Benjamin Britten's Early Viola Works with a Pedagogical Analysis Intended for the Advancing Viola Student

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BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S EARLY VIOLA WORKS WITH A PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS
INTENDED FOR THE ADVANCING VIOLA STUDENT

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES .................................................................................................................. vii
- LIST OF EXERCISES .................................................................................................................................. viii
- ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. ix
- 1. INTRODUCTION TO BENJAMIN BRITTEN ......................................................................................... 1
- 2. BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S Reflection For Viola & Piano (1930) ............................................................ 11
  - Fingerings .............................................................................................................................................. 13
  - Shifting .................................................................................................................................................. 14
  - Double Stops ....................................................................................................................................... 16
  - Bowings ............................................................................................................................................... 19
  - Rehearsing with the pianist .................................................................................................................... 20
- 3. BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S Elegy For Solo Viola (1930) ................................................................. 26
  - Tempo ................................................................................................................................................... 27
  - Double Stops ....................................................................................................................................... 30
  - Chromaticism ...................................................................................................................................... 31
  - Dynamics ............................................................................................................................................ 34
  - Shifting ............................................................................................................................................... 35
  - Glissando .............................................................................................................................................. 36
  - Fingerings ........................................................................................................................................... 38
  - Bowings .............................................................................................................................................. 42
- 4. BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S Two Portraits (1930), No. 2 ................................................................. 48
# LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

1. Britten’s Fingerings *Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930)*, bars 5-7 ........................................13
2. Britten’s Fingerings *Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930)*, bars 11-16 ..............................14
4. *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 67-74 ....................................................................................28
5. Britten’s and Author’s Fingerings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 24-28 .........................39
6. Author’s Fingerings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 30-34 .............................................40
7. Author’s Fingerings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 53-54 .............................................41
8. Author’s Fingerings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 67-72 .............................................42
9. Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 4-19 ..................................................43
10. Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 23-28 ..................................................44
11. Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 36-39 ..................................................45
12. Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 57-70 ..................................................46
13. Author’s Fingerings *Two Portraits (1930) No. 2*, bars 1-6 .................................................52
14. Author’s Fingerings *Two Portraits (1930) No. 2*, bars 14-20 ..............................................53
15. Author’s Bowings *Two Portraits (1930) No. 2*, bars 41-54 .................................................54
16. Author’s Bowings *Two Portraits (1930) No. 2*, bars 82-93 .................................................56
17. Author’s Fingerings and Bowings *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, bars 94-103 ...64
LIST OF EXERCISES

1 Shifting to Fifth Position Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bar 13 .........................16
2 Double Stops Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bar 23 ...........................................19
3 Rhythm Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bars 5-8 ..................................................22
4 Quarter note equals 80, Fermatas Added Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 67-69 ..........29
5 Reverse Sixteenth Note Passage Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 70-72 ....................30
6 Condensed Double Stops Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 58-65 ............................31
7 Chromaticism Elegy for Solo Viola (1930) .........................................................................32
8 Chromatic Shift on the First Finger, Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bar 1 .....................33
9 Two-Octave Scale and Dynamics Elegy for Solo Viola (1930) ........................................35
10 Glissando Slide Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 10-12 ..............................................37
11 Fingerings and Increasing Tempo There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook, bar 72 .......63
12 Viola and Piano Rhythm There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook, bars 61-65 ............67
13 Subdivision There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook, bars 52-54 ..............................70
ABSTRACT

Benjamin Britten wrote five pieces for the viola, the most well-known being the *Lachrymae, Op. 48: Reflections on a song of Dowland* written in 1950 for the Scottish violist William Primrose. Britten’s other viola works were composed in 1930-1932 and were written for himself to perform as the violist. They were not published until after his death and have only recently been available for purchase. The intent of this treatise is to help make these lesser-known works more accessible and to help encourage instructors in order to teach these pieces to young advancing violists. For the purpose of this study, advancing violists may be defined as students who generally are in high school or college with well-developed techniques such as vibrato, shifting, *spiccato*, and bow control.

This document includes a short biography of Benjamin Britten along with a pedagogical analysis of the pieces *Reflection for Viola and Piano (1930)*, *Elegy for Viola Solo (1930)*, *Two Portrait (1930)* No. 2, and *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*. The author studied each piece and worked with a pianist to establish proper tempos and fingerings. For rhythmically challenging ensemble passages, the author created original exercises for piano and viola to be played together. The author also has created original exercises for practicing difficult passages and improving techniques such as shifting. Musical examples, with alternate bowing and fingerings, are also included and discussed in this study.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Before the twentieth century, the most well-known English composers were from the Renaissance and Baroque eras, composers such as John Dowland 1563-1626 (Renaissance composer) and Henry Purcell 1659-1695 (Baroque composer). During the end of the nineteenth century, Nationalism was becoming popular in parts of the United Kingdom, including Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Many of the composers of the twentieth century incorporated folk music or folk elements in their works. Several of these composers wrote works for the viola or featured the viola prominently in their symphonic works: Frederick Delius, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge, John Ireland, Arnold Bax, Rebecca Clarke, Peter Warlock, Gordon Jacob, William Walton, and Malcom Arnold. Some of these composers worked with the Scottish violist William Primrose, as did Benjamin Britten. Britten himself was a violist and pianist.

Benjamin Britten grew up in a musical home. His mother Edith Rhoda Hockey was a pianist and a mezzo soprano while his uncles were organists. Robert Britten, his father, married Edith in 1901 and they had four children. Benjamin was the youngest child, born on November 22, 1913, the same day that the Catholic tradition celebrates St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. His siblings were Barbara, born in 1902, Robert, born in 1907, and Beth, born in 1909. Beth with whom he had a close relationship, went on later to write a biography on Benjamin.¹ One of the more interesting facts about Britten is the three names that he went by in his life. His parents named him Edward Benjamin Britten, however, they called him Benjamin. Britten

¹ Britten, Beth, My Brother Benjamin (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kendal Press, 1986), 29
referred to himself as Beni, and his teacher Frank Bridge called him Benji. The family lived in Lowestoft, England, a low-income sea town where fishing was important and sea rescues and shipwrecks were a part of everyday life. The South Pier was a location where military bands, such as the Grenadier Guards, would perform. Britten was taken to these concerts as a young child and to the town concert hall to hear concert pianists. Beth Britten remembered her brother being asked as a child what he would be when he grew up and he answered “a composer,” to which the interviewer replied, “Yes, but what else?”\(^2\) It was never considered by his family that composing was a career that someone could make a living at; composing was considered to be a hobby.

Britten’s first teacher was his mother Edith Rhoda Britten, in part due to the lack of available teachers during World War I. Mothers taught their children at home during the war years as schools were not always in session or regulated. Edith Britten taught her son to read from the book *Reading Without Tears* before starting school. She also taught him to read music, write, and play piano. The family chose to stay in Lowestoft despite the dangers of possible bombings. His mother, Edith, played piano and sang in the home. Live music was a constant part of the household and the only music allowed. According to his sister, Beth Britten, mechanical music, such as music from a radio or gramophone, was not allowed in the house by his father until 1930 when Benjamin was seventeen.\(^3\)

At the age of 7 in 1920, Benjamin Britten went to a dame school. Dame schools were usually convened in the home of the teacher and, by today’s standards, would be considered to be either a private school or more like a daycare for youngsters depending on the role of the

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\(^2\) Britten, Beth. *My Brother Benjamin*, 37
\(^3\) Kildea, Paul. *Benjamin Britten: A Life In the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2013), 31
teachers. Miss Ethel Astle became his first piano teacher after his mother. In 1921 at the age of 8, Britten was sent to the preparatory school South Lodge, which was a local school in Lowestoft. Edith also sent her son to the Hockey family in Ipswich to study music with his Uncle Willie, Edith’s brother, an organist. Britten’s piano skills were advanced enough at the age of seven that he could play duets from Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* with his mother on the piano.

Later that year, Britten began studying the viola with Audrey Alston. A professional violist, Mrs. Alston had a son Benjamin’s age who later became the director of music at Lancing College. She was influential in Britten’s composition career by taking him to various new music concerts such as the Norwich Triennial Festival to hear a new work entitled *The Sea*, composed by Frank Bridge (1879-1941). This piece made a significant impression on the young composer and three years later Audrey Alston introduced Britten to Frank Bridge at the Norwich Triennial Festival in 1927. The two immediately bonded and Britten began studying with him. One interesting quote that stayed with Britten throughout his life was when Bridge told him, “You should find yourself and be true to what you found.” Bridge was a teacher, confidant, supporter, and friend to Britten for the rest of his life.

Bridge arranged for Harold Samuel to teach Britten piano while he taught him composition. Frank Bridge was a violist in the English String Quartet and also performed in other quartets. Britten was his only composition student. They had extensive lessons that Edith would interrupt after several hours, saying that they were too long. During this time Britten himself said,

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5 Powell, Neil, *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music, 7*
“I had started playing the piano and wrote elaborate tone poems usually lasting about twenty seconds, inspired by terrific events in my home life such as the departure of my father for London, the appearance in my life of a new girl friend or even a wreck at sea. My later efforts luckily got away from these emotional inspirations and I begun [sic.] to write sonatas and quartets which were not connected in any direct way with life.”  

In the year of 1929 Britten wrote *Etude* for viola. This work was unknown until recently and has only one recording with Matthew Jones playing viola. This recording was released on a CD titled *Britten: Reflections*, and was recorded by Naxos on November 4th 2013. Sheet music for *Etude* is currently unavailable to the public to purchase. The author has decided to discuss viola works by Britten that are in print and available to the public, however in the future perhaps this work will be accessible and violists can learn it.

After attending South Lodge preparatory school, Britten was sent to Gresham’s School in Holt, Norfolk. This school was not a good fit for Britten, as he was a boarder student and missed his family. He disliked the music instructor and the bullying culture that was prevalent.  

Benjamin Britten’s early education from 1928 to 1930 at Gresham’s School did not initially involve any music study despite winning a musical scholarship of £30 a year. Instead he continued his musical instruction from Frank Bridge in London. In his second year at Gresham, he enrolled in a music theory course and was unfortunately mistreated by his theory professor. Benjamin Britten and his parents decided he should leave school at the age of sixteen and take the school certificate exam rather than a diploma. In July of 1930 he went to London and took the written exam for a scholarship at the Royal College of Music. Fortunately, he won the

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8 Britten, Beth, *My Brother Benjamin*, 56
10 Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 56
scholarship for free tuition, because otherwise he would not have been able to attend. S.P. Waddington, John Ireland, and Ralph Vaughan Williams were on the board of examiners for the Royal College of Music at that time overseeing his application.

At the Royal College of Music, Benjamin Britten studied with Arthur Benjamin and John Ireland. At this time, Britten was still in contact with Bridge as a mentor rather than as a teacher. He played viola and piano at different concerts held at Frank Bridge’s home. Under Arthur Benjamin’s tutelage on piano, Britten grew significantly as a performer. He performed publicly many times as a soloist and an accompanist. Britten also worked on pieces and brought them to Bridge for feedback and occasional coaching. In 1933 the BBC Singers performed his set of choral variations, *A Boy Was Born*, and Britten composed the *Three Suites for Piano*, six string quartets, ten piano sonatas, an oratorio, and dozens of songs.\(^\text{11}\) His musical tastes varied from twentieth-century composers such as Gustav Mahler, Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, and Alban Berg as well as the Classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Romantic composer Franz Schubert. Later in his life, Britten admired the music of English composers Henry Purcell and John Dowland, and even featured their songs in his later works.

While attending classes, he achieved his first public performance of his work *Phantasy Quartet (1932)* on December 12, 1932, at the Ballet Club Theatre, which was later known as the Mercury Theatre. The piece was performed by the International String Quartet and then later at the International Society for Contemporary Music (I.S.C.M.) Festival in Florence. In the same year Britten began to write a double concerto for violin and viola, however he did not complete it. Years later, the composer Colin Matthews, who worked under Britten at the Aldeburgh Festival and is now the music director of the Britten-Pears Foundation, has finished the work.

