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‘1910’: Ethel Smyth’s Unsung Suffrage Song

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Abstract
Ethel Smyth’s (1858-1944) decision to join the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1910 had a significant impact on how she has been portrayed in historical narratives. In addition to being a successful composer and writer, she gained a reputation as a militant suffragette and spent time in prison as a result of her actions. It was during a stint in Holloway Prison that Sir Thomas Beecham famously observed Smyth conducting her song ‘The March of the Women’ from her cell window, while her fellow inmates processed around the quadrangle. ‘The March of the Women’ is the final piece in Smyth’s Songs of Sunrise, published in 1911. After presenting this rousing call to arms to the WSPU, they adopted it as their suffrage anthem, helping to secure its place in history. The two preceding songs, ‘Laggard Dawn’ and ‘1910’, are often overshadowed by the success of the march and historically have received mixed reviews. ‘1910’ is a mini-operetta inspired by the Black Friday suffrage demonstration, which took place on 18 November of the titular year. As such, the song provides the twenty-first century listener with an insight into the suffragettes’ sound-world. It remains the only one of Smyth’s *Songs of Sunrise* to still be recorded and it is often overlooked in scholarship on this area of her output. This article contextualises ‘1910’, explores its critical reception, and examines its musical content in order to bring this song to the forefront of the discussion.

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Introduction

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944) was an English composer, writer, and social activist.[1] She was born into a military family—her father being a General Major in the Royal Artillery—and was educated at home until the age of fourteen. In 1870, one of Smyth’s governesses ignited her desire to study music more formally and she spent the next seven years persuading her father to allow her to attend the Leipzig Conservatory.[2] Once in Germany she met composers such as Clara Schumann, Brahms, Grieg and Tchaikovsky, and formed connections that would last her lifetime. Her decision to study abroad was to have a significant impact on her musical career, resulting in her being seen as an outsider in both England and Germany.[3] It also shaped her compositional style and the genres to which she gravitated, notably to opera, which she associated with Germany’s subsidised opera houses.[4] Indeed, though she composed a rich body of chamber works, piano pieces, and songs, it is for her six operatic works that she is most well-known. Her decision to turn her attention to this genre was partly influenced by the difficulty she had in securing further performances for her Mass in D (1891) after its premiere in 1893.[5] The English choral scene was difficult to penetrate and annual events, such as the Three Choirs Festival, were markedly male-dominated. Smyth’s contemporaries—notably Edward Elgar, Hubert Parry, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Charles Villiers Stanford—were programmed alongside the likes of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.[6]

Smyth’s frustration with this ‘Inner Circle’ of composers prompted her to ask whether it was probable ‘that the Faculty would see any merit in a work [her Mass in D] written on such very different lines—written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?’[7] She considered her sex and foreign education to be the primary factors behind her exclusion from the English choral scene. Sophie Fuller notes that Smyth’s determination to access the same performance spaces as her male contemporaries set her apart from many other women who were composing at the time. ‘Some women composers,

[1] An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Plenary Conference of the Society for Musicology in Ireland, held jointly with the Irish Chapter of the International Council for Traditional Music in May 2021. I am grateful to Dr Róisín Blunnie and Professor Lorraine Byrne Bodley for reading earlier drafts and offering thoughtful suggestions and advice.

[2] Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1919), 1:85.

[3] For a detailed exploration of Smyth’s reception in England and Germany, see: Elizabeth Kertesz, “Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany” (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2001).

[4] Smyth expressed her views on opera in England throughout her career, most notably in her memoir *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1921). In *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1936) she recalls shifting her attention from England, where she had been trying to secure performances of her Mass in D, to Germany ‘and her hundred Opera Houses’ (49). Her first three operas—*Fantasio* (1892–94)*, Der Wald* (1899–1901), and *The Wreckers* (1902–4)—were premiered in Germany, but World War I disrupted the planned premiere of her fourth, *The Boatswain’s Mate* (1913–14).

[5] Dates of composition are taken from the list of works compiled by Jory Bennet in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 373–381.

[6] Anthony Boden and Paul Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival: A History*, New and Revised Edition, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017).

[7] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172–173.

such as [Adela] Maddison or [Maude Valérie] White sought alternatives to the mainstream Renaissance establishment', but Smyth was seemingly reluctant to accept anything but an equal platform.[8] Similarly to Maddison (1862–1929) and White (1855–1937), Ethel Barns (1873–1948) established a chamber concert series with her husband, Charles Phillips, at which she performed her own violin works.[9] She was also a member of the first committee of The Society of Women Musicians (SWM), established in 1911, which offered performance opportunities for women and provided a platform for composers to share their works.[10] Many of the SWM's members were both performers and composers, such as the society's first president, Liza Lehmann (1862–1918). A number of Smyth's contemporaries were members of the SWM, including Augusta Holmés (1847–1903), Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944), Dora Bright (1863–1951), and Adelina de Lara (1872–1961). Smyth was an intermittent member of the society during her career; Laura Seddon suggests that Smyth 'became disillusioned with the "ready-made" community of women musicians including the SWM composing groups'.[11] Her determination to access the same opportunities as her male contemporaries might have contributed to the disillusionment to which Seddon refers.

Smyth's preoccupation with the women's suffrage movement also may have led to sporadic engagement with the society during its early years. Lady Constance Lytton, member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), wrote to Smyth in 1910 to try and gauge her opinion on women's suffrage.[12] Smyth had recently been awarded an honorary doctorate from Durham University, which had further raised her public profile. Her initial response to Lytton was never sent, a fact for which the composer was likely grateful when she changed her stance on the issue. She was in Venice at the time and staying with the writer Hermann Bahr and his wife Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, a successful soprano.[13] Bahr expressed surprise at Smyth's 'confession of indifference tinged with distaste and […] ridicule' regarding the women's suffrage movement. He commented:

> the militant movement is the one really alive issue in England… perhaps in Europe, and your Mrs. Pankhurst is in my opinion the most astounding personality that even England—a country that is forever turning out new types of genius—has yet produced.[14]

[8] Sophie Fuller, "Women composers during the British musical renaissance, 1880–1918" (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, 1998), 138.
[9] Sophie Fuller, "Barns, Ethel," Grove Music Online, 2001, accessed August 9, 2021, https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45629.
[10] For more information on The Society of Women Musicians and a number of Smyth's contemporaries, see: Laura Seddon, *British Women Composers and Instrumental Chamber Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 57–74.
[11] Ibid., 90–91. Seddon explores Smyth's relationship with the Society of Women Musicians more closely in Chapter 4, "The Other Side of London's Musical Society: Adela Maddison, Ethel Smyth and Morfydd Owen," 75–115.
[12] Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden*, second edn., (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1934), 191.
[13] Anna Bahr-Mildenburg (1872–1947) was a successful soprano who came to the attention of the Hamburg Opera in 1895. After an impressive audition, Bernhard Pollini (1838–1897) cast her in a number of roles, including Brünnhilde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Her performance sparked a mutually fruitful working relationship with the company's conductor, Gustav Mahler, and Bahr-Mildenburg worked with the Hamburg Opera until 1916. See Desmond Shawe-Taylor, "Bahr-Mildenburg [née Mildenburg von Bellschau], Anna," Grove Music Online, 2001, accessed June 1, 2021, https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01784
[14] Smyth, *Female Pipings*, 191.

