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The Oboe Works of Benjamin Britten

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**THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MUSIC**

THE OBOE WORKS OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

By

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ABSTRACT

Benjamin Britten is regarded as one of the most prominent British composers of the Twentieth Century. His music covers nearly all genres and can routinely be heard in many different types of performances. Britten worked diligently throughout his life to produce a large body of works that are in most cases accessible to the listener, yet highly detailed in their construction. For a large part of his life Britten enjoyed celebrity as a composer, having had his works performed in the world's most prestigious musical venues by many of the most renowned virtuosi. Through his work as a composer, Britten worked to revive English opera. He also increased outreach to schoolchildren in an effort to boost national musical awareness and musical literacy throughout the population.

Britten wrote four pieces for the oboe, each of which is now a standard in the Twentieth Century repertoire for the instrument. All four of these pieces feature the use of harmonies that are very characteristic of the composer's writing—tonal, yet tinted with slight ambiguity and/or dissonance. In addition, all of Britten's oboe pieces represent the high level of detail for which he was known.

This treatise chronologically depicts the life and career of Benjamin Britten as a whole. For each of the four oboe pieces in question, historical elements such as time, place, reasons for composition, similarities with other pieces by the composer, relationships to musical trends of the respective period, as well as British and/or world issues of the time are examined. Harmonic and formal analysis is also provided for each piece. Several commercial recordings of today's most famous oboists playing the pieces in question are examined and evaluated in this document. Particular attention is paid to performance practice and the adherence, or lack thereof, to Britten's intentions for each piece.

CHAPTER 1: BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Benjamin Britten is widely regarded as being among the most prominent British composers of the Twentieth Century. During his lifetime, Britten earned the admiration of his contemporaries throughout the musical world. Britten's music covers a wide range of musical genres and today is popular in opera houses, orchestral concerts, and recitals of all types. In addition, the world's foremost musicians have recorded numerous compositions by Britten. Through his efforts as a composer, Britten worked to revive English opera, and to ensure the future and security of British music drama. He also strived to increase musical outreach to English schoolchildren in an effort to help national musical awareness and future musical literacy among the population.¹

An important ideal to Britten was that his music be accessible to all audiences. Britten rejected most "modernist" musical ideologies. He developed a unique tonal language that allowed both novices and seasoned musical audiences to appreciate his work.² Very often, as can be seen in his works for oboe, Britten pushed the boundaries of functional tonality. However, he did this in such a way that added ambiguity and/or heightened the sense of grounding upon the inevitable return of the tonal center. This is a common trait in Britten's compositions that will be explored later in this document.

Britten was born in Lowestoft, Great Britain on 2 November 1913 and was the youngest child in a middle-class Suffolk family. His father Robert Britten was a dental surgeon who, although supportive of his son's musical pursuits, by all accounts did not play a large role in the composer's musical career or development.³ Benjamin Britten's mother Edith was an avid amateur singer and pianist. From the composer's earliest musical ventures, Edith controlled his life until her death in 1937. His mother was the center of his emotional world and as such she gave the composer much musical and

¹ Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, vol. 4. London: Macmillan, 2001. 364.

² Ibid.

³ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 6.

professional guidance throughout the years prior to her death.⁴ Britten demonstrated much interest and ability in music from a very young age. He began composing at age five and began piano lessons at seven, and at eleven he began to study the viola. Britten was extremely active as a juvenile composer and the large volume of unpublished works from his early years attests to this.⁵ The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* lists over two-hundred examples of unpublished juvenilia by Britten.⁶

In 1926, Britten was studying viola with Audrey Alston. On one occasion in that year, Britten attended a concert at the Norwich Festival with her. At this particular concert Britten was inspired by the performance of the orchestral work *Enter Spring* by Frank Bridge, the British violist, composer, and conductor. Subsequently, Mrs. Alston arranged a meeting between the young Britten and Bridge, who was a personal friend of hers.⁷

Britten studied privately with Frank Bridge, starting in 1926, and from Bridge Britten gained much of the clarity and attention to detail that would be seen in his later compositions. Bridge insisted that Britten write clearly what was on his mind on any given day and give scrupulous attention to good compositional technique. Britten later said that Frank Bridge gave him a sense of “technical ambition.”⁸

It is known that throughout Britten’s life he held strong pacifist beliefs and was opposed to the idea of war. It is possible that much of Britten’s pacifism stemmed from the influence of Frank Bridge, as Britten stated in a memoir that his feelings against the First World War came largely from Bridge.⁹ Britten’s schoolteachers rejected his 1928

⁴ Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, vol. 4. London: Macmillan, 2001. 364.

⁵ White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: A Sketch of his Life and Works*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd., 1954. 13-14.

⁶ Sadie, Stanley. 390-402.

⁷ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 5.

⁸ Kennedy, Michael. 6.

⁹ Kennedy, Michael. 6-7.

essay *Animals*—which because of its pacifistic content was a criticism of hunting and cruelty in general, and more particularly, the cruelty of war.¹⁰

Benjamin Britten won a scholarship in composition at London's Royal College of Music in 1930. The entrance examiners in that year were S.P. Waddington, John Ireland, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Over the course of the following three years Britten studied composition with John Ireland and piano with Arthur Benjamin. In 1933 Britten won the R.C.M.'s Farrar Prize for composition. During Britten's years of study at the R.C.M. some of his works began to be published. One piece that was heard publicly was Britten's *Phantasy Quartet* for oboe and strings, which was broadcast in August of 1933 with Leon Goosens performing with members of the International String Quartet. The *Phantasy Quartet* was subsequently performed in concert at Westminster and was lauded in the *London Times* as being "unforced, original, and arresting."¹¹

Living in London, Britten's opportunities for hearing music of all types were much better during his years at the R.C.M. Of the classic composers, the greatest influences on Britten were Mozart and Schubert. Britten also found Mahler to be a type of kindred spirit, due to his attraction to lyricism and melody. Among contemporary composers of the time, the young Britten most respected the works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Berg. Britten nearly studied with the latter in the autumn of 1934 during a visit to Vienna, after having left the R.C.M. However, his parents did not allow him to study with Berg as a result of advice given to them by authorities at the College.¹² Apparently, the R.C.M. had told Britten's parents that Berg was immoral, due to the R.C.M.'s policy against serial music—which they also labeled immoral. Britten's parents were led to believe that Alban Berg was actually an immoral individual rather than musically immoral in the opinion of the College. In a related matter, when Britten

¹⁰ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 6-7.

¹¹ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 50-51.

¹² White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: A Sketch of his Life and Works*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd., 1954. 15-16.

asked the R.C.M. to purchase a copy of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* for the library, he was refused.¹³

In 1935 the Brazilian Alberto Cavalcanti and William Coldstream recruited Britten to work under John Grierson, who was making documentary films for the English General Post Office, or the G.P.O. During his tenure at the G.P.O. Britten would compose both the *Insect Pieces* and the *Temporal Variations* for the oboe. The documentary films that the G.P.O. was producing at that time had a fairly left-leaning political stance. This position made the G.P.O. all the more attractive as a place to work for many young English intellectuals. During the years that Britten worked for the G.P.O. he learned to write music quickly because their films were being produced in rapid succession. Britten also gained experience writing for small chamber ensembles during the mid-1930's, since the G.P.O. film budgets were often scarce and could not cover the expense of hiring large ensembles or orchestras. In most cases Britten had to write film music for no more than seven players, yet still create all of the effects needed for each film.¹⁴

In 1935 Britten would begin his professional relationship with Wystan Hugh Auden, a poet who was invited to contribute text to the film *Coal Face*. (The film was a documentary about the coal mining industry and its associated disasters.) As time passed, Auden would contribute other material to additional G.P.O. productions. Britten and Auden would collaborate in the future on several projects and Britten would be influenced by many of Auden's ideas concerning such issues as art, philosophy, sexuality and politics.¹⁵

In the summer of 1939 Britten left England initially for Quebec, Canada, accompanied by the English tenor Peter Pears. His intention was to become a U.S. citizen and remain in the country permanently. Many artists emigrated from Europe to the U.S. at this time, including W.H. Auden, who became an American citizen. There were several reasons for Britten's trip to the United States. The first was the darkening

¹³ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 52-53.

¹⁴ Carpenter, Humphrey. 65-67.

¹⁵ Carpenter, Humphrey. 67-68.

political situation in Europe in the later 1930's. Additionally, Britten had grown unhappy by 1939 with the reception that his work was receiving in Great Britain. Paramount was the example that Auden had set in coming to the United States to pursue his own career.¹⁶

While in Quebec, Britten first wrote his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Minor*, which was subsequently performed by the New York Philharmonic under John Barbirolli with Antonio Brosa as the violin soloist. The final movement of the concerto is interesting in that it is the first time Britten chose to use the passacaglia form, which later became a characteristic feature of many of his works.¹⁷

Britten's initial intention of becoming a United States citizen was complicated by the outbreak of the Second World War. Given Britten's pacifist convictions, it is likely that he would not have become a combatant in the war. However, Britten feared what consequences might await him if he returned to England. In 1940 Britten was diagnosed with an acute streptococcal infection that lingered for a year, further preventing his return. During a 1941 trip to Escondido, California, an article in the B.B.C.'s weekly *Listener* about the poetry of George Crabbe moved Britten. Crabbe was an early nineteenth-century poet from Aldeburgh, not far from Britten's hometown of Lowestoft. Britten became homesick for the English countryside and artistic world as a result of this article and his ideas of returning to his native country were cemented. Travel across the Atlantic Ocean was dangerous and difficult during 1941 and it was often not easy for travelers to find passage across the ocean: such was the case for Britten. Britten and Pears were not able to depart for Great Britain until 6 March 1942, around six months after the decision had been made to return.¹⁸

Britten and Pears returned to England on a small Swedish cargo boat in 1942. During the month-long journey, Britten completed the *Hymn to St. Cecilia* and *A Ceremony of Carols*. Britten's compositions from his American period were readily accepted in wartime England. This was partly because there were scant opportunities to

¹⁶ White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: A Sketch of his Life and Works*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd., 1954. 29-30.

¹⁷ White, Eric Walter. 31.

¹⁸ White, Eric Walter. 32-37.

hear new music during the war and also because of Britten's considerable maturation as a composer during his time in America.¹⁹

Upon his arrival in Great Britain, Britten was granted, along with Peter Pears, exemption from military service by a conscientious objectors' tribunal. The exemption was given on the condition that Britten was to give recitals on behalf of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, which would later become the Arts Council of Great Britain. During the Second World War, Britten performed in numerous recital halls and cathedrals throughout England. In addition to his performances, Britten wrote several pieces during this period, because he had been artistically stimulated by being back at home. Some of the works composed by Britten at this time include: the *Serenade, Opus 31*, for tenor, horn, and string orchestra; *Rejoice in the Lamb*, a cantata for chorus and organ; and *Prelude and Fugue*, for string orchestra.²⁰

During the six-month wait for passage back to England in 1941-1942, Britten met Serge Koussevitsky at a concert in Boston. Koussevitsky asked Britten why he had not yet written a full-scale opera. Britten explained that although he had been thinking about the possibility of developing an opera based on Crabbe's poem *The Borough*, the time required to write a full-scale opera demanded too much freedom from other endeavors to be economically possible for a young composer. However, Koussevitsky was interested in Britten's ideas for a Crabbe project and arranged for the Koussevitsky Music Foundation to give him a \$1000 commission to write the opera.²¹

Britten began composing music for the opera that the Koussevitsky Foundation commissioned in 1944. The opera would be known as *Peter Grimes*. In Britten's opera, Grimes was a fisherman who was a tortured idealist, rather than the villain that he was in the Crabbe poem. The situation of Peter Grimes was not unlike that of Britten in 1944. The composer was not literally suffering, but rather was tensely at odds with his society as a conscientious objector to the war. Britten devoted most of his time composing to

¹⁹ White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: A Sketch of his Life and Works*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd., 1954. 38-39.

²⁰ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 35-38.

²¹ White, Eric Walter. 36-37.

Peter Grimes in 1944, he composed no other works of great significance during this year, and the opera was completed in February 1945. It was premiered on 7 June 1945 to critical acclaim. *The London Times* declared that *Peter Grimes* was a success and a good omen for the future of British opera.²²

Peter Grimes was subsequently performed around the world in the most famous opera houses and conducted by the world's most important conductors. It remains a standard and important part of the Twentieth Century operatic repertoire. *Peter Grimes* was also a financial success for Benjamin Britten and he was able to live more comfortably as a result of its profits.²³

Britten collaborated with poet Ronald Duncan in creating his next opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*, during 1946. The chamber opera was premiered at the Glyndebourne Festival in July of the same year. Many critics lauded *The Rape of Lucretia*; but the opera's combination of Christian moralizing and classic tragedy offended many as well.²⁴ With the future success of English Opera in mind, Britten orchestrated *The Rape of Lucretia* in such a way as to make it more viable for smaller cities and institutions to produce. The orchestra that Britten wrote for in this opera is made up of only twelve musicians: a string quartet, double bass, woodwind quintet, a harpist and a single percussionist. By reducing the number of performers in the orchestra and on stage, Britten reduced the vast financial burden normally associated with the production of opera performances, thus making performances of *The Rape of Lucretia* more feasible for groups outside of the large national musical institutions.²⁵

Britten also composed the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* in 1946 for the purpose of accompanying a Ministry of Education film on the instruments of the

²² Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 38-44.

²³ Britten, Beth. *My Brother Benjamin*. Kensal House, England: The Kensal Press, 1986. 104.

²⁴ Kennedy, Michael. 45-48.

²⁵ Del Mar, Norman. "The Chamber Operas," in *Benjamin Britten*. ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc. 1953. 132-133.

orchestra. The Liverpool Philharmonic, under the direction of Malcolm Sargent, premiered the work on 15 October 1946.²⁶

Britten began composing his opera *Albert Herring* in 1946 and completed it in 1947. Eric Crozier wrote the libretto for this opera, using Maupassant's short story *Le rosier de Madame Husson*. For the purpose of *Albert Herring*, Crozier moved the setting of this story from the French provinces to a fictional Suffolk town, "Loxford."

Britten bought a large three-story house in 1947, known as Crag House, in the seaside town of Aldeburgh that he and Peter Pears made their permanent home. Subsequently, money was raised and the Aldeburgh Festival was started, eventually seeing numerous premieres of Britten's works.²⁷ The festival rapidly achieved an international reputation; only outstanding singers and instrumentalists, who were often friends of Britten, performed at the Aldeburgh Festival.²⁸

In 1949 Britten had begun work on *Billy Budd*, the opera based on Herman Melville's novel of the same name. In preparation for 1951's Festival of Britain (a celebration of the country's emergence from the war), the Arts Council of Great Britain hastened Britten's completion of *Billy Budd* with a commission. For the opera, Britten would collaborate with librettists Eric Crozier and E.M. Forster. *Billy Budd* was premiered on 1 December 1951 at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The opera received lukewarm reviews and did not become a success until twenty years later.²⁹

The character of Billy in *Billy Budd* was not unlike Britten himself. In the opera, as in the novel, Billy Budd is falsely accused of attempting to organize a mutiny onboard his ship. He inadvertently kills his accuser as a result of his own stutter and is subsequently executed for this crime. Billy Budd is not an evil character in any way

²⁶ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 45-48.