\(^{11}\) Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 27
In between December of 1933 and February of 1934, Britten went on to write one of his more popular string orchestra pieces, *The Simple Symphony Op.4* for string orchestra or string quartet. Britten revised piano music he had composed during the years 1923-1926 implementing them into newly composed movements. Several of the tuneful pieces Britten wrote between the ages of nine and ten were later used in his *Simple Symphony*. The first performance was in 1934 in Stuart Hall in Norwich. Britten conducted this performance with an amateur orchestra. The *Simple Symphony* is dedicated to Audrey Alston, Britten’s first viola teacher. After these premieres and public successes, Britten was able to gain post-graduation composition employment with the government, writing music for various films for the next five years.

The year 1937 was very eventful for Benjamin Britten; his mother, Edith Britten, passed away, he met the tenor Peter Pears, and he composed and premiered *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. The death of his revered and protective mother liberated Britten professionally. He was then able to meet people that she had previously deemed questionable. At this time, Britten became an adult and therefore became responsible for his own career without any interference or support from his deceased mother, Edith. Britten went on to use his inheritance to buy property known as the Old Mill at Snape in Suffolk County. He used this country house as a getaway to write music throughout his life and also to have Wysten Auden and Aaron Copland visit.

One of the most important people in his life was Peter Pears, whom he met after the death of a mutual friend, Peter Burra. As the two were moving Burra’s belongings to help the family, they became fast friends themselves. Within a year they had become romantically involved and

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continued their relationship together for the rest of their lives. One of the first works Britten wrote for Pears, *A Thousand Gleaming Fires for Tenor and Strings*, featured a setting of the poem of the same name by Emily Brontë. Britten went on to write song cycles such as the *Seven Sonnets of Michangelo* along with tenor opera roles for Pears to perform. Together they formed the English Opera Company, established the Aldeburgh Festival and the Britten-Pears Foundation. The Foundation continues to have grants for local musicians and brings international groups to Aldeburgh to promote and perform English works.

Just as his career was taking off, World War II was beginning in Europe. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears were pacifists and this proved to be a major obstacle in the United Kingdom so the two decided to travel to America in 1939, first to Canada and then to New York. The invitation to visit was prompted by W. H. Auden, a colleague from Britten’s film score work. When Bridge learned that Britten was going to America, he gave him his prized Giussani viola with the following note attached:

“So that a bit of us accompanies you on your adventure.  
We are all ‘revelations’ as you know. Just go on expanding.  
Ever your affectionate  
& devoted  
Ethel & Frank  
Bon voyage et bon retour.”¹⁴

Bridge died in 1941, never seeing Britten (or his viola) again.

In 1948 the Aldeburgh Festival was launched with Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, and Eric Crozier as the directors and founders. This summer festival is still active today, having multiple performances throughout the summer months. Britten had just purchased a house in Aldeburgh that became his primary residence for the rest of his life. Both Britten and Pears had been traveling with the English Opera Group and found Aldeburgh to be an ideal place for a

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¹⁴ Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 149
summer festival. The first year they performed the opera *Albert Herring* and a cantata for tenor, chorus, and orchestra entitled *Saint Nicholas*.\(^{15}\) The festival became a success and attracted performers from all over the world. In 1967 Queen Elizabeth II opened the new theater and attended a concert at the festival. Britten wrote music for the performers that attended the festival such as: *Lachrymae, Reflections on a song of John Dowland* for violist William Primrose; *Nocturne* for guitarist Julian Bream; and *Suites for Cello* for the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Almost every year until his death, a new work by Britten was premiered at the Festival. As a pianist, Britten was known for accompanying many of the major performers at the festival. He accompanied Pears, Kathleen Ferrier, Mstislav Rostropovich, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, along with many others. Britten also performed piano duets with Sviatoslav Richter and chamber music with the Amadeus String Quartet.\(^{16}\) Upon meeting and corresponding with the Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, Britten wrote three cello suites in the style of Bach in 1964, 1967, and 1972.\(^{17}\) The *Lachrymae, Reflection on a song of John Dowland Op. 48* was written for the violist William Primrose who premiered it at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1950. Later in 1976 Britten orchestrated the piano accompaniment for strings.\(^{18}\) In 1963 Britten wrote a similar theme and variations also based on a John Dowland song *Come Heavy Sleep*, the *Nocturnal after John Dowland*, for Julian Bream to premiere at the festival. Britten went on to quote other English composers’ works in his own, such as with his orchestral piece *The Young Persons Guide to the Orchestra* which featured the *Rondeau* from the incidental music to *Abdelazer* by Henry Purcell.

\(^{15}\) Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 295
\(^{16}\) Powell, Neil, *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music*, 420
\(^{17}\) Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 525
\(^{18}\) Palmer, Christopher ed., *The Britten Companion*. (London; Boston: Faber and Faber), 423
In 1952, Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten had the first Committee Meeting of the Aldeburgh Music Club. The meeting was held in the Crag House on April 8. The community club featured artists and amateur local musicians who gathered to play chamber works. To provide a more open and safe environment for the nonprofessional performers, Pears would play piano instead of singing and Britten would play viola in a string quartet instead of playing the piano, straying from their primary instruments.¹⁹ When Britten did play piano, it was with professional musicians.

Britten was known also as an accomplished conductor. Along with conducting his own works, he conducted the first performance outside of Russia of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 14, Op. 135. This was very significant in that the symphony had been dedicated to Britten, written and dedicated in 1969, premiered in 1970.²⁰ Britten conducted at Aldeburgh and abroad with much success. He continued to conduct his own works for recordings and for performances of other great English composers such as Henry Purcell, Edward Elgar, and Gustav Holst.

Benjamin Britten died on December 4, 1976 and was buried in Aldeburgh, and Peter Pears, who died in 1986, is buried next to him. A few months after Britten’s death, on March 10, 1977, a memorial service at Westminster Abbey was given for him and attended by Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother. In 2013 during the 100th anniversary celebration of Benjamin Britten’s birth, the redevelopment of the area known as The Red House site was completed at Aldeburgh. The studio where works such as the War Requiem were composed has been made open to the public. Dame Janet Baker officially opened the Britten-Pears archive in a new building of The Red House. The Britten-Pears Foundation has restored and created temporary exhibitions, and most importantly, an archive is available to scholars online including items such

¹⁹ Britten, Beth, My Brother Benjamin, 193
²⁰ Kildea, Paul, Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century, 213
as rare recordings, notes, and publications. Scholars and the public may see Britten’s
internationally significant collections of music. Visitors can attend performances at the festival and visit The Red House museum.

Today Benjamin Britten’s music is performed regularly. There is even a touring ensemble named the Britten String Quartet. Works such as *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* are performed yearly at children’s concerts; this work and the one-act opera *Noye’s Fludde*, also by Britten, was featured heavily in the 2013 movie *Moonrise Kingdom* directed by Wes Anderson. Britten’s music appeals to younger players such as teenagers, as many of his most popular works, such as the *Simple Symphony*, were written when the composer was young. The *Simple Symphony* includes musical pieces the composer wrote between the ages of ten and twelve. *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* features a theme of Purcell’s that is used in method books for the beginner to intermediate student. Students may not know where the theme is from, however they will be able to remark on its familiarity.

The viola pieces that will be discussed in this paper were written while Britten was a serious viola student, before he was twenty. The appeal of these pieces is undeniable, making them very well-suited for the advancing viola student.
CHAPTER TWO

BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S *REFLECTION FOR VIOLA & PIANO (1930)*

The viola and piano piece titled *Reflection for Viola and Piano* is ideal for instructors to use to introduce twentieth century music to students. Benjamin Britten wrote *Reflection for Viola and Piano* on April 11, 1930, when he was seventeen. The work was submitted later that year along with several other pieces for a composition scholarship at the Royal College of Music. Britten’s original title for the work was *Piece for Viola and Piano*, however, the publishers at Faber changed the title to *Reflection* decades later.\(^{21}\) The new title was selected by the publishers because it was seen to be more marketable than the original title. The publication was prepared from the manuscript copy in the Britten-Pears Library in Aldeburgh. The work was recorded initially by Philip Dukes, viola, and Sophia Rahman, piano in November of 1995 as a part of the BBC Radio 3 retrospective of Britten’s early music. The radio program featured many of Britten’s earlier works and generated interest from the public, encouraging publishers such as Faber to publish these works for the first time. The first concert performance was played by Nobuko Imai, viola, and Ellen Corver, piano, on October 24, 1996, in the *Kleine Zaal* of the *Concertgebouw, Amsterdam*.

The *Reflection’s* tonality features sections and parts that resemble the chromaticism found in the Second Viennese School of composers such as Arnold Schoenberg. Britten was studying piano works by Schoenberg and was also preparing to perform them while composing his own works during 1930-1932. These works were considered atonal in that the pieces do not

have a clear tonal center and one cannot assign a key signature. Atonal composers write passages filled with accidentals featuring leading tones that may or may not lead to an expected key. Though influenced by Schoenberg, Britten writes the piece as if in C major, adding accidentals such as C-sharp, B-flat, and A-flat in one bar. Often younger players have been taught to interpret a key signature and use set finger patterns to play in that key. This works well in classical music prior to the twentieth century and, while there may be accidentals, they are used for modulations or for establishing a secondary dominant. In atonal music, performers must be cautious when playing accidentals so that they play the exact notes on the page and do not continue to play additional accidentals not in the music, mistakenly establishing a key where the composer has not intended. In works such as this piece, it is easy for players that are not familiar with playing and listening to works from this time period to miss new accidentals from bar to bar.

Three days after writing the Reflection, Britten wrote in his diary:

Go in morning, after trying over the Vla piece [Reflection] with Basil [Reeve, a pianist friend] . . . to get my Schonberg [sic] (6 Short Pieces [Op.19]) ordered on Friday. . . .I am getting very fond of Schonberg [sic], especially with study.\textsuperscript{22}

In this chapter the author will discuss various technical aspects of the viola part and considerations for the piano part. The suggestions and information for teaching high school students will be aimed at advancing violists. For the purpose of this study, advancing violists may be defined as students who generally are in high school or college capable of techniques such as vibrato, shifting, spiccato, and well-developed bow control. The technical aspects of the viola part to be discussed will consist of fingerings, bowings, and phrasing.

\textsuperscript{22} Reed and Matthews, p2, from Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930)
Fingerings

Britten’s original viola fingerings have been omitted in the viola part of the Faber publication, however, Faber included them in the piano score. It is worthwhile to transfer them over to the viola part and try them out. The author found that most of the fingerings are useful and solve chromatic fingering issues. Britten uses fingerings that are ideal for younger players that are advancing in their technique. Often intermediate players will slide a finger up a half step such as third finger from C to C-sharp on the G string, creating micro-tones or slides between the notes that are not written by the composer. The fingering technique of using a single finger for a half step (the same finger for different notes) can alert the listener to weaknesses in the performer’s left hand technique. Sliding with an audible glissando is acceptable in popular musical styles, however, in classical music, modern performers are taught to have clean shifts. The original fingerings used by Britten avoid sliding into pitches, solving the sliding problem. In Example One, the author has written in additional fingerings in the 5\textsuperscript{th} bar and at the middle of the 6\textsuperscript{th} bar. The placement of a second finger for the E-natural dotted quarter note in bar 6 is to assist the student with vibrato. Britten’s fingering is in bar 7, C-sharp to C-natural, moving from second to first finger, indicating that he does not want the performer to slide one finger from pitch to neighboring pitch. He uses this fingering again in bar 24. This fingering is efficient for students to play the pitches in tune while not sliding into notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fingering:</th>
<th>Author’s fingering</th>
<th>Britten’s fingering</th>
</tr>
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Example One: Britten’s Fingering Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bars 5-7 ©1930 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.
The majority of fingerings used by Britten are in third position. It can be inferred from the placement of fingerings how important a note was for using *vibrato*. For example in bar 13, Britten has an A-natural, an octave above the A string, marked with a third finger, which would be fifth position (see Example Two). The note is a dotted quarter note with the indication of *cantabile* underneath. *Cantabile* means that a section should be played singingly. Britten’s likely reasoning of indicating a third finger is to enhance *vibrato* in that section, because a fourth finger, normal for third position, would be more difficult for a younger player to vibrate. If a younger player used a fourth finger in fourth position on that pitch, they would most likely play it as a harmonic. This fingering does involve shifting to fifth position which can be intimidating to a younger player.