Bahr's observation appeared to cause Smyth to reconsider her attitude towards the movement and she attended a WSPU meeting two weeks later, meeting Emmeline Pankhurst for the first time. In her essay collection *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934) Smyth remarked: 'Before a fortnight had passed it became evident to me that to keep out of the movement, to withhold any modicum it was possible to contribute to the cause, was as unthinkable as to drive art and politics in double harness'.[15] The question of how to combine art and politics was something that she seemed to grapple with. However, within the month, Smyth had settled her musical affairs and decided that she would give two years to the WSPU, after which she would return to composing.[16] It is evident from her reflections in *Female Pipings* that she felt that her career would need to put on hold while she contributed to the suffrage cause, yet many of the works that emerged from this period—including her *Songs of Sunrise* (1911) and *The Boatswain's Mate* (1913–14)—reflect her involvement with the suffrage cause and unify two facets of her life that she had considered incompatible.

Smyth's decision to join the WSPU has had a significant impact on how she has been portrayed in historical narratives. In April 1958, Sir Thomas Beecham gave a tribute to the composer to mark the centenary of her birth.[17] Here he recalled the now famous image of Smyth in 1912, leaning out of her cell window in Holloway prison and conducting her suffrage anthem 'The March of the Women' with a toothbrush as her fellow inmates processed around the quadrangle.[18] This image of Smyth—which encapsulates her identity as a militant suffragette—has more recently been immortalised by the sculptor Christine Charlesworth, further emphasising its prevalence in perceptions of Smyth's life.[19] This not only reinforces the significance of her service to the women's suffrage movement but also emphasises the importance of 'The March of the Women'. Indeed, it is rare to encounter an introduction to the composer that fails to mention this song, or her involvement with the movement more broadly.

The March, along with 'Laggard Dawn' and '1910', forms the *Songs of the Sunrise*, a collection that was published in 1911. Given their political link, these songs have helped to secure Smyth's place in suffrage history and have received attention in Smyth scholarship. However, researchers have tended to favour the first and third songs in the collection—'The March of the Women' and 'Laggard Dawn'—over the middle piece, '1910'. The March, with its overt dedication to and association with the WSPU has prompted discussion, and 'Laggard Dawn' has been combed for evidence of Smyth's feelings towards Emmeline

[15] Smyth, *Female Pipings*, 192.
[16] Ibid., 191. Smyth spent closer to three years with the WSPU, having joined in November 1910 and left in the summer of 1913.
[17] Thomas Beecham's tribute was originally aired on the BBC Home Service *Music Magazine* show (*Radio Times* 139 no. 1797, April 18, 1958, 24) and appeared in print later the same year. See: "Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)," *The Musical Times* 99, no. 1385 (1958), 363–365.
[18] Beecham, "Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)," 364.
[19] For further details on this sculpture, which is due to be unveiled in 2021, see: "Dame Ethel Smyth," Christine Charlesworth, accessed June 20, 2021, http://www.christinecharlesworth.co.uk/news/dame-ethel-smyth/

Pankhurst, which some scholars believe to have been romantic in nature.[20] Markedly under-explored within the literature is '1910', a somewhat unconventional medley for which Smyth used a blend of remarks and a song quotation to create her own text.[21] In bringing this song to the fore, this article gives voice to Smyth's overshadowed song so that the suffrage trio may be heard anew. It provides a contextual overview of the piece and its premiere, exploring its critical reception and drawing attention to the response it received from the largely suffragist audience. It examines the nature of the song's text and its relationship to the melody, questioning whether Smyth's intentions in composing '1910' were the same as for 'Laggard Dawn' or 'The March of the Women'. Furthermore, in engaging with both historical and contemporary literature on the song, the article examines the potential reasons behind its neglect.

Songs of Sunrise at the Queen's Hall

'1910' was premiered along with 'Laggard Dawn' at a concert at the Queen's Hall in London on 1 April 1911. The final piece in *Songs of Sunrise*, 'The March of the Women', had been officially presented to the WSPU earlier that year at a meeting where Emmeline Pankhurst spoke of women who had 'come out and risked even their reputation' for the suffrage cause.[22] She named Smyth as one such individual, thanking her for the March and stating, 'no one could feel as deeply as I do the gratitude for her services to the women's cause'.[23] Smyth also conveyed her hopes for the song, remarking: 'If I have contrived to get into my music anything of the spirit which makes this movement the finest thing I have ever known in my life, then perhaps the March may in some way be worthy of your acceptance.'[24] Her comment indicates a desire to capture and musically express the atmosphere of the movement, which is pertinent to all three of the *Songs of Sunrise*.

Given the appreciation Smyth received for 'The March of the Women', it is unsurprising that her concert in April, with two additional suffrage songs, was eagerly anticipated by members of the WSPU. On the eve of the concert, *Votes for Women* announced that 'For the first time this movement—the greatest that the world has known—will be typified in music'.[25] The *Songs of Sunrise* appeared last in the varied programme of Smyth's works, which

[20] See for example: Kathleen A. Abromeit, "Ethel Smyth, 'the Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham," *Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1989), 196–211; Rachel Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us': Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and 'Possession,'" *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015), 335–70; Christopher Wiley, "Ethel Smyth, Suffrage, and Surrey: From Frimley Green to Hook Heath, Woking," *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network*. Special Issue: 1918–2018. 2, no. 11 (2018), 11–18; Elizabeth Wood, "Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music," *The Massachusetts Review* 24, no. 1, Woman: The Arts 1 (1983), 125–139; Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1995), 606–43.

[21] Elizabeth Wood briefly addresses '1910' in "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage."

