

## CHAPTER VII

### VOICE AND PIANO IN GRIFFES'S SONGS: RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONS

There is a close relationship between the piano and the voice in Griffes's songs. Almost universally there is thematic interrelationship, with motives shared from accompaniment to voice, as well as close similarity in spirit and mood. It was important to Griffes that both parts share in the creation of the desired atmosphere.

Yet, while closely related, each part maintains its individual character, since separate functions were delegated to both the piano and the voice. Basically the voice is the declaimer of the text. In various ways it illuminates the mood and character of the words--through range, rhythm, dynamics, and the intervallic makeup of the melody itself. The fact that the vocal melody was composed first indicates the primacy of the voice for Griffes in the textual expression of his songs. Though obviously not as complicated as the accompaniment, the voice begins as the inspirational spark from which the total work is generated.

It seems clear that Griffes intended the piano to become more involved with the expression of the text than merely underpinning or supporting the voice. The piano is charged with the creation of the atmosphere which envelops the voice, and for Griffes this is accomplished through many avenues--range, dynamics, structural texture, rhythm, and especially harmony. Another basic function of the piano is the disguising of the seams in the formal structure by introducing or concluding sections.

Since the piano and voice on the one hand share thematic character yet on the other hand maintain separate functions, their relationship should be described in terms of their interdependence, since they are neither totally dependent on, nor completely independent of, each other. In this interdependency, the integrity of each part is maintained. That Griffes's accompaniments do at times tend to overshadow the voice cannot be denied, yet it is indicative of Griffes's concept of the nature of song. The voice, or more particularly the vocal melody, is not necessarily the focal point of that song. Instead the voice and its accompaniment share in the creation of the song in such a way that they are partners. The result of this partnership is that at times both parts appear equally involved and at others one partner will seem to overshadow the other. In some songs, the relationship becomes an ever-shifting continuum of involvement with no pre-established proportions concerning relative vocal and piano emphasis.

The extent to which the piano and voice maintain their separate identities and perform their individual functions differs among the three groups. Yet the interdependence of vocal melody and accompaniment is a universal trait throughout Griffes's songs.

#### Formative Songs

In the relationship between piano and voice, the truly formative nature of Griffes's earliest songs is very evident. The concept that the voice and its accompaniment should maintain separate identities and yet be intertwined in some way has not yet solidified. Therefore, a certain vacillation between two extremes can be found among these songs.

On the one hand, we find several songs in which the accompaniment

and voice are identical; their thematic structure is exactly concurrent and the setting is rather homophonic. That there are really no separate identities in Griffes's first song, "Si mes vers," is shown in the fact that he easily rewrote it in a piano version. Yet such a lack of separate idiomatic identities is not limited to his first efforts. In both "Meeresstille" and "Am Kreuzweg" the voice and piano are combined in a homophonic, almost chorale-like setting, with the upper voice of the accompaniment doubling the vocal part.

There are also examples of the other extreme, in which simultaneously shared motives are relatively rare. Such is the case with "Wohl lag ich einst," in which the vocal melody and accompaniment pattern seldom coincide with similar motives. Yet the utmost extreme of unrelatedness is never encountered, since Griffes closely paralleled the spirit and energy of the two parts.

Most of the formative songs combine elements of these two extremes, however. In many of these songs instances of occasional doubling may be found as well as examples of more separation of identity. Very often, as in "Es fiel ein Reif," the accompaniment may suggest the vocal melody in a nonsimultaneous pattern, yet it becomes much more developed than a simple underpinning of the voice.

In many other songs, such as "Könnt' ich," sections of doubling by the accompaniment are contrasted with sections of more marked thematic separation. This technique often corresponds closely with the formal contrasts created by harmonic and rhythmic shifts.

There are very few exceptions, however, to the functional separation and performance of the voice and piano. The declamatory nature of the vocal melody, described in Chapter III, has been particularly empha-

sized among the formative songs, possibly due to their stylistic reliance on the late German romantic vocal style.

This declamatory style is exceptionally developed in more narrative songs, such as "Zwei Könige." Yet, without destroying the declamatory function, as a group these songs contain some of Griffes's most lyrical vocal writing. This idiomatically vocal character of the melody becomes almost universally the inspirational momentum for the creation of the accompaniment. It is particularly easy to see how this is accomplished in songs such as "Elfe" (Example 26) and "Auf geheimen Waldespfade" (Example 6), in which the vocal melodies imply tremendous expressive possibilities.