Fingering: Britten’s fingerings from the piano score

Example Two: Britten’s Fingerings *Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930)*, bars 11-16 ©1930 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

**Shifting**

The author recommends having the student practice a shifting exercise from third to fifth position on the D and the A string. The pitch that the student is shifting to is a natural harmonic
on all of the strings. This will be an advantage, in that the student can quickly check and assess if the played pitch is in tune. On the viola, fifth position involves having the left hand slightly around the shoulder of the instrument. Moving the left hand to the correct position involves rotating the thumb underneath the neck of the instrument and swinging the elbow out from underneath the instrument. To do this properly, a student must be confident in their shoulder rest set up as they will need to hold their instrument in place solely with their head. Most unsuccessful shifting attempts involve the viola not being properly secured, thus resulting in the wrong pitches being played. A teacher should make sure that the student has proper posture holding the instrument with the scroll aimed at the wall, not the floor, and securing a shoulder rest that fits the instrument and is adjusted to the student’s body proportions.

The first thing that should be worked on is moving the hand up the instrument to higher positions with a focus on thumb placement. In third position the thumb will be on the neck of the instrument in the player’s sightline. In fifth position the thumb will be underneath the neck, not visible to the player. The student can practice shifting from both positions until they feel comfortable with the exercise before adding fingerings. In this example, the student will have a first finger on the D string in third position and will then shift up to fifth position dropping a third finger on the A string (see Exercise One). Instructors can have the student practice this part of the exercise starting in third position on the D string with a first finger on a G. The student will then shift to fifth position thus moving the first finger to B-natural. Having the index finger establish the new position will help secure the position of the hand better than any other finger for a young player getting used to shifting to fifth position. Playing the pitches G to B repeatedly at different speeds will help performers with pitch accuracy and maneuvering around the neck of the instrument. Once a student is secure with fifth position on the D string they will need to
practice dropping their third finger onto the A string from that position. Since the pitch they will be playing is A-natural, they can check it with the open string or occasionally as a harmonic to determine accuracy. Students may be intimidated by playing in the higher register, however, daily drills involving exercises, like the one illustrated below, will increase shifting fluency and make the process less taxing.

![Exercise One: Shifting to Fifth Position](reflection_for_viola_and_piano.png)

In several parts of the music, Britten indicates on which string he wants the performer to play the pitches. Generally these markings are so that a player does not shift on a lower string and instead gets the brighter tone on a higher string. An advanced player can play most of these passages on one string shifting between first and fourth position creating a more subdued tone and color. Without the markings of *sul A* and *sul D*, a performer could play higher up on the instrument; however, with those markings added, the performer does not have to shift and the passage will be played on the louder and more intense strings. This is ideal for intermediate to advancing students as their intonation will be more accurate in the lower register of the instrument. Teachers should encourage these markings to be followed and not altered, after explaining the reasons why to the student.

**Double Stops**

The most difficult passage for a younger player is in bar 23. This bar involves playing in fifth position with double stops (see Example Three). Double stops can discourage younger
players from wanting to play advancing pieces as they may think that the piece is unplayable. To avoid this, teachers should be assigning etudes such as *Etudes Especiales Op. 3, Book One* by Jacques Fereol Mazas, *Twenty-Five Studies for Viola* by Antonio Bruni, *Melodious Double Stops* by Josephine Trott, or the *Forty-Two Studies* by Rodolphe Kreutzer. *Reflection* would not be ideal for a student’s initiation into double stops. After studying double stops in a “safe setting” with etudes, then the young performer can play this passage without intimidation.

In Example Three, the fingerings marked are from Benjamin Britten’s original score. He has the performer going into fifth position in bar 22 and there the performer should stay. This way, the hand is already set up for the next bar with the double stops. The fingering involves shifting the hand down within a slur. Britten was performing different piano pieces by Scriabin and Debussy while he was composing this piece. This work has an Impressionist influence on the style. Slides on the viola within slurs would be a musical interpretation that would be acceptable. Therefore, the shift under a slur indicates that the performer should slide the hand down to the next position creating a Romantic style slide with audible *glissando* between the pitches. The sound of the shift should be heard. The fingering indicates playing in fifth position on the D string starting at the end of bar 20 with a second finger on the C-sharp. In bar 21 the markings indicate the F-sharp is to be played on the A string in third position. The violist would then shift on the open A in bar 22 to fifth position for the A and stay there until the second double stop in bar 23. In this bar the violist will shift down to fourth position and then third before the end of the bar. From this point on the player will be able to shift to third positon when the alto clef returns, making it easier to avoid awkward string crossings. The teacher will want to have the fingerings marked clearly in the part for the student with either just the numbers or the numbers with the positions marked below.
In bar 23, the distance of the fourth finger shift at the beginning of the bar is exactly a half-step lower. Students will need to practice this shift by playing one line at a time first. This involves having the student play the lower line with the correct fingering of second finger on a C-natural on the D string in fifth position. The player will then slide their second finger and hand down to fourth position on the B-natural. This motion will need to be practiced successfully multiple times before adding the upper line. The fourth finger on the A string playing B-flat will then be played in fifth position. The student will slide this finger down a half step to A-natural in fourth position (see Exercise Two). After completing this part successfully multiple times, the student can then add both the fourth finger and second finger on to the strings. This part of the exercise involves the student playing the bow on only one string at a time while fingering both strings. The point of this is that the student is practicing coordination of the two fingers in the shift while only hearing it played correctly by isolating one pitch. The student can start with playing the C-natural to B-natural shift on the second finger on the D string while the fourth finger is on the A string moving from B-flat to A-natural. After playing this several times, the student will switch strings and bow the A string, hearing the fourth finger shift
while still fingering on the D string. When the student is successful on both parts of this exercise then they can play this passage as written. This is an exercise that can be played daily and used as a model for other passages for other pieces.

Exercise Two: Double Stops Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bar 23

**Bowings**

The bowings marked in the piece are Britten’s bowings and not markings of the editor. He writes tenuto markings, accents, and slurs throughout the piece in different sections. The beginning is marked *Andante ma con moto*, meaning a medium speed but with motion. Britten has all of the single eighth notes marked tenuto. Discussing what this means with the student would be ideal for creating a dialogue later about the phrasing. Bow division for the longer slurs that come up in the *Tempo primo* section will have to be addressed. The marked bowings match the changing sections of the piece and it is not recommended that the performer change them.

The piece has six different sections marked *Andante ma con moto, a tempo di piu animato, Tempo primo, allargando, a tempo, and Tempo primo ma poco piu lento*. The first
section has a theme that comes back slightly altered in the *Tempo primo* and the *allargando* sections. Britten writes *dolcissimo* and later in the work *molto dolce* and *dolcissimo sempre*. *Dolcissimo* is a direction for the performer to play sweetly and *molto dolce* means to play very much in a sweet or soft tone. The *dolcissimo sempre* indicates always play in a sweet tone. Britten uses these indications around passages he marked *piano* and *pianissimo*. The bowing that he uses makes this possible. Younger students tend to break bowings and generally concentrate more on their left hand if not given specific instruction. Teachers can direct students to play these bowings on open strings so that they can practice attaining a sweet tone. Students can play bars 18 through 21 on open strings allowing them to focus entirely on the right hand. They can add in the pitches once the bowing is planned out and comfortable.

**Rehearsing with the Pianist**

It is important to use the piano part when teaching and rehearsing this piece with an advancing student. Often in less advanced pieces, the piano part is more accompanimental and does not require much rehearsing. In this work the piano part is involved as part of the melody and provides much of the rhythmic texture that contrasts with the *dolcissimo* section in the viola part. The author recommends having the student and teacher play off of the score during lessons before working with a pianist. The student will be able to see what is going on in the piano part during the rests in the viola part, and along with counting her rests and proper rhythms, will have a better idea about how it all fits together. The instructor can play one line from the piano part or switch back and forth, thus helping the student to focus on the interaction of the viola and piano.

The piano part was originally played with Britten on viola and Basil Reeve on piano. Britten was a talented pianist, however he chose to play the viola part when rehearsing with his friend Reeve, who was a pianist. The two parts have alternating duplets and triplets within the
same bars, exchanging the rhythm back and forth. A younger player will be tempted to follow the pianist and as a result not count their part properly. Working from the score allows the young player to see what is written to improve the ensemble with the pianist. The first part of the next exercise omits notes from the viola part and indicates rests on beats two and three where the piano part has the dotted eighth note triplets (See Exercise Three). This way, the player will be listening to the piano part without having to fit in all of the notes. After hearing what is played on beats two and three, the second part of the exercise is for the violist to only play on the second and third beat while resting on the first and fourth beats. This way, the player will more likely play the dotted quarter notes the correct length, while before they would have had the tendency to guess and cut the note short.

The third section of the exercise is where the viola part has been restored. For this exercise, the author found it useful for the viola part to be written below the piano part. This allows the performer to be able to look up at the piano part while playing instead of looking down. In the author’s experience, teenagers reading from a score while playing is problematic, in that the player is unable to look down at the piano part and continue to play from the viola part. The author decided to write the exercises so that the viola player could look up at the piano part during the rests and be able to stay on their viola line. Eventually the student will be able to play from the score in the correct order of the viola being on the top line and the piano part being below, however, when playing an exercise where the music is altered, this setup with the viola part on the bottom works best. When playing the exercise the student should repeat each section as many times as necessary, to be able to play the section accurately before moving on to the next section. A good rule to follow when playing any exercise is to strive to play it five times in a row correctly before moving on. If one of the repetitions is played incorrectly then the student
will start over with their count. Instead of playing a section several times wrong then one time right and moving on, this guarantees that the student will be steadily improving with more accuracy.

Exercise Three: Rhythm Reflection for Viola & Piano (1930), bars 5-8
Exercise Three: (continued)

Another element that a teacher must make clear is the meter of the piece. 5/4 is an uncommon meter to many advancing students and while the student should not have any problem playing their moving rhythm, the rests could be a struggle. The instructor and the student can number the beats in bars where there are more than two or more beats of rests and on long tied notes. The section marked *a tempo di piu animato* begins with the melody in the piano
while the viola rests. In bar 11, the viola has two slurred eighth notes with an accent marked *pianissimo*. When rehearsing with the pianist, the viola student will need to follow the piano part in order to enter correctly. The passage is difficult to play with the three-against-two hemiola that Britten wrote if the student is unaware of the rhythm of both parts. The author recommends practicing with a metronome during the rehearsals with the pianist and pausing between sections to reset the metronome to different tempos. Often when a younger player performs a piece, the accompanist will follow the student, making adjustments by adding or dropping beats if needed; but this practice should be avoided here. Students should be held accountable for mastering the rhythm with the teacher before working with the pianist. Assigning specific metronome markings to each section will help the student avoid having only two speeds, slow and fast, and will help facilitate rehearsals in that there is an established tempo to maintain. Often younger performers will start to match all of their tempos in a work without being aware of it.

