

THE VAGABOND

WARNING: The following analysis is by my esteemed colleague Dennis Foster and is EXTREMELY detailed. You will most likely only need to know a fraction of this information for your exam!

Please note there is also a great interpretation of lyrics by Dennis, available for download from www.blitzbooks.com.au

The Basics

Poem by: *Robert Louis Stevenson*
 Music by: *Ralph Vaughan-Williams*

Song type: *English Art Song*
 Song form: *Modified strophic*

Key signature: *3 flats (C minor)*
 Time signature: *C (common time, 4/4)*

Special features

The structure of R L Stevenson's poem *The Vagabond* is very unusual because Verse 4 is an exact repeat of Verse 2. Vaughan-Williams sets all four verses of the poem but by repeating the music of Verse 2 to the words of Verse 4 he gives the song the overall form AA B A (Ternary).

The composer gives very detailed dynamic and expressive markings throughout the song to indicate how he wants the song sung and the accompaniment played.

Section	Poem	Vocal line	Piano accompaniment	Expression and Dynamics
Stanza 1 (Bars 1-22) C minor (Tonic)	The poem is like a statement of belief in living life as a Vagabond ¹ . All a vagabond needs is nature and a place to go. "There's the life for a man like me."	The vocal line is composed of chord note leaps and scale note steps. The notes of the first phrase, <i>Give to me the life I love, Let the lave go by me</i> , are raised a minor third to create second phrase, <i>Give the jolly heaven above, And the byway nigh me</i> . The triplet figure and arpeggio notes at the words <i>Give to me the life</i> become a motif used throughout the song to recall the Vagabond's free choice of lifestyle. The singer is instructed to sing <i>risoluto</i> (with resolve); the words <i>Bread I dip in the river</i> are marked by the composer as a single phrase; a <i>crescendo</i> to <i>forte</i> for the Eb climax of the stanza is followed by <i>diminuendo</i> to <i>p</i> for the last phrase quietening to <i>pp</i> to the end the verse.	6 bar introduction. Bar 1 introduces the two recurring rhythmic features of the accompaniment, staccato octaves in bass and the Give to me the life motif in RH. In every verse of the song, the staccato octaves moving between two notes, (eg in Verse 1 C-D-C-D (often with a shared middle note, eg C-G-c. D-G-d)), remind us of the Vagabond's plodding feet. The rhythm and arpeggio notes in the RH recall the words at the singer's first entry, <i>Give to me the life I love</i> and remind us that life on the road is the Vagabond's preferred life. The composer gives explicit instructions about how the accompanist should play the piano part, <i>p ma sempre marcato; sempre pesante il basso; colla voce</i> (follow the voice).	<i>Allegro moderato (alla marcia)</i> <i>p ma sempre marcato</i> <i>risoluto</i> <i>f</i> <i>p</i> <i>pp</i>

¹ A *vagabond* can be a homeless person, but vagabonds can also be people who choose to live their life moving around. Vagabonds, like the one in Stevenson's poem, get 'itchy feet' if they stay any place too long. They prefer new places, new people and different ways of life to living by the expectations and rules of partners, family or friends. In the 19th century, a 'vagabond life' was associated closely with Bohemianism – living without the rules of society. Vagabonds have been described as people "with a vagrant strain in the blood, a natural inquisitiveness about the world beyond their doors." Other names for a vagabond are 'tramp' or 'hobo'. Vagabonds are not 'bums', as 'bums' stay in one place.