²⁷ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 244-252.

²⁸ Duncan, Ronald. *Working with Britten, A Personal Memoir*. Welcombe, England: The Rebel Press, 1981. 119.

²⁹ Kennedy, Michael. 55-57.

however. Rather, he is a victim of the evil of those around him.³⁰ Throughout his life Britten felt at odds with his society, country, and government, in many cases for reasons that were beyond his personal control. His situation in life was similar to that of the protagonist in his opera *Billy Budd*, who is at odds with his shipmates.

In addition to *Billy Budd*, Britten composed the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, Opus 49, for solo oboe in 1951. The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* is a series of miniatures based on legends included in *The Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.-17 A.D.). Britten's *Metamorphoses* deal with characters from Ovid who, in most cases, transform into new forms throughout the course of each piece. There are similarities between the opera and Britten's *Metamorphoses*; these will be discussed later in more detail.

As stated before, Britten and Pears lived together. Although homosexuality was illegal in England during the mid twentieth century, the two were partners and shared Crag House, the residence in Aldeburgh. This topic was an open secret in the music world and with journalists.³¹ Britten did have a slight encounter with the law in 1952 as a result of his sexuality. For reasons that were not clear, he was interrogated under Scotland Yard's policy against homosexual activities.³² Whether or not this particular interrogation by detectives manifested itself in any way in Britten's compositions is not known. However, the interrogation of artists in England during the 1950's is indicative of a somewhat repressive social climate and may possibly have led to Britten's fascination with scenarios of man vs. society.

During the remainder of the 1950's Britten worked on several projects. In 1953, while a serious illness prevented the use of his right arm, Britten completed his opera *The Turn of the Screw* writing only with his left hand. He conducted the world premiere of this piece in Venice in September of 1954. At the end of 1955, Britten and Pears

³⁰ Cooke, Mervyn and Philip Reed. *Benjamin Britten: Billy Budd*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 1-14.

³¹ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 257-258.

³² Brett, Phillip, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds. *Queering the Pitch, the new gay and lesbian musicology*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 244-252.

embarked on a long trip during which they gave recitals throughout Yugoslavia, Turkey, Indonesia, Japan, and India. The trip was inspirational to Britten. The eastern influences would later be seen in his ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas*, which opened on 1 January 1957 at Covent Garden.³³ In *The Prince of the Pagodas* Britten utilized instrumentation that was intended to be reminiscent of the Javanese gamelan music he heard while traveling in the winter of 1955-56. In an attempt to imitate the gamelan, Britten augmented the orchestra with vibraphone, celesta, piano, xylophone, tomtoms, and gongs.³⁴

The stage and orchestra pit of Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh were enlarged in 1960. As a result, Britten decided to write a full-length opera for the Aldeburgh Festival that year. Due to time constraints, and because Britten liked to compose from a completed libretto, he used Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Britten had always liked the play and found the three basic groups of characters in the play—the Fairies, the Lovers, and the Rustics—suited to his style of composing. A master of colouration, Britten used various instruments to denote each group of characters. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was somewhat difficult to produce, as it called for coloratura soprano and counter-tenor roles. Counter-tenors were extremely scarce in Europe in 1960.³⁵

Britten attended a concert in London with Shostakovich in 1960 in which the Russian's Cello Concerto was receiving its British premiere. The soloist was a then 23-year-old Mstislav Rostropovich. Britten was greatly impressed by the cellist and subsequently asked to write a piece including the cello. The result was Britten's *Sonata in C*, which was completed and sent to the Soviet Union in 1961.³⁶ With the approval of the Soviet Cultural Ministry, Rostropovich premiered Britten's sonata at the 1961

³³ Kendall Alan. *Benjamin Britten*. London: Macmillan, 1974. 33.

³⁴ White, Eric Walter. John Evans, ed. *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*. Second edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. 82.

³⁵ Kendall, Alan. 34.

³⁶ Gishford, Anthony, ed. *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on his Fiftieth Birthday*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963. 14-18.

Aldeburgh Festival. Both the cellist and the composer/pianist received extremely positive reviews.³⁷

The *War Requiem* was completed by Britten in 1962. The piece was written for the consecration of a new Coventry Cathedral, the original structure had been destroyed during the Battle of Britain during World War II. The *War Requiem* was premiered at the new cathedral on 30 May 1962. Britten's strong pacifist ideals can be seen in the *War Requiem* as the work is not in any way a glorification of the English victory. Rather, it is a statement on the part of the composer about the general wickedness and futility of war. The piece was dedicated to four of Britten's friends, three English and one Kiwi, who were killed in World War I. For the text of the *War Requiem*, Britten interspersed material from a Latin mass with nine poems by Wilfred Owen, a soldier killed shortly before the end of World War I. The *War Requiem* requires massive musical forces to be performed: soprano, tenor, and baritone soloists, chamber orchestra, full choir, full (main) orchestra, boys' choir, and organ. Conducting the massive ensemble, Britten recorded the piece for the Decca Record Company in 1963. The remastered version of this recording, released in 1999, includes excerpts from rehearsals by Britten of the *War Requiem*. Upon listening to this recording, one can witness the level of detail and precision that Britten strived for in the performance of his work, (this will be discussed later in more detail).³⁸

Britten was made an honorary freeman of Aldeburgh in 1963. In his acceptance speech Britten expressed his belief that an artist should be a part of his community, having direct contact with his public. Long known to value audience appreciation of his own work, Britten went on to speak out against artistic serialism, drawing a distinction between the likes of Stravinsky and "electronic experimenters," and Picasso and "the chap who slings paint on a canvas."³⁹

³⁷ Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 395-402.

³⁸ Britten, Benjamin. *War Requiem*. London: Decca Record Company, Ltd. 1999.

³⁹ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 77.

Later in 1963 Britten and Pears went to the Soviet Union for numerous conducting and performing engagements—a sign of the lessening tensions between the West and the Soviets during the Khrushchev era. On 3 May 1963 while in Russia, Britten completed his *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 68*, which he had been composing for Rostropovich. Upon Britten's return to the U.K. he was showered with celebrations for his fiftieth birthday. Numerous concerts celebrated the occasion. Faber and Faber published a *Festschrift*, edited by Anthony Gishford, which included articles from thirty-five of Britten's friends. In addition, Britten's contemporary Michael Tippett dedicated his *Concerto for Orchestra* to Britten.⁴⁰

Britten traveled extensively in the year 1964. He returned to the Soviet Union to conduct the March premiere of his *Cello Symphony* with Rostropovich as soloist. The musicians in Russia warmly received Britten. While in Leningrad, Britten attended the first Russian performance of *Peter Grimes*, which led to further performances in Leningrad and Moscow the following year. The following spring Britten traveled to Budapest where he met Zoltan and Gabriel Jeney, two young sons of a distinguished Budapest flutist. Britten was inspired by their talents for the flute and the violin and the result was the composition of the *Gemini Variations*.⁴¹ In May of 1964 he traveled to Colorado to be awarded the Aspen Award in the Humanities, which also paid him a sum of \$30,000 for his advancements and contributions to the world as a composer. Britten returned to the Soviet Union, in October of 1964. On this trip he went to Riga, Leningrad, and Moscow for performances of his operas *Albert Herring*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, and *The Turn of the Screw*. Britten's friendship with Shostakovich was cemented, the Russian having given him a photograph inscribed, "to Dear Benjamin, one of my most beloved composers."⁴²

Benjamin Britten's relationship with his publisher Boosey and Hawkes ended in 1964. The relationship had been deteriorating for some time. Subsequently, Britten approached Faber and Faber about publishing some of his works. As a result, Faber

⁴⁰ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 78-79.

⁴¹ Kennedy, Michael. 82.

⁴² Kennedy, Michael. 82-85.

Music was formed as a division of Faber and Faber, with Britten as a board member. From 1965 onward, Faber Music would publish all of Britten's works.⁴³

Britten and Pears decided that 1965 was to be a year of sabbatical, as far as conducting and recitals were concerned. The exception to this was the annual Aldeburgh Festival. In August of 1965 Pears and Britten traveled to Yerevan, Armenia for the dual purpose of visiting Mstislav and Galina Rostropovich and attending the Britten Festival at Yerevan. In October of 1965 Britten was awarded the Wihuri-Sibelius Prize in Helsinki, Finland. Also in October, Britten's *Voices for Today*, commissioned by the United Nations, was performed in New York, Paris, and London.⁴⁴

In reciprocation, the Rostropoviches, who had spent Christmas at Crag House in 1965, hosted Britten and Pears in the U.S.S.R. for Christmas and New Year's in 1966-1967. While in the Soviet Union, Britten and Pears gave recitals in Moscow and Leningrad. Additionally, Britten spent more time during the 1966 Christmas holiday with Shostakovich.⁴⁵

One of the most significant events in Britten's life during 1967 was the opening of Maltings Concert Hall and Opera House in Aldeburgh. At this point Britten was semi-retired to Aldeburgh. Presiding over the consecration ceremonies for the Maltings was Queen Elizabeth II, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh. Maltings was opened during the Aldeburgh Festival in June of 1967.⁴⁶

The construction of Maltings Concert Hall and Opera House was made possible by large grants from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the National Arts Council, the Decca Record Company, and the Pilgrim Trust. The previous March Britten had completed his *Building of the House, Opus 79*, for orchestra and chorus. This would be the first piece that was performed in Maltings, by the English Chamber Orchestra under Britten. The hall was noted for its richness and warmth of acoustics during subsequent performances

⁴³ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 84.

⁴⁴ Palmer, Christopher. ed. *The Britten Companion*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 446.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, Michael. 88.

⁴⁶ Palmer, Christopher. 447.

of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Golden Vanity*, the latter being performed by the Vienna Boys Choir.⁴⁷

Britten began a strenuous recital tour beginning in Montreal with the English Opera Group in the fall of 1967. In Montreal the group performed two of the composer's *Church Parables* which included: *Curlew River, Opus 71* and *The Burning Fiery Furnace, Opus 77*. After the Montreal engagement, Britten and Pears gave recitals in New York. This was followed with a British Council recital tour of Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina.⁴⁸

While at work in 1968 on *The Prodigal Son, Opus 81*, another *Church Parable*, Britten became violently ill with sub-acute bacterial endocarditis. SBE is an infection of the lining of the heart and it is the same illness took the life of Mahler in 1911. This condition was very likely a result of a case of rheumatic fever that had afflicted Britten during his childhood. In addition to his stress over this condition, Britten was extremely worried about the completion of his composition before the summer of 1968—due in part to the large number of people whose summer jobs depended on its performance. Britten recovered, for the time being, and finished *The Prodigal Son* in April; it was later performed that summer.⁴⁹

In 1969 the B.B.C. recorded Britten conducting *Peter Grimes* for television at Maltings. A fire nearly destroyed this facility in the summer of that year. The walls remained but the roof was destroyed along with many instruments, including Britten's Steinway piano. The building was insured and local tradesmen were eager to help rebuild the facility in preparation for the 1970 season. Britten and Pears traveled to New York and Boston in October of 1969 in order to give recitals to raise additional money for the reconstruction of Maltings.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 89-91.

⁴⁸ Palmer, Christopher. ed. *The Britten Companion*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 448.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, Michael. 91.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, Michael. 94-95.

The always left-leaning Britten composed *Who are these children?*, Opus 84, in 1969. These were twelve settings of Scottish and English poems by the Scottish socialist writer William Soutar (1898-1943). The pieces were not performed until 1971, when Pears and Britten performed them at the Cardiff Festival of Twentieth Century Music.⁵¹

By the summer of 1970 Britten's beloved Maltings was reconstructed and was found to be acoustically better than before. The Queen attended the first concert of the Festival on June 5. For the first time since 1962, Britten had no new works to premiere at the Aldeburgh Festival.⁵² However, he did conduct the first performance outside of the U.S.S.R. of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 14*, which is dedicated to Britten.⁵³

It is due to the existence of Maltings that we have numerous recordings today of Britten conducting the works of other famous composers. Some examples of these are Bach's *Brandenburg Concerti* and the *St. John Passion*, Mozart's 38th and 40th Symphonies, Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, and several others. Britten recorded his own compositions during 1970, *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Owen Wingrave*, at Maltings. In his later years, Britten would not have been willing to spend enough time in London to make recording a possibility. However, with Maltings at his doorstep, the possibility of recording was much more attractive to the composer.⁵⁴

In May of 1971 Britten again traveled to the U.S.S.R. to conduct the London Symphony performances in Moscow and Leningrad of his *Cello Symphony* with Rostropovich. Earlier in 1971 Britten had composed his third *Cello Suite*, Opus 87, for Rostropovich, with the intention that it would be premiered the following summer at the Aldeburgh Festival. However, the cellist had to withdraw from that year's Festival because of political reasons. Due to his support of the dissident Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Rostropovich had fallen into disfavor with the Soviet authorities and was not allowed to travel to England. Later in 1971 a brief appendix was added to

⁵¹ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 95.

⁵² Kennedy, Michael. 97.

⁵³ Palmer, Christopher. ed. *The Britten Companion*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 450.

⁵⁴ Kennedy, Michael. 97.

the Aldeburgh Festival in September. It was at this time that Britten and Pears premiered the previously mentioned *Who are these children?*, which was based on the work of Soutar. In the late fall of 1971, Britten traveled to Venice where he began what would be his final opera, *Death in Venice*.⁵⁵

Britten continued to work on *Death in Venice* throughout 1972 in spite of continuing heart problems. The opera was based on the story from Thomas Mann's novella (1912), which contains the troubling themes of pedophilia and death by cholera in Venice. Britten completed *Death in Venice* in December of 1972. This year also marked the last time that he would give a recital with Pears, and this event took place at the Maltings.⁵⁶

Britten entered the National Heart Hospital in May of 1973 to have an operation to replace a deficient valve in his heart. The operation lasted six hours and, during the course of it, Britten suffered a mild stroke. Afterward, his speech was temporarily problematic, but his right hand was permanently affected. Britten never played the piano again, nor was he able to attend the premiere of *Death in Venice* on June 16 at the Aldeburgh Festival.⁵⁷

After open-heart surgery Britten was very frail and rarely left Aldeburgh. Britten finished his *Suite on English Folk Tunes, Opus 90*, in 1974. During October of that year *Death in Venice* was premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Also in 1974 Britten was awarded the Ravel Prize by the French government for achievements as a composer. In December of 1974 Rostropovich was finally able to perform Britten's *Cello Suite, Opus 87*, at Maltings.⁵⁸

Although he was ill, 1975 was a more prolific year for Britten as a composer. During 1975 Britten completed *Sacred and Profane, Opus 91*, for mixed chorus; *A Birthday Hansel, Opus 92*, which are poems by Burns that were set for voice and harp at

⁵⁵ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 97-99.