Metronome markings suggested by the author for the different sections are as follows:

- **Andante ma con moto**
  - quarter note= 63

- **a tempo di più animato**
  - quarter note= 100

- **Tempo primo**
  - quarter note= 63

- **Allargando**
  - quarter note= 50

- **a tempo**
  - quarter note= 63

- **Tempo primo ma poco più lento**
  - quarter note= 60

In *Reflection*, there is one issue for which the pianists need to be aware. The piano part has markings that the viola part does not have, such as in bar 10, where *il basso cantabile e marcato* is marked in the left-hand part. This line is similar to the *dolcissimo* section of the viola part in the *Andante ma con moto*. The pianist is encouraged to play this section with
attention to the moving eighth notes and bring out the rising eighth notes. The style of the piece can be revealed from looking at other pieces Britten was playing in his piano lessons. He had been studying Impressionist composers such as Debussy and contemporary composers such as Schoenberg. The pianist can emulate the Impressionist composers in the top part. The right hand has triplet figures above this and sounds similar to Claude Debussy and Alexander Scriabin’s piano works. A watery, thin, and faint sound should be the overall effect during the softer sections. Britten played these composers’ works on piano and studied them with Frank Bridge. The piano part is possibly an homage to these composers that he admired.

The *Reflection for Viola and Piano* is ideal for advancing players to perform as it involves technical and musical challenges that are appropriate for their level. This would be an appropriate work to assign for a studio recital. While studying this work and others like it, the author suggests that the instructor strongly encourage the student to listen to recordings of early twentieth century music such as English folk music by Vaughan Williams, Holst string orchestra pieces, and Bridge’s chamber pieces.
Benjamin Britten may have composed *Elegy* as a reflection on his feelings about leaving school. The piece was written the day after Britten left boarding school on August 1, 1930. As stated in Chapter One, Britten was attending Gresham’s School in Holt, Norfolk, as a boarding student. He suffered from the bullying that was common among the students and faculty, including one of his own music teachers, an instructor who treated Britten harshly and ridiculed his music. In a letter to his mother, Britten stated that the music master had told Britten he had a ‘flimsy technik’ and that it ‘would be no good whatsoever for me to go into the musical profession. Music in this school is now finished for me!’.

The Britten family approved of the decision to take the school certificate exam and leave school early rather than to endure the abuse. Britten wrote about this work in his diary stating, “I didn’t think I should be so sorry to leave.” Leaving school also meant that he had to leave his friends behind.

Britten left the piece untitled and the title of *Elegy* was named by the editors at Faber in 1985, fifty-four years after Britten composed the work. The published work contains Britten’s fingerings that he used himself. Along with many of his other early works, the first publication, recording, and performance of *Elegy* occurred decades after it was composed. The first performance was given on June 22, 1984, at The Maltings, Snape. The performer was the violist Nobuko Imai.

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23 Kildea, Paul, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 47
25 Matthews, Colin, ed., *Elegy for Solo Viola*, 2
To teach this piece to a young viola student, there are several main topics for a viola teacher to introduce: tempo, double stops, chromatic passages, dynamics, reading treble clef, shifting, *glissandos*, fingerings, and bowings. Each of these topics will be discussed with the challenges and solutions for this particular piece with examples and practice exercises covering each of these aspects.

**Tempo**

When a student begins a piece, one of the first things they learn is the tempo, asking, “Is this a slow song or a fast piece?” *Elegy* is marked *Poco Lento* at the beginning and the ideal metronome marking would be between forty to sixty beats per quarter note. Forty may initially seem slow, however on the second page, at bars 67-72, the student may have difficulty performing the rising sixteenth notes that approach the top of the viola’s register. This challenging passage begins on the G string in first position and finishes on a harmonic A-natural two octaves above the A string. Younger players usually want to take a faster tempo and lack the technique to handle maintaining a steady beat through harder passages, so beginning with a slower tempo is necessary. To avoid a potential conflict between the teacher and the student about selecting a proper performance tempo, a compromise can be made of having the student start with a slower tempo with an incentive for the student to work on their shifting and tone production in the top part of the register.

Once a student can maintain a consistent and steady tempo throughout the entire piece, they should increase the speed. One of the ways a teacher can help the student accomplish this is by targeting the fastest notes. In this piece, it is the sixteenth note passage from bars 67-72 (see Example Four).
The student will play the sixteenth notes in groups of four sixteenth notes per quarter note. The student will then play the groups of four notes in tempo, at quarter note equals sixty. After playing one beat of sixteenth notes, the student should pause and prepare their left hand for the next group of four notes. The student determines the length of the pause and when ready, plays the next group of four sixteenth notes. Exercise Four shows how to play and pause throughout the whole passage. This exercise is to help the student play at the faster tempo immediately, by playing the notes in small groups of four notes, and not continuously. After playing the exercise as written successfully, the student can alter where the pause or fermata is. The student could play two beats of sixteenth notes in tempo and then pause with a fermata and do this throughout the exercise. After being able to do that, then the student could play three beats of sixteenth notes in tempo and then pause with a fermata. The student could keep adding beats until they are able to play all eight beats in tempo without a fermata, this would be an ideal goal to assign a student.
Exercise Four: Quarter note equals 80, *Fermatas Added Elegy for Solo Viola* (1930), bars 67-69

There is another exercise the teacher can assign to prepare for bars 67-68 and 70-71. The student starts with the fourth beat of sixteenth notes in bar 68 and plays them in tempo. If the student is successful, they would then begin on the third beat of the same measure and play through beat four. Working backwards in this same way, the student will continue to add the previous beat of sixteenth notes, all the while playing them in tempo (see Exercise Five). This exercise is ideal for short passagework. Rather than have the students work from the beginning of the challenge and derailing in the middle, this teaches them how the ending of the passage goes so they can continue successfully throughout the passage. The author would not recommend this type of exercise if the passage had accidentals being added on each bar without discussing the chords that were being used. The exercise can be used as a warmup before playing through the section at different speeds. Students could play the first bar over and over before attempting the second bar with additional notes. There is no reason to speed through the exercise, instead the goal should be for the student to play small sections up to tempo successfully.
Exercise Five: Reverse Sixteenth-note passage, *Elegy for Solo Viola* (1930), bars 70-72

**Double Stops**

Tempo is also a concern regarding the quarter note double stops in bars 58-65. Double stops are a challenge, in that a player must read them vertically. Unlike pianists, string players read their music horizontally and have difficulty when immediately switching to reading vertically. One way to approach this problem with a student, can be to play double stops without any single notes in the measure. The teacher would assign bars 58-65 and first have the student write in the fingerings of the double stops. Bar 58 is difficult in that there is an A-sharp and a C-sharp double stop. In bar 62, Britten writes the same pitches but spells them as a B-flat and a D-flat. Teachers may want to assign the same fingering for both and explain why they use the same fingering for the student.
After the student can play all of the double stops in tune with correct fingerings, the teacher should assign Exercise Six. In this exercise, the student plays all of the double stops in a row going forward and backward in the progression. This will aid in developing the vertical reading skills and assist with developing the student’s musical ear for intonation of double stops along with finger memory. When the student can play this exercise at different tempos, then the teacher can assign bars 58-65 as written.

Exercise Six: Condensed Double Stops *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 58-65

**Chromaticism**

One aspect of teaching this music is to help the student with chromaticism and accidentals. There is no key signature marked and a younger player may assume that the assigned key is C major or A minor. This would mean that they would be assigning fingerings to each string in the key of C, which would make the work difficult to learn as it is not in any one key or mode. In the opening bars, almost every pitch is altered, starting with a D-flat slurred to a D-natural, B-flat to B-natural, and an F-sharp followed by F-natural. This type of chromatic writing at a slow tempo will need to be taught with attention on how to slide a finger in a slur without hearing an audible *glissando*. One recommendation for a teacher is to have the student practice one octave chromatic scales that start on the open strings. The student would play for example Exercise Seven on the C string, open string C-natural, D-flat, D-natural, E-flat, E, F, G-flat and G-natural. Then the student could play the same scale again, this time thinking about
sharps. Students can practice this on each string. This will allow the student to be aware of which pitches are the same.

Exercise Seven: Chromaticism *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*

Instructors should also assign students to use a metronome when practicing scales with chromaticism. First a student will place the metronome on a speed between 40 and 50 beats per beat. The instructor can have them pick the string such as the A string. The student would then play B-flat and B-natural using the first finger with separate bows. The goal is to hide the sound of the finger moving to the different location. Once the student can play those two pitches without hearing the motion of the finger, they will slur the two pitches. The bow speed in the
slur can be altered to hide the sound of the motion. The student must experiment with different bow speeds and strokes to accomplish this (see Exercise Eight).

Exercise Eight: Chromatic Shift on the First Finger, *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bar 1

One of the interesting parts of the piece is how Britten notates consecutive pitches respelled enharmonically such as having a D-flat followed by a C-sharp in bar 19. It is possible that students will have previously encountered enharmonics in their orchestral playing, however this may be the first time they see it in their solo repertoire. A student could play the passage incorrectly, by using different fingers for the same pitch in different locations on the fingerboard by not realizing that these are the same pitches. The author recommends a fingering of a high second finger for both notes and writing in the part C-sharp over the D-flat. Most players can locate a C-sharp on the A string without much effort, but a D-flat fingering of a low third finger will most likely result in a pitch that isn’t low enough.
Dynamics

Britten marked wide-ranging dynamics from ppp to ffff. The editors at Faber added in some decrescendos and crescendos that are marked in brackets to indicate what Britten did and did not write so the performer can choose to do them or not. Students should be encouraged to practice either both way, playing all of the dynamics or omit the bracketed dynamics. The editors usually place the additional dynamics at the end of a phrase right before a dynamic marked by Britten. This results in having all of the dynamic changes prepared by a crescendo if a forte is written or a decrescendo if a piano is written in contrast to the indications of the subito dynamic changes written by Britten. Letting the student choose will give them a creative task that will be appropriate for developing their musicality. The instructor will want to discuss tone production when creating the difference of dynamics. Assigning two-octave scales with crescendos and decrescendos (see Exercise Nine) is an exercise to have the student focus on the dynamics. Two-octave scales will allow the student to play on all four strings in first position. A three-octave scale would unnecessarily involve a student shifting into higher positions on the instrument that may not be as secure for the student as first position; this may result in the student focusing more on their left hand when the emphasis of playing the scale with dynamics needs to be on the right hand. Often when practicing scales students either add decrescendo or crescendo to their notes based on their bowing. Down bows start forte and become softer while up bows start piano and begin to swell to fortissimo. Adding dynamics is not hard to do for the advancing student; adding dynamics in a purposeful and thoughtful way mapped out is. Teachers can assign this exercise for other works besides the Britten pieces. Students can also use this exercise to focus on tone production.
Shifting

Viola students attempting the *Elegy* will need to be able to read treble clef and be able to shift beyond fifth position. These techniques can be enhanced by different exercises the teacher can give the student. For reading treble clef, the advancing student is strongly encouraged to write in the letter names for any pitches they do not immediately recognize. This will cut down the amount of wrong notes the student might needlessly drill. Key bars where this would be helpful would be in 68 and 71. Britten has the viola playing these bars with pitches from A5 to A6. These notes are not generally played in high school level repertoire and are played only rarely by the undergraduate student. Having the student play these two bars an octave or two octaves below the printed pitch by using their own written pitches will help with reading and
intonation. The instructor will want the student to play these bars slowly down an octave to develop the ear of the performer. When attempting to play the notes as written, this ear training will enable the student to have more of a chance to improve their reading instead of just following the fingering mindlessly.

Correct intonation for shifting can be difficult for all violists, not just students. Several large shifts in the *Elegy* can be intimidating to students because of their distance and for the challenge of the interval. One exercise that is helpful for playing a large shift accurately is to slowly slide up the fingerboard on the finger to be used on the next note. By sliding up slowly the student is less likely to miss the pitch as they can hear and adjust as they approach the note. Younger players who shift quickly and do not know where the note is are just hoping to get to the right place, instead of measuring distance. This slide is not a correct way to perform the shift, rather it is a way to teach the hand placement. Once the student is successful in this type of shifting then the teacher can have them disguise the shift. This involves changing the speed of the arm and hand. Immediately, without hesitation, the student shifts to the given pitch while timing the bow speed so that the listener does not hear all of the notes between. This should not be attempted until the student can successfully find the pitch without adjustment.

