

Great Esotericists

Cyril Scott (1879–1970)



**Cyril Scott. Portrait by George H. Neale
National Portrait Gallery, London**

Cyril Meir Scott is recognized as a composer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and biographies typically add that he was also a writer and poet. Less well-known is Scott's unique contribution to modern esotericism. He was a Theosophist, commentator on a number of esoteric topics, and exponent of music's potential to provide a medium for the communication of devic and even Hierarchical impressions.

Cyril Scott was born in Oxton, Cheshire, England, on September 27, 1879, the son of Henry and Mary Griffiths Scott. Henry Scott was a scholar of Hebrew and Greek, in addition to managing a shipping company. Mary Scott was a talented amateur pianist, and Cyril showed an aptitude for the piano at an early age. Before he was three "he could pick up any tune or hymn he heard, and could also improvise; though it was not until the age of seven that he began to write things down, having received some instruction in musical notation from his governess."¹

At twelve years of age Cyril Scott spent time with a tutor in Frankfurt, Germany. Four years later he returned to Frankfurt to study at the famed Hoch Konservatorium-Musikakademie.²

The vitality of Scott's piano performances was soon recognized. He also showed promise as a composer, and in the 1890s he joined a circle of composers at the Conservatory. Scott's first symphony was performed, when he was twenty years old, through the good offices of friend and poet Stefan George. Much later Scott dedicated a book of poetry to George.

In 1902, Scott met Evelyn Suart—later Lady Harcourt—who had a formative influence both on his musical career and on his interest in esotericism. Suart, a concert pianist, encouraged him, premiered some of his compositions, and introduced him to Robert Elkin, who was starting the music publishing company that flourishes today as Elkin Music International. Elkin agreed to publish Scott's work, and the firm went on to publish most of his future compositions. More importantly, for our present purposes, Suart was a Christian Scientist, and under her influence Scott wrote several books on alternative healing therapies.

Cyril Scott came into contact with Theosophy in about 1905, and thereafter it colored his whole life and work. In the words of a biographer, it became "the most vital and most absorbing thing in life; embracing all its

activities and inspiring them with a meaning of unfathomable profundity.”³ In 1921, Cyril Scott married Jewish novelist and Theosophist Rose Laure Allatini.⁴ The couple had two children, Vivien and Desmond.

Cyril Scott established his reputation as an esoteric writer with the trilogy: *The Initiate: Some Impressions of a Great Soul* (1920), *The Initiate in the New World* (1927), and *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle* (1932). Early editions were published under the pseudonym “His Pupil,” but later editions named Scott as the author. The trilogy, written in fictionalized style, heavy with dialog, describes students undergoing advanced esoteric training. The first of the three books is dedicated to “That Great Soul Whose Identity is Concealed Under the Name of Justin Moreward Haig,” and Haig features as a mysterious figure throughout the trilogy. Other teachers also come and go in the story. The first and third books are set in England and the second in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Initiate. Some Impressions of a Great Soul begins thus: “The story, if so it can be called, of Justin Moreward Haig is a true one, in so far that such a person does exist, although ... I have been compelled for many reasons to conceal his identity.”⁵ After many adventures, the “Pupil” is instructed to write an epic saga in the following style:

Let the English be quaint, flowing, and as poetical as possible ... for occult truths impress themselves more readily on the reader if they be clothed in melodious language. Also endeavor to decorate the large story by a number of smaller stories, and do not fail to be lavish with simile and parable.⁶

The saga, which occupies a major portion of the book, involves two characters: Antonius, a rich man, and his former mistress Cynara. They are repeatedly tested on their spiritual journey together, and “and in the course of time a son was born to them; and because of the purity of their love and the exaltedness of their souls, they attracted to themselves an entity so lofty that he became a great sage, leaving the world an enrichment in the form of a divine philosophy.”⁷ Sadly the great sage is not named.