These expressive possibilities are explored in several different ways as the piano accompaniment seeks to fulfill its function of creating the appropriate atmosphere to surround the vocal melody. There is a noticeable emphasis on harmonic methods of expression in the formative songs. Almost every song relies somewhat on shifting modulations and unexpected or delayed resolutions to create the desired atmosphere.

Yet there is also a dependence on the range or tessitura of the accompaniment to suggest a certain aura. Thus the low register at the opening of "Nacht liegt," coupled with the heavy block chords, implies a gloomy or apprehensive character (Example 8). Of course the opposite technique is involved in "Elfe," in which the staccato chords in the upper register help produce the delicate, airy feeling (Example 26). The importance of rhythm is not overlooked in these songs. It plays a crucial role in the emotionally sensitive "Auf ihrem Grab," as explained in Chapter VI.

In the formative songs the piano does not universally perform the

function of disguising seams. In some songs the accompaniment gradually leads from one section to a contrasting section and, very often, gradually back from the contrasting section to a repeat of the opening section or into another contrasting section. An excellent example of this is found in the transitions in "Es fiel ein Reif." From meas. 16 to meas. 23 the piano incorporates the crucial element--e#--of the impending contrasting section into the arpeggiated figure of the opening section and thus makes the appearance of the new idea seem more natural.<sup>1</sup>

In "An den Wind" Griffes attempted a similar technique but the sections are so dissimilar that the accompaniment transitions cannot assume a strong unifying function.

Though such transitions are common in the accompaniments of Griffes's formative songs, very often it seems that the composer denied this unifying function of the piano. In "Auf dem Teich" the piano actually makes the formal seams obvious by announcing, through a sustained chord unrelated to the previous sections, the appearance of a new area of different thematic material. This happens dramatically at least twice in this song, with other minor shifts of similar character (Example 5). Thus for the formative songs the piano always performs the function of introducing and concluding, but its method of fulfilling this function may vary between the opposing techniques of a gradual or an abrupt transition.

Griffes also demonstrated ambiguity in achieving the continuum of expression in the proportion of involvement for piano or voice. There are rare instances in which the accompaniment's expression overpowers the

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix, Song 2.

voice and tends to determine the character of the voice. The most obvious example of this is the concluding section of "An den Wind," mentioned in Chapter III. Yet the melodies in this group are so well-defined and idiomatically satisfying that much of the expression is borne by the voice. Though complete and well-developed in their own right, the accompaniments relate closely to the vocal melody. They serve to round out the texture rather than to explore new expressive avenues of their own instigation. Thus, while voice and piano are interdependent in creating the text's expression, one could conclude that special emphasis is given the voice.

#### Divergent Songs

As with the formative songs, there is a contrast in the divergent songs between different approaches to relating piano and voice while retaining separate identities. Yet the situation is not parallel here. One realizes that these approaches are now conscious choices by the composer rather than results of a formative or learning process. Also, the two approaches are not extreme contrasts with this group of songs.

Many songs demonstrate a lack of truly separate identities for piano and voice. Doubling of the vocal melody by the upper voice of the accompaniment is very common yet never forms the entire basis of the accompaniment's structure, as in some formative songs. This basic underpinning by piano is evident in "Tears" but is not consistent throughout, as nonsimultaneous separation of motives occurs through the contrasting section. Two techniques of thematic relation are shown in "This Book of Hours." In the homophonic sections the vocal melody is doubled by the piano, and in the canonic sections the vocal melody is imitated contra-

puntally by the accompaniment.

There are several songs with few or no shared motives between voice and piano, such as several of the oriental songs, particularly "So-Fei," "A Feast of Lanterns," and "Kinanti," Yet in these songs the accompaniment has established ostinato-type patterns which are continually repeated. The vocal melody moves through these patterns but is not totally divorced from the accompaniment in its motives. Rather, there is a basic structure, usually a particular pentatonic pattern, from which both voice and piano derive their character. This creates a close relationship stylistically, if not motivically.

Some songs demonstrate a combination of these two approaches. In "Come, Love" separate identities are maintained through the use of ostinato-type patterns in the accompaniment, while frequent reminiscences of the vocal melody in the accompaniment help create a thematic similarity. The situation in "Evening Song" is more similar to the process in the formative songs, which combines sections of occasional doubling with portions of more marked motivic separation. This is not surprising when one realizes the close harmonic association between this song and the formative songs.

In the divergent songs the declamatory function of the voice is observed fairly strictly. As a matter of fact, it often seems as though the vocal melody is intended only to be the bearer of the text, especially in the oriental songs. There is a relatively uncomplicated character to these oriental melodies. This emphasizes their function as text-carriers rather than mood-creators.

There are other vocal melodies whose lyricism is obviously an inspiration for the accompaniment. This is true particularly in "We'll to the Woods" with its lilting, vibrant melody and spirited accompaniment.

The piano's functions in the divergent songs also seem to be on a less complicated level. Certainly the accompaniment is intended to create the appropriate atmosphere, yet though basically dependent on techniques similar to those of the formative songs, its manifestation is less intricate.

Rhythmic configurations are sometimes used for expression effects, as with the rhythmic vitality of "We'll to the Woods" or the accentual conflict of "Two Birds." Yet harmony again plays a significant role in creating atmosphere. This is accomplished not through the modulations and delayed resolutions of the formative songs but through the particular harmonic structures indigenous to the styles borrowed. The required sound is created, as in the open fifths and pentatonic scales which suggest the oriental feeling, at least to Western ears.

It is especially texture, combining several elements, which is crucial to the expression of the divergent songs. Through the transparency of texture--created by simple lines, an open harmonic style, uncomplicated rhythmic patterns, and often a restrained use of dynamics--the true delicacy demanded by these texts is achieved.

There is little opportunity in the divergent songs for the piano's function of disguising organizational seams to develop to any great extent. Generally there is no abundance of sectional changes or formal seams to disguise, as the initial character of a song usually remains unchanged, with only slight deviations. Rather than disguise seams, the piano is often given the task of blending the original motive with its variation, as in the strophic transitions in "Two Birds."

For the divergent songs the interdependence of voice and accompaniment presents more a picture of a static relationship than a flexible



continuum. This parallels with the still-life quality of many of the songs.<sup>2</sup> The basic process seems to be as follows: the vocal melody has been established and certain formulas (e.g., ostinato patterns) are chosen to suit that melody. Then the two are combined in a structure which is more of a fixed process rather than a continually unfolding development.

### Mainstream Songs

With the mainstream songs, the ambiguity concerning the relationship between piano and voice has been resolved. Now the attempt to infuse both parts with their separate identities and functions and yet construct a definite relationship between them is almost universally successful. Of course, in some songs the piano and voice are more obviously related than others, but the methods of creating this similarity are more subtle than in the other two groups.

There are several instances of doubling of the vocal melody by the accompaniment. Perhaps the most obvious example of this technique is in "La Fuite de la Lune," yet this occurs mostly in the opening section. This points out the difference between doubling in the mainstream songs and in the songs of the other two groups. Seldom in these songs does it occur in a simple homophonic setting, and usually it happens only briefly. Also, usually the doubling is hidden in the texture, so that it becomes much more complicated than an underpinning of the voice. In "Thy Dark Eyes" the identity of one of the piano's voices with the vocal melody is disguised by the complex texture created by several different lines moving simultaneously (Example 93).

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<sup>2</sup>See "Djakoan," Example 83.

In addition to melodic doubling, there are more subtle kinds of motivic identification between piano and voice. In "Le Réveillon" there is rhythmic doubling, as the lower hand of the accompaniment assumes the vocal meter against a conflicting pattern in the other hand (Example 49).

Shared motives, aside from simultaneity, are important to the mainstream songs. This technique is developed extensively in "Waikiki," in which motives previously stated as accompaniment figures become vocal melodies (see Chapter V). Yet again the recall of earlier motives takes an increased subtlety through transformations and variations.

Although there are no examples in this group of exact identification between piano and voice, there are some songs which occasionally tend toward the opposite extreme--total separation of identities. As early as "The First Snowfall" there is evidence of this tendency. From the very beginning piano and voice follow separate patterns, and Griffes only sparingly attempted to close this gap. Yet somehow in this song the two parts have been interrelated sufficiently to avoid destruction of unity.

In "Phantoms" (Giovannitti) the separation actually creates such a conflict that the voice and piano appear overly independent of each other. This is another factor in this song which contributes to its lack of unity. Yet such extreme independence is the rare exception to the overall concern shown by the composer for the piano and voice to maintain individual characters while sharing some similarities of structure.