**Glissando**

Britten does have some shifts written in with a *glissando* such as in bar 38. The student is on the C string on a C-natural two octaves above the open string and the *glissando* goes down to a D-flat. The *glissando* must be slow because it is on a half note, which at the performance tempo of 40 beats per minute equals the quarter note, is very slow. Benjamin Britten uses
glissandi throughout the piece. A glissando is “a glide from one note to the next.” Some of these glissandi involve sliding on one finger and then ending on another finger such as in bar 12 (see Exercise Ten). In this bar the viola part has a third finger on a G-natural on the D string with the glissando going down to an A-flat on the G string first finger. This type of technique involves dropping the new finger in time so that the tempo of the piece is not altered. Viola students can practice this by playing the glissando without the bow, shifting the finger from the first note to the next, and leaving the finger down on the string. This way the student’s focus will be entirely on the left hand. After practicing the slide descending with the additional finger lifting in time, a metronome should be added. Students should practice not only by playing at the designated tempos but also at additional tempos that are faster and slower. Some of the glissandi are written all in one beat while others are written over two beats. Two beats means that the speed of the glissando needs to be slower. Practicing the timing with the metronome will allow the student to be in control and more confident. A suggested metronome marking to begin with would be 50 beats per minute.

Exercise Ten: Glissando Slide Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 10-12

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26 Ammer, Christine. The A to Z of Foreign Musical Terms (Boston: Massachusetts, 1989), 47
Fingerings

In general there are only a few fingerings by Britten marked in the *Elegy*. However, Britten has marked specific passages *sul* D string and *sul* G string. Teachers can encourage younger students to learn these passages in first position to hear them in tune. Once they can successfully execute the passage in first position, then they can play with the marked fingering. Alternating between these fingerings will develop the student’s ear to hear the pitches and will help hone the accuracy of their shifting. Instructors may be tempted to simplify these fingerings and play everything down in first position, however, the author’s experience with younger students is that they enjoy playing up high on lower strings as they can appreciate the difference in tonal color. In addition, the fingerings are Benjamin Britten’s; he wrote them down and played them. These fingerings are convenient and are logical. The tone and texture of the piece is altered when played with these fingerings; they are used in sections marked *piano*, such as in bar 24, to help maintain a darker sound rather than the bright timbre in first position on the A string. In bar 55 the performer plays a *fortissimo* figure, slowly descending from either fourth or fifth position using *sul* G which brings intensity to the piece. Playing it in first position on the D string dulls the forceful effect that Britten wanted to create. These sections are a great way to help students maneuver around the fingerboard and understand tone colors and other aspects of sound specific to the viola.

The author recommends additional fingerings to help younger players with intonation and playing the correct pitches. The fingering shown in Example Five, for bar 2, will help the student play in tune and learn the correct distances between pitches. In the second bar the fingering will help the student, playing each pitch with a different finger, to avoid sliding into each pitch, and to avoid negatively affecting intonation. There are appropriate places where
students can use slides in their fingerings that are more suitable. In bars 16 and 17 the use of third position by the performer can help maintain the *mezzo forte* by playing on the lower strings. The second and third fingers can slide as they are moving a half step, and the *vibrato* will be able to continue somewhat seamlessly.

One of the only of Britten’s original fingerings that the author finds disagreeable is in bar 24. Britten has written *sul D* and has a second finger marked for the C-sharp that is an octave above middle C. This would require the player to be in fifth position and, after playing a few notes, to shift down and then back up again somewhat abruptly. Shifting up and down for younger players can create instability with pitch and the location of their hand in a higher position. Alternatively the author recommends playing the *sul D* section in third and fourth positions. Starting the player in third position and then shifting towards fourth position will help the player maintain the momentum of the phrase without any pauses or hesitations. In Example Five, bars 24-28, the shift starts from third position and goes to fourth position.

Example Five: Britten’s and Author’s Fingering *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 24-28 ©1930, 1985 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

In Example Six, bars 30-34 there are no fingerings marked, however, it is implied that the performer would use a first and fourth finger as the notes are an octave apart. The author recommends the following solution as practice for this section. The octaves in this passage start
on the open C string which is slurred to middle C. To practice these three sets of octaves played
with first and fourth finger, the student can play them as double stops to check for tuning, and
learn how far the spaces are in first, third, and sixth position. In bar 32 the author recommends
that the player stay in position rather than shifting down. Shifting in half steps and using
different fingers for the notes in the slur will help the student play the correct pitch without
becoming flat. The sequence of downward shifts occurs between the slurs, thus hiding the
movement of the shift.

Example Six: Author’s Fingerings Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 30-3 ©1930, 1985 by Faber
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reserved.

In bars 51-54 the author recommends a fingering of 1-2 for this ascending line (see
Example Seven). The student will play first finger and then second finger for B-flat to B-natural,
D-natural to E-flat, G-natural to G-sharp, and then A-natural to B-natural. This makes the
fingering successful in that the student is more likely to play in tune and play the correct pitches
for the treble clef section. The last note, D-natural, will be played by a fourth finger. The
student will be able to shift in time with the 1-2 fingering and will play through four different
positions in five beats. Students may not see the treble clef in bar 54 and play the first note as an
A-natural instead of G-natural as if the bar was still in alto clef. The author recommends that if a
student makes these types of mistakes the teacher marks the clef changes with a highlighter
where needed.
In bar 67-72 the fingerings will feature patterns that the student can employ while gradually shifting. The player will want to start in first position and shift to fourth position on the fourth beat of bar 67. The fingering on this beat (1-2-3-1) will have a half step on the B-natural to C-natural (see Example Eight). The first finger will lock down on the A-natural securing the hand in fourth position. The student will then be placed well for the treble clef in bar 68. The student will use the finger pattern (3-1-3-4), on each beat of this bar while shifting the hand up one half step at a time. The student will then slide the fourth finger on the last note of the bar, the B-natural, towards the E-natural harmonic in bar 69. The second beat of this bar will be in first position. In bar 70 the first beat will be in fourth position played with a fourth finger, while the second beat will be in first position with an open A string. The second beat will have a shift in the slur as the player can take advantage of the open A and shift to second position for the C-sharp. The fourth beat will be in fourth position with a (1-2-3-1) pattern. In bar 71 the student will use the finger pattern (2-1-2-1) first in sixth position on the A-flat and G-natural. The second beat will have the same pattern with the player shifting the hand up a half step for the A-natural and the G-sharp. The third and fourth beats use the finger pattern (2-1-4-3) starting in sixth position and going to ninth position. Even though these notes may seem high for an advancing student, the fingering patterns make these shifts easy to implement. Practicing the earlier recommended exercises will help younger players not to be intimidated by higher notes.
Example Eight: Author’s Fingerings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 67-72 ©1930, 1985 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

**Bowings**

The bowings that Britten has marked generally work well for the advancing player. Many of Britten’s original bowings work well, however the author found that passages starting in *piano* or *pianissimo* needed to start up bow or have a slur to be broken to accomplish the dynamic marked. There are a few changes that the author has made when either the bowing was unclear or potentially awkward. The piece will be begin with a down bow. The first bowing that had been altered is in bar 4 (see Example Nine). In this bar the player will be at the tip of the bow and have an up bow on the D-flat. The player will then break the slur on the C-sharp with a up bow on the D-natural. In bar 8 the *pianissimo* section should start down bow followed by two more down bows on the D-flats. This will help the player get the bow to the upper half and eventually the tip while maintaining the *pianissimo* and prepare for the slurs in the next bar. In bar 12 the glissando will take place on an up bow which will result in both hands moving in the
same direction to the left of the body. Having the hands coordinated in the same movement is
easier for an advancing player to accomplish. The next bowing change that was made is in bars
12-14. The author recommends starting the A-flat on the *pianissimo* in bar 12 down bow, and
break the slur in bar 13 by having the D-natural go up bow and the E-flat go down bow. The
player should break the slur also in bar 14. Bar 16 should start down bow and bar 19 should
begin up bow.

Example Nine: Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)*, bars 4-19 ©1930, 1985 by Faber
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reserved.

Bar 23, which is similar to bar 9, is also recommended to start down bow followed by
two down bows (see Example Ten). This will help maintain the *piano* and place the bow at the
tip for bar 24. The fourth beat of bar 27 should start up bow as it is an upbeat and this will feel
natural for most performers. The student will be near the tip of the bow however they should be
able to begin the note with the *forte* dynamic and then break the slur in bar 28. The author found
the slur in bar 28 difficult to play in trying to play a crescendo in a forte dynamic over three beats in a tempo marked Poco Lento. Breaking the slur allows for more dynamic contrast.

Example Ten: Author’s Bowings Elegy for Solo Viola (1930), bars 23-28 ©1930, 1985 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

The bowing in bars 36-39 may feel awkward to an advancing player (see Example Eleven). The author found that by starting down bow on the G-flats in bar 36 it was easier to maintain the pianissimo, even though the next bar would have to start up bow. Normally for younger players a series of eighth notes would be played with down bows on the down beat. By changing this to an up bow on the down beats the music will avoid having the beats emphasized and the student will get to do the glissando in bar 38 on an up bow as in Example Nine. This coordination of the two hands, the left sliding down towards the scroll of the instrument and the bow heading towards the performer’s left shoulder, will be easy to coordinate and create a unique effect in the tone of the piece. The molto dolce indicates a very light touch on the bow on the G-naturals hooked together. The student can reset their bow on the quarter note rest and place it at the middle of the stick. This will allow the student to stay in the upper half,
From bar 48 on the author recommends starting with an up bow on pickups in general. Britten does not have up and down bows marked; however, based on the slurs, bowing “as it comes” works out best for the rest of the piece with a few exceptions. Starting with the pickup to bar 55 the passage is marked *fortissimo* and the player will want to play this pickup with a down bow by taking a “retake” after the D-natural on beat three (the performer will lift the bow off of the string and place it back on in the lower half of the bow). The bowing should be changed in bars 57-58 (see Example Twelve). The slurs that Britten wrote make it difficult for an advancing player to maintain the *fortissimo* without breaking some of the slurs. By breaking the slur in bar 58 the student can have down bows on the strong beats of the bar. This will help with making the bow strokes less awkward. The author recommends for players to break the slur on the fourth beat and go down bow on the E-natural in bar 57. In the next bar the second beat on G-natural would be an up bow and the third beat would be a down bow. Beginning in bar 60 the player will not break the slurs and will instead use whole bows with additional pressure. It is recommended that bar 60 start with a down bow. Bar 64 can also start down bow followed by two hooked up bows allowing the chord in 65 to start down bow with a full bow stroke. The last two eighth notes on beat four of this bar will also be hooked into two up bows. The last bowing change is in bar 69. The author found the slurs over the string crossings difficult to play.
smoothly and recommends changing the last beat to an up bow. The last section of the piece is marked *pianissimo* to *pianississimo* and *con sordino*. The bowings are easy to play and help maintain the dynamics well. From bar 73 to the end of the *Elegy* the bowings can be played as Britten wrote them.