In *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle*, a teacher identified as “Sir Thomas” expounds on the future of the arts. Musicians, he declared, “will be inspired by the Devas to bring down combinations of sounds from the Higher Planes to help and to heal.”⁸ In the final chapter the narrator describes two transformative experiences:

From far away I heard the strains of an organ with which was mingled the sound of voices so pure and ethereal as to suggest the chanting of a celestial choir, wafted on a peaceful evening breeze. The music was unlike any music I had heard before; it was subtle, yet melodious, sweet, yet devoid of all sentimental lusciousness; at one moment powerful and awe-awakening, at another soft and tender as the caress of an angel’s hand.⁹

“My brother Koot Hoomi playing on His organ,” Sir Thomas explains; “and the voices you hear are those of the Gandharvas.... Listen well, and remember, for one day you shall give forth such music to the world.”¹⁰

Then, as “a sweet fragrance as of mingled flowers” wafted over the group, Justin Moreward Haig introduces the “Pupil” and one or more fellow students to the Masters Koot Hoomi and Djwhal Khul: “Brothers and Masters,” he said, “into your keeping I give my beloved chelas who have served me well. May they prove worthy of your guidance, your protection and your love.”¹¹ In response,

Master Koot Hoomi stretched out His arms to us in loving welcome, and in His eyes was a look of recognition, as if to say: “Have we not spoken with each other before?” Then His lips moved and I seemed to hear Him say: “Long years ago in Greece when I was Pythagoras, you were both my pupils, and now I welcome you back to me again. You who desire to serve humanity shall be given greater power to serve—you, with your pen, and you”—he turned to Lyall—“with your music.”¹²

The trilogy seems to explore Scott’s dual mission as a writer and a musician. In this last quote the narrator and “Lyall” could be interpreted as Scott’s two personas competing for

expression. Perhaps by “turning” to Lyall, the master was signaling that music should be Scott’s primary focus—though we would say that his biggest contribution was to *write* about music.

The Master Koot Hoomis is known to love music and to be a talented organist. Theosophist Charles Leadbeater described a combined organ–piano in the master’s home. The organ portion has three manuals: great organ, swell and choir.¹³ Leadbeater commented that, “by magnetization,” Koot Hoomi placed the organ

in communication with the Gandharvas, or Devas of music, so that whenever it is played they cooperate, and thus he obtains combinations of sound never to be heard on the physical plane; and there is, too, an effect produced by the organ itself as of an accompaniment of string and wind instruments. The song of the Devas is ever being sung in the world; it is ever sounding in men’s ears.¹⁴

Cyril Scott’s interest in writing about music was already evident in 1928 when he published *The Influence of Music on History and Morals*, with the subtitle “A Vindication of Plato.”¹⁵ Scott acknowledged that the book was inspired by “a High Initiate of Esoteric Science.” Five years later—after completion of the trilogy and Scott’s reported contact with the masters—he realized that his understanding of the topic had developed and wrote a more comprehensive work, incorporating some of the earlier material.

Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages (1933), was Scott’s most significant and influential book. By the time it was published he felt free to identify the “High Initiate of Esoteric Science” as the Master Koot Hoomi and dedicated the book to him. Koot Hoomi, Scott explained, was “my Authority for what was previously set forth and for much added information which follows.”¹⁶ Scott also acknowl-

edged the contribution of his wife, Rose, who provided “much literary assistance.” Even with the new information, he was not satisfied, and a substantially revised edition appeared in 1958.