⁵⁶ Kennedy, Michael. 99-100.

⁵⁷ Kennedy, Michael. 101-103.

⁵⁸ Palmer, Christopher. ed. *The Britten Companion*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 452.

the request of the Queen; *Phaedra, Opus 93*, a cantata for harpsichord and small orchestra; and his *String Quartet No. 3, Opus 94*. In addition, Britten was able to attend the Royal Opera House for the last time for the July productions of *Peter Grimes* and *Death in Venice*. He also traveled to Venice in 1975 for the last time in his life. Britten was not able to fulfill all of the requests for compositions that he was receiving at this period in his life, due to his physical limitations, but he did work as much as possible, as he felt that composing helped “get him back on the rails.”⁵⁹

Britten was made a Lord on 12 June 1976 at his home in Aldeburgh. This was the first time such an honor had been bestowed upon any British composer. Later in the year, on December 4, Britten would die in his home at age sixty-three—while with Peter Pears. Britten was buried in the Aldeburgh Cemetery with simple services on 7 December 1976.⁶⁰

Today, Benjamin Britten is regarded among the world’s greatest composers. His music covers a wide range of musical genres and is popular in opera houses, orchestral concerts, and recitals of all types. Additionally, the world’s foremost virtuosi have recorded numerous compositions by Britten. He is known for many things today, including his revival of English opera, re-energizing of common practice tonality in the Twentieth Century, the creation of the Aldeburgh Festival, and his strong pacifist beliefs. Britten valued the opinions of his audience and strived to compose music that was accessible to a wide range of music listeners. His music is concise, detailed, clear, and is often based upon specific literature and historical information. His four works for oboe clearly demonstrate these traits.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 104-106.

⁶⁰ Kennedy, Michael. 107-110.

CHAPTER 2: *PHANTASY QUARTET, OPUS 2*

The *Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2*, was composed by Benjamin Britten in 1932 while he was attending the Royal College of Music. The work is written for oboe, violin, viola, and cello and is dedicated to the legendary British oboist Leon Goossens. Britten wrote the *Phantasy Quartet* specifically for a “phantasy competition,” (presumably the Cobbett competition for single movement phantasies). The work did not win the competition, however, and was not performed immediately after its composition.¹

The term “phantasy,” as used in the *Phantasy Quartet*, harks back to the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. “Phantasy” is the old English spelling of the word “fantasia.” The English musicologist Walter Wilson Cobbett adopted this spelling in 1905 when he devised a competition for phantasies—single movement works without breaks intended to permit compositional freedom. Cobbett’s competition was open only to British composers. Some composers other than Britten who wrote phantasies for this competition included Vaughan Williams and Bridge.

Britten’s *Phantasy Quartet* was first heard publicly in August 1933 in an English radio broadcast featuring Leon Goossens, the composition’s dedicatee.² The quartet was subsequently performed by Goossens and members of the International String Quartet in Florence at the I.S.C.M. Festival. This performance made the nineteen-year-old Britten’s name and work internationally known and foreshadowed his future promise as a composer.³

It is noteworthy that Britten composed the *Phantasy Quartet* a few years after the composition of the two quintets for oboe and strings by Arthur Bliss and Arnold Bax, which were written in 1922 and 1927 respectively. One of the common links that exists between the Britten and the Bax is Leon Goossens, to whom both pieces are dedicated. A

¹ Barret, Mary Ashley. *An Analysis and Comparison of the “Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2,” by Benjamin Britten and the “Quintet” for Oboe and String Quartet by Arthur Bliss*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University, 1993. 39.

² Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons/Macmillan, 1992. 50-51.

³ Hamburger, Paul. “The Chamber Music,” in *Benjamin Britten*. ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc. 1953. 211.

relative unknown in 1922, Goossens was famous by 1932 when Britten dedicated his quartet to the oboist.⁴

In addition to his *Phantasy Quartet*, Britten had written his *Phantasy* string quintet in F Minor in 1932, the work that won the Cobbett Competition for phantasies.⁵ Britten remained a fan of the English pastoral school at this time.⁶ This is evident in the *Phantasy Quartet*, which in a passage (rehearsal number 26) resembles the first movement of the *Oboe Concerto* by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Both the Britten and the Vaughan Williams feature fluid and lyrical melodies in the oboe that are placed above more structured accompaniments.

There are elements of Britten's pacifism that can be seen in the *Phantasy Quartet*. In the A sections of the piece—which will be discussed more later—one can hear the initial theme, a “lyrical impulse neutralized by cryptic march accompaniments.”⁷ The juxtaposition of singing lyricism against a quasi-military march theme suggests the composer's pacifism. War deeply haunted Britten at this point in his life.

There are a few different ideas amongst scholars as to the form of the *Phantasy Quartet*. Most agree that on the large scale the quartet is in an arc pattern. The piece begins and concludes with the same melodic material contained in the A sections. The arc is strengthened by Britten's treatment of these A sections. In the beginning of the piece he writes music that approaches the listener and becomes more complex as the section unfolds. Rhythms and harmonies at the beginning become more rapid and compressed and the dynamic levels increase progressively. The recapitulation of the A section is just the opposite of this; the music is in departure at this point, seemingly moving in a backwards motion in comparison to the introduction.⁸

⁴ Zetterqvist, Cynthia, jacket notes, *Oboe Music by Britten, Bax, and Bliss*, Gordon Hunt, oboe and the Tale String Quartet, B.I.S., CD-763, Djursholm, Sweden, 1997. 3.

⁵ Palmer, Christopher. ed. *The Britten Companion*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 428.

⁶ Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, vol. 4. London: Macmillan, 2001. 365.

⁷ Evans, Peter. *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1979. 23.

⁸ Hamburger, Paul. “The Chamber Music,” in *Benjamin Britten*. ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc. 1953. 211-218.

One must put the *Phantasy Quartet* into the proper context of time and place when determining its specific form. An important issue to consider is Britten’s love for composers such as Beethoven and Brahms in 1932. Also important is the nature of the Cobbett competition, for which Britten was composing the piece. The Cobbett competition was for “phantasies,” single movement works that challenged the long accepted four-movement archetype for compositions. Taking this and Britten’s admiration for the classics into account leads one to surmise that Britten combined classical forms and traditions with prevailing modern ideas when writing the *Phantasy Quartet*.⁹

A close examination of the *Phantasy Quartet* leads one to conclude that the quartet is a unification of a four-movement work with unique themes characterizing each of the “movements.” Taking the circumstances surrounding the *Phantasy Quartet*’s composition into consideration makes this theory all the more logical.¹⁰

Table 1—Symbols used for discussion of sections in the *Phantasy Quartet*

Larger sections/functional “movements”	A, B, C, etc.
Smaller sections/sections within “movements”	a,b,c, etc.

The A section of the *Phantasy Quartet* consists of measures 1-60. The music is processional here at the opening of the piece, just as it is recessional at the closing of the piece. Interestingly, this characteristic led Whittall to describe the *Phantasy Quartet* as a programmatic work.¹¹

The “Andante” A section contains two distinctive themes: the initial march theme played by the strings, which is then followed by the lyrical theme played by the oboe beginning in measure 24. The tonality of the movement fluctuates between G Major and C Major, with the harmonies of C Major becoming more convincing around measure 27.

⁹ Barret, Mary Ashley. *An Analysis and Comparison of the “Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2,” by Benjamin Britten and the “Quintet” for Oboe and String Quartet by Arthur Bliss*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University, 1993. 39.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Whittall, Arnold. *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 57.

The A section, or processional, begins with a *ppp* dynamic in the cello. True to the larger arc form, the dynamics slowly increase throughout the section until the frenetic *ff* finish at measure 60.

The B section of the *Phantasy Quartet*, consisting of measures 61-212, is characterized by a more agitated quality. This is created by the *allegro giusto* tempo, 2/2 meter, and generally higher dynamic levels. This B section is in an ABA form. The first section, or *a* section, consists of measures 61-102 and begins in the tonal area of C Minor. It is characterized by the theme first played by the violin in measure 65. The *b* section begins in measure 102 and is centered around D Major. The music played by the oboe in this section is a scalar, pentatonic figure based on D, which adds a slightly exotic flavor to this section of the piece.¹² The theme of this *b* section is first heard in the cello part at measure 103 and subsequently elaborated upon by the other instruments in the quartet. The thematic material from the *a* section returns at measure 165 in the viola part, marking the recapitulation of the first section.

The C section is made up of measures 210-371. In the scheme of a traditional four-movement work, this section represents the typical slow movement. It is the C section of the *Phantasy Quartet* that most resembles the music of the English pastoral composers such as Vaughan Williams.

The C section is marked by a new meter and tempo. The meter is a $\frac{3}{4}$ that remains relatively slow throughout the duration of the section. The music here is much more sedate and serene than that which preceded it in the B section. Measures 234-308 make up a string trio that includes cadenzas for all three stringed instruments. In measure 310 the oboe re-enters with a fluid cadenza. Britten asks that the oboist be flexible against a fairly metronomic string accompaniment. This can be seen with his markings of *ad libitum* for the oboe part and *sempre a tempo* for the strings.

Britten unified the four sections of the *Phantasy Quartet* through thematic integration. The C section of the quartet borrows material from both the A and B sections, effectively bringing more unity to the *Phantasy Quartet*. An example of

¹² Barret, Mary Ashley. *An Analysis and Comparison of the "Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2," by Benjamin Britten and the "Quintet" for Oboe and String Quartet by Arthur Bliss*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University, 1993. 42.

melodic material borrowed from the A section can be seen in measure 234, or rehearsal number 20. At this point a melodic line in the viola is intervallicly related to the oboe's initial theme in the A section. An example of music borrowed from the B section begins in measure 349, or rehearsal number 30. In this case Britten integrates the themes from the B section with melodic material from the C section in the oboe. The sharing of thematic material between sections brings more unity to larger sections and/or pieces and is very typical of Benjamin Britten—this is one of his compositional trademarks. One can see the same technique used in the *Phantasy Quartet* in Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49*, from 1951.

Whittall calls the final section of the *Phantasy Quartet* “recessional.”¹³ In this recapitulation of the original A section, beginning at measure 371, the music seemingly goes from near to far. Specifically, the closing music of the piece becomes less complex as it unfolds; rhythms and harmonies become progressively less tightly compressed and the dynamic levels gradually fade into a whisper. This also strengthens the idea that the arc form is completed, since the music came from far to near in the initial A section.¹⁴ The recapitulation of the A section repeats the juxtaposition of the oboe's lyrical lines against the march-like string accompaniment. The section is in the key of G and ends on a rather distant-sounding unresolved F-Sharp in the cello. However, due to the sparse texture at the end of the final A section, the key and harmonies become increasingly unclear just as they became increasingly clear in the introduction.

Britten's *Phantasy Quartet* was the first piece to bring the composer international recognition. Many of Britten's hallmark compositional devices are evident in this early work. There are many similarities between the *Phantasy Quartet* and Britten's subsequent pieces featuring the oboe.

At this point it is important to note that all of Britten's pieces for oboe, including the *Phantasy Quartet*, are representative of the high degree of detail typical in Britten's compositions. It is apparent that Britten, as well as the publisher Boosey and Hawkes,

¹³ Whittall, Arnold. *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 57-66.

¹⁴ Barret, Mary Ashley. *An Analysis and Comparison of the “Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2,” by Benjamin Britten and the “Quintet” for Oboe and String Quartet by Arthur Bliss*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University, 1993. 43.

took great care to diligently place dynamic markings in the *Phantasy Quartet*, often with crescendos and decrescendos having very obvious origination and termination points. Additionally, Britten was very specific with his instructions for the string parts, often indicating what part of the instrument, with or without mute, or with which string and/or fingering. One of the most striking things that can be seen in the *Phantasy Quartet* is the amount of control that Britten demanded with regard to articulation. Not only are numerous phrases written with many types of accent markings, but one can see much variety and specificity in Britten's demands as well.

The remastered version of Decca Records' 1963 recording of Britten's *War Requiem*, which was released in 1999, contains audio material of the composer rehearsing the piece in the recording studio. Britten's attention to detail is clearly apparent in these rehearsals. In one instance while rehearsing "Requiem Aeternam," he says to the violins: "...you're sustaining excellently, the trouble is, it's a little bit too vibrato on the crotchets (quarter notes)...it's a little too personal sounding, it should be rather a more general feeling."¹⁵ In another instance, Britten says candidly to the chorus: "[At rehearsal number] eight, chorus, I have to admit the composer was right, *mezzo-forte* is too much, so can you go back to *piano*?"¹⁶ These comments are somewhat revealing as to Britten's desire for the performance of his music to closely fit his personal conceptualization of it. What is more revealing, upon listening to several minutes of the rehearsal, is that Britten seemingly never stops trying to cement the details in his music and never loses his intense push for perfection.

The larger significance of Britten's extensive use of dynamic, tempo, expression, and articulation markings has to do with performance practice. It is clear that Britten had very specific intentions as to what he desired from his music in performance. This is evident in his music and it is also clearly obvious in his rehearsals. For these reasons performers must be careful to take liberties only within Britten's performance parameters, carefully taking into consideration all of his structural and expressive markings.

¹⁵ Britten, Benjamin. *War Requiem*. London: Decca Record Company, Ltd., 414 383-2, 1999. Track 5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: *TWO INSECT PIECES*

Benjamin Britten composed the *Two Insect Pieces* in the spring of 1935 for the British oboist Sylvia Spenser. These works are short, rather sparse, programmatic character pieces for oboe and piano depicting “The Grasshopper” and “The Wasp.” The *Two Insect Pieces* were played through by Britten and Spenser in April of 1935. However, they were not performed publicly until 7 March 1979, when they were played by Janet Craxton and Margot Wright in a memorial concert for Sylvia Spenser at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.¹ It is logical to assume that the composer was relatively happy with them, or at the very least the idea of “insect” pieces. This is because Britten wrote sketches for several more insect pieces that were never completed.²

The *Two Insect Pieces* were one of only two instrumental recital pieces written by Britten during 1935, the other one being the *Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6*. In 1935 Britten also wrote fourteen film scores and two theatre scores. Britten worked on several films in 1935 where his music played a significant and substantive role, such as *The King’s Stamp, Coal Face, and The Torch*. The latter is a shadow play with continuous music written by Rossini and arranged by Britten. The remainder of the film music that Britten wrote in 1935 was less significant, in many cases just title and end music.³

The first of the *Two Insect Pieces* is “The Grasshopper.” The typical motions of a grasshopper are brought to life by a 6/8 meter that is punctuated with staccato attacks. The initial tempo designation for “The Grasshopper” is “Allegretto leggiero” with the tempo of the dotted quarter note equaling 60. Performed with two beats to the bar, the theme of “The Grasshopper” typifies the insect jumping about, often with the launch on the third or sixth eighth note and the landing on the fourth or first eighth note, or main beat. From beginning to end in “The Grasshopper,” Britten wrote staccato eighth note

¹ Matthews, Colin. Preface to *Two Insect Pieces*, by Benjamin Britten. London: Faber Music. 1980.

² Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 17.

³ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 100.

punctuations in the piano that form the interval of a major second. It is possible that this interval represents the irregular nature of the grasshopper's footing on naturally juxtaposed blades of grass and/or the friction of the grasses as the grasshopper launches and lands upon them.

"The Grasshopper" is in ABA form and is in the key area of E. Measures 1-42 make up the A section. The section is characterized by the aforementioned launching/landing quality of the music inherent in its 3-4 and 6-1 motion of eighth notes in triple meter. The A section begins in the key area of E Major and ends in a tonicized F Major. Measures 43-56 make up the animated B section, which is marked "Molto piu animato." This section begins abruptly in the key of E Major with an E tonic pedal in the piano. In a manner similar to most of Britten's *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*, the B section of "The Grasshopper" contains some material and devices previously seen in the A section. For example, a descending figure with major second intervals on the bottom can be seen in the right hand of the piano throughout the B section. This figure is borrowed from the A section's left hand piano part. Also, some of the launching/landing figures from the rhythms of the A section are present in the oboe melody in the B section. Finally, the staccato articulations asked for by the composer in the A section remain in the B section. The B section ends with prominent pitches of D and F Sharp, in the oboe and the right hand of the piano, respectively. This prepares the beginning of the A section's return in measure 57 with dominant inflections towards its initial key area of G minor.

The recapitulation of the A section quickly moves from G minor to the original key area of E Major. In this section, a warmth of sound is the result of Britten's use of sustained triads in the left hand of the piano from measure 66 onwards. This liberal use of pure triads in a piece intended for public performance is a first for Britten in 1935. However, in every case in the final section of "The Grasshopper" the consonant triads are subsequently overlaid with additional pitches that are dissonant.⁴

With the exception of Britten's use of sustained triads in the return of the A section, the music is very much like that of the initial A section. The last five measures

⁴ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 100.

of “The Grasshopper” contain the oboe’s “ad libitum” motion upwards to a sustained pitch of E. This is followed by a pure triad of E Major in the right hand of the piano, which is subsequently accented by a dissonant F-Sharp punctuation in the ultimate measure of the piece.

“The Wasp” is the second of Britten’s *Two Insect Pieces*. “The Wasp” is more virtuosic than “The Grasshopper,” particularly in its piano part. Just as in “The Grasshopper,” “The Wasp” contains melodies and devices that typify the particular insect that forms the basis for the piece. In the case of “The Wasp” Britten chose a more rapid tempo, quarter note equaling 135, in order to portray the rapidity of the wasp’s flight and/or the speed of its wings. In addition, the piano part usually has some sort of oscillating sixteenth-note figure, presumably to again represent the velocity of the wasp’s wings or to portray the busy nature of this particular insect. The unarticulated melodies in the oboe represent flight. In “The Wasp” these melodies are a slurred dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm that may seem somewhat jagged for depicting flight. However, they are appropriate here; the flight of a wasp is not the smooth affair that is the flight of a bird, or even most other winged insects.

The form of “The Wasp” is a simple ABA. The piece begins in the key area of E Major and ends in the key area of A Major. Measures 1-28 make up the initial A section. This section begins and ends in E Major. It includes the previously mentioned sixteenth note passage that is indicative of flight and haste. The oboe melody is the aforementioned dotted-eighth-sixteenth note figure. However, in measure 24 the rhythm in the oboe part accelerates: first to triplets, then sixteenth notes, then finally to a forte trill just before the dramatic conclusion of the A section in E Major.

Just as in “The Grasshopper,” the B section (measures 29-39) of “The Wasp” makes an abrupt start in a key that is in contrast to the key area that immediately preceded it in the A section. In the case of “The Wasp,” the B section begins in a forte D Major. The melodic lines in this section are slightly longer and more lyrical than those in the A section. In the oboe part the final slurred eighth note in each measure is preceded by a pitch that is always a minor second away from it. Britten’s use of a minor second in this case may represent the wasp’s ability to sting. Or, since this particular music is lyrical yet snipped at the ends with a minor second, it may represent the possibility of a

wasp stinging unexpectedly. The B section of “The Wasp” concludes with a sounding D Major triad that is written atop a B Flat tonic pedal, which in performance would have diminished in volume somewhat over the preceding six measures.

The return of the A section of “The Wasp,” in measure 40 is very similar melodically to the initial appearance of the A section. However, in this case the section is in the key of A Major. This is also the key in which “The Wasp” ends after its repetition of the original A section’s melodies.

An interesting characteristic worth noting about the conclusions of both of the *Two Insect Pieces* is the use of accent markings by the composer. The accents show Britten’s desire for a somewhat bolder finish at the end of his pieces. The final notes are accented in both “The Wasp” and “The Grasshopper,” just as they are in the *Temporal Variations* by Britten. Also, the final movement of the *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*, “Arethusa,” ends with a crescendo spanning the final two measures—with the ultimate note being the strongest again as a result.

CHAPTER 4: TEMPORAL VARIATIONS

Benjamin Britten's *Temporal Variations* was written for oboe and piano in 1936. The work was completed on 12 December 1936 and premiered on 15 December of the same year in London's Wigmore Hall. The performers were Natalie Caine and Adolph Hallis. Britten's diary entry from this day indicates that he was pleased with the work.¹ However the *Temporal Variations* was not performed again until 1980, the year in which it was published.²

Britten's work with the General Post Office film unit likely influenced his writing style in a way that can be seen in the *Temporal Variations*. The style of writing for film involves more colouration and effects than normally associated with typical art music. This manifested itself in many of the composer's compositions, including the *Temporal Variations*' "Chorale." In this variation Britten used the oboe in the harmonic register over chordal motion in the piano in order to create an ethereal *tinta* in this movement. Also, in the "Polka" variation, Britten wrote rather unflatteringly for the oboe "giving semitones new potency...but with less subtlety than the earlier pieces;"³ presumably in an attempt to create a type of effect rather than for outright beauty of melody and voice.

The *Temporal Variations* was composed at the end of 1936, a very significant year for Britten. Earlier in 1936 Britten composed *Our Hunting Fathers*, a large-scale symphonic song cycle for high voice and orchestra. For the text of *Our Hunting Fathers* Britten collaborated with his colleague W.H. Auden. Britten was very pleased with the song cycle and considered it to be his first important work. His diary, which he kept from 1928-1938, attests to this.⁴ It was in 1936 that Britten composed the quasi-song cycle for oboe, the *Temporal Variations*, the same year of the composition of *Our*

¹ Matthews, Colin. Preface to *Temporal Variations*, by Benjamin Britten. London: Faber Music. 1980.

² Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 121.

³ Evans, Peter. *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1979. 553.

⁴ Mitchell, Donald. *Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981. 19.

Hunting Fathers. Britten learned a great deal from his colleague W. H. Auden; the poet introduced Britten to a wide range of thought about art, politics, sociology, and sexuality. *Our Hunting Fathers*, which is fundamentally about the inhumanity of man in general, stems from the ideals held by Auden and Britten in 1936.⁵

There are some technical parallels between the *Temporal Variations* and *Our Hunting Fathers*. Just as in the *Temporal Variations*, *Our Hunting Fathers* combines straightforward forms and more ambiguous harmony. As an example, several movements of *Our Hunting Fathers* contain a five-note cell that juxtaposes major and minor tonalities. Britten was determined to have a unifying principle in the song-cycle and chose to use a typical symphonic structure to bring a degree of absolutism to the work. A model for this type of writing may have been Alban Berg, with whom Britten wanted to study one point. In Berg's *Wozzeck* less traditional tonality is combined with more concrete forms. As a result, in the second act of *Wozzeck* one can see a type of symphony with five movements that is hidden within the larger opera.⁶

Much of the existing literature on Benjamin Britten discusses his respect for Gustav Mahler's orchestration and creation of lyrical melodies. In the case of *Our Hunting Fathers*, and to some degree the *Temporal Variations*, it is possible for one to see a spiritual kinship between Britten and Mahler. The use of a song-cycle by Britten, whether in large-scale orchestral form or modified form for use in the oboe piece, points to Mahler's monumental works *Das Lied von der Erde* and the *Kindertotenlieder*.⁷

Britten learned to write at a high rate of speed in the mid-1930's in order to deliver his film assignments on time. Interestingly, Britten's oboe works were usually composed rapidly during years in which he was busy with very large projects. This is evidenced by the relatively high output of compositions by Britten during these years. Britten completed *Irish Reel*, for orchestra, *Night Mail*, for chamber orchestra, *Three Divertimenti*, for string quartet, and *Russian Funeral*, for brass and percussion ensemble all during 1936. But the majority of Britten's time composing in 1936 was devoted to

⁵ Cooke, Mervyn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1999. 262.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

G.P.O. films. During this year he wrote music for several films: *Peace of Britain*, *Around the Village Green*, *Men of the Alps*, *The Saving of Bill Blewitt*, *Calendar of the Year*, *Line to the Tschierva Hut*, *Four Barriers*, *Message from Geneva*, *Love from a Stranger*, *The Way to the Sea*, and *Book Bargain*.

The “Theme,” which begins the *Temporal Variations*, starts in G minor. In measure 12 the key area of E-Flat minor appears by way of E-Flat minor triads in both hands of the piano. This is followed by triads of A-Flat minor and F diminished, which further suggest the key of E-Flat minor. However, harmonic ambiguity appears at the end of the “Theme” with the return of the oboe to the opening D. This return to D is aided by strong voice-leading in the precedent accented C-Sharp. The lack of any harmonic support in the piano leaves the listener with a feeling of ambiguity, questioning whether the movement has arrived at D or at the sounding B minor that is played in the piano prior to the oboe’s concluding figure.⁸ It is noteworthy that in the opening C-Sharp to D motive of the “Theme” that the lower note is always accented and the upper note is never accented. This will be examined later in more detail.

Also of significance in the “Theme” is the interplay between A and B motives. The initial lyrical motion in the oboe, often by motion of a second or a sixth, represents the A motive. B is represented by the more rapid countermelody in the piano. The A and B motives can be seen throughout the *Temporal Variations*, usually morphing form in some way while retaining a similar relationship to one another. This interplay between lyricism and turbulence is somewhat reminiscent of the juxtaposition of the march-like accompaniment with singing lyricism in the opening of Britten’s *Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2*.

The “Oration” is centered on the key area of E-Flat, the last key that was firmly established in the preceding “Theme.” As in the “Theme,” the opening of the “Oration” is harmonically ambiguous. Elements of G minor and E Flat are intermingled. The brilliant opening piano gesture leading to the forte oboe entrance is the first rhetorical device that manifests itself in slightly different forms repeatedly throughout the

⁸ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 122.

movement. The examples of this device in measures 24 and 39 are the most assertive in E-Flat.⁹

The “Oration” is through-composed. This is affirmed by the title itself as well as the ‘Lento quasi recitativo’ designation at the top of the movement. The A and B themes are written in an interconnected manner in “Oration.” For example, measures 22-23 are a version of A, which lead to a more declamatory B in the oboe at 24, followed by another version of A in measure 25. The movement has a secondary harmonic center of D-Flat that can be seen in measure 29 and E minor in measure 31-32. Measures 34-35 have an allegiance with both D-Flat and E-Flat minor. The “Oration” ends in an inconclusive manner on the dominant of E-Flat minor. Britten’s propensity for ambiguity is seen in the non-standard form of this movement as well as its less concrete harmonies.¹⁰

The “March” is centered in the key area of A Flat and is in ternary form. A triplet march rhythm is present in every bar of this movement. The interval of the major seventh is omnipresent in this movement and recalls, in an inverted form, the A motive from the beginning of the “Theme.” For example, theme A in the March is initially represented by the motion from E to D-Sharp at the beginning of the movement. Additionally, the piano plays the interval of a major seventh when it takes the A theme from the oboe in measure 49.¹¹

In measures 50-51 of the “March” the oboe plays a triplet figure similar to the opening figure; but in this case it leads up to a series of staccato E-Flats preceded by lower neighbor grace notes. This figure, in addition to the harmonies in this section of the movement, confirms the key of A-Flat.¹²

Despite its underpinning by the march rhythm, the central section that begins in measure 60 is fairly lyrical. This section also contains the reference to the “Theme” as seen in the piano starting in measure 60. Britten takes the movement to the key of C-Flat at measure 71, where it will remain until its return to A-Flat at measure 76. The

⁹ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 123.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mark, Christopher. 124.

movement concludes with chromatic motion in both voices that ends abruptly and is followed by an *attaca* movement: “Exercises.”¹³

The initial oboe melody in “Exercises” has to be interpreted against the key area of D, which is simultaneously present in the piano. In measure 90 the piano plays a lyrical, yet chromatic, melody that bears resemblance to the melody seen in the “March,” initially in measure 48. Also in measure 90 the oboe’s A motive is inverted at the same time as the dominant pitch of A appears in the bass. From measure 92 onwards, the centrality of D is no longer present as the piano part contains chromatic motion that is transitional. In measure 99 an interplay between the oboe and piano begins that is a battle for tonality: the piano repeatedly cadences on F while the oboe repeatedly cadences on F-Sharp. However, F-Sharp eventually wins out in measure 103 and becomes the prevailing key area. In measure 118 the movement climaxes in D minor with a clear assertion of that triad in the piano. “Exercises” retains its emphasis on D for the remainder of the movement.¹⁴ The strong emphasis on D gives a dominant preparation for the upcoming movement, “Commination,” which begins in G minor.

“Commination” is primarily a textural variation.¹⁵ The movement bears one of the strongest resemblances of all of the variations to the “Theme.” The movement is in G minor and does not stray from the key. In “Commination” the material that is played by the oboe is borrowed from the “Theme,” but this time it is played in the lower octave of the instrument, which is more strident, or *fuoco*. The differences between the “Commination” and the “Theme” have more to do with the harsher color and texture of the “Commination” than with harmony or form. Predictably, the word *commination* is defined as “a denunciation or threatening, especially from a divine source.”¹⁶ The tempo marking for “Commination” is *Adagio con fuoco* and the dynamic levels are predominantly higher than those of the “Theme.” The “Theme” is centered around a

¹³ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. 124.