Example Twelve: Author’s Bowings *Elegy for Solo Viola* (1930), bars 57-70 ©1930, 1985 by Faber Music Ltd, London WC1B 3DA Reproduced by permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

Teaching the *Elegy* to younger players can be successful when an instructor focuses on separating the topics of tempo, double stops, chromaticism, dynamics, reading treble clef, shifting, *glissandos*, fingerings, and bowings. There are several solutions for these challenges that will assist a performer in mastering this work. Teachers should try them out and use them
when appropriate. Adolescent students may appreciate learning the history of this piece while learning the music. The idea that Britten was able to express himself in a positive way over a distressing time in his life, when leaving school abruptly, might appeal to younger players.
CHAPTER FOUR

BENJAMIN BRITTEN’S TWO PORTRAITS (1930), No. 2

Benjamin Britten wrote the *Two Portraits (1930)*, No. 1 for string orchestra and No. 2 for solo viola and string orchestra, between August and September of 1930. This work has two movements that are sketches of specific people. The first is titled No. 1 “D. Layton” and is a portrait of the violinist David Layton. There is no solo part for the violin, instead it is a string orchestra work, however, the first violin section part is very technical and virtuosic. The second portrait is titled No. 2 “E. B. B.” and was written as a sketch of Benjamin Britten himself, using the initials of his full name Edward Benjamin Britten. The solo viola part was written for Britten himself to be the soloist. Originally the pieces were called “Sketches” by Britten and were later changed to Portraits by the publishers after his death. The title “Sketches” may have sounded too casual and unfinished for the purposes of marketing. The works were intended to be a musical depiction of character so the new title, “Portrait”, is appropriate. Britten intended to compose a third portrait for a different friend, Peter Floud, however it was never written. The violinist David Layton was also portrayed in the *Alla Quartetto Serioso* (1933) later retitled in 1936 as *Three Divertimenti*. The author will be focusing on the second of the portraits because it was written for Britten to play and has a solo viola part.

The work was first performed publicly in 1996 for the BBC Radio 3 Series, “Britten’s Apprenticeship.” Until recently there was no solo viola part available for this piece for purchase.

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27 Colin Matthews, Donald Mitchell, and Philip Reed, ed. *Two Portraits (1930)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1
from the publishers and the work was available only in score form. Performers would have
needed to create their own parts from the score. In 2009 the violist Martin Outram from the
Maggini Quartet arranged the piece for viola and piano. While a student could be assigned either
version, since the viola part is almost the same, the author has decided to discuss the original
work with string orchestra. Advancing violists in high school and in undergraduate studies will
have more opportunities to perform in an ensemble. Ideally this would be a great piece for a
private teacher with an advanced viola student to perform with a string orchestra for a senior
recital or special occasion. The orchestra part is playable by a youth orchestra or a high school
advanced group of players. Young viola players could be assigned to research Britten’s
biography and list of works. Overall lack of balance problems and the modest range of the solo
part make the work a great introduction to the student violist as a soloist.

The dynamics and phrasing in the score are Britten’s original markings with little
corrections such as wrong notes due to hasty writing in the string orchestra parts. The first
performance of *Two Portraits* along with the other pieces mentioned in previous chapters, were
part of a BBC series entitled ‘Britten’s Apprenticeship’. The broadcast was on BBC Radio 3 on
December 5, 1995, conducted by Martyn Brabbins. The first concert performance was on
February 8, 1996, at St. John’s Smith Square, London, with Martin Altrim playing the viola solo.

*Portrait No. 2* is compact with only 93 bars of music. Teachers could assign this work to
performers before giving them Hindemith’s *Trauermusik* which has a similar instrumentation of
viola solo with string orchestra. The orchestration involves having the string orchestra use
*pizzicato*, mutes, and dynamics of *pianissimo* to *mezzo forte* when the soloist is playing. Britten
has arranged it so that there are no balance problems between the soloist’s part and the
accompaniment in the orchestra. Often the orchestra part has rhythm in unison during these
sections, providing a simple accompaniment of moving chords. The soloist is then able to play in a wide range of the viola’s register, from the low C string to the A string in third position without ever having to struggle to be heard. The work ends with the double bass finishing the viola melody while all of the other parts are tacet.

The second portrait is a contrast to other viola pieces that Britten has written. One contrast is the technical challenges for the player. Unlike the Elegy and the Reflection, this work has the soloist only playing as high as third position compared to the other two with fifth position and beyond being used. In addition there are no fast technical passages involving quick fingering of the left hand; instead this work is very lyrical and has more phrase markings than the other two. Also there is a key signature marked as E minor where the other early viola pieces have no key signatures indicated. The piece is marked poco lento at the beginning which effectively helps create a dreamlike state. Later there is a poco animato section featuring the orchestra and then a Tempo I followed by a poco rallentando by the double bass at the end of the work.

Of the three viola pieces that Britten wrote during 1930, this one has the easiest technique for an advancing player to handle and likely is the most suitable for introducing Britten’s early viola works to an audience. The piece is overall tonal and has a definite plan and form. Unlike the other two pieces, Britten’s fingerings are not in the score. The author has used fingerings similar to the way Britten has fingered the other pieces avoiding audible glissandi in the left hand.

The author would like to suggest that while studying this piece, the teacher and the student take turns playing different lines from the score in some of the lessons. The student can begin by playing the solo viola part and the teacher can play a different line each time. This will
allow the student to hear how their part matches or is independent from each part of the string orchestra. This will help prepare for rehearsals with an orchestra or a pianist, because younger violists have a tendency to follow other players and alter their rhythm or tempo in an attempt to match the other parts while playing their music incorrectly. Having the knowledge of who plays what and when will only benefit the student. When preparing for rehearsals with an orchestra, a conductor should be able to be free to focus more on balance, and less on the soloist learning how the orchestra part fits with the solo part. A well-informed student is capable of playing as a soloist with the orchestra successfully.

**Balance Concerns**

The string orchestra begins with *pizzicato* playing *pianissimo*. This allows the viola part not to have to be played at a constant *forte* dynamic and instead allows the performer to play the passage with a wide and varied dynamic range. The author recommends taking advantage of the *pizzicato* in the orchestra parts and to play the opening in third position (see Example Thirteen). Britten does have a dramatic *forte* in the string orchestra part that is immediately followed by a *piano* while the viola part has a slight *crescendo*. Britten has the viola part start in the middle range of the instrument and then go to the lowest register. It is not until bar 13 that Britten has one violin section switch to *arco* in a *pianissimo*-marked counter melody to the viola solo. The *pizzicato* section should be played with a slight *vibrato* and little direction until marked by a *crescendo*. Students preparing the solo part should experiment with how soft they can play with a controlled *vibrato* in the opening bars. The intonation on the *pizzicato* may be an issue however without the soloist the conductor could have the group bow the chords to tune. The violist can be added in after the orchestra has returned to *pizzicato*. 
Fingerings: 2 3 2 3 4 3 1 3 2 3 4 2 1 3 1 3 2 1 2

Example Thirteen: Author’s Fingerings Two Portraits (1930) No. 2, bars 1-6 © Copyright 1930 Britten Estate Limited

Fingerings

The author recommends the fingering to start in first position and then on the second note, the E-natural, to shift into third position. The violist can stay in third position on the G string which will help maintain the piano dynamic without having to play many potentially disrupting string crossings (see Example Thirteen). The challenge for the younger player will be not to over-play the melody at section A, bar 17 (see Example Fourteen). In this section the first violin part is arco above the viola melody by intervals of only a fourth in some sections marked mezzo forte. The other string sections have pizzicato on the beats marked piano. The viola part is in third position on the A string and has different markings for dynamics; for instance, while the viola part has a slight decrescendo, the orchestra part does not. Not realizing this, a younger
player will more likely follow the direction of the orchestra and subliminally tailor their musical line to match what they hear. Teachers can play the different sections of the score along with the student on the solo part during the lesson and use the score to show what is written dynamically and where. If the instructor is conducting a small ensemble with their student playing they will be in an ideal position to oversee any balance issues.

Fingerings: 2 3 4 0 1 3 4 0 1 1 2 2 3 4 3 3 2 1 3 2 1 0 1 2 1

Example Fourteen: Author’s Fingerings Two Portraits (1930) No. 2, bars 14-20 © Copyright 1930 Britten Estate Limited

**Bowings for the orchestra**

The section titled *poco animato* (see Example Fifteen), is the first time in the work that the orchestra plays alone without the solo viola part, and marks the first entrance of the double basses. The string orchestra can play out in the marked *forte* and even more in the *fortissimo* without any concern for balance issues. The rising pitches and the accidentals added will need to be emphasized. The cello and bass parts take over the rhythm (of the dotted quarter note slurred to an eighth note followed by two quarter notes) that was first played by the upper strings in bar 43. This allows the string orchestra to play *forte* and then begin playing the *decrescendo* down to a *pianissimo* before the solo viola entrance in bar 58.

The bowings in Example Fifteen have been added by the author to facilitate the *crescendo* and *fortissimo* markings. The author has broken several of the slurs and has several
bars start up bow. The original bowings make it difficult for an ensemble to maintain the *fortissimo* without adding an additional *diminuendo*.

Example Fifteen: Author’s Bowings *Two Portraits (1930)* No. 2, bars 41-54 © Copyright 1930 Britten Estate Limited
When the *Tempo I* section begins, the solo viola part is marked *pianissimo* with a *crescendo* to a *pianissimo*. The soloist can play very quietly over the fingerboard with moderate swells in the following *crescendos* without a concern for balance because only the viola and cello sections are accompanying. The orchestra viola part is marked for four *soli* non-divided players playing *pizzicato* while the cello part has been divided into three parts playing on alternate beats also marked *pizzicato*. The author recommends that the bowing at the end of the piece in both the viola solo and cello part be played as written (see Example Sixteen). Britten has written in *morendo*, gradually dying away, while passing the melody to the lower strings. Breaking the slurs would make the *morendo* difficult to accomplish for most players, and would cause unwanted swells in the dynamics.

In the last section of the piece, the cello part continues the E-natural from the solo viola part and continues playing the motive and then passes it on to the double bass. The cello and double bass parts are marked *pianissimo*, later followed by a *diminuendo*, and then ending on an E-natural. The last section is marked *poco rallentando*, a little gradual slowing of the tempo that would be controlled by the conductor. There are a few concerns for performing the *Portrait* with students on the orchestra parts towards the end of the piece such as intonation, dynamics, and tone. The notes in bars 87-93 in the divided cello parts and the bass part would need to be carefully tuned and it would be recommended that this small section be tuned at every rehearsal. Younger players do not often play solo lines in their high school orchestras on their lowest strings. Developing their ear-training at each rehearsal will help avoid any unclear pitches. In addition to careful tuning, the dynamics need to be followed which can be a challenge since they are *pianissimo* and *pianississimo*. Students will need to rehearse how quietly they can play their
part while keeping a good tone on their instrument. These skills can be worked on without the soloist and perhaps practiced with an E minor scale.

Example Sixteen: Author’s Bowings *Two Portraits* (1930) No. 2, bars 82-93 ©Copyright 1930 Britten Estate Limited
Teachers working with their young students on this piece should discuss what to do after they finish playing their part when there are rests in the solo part. Often a younger performer playing for the first time as a soloist with a large ensemble may feel uncomfortable with what to do when they are not playing. Skipping over the rests when they practice and “ending” the piece when they stop playing can become a habit that will interfere visually with a good performance. Teachers can play along from the score with their students and let them get used to how long the ending really is and to get used to standing in rest position. The mood of the work is serious and emotional, therefore it would be very distracting to the audience and other musicians to have a student performer walk away or drop character during such an intimate ending.
Benjamin Britten did not write the original version of *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*. The piece was originally written by Frank Bridge for orchestra in 1927. Frank Bridge was Britten’s teacher and mentor, and gave him a miniature score of the piece sometime during December of 1932. Britten attended a performance of the string orchestra piece with choreography by the Camargo Ballet on December 4, 1932. He wrote about the event in his diary that night.

Go to Camargo Ballet after supper with Bridges and Miss Fass. Pretty dismal show except for Wendy Toye’s magnificent dance in F. B’s “Willow”. There were things I didn’t like about her choreography tho’.