[22] "Stifled in Holloway," *Votes for Women*, January 27, 1911, 272. 'The March of the Women' was first presented on January 21, 1911, to celebrate the release of prisoners held at Holloway Prison. For further details about this event, including the full programme, see "The Prisoners' Welcome," *Votes for Women*, January 20, 1911, 254.

[23] "Stifled in Holloway," 272.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc," *Votes for Women*, March 31, 1911, 427.

culminated in the March and gave audience members the opportunity to join in.[26] Due to the unexplained absence of Sir Thomas Beecham, who was due to conduct the concert, Smyth took to the podium and received a 'rousing welcome' of applause that 'increased rather than lessened' when she announced that she would be conducting.[27] While *Votes for Women* commended Smyth's presence on the podium, not all critics were convinced. *The Daily News* asserted that she 'does not really shine as a conductor', although they conceded that Smyth 'deserves to be ranked with the best of our British men composers'.[28]

Gendered criticism such as this was not uncommon and it appears in many of the articles following the concert. *The Referee* felt that 'Sleepless Dreams', a setting of a sonnet by Rosetti, and 'Hey Nonny No!' were 'instinct with masculine outlook rarely evinced by women composers, but which pre-eminently distinguish the best of Miss Smyth's compositions', conveying the notion that women composers were considered successful if their music sounded like it had been composed by a man.[29] Conversely, *The Gloucester Journal* asserted that 'the more tender parts' of Smyth's otherwise 'wild and passionate music' had 'not quite the proper amount of sentiment'.[30] These contrasting viewpoints attest to the difficulty often faced by women composers, whose music was criticised from both sides. As Eugene Gates summarises: 'sexual aesthetics allowed critics to attribute both merits and shortcomings of a woman's compositions to her gender. It effected not only a double standard but a double bind.'[31] This criticism did not go unnoticed by Smyth, who remarked that 'there is no sex in art' but argued 'a critic's first and last thought in connection with her [a woman who practises art] work is her sex'.[32]

Smyth received praise elsewhere, highlighting her popularity with the public and indicating that her suffrage activity did not do her a disservice. In concert reviews she was described as 'the most considerable woman composer we have' and one who had 'achieved the great distinction, for a lady musician, of having an opera produced at Covent Garden'.[33] *The Hendon and Finchley Times* also celebrated her achievements, stating:

> Women generally must be grateful to Dr. Ethel Smyth for having removed a long-standing reproach from the sex! It has been told against us from all time that there has never been a great woman composer; woman may have been

[26] "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, April 7, 1911, 443. The programme included excerpts from *The Wreckers*, including the opera's overture and introduction to Act II; the choral opening of *Der Wald*; 'Sleepless Dreams' (1910); 'Hey Nonny No!'; 'Ode Acacréonique' (1907); Benedictus from the Mass in D (1891); *Songs of Sunrise*. This list has been constructed from the following newspaper articles: "Miss Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall," *The Referee*, April 2, 1911, 3; "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *The Westminster Gazette*, April 3, 1911, 14; : "Dr Ethel Smyth. Three New Suffragist Choruses," *London Daily News*, April 3, 1911, 7; "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, April 7, 1911, 443. When the concert was repeated on June 29, 1911, 'Odette' and 'Chrysilla' from the same song collection as 'Ode Acacréonique' were added to the programme. See: "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, July 7, 1911.
[27] "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, April 7, 1911, 443.
[28] "Three New Suffragist Choruses," *London Daily News*, April 3, 1911, 7.
[29] "Miss Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall," *The Referee*, April 2, 1911, 3.
[30] "A Woman's Letter: Women Musicians," *The Gloucester Journal*, April 15, 1911, 7.
[31] Eugene Gates, "Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 31, no. 1 (1997): 64.
[32] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 242.
[33] "Musical Notes," *The Falkirk Herald*, April 3, 1911, 3; "London Topics," *The Kilmarnock Herald and North Ayrshire Gazette*, April 7, 1911, 3.

> successful in other of the arts, we were told; but in music she had no place. Dr. Smyth has changed all that.[34]

These positive responses to Smyth's concert demonstrate that she was publicly well known and admired, and not just by the readership catered for by suffrage newspapers such as *Votes for Women*, *The Common Cause*, or *The Vote*, each of which provide valuable yet biased insights. Ultimately, the success of Smyth's concert in April prompted a repeat event in June 1911, conducted once again by the composer at the Queen's Hall.[35]

'1910': Inspiration and Reception

Many of the reviews of Smyth's concerts—in both April and June 1911—feature references to '1910', indicating that the song made a clear impression on Smyth's audiences. The piece is scored for SATB choir with optional orchestral accompaniment and was defined by Smyth as 'a faithful chronicle of remarks frequently heard and liable to repetition *ad lib.* on a current question'.[36] Each vocal part in the choir offers a different viewpoint on the suffrage movement, including that of suffragists, anti-suffragists, friendly men, and unfriendly men.[37] The fragmentary text (provided below) conveys an overarching message of defiance and triumph for the suffragettes, who laugh in the faces of their opponents.[38] In the final lines, Smyth makes reference to 'Nelly Bly', a minstrel song composed by Stephen Collins Foster in 1850.[39]

'1910' (Ethel Smyth)

Suffragists [S]: Sounds of the battle raging around us, up and defy them laugh in their faces!

Friendly Men [FM]: How they will knock you about, and yet as you say, this cause is worth a blow or two

[34] "Ladies Column," *The Hendon and Finchley Times*, April 14, 1911, 8. The article also appeared in the "Ladies Column" of *The Midlothian Journal*, April 14, 1911, 2; *The Musselburgh News*, April 14, 1911, 4; *The Falkirk Herald*, 3 April 1911, 2; *The Faringdon Advertiser*, April 15, 1911, 2.

[35] "Dr Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, June 2, 1911, 579. The concert took place on June 29 at the Queen's Hall, London.

[36] See the list of works compiled by Jory Bennet in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 378. Although Bennet mentions the optional orchestral accompaniment in the list of works, precise details are not given. The score published by Breitkopf & Härtel (see footnote 38) is for SATB choir and piano but states that the work is 'For mixed Chorus, with (or without) Band'.

[37] In *Votes for Women* (March 31, 1911, 427) the speakers are defined as 'Suffragist (S), Anti-Suffragist (A), Friendly Men (FM), and Unfriendly Men (UM)'. These are sung by soprano, alto, tenor, and bass respectively.

