



# BEYOND THE TUBA TUNE

## The Organ and Sacred Choral Works of C.S. Lang

The west-end division at Christ's Hospital, including the famous Tuba Magna. Photo: Toby Phillips, reproduced by kind permission of Christ's Hospital.

By Alex Hodgkinson

C.S. Lang is best remembered for his joyful and appealing Tuba Tune in D Major. Perennially popular and something of a rite of passage for student organists, it is undoubtedly his most enduring work. But there is more, equally attractive music that lies waiting to be rediscovered.

Born in 1891 in New Zealand, Craig Sellar “Robin” Lang was educated at Clifton College in Bristol, U.K., and then the Royal College of Music (RCM), where he was taught by Walter Parratt and C.V. Stanford.<sup>1</sup> After the RCM he returned to Clifton as assistant music master; while there, in addition to his teaching duties, he completed a Durham doctorate and composed much music (including the Tuba Tune).<sup>2</sup> In 1929, Lang was appointed director of music at Christ's Hospital (School) in Horsham, West Sussex, where he remained until his early retirement in 1945.

Lang was a gifted educator who had the ability to communicate his love and enthusiasm for music to all around him. His obituary in the *Musical Times* in February 1972 describes his personal magnetism:

A successful director of music in a large school is a person out of the ordinary, but even amongst a doughty and idiosyncratic band of contemporaries ‘Robin’ Lang was conspicuous, not only for his wiry, aquiline and seemingly unchangeable features, but also for his zealous exuberance which stimulated . . . the budding musicianship of every sort of pupil.<sup>3</sup>

Lang (center) in the 1936 Christ's Hospital school photograph. Reproduced by kind permission of Christ's Hospital.



At Christ's Hospital (CH), much of Lang's energy was focused on chapel music: choral and congregational singing and the organ. Upon arrival, Lang found the chapel organ, installed less than 30 years previously, to be extremely unreliable, and he persuaded the authorities to replace it with an entirely new instrument by Rushworth & Dreaper (1931). This titanic five-manual organ of over 70 stops, recently restored by Mander, has a vast palette of symphonic color and a great many solo orchestral voices, including a rare French Horn and an ear-splitting Tuba Magna, part of a three-stop west-end division designed to aid congregational accompaniment. The size and breadth of color of the instrument allowed Lang to realize his numerous orchestral transcriptions particularly well. Often played as duets with pupil organists after chapel services, they ranged from Beethoven symphony movements to excerpts from Wagner opera cycles.<sup>4</sup>

Lang was unashamedly conservative in his musical tastes and compositional voice. He had little time for the French Impressionists, the Scandinavian symphonists, or the "modernists": Britten, Walton, Stravinsky, and so on. Instead, his music is characterized by an attention to contrapuntal detail that he inherited from Stanford and a Romantic expression typical of half a century earlier—the language of Stanford, Parry, Rheinberger, and Karg-Elert (a friend of Lang who visited and played at CH on several occasions).

As might be expected from a career teacher, much of Lang's output was pedagogical. In addition to the well-known volumes of keyboard and vocal exercises,

collections such as *The Miniature 48* are instructional, this one providing a gently progressive platform from which developing pianists can launch into Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. In addition to a large number of keyboard works, he wrote instrumental solo and chamber music, orchestral suites, art songs, part-songs, and large-scale cantatas. A sizable portion of Lang's output remains unpublished, and many scores are housed in the RCM Library—everything from *Examples in Strict Counterpoint* to a Fugue on "Yan-kee Doodle"!

Much of Lang's choral music was written with young voices in mind, with many pieces specifically composed for the chapel at CH. Several works have a four- to eight-part chorus for the chapel choir, with a congregational part for the rest of the school (which had roughly 800 pupils during Lang's tenure).

Some will be familiar with Lang's setting of the Epiphany hymn *TRES MAGI DE GENTIBUS* ("Eastern Monarchs, Sages Three"). This is still sung at CH, as is another work in a similar vein, the joyfully rambunctious "Hail, Gladdening Light." Vaughan Williams was so impressed by the antiphonal singing between choir and congregation at CH that he wrote a setting of the morning and evening canticles and a Holy Communion service along the same lines.<sup>5</sup>

Two short choral anthems that parish choirs might find accessible and enjoyable are "This Joyous Day" and "O Lord, Support Us All the Day Long." "This Joyous Day" sets the latter part of a religious sonnet for Easter by Edmund Spenser (ca. 1552–1599), emphasizing the biblical mandate to love one another. Here, Lang reveals his gift for illustrating





The vast chapel at Christ's Hospital, completed in 1902. The east-end cases of the 1931 Rushworth & Dreaper organ (designed by Lang) flank the sanctuary. Photo: Toby Phillips, reproduced by kind permission of Christ's Hospital.

text in a way that is effective but not labored. The joy and darkness of the opening lines are carefully colored through harmony and tessitura.

The structure of the piece is unusual. A central baritone solo (which works just as well with full tenors and basses) is in full Easter *vincit* mode, bookended by two chorus sections. Unusually, there is little thematic development or repetition in the piece; the last phrase of the first section is recycled at the end, and that is about it. Alongside triumphant moments of full-bodied homophony, there are sweeping melodic lines (including a hint of Parry's "Long Since in Egypt's Plenteous Land") and a phrase of choral recitative. Underpinned by a supportive organ part, the vocal writing is simple and attractive.