Section	Poem	Vocal line	Piano accompaniment	Expression and Dynamics
Stanza 2 (Bars 23-43) C minor (Tonic)	Vagabond says that no matter how long his life, or what happens to him, the wealth, hope, love and friends that other people need are not important to him. All he needs is his freedom.	The vocal line of Stanza 2 is the same as Stanza 1, except for minor rhythmic adjustments to match differing syllable stresses of some words, for example: <i>V1 Bed in the bush V2 Wealth I seek not</i> The inferred <i>pp</i> start and the tenuto accents on the Eb notes for words <i>All I</i> at the climax of the verse are the only differences between the vocal lines of Stanzas 1 and 2.	Like the vocal line, the accompaniment of Stanza 2 is the same as Stanza 1.	<i>pp</i> <i>f</i> <i>pp</i> <i>colla voce</i> <i>crescendo</i>
Stanza 3 (Bars 44-61) E minor, (relative minor of G, dominant of C minor) Contrasting section	Stanza 3 tells us that nothing, not even the worst weather and cold of autumn and winter will convince the Vagabond to give up his freedom.	The vocal line changes in Stanza 3. The melody is set in E minor, the relative major of G major, which is the Dominant of C minor (the Tonic key). The melody moves mostly by step compared to the leaps of earlier stanzas. The <i>Give to me the life</i> triplet motif is absent, and the vocal line has a different rhythmic figure: The starting notes of phrases climb higher as the intensity of feeling increases: Phrase 1: E – <i>Or let autumn...</i> Phrase 2: G – <i>Silencing the bird...</i> Phrase 3: Bb – <i>White as meal ...</i> Phrase 4: Doesn't start higher but mid-way takes the melody up to the tonic C and then to Eb, the climax of stanza and song. The longer phrases <i>White as meal the frosty field, Warm the fireside haven,</i> provide lyrical contrast within the stanza between the shorter phrased sections before and after. The singer is instructed to sing the stanza louder, not <i>p</i> or <i>pp</i> , but <i>mf</i> and faster, <i>Animando</i> and stronger <i>robustamente</i> (robustly). In Bar 57 the vocal line is marked <i>f ancora animando</i> (loud, again more animated). This increases the excitement and pushes toward the implied <i>fortissimo</i> for the Eb that is the climax of the stanza and the song. After the climax the singer is directed to slow back to <i>Tempo 1..</i>	Half a bar intro – RH chords; LH the plodding motif in crotchet octaves but they are no longer staccato. His mind moves to a more confident mood. Modulation to the key of E minor, (relative major of G major, the Dominant of C minor), makes a strong and unexpected contrast to C minor. Tenuto accented syncopated chords under the words <i>linger</i> and <i>blue finger</i> add a carefree quality, as if to say, 'No matter what others may say (the syncopated chords), the Vagabond's beliefs about freedom (the long notes) hold firm. The rising quaver figures in the LH (eg Bars 46, 48, 50-51, 54 and 56-57), often <i>staccato</i> , are used to move from one tonality to the next. They also increase the feeling of tension moving towards the climax of the song. The accompaniment passes through many keys in Stanza are some are distant relations and unexpected, eg Bar 43: C minor to Bar 44: E minor Bar 48: E major to Bar 49: G minor Bar 57: C# minor to A minor Bar 59: A minor to C minor. At the climax of the song, which occurs at the end of Stanza 3 at Bar 60, the melody and accompaniment move back to C minor (Tonic). The RH sounds the <i>Give to me the life</i> motif as it was first heard in Bar 1. The LH steps down in <i>staccato</i> unison octaves and returns to the plodding movement between two notes. As if the Vagabond had moved back into his former walking stride, ready for the future.	<i>Animando</i> <i>mf</i> <i>robustamente</i> <i>poco f</i> <i>meno f</i> <i>ff</i>

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Section	Poem	Vocal line	Piano accompaniment	Expression and Dynamics
Stanza 4 (Bars 61-84) C minor (Tonic)	Stanza 4 repeats Stanza 1. The Vagabond restates that no matter how long his life, or what happens to him, wealth, hope, love and friends that other people need are not important to him. All he wants is his freedom.	Other than extending a crotchet to a minim for the word <i>me</i> at Bar 75, the vocal line of Stanza 4 is exactly the same as Stanza 2. The composer, however, changes some expression markings to make Stanza 4 sound different to Stanza 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bar 65, sing Stanza 4 <i>parlante</i> (like speaking) [V2 no marking] • Bar 71, phrase beginning <i>Wealth I ask not, hop nor love</i> is marked <i>sempre pp</i> [V2 no marking] • Bars 73, 74, 75 and first beat an a half of Bar 76 are marked as a single, long phrase [V2 breaks the lines into 2 phrases with a crotchet rest after <i>me</i>] • Bar 75 <i>portamento</i> (sliding from the minim Bb (<i>me</i>) to Eb crotchet (<i>All</i>) • Bar 75 <i>All I ask</i>, marked <i>ff</i> [V2 <i>f</i>] • Bars 78-79, the last phrase marked <i>pp</i> [V2 marked <i>p</i>] 	4 bars of plodding motif introduction. The notes of the accompaniment to Stanza 4 are exactly the same as Stanza 2. There are some changes to the expression markings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bar 65, marked <i>pp ma marcato</i> [V2 no marking] • Bar 71, phrase beginning <i>Wealth I ask not, hop nor love</i> is marked <i>sempre pp</i> [V2 no marking] • Bar 75 <i>All I ask</i>, marked <i>ff</i> [V2 <i>f</i>] • Bar 78 diminuendo to <i>pp</i> then Bar 79 <i>diminuendo</i> further [V2 <i>pp</i>] <p>Bars 81 – 84 form a Coda. RH repeats a C minor chord in semibreves. LH plays the plodding motif (staccato crotchets on each beat) and then only on first and third beats with rests in between, finishing with open 5th C-G.</p> <p>The Vagabond's journey slows to a halt.</p>	<i>parlante</i> <i>Pp ma marcato</i> <i>sempre pp</i> <i>poratamente ff</i> <i>colla voce pp dim.</i>