Scott insisted that music is more than an esthetic medium; it can be a form through which higher impressions can be captured and shared with those with ears to hear. He cited the example of Johannes Brahms, who confessed that he was inspired by a power higher than himself—though Brahms would not allow that confession to be revealed until fifty years after his death.¹⁷ Music can also build character; it even has the power to mold, for good or evil, whole civilizations. For example,

Scott credited the “intellectuality” of the German people in large measure to Johann Sebastian Bach’s “monumental genius” and grasp of mathematics.¹⁸

Much of *Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages* is devoted to biographical notes on famous composers, like Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. Scott commented that César Franck was “the first Deva-exponent,” adding that Franck “was a master of that form of improvisation which Initiates know to be the Devic type.”¹⁹ And “it is just this spontaneity ... which is so evidential of the Deva-inspired, or the Deva-overshadowed man.” Franck’s religious piety brought him ever closer to “those ‘Shining Ones,’” making possible compositions like *The Beatitudes* which Scott held in high regard.²⁰

Scott commented on the work of Claude Debussy and the way it captures the joy—and occasional mischief—of the nature spirits. Significant is “its similitude to the subtle music of Nature, yet only those who possess clairaudience will realize how great that similitude.”²¹ Maurice Ravel, whom Scott and many others compared with Debussy, bridged the gap “between the music of the nature-spirits and that

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of the lesser Devas—those who inhabit the Emotional Plane.”²²

Alexander Scriabin is often cited for the esoteric quality of his work. Writing eight years after Scriabin’s death, Theosophist Dane Rudhyar described him as “prophet of the music of the future, a seer to whose Inner gaze the plans of a great art-synthesis were revealed.”²³ Scott offered a more cautious evaluation:

[I]n contacting the Devas of the higher planes, he [Scriabin] subjected his delicate physical vehicle to such a strain that he laid himself open to the attacks of the Dark Forces. Not being clairvoyant and possessed of the necessary knowledge, he was unable to keep them at bay.... Thus he died at forty years of age with his greatest work unaccomplished.²⁴

Yet Scott agreed that Scriabin’s music has a quality of “exuberance and ecstasy.” Scriabin’s *Prometheus*, in particular, exhibits “the grandeur of mighty Beings, flashing forth Their unimaginable colors and filling the vast expanses with Their song.”²⁵

Cyril Scott lamented that, for various reasons, devic influence on musical compositions had failed, or at least had not achieved its full potential. But now, he said, “certain Masters are specializing in the work of directing the *higher* types of Devas, suggesting to them what lines to adopt and deprecating those which have hitherto proved unfortunate and even disastrous in their results.”²⁶ But the Masters are selective in whom they are prepared to work with. Trustworthy individuals are known by the quality of their causal bodies, and “Only if the Master thinks fit do they bring through into waking consciousness the knowledge of how to invoke the Devas, and then solely for the helping of their fellow men.”²⁷ Presumably such screening applies to others as well as to musicians.

Like many Theosophists, from Helena Blavatsky onward, Scott did not share César Franck’s religious piety. Although he applauded the ministry of Jesus, he criticized institutional Christianity’s response to Jesus’ message. In *The Vision of the Nazarene* (1933), he commented on “the task of the great Founders of

the Christian Faith to save the noble ‘ark’ which They built from shipwreck on the rocks of man’s ineptitude.” And: “a part of Master Jesus’ work has been and still is by means of the written word to counteract those baneful, doctrinal fallacies of the past, thereby seeking to inspire a great spirit of tolerance, not only among the differing sects but also towards other religions.”²⁸ Later the master is quoted as saying:

To my first disciples did I teach the eternal verities, and instructed them in the way of Realization and the finding of the mystic Christ. And I taught them of the true nature of man, and of his subtler bodies and of the inner worlds and of the doctrine of re-birth.... And after I had passed from their midst, my disciples taught others those same doctrines.²⁹

Sadly, he continued: “the enemies of Truth sowed noisome tares which choked those beautiful flowers.”³⁰

Notwithstanding his distaste for the church, Cyril Scott lived in an “ecclesiastical atmosphere” with gothic furniture and stained-glass windows; and he “candidly avows his fondness for the smell of incense, which he is constantly burning.”³¹ Scott’s attitude to sacred music was similarly ambiguous. On the one hand he criticized it—or people’s attitude toward it—as being arrogant.³² On the other, he was a great admirer of Handel, and he composed a few sacred works of his own, including a setting of the Evensong canticles: the *Magnificat* (“My soul doth magnify the Lord”), and *Nunc Dimittis* (“Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace”).³³ The works are rarely performed, however, and no recordings seem to have been made.