Slightly more elaborate, but still elegant and accessible, is the unaccompanied motet "O Lord, Support Us All the Day Long," published in 1950. Curiously, the text is described as being from the 16th century, but it is actually a prayer of John Henry Newman written three centuries later—perhaps a deliberate move on the part of the publisher to appeal more readily to the Anglican market. This piece is undoubtedly influenced by Parry's *Songs of Farewell*, with a dramatic illustration of the text that results in long, luxuriant stretches and shorter, isolated utterances. It is well crafted, with dense counterpoint and opulent, Romantic harmony, full of suspensions and retardations.

Using rich, chromatic harmony, the second phrase ("until the shades") slowly descends as the evening draws in and the world slows down. The final stanza is equally effective, with a rising sequence in thirds in the alto and tenor over a dominant pedal in the bass. The sopranos rise to "rest" then dive down a minor 7th to "peace," over a particularly interesting harmonic progression.



rest, and peace at the last. A - men, A - men.

rest, peace at the last. A - men, A - men.

rest, peace at the last. A - men, A - men.

ly rest, peace at the last. A - men, A - men.

rest, peace at the last. A - men, A - men.



There are several ways to analyze the harmony on the final “rest”: it could be an augmented 6th, an altered diminished 7th, or perhaps simply a Ib–II<sup>7</sup> in G with chromatic passing notes in the soprano and bass. However it’s described, it is clearly a nod to Lang’s teacher Stanford, who performed a near-identical maneuver in the final cadence of his Postlude in D minor, Op. 105, No. 6—a work Lang surely knew well.

Of the organ music, the Sonata in D Minor (1947) and the *Fugue Trilogy on EBG* (1952) most amply demonstrate Lang’s skill in large-scale forms. Along with his meticulous

approach to counterpoint, Lang is very detailed in his articulation instructions, with accents and staccatos littering the scores—a trait of his teacher Walter Parratt.

Another significant organ work from this productive period is the Introduction and Passacaglia in A Minor (1952), written for the organist of Worcester Cathedral, a young David Willcocks (also an Old Cliftonian, although after Lang’s time). The Introduction is Lisztian: virtuosic 16th notes rocket up the keyboard then give way to dramatic diminished sevenths with retardations into their major resolutions.

Ex. 2: Introduction and Passacaglia in A Minor (opening)

1

*To David Willcocks*  
*Organist of Worcester Cathedral*

## INTRODUCTION AND PASSACAGLIA

in A minor

C. S. LANG  
Op. 51

**Allegro brillante** ♩ = 100

**MANUAL** *f* *♯* *non legato*

**PEDAL**

8<sup>va</sup> reed

Ex. 3: Introduction and Passacaglia in A Minor (passacaglia theme)



As expected, the passacaglia theme is first heard in the pedal, its melodic shape rising then falling, and it is in 3/4 time. “Half note–quarter note” is the prevailing rhythm, although a hemiola piques the interest. There is a particularly persuasive variation where the hands overlap: the right hand echoes the left at the same pitch but on a different manual (mm. 42–50). The French Horn is called for in a variation that sees the theme at the top of the texture (m. 60), and this is followed by a variation with rhythmic diminution (m. 67), giving a sense of 4/8 among the other variations in 3/4.

Each variation is more virtuosic than the last, and Lang increases the excitement by having the accompaniment anticipate the theme in several variations. Reger’s shadow can be felt in the ever-thickening texture as well as the 32nd-note scalic flourishes and diminished exclamations. The final variation is a thrilling climax, beginning with the passacaglia theme in the tonic major on the Tuba, followed by a stirring conclusion on full organ.

A later work, the Prelude, Pastorale, and Fugue (1962), is less theatrical and more stately, though still full of trademark harmonic gestures. The bold Prelude is followed by a delightful Pastorale in 6/8, with another charming hemiola feature. Again demonstrating Lang’s contrapuntal skill, the final movement is a double fugue with two interesting, contrasting subjects that are eventually heard simultaneously at the glorious conclusion of the piece. There are one or two slightly stilted moments where perhaps melodic shape plays second fiddle to mechanics, and there are some unprepared dissonances between the answer and the countersubject that feel slightly out of place from a man usually so fastidious in his adherence to harmonic convention. But the piece is nonetheless attractive, accessible, and rewarding for both performer and listener, as Lang’s music tends to be.

C.S. Lang’s memorial tablet in Christ’s Hospital Chapel carries the inscription “his music lives on in us,” an apt sentiment in the building for which much of his output was written. I very much hope the best of Lang’s music will continue to live on further afield, too.

## NOTES

1. *Musical Times*, May 1971, 440; *Musical Times*, Feb. 1972, 189.
2. According to *Centenary Essays on Clifton College*, ed. N.G.L. Hammond (Bristol, U.K.: Arrowsmith, 1962), the Tuba Tune was “eventually considered too frivolous for an outgoing voluntary, and its performance was regrettably forbidden” (113).
3. *Musical Times*, Feb. 1972, 189.
4. Lang’s most notable pupil was Ivor Keys, FRCO (1919–1995), who later became a musicologist and university professor.
5. The Vaughan Williams works were recorded by the choir of St. Michael at the North Gate, Oxford, U.K., on Regent Records in 2012.

## O Lord, Support Us All the Day Long

By Craig Sellar Lang

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## Introduction and Passacaglia

By Craig Sellar Lang

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