On December 11, Britten began to arrange this work for viola and piano, and finished it two days later. Frank Bridge along with Britten played the piano, although for both men the viola was their main string instrument. Because he wrote his other viola pieces in 1930, just two years before taking on this arrangement, it is ideal to compare how Britten, now as a college student, had changed his writing for the viola. The range of the viola part is extensive compared to his earlier viola works, while the piano has a reduction of the orchestra’s harmonies and counter melodies.

This is the last viola work that Britten wrote for the viola as a soloist until 1950, when he wrote the *Lachrymae, Op. 48: Reflections on a song of Dowland* for the violist William Reed.

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28 Reed, Philip, ed. *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, (London: Thames Publishing 1990), 2
Primrose. Lachrymae was written for Primrose, in contrast to these earlier works, which were for Britten to play on viola himself. *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook* is available at www.musicroom.com as a print on demand title and is not listed in the standard repertoire for advancing violists. Ideally, the more that this work is performed and studied, the more likely it will be added to repertoire lists, giving more variety to performers looking for English music.

There was no public performance of *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook* until August 27, 1988 and this was in the Erin Arts Centre, Port Erin, Isle of Man, as part of the Lionel Tertis Competition and Workshop with Nobuko Imai, violist, and Roger Vignoles, pianist.

The title is taken from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* Act Four, Scene Seven, when Gertrude tells Laertes that his sister Ophelia has drowned. The whole passage is about how Ophelia has gone mad after being with Hamlet and has been collecting several types of flowers. She goes down to a willow tree by the brook and falls into the water. Instead of getting out or calling for help, she does not seem to realize the danger she is in, and while being buoyed by her clothing, continues to sing songs until her clothes, having become heavily saturated, drag her down into the water and she drowns. Many students study Shakespeare in high school and analyze *Hamlet.*

Discussing the play and Hamlet’s role in Ophelia’s death in a lesson, and assigning the student this passage from the play to be studied, would be ideal to help a young performer to begin to shape and phrase this work.

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of cornflowers, nettles. Daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call
Them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious silver broke
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide.
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.29

**Musical Concerns**

The work has seven sections marked as *Adagio e tranquillo, Poco allegretto,*
*Tempo I, Con moto ma non troppo,* *Animato appassionato e rubato,* *Tranquillo,* and *Lamentoso.*
The violist begins *con sordino,* with mute, playing long slurs creating a very calm sound. The first section is marked *pianissimo, dolce,* and *espressivo.* The viola part holds long notes and then stays in treble clef for 40 bars until the *Con moto ma non troppo* section. Overall the viola part does not have any difficult rhythms and has sections of holding long notes. This first section is our introduction to Ophelia. The teacher will need to work with bow speed control over the length of the bow and with counting the 12/8 meter. Two-octave whole-note scales played at a metronome speed of 48 equals the quarter note, with different dynamics such as *crescendo* lasting four full beats, would be an ideal exercise.

The second section of *There is a Willow,* is titled *Poco allegretto,* and has a faster tempo of one dotted quarter note equals sixty-six. Britten has changed the meter from 12/8 to 6/8 thus making it easier for the performers to pick up the tempo. The piano part is very sparse and is mostly playing chords on the second beat of the bar with the result of there being no balance problems for the viola part in this section. Teachers can encourage students to vary their *vibrato*

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here. When there is a crescendo marked the student can increase the speed of their vibrato instead of relying on the bow alone for the dynamic change.

In the Tempo I section, Britten marks the metronome marking at the beginning of the section along with a meter change from 12/8 that later becomes 9/8. The piano part is different from the opening, being marked dolce e legato with moving eighth-note chords. The performers will want to make sure that they arrive at this tempo together by using a metronome in their rehearsals.

The section marked Tranquillo has the viola part with the melody while the piano plays chords of tied whole notes. The mood has shifted here, and this can be interpreted as the clothing spreading out in the water, floating out in a large circle around Ophelia who has not realized the danger she is in. The Lamentoso section has a clear tempo marked and is slightly faster than the previous section. The viola part, compared to the beginning of the piece, has more rhythmic contrast. The metronome marking of 42 equaling the quarter note indicates that the bow stroke of the slurred notes will need to be a long bow stroke with different speeds for the crescendo and decrescendo markings. Teachers can have their students play two-octave scales while adding in different dynamics, and focusing on varying the bow speed. Playing with the metronome at the speeds marked in the viola part will help students learn how to gauge how slow this section is and how to evenly use the bow.

**Fingerings and bowings**

The fingerings recommended by the author allow for the student to vibrate on a third finger in fourth position which is more ideal for an advancing student. Playing in first or third position creates a problem of either having an open A string or the fourth finger being used with
limited or no vibrato (depending on the student). The A-sharp in the eighth bar of the example is to be fingered like a B-flat on the A string in first position with a low first finger. Playing in first position will avoid string crossings and also assist with intonation accuracy. Teachers can write B-flat over the note, helping students find the pitch faster. Most string players do not play in keys with A-sharp in high school youth orchestras or in their student repertoire. Reviewing Exercise Seven in Chapter Three will also help students with accidentals.

The end of the Tranquillo section has an E-flat, G-natural, B-flat, D-natural, and F-sharp written as thirty-second notes descending two octaves and then arriving on a D-natural marked fortissimo. To the younger player, it looks intimidating and they may skip over it when practicing. To make this easier and less daunting the author recommends having the student play bar 71 backwards. The student begins in the lower register and plays backwards all the way up to the G-natural marked forte. Going backwards will allow the student to see this pattern of the five notes and help them recognize the pattern each time it restarts. The notes will no longer seem random and the student will begin to feel more in control of the music. The student can play this passage backwards and forwards with and without slurs.

The run of thirty-second notes leads the music into a slower section where the performer can do a slight ritardando while playing the run (see Exercise Eleven). This ritardando would only be used by a performer for the exercise, and after becoming comfortable with the pitches and the shift into third position, the performer would then play the passage as written with the precipitoso written above the thirty-second notes. The precipitoso indicates the notes descending should be hurried.
Exercise Eleven: Fingerings and Increasing Tempo *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, bar 72

In Example Fourteen, the viola part is shifting from first positon to third, fifth, and then ending in eighth position on the A string. There is an alternate part for bars 97-99 written down an octave. The author recommends that younger players play the lower line when first learning this section. It is an octave below the top line and can be played entirely in first position. After playing this passage correctly with the right pitches, the student would be able to start learning the higher octave. Practicing this way will allow the student to avoid playing wrong pitches in the higher register of the instrument. The author has a suggested fingering for this section that is approachable for younger players in that it has shifts on the A string only when needed. Often fingerings involving the performer shifting both up and down in succession can result in students losing their control of hand positioning, resulting in wrong notes and intonation issues. By moving the hand up the instrument gradually with no downward shifts, the younger player will be able to maintain control, therefore sustaining the correct hand position needed for each shift. This can be accomplished when focusing on the position of the left hand’s thumb. The thumb can lead the hand forward in a shift helping to secure the new hand position.
Example Seventeen: Author’s Fingerings and Bowings *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, bars 94-103

Through rehearsal, the author found balance issues in this section in that the piano part, since it is in a different register than before, causes the violist to have to strain to be heard. One of the solutions is to break the long slur in bar 42, and to have three bow changes instead of one to maintain the *forte*, thus avoiding having the quality of the tone being compromised. The *Sul D* marked in bar 45 would be ideal to observe until bar 48. At bar 48 the student should play the C-sharp on the A string. While this C-sharp could be played on the D string, the ability of an advancing player to swing their hand around the instrument on their second string and play it in tune with an even tone would be unlikely. The student would be more successful in achieving the correct intonation and having a controllable tone playing on the A-string. This section of *Tempo I* involves second, third, fifth, and sixth positions. Students may need to practice one-octave scales in each position to assist with intonation. Focusing on one position at a time with a tuner will help the student develop their ear and be more confident with shifting. Second position has larger spaces for whole steps on the fingerboard than a more common position like third, making it more likely that a student will play flat. Also second position is not used as often as first and third position by younger players, making it ideal for the teacher to add scales in second position to the student’s weekly assignments.
Rehearsing with the pianist and issues with ties in 6/8

There is a mistake in the viola part in bar 53 in the Con moto ma non troppo section in that an alto clef is missing so that it looks like the whole passage should be in treble clef. The piano score has an alto clef in the viola part in bar 53 which makes this section a whole lot more feasible for the younger player. The majority of this section can be played in first position. It is marked senza sordino and is played mezzo forte to forte. The rhythm with the tied notes in 6/8 meter can be hard for a younger player to play correctly. The piano part has a written-out tremolo that continues throughout the section. There are no distinctive beats for the violist to rely on. The pianist can emphasize the main beats by either placing an accent or playing slightly shorter on the beat; this can be taken out for performances and used only in rehearsals.

The Animato appassionato e rubato section is the fastest part of the piece. When it begins, the viola part is still holding a long F-sharp from the previous section before switching over to pizzicato (see Exercise Seventeen). The pizzicato is marked forte and then fortissimo. In this section the piano part is playing the melody with the viola pizzicato arpeggio at the end of each phrase, emphasizing a state of urgency and action. The musical depiction for this section of the piece could be discussed with the student during a lesson; the discussion would involve thinking about the emotional state that the character Ophelia is in when she goes down to the brook, and the danger arising of her falling into the water.

The difficult part of this section is for the student violist to count the rests properly and to know when to come in at each entrance. The piano part in the left hand has written-out tremolo syncopations, and the right hand has syncopated notes with ties in a higher register. The pianist could cue each entrance for the student; however, this is not always practical and should be used...
as a last resort. The author found that separating the two piano lines and focusing on one line at a time made it easier to count rests.

To help coordinate between the viola and piano parts, the author has created an exercise of separating the parts so that the student can hear each line (see Exercise Twelve). When rehearsing this exercise with the pianist, the student can count the rests out loud before internalizing the counting. The first part of the exercise features only the right hand playing more than two octaves above the viola part, with tied notes, making it difficult to determine where the beat is. While playing one hand at a time and counting out loud the student should be prepared to be successful in making their entrance. In the second part, the left hand is being played with a tremolo and then triplet sixteenth notes and syncopation. The student will continue to count out loud, this time focusing on the other part. For the last part of the exercise, both parts are played creating a thick rhythmic texture while the student continues to count out loud until she is confident enough to properly count in her head. The instructor is also encouraged to play with the student from the score. Each part of this exercise can be played with the pianist or the teacher as many times necessary before going on to the next part. The author recommends in the rehearsals to implement the perfect five rule for this exercise. Each part must be played correctly five times in a row before going on to the next section. It is a challenge of focusing and demanding the best from the student. Often playing a difficult passage can take up most of a lesson. Teachers will want to avoid this by having students play this exercise at every lesson and every rehearsal. This will make the passage not seem so difficult to coordinate and become instead a daily task that will become more and more a familiar passage. This exercise is similar to the rhythm exercise in chapter two.
Exercise Twelve: Viola and Piano Rhythm *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, bars 61-65
Exercise Twelve: (continued)

The piano part in the *Lamentoso* begins with chords marked *una corda sempre ped.* (see Example Seventeen). This marking means that the pianist should use the soft pedal, resulting in the action shifting to the side so that instead of the three hammers hitting the strings at the same time, only two hammers make contact. The effect is there is a duller sound that changes the tone color from being bright to more calm and smooth. The piano part on this section illustrates
Ophelia floating down the brook while her clothing is spreading out in the water holding her up. She is singing songs as she floats along the brook oblivious to the danger she has placed herself in. The section is marked *pianissimo* and maintains this until the *crescendo* into *fortissimo*. At this point the piano part has a *tremolo* in the right hand which changes the dreamlike state and begins the drowning of Ophelia. The author recommends that the pianist chosen to play with the student be encouraged to shape these sections and phrases as they would as a soloist. Often the viola part has a rest or is sustaining a long note while the piano part provides most of the musical interest. The way the piano part is written might look intimidating until a performer plays through it. Benjamin Britten has written out *tremolos, glissandi*, and other effects, making the piece look more formidable than it is.

