing which once again gained the structure music from the Baroque and Classical eras had.<sup>119</sup> As a result, certain scholars see the origins of Schoenberg's twelve-tone system as a response to the gradual breaking of tonality and structure increasingly present in music from his immediate forbearers. This approach, although correct, neglects the degree to which the war and the details of Schoenberg's life affected the creation of the twelve-tone method. The method in itself is not the logical next step following Romantic era music, but is rather very peculiar in its rules, and is

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<sup>116</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, "Erwartung," YouTube video, 0:00-29:21, November 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIQssywUirE&t=421s>.

<sup>117</sup> Taruskin and Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 903.

<sup>118</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg Letters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 100. To quote a translation of Schoenberg's letter, he said, "For the present, it matters more to me if people understand my older works... They are the natural forerunners of my later works, and only those who understand and comprehend these will be able to gain an understanding of the later works that goes beyond a fashionable bare minimum. I do not attach so much importance to being a musical bogey-man as to being a natural continuer of properly-understood good old tradition!"

<sup>119</sup> This interest in influencing contemporary compositions by taking inspiration from prior art movements is a part of the Neoclassicism movement, which Schoenberg was a part of.



therefore closely connected to Schoenberg specifically and his past. As traumatic moments in his life produced compositional droughts, there is certainly a connection between Schoenberg's personal life and his composing which cannot be overlooked. Schoenberg's compositional droughts between 1907-1908 and 1914-1922 and the subsequent reorientations in style make it clear that atonal music did not just naturally evolve, but rather was related to Schoenberg's personal life to some degree. With little-to-no information left by Schoenberg referencing the exact influences of the development of his music, it is not entirely clear how significantly his personal life impacted his music. I only present this argument to challenge the work of other scholars by pointing out that Schoenberg's personal life, especially during the First World War which prompted the longest compositional drought, did influence Schoenberg's music.

No one shaped atonal music as significantly as Schoenberg. His difficult formative years, his marriage, and the First World War directly influenced his musical progression from tonality to atonality to his twelve-tone method. The war gave him validation that humanity was in a state of disorder, and that therefore, his move to atonality was appropriate. The war might not have impacted Schoenberg as emotionally as Vaughan Williams and Ravel, but it gave Schoenberg time and purpose to rethink his methods.

### **Coping Through Composing: Similarities and Differences in Compositional Reactions**

As addressed in the first section, people from various backgrounds and walks of life coped with the war in unique and often divergent ways. Composers expressed their reactions to the war in their compositions, and these reactions varied. This was due to differences in wartime experiences and prior compositional styles. Despite these differences, Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg each changed how they dealt with tonality in at least their immediate postwar

composition. However, their approaches were unique. Schoenberg in particular stands as an outlier from the other two considering he had negative views of tonality before the war. He hoped to replace it with an alternative: his twelve-tone method.

As shown throughout this paper, each composer had a unique wartime experience, which affected their compositional style. However, certain similarities in experience led to similarities in compositional reaction. Vaughan Williams and Ravel both spent considerable time at the front performing jobs—a stretcher bearer and an ambulance driver—that brought them face to face with the grim reality of war. This, paired with personal anguish over the death of a friend or close loved one—George Butterworth for Vaughan Williams and Ravel's mother for Ravel—led these two composers to become stricken with grief, and as a result, led them to represent their grief in their postwar music. To put it simply, traumatic experiences made their compositions more emotional. This emotion was conveyed through weakened tonality and the addition of complex rhythms. Vaughan Williams incorporated lop-sided dance rhythms in *A Pastoral Symphony*, and in *Frontispice*, Ravel made identifying the meter difficult due to the disunity of the two hands of the piano part. By breaking tonal and rhythmic norms, the effect is that music sounds more chaotic and unsettling. Time at the front also led composers to reference specific wartime memories, like a bugler in the case of the second movement of *A Pastoral Symphony*.

Schoenberg, despite being called up to fight in the Austrian Army twice, did not spend considerable time serving in the army due to health issues. When he was at war, the extent of his duties was being part of a military army band. Therefore, his music did not become more emotional. Instead, what war did do for Schoenberg is give him time to think and ask bigger questions about his style of composing. As a result, he devised his twelve-tone method, which

actually structured his music, instead of making it more chaotic. His compositions do not reference specific memories at war.

In addition to differences in wartime experiences influencing compositions, the prewar compositional style of composers also influenced postwar works. It would be unreasonable to think the war would produce similar reactions when the prewar styles of these three different composers were different. For example, Schoenberg had been writing completely atonal pieces since 1908. Vaughan Williams and Ravel, however, were still composing tonal pieces before the war. It clearly would not have made sense for Vaughan Williams or Ravel to suddenly gain inspiration to develop the twelve-tone method themselves after the war. It is rather Schoenberg's experiences and prewar style of atonal writing which set him up for being able to edit his already atonal writing and structure it.

Although there were dissimilarities between the composers, a commonality is present between Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg in the way they reflected on the war. Each of these composers responded to the war by altering their prewar conception of tonality or lack thereof in the case of Schoenberg. As reflected in *A Pastoral Symphony*, Vaughan Williams still composed in tonality, but he broke down this tonality in part by frequently changing the tonal center of the piece to give it a more unsettling feeling. Ravel, in *Frontispice*, uses polytonality to create a similar impact. And Schoenberg, who already had abandoned tonality in 1908, edited his conception of atonality by structuring it with his twelve-tone method in his first piece after the war, *Piano Suite, Op. 25*, and the breadth of his compositions for the rest of his life. By not adhering to tonal norms that governed the relationship between notes in music, composers were in a sense rejecting the methodology that had governed how composers composed since from around the year 1650.

Although changing prewar tonal style is a commonality, clearly these three composers went about changing their tonal style in different ways. In addition to reasons given above, Schoenberg was unique compared to all other composers in that he completely rejected tonality in 1908, prior to the war. Schoenberg saw rejecting tonality as a direct rejection of the old world order, but it was not until after the war that this idea became mainstream. Tonality, which was the conventional way of composing up until the war, was seen as a manifestation of the political and social framework of the Western World. The First World War led Europeans to question the political and social frameworks that created the war, and as a result, tonality, like other prewar standards, was likewise thought by many composers to be outdated and representative of a past which was complicit in bringing on the war. Moving away from tonal composing suddenly began to be seen as liberating among many composers.<sup>120</sup> With many composers now seeing tonality as an outdated framework, Schoenberg felt validated in his early move to atonal composing.<sup>121</sup> This convinced him that he had been on the right track, and that therefore, his twelve-tone method should likewise be the next thing to catch on.

Particularly disliking tonality for the frequent rule breaking that characterized late 19th century music, Schoenberg felt that by using a new system, his twelve-tone system, tonality could be replaced with something that brought structure back to composing, and was therefore superior. He particularly did not like many Romantic-style composers who took very individualistic approaches to composing.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> The association between tonality and old world European values, and how the war soured tonality for many, is not simple. For clarification, I strongly suggest reading the introduction and first chapter of the following citation, especially the two pages indicated. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 16-17.

<sup>121</sup> Prater, "The Great War's Effect on Schönberg's Development of the Twelve-Tone System," 111.

<sup>122</sup> Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed.. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 60; In 1914, when remarking negatively on the music of Ravel, Stravinsky, and Bizet, Schoenberg wrote, "Now comes the reckoning! Now we will throw these mediocre kitschmongers into slavery, and teach them to venerate the German spirit and to worship the German God."

Vaughan Williams and Ravel did not go as far as completely rejecting tonality, even after the war. Instead, by weakening tonality in their immediate postwar compositions, they were able to compose pieces which had increased dissonance and rhythmic ambiguity. This allowed them to implicitly express their war induced traumas through their compositions. For all three composers, bending tonal norms served as a way to showcase dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in Europe and their own lives. It served as a way of lamenting about the war and the forces that led to the war.

## **Conclusion**

The First World War brought with it a degree of destruction humanity had not yet experienced. The war's effects were especially extensive for those at the front; the physical and mental scars inflicted on trench soldiers endured far past the war. These individuals influenced art and society for decades to come. Additionally, a collective memory arose out of the war, with many mourning for a lost generation. In an attempt to move beyond the war, individuals resorted to various ways of coping ranging from glossing over reality with nostalgia to hurdling into the postwar period with newfound ambition to reject past norms and practices. Classical music fit into this mold. Some compositions were nostalgic of the prewar period, others directly rejected wartime experiences and traumas. Pieces like the *Piano Concerto for Left Hand* by Ravel were born out of unique war-induced needs, like composing music for amputees.

Composers reflected upon their unique wartime experiences in their music. Elements of war like the frequent sound of a bugle on the front became represented in music like *A Pastoral Symphony*. Deaths of loved ones also impacted music in a less direct way, infusing pieces with lament and sorrow. Creations like Schoenberg's twelve-tone method were also born out of the

era. In time, Schoenberg's alternative to traditional tonality did not gain enough popularity to replace its predecessor, or to put Germany at the top of music making for the next hundred years like he hoped.<sup>123</sup>

The lives of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, and Schoenberg are a small case study into the changes of classical music due to the war, but a fruitful one. Beyond their similarities and differences, they each are representative of the profound effects the war had on society, and on art more specifically. No one was exempt from the physical and mental destruction the First World War inflicted.

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<sup>123</sup> Today, the twelve-tone method is used by some contemporary classical composers and is taught at universities, but is not used widespread among contemporary composers. Composing atonally remains very common among contemporary classical composers, a testament to the influence of Schoenberg. Tonality remains a fixture of society, especially in popular music.

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