Cyril and Rose Scott separated in 1939. By that time he had met Marjorie Hartston who had clairvoyant gifts. Hartston remained his companion until his death at age ninety-one. Although Scott’s musical fame waned over time, Hartston encouraged him to continue composing, which he did until the last weeks of his life.

So often the value of musical compositions is recognized only after composers’ deaths.

Scott's music has enjoyed a revival during the last two decades, and a number of recordings have now been made. His legacy amounts to some 400 works, including two mature symphonies, three operas, three piano concertos, and four oratorios. Scott now is often hailed as the "Father of modern British music."

Cyril Scott shared his Libra sun sign, and its emphasis on beauty and harmony, with Howells, Ives, Liszt, Saint-Saëns, Schütz, Shostakovich, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, and Verdi. He established himself as a professional musician and composer in the late Romantic style. But Scott may be remembered best for his unique insights into the esoteric dimensions of music. He could speak with authority on both sides of the equation, and his writings marked a turning point in our understanding of the efforts of the devas, and even the Masters, to guide, inspire and teach us through the medium of music.

Interaction can be expected to increase when the Fourth Ray comes back into manifestation in 2025. We understand that the Master Serapis, head of the Fourth-Ray ashram, is presently "giving most of His time and attention to the work of the deva, or angel evolution, until their agency helps to make possible the great revelation in the world of music and painting which lies immediately ahead."³⁴ Scott reassured people who might find modern music difficult to listen to: "[M]usic of the near future will tend to become more harmonious than of recent years."³⁵ He was writing sixty years ago, and some of us may be wondering when the "near future" will arrive.

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¹ Eaglefield Hull (ed.), *Cyril Scott: Composer, Poet and Philosopher*, 2/e (London: Kegan Paul, 1916), 12.
² *Ibid.*, 12-14.
³ *Ibid.*, 151.
⁴ Allatini, who wrote under several pseudonyms, attracted considerable controversy for her fictional treatment of subjects like homosexuality.

⁵ Cyril Scott, *The Initiate: Some Impressions of a Great Soul* (London: Routledge, 1920), 5.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.
⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.
⁸ Cyril Scott, *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle* (London: Routledge, 1932), 65.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.
¹¹ *Ibid.*
¹² *Ibid.*
¹³ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925), 25. Leadbeater and many other esotericists spell the master's name "Kuthumi." "Koot Hoomi" is used herein because of Scott's preference.
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.
¹⁵ The book is out of print, and the present author has been unable to locate a copy, reprint or facsimile.
¹⁶ Cyril Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages*, revised edition (Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1958), 31-32.
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59.
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118-119.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-120.
²¹ *Ibid.*, 129.
²² *Ibid.*, 130.
²³ Dane Rudhyar, "Alexander Scriabin—Precursor of the Future Synthetic Art," *Christian Science Monitor* (May 19, 1923). Online: <https://www.khaldea.com/rudhyar/scriabinprecursor.html>. Last accessed Dec. 11, 2018.
²⁴ Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 133.
²⁵ *Ibid.*
²⁶ *Ibid.*, 146. Italics in original.
²⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.
²⁸ Cyril Scott, *The Vision of the Nazarene* (London: Routledge, 1933), xi.
²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.
³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77. "Tares" is a reference to the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13.
³¹ Hull (ed.), *Cyril Scott*, 29.
³² Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 51-52. In particular Scott contrasted Victorian glorification of sacred music with its prudery concerning other types of sensual experience.
³³ Published by Stainer and Bell, London, 1931.
³⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis: 1922), 60.
³⁵ Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 147.