The viola part in the *Lamentoso* section is not difficult to play on its own; however, what makes it difficult is that the pianist is in 2/4 with no clear beat and the violist is in 6/8 (see Exercise Thirteen). An exercise to help with this issue allows the student to use subdivision to help her count longer tied notes when there are no clear beats. The student plays each part of the exercise as many times as it takes to master it before going on to the next section. For the purpose of the exercise, the subdivision is first in sixteenth notes and then in eighth notes and finally played as written. The author recommends setting the metronome for the beat to equal an eighth note instead of a dotted quarter note. The player will need to be subdividing through this entire section in eighth notes in order to stay in control of the tempo and meter. The metronome setting could start at 120 equals the eighth note, working towards the tempo of 180.
Exercise Thirteen: Subdivision *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, bars 52-54
CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Benjamin Britten wrote several viola pieces during the years 1930-1932. These works should be performed and added to the viola repertoire. Often it can be a struggle for private teachers to find repertoire for their advancing viola players beyond the standard concerti or solo Bach suites. Many of the pieces that are written for viola in the twentieth century are for the advanced player with a developed technique. Through expanding a teacher’s choice of repertoire to assign, the teacher’s private studio can benefit in many ways, in this case it can educate students about English composers, have a unique and innovative look at compositions from the twentieth century, and allow for more musical opportunities. Much of the focus on Britten’s works has been on his thirteen operas and the War Requiem, with the result that his solo instrumental works are not as well-known or studied by young advancing players. The majority of Britten’s compositions have survived and have been released by the Britten-Pears Institute decades after his death.

Having young students play Britten’s juvenile works can allow the teacher in a lesson to discuss composition, influences on Britten, and how the student thinks about studying music. Ultimately this will allow the student to begin to learn not just their solo part, but also to be aware of all the details that go into studying and learning music. When selecting music for a student, private teachers need to know what is appropriate for the student’s technical level, what genre the student needs to learn about, what development of solo repertoire the student has, the musicality of the student, and considerations for preparing a recital or studio performance.
Sometimes teachers will have multiple students at the same technique level and will want to have some variety of repertoire amongst the students in their studio performances. Being able to add an English composer with multiple works is ideal for rounding out a recital’s repertoire. Having a multiple movement piece (such as a sonata or suite) paired with the *Elegy or Reflection* can allow for a contrast to traditional musical genres.

Knowing about early viola works by Benjamin Britten is important to help the viola community increase its knowledge of solo viola works for the advancing student. Teachers often struggle to find variety when selecting repertoire for their students in high school and in undergraduate studies. Often the music that is selected is by Germanic composers such as Hindemith, Bach and Brahms, whose works contain multiple movements. An example of this is the Suzuki method for viola used for high school students. The composers featured in the later books are Telemann, Brahms, Seitz, Mozart, Bohm, Bach, Beethoven, Handel, and Schubert. One series that has recently added some English composers is the *Royal Conservatory Music Development Program’s Viola Repertoire* books that has a new 2013 edition featuring two different pieces by Frank Bridge in the sixth and seventh level along with works by William Flackton (1709-1798), Robert Valentine (1671-1747), Gordon Jacob (1895-1984), Kenneth Jones (b.1924), and Timothy Baxter (b.1935). Finding works that are single pieces such as character studies usually involves arrangements of violin works that are in unsuitable keys and do not always sound best on the viola. Expanding the repertoire with original English works such as the *Elegy, Reflection, and the Portrait* will benefit the community and provide variety to a studio recital.

With such diversity in style during the last century, young students may not be as knowledgeable about compositions and composers that are not from the Baroque, Classical, and
Romantic periods. Private teachers can hand out listening assignments to their students when preparing them to study music of the twentieth century. With access to www.youtube.com and iTunes, students can listen, after a few minutes of internet browsing, to almost any piece of music and see live performances of students and professionals. One of the first pieces younger students could be assigned would be Benjamin Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*. This work, while seeming to be educational for children about what instruments make up an orchestra from the title and narration, is a celebrated work for modeling the theme and variation form. It is an impressive example of how Britten uses melodies and also shows his skill at writing for all of the instruments. High school students may have heard this work either by playing it in a youth orchestra or having gone to an educational concert by their local orchestra. Recently the film *Moonrise Kingdom* uses several parts of the *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* along with the *Playful Pizzicato* from the *Simple Symphony* in key scenes. The author has had the experience of younger viola players knowing of these works from the film and asking the author, “Did he write any viola pieces?” This then follows with an ideal opportunity to introduce English music and provide an example of a different type of twentieth century music available to the student to perform.

Often students and teachers know about pieces for the viola based on what is advertised on the back covers of their current music repertoire books and are led astray as to what is appropriate. Sometimes an advanced piece such as Bartok’s *Viola Concerto*, an ASTA (American String Teacher Association) level six piece, would be advertised in a repertoire book that has pieces in the body of the book from ASTA level three and four. It can be a struggle to find appropriate middle ground repertoire for performers in this mid-to-advancing level. Often composers from England, France, Spain, and the United States are not included in “these
mentioned” repertoire lists due to a lack of awareness of the level and availability to the viola community. The Portrait would be ideal for students at ASTA level three while the Elegy and Reflection would be ideal for ASTA level four. There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook would be ideal for students playing between ASTA level four and five. Many viola students in college are playing at an ASTA level four to five and would be able to perform all of the mentioned works.

An appropriate piece for a high school student would be the second of the two portraits. The Two Portraits (1930) No. 2, for solo viola and string orchestra, is a work that was finished right after the Elegy as Britten was preparing to leave for college. This piece would be appropriate for high school students participating in a competition for a solo opportunity with their youth orchestra or local ensemble. The work was arranged in 2009 by Martin Outram for viola and piano, however, if possible, it should be played with orchestra as it was intended. The overall orchestration of this work makes it ideal for performance opportunities with a first-time soloist or someone who has already played Telemann’s Viola Concerto. The work has no dynamic balance problems so that the viola part is heard clearly against the string orchestra. Also the solo part is not difficult technically for either the left or right hand. Private teachers could even arrange to have this piece played on a student or studio recital without having too many rehearsals with a small orchestra. Teenage students may be interested in discussing what the Portrait says about Britten and how they would want to phrase it in relation to how they feel about the composer. Many times local orchestras and youth orchestras have concerto competitions which will allow pieces such as this to qualify. Instead of another Baroque or Classical viola concerto, there could be a twentieth-century piece that is lyrical and challenging
for all of the orchestra sections. In a university setting, this work could be played in a chamber orchestra concert or in a lecture recital.

A piece that is more difficult than the second of the two portraits is the Reflection for Viola and Piano (1930). This work is ideal for an advancing viola player who may be in high school or in college. The work has several contrasting passages with some technical difficulty for the viola part, along with melodic passages in both the piano and viola. When selecting which viola piece would be appropriate to first introduce Britten to a student, the Reflection is perhaps the best choice. The author found that the piece, while offering some technical challenges, would be ideal for a recital piece, providing a contrast to a Bach cello suite. The Reflection requires the student to work with a pianist as a collaborative artist and not as an accompanist who follows and adjusts. This may be the first time the student would need to be both aware and thoughtful of how the piano part goes beyond merely complementing the viola line, and how it functions as an equal partner.

The most difficult of the viola works discussed is the Elegy (1930). The contrast between these two works is most noticeable in that the technique required to play the Elegy is more advanced. This work has the violist playing in all registers of the instrument, with double stops, chromaticism, and fast runs into treble clef and the higher register of the viola. This work is ideal for a college student’s recital to be played from memory or for a studio recital as a contrast to other twentieth century pieces by composers such as Hindemith and Reger. The technically advanced student in an undergraduate program would find the Elegy ideal for a recital. It is over seven minutes long, dramatic and musical, and in the opinion of the author, easy to memorize, and is a solo piece conveniently requiring no accompaniment. By the end of the work where the
viola is muted and there is *pizzicato*, the performer will have been able to demonstrate a wide dynamic range.

*There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook (1932)* for viola and piano, is an arrangement of Frank Bridge’s orchestra piece of the same title. This work is challenging to rehearse and to perform because the piano part contains many different voicings and lines from the string orchestra. This work would not be appropriate for a high school student but instead for a lower level undergraduate college student. When assigning this work, the teacher will want to be able to supervise rehearsals and work on rehearsal strategies for the violist and pianist. This work would be best assigned after a student has played several other twentieth-century works and has played successfully in a duo setting with a pianist. *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook* is the most difficult piece of the four works discussed in this study to coordinate for a performance. Multiple rehearsals for the student and pianist would be needed, along with careful listening to the original version. One recording of Bridge’s original piece for full orchestra that is available on iTunes is the 1993 Wyastone Estate Limited Recording of the English String Orchestra performing with William Boughton conducting. The author recommends having students be assigned to this work after they have played Britten’s other pieces, played in an orchestra, or had some significant chamber music experience before working on this with a pianist. Overall this composition is a character piece in that it tells a story about one character from a famous work, a character this is potentially appealing to young students. Discussions on the play *Hamlet*, Ophelia’s role in the plot, what happens to her and how it is conveyed musically, will allow the student to expand their performance skills.

Almost twenty years after the Frank Bridge arrangement, Benjamin Britten went on to write another viola work called *Lachrymae*. This work features a theme from the Renaissance
English composer John Dowland, and is a set of variations with an unusually placed theme occurring at the end. Britten wrote this work for the celebrated English violist William Primrose and not for himself to perform at Aldeburgh. Britten also wrote a set of variations, again with the theme at the end, in his piece *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70 (1963)* incorporating *Come, Heavy Sleep* by Dowland. This work was written for the guitarist Julian Bream. The viola pieces that Britten wrote, for when he was younger, were meant for himself to be the viola performer. Benjamin Britten wrote other works for solo string instruments such as his *Cello Suites*. These works are for solo cello and perhaps, like the cello suites of Bach, they will be transcribed for the viola.

English composers that have been influenced by Britten are Colin Matthew, Imogen Holst, Peter Maxwell Davies, John Tavener, and Richard Rodney Bennett. As one of the most well-known English composers of the 20th century, Benjamin Britten has continued to influence today’s composers, performers, and audiences. Learning Britten’s viola works will benefit the advancing viola student by experiencing the music of this important composer.
APPENDIX A

COPYRIGHT LETTERS

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to Colleen Manseau

RE: Permission to use music for treatise

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78
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**Film**


Electronic Website

Colleen Manseau grew up in the Detroit area, studying Suzuki violin with a local teacher at her church. Beginning in high school, she switched to the viola and began winning competitions and playing in multiple orchestras. After winning a scholarship, she began her college studies at the San Francisco Conservatory studying viola performance with Don Ehrlich. Ms. Manseau later transferred to San Francisco State University and studied with Paul Yarbough of the Alexander String Quartet. Her graduate studies have been at Florida State University where she earned a Masters in Performance in 2005.

Colleen Manseau has a private studio of violin and viola students and has assisted them with competitions and college entrance auditions. She has worked in the public school system teaching beginning strings to fifth graders. Ms. Manseau currently plays with the Gulf Coast Sinfonia, Albany Symphony Orchestra, and the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. In the summer she is the director of her own string orchestra camp that features popular music she arranges. Working with other local musicians, she has been a chamber coach in the Chamber Music Festival in Tallahassee for the past four years, working with string quartets made up of middle and high school students. She is a founding member of the Torreya String Quartet. Colleen Manseau is currently a director of the Orchestra Fundamentals Ensemble of the Tallahassee Youth Orchestra. She lives in Tallahassee, FL and enjoys activities such as swimming, reading science fiction, and arranging music.