[38] Text transcribed from Ethel Smyth, *Songs of Sunrise Choral Group, No. 2, '1910', for female mixed Chorus, with (or without) Band* (London: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911). The lines are often sung against one another, and the voice parts do not rigidly adhere to their assigned 'roles'. The first phrase, for example, is sung by both soprano and alto despite expressing a suffragist sentiment. Thus, this transcription attempts to align the remarks with the four roles, rather than the four voice parts. Punctuation has been added to improve cohesion and ellipses have been used to indicate repetition, which is particularly common at the end of a phrase.

[39] Elizabeth Wood describes 'Nelly Bly' as a 'children's rhyme' (see: "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4, 1995: 623). However, Stephen Collins Foster (1826–1864) was a composer of minstrel songs and this piece can be seen to align with this genre. Smyth quotes directly from verse three of the song and mirrors Foster's text ('Nelly Bly, shuts her eye when she goes to sleep!') and melody, before creating her own ending. *Votes for Women* on March 31, 1911 reports an American audience member observing that Smyth's ending differs from the original (427).

S: This cause that we love, this cause that we serve, is worth a blow or two
FM/Unfriendly Men [UM]: Sounds of the battle raging. Hi! Stop them if you can, stop them, stop them, O stop them if you can.
UM: stop them, O stop them if you can
S: This cause that we love, this cause that we serve, it shall prevail as prevails the light
FM/UM: this cause that we serve, it shall prevail, is prevailing
FM: Sounds of the battle raging around us, gently ladies, gently ladies. Why this violence?
UM: Sounds of the battle raging around us, come move on please, come move on
S: But the vow! We vowed to obey, we vowed to obey, honour, love
Anti-Suffragists [A]: What of the vow to obey! We vowed to obey, we vowed to obey honour, love
FM: You vowed to obey us
UM: You vowed to obey, you vowed to obey, I know Mrs Humphrey Ward. You vowed to obey…
All: This cause that we love, this cause that we serve, is worth a blow or two
FM/UM: Stopping the traffic, stopping the traffic
S: Try again, try again, on to the goal!
FM/UM: They are putting back the cause, they are putting it back for years
S: Patience, patience
S: This cause we love will surely prevail as sure as sun doth rise!
FM/UM: I fear they will get it, I fear they will get it
All: We know we shall get it! We know we shall get it! Soon or later, surely, surely…
S: we know we shall get it…
Men: they will soon get it…
S: The sounds of the battle raging around us, raging, raging, raging, raging…
UM: Move on, move on, move on…
S: We know we shall get it! Sounds of the battle raging around us
S: Nelly Bly, shuts her eye when she goes to sleep!
A, FM, UM: But when she wakened
All: then she knew she would get it! When she wakened then she knew she would get it! … She has wakened up again and of course she will get it.

Although each of the *Songs of Sunrise* conveys a political message, the text seems to be of central importance in '1910'. However, the precise inspiration behind the song remains unclear, with contrasting opinions emerging since its composition. Despite Sylvia Pankhurst's assertion in 1931 that the work was a setting of 'a Suffragette raid in Trafalgar Square', the song itself offers little to confirm this.[40] Similarly problematic is Elizabeth Wood's statement that '1910' is a 're-remembered "chronicle" [which] commemorates the bloody events, police brutality, and mass arrests of Black Friday'.[41] This demonstration, which took place on 18 November 1910, has become a landmark in suffrage history due to

[40] Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 379.
[41] Wood, "Performing Rights," 622.

the allegations of police brutality that subsequently emerged.[42] Christopher Wiley also states that '1910' 'commemorat[es] the disastrous events of so-called Black Friday' and suggests that the song 'contains some quite specific references to the day, notably naming Mrs Humphrey Ward, the leader of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League'.[43] While both Wood and Wiley present this reading as fact, it is unclear on what evidence they base their assertions. There is no indication on the score that the work was composed in memory of this event, nor is there any reference to it in Smyth's publications. Despite Wiley's comment to the contrary, the text itself lacks specificity and Smyth's description of it being a collection of 'remarks *frequently heard* and liable to repetition *ad lib.*' suggests that the text is more broadly representative of views aired on the suffrage movement.[44] Moreover, in connecting '1910' to Black Friday, Wood and Wiley create a disparity between their account and Sylvia Pankhurst's, as the demonstration on 18 November took place in Parliament Square rather than Trafalgar Square. The accounts of the inspiration behind '1910' offered by Pankhurst, Wood, and Wiley highlight the inherent challenges involved in discussing works that are not expressly dealt with by the composer in her publications.[45]

Smyth makes no reference to Black Friday in *Female Pipings*, either as a participant or an observer. Given that she had not long joined the WSPU when the event took place, it is possible that she was not involved.[46] However, she was undoubtedly aware of the demonstration, as evidenced by her statement during the trial following the window-smashing in March 1912. *Votes for Women* reported extensively on the trial and quoted Smyth:

> I did not want to take any part in your [Emmeline Pankhurst's] March agitation because I was too busy. Then came the refusal of the Home Office to permit the inquiry into the conduct of the police on Black Friday. I know what these women had been through. I then wrote straight away to Mrs. Pethick Lawrence to say that I begged to take part in the next protest. I went as far as to say that I hoped whatever the protest might be, it would not be such a protest as the one

[42] Sylvia Pankhurst gives an account of Black Friday in *The Suffragette Movement,* 342–44. Christopher Bearman explores the repercussions of the suffrage stance following Black Friday and the demonstrations that followed it in November 1910 in "The legend of Black Friday," *Historical Research* 83, no. 222, 2010: 693–718. For further reading, see: June Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst" in *Votes for Women* ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 109–34; Martin Pugh, *March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202–10.

[43] Christopher Wiley, "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as a feminist opera" in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose (London: Routledge, 2021), 173.

[44] See the list of works compiled by Jory Bennet in: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 378. Emphasis added.

[45] It is also worth noting that *Votes for Women* does not connect '1910' with Black Friday in its descriptions of the song. Given the newspaper's commentary on Black Friday and the demonstrations that followed during November 1910, it is not unreasonable to assume that *Votes for Women* would likely have promoted a work that was explicitly connected to a date with such political significance.

[46] Smyth was listed 'among those who accepted invitations' to a WSPU meeting hosted by Lady Brassey on November 1, 1910. Based on Smyth's reflections in *Female Pipings,* it is likely that this is the first meeting that she attended, given that Emmeline Pankhurst had been on a tour of Scotland and Ireland until October. She also reflects that at the time she made her decision to join the WSPU, she 'was deep in musical undertakings', which needed to be completed before she could devote her time to the movement. See: "A Drawing Room-Meeting," *Votes for Women*, November 11, 1910, 84 and *Female Pipings*, 191–92.

> on Black Friday, because I did not think that any women should subject themselves to that sort of usage again.[47]

While Smyth's statement suggests an understanding of the events of Black Friday, there is little to indicate that she was involved. Her reference to knowing what 'these women' had been through, rather than a more inclusive 'we', might indicate that her knowledge of the demonstration was second-hand. Furthermore, Smyth's reflection appears to convey the seriousness of the event and expresses her dissatisfaction at the treatment the suffragettes received. In light of this, it seems incongruous for Smyth to compose a song with such comedic value to commemorate Black Friday. It prompts the question of whether the suffragettes, who considered '1910' to be 'humorous', 'virile', and 'gay', would have responded thus to a work written to commemorate such a turbulent event.[48] Foregrounding Smyth's own description of the piece—as opposed to its potential link to Black Friday—can also help to understand the fragmentary text, which is markedly different to those she set in the other *Songs of Sunrise*.

As an amalgamation of 'remarks', it is likely that Smyth carefully considered the phrases that she chose to set, resulting in a composition in which the text is of primary importance. This emphasis also suggests that the text may have guided the composition process, a notion that may be further supported by the narrow range of the vocal parts, particularly in the first half of the piece, which is reminiscent of the recitative delivery often found in opera (see Example 1, Appendix). Conversely, the other two pieces in the *Songs of Sunrise* are arguably melodically—rather than textually—driven. The composition of the 'The March of the Women' was propelled by the melody that Smyth borrowed from an Abruzzi folk tune.[49] Cicely Hamilton was asked to write the words retrospectively, implying that Smyth knew she had found a memorable melody that would work well as a suffrage anthem, designed to be sung at demonstrations.[50] 'Laggard Dawn' is similarly 'based on a melody by the late Prince Edmond de Polignac', as Smyth indicated in the score, which may also have predated the text. [51] In the catalogue of her works, she described it as 'a lovely song, never sung'.[52]

[47] "Tuesday: Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc.," *Votes for Women*, May 24, 1912, 549.
[48] "Dr Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, April 7, 1911, 443. Following Black Friday, the WSPU processed to Parliament Square again on November 23, which resulted in further arrests. In *Votes for Women* two days later, Christabel Pankhurst expressed her thoughts on the government's failure to address women's suffrage and concluded: 'The Prime Minister's statement, constituting as it does a message of defiance to us, means that we revert to a state of war.' See: *Votes for Women*, November 25, 1910, 126.
[49] St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 151.
[50] Ibid., 151. St John notes that before Smyth approached Cicely Hamilton, she had asked the writers John Masefield, Gilbert Chesterton, and John Galsworthy. Hamilton's text is a musical call to arms, reminiscent of wartime recruitment posters with its use of imperatives and direct address. Its message is also a hopeful one and the suffragists are depicted as a unified whole with a common purpose, marching 'shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend'. This image reflects the community found within the women's suffrage movement and alludes to the empowering nature of women's networks more broadly.
[51] Smyth wrote the text for 'Laggard Dawn', taking inspiration from a moment she shared with Emmeline Pankhurst in 1910. In *Female Pipings*, Smyth recounts this memory of 'Census night […] when she [Pankhurst] and I, standing in our dressing gowns at the window, watched the dawn rise beyond the river and fight its way through the mist' (194). The ambiguous 'we' used throughout 'Laggard Dawn' likely refers to Smyth and Pankhurst waiting for the dawn, but it would have been equally relatable to other suffragists and appropriate for performance at associated gatherings.
[52] Smyth produced a handwritten catalogue of her works between 1936–38. See: 'Main Book (Music) of Ethel Mary Smyth, D.B.E. (b. 1858, d. 1944)', Add MS 49196, The British Library, London.

While 'The March of the Women' and 'Laggard Dawn' are each imbued with a different character, they are unified in a number of ways. Both are strophic settings with memorable melodic lines, and the texts are conventional, each with a clear structure and regular rhyme scheme. None of the features that unite these songs are present in '1910', which further emphasises its singularity in the collection. In composing the song, Smyth was seemingly attempting to push the boundaries and deviate from a more traditional text setting.

The unconventional character of '1910' provoked a variety of reactions from the press, but the audience on 1 April 1911 appreciated it to such an extent that it was encored. *The Referee* gave the evening a positive review, mentioning '1910' in particular:

> [1910] is a clever jeu d'esprit, a setting of supposed desultory remarks, adverse and otherwise, of a crowd on the Suffrage policy, including the iterations of the police to "Move on." It is excellent fooling, and so amused the audience that it was repeated. In its entirety the concert was a remarkable exhibition of woman as composer, and certainly set forth music as strong as anything that has been produced by Continental women.[53]

The humour of the piece was remarked upon in other newspapers, with *The Westminster Gazette* describing it as 'decidedly amusing', a 'vocal battle' in which the 'music is as amusing as its text'.[54] The combination of conflict and humour was also highlighted by *The Illustrated London News*, who described '1910' as a 'delightful jest' that was 'descriptive of a battlefield'.[55] The perception of '1910' as a humorous composition, one which entertained the audience enough to garner an encore, suggests that there may have been a performative element to the work. The driving, march-like rhythm of the piece, combined with the recitative delivery, may have lent the song an operatic or theatrical undertone. It is easy to imagine the suffrage audience being amused by the parodic portrayal of their opponents and by hearing anti-suffrage sentiments expressed in a comedic setting.

However, not all critics were convinced that the song was successful in its aims. *The Falkirk Herald* asserted that 'the composition is not clear enough to bring out all the humour that is intended', although they conceded that 'the reiteration in very solemn tones by the unfriendly men, "They are putting back the cause for years," was very funny'.[56] Other sources describe the song as 'a curious, and not unskilful "Medley"' and 'a grotesque symphony of suffragists, anti-suffragists, and the hullabaloo of a Parliament-square riot'.[57] The latter returns to the gendered criticism addressed above, stating: 'Dr. Smyth affects a masculine garb to a great extent. She is fond of short double-breasted coats, tweed skirts, collars and ties, and motor-caps.'[58] Within the context of the article, the reference to Smyth's dress-sense seems to indicate that this perceived masculinity explains her involvement with the suffrage movement. The article concludes: '[She] holds the belief that if a woman wishes

[53] "Miss Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall," *The Referee*, April 2, 1911, 3.
[54] "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *The Westminster Gazette*, April 3, 1911, 14.
[55] "Music," *The Illustrated London News*, April 8, 1911, 518.
[56] "Musical Notes," *The Falkirk Herald*, April 3, 1911, 3.
[57] "Music and Musicians," *The Queen, The Lady's Newspaper*, April 8, 1911, 613; "Music and Militancy," *The Witney Gazette*, August 3, 1912, 7.
[58] "Music and Militancy," *The Witney Gazette*, August 3, 1912, 7.

to devote herself to art she must not think of marrying!'[59] The exclamation mark lends a sense of incredulity to Smyth's sentiment.