¹⁴ Mark, Christopher. 124-125.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Landau, Sidney I., ed. *The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*. The Reader’s Digest Association. 1966. 272.

pianissimo dynamic and its tempo indication is “Andante rubato.” Although the material from the A motive of the “Theme” is basically the same but in a lower octave, the B motive has been altered. In “Commination” the B motive in the piano, starting in the first full measure, is a more liquid figure (sextuplet leading into septuplet) as opposed to the more rigid accented septuplet of the “Theme.”

In addition to the textural diversions accomplished by “Commination,” the movement serves another purpose. Although “Commination” is not complex, it is worth observing its placement in the *Temporal Variations* as a whole. The movements of the *Temporal Variations* are grouped two by two: slow, slow, fast, fast, etc. The “Commination” fits nicely into a group of two slow movements. In addition, the two movements most similar to the “Theme” itself are clearly “Commination” and “Resolution.” These movements are first, fifth, and ninth, respectively—all equidistant from one another. One might think that this is coincidence; however, given the meticulous detail present in Britten’s work, the author suspects that the placement of “Commination” at dead center was intentional on the part of the composer in a possible attempt to bring balance to the piece and maintain a presence of the original thematic material.

The “Chorale” is in E-Flat minor and is distinguished by its placement of isolated pitches in the oboe that are in semitonal conflict with the diatonicism in the piano. This can be seen in measures 151, 154, etc. There are many purely diatonic triads in this movement. The oboe is pitted against the piano in the “Chorale” harmonically, but the effect is more ethereal than purely dissonant due to the writing for the oboe that is always in a higher register than the piano. In measure 157 the “Chorale” cadences on E-Flat Major, moving away from the initial E-Flat minor. In measure 158 Britten introduces a minor ninth to the E-Flat dominant chord, lending more chromaticism to the movement. B-Flat is the final tonality of the “Chorale,” however, Britten added an E-Flat to the final chord in the piano in a typically Brittenesque move to add ambiguity. The E-Flat will not be fully resolved until the movement following the “Chorale,” the “Waltz.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1995. 125-126.

The “Waltz” begins in E-Flat with an oscillation between tonic chords in the second-inversion and ii7 chords. The movement employs the A motive from measures 13-15 of the “Theme”; specifically, this can be seen in the descending motion in measure 176. The “tremolando” figure, or B motive, from the “Theme” is also used in the “Waltz” in slightly modified form in measures 190-191. The central section of the movement, measures 190-208, includes interplay between C and G-Flat. These two keys are interestingly equidistant from the initial tonic of E-Flat minor, which the “Waltz” returns to for its conclusion.¹⁸

The lightweight “Polka” begins in the key of D Major. The oboe melody in the first few bars is a descending major seventh. This can be interpreted as an inversion of the initial fragment of the A motive from the “Theme.” The central section of the “Polka” (measures 247-271) is based on a D7 chord. In this case the chord is not functioning as a dominant chord, as one might suspect, in preparation for the final movement in G Major. Rather, this particular chord a non-resolving seventh-chord which is used to form the harmonic foundation for the section. This “natural seventh” phenomenon is highly characteristic of later works by Britten, yet curiously present in this early work by the composer.¹⁹ In measure 271 there is a recapitulation of the original thematic material, again in D Major. In this final section of the “Polka” the oboe reaches its melodic peak of d3 shortly before the accented conclusion of the movement

“Resolution” is a highly appropriate title for the final movement of the *Temporal Variations*. The melodic material in the oboe part is borrowed directly from the “Theme.” The movement “resolves” by coming back to the tonality of G, but in this case, G Major and not G minor. “Resolution” begins in the key area of B-Flat and makes progressive motions around the circle of fifths, by way of the chordal motions in the piano part, until the key area of G Major is eventually reached in measure 308.²⁰ The final D that is played in the oboe is accented. This is in contrast to the accent that, in

¹⁸ Mark, Christopher. *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1995. 126-127.

¹⁹ Mark, Christopher. 127-128.

²⁰ Ibid.

every other case, is on the C-Sharp in the “Theme” and the “Resolution.” The accent on the fifth also confirms the “resolution” to G Major at the end of the piece.

The *Temporal Variations* is representative of writing that is very typical of Benjamin Britten and in general, the harmonic language that is used is very straightforward for a piece that was written in the 1930’s. Although Britten often chose to add a degree of ambiguity to the harmonies in the piece, he never opted to fully depart from the rules of common practice musical writing. Triads and traditional dominant/tonic relationships are the basis for this work. The non-chord tones that add ambiguity are present in order to add color rather than to form the basis for the composition. Rhythmically, the *Temporal Variations* is not a complex work; Britten had chosen in this case to avoid mixed-meters and cross-rhythms. As with the other works for oboe by Britten, one can see that very close attention was given to details such as dynamic indication and articulation markings. For example, in some instances material that Britten borrowed from previous movements can be seen with new markings that contribute to very different musical effects than were heard previously. All of the above mentioned characteristics of the *Temporal Variations* are highly typical of Britten’s work. Although not a large-scale piece, the *Temporal Variations* is a standard recital piece in the oboe repertoire, as well as one of the more important works to be written for oboe during the Twentieth Century.

CHAPTER 5: SIX METAMORPHOSES AFTER OVID, OPUS 49

The inspiration for Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49*, came to him from the *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid. As stated in the first chapter, Ovid lived from 43 B.C. to 17 A.D. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are a collection of legends that in many cases deal with transformation. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are themselves influenced by the writings of the ancient Greeks, in particular, Homer and Boios.¹

Benjamin Britten wrote the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* in 1951, which was the same year in which he devoted the bulk of his time to writing his opera *Billy Budd*, based on the novel by the American writer Herman Melville. Melville is famous for writing sea stories that are based, to some degree, on his own experience as a sailor. It is not surprising that Britten, who by twentieth century Continental standards was not a pure musical innovator in the mold of the Second Viennese School for instance, would find inspiration in this nineteenth century author—in a way paying homage to the artistic ways of the past.

The majority of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* deal with a character that undergoes a transition in form or state of mortality. In the four movements involving actual metamorphoses in form, the respective legends from Ovid always depict the metamorphosis or transition being initiated by a more powerful being. The legends from Ovid are not unlike the literary basis for the opera *Billy Budd*. Billy Budd is a transitional character; he is initially an innocent youth. However, as a result of malicious shipmates who are more articulate than he, he inadvertently kills a man and is later executed himself. The initial malice towards, violence against, and execution of Billy Budd in Britten's opera comes from other persons in Billy's environment.² In the end, Billy Budd was a victim of more powerful people, just as many of the characters from the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* were victims, in one way or another, of beings more powerful than themselves.

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Translated with Intro. by Innes, Mary M. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955. pgs. 12-13

² Cooke, Mervyn and Philip Reed. *Benjamin Britten: Billy Budd*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 1-14.

Since it is impossible for composers to write in a vacuum, *Billy Budd* is likely to have influenced Britten's *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*. The music of *Billy Budd* took over a year for Britten to write and months more to score. During 1951, Britten was able to write only two other compositions: the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* and *Abraham and Isaac*. Since the *Six Metamorphoses* deal with personal transitions on the part of the subjects, just as *Billy Budd* does, it stands to reason that both the opera and the solo oboe work share this characteristic in part due to proximity of composition. In fact, it is possible that *Billy Budd* could very well have led to the composition of *The Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*.

Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* was written for the British oboist Joy Boughton. It was premiered in an outdoor venue at the Aldeburg Festival of 1951 by the dedicatee. Incidentally, the manuscript copy accidentally fell from Britten's hand at the premiere and into a nearby pond.³ The reviews were generally positive, as one example from *Music and Letters* reads: "...each piece is like a pastoral improvisation, where the shepherd's pipe can never remember the original starting point of a tune and loses itself in a fresh excursion of exquisite musical verbiage."⁴

The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* is one of the few notable compositions written for an unaccompanied wind instrument in the Twentieth Century.⁵ At present, this piece is by far the most frequently performed unaccompanied composition for solo oboe. Additionally, the work has become a standard part of the oboe's solo repertoire and a common piece for students and professionals to study and perform.

"Pan," the first movement, includes the descriptive prose: "Pan, who played upon the reed pipe which was Syrinx, his beloved."⁶ Pan is portrayed by Ovid as a strong, powerful god with a very high opinion of himself. Pan had an appetite for naïve young

³ Kennedy, Michael. Stanley Sadie, ed. *Master Musicians: Britten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 57.

⁴ Capell, Richard, ed. "Review of 'Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49,' by Benjamin Britten." *Music and Letters*, 33, 1952. 365-366.

⁵ Evans, Peter. "Benjamin Britten," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, ed. London: Macmillan, 1980. 3: 293-308.

⁶ Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 1.

women and—like most other gods—usually got what he wanted.⁷ In Ovid, Pan pursued Syrinx, a wood nymph, by speaking seductively to her. She gave him only scorn in return and fled into the forest to the point of the Ladon River. At this point, Syrinx prayed for transformation in order to elude Pan and her prayers were granted. As Pan reached for Syrinx, she vanished, and he instead ended up with a handful of marsh reeds that produced a tone reminiscent of the nymph.⁸ When one takes into account Ovid’s prose, “Pan” depicts not the morphing of Syrinx into reed pipes, but rather the experience from the perspective of Pan.

As can be seen in most of the movements from the *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*, “Pan” is in ABA form. The pre-metamorphosis character is depicted in the A section and the action of the metamorphosis is depicted in the B section of the movement. The character is depicted in its transformed state in the return of the A section.⁹ As with the rest of the movements in this work, there are elements of the A section intermingled in the B section and vice-versa. This simultaneously adds a touch of ambiguity and connectivity that is a hallmark of Britten’s music.

The first five measures of “Pan” make up the A section. This section is based on the A Major scale and features musical lines that are scalar and flowing with four fermatas. These fermatas serve to strengthen the section as a whole by setting up each phrase with a brief melodic silence. The forward motion of the section is aided by the use of unstable scale degrees on the final two fermatas. The section ends on an unresolved F-Sharp, adding ambiguity as it sets up the transformative B section.¹⁰

The B section encompasses the music between measures 6 and 10. The repeated use of A-Sharp creates a tension that permeates the section. In measures 7-9, the tension created by the A-Sharp is resolved to A-natural at the end of each measure. Intervals of

⁷ Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise. School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 23-33.

⁸ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Horace Gregory, trns. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 51-52.

⁹ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the whole-tone scale are outlined in measure 10, further heightening tension by adding an element of instability.¹¹

The A section of “Pan” returns in compressed form at measure 11 with elements of the B section (repeated A-Sharps) added in. The final two measures suggest the Lydian mode on D.¹² In addition, D is the tonic note of the fundamental scale of the oboe, D Major. As is the case with many of his oboe works, Britten chose to utilize this pitch to conclude this particular piece. The final phrase ties together different elements of “Pan” and gives a sense of resolution to the movement, while depicting the completed transformation of Syrinx.¹³

The second movement of the *Six Metamorphoses* is “Phaeton.” In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Phaeton was the son of the sun god, Phoebus. Due to the taunting of other children, Phaeton approached Phoebus to verify that he was indeed his father. In order to prove his paternity, Phoebus granted Phaeton any wish. Phaeton then asked for the use of his father’s chariot and its wing-footed horses for one day. With regret, Phoebus allowed Phaeton to use this lightweight chariot. Immediately, the horses sensed that Phoebus was not aboard the chariot and leapt high into the sky. Phaeton was so frightened that he dropped the reins, at once losing control of the chariot. The chariot veered upwards and then made a steep descent. The earth caught fire and Atlas had difficulty holding up the sky. Phoebus mustered the strength of all of the gods in an effort to prevent the complete destruction of the earth. A lightning bolt was hurled through the sky to prevent any further destruction, charring Phaeton and causing him to crash towards the earth. The earth was saved. Phaeton landed into a river and Nymphs subsequently buried his scorched body.¹⁴

“Phaeton” does not exactly fit the definition of a metamorphosis. Nor does Britten indicate, by his music or descriptive prose, that the movement is to be considered a metamorphosis. Although “Phaeton” follows an ABA form, the B section in this case

¹¹ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 23.

¹² Hiramoto, Stephen. 24.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Horace Gregory, trns. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 53-68.

is not music that represents transformation. Rather, it is a simple variation of the A section that does not significantly elaborate upon the melodic ideas of the A section. Furthermore, the return of the A section does not incorporate ideas from the B section as do the transformative movements of the *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*.¹⁵

“Phaeton” is more similar to the *Two Insect Pieces* by Britten than to the more transformative movements of the *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*. As with the *Two Insect Pieces*, the music in “Phaeton” is representative of a character in action and not one that is involved in any type of metamorphosis. This is confirmed by Britten’s prose:

“Phaeton, who rode upon the chariot of the sun for one day and was hurled into the river Padus by a thunderbolt.”¹⁶

Measures 1-18 make up the A section of “Phaeton.” For the most part, this section is built on an octatonic scale that is based on G.¹⁷ The melody covers a wide range of the oboe, yet does so by motion that is in small intervals. This is integral with the idea that the A section represents horses “hurtling themselves forward, galloping into the air, and tearing through the clouds.”¹⁸

The B Section of “Phaeton” is built from C and D triads with the addition of some non-chord tones.¹⁹ In measure 27 one can see the outline of a C7 chord that lends a touch of ambiguity as it resolves to a section centered on the pitch of A in the subsequent bar. At the same time the A-centric music in measure 28 is prepared with the flat seventh, B flat. This less-concrete use of functional tonality is very common in the music of Britten, including all of his oboe pieces.

¹⁵ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 26.

¹⁶ Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 2.

¹⁷ Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise, School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 35-36.

¹⁸ Mulder, Frank. “An Introduction and Programmatical Analysis of the ‘Six Metamorphoses After Ovid’ by Benjamin Britten.” In the *Journal of The International Double Reed Society*, no. 20 (July 1992). 67-74.

¹⁹ Mattson, Sheri Lee. 36.

The articulation of the B section is slurred, in contrast to the A section's staccato. It is plausible that the smoother melodies and higher register used in the B section represents the point at which Phaeton reaches a high altitude, is numbed with fear, drops the reins, and loses control of the chariot.²⁰ The latter is confirmed by Britten's combination of more unstable harmonics in measure 27 with a crescendo dynamic.

The recapitulation of the A section occurs at measure 28 in "Phaeton." At this point the thematic material returns, as does the staccato articulation. The recapitulation of the A section is centered on the pitch of A and is again based on the octatonic scale. Measures 38-41 are a brief coda that pulls together earlier ideas from "Phaeton." These measures likely represent the "hurtling through the sky towards the river" that Britten mentioned at the top of the movement. Or possibly, according to Frank Mulder, the measures are representative of the river "receiving (Phaeton's) charred body" and its subsequent burial by nymphs.²¹

"Niobe" is portrayed in the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* as: "Niobe, who lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain."²² Niobe is a "noble lamentation"²³ that depicts this sad character from Mt. Sipylus. Niobe had fourteen children: seven sons and seven daughters. She felt superior to Latona, a Titan, since Latona only had two children. Enraged, Latona sent her two children, Apollo and Diana, to kill all of Niobe's offspring. Niobe was so sad after the death of all of her children that she was transformed into a stone on a mountain, where streams of tears trickled down her face.²⁴

Similar to "Pan," "Niobe" follows an ABA form with the A sections giving a musical picture of Niobe before and after metamorphosis, and the B section depicting the

²⁰ Mulder, Frank. "An Introduction and Programmatical Analysis of the 'Six Metamorphoses After Ovid' by Benjamin Britten." In the *Journal of The International Double Reed Society*, no. 20 (July 1992). 69.

²¹ Mulder, Frank. 70.

²² Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 3.

²³ Capell, Richard, ed. "Review of 'Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49,' by Benjamin Britten." *Music and Letters*, 33, 1952. 366.

²⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Horace Gregory, trns. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 167-172.

metamorphosis itself. The entire movement is based on the development of a singular melodic idea presented within the first two measures.²⁵ Britten gave “Niobe” the marking “piangendo,” which in Italian means “crying.”²⁶ The melodic line itself in this movement is somewhat representative of crying and tears, as it is made of very liquid slurred phrases that often move downwards.

The A Section (measures 1-10) of “Niobe” begins in D-Flat Major, which the entire movement is based upon. D-Flat is a more covered sounding key on the oboe and very appropriate for use in a lamenting movement such as “Niobe.” Britten was a fine orchestrator who studied Mahler and had a keen knowledge of the various possibilities of the keys of the oboe.

There are three phrases in the A section of “Niobe,” each of which begins with a consonant descending head motive, followed by dissonant ascending material that is resolved by descending scalar motion. This pattern gives the movement its impetus and is evocative of tears.²⁷ In the legend of Niobe her seven sons are killed first. First, six are savagely killed, then the last is killed after he pled to the gods to spare him. An interesting detail in “Niobe” is that in the first two phrases Britten chose to use six notes for the first phrase and seven for the second.²⁸ It is unlikely that this is a coincidence; this is the type of hidden detail that is common in the music of Britten. The A section of “Niobe” concludes with the notes A, G, and E used prominently. It is possible that the use of these notes is suggesting the dominant of the Phrygian scale degree; since in legend, Niobe is from Phrygia.²⁹

²⁵ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 24.

²⁶ Love, Catherine E. and M. Clari, eds. *Collins Gem Italian Dictionary*. Glasgow: Omnia Books Ltd. 2001. 196.

²⁷ Hiramoto, Stephen. 24.

²⁸ Mulder, Frank. “An Introduction and Programmatical Analysis of the ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid by Benjamin Britten.’” In the *Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, no. 20 (July 1992). 70.

²⁹ Hiramoto, Stephen. 24.

The B section of “Niobe” occurs in measures 10-19. The melody is reminiscent of the A section but the rhythm is changed.³⁰ The music in the B section becomes more and more chromatic as it progresses; at the same time there is an indication of “animando.” These elements were combined by Britten to represent the metamorphosis of Niobe into the face of a mountain. At the conclusion of the section there is a fermata over a rest. At this point the metamorphosis of Niobe is complete.

The return of the A section in measure 20 features the initial two bars from the beginning of “Niobe.” The final four measures utilize only the pitches from the first measure of the movement and are marked “senza express.,” strengthening the idea of Niobe’s transformation into stone.³¹

The fourth movement of the *Six Metamorphose after Ovid* is “‘Bacchus,’ at whose feasts is heard the noise of gagging women’s tattling tongues and shouting out of boys.”³² “Bacchus” is the singular movement in this work that is not at home within the surroundings of the other movements. In this movement, Bacchus makes no transformation of form, or even state of mortality, as Phaeton did.³³

“Bacchus” is not based on a specific story. The movement is more a characterization of what a Bacchanal would have been like as stated in the poetry of Ovid. Bacchus or his priests oversaw these feasts, which were in worship of Bacchus himself. At the Bacchanals, there was much eating and drinking. Bacchus was usually as drunk as his subjects. Often, worshipers became so frenzied that they tore apart animals or humans with their bare hands.³⁴

³⁰ Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise, School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 45.

³¹ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 25.

³² Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. London. Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 4.

³³ Mulder, Frank. “An Introduction and Programmatical Analysis of the ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid by Benjamin Britten.’” In the *Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, no. 20 (July 1992). 72.

³⁴ Mattson, Sheri Lee. 53.

The movement is in rondo form and there are five sections: A (refrain), B (episode), A' (abbreviated refrain), C (episode), and A (coda based on refrain). Measures 1-14 form the initial A section which has a tonal center of F Major and is in binary form. Measures 6-14 are a variation on the first five measures. This section represents Bacchus, who wandered drunk through his Bacchanal. The "Piu vivo" B section represents quick activity, possibly voices or motion. The section spans measures 15-24 and is centered in A Major. The truncated return of A happens in measures 25-32 and is again centered in F Major. This again represents a drunken Bacchus stumbling around his feast. The rapid "con moto" C section, or second episode, represents the "tattling tongues" of the women at the feast. This section is in C Major, the dominant of the A section. The C section is characterized by intervallic motion that is mainly in thirds as well as long legato lines. The coda introduces new material in its beginning: fermata low C's followed by falsetto punctuations. This represents Bacchus belching. In the final five bars, the original theme from the A section returns and brings the movement back to F Major.³⁵

The fifth movement of the work is "Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image and became a flower."³⁶ In the legend from Ovid, Narcissus was a handsome youth who was loved for his beauty by many women and men. However, he shunned all those who loved him, including a young man who prayed to Nemesis to curse Narcissus by causing him to fall in love with his own image. One day an exhausted Narcissus spotted a pool of still water and stopped for a drink. As Narcissus bent over to take a drink from the pool, he fell in love with the beautiful image staring back at him, not realizing that the image was his own. He tried to embrace the beautiful youth, but upon touching the water, ripples caused the image to disappear. Narcissus wondered after a while if a supernatural wall separated him from his true love. Narcissus eventually believed that the beautiful youth was returning his love, because he returned all of his expressions exactly. It was at this point that Narcissus realized that he had fallen in love

³⁵ Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten's Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise, School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 53-64.

³⁶ Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. London. Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 6.

with his own image. He then began to abuse himself but stopped when he realized the pain that it brought to the reflection in the pool. Narcissus then sat perfectly still and stared at his reflection until he died. After his death the Nymphs grieved for him, but upon their return, after a time, Narcissus had vanished. In the place of Narcissus was a golden flower with white petals.³⁷

“Narcissus” is in ternary form. It begins in F Minor, and ends in C Major. This particular movement is in 6/8 meter and is the first movement in the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* to have an absolute time signature. The result of this is a more rigid framework with regard to melodic lines and phrases than was heard in previous movements. The use of an absolute time signature could very well be programmatic in nature, representing the rigid nature of Narcissus’ love affair with a mirror image of himself.³⁸

The A section of “Narcissus” occurs in measures 1-9. This section presents a melody that represents the image of Narcissus himself and is characterized by a recurring sextuplet figure that is much like a rhythmically regulated trill. The B section of the movement is made up of measures 10-23 and represents the metamorphosis of Narcissus. Beginning in measure 10, the notes printed with downward stems represent Narcissus and those with upward stems represent his reflected image. The notes with downward stems in measures 10-20 make up the entirety of the initial melody of “Narcissus” from measures 1-7. The musical reflection of Narcissus is accomplished with the counterpoint that is formed by the inversion of the direction of the intervals of the original melody’s fragments. Beginning in measure 19, the counterpoint is no longer formed by the inversion of the direction of the intervals of the original. Instead, it moves in the same direction while the intervallic distance between the two lines (real and reflected images) decreases, until the two lines are indistinguishable from one another. The return of the A section begins in measure 24. In this section, the melody of the upwardly stemmed notes

³⁷ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Horace Gregory, trns. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 95-100.

³⁸ Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise, School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 66.

is integral with their downwardly stemmed counterparts. This section represents Narcissus in the final state of a flower as it brings the movement to a close.³⁹

The final movement of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* is “Arethusa, who, flying from the love of Alpheus the river god, was turned into a fountain.”⁴⁰ In the Ovid Arethusa was a nymph who lived in Achaes and was well known for her beauty. One day, Arethusa went swimming naked in a stream. After swimming for a while, she heard a voice that turned out to be Alfeus, the river god, who was in love with her. Arethusa was frightened and immediately fled, but could not outpace Alpheus. In her fear, Arethusa prayed to Diana, goddess of the hunt, to protect her. Diana subsequently created a dense cloud to hide Arethusa. Alfeus searched for the nymph in the cloud but could not find her. Eventually, after a cold, nervous sweat began flowing over her, Arethusa became a stream. Before Alfeus could reach the nymph, the earth opened up and she poured deep into the opening. Arethusa finally resurfaced on the island of Ortygia, near Sicily, where she became a fountain.⁴¹

“Arethusa” is in ABA form and, similar to some of the preceding movements, takes on the familiar pattern of character, metamorphosis, transformed character. The first A section represents Arethusa’s flight from Alfeus and her desperate call to Diana for help. The B section of “Arethusa” represents Arethusa in the cloud and her transformation into a stream. The return of the A section represents Arethusa’s re-emergence as a fountain.⁴²

The first A section (measures 1-41) of “Arethusa” is firmly in the key of D Major and employs a largely descending line that includes many descending skips of a third. As with previous movements of this work, the B and A sections are slightly intermingled. In this case the descending scale in measures 32, 35, and 38 foreshadows the descending

³⁹ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 25.

⁴⁰ Britten, Benjamin. *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. London. Boosey and Hawkes, 1952. 7.

⁴¹ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Horace Gregory, trns. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 156-158.

⁴² Mattson, Sheri Lee. *An Analysis of Benjamin Britten’s Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, for Solo Oboe*. Doctoral Treatise, School of Music, The Florida State University. 2000. 77.

motion in the B section. This section, in measures 42-61, is harmonically ambiguous up to its ending on the pitch of A, which prepares the return of D Major in the final A section.⁴³ This harmonic ambiguity is evocative of the blind conditions of the cloud in which Arethusa was hidden.

The B section of this movement is typified by its dolce, pianissimo trills. These are similar to the pianissimo sextuplet figures in “Narcissus.” The brief passages of multidirectional scalar motion beginning in measures 44, 52, and 61 are reminiscent of the melodies in the A sections. The final A section of “Arethusa” starts in measure 62 and begins in A Minor, but quickly moves to D Major. The melodic lines are basically those of the A section with some new intervals added from the B section. The ending of Arethusa, starting in measure 72, parallels the opening statement of the movement.⁴⁴

The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* ends in a manner similar to the *Temporal Variations*; both works end in an affirmative manner at a strong dynamic level. Additionally, both pieces end with the oboe’s middle D. As mentioned before, D is the tonic of the oboe’s fundamental key, D Major. It is unlikely that this is a coincidence; Britten is known to have favored the musical norms of the past over “modern” complexity. The oboe parts of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, *Temporal Variations*, and *Phantasy Quartet* all end on D, the foundational pitch of the oboes of antiquity and today. Possible further proof that Britten respected the artistic ways of the past lies in the final metamorphosis, “Arethusa,” which shares its last “letter” with the name of Ovid, that being a D.

⁴³ Hiramoto, Stephen. “An Analysis of Britten’s ‘Six Metamorphoses after Ovid.’” *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, vol. 22, no. 2. 1999. 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

APPENDIX A

DISCOGRAPHY

Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2

Christy, Judy, oboe, and the Christy Oboe Quartet. *The Christy Oboe Quartet*. 2005.

Dent, Simon and members of the Munich Soloist Ensemble. *Schumann, Britten: Fantasies*. Amati, 9801. 1999.

Francis, Sarah, oboe, with Michael Dussek, piano, and members of the Delmé Quartet. *Britten: Music for Oboe and for Piano*. Helois, CDH55154. 2003.

Hunt, Gordon, oboe and the Tale Quartet. *Oboe Music by Britten, Bax, and Bliss*. BIS, CD-763, 1997.

Leleux, François, oboe. *Les Nouveaux Interprètes*. Harmonia Mundi France, HMN 911556. 1995.

Pailthorpe, Emily. *Though Lovers Be Lost*. Oboe Classics, CC 2008. 2004.

Pecha, Pamela and members of the Audubon Quartet. *English Music for Oboe and Strings*. Innovative Music Productions, 6701032. 1996.

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Schmalfluss, Gernot, oboe, with Mamiko Watanabe, piano, and members of the Mannheim String Quartet. MD&G (Dabringhaus & Grimm) Gold, CD 3010925, 2000.

Speller, Eric, oboe. *Contrastes*. Ambrosie, 9909. 2003.

Wakao, Keisuke, oboe. *Keisuke Wakao...with friends from the Boston Symphony Orchestra*. Pentatone, SACD PTC 5186 018. 2004.

Woods, Pamela Pecha, oboe and members of the Audubon String Quartet. *Bax-Bliss-Britten: Music for Oboe and Strings*. By Benjamin Britten. Telarc, CD 80205. 1990.

Two Insect Pieces

Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses*. Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.

Francis, Sarah, oboe, with Michael Dussek, piano, and members of the Delmé Quartet.
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Mannheim String Quartet. MD&G (Dabringhaus & Grimm) Gold, CD 3010925,
2000.

Speller, Eric, oboe. *Contrastes*. Ambrosie, 9909. 2003.

Temporal Variations

Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses*.
Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.

Daniel, Nicholas, oboe, with the Northern Sinfonia and Steuart Bedford, cond. *Britten:
Simple Symphony, Temporal Variations, Suite on English Folk Tunes*. Naxos,
8.557207. 200-.

Francis, Sarah, oboe, with Michael Dussek, piano, and members of the Delmé Quartet.
Britten: Music for Oboe and for Piano. Helois, CDH55154. 2003.

Indermuhle, Thomas, oboe, and Kalle Randalu, piano. *Britten, Haas, Hindemith*.
Camerata Records, 30CM 449. 1997.

Leleux, François, oboe. *Les Nouveaux Interprètes*. Harmonia Mundi France,
HMN 911556. 1995.

Schellenberger, Hansjörg. *Benjamin Britten, Musik mit Oboe*. Camerata, CAMM
130038. 1997.

Schmalfuss, Gernot, oboe, with Mamiko Watanabe, piano, and members of the
Mannheim String Quartet. MD&G (Dabringhaus & Grimm) Gold, CD 3010925,
2000.