While both piano and voice fulfill their individual functions in the mainstream songs, the intensity of that fulfillment is quite different from that of the other two groups. Declamation of the text is still emphasized as an important task of the voice, yet it seldom if ever

becomes the overriding vocal function. An excellent illustration of the word-bearer emphasis is found in the final section of "Impression du Matin" (Example 60). Even here, however, the voice conveys the germ of expression which is to be expanded or fulfilled by the accompaniment. Though approached from highly contrasting angles, this latter function of the voice assumes a crucial stature with the mainstream songs. On the one hand we have the lyricism of the vocal melody in "In a Myrtle Shade" which suggests a delicately sensitive setting, while the angular vocal melody of "Sorrow of Mydath" demands a setting which will complete the gripping desperation it suggests.

Consequently, given the expressive demands of the vocal melodies, the piano in the mainstream songs is especially burdened with the expectation of creating the appropriate enveloping atmosphere. No function of voice or piano is more seriously accepted in any group than the expressive task of the piano in the mainstream songs. This acceptance is not only universal for these accompaniments but is the critical factor in the song's musical incarnation. All elements play significant roles in the creation of these expressive accompaniments, with emphasis again on harmonic techniques. Griffes's accompaniments are typically adventuresome with respect to harmony. The impression is created that the composer assumed quite a wide latitude in seeking the harmonic parallel most appropriate for his melodies. Every song, then, achieves an individual harmonic character, from the haunting Tabb "Phantoms" to the otherworldly approach to atonality of "The Rose of the Night."

Since the rhythmic element of the mainstream songs is developed to such an involved extent, it is obvious that rhythm also plays an important part in the accompaniment's expression. The role of rhythmic

ambiguity, which correlates with the textual conflict in "The Half-Ring Moon," has already been discussed. Likewise the rhythmic complexity of "Sorrow of Mydath" and "The Lament of Ian" help create the impression of despair.

As with the divergent songs, much of the established atmosphere is accomplished through textural effects. In contrast to the transparency of the divergent songs, however, the mainstream songs rely on a complex texture. Since the texts of this group are more psychologically intense and the images more involved, there is also a corresponding intensity of texture. This takes shape usually in a more linearly-conceived, contrapuntal structure.

In these songs the piano's function of disguising structural seams is expanded to include a more general involvement in establishing formal continuity. In many songs the piano leads through contrasting sections by foreshadowing shifts of mood or thematic contrasts, as in "La Mer." But sometimes the structural demand of the accompaniment is the announcement of the next section. In "An Old Song Re-Sung" the piano announces each new strophe with repeated introductory chords (Example 86).

The concept of a continuum of involvement between piano and voice is most consistently explored in the mainstream songs. Whereas the proportion of involvement between voice and accompaniment is fairly stationary in the other two groups, a true flexibility in this proportion is found in the mainstream songs. In the same song the voice may take precedence at one point and, most typically, the accompaniment may overshadow the voice in its fervor at another point. This flexibility of emphasis is due to the highly interdependent nature of the two parts. For the

most part in these songs, the vocal melody is strikingly incomplete without the piano. The piano, on the other hand, derives its direction from the voice, and, though highly developed in its own structure, it lacks coherency and significance without the voice.

In this matter the crux of the differences between the three groups is discovered. For the formative songs, the vocal melody is almost complete in and of itself, unlike the incomplete yet directional melody of the mainstream songs. The piano thus derives meaning and structure from the voice; its essence is restrained and almost subordinated by the voice. This is not to imply that the accompaniments of the formative songs are neither fully developed nor interesting in their own right. Yet even the emphasis on homophonic texture in these songs suggests the leadership of the voice in the textual expression.

A more unusual situation is met in the divergent songs. The emphasis is neither on the specific shape of the melody nor the particular structure of the accompaniment. Rather it is the style undertaken which assumes foremost importance. There is the impression that the vocal melody could take any of several choices of directions, and likewise the accompaniment, so long as these directions remain within the boundaries established by the style chosen by the composer. It appears the particular form of the concrete manifestation of voice and piano is immaterial, so long as the desired style is maintained. Thus, at times one may believe either voice or piano is leading, yet in truth the stylistic demands are in control.

Nothing could be more in contrast to the concept behind the mainstream songs. Stylistic restrictions are at a minimum; only the demands of the immediate text dictate to voice and piano. Thus, not only are the

two parts individual in their character but their manifestation is unique to the circumstances at hand. Both piano and voice combine in a complex interrelationship whose primary impetus is the precise musical rendering of the poetic text.