Despite the broadly positive response to '1910', Smyth's contemporaries largely dismissed the work. When Sylvia Pankhurst reflected on the *Songs of Sunrise* she noted: 'The words of the two last ['Laggard Dawn' and '1910'] were her own; highly characteristic and amusing, but by no means comparable with the music.'[60] Smyth's biographer Christopher St John was even more disparaging, describing '1910' as 'a complete flop'.[61] She felt that 'It had none of the fierceness, the overwhelming strength of her great chorus, *Hey Nonny No*, written before she joined the militants'.[62] Although '1910' was positively received in 1911, it does not seem to appear in many concerts thereafter, which may explain St John's dismissal of the piece. The song's disappearance from the performance repertoire may also indicate that Smyth's attempt to compose a less conventional text setting did not have the long-term impact that she had desired.

Into Obscurity

In May 1913 there were plans for a concert of Smyth's suffrage works to be held in November at the Musikverein in Vienna. Smyth's friend, the soprano Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, was due to perform a number of the composer's new songs, along with excerpts from *The Wreckers*. *The Suffragette* also reported: 'The programme will include, by special request, the Suffragette Raid Chorus, '1910', which has been translated into German.'[63] These details were repeated in August, with a direct quotation from Smyth:

> I am conducting the work [the overture to *The Wreckers*] again on November 20, in Vienna, where they are giving a concert of my works, at which they are putting a big orchestra and a magnificent chorus entirely at my disposal. And I have not a penny to pay for it. That is rather interesting, I think. They are arranging the concert themselves and have asked me to conduct.[64]

Additionally, Smyth stated that she had found 'a very remarkable libretto' by Hugo von Hofmannsthal to use for her next opera, the premiere of which had 'already been arranged at the Munich Opera House'.[65] This comment, in addition to her remark that she would not be liable for the cost of the concert, draws attention to the financial implications of securing performances. Larger works in particular often required lengthy negotiation and the support of influential figures, as was the case with her Mass in D (1891). The German conductor Hermann Levi and the Empress Eugénie, widow of Napoleon III, were instrumental in securing the work's premiere. In 1892, the Empress introduced Smyth to Queen Victoria

[59] "Music and Militancy," *The Witney Gazette*, August 3, 1912, 7.
[60] Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Longman Group, 1931; repr. London: Virago, 1977), 379.
[61] St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 152.
[62] Ibid.
[63] "Musical Intelligence," *The Suffragette*, May 30, 1913, 547.
[64] "Dr. Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall," *The Suffragette*, August 29, 1913, 802.
[65] Ibid., 802. Hugo von Hofmannsthal was the librettist for many of Richard Strauss's operas, including *Elektra* (1909), *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912), *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919), *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928) and *Arabella* (1929).

and encouraged her to sing some of the Mass to Her Royal Highness.[66] Through the connections she made during two audiences with the Queen, Joseph Barnby, conductor of the Royal Choral Society, reconsidered his earlier hesitancy to perform the work and the Mass received its premiere in January 1893.[67] The Empress also assisted the composer financially, covering the outstanding £100 printing fee that the publishers requested Smyth to pay.[68]

Having an influential advocate for her music was similarly important for the 1898 premiere of her first opera, *Fantasio* (1892–94), which benefitted from the support of Baroness Olga von Meyendorff, Charles Alexander—Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach—and the conductor Felix Mottl.[69] While the planned concert in Vienna in 1913 would likely have been smaller in scale, the fact that the Musikverein had invited Smyth to conduct, rather than her having to organise and finance the event herself, was clearly a welcome deviation from the norm. Although these details appeared in the Austrian press as late as October 1913, there is no record in the newspapers of the concert taking place.[70] However, it appears that Smyth did go to Vienna and recalled being 'begged to give interviews, write articles, and speak at meetings' while staying there.[71] This was not quite the clean break from the political whirlpool that Smyth had in mind, and in order to put greater distance between herself and the suffrage movement, Smyth decided to travel to Egypt.[72] Here she settled to work not on Hofmannsthal's pre-existing libretto, but on her own adaptation of William Wymark Jacobs's *The Boatswain's Mate.*[73]

The same year, 1913, also marked the end of Smyth's formal involvement with the WSPU. Her detachment from the suffrage movement, in addition to the outbreak of the First World War the following year, likely contributed to the obscurity into which '1910' fell. Suffrage activities were suspended during the war, which resulted in fewer opportunities for Smyth's works to be heard.[74] Beyond these contextual factors, the character of the song itself may also have made it a less appealing option to both performers and researchers who came across it at a later date. 'The March of the Women' and 'Laggard Dawn', with their

[66] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 100.
[67] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 60–1. Smyth also addresses this subject within her "Two Glimpses of Queen Victoria," found in *Streaks of Life*, 93–111.
[68] Ibid., 61.
[69] For further details on the premiere of *Fantasio*, see: Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1940), 63–86.
[70] See, for example: "Eine neue Oper von Ethel Smyth," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 25, 1913, 6; "Theatre und Kunst," *Pester Lloyd*, October 3, 1913, 8.
[71] St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 163. St John quotes a passage from a draft of Smyth's unpublished and incomplete autobiography *A Fresh Start* that she started in 1941. This manuscript is part of the Ethel Smyth Collection at the University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Research Center).
[72] Ibid., 163.
[73] Ibid., 164. The reference to Hofmannsthal's libretto is absent from existing Smyth scholarship, except for a brief reference in Louise Collis's *Impetuous Heart* (128). The composer was clearly experimenting with various ideas at this time as she had also considered setting John Millington Synge's play, *Riders of the Sea*, and travelled to Ireland in the summer of 1913 for research purposes (see St John, 162). This work, a bleak depiction of loss and bereavement, is far from the light-hearted comedy of *The Boatswain's Mate* and would have resulted in a very different opera. Jacobs's story provides greater scope for female empowerment, which allowed Smyth to express feminist sentiments in a way that would not have been possible had she adapted Synge's play. Louise Collis also notes that Smyth had difficulty securing the use of the copyright for *Riders to the Sea*, which may have contributed to her decision. See: *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984), 131.
[74] Smyth, who served as a radiographer during the war, would also have been otherwise engaged.

clearer history, have arguably made more accessible case studies of Smyth's suffrage works. '1910' is more elusive, as exemplified by the breadth of descriptions used, ranging from 'medley' to 'grotesque symphony'.[75] While audiences enjoyed the work in 1911, critics evidently struggled to define precisely what it was that they were enjoying. More recently, Wood and Wiley have added 'mini-operetta' and 'operetta-style' song to the list of descriptions, further reinforcing the possibility of '1910' having a performative undertone.[76] While the narrow vocal range, the humour perceived by the audience, and the contemporary subject matter may support the operetta argument, it is equally important to recall Smyth's description of the piece.[77] 'A chronicle of remarks' does not suggest that she had an operetta in mind.[78] Moreover, the work lacks a clear narrative due to its fragmentary text and the score shows no indication of the roles to be adopted by the vocal parts; these appeared in newspaper articles rather than on the score.[79] Although Smyth may have been attempting to compose a more modernist operetta—or indeed an 'operetta-style' song—in setting a less conventional text, she may also have been aiming to musically articulate comments often overheard for the entertainment of those involved in the cause. Without a sympathetic suffrage audience, however, '1910' may have lost its relevancy and appeal for concert organisers, thus losing its foothold in the performance repertoire.

Whatever Smyth's intentions for the song, it has secured a place in her repertoire only as an addendum to the other *Songs of Sunrise*. Kathleen Dale believed that '1910' and 'The March of the Women' 'would inevitably have fallen into the oblivion that overtakes topical songs had not their spirited music been granted a new lease of life in the Overture to *The Boatswain's Mate*'.[80] However, due to a lack of commercial recording, listeners are unlikely to be able to pick out the melody of '1910' as they might for 'The March of the Women'. Thus, despite its presence in the overture, the song has slipped into the oblivion to which Dale referred. The overture starts with the opening melody of '1910', mirroring both the key and time signature, before segueing into 'The March of the Women' at bar 78. The upbeat character of both pieces is fitting for the comic opera and Smyth maintains a largely cheerful mood throughout this opening movement, briefly inserting more sombre material between the jubilant iterations of the March. Wood describes Smyth's use of the suffrage songs as 'a kind of first and second subject', highlighting that neither 'reappears in the body of the work', contrary to operatic conventions, whereby the overture would usually introduce themes heard within the work.[81] Smyth was unusually explicit in her reasons for this, informing Emmeline Pankhurst in 1914: 'I've scrapped all I had written [of the overture] and am

[75] 'Medley' appears most frequently in newspaper articles of the period. See, for example: "Dr Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, April 7, 1911, 443 or *The Falkirk Herald*, April 3, 1911, 2. For 'grotesque symphony' see: "Music and Militancy," *The Witney Gazette*, August 3, 1912, 7.
[76] Wood, "Performing Rights," 622; Christopher Wiley, "Ethel Smyth, Suffrage, and Surrey: From Frimley Green to Hook Heath, Woking," *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network*. Special Issue: 1918-2018, 2, no. 11, (2018): 15.
[77] Anastasia Belina and Derek B. Scott remark that operetta was 'to be characterized as the aesthetic opposite of "serious music"; it was "light music" (in the sense of lightweight or easy music)', which correlates with the buoyant feel of '1910'. They further highlight operetta's tendency towards 'the contemporary and modern'. See: *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta*, ed. by Anastasia Belina and Derek B. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pages 4 and 5 respectively.
[78] Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, 378.
[79] See footnote 37.
[80] Kathleen Dale, "Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study" in St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 297.
[81] Wood, "Performing Rights," 628.

writing quite a short but very cheerful piece with never a theme from the opera in it, but as the chief tune… *The March of the Women*! … I simply stuck in the March because I like the tune!'[82] Perhaps her inclusion of '1910' was equally pragmatic and aided by its similar march-like rhythms.

As a result of being overlooked in both the *Songs of Sunrise* and *The Boatswain's Mate*, '1910' appears to have lost its identity within Smyth's output. In the overture, the song is stripped of its words—the very thing that drew tears of laughter from audience members—and its message is lost.[83] Although the text is fragmentary, Smyth clearly hoped to capture some of the political sound-world, not only to entertain her fellow suffragettes but also for the benefit of future generations. Dale notes that Smyth dismissed the *Songs of Sunrise* in her personal catalogue as being 'of antiquarian interest only', which, while reductive, suggests that she knew their political link would prove important. Furthermore, interest in Smyth as a suffragette and in the works that she composed during this period attest to the significance of her involvement in the movement. As her unsung suffrage song, '1910' deserves greater recognition within this context.

[82] Quoted in St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 301.
[83] "Dr. Ethel Smyth's Concert," *Votes for Women*, July 7, 1911, G.V. writes, 'the rendering of that most amusing chorus ['1910'] in which familiar remarks frequently heard on "a current topic of the day", melted even the most hardened concert goers into tears of laughter' (662).

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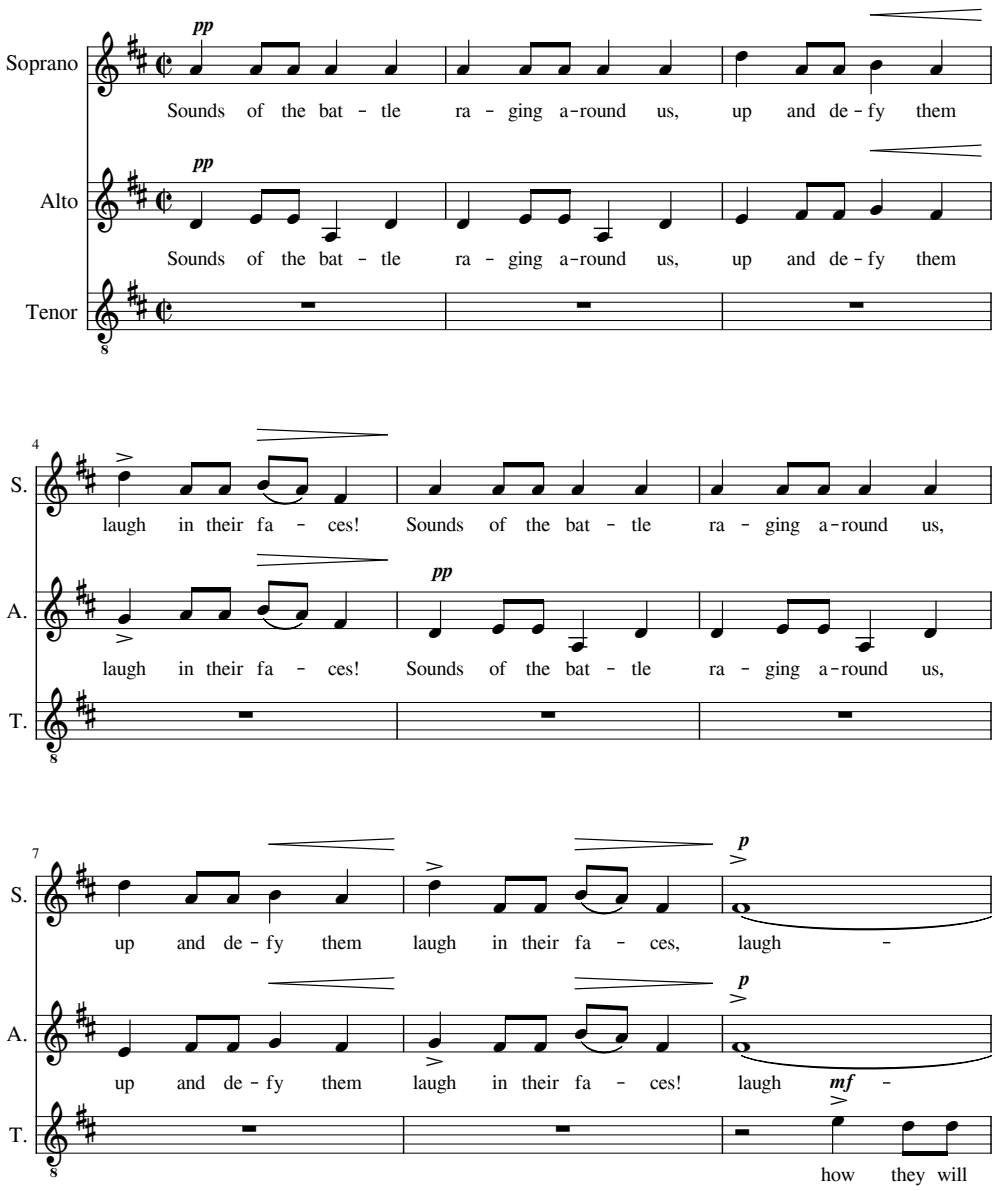
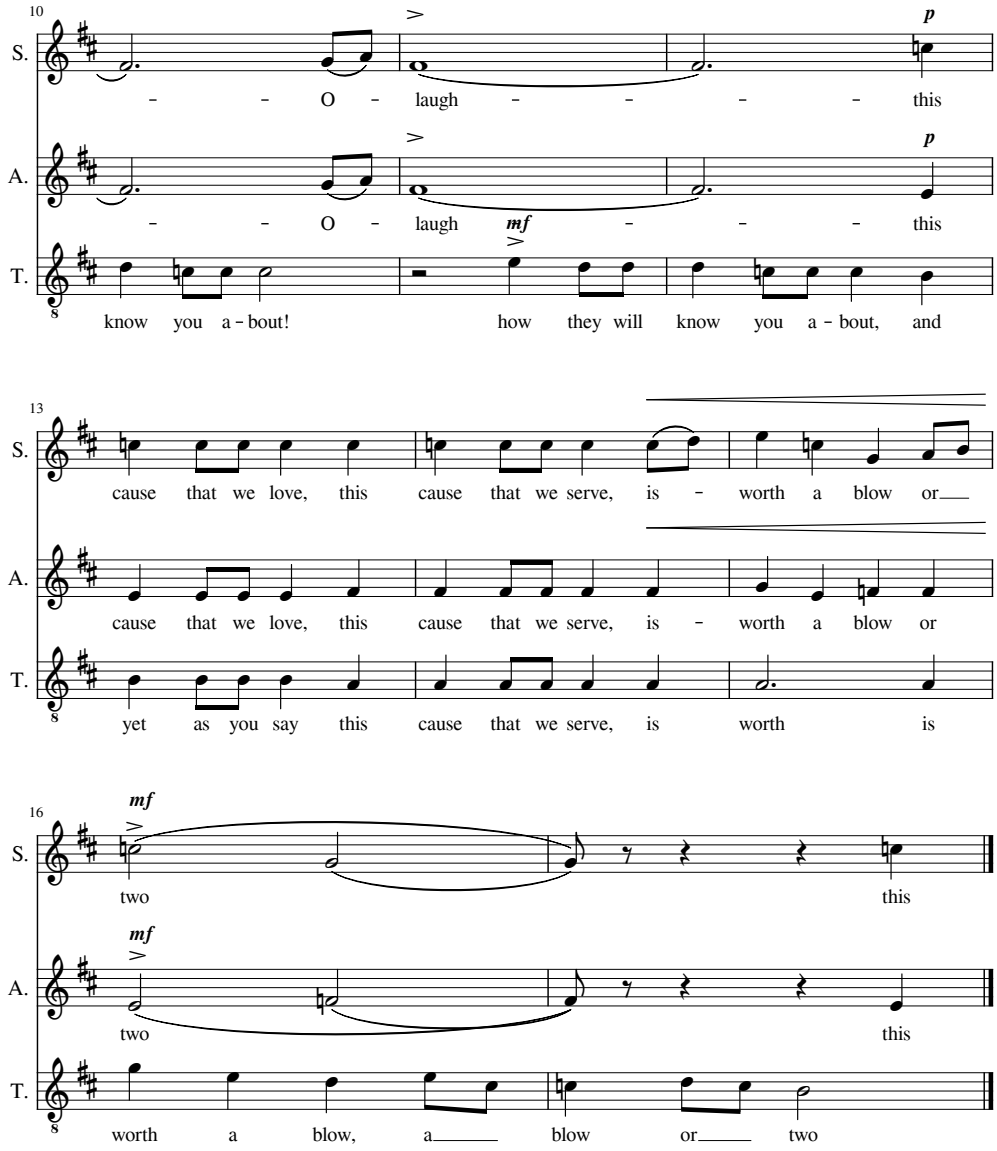
Appendix



Ex. 1. Ethel Smyth, *'1910'*, bars 5–21 (continued on the next page)[84]

[84] While the piece is scored for SATB choir, the first bass entry does not occur until bar 36. The piano part has been omitted from this example.



Ex. 1. Ethel Smyth, *'1910'*, bars 5–21 (continued).

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