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Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49

- Ambrose-King, Nancy, oboe. *Evocations*. Boston Records, BR-1030CD, 1999.
- Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses*. Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.
- Carter, Roy. *Britten:....SixMetamorphoses*. Capitol, 55398. 1996.
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- Mack, John, oboe. *John Mack: Oboe*. Crystal Records, C325, 1985.
- Meyer, Francois. *Works for Oboe and Piano*. Sonpact, 94011. 1995.
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- Schmalfuss, Gernot, oboe, with Mamiko Watanabe, piano, and members of the Mannheim String Quartet. MD&G (Dabringhaus & Grimm) Gold, CD 3010925, 2000.
- Schellenberger, Hansjörg. *Benjamin Britten, Musik mit Oboe*. Camerata, CAMM 130038. 1997.
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- Vogel, Allan. *Oboe Obsession*. Delos, DE 3235. 2000.
- Watkins, Sara. *Music by Benjamin Britten*. Meridian, 84119. 1993.
- Zupnik Marilyn, oboe. *A Guide to Classic Oboe Etudes*. DLM Records, 1998.

APPENDIX B

ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY OF SELECTED RECORDINGS

Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2

Woods, Pamela Pecha, oboe and members of the Audubon String Quartet. *Bax-Bliss-Britten: Music for Oboe and Strings*. By Benjamin Britten. Telarc, CD 80205, 1990.

Pamela Woods, the former Assistant Principal Oboe of the Cleveland Orchestra, and members of the Audubon Quartet have recorded Benjamin Britten's *Phantasy Quartet* on the Telarc label. Throughout the recording Ms. Woods' tone is very focused and dark. Her intonation, as well as that of the strings, is also very good. Ms. Woods exhibits excellent ensemble playing with the members of the Audubon Quartet on this recording.

In the A section of the *Phantasy Quartet* the performers—particularly Ms. Woods—generally exhibit very good adherence to Britten's intentions. The rhythms are played fairly metronomically, as would be expected in a section marked *Andante alla marcia*. Interestingly, the tempo taken by the quartet seems slightly fast for an andante march; however, Britten gave no numeric tempo indications in the *Phantasy Quartet*. Articulation markings are well observed in this movement. Ms. Woods plays in a way that maintains coherence in the musical phrases while demonstrating clear differentiation between accented, staccato, and legato articulations. The group also faithfully observes Britten's dynamics in this section. In particular, Ms. Woods does an extremely fine job of exiting into silence as well as entering from silence—a feat not inherently easy on the oboe.

The members of the ensemble also adhere very well to the intentions of Britten in the B section (measures 61-212). Articulation is again good, especially that of Ms. Woods' in the scalar figures at rehearsal number 9, where she demonstrates a light and very consistent staccato. The performers closely observe the composer's dynamics here, in particular in the oboe's entries and exits to and from *ppp*. However, there is a noticeable problem with intonation in the cello in the measures immediately preceding rehearsal number 17.

In the difficult C section (measures 210-371) of the *Phantasy Quartet*, the ensemble again does a fine job of observing Britten's dynamics, articulation, and tempo markings. Unfortunately, intonation—especially in the strings—is not as good as in previous sections. Also, there are some points in the C section where the digital editing is not exactly seamless.

Pamela Woods and the members of the Audubon Quartet do justice to the recapitulation of the A section at measure 371. The section sounds very fluid and natural and is in close adherence to Britten's markings. The ensemble successfully completes the arc form as they conclude the piece, fading into a delicate pianissimo silence just as they entered from at the beginning.

This Telarc recording of Britten's *Phantasy Quartet* is a fine example of 20th Century performance practice. It is obvious that the performers paid very close attention to the implementation of the composer's wishes, while still sounding very fluid and expressive.

Hunt, Gordon, oboe and the Tale Quartet. *Oboe Music by Britten, Bax, and Bliss*. BIS, CD-763, 1997.

Gordon Hunt, the principal oboist of the London Philharmonia and the London Chamber Orchestra, has recorded Britten's *Phantasy Quartet* with the Tale Quartet on the BIS record label. The Tale String Quartet is a well-known group of Swedish musicians that performs throughout Scandinavia. Gordon Hunt's tone is characteristically British—much like Britten may have composed for originally. It is full of depth and Hunt is capable of playing an extremely wide range of dynamic levels while retaining nearly perfect intonation. As is common in England, Hunt's vibrato is slightly slower and wider than what most Americans are accustomed to using and/or hearing; however, Leon Goosens, to whom the work is dedicated, also had a rather wide vibrato. The members of the Tale Quartet play very convincingly on this recording. One is struck by the constant sense of energy and melodic direction that is present in their very cohesive ensemble. Also noticeable on this recording of the *Phantasy Quartet* is the omnipresent reverberation that can be heard. In this case however, the reverberation sounds authentic and the location of the recording—Länna Church in Norrtälje, Sweden, confirms this.

In the A section (measures 1-60), or “first movement,” Gordon Hunt and the members of the Tale Quartet observe Britten’s expressive markings very closely. All of the composer’s indications for tempo, articulation, dynamic level, and bowing are followed exactly. In measure 57, Mr. Hunt finishes the section in a more fast and aggressive manner than one generally expects. However, this is justified as Britten marked this spot in the quartet *piu presto* and *ad libitum*. Throughout the A section Hunt plays with impeccable intonation. Additionally, he and the string players play with fine ensemble in this section.

In the B section (measures 61-212) the ensemble plays with a type of technique that seems both flawless and effortless. All of Britten’s expressive markings are followed diligently by the musicians in this section of the *Phantasy Quartet*. As an example, the decrescendos in the fifth and seventh measures after rehearsal number 6 are played only at the very end of the whole notes and span into the following measures, exactly as Britten wrote them. Also very worthy of mention is Gordon Hunt’s impulse and line in this brisk section which, to the author, always sounds appropriate. Mr. Hunt’s tone sounds as one throughout the entire range of the oboe in this section. There are no notes that sound out of place or improperly voiced when compared with their neighbors on his Howarth oboe.

In the C section (measures 210-371) Mr. Hunt again demonstrates fantastic control and intonation. His voicing is very revealing as to his understanding of Britten’s harmonies that underpin the section. At the beginning of the section, between rehearsal numbers 18 and 19, the strings slightly overpower the oboe. In the string trio between rehearsal numbers 20 and 27 the string players observe Britten’s musical directions very closely, most obviously those for bowing. In this section the strings all play with a very vocal, yet light, quality throughout the ensemble. Unexpectedly, in the measure before rehearsal number 29, Mr. Hunt seems to break the ascending phrase that Britten marked legato with his use of air. In the music spanning from rehearsal number 27 to the end of the C section, the quartet handles the duple against triple rhythmic patterns with unusual finesse. There seems to be a certainty and flexibility in this section that permits slight liberties while leaving no doubt as to the location of the pulse. It is very calming and assuring to the listener.

In the recapitulation of the A Section (measure 371—) the musicians continue to follow Britten’s expressive markings precisely. However, in the forte passages after rehearsal number 32, Mr. Hunt’s vibrato is not consistent from note to note. Tonally, the oboe and the strings become progressively more transparent as the movement moves toward its conclusion. By doing this, they bring the arc form of the piece to an elegant conclusion.

Generally, the recording of Britten’s *Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2*, by Gordon Hunt and the Tale Quartet is an excellent recorded example of this work. The musicians play with ensemble and musicianship that will be attractive to most classical music listeners. With regard to performance practice, they give much attention and respect to Britten’s demands and wishes for the piece.

Two Insect Pieces

Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses*. Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.

French oboe recitalist Michel Benet’s recording of “The Grasshopper,” from Benjamin Britten’s *Two Insect Pieces*, is a good example of this movement. The recording is on the Fossati label, the same Fossati of Paris that manufactures oboes. Benet’s oboe playing in general has an international appeal; it is likely that it will please oboists from both the American and European Schools. Benet’s tone is light, focused, and clear on this recording.

Benet and his accompanist, Sabine Batin, carefully observe Britten’s directions for tempo, dynamics, articulation, and timbre. One unusual aspect of Mr. Benet’s interpretation of “The Grasshopper” is his use of staccato in the final nine measures of the movement. To the ears of many woodwind players, Benet’s use of wind may sound somewhat different from what they are accustomed to using and hearing. This is because Mr. Benet plays the staccato with the wind, rather than on the wind. In other words, he uses a single puff of air for each staccato note, rather than an entire phrase or gesture. While this may sound unusual to some, Britten made no indications for or against this, and Benet’s staccatos at this particular point are sufficiently short and detached.

In “The Wasp” Benet again follows Britten’s instructions for dynamic, articulation, tempo, and timbral usage fairly closely. However, there is one noticeable exception to this in the case of “The Wasp.” The piano slightly overpowers Benet at the *A tempo giacoso*, where both parts are marked pianissimo. It is likely that Britten intended for his piano parts to be taken even more literally than his oboe parts. This is because he was a pianist himself—and one known for being very meticulous about his own performance.

In the opinion of the author, the Fossati recording of Britten’s *Two Insect Pieces* performed by Michel Benet is a fine and accurate interpretation of the work. Commercially produced recordings of this work are not widely available at the present time. However, in most cases, Michel Benet’s recording of the *Two Insect Pieces* follows Britten’s intentions very closely, filling a need for an authentic recording of Britten’s *Two Insect Pieces*.

Leleux, François, oboe. *Les Nouveaux Interprètes*. Harmonia Mundi France, HMN 911556. 1995.

One of Europe’s most respected oboists, François Leleux is the French first oboist of the Bavarian Radio Orchestra. Leleux is internationally acclaimed for his technical prowess and this recording conveys this well deserved reputation. It seems in many instances on this particular recording that Leleux seems to be playing Britten’s *Two Insect Pieces* more as a showcase for his own virtuosity and less as an artistic work in and of itself.

Mr. Leleux observes Britten’s dynamic and tempo markings fairly closely in “the Grasshopper.” However, he adds hairpin crescendos/decrescendos where Britten wrote none on most of the dotted-quarter notes. His staccato notes are extremely short in the A section and its recapitulation. Although the staccatos in the *molto piu animato* B section are of the same type, they are curiously played much longer and fuller. Interestingly, from the “Tranquillo” onwards, Leleux seemingly begins the staccato notes with his wind and ends them with his tongue. Although this is most unusual for an oboist to do, Britten made no indications for or against it.

François Leleux's rapid interpretation of the "Wasp" showcases his virtuosic technique as well as that of his accompanist, Emmanuel Strosser. At the point in the music marked *Lamentoso*, Leleux carefully observes the hairpins that are requested by the composer. Leleux is able to produce a very wide range of dynamic contrast in "The Wasp." However, at the louder levels, the tone often becomes spread, as it does in the final two measures of the piece.

Temporal Variations

Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses*. Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.

Michel Benet has recorded the *Temporal Variations* for Fossati of Paris. In this recording, Benet's playing is again characterized by his light and focused tone. In addition, he and his accompanist Sabine Vatin play the most technically challenging variations with expert technique.

In the first of the *Temporal Variations*, "Theme," Benet closely observes Britten's tempo, dynamic, and timbral markings. Strangely, he ignores every one of the composer's accent markings. In the "Theme" Britten wrote accents only on anacrusis notes. In Mr. Benet's interpretation, he chooses to play the main notes with accent in every case. The accent patterns written by Britten are an important aspect of the *Temporal Variations* that unify the piece as well as define its conclusion in "Resolution."

In "Oration" Michel Benet closely adheres to all of Benjamin Britten's expressive markings, with the minor exception of the ritard in measure 28. Especially well observed are the printed tenutos in this movement, where the oboist is able to produce a delicate subtlety. Also worthy of note is the piano playing of Sabine Vatin in "Oration," which was very forthright, clean, and virtuosic.

In the "March" the interpretation of Benet and Vatin again stays close to most of what Benjamin Britten wrote. In addition, they play with fine ensemble. Although Britten wrote no numeric tempos in the *Temporal Variations*, the tempo taken by the duo seems slightly fast for a movement marked *Alla marcia*.

The intricate “Exercises” is played briskly on this recording, very much as Britten indicated with his marking of *Allegro molto e con fuoco*. Other than some momentary issues with ensemble, the variation is performed brilliantly and is very much in line with the intentions of the composer.

“Commination,” the central variation most similar to the “Theme” and “Resolution,” demonstrates a curious departure from Benet’s interpretation of the “Theme.” Unlike in his interpretation of the “Theme,” Benet’s rendition of “Commination” correctly observes Britten’s accent markings. This time, Benet accents the anacrusis notes, just as the composer specified. In addition, he pays close attention to the printed tempo markings. This is particularly apparent in measure 141, where *accelerando* is observed and then suspended on the fourth beat, just as Britten indicated.

Benet and Vatin play the brief “Chorale” accurately. All of Britten’s intentions are taken into consideration by the duo. Benet’s vibrato may sound slightly intrusive in this piano, dolce movement to some listeners.

Benet and Vatin closely observe Britten’s expressive markings in the “Waltz,” using liberal amounts of rubato in this variation. It is the opinion of the author that while the duo uses a high amount of rubato, they do so in a manner that is logical and in good taste, always keeping the pulse clear and intact. Particularly well executed on the part of the oboist is the difficult slur up to a staccato and piano harmonic E-Flat at the end of the variation.

In the penultimate variation, the “Polka,” the duo chooses to play an *accelerando* in the opening measures. They begin very slowly and accelerate up to the “Vivace” at measure 235. While this may sound captivating to the listener, it is not what Britten wrote. Dynamics are nicely observed in this particular variation, as are the printed articulations.

In the final variation, “Resolution,” the duo observes Britten’s dynamics nicely. There is an ambiguity as to whether or not Benet is accenting the C-Sharp or D in many cases. However, on the final gesture, Benet does clearly accent the D and precede it with an unaccented C-Sharp, bringing closure to the work as a whole as Britten indicated.

With the exception of the “Theme” variation, the recording of Michel Benet reflects Britten’s intentions in the *Temporal Variations*. At the time of the preparation of

this treatise, difficulties exist in locating commercial recordings of Britten's *Temporal Variations*. The example described here generally represents a good recorded example of the work, especially when taking into consideration the lack of recordings currently on the market.

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49

Ambrose-King, Nancy, oboe. *Evocations*. Boston Records, BR-1030CD, 1999.

Dr. Nancy Ambrose-King has recorded Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for Boston Records on her compact disc entitled *Evocations*. Dr. Ambrose-King's tonal characteristics are somewhat similar to those of English oboists on this recording, much as Britten would have had in mind. She uses a flowing and relaxed type of vibrato. Particularly noticeable in this recording of the *Six Metamorphoses* is the addition of a liberal amount of artificial reverberation. Dr. Ambrose-King is well known for her virtuosity and technique; the recording in question is no exception to this well deserved reputation.

In "Pan" Dr. Ambrose-King plays with great fluidity, dynamic contrast, and expression. However, there are several cases in which the expression is in contradiction with what Britten has written. For example, in measure 9 Dr. Ambrose-King plays clipped slurs, where Britten wrote no staccato markings and subsequently plays the following series of staccato notes in a very legato fashion. In some cases, dynamics are played that are the opposite of what Britten wrote, such as measures 3 and 6. In most cases where there is a fermata, Dr. Ambrose-King plays a substantial ritard where Britten wrote none. Most unlike the intentions of Britten is the attention to pulse and rhythm in this interpretation of "Pan." Although the composer wrote *senza misura* at the beginning of "Pan," Dr. Ambrose-King elects to play rhythms that do not match the note values written by Britten. Britten wrote "Pan" in such a way that if one plays what is written, the music sounds *senza misura*. The music needs no further help to make it sound unmeasured.

In “Phaeton” Dr. Ambrose-King demonstrates nearly flawless finger and tongue technique. In addition, she adheres closely to all of Britten’s intentions for tempo, rhythm, dynamics, and articulation.

In “Niobe” Dr. Ambrose-King adheres well to Britten’s articulation and dynamic markings, but there is again an issue with rhythmic accuracy. In the case of “Niobe” Britten gave no indication that liberties should be taken with regard to pulse or rhythm, but in this recording of “Niobe” the author feels that Dr. Ambrose-King attempts to add rubato in so many places that the end result is a pulse that sounds erratic. However, in the final four measures where Britten wrote *senza rubato*, the performer does suspend her use of rubato.

Dr. Ambrose-King’s interpretation of “Bacchus” is very evocative of the feasts that Britten described. She musters the legato as well as the pointed articulation that Britten calls for in the initial section of the movement. In addition, she is able to produce the course timbre suggested by Britten on the low C fermatas in the final eight measures of the movement and subsequently contrasts this with a subtle piano decrescendo. Dr. Ambrose-King displays unusually virtuosic technique in the “Piu vivo” and “Con moto” sections of this movement, which she plays at an even more ambitious tempo than Britten indicated.

In two instances Dr. Ambrose-King elects to change the rhythm that Britten wrote in “Narcissus.” One measure before the “Tranquillo” she plays thirty-second notes rather than the sixteenth notes that Britten wrote. The author feels that the performer also elects to play the final measure of “Narcissus” out of rhythm, observing only “long” and “short” note values. This is not how Britten wrote this measure to be performed. Other than these instances, Dr. Ambrose-King plays “Narcissus” closely with the rhythmic, dynamic, and coloration scheme proposed by the composer. With regard to the latter, she makes a particularly sharp contrast between the real and reflected images of Narcissus called for by Britten.

As with previous movements of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, Dr. Ambrose-King plays “Arethusa” with flawless and expert finger technique. Again, there are issues with dramatic rubato where Britten indicated none. The “poco piu lento” section is very rhythmically solid and keeps with the articulation and dynamic scheme set forth by the

composer. Britten wrote the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for a British oboist and it is worthy of note that Dr. Ambrose-King plays “Arethusa” with tonal characteristics that are in many ways very British, especially in the higher registers.

Zupnik Marilyn, oboe. *A Guide to Classic Oboe Etudes*. DLM Records, 1998.

The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* are included as part of Marilyn Zupnik’s recording, *Classic Oboe Etudes*. This DLM Records recording generally presents interpretations that are very accurate with regard to the intentions of Benjamin Britten. Ms. Zupnik’s sound is light and very refined and her intonation is impeccable on this recording.

In “Pan” Ms. Zupnik plays very rhythmically with an occasional subtle rubato. All liberties that she takes are within the framework of Britten’s rhythmic and tempo indications. Her observance of the composer’s dynamic scheme is very accurate with the exception of measure 10, where she does not decrescendo. (This may be attributable to different editions of the piece by Boosey and Hawkes.) Interestingly, Ms. Zupnik holds the final A Sharp fermata in measure 9 for an unusually long time. However, it is in time with the ritard that she set up previously in the measure. Ms. Zupnik concludes the movement with dramatic contrast between Britten’s successive forte and piano figures, using a very ethereal tone quality for the latter.

Ms. Zupnik plays “Phaeton” in a manner that is nearly identical to the way in which Britten indicated. She observes all of the composer’s dynamic, articulation, and breath markings. Additionally, Ms. Zupnik adds no substantial ritards that are not indicated by Britten at the fermata points. Interestingly, Ms. Zupnik plays “Phaeton” at a tempo that is slightly slower than the printed dotted-quarter = 152.

“Niobe” is, again, played in a way that seems very close to what Britten intended for the movement. One point in which Ms. Zupnik diverges from what is printed is in the first measure. Rather than extending the decrescendo through the final A-Flat of the measure, she plays the note slightly louder. In the case of Marilyn Zupnik, the author suspects that this is intentional. Given the amount of diligence and care that is obvious in

Zupnik's playing, it is unlikely that she overlooked what was printed, or altered the composer's intentions because of technical challenges. Ms. Zupnik plays the final D Flat of the movement with what seems to be a harmonic fingering, which does justice to the somber ending.

In "Bacchus" Zupnik plays Britten's rhythms slightly more literally than do most oboists. In fact, there is no indication by Britten that rhythmic liberties should be taken in this movement. In contrast to Ambrose-King, Zupnik observes Britten's tempo markings in "Bacchus" almost exactly. The slurred sixteenth notes in the difficult "Con moto" section are played very cleanly with a very continuous line. In the final eight measures of "Bacchus" Ms. Zupnik observes the quarter rests written by Britten exactly, unlike many oboists.

Throughout "Narcissus" Ms. Zupnik uses vibrato in a very well controlled and subtle manner, similar to most other students of John de Lancie. Ms. Zupnik takes a few liberties with tempo and pulse in this movement; but it is always done in a very subtle manner. It is the opinion of the author that Ms. Zupnik's liberties are very tasteful and never destructive to Britten's intentions.

In the final movement of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, "Arethusa," Ms. Zupnik again follows Britten's expressive markings almost exactly. One interesting and effective thing that Ms. Zupnik does in her recording of "Arethusa" can be heard in measures 5 and 12. In these measures, one can hear the performer drop to piano dynamic where one is not marked. The result of this however is that it serves to strengthen the written crescendos in these measures. This is an example of a liberty taken on the part of Ms. Zupnik that enhances what the composer wrote.

Marilyn Zupnik's interpretation of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* on her compact disc *Classis Oboe Etudes* is an excellent representation of Benjamin Britten's intentions for what his piece was to sound like. In this work, Britten leaves little up to the performer; he is very detailed and specific with his expressive markings. In most cases, Ms. Zupnik follows the composer's intentions very closely. When the notation is followed in an exact way, the piece sounds natural and as the composer intended.

Mack, John, oboe. *John Mack: Oboe*. Crystal Records, C325, 1985.

Of all of the recordings of this work discussed in this chapter, the one by John Mack, the retired Principal Oboe of the Cleveland Orchestra, is the oldest and likely the most widely circulated. The piece was recorded on the Crystal Records label in 1985. Possibly due to the fact that all of John Mack's recordings are in real time and from a single take, the listener often has the sensation that they are listening to a live performance on this recording. On this recording, Mack demonstrates a clarity and substance of tone as well as more multidimensional style of articulation and tone coloration that changes depending upon the style of the music.

Mr. Mack's interpretation of "Pan" begins with phrases that are played in a slightly unmeasured fashion, as was written by Britten. Although some rhythmic pushing and pulling is present in the initial measures of "Pan," Mr. Mack never deviates from the note values that Britten wrote. As one might expect from a Cleveland Orchestra woodwind player, Mr. Mack's staccato notes are slightly longer than those of many other oboists. However, they are always played in a detached manner, as Britten requested, and have a distinctive presence when played this way.

In "Phaeton," Mack plays all articulations and dynamics, as well as rests and breaths, indicated by Britten. Similar to Marilyn Zupnik's recording of "Phaeton," Mr. Mack plays the movement slightly slower than indicated by Britten.

In "Niobe" Mr. Mack follows Britten's expressive markings very closely. In addition to playing with very smooth lines and contours in "Niobe," Mack is able to make many of the oboe's dull notes sound brilliant and many of its bright notes sound opaque in this movement. This brings a smoother and more somber quality to this sad movement.

Mr. Mack follows Britten's expressive markings and tempo markings closely in "Bacchus." He is able to make a dramatic contrast in tone color between the more percussive sections and the legato sections. In addition, he plays the rests in the final eight measures of the movement with diligence and accuracy.

For "Narcissus" Mr. Mack is able to produce an extremely dark sound, particularly in the opening several measures and, more significantly, in the notes

representing the reflected image of “Narcissus.” Mr. Mack’s range of dynamics is very broad in this movement. He is able to play a very strong and focused fortissimo where called for, yet take some decrescendos down to silence when indicated by Britten.

Mr. Mack’s interpretation of “Arethusa” does justice to Britten’s writing. In particular, he follows Britten’s dynamic scheme very precisely. Notable in the “poco piu lento” is Mr. Mack’s use of the trill. He is able to trill in such a way that sounds seamless as each descending trilled note passes. It is clear that Britten had the same intention for the trills in this section since he extended trill markings over the entire length of each note, in addition to marking them with a *tr.*

John Mack’s recording of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* is played very closely to what Britten wrote, with regard to musical aspects that are structural as well as more esoteric. In some cases the recording is not as technically exact as the recording by Marilyn Zupnik, but there seems to be a human and multidimensional quality about it that many other recordings lack.

Benet, Michel, oboe and Sabine Vatin, piano. *Hautbois and Piano: Metamorphoses.* Fossati of Paris, FOSS7030, 2002.

French recitalist Michel Benet’s recording of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* begins with a fairly authentic interpretation of “Pan.” In this movement he generally pays close attention to the expressive markings of Britten, particularly those that have to do with rhythm and pulse. Curiously however, he holds the half note trill in measure 14 for three beats rather than two. Mr. Benet usually holds the fermatas in “Pan” much longer than other oboists. While this sounds somewhat unusual, Britten gave no instructions relating to the duration of the fermatas.

Benet’s interpretation of “Phaeton” again follows very closely to what was written by Britten, with one notable exception. In measures 35-37 Benet slows the tempo down from where it had been in previous measures. Britten gave no indication for the performer to do this. It is logical to assume that Benet slows these measures down because of the inherent difficulties in tonguing fast in the low register of the oboe. Aside from this, Mr. Benet’s recording of “Phaeton” is, in the opinion of the author, a very effective and satisfying one.

In “Niobe” Mr. Benet plays with fine musical line, excellent intonation, and a fairly dark tone. Again, he adheres to Britten’s markings for musical expression. Particularly well executed on the part of Benet are the final four measures of “Niobe” where he plays very seamlessly and without vibrato, accomplishing Britten’s marking of *senza espressione*.

Benet begins “Bacchus” nearly half as fast as the quarter = 112 tempo that Britten indicated. In the first section, Mr. Benet also plays all of the staccato sixteenth notes “with the wind,” or with one puff of air per note. Britten gave no directions against this and Benet does manage to detach the staccato notes by blowing in this manner—although this is a highly unusual manner in which to play these passages. The *con moto* section is clean, smooth, and up to tempo. However, in the following measures that conclude the movement Benet plays the low C fermatas sharp, relative to the rest of his scale.

“Narcissus” is played by Michel Benet much more slowly than eighth note = 84 that Britten indicated for the movement. Benet is able to make significant contrasts in tone color and volume in the “reflective” section, just as the composer asked for. This recording also demonstrates a performer that is able to play extremely well at the softest dynamic levels, as evidenced in the “Tranquillo” section.

Mr. Benet’s interpretation of “Arethusa” is very divergent from the indications of Benjamin Britten. The printed tempo for this movement is eighth note = 152, which is more than twice as fast as it is played on the recording. In addition, Mr. Benet adds a *molto ritardando* in measures 39 and 40, where no ritard is written. From the *poco piu lento* onwards, Mr. Benet stays fairly close to the desires of Britten. The final few measures are played with expert finger technique, but the final note of the piece, a middle D, becomes sharper as it gets louder.

The recording of the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* by Benjamin Britten by Michel Benet is an enigma to this author. While “Bacchus,” “Narcissus,” and “Arethusa” deviate dramatically from the musical intentions of Benjamin Britten, “Pan,” “Phaeton,” and “Niobe” are played conservatively and exhibit authenticity with regard to performance practice. However, the constants throughout most of the work are Mr. Benet’s rather refined and colorful tone as well as his clean technique.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Oboist and English hornist Sotos Djiovanis is currently a member of the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra. He received the Doctor of Music degree from the Florida State University in 2005. Prior to this, he received the Master of Music and Bachelor of Music Degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 2001 and 2000, respectively. Mr. Djiovanis' major teachers include Eric Ohlsson, John Mack, and Martha Scherer-Alfee. In addition to his duties in Naples, Mr. Djiovanis has performed frequently with numerous other orchestras including: The New World Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Tallahassee Symphony, Florida West Coast Symphony, Orlando Philharmonic, American Sinfonietta, Pensacola Symphony, Youngstown Symphony, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Erie Philharmonic, Wheeling (W.V.) Symphony, Canton Symphony, Mansfield Symphony, Brevard Music Center Orchestra, and Central Florida Philharmonic. Very active performing internationally, Mr. Djiovanis has toured Germany as English hornist with the American Sinfonietta under Michael Palmer, performed in the Dominican Republic with the Santo Domingo Festival Orchestra under Philippe Entremont, and served as Co-Principal Oboe of the Orquesta Sinfonica de Aguascalientes in Aguascalientes, Mexico. Mr. Djiovanis has been employed by several music festivals including: The Bellingham Music Festival, The Swannanoa Chamber Music Festival, and the Santo Domingo Festival of Music. While a student, Mr. Djiovanis attended the Kent/Blossom Music Festival, the Brevard Music Center, and the John Mack Oboe Camp. Mr. Djiovanis has played under many notable conductors including: Jorge Mester, Michael Tilson-Thomas, Christopher Seaman, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Stern, Vladimir Verbitsky, Phillippe Entremont, Jahja Ling, among many others. Mr. Djiovanis has been active as a teacher in Florida, Ohio, and Mexico. As a teaching assistant for the School of Music at Florida State University he taught private lessons, masterclasses, reed classes, and coached several chamber music ensembles. In addition, he has been an oboe and theory instructor at the Florida State University Summer Music Camps, where he also conducted the Double Reed Choir. Mr. Djiovanis can be heard regularly performing in orchestras on National Public Radio stations throughout the United States. His performances have also been broadcast on the

state television station of Aguascalientes, Mexico. Mr. Djiovanis has been published in the *Double Reed*, the quarterly publication of the International Double Reed Society, of which he is a member. In addition to his major instructors, Mr. Djiovanis has worked with many of today's most notable musicians such as Joshua Smith, Felix Kraus, Elizabeth Camus, Linda Strommen, Thomas Stacy, Martin Schuring, Jeffrey Keesecker, John Clouser, Ronald Phillips, Daniel Gilbert, Richard King, Eli Epstein, Daniel McKelway, Carolyn Bridger, