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**Theosophy and modernism**

Abstract

The importance of theosophical influence on early-twentieth century arts is routinely acknowledged. In music, for example, we find traces of its beliefs, ideas, or tales in Skryabin, Schoenberg, Cowell, and Crawford Seeger. But Theosophy was also a hidden force in English music of the early decades of the twentieth century, when it unfolded specific ideological functions. Gustav Holst, John Foulds (together with Maud MacCarthy), and Elisabeth Lutyens were influenced by theosophical thinking at certain points in their careers and used theosophical beliefs and ideas to locate their own artistic identities on a perceived scale between avant-garde and tradition.

By attempting an overview of the path from theosophical source to musical feature in these composers’ biographies and pieces (for example Holst’s *The Planets* and Foulds’s *A World Requiem*), this paper argues that theosophy manifested itself in very different ways: it spelled a boost of confidence and focus for Holst and helped Foulds justify his modernist techniques, but it also represented a stifling religious hierarchy leading Lutyens to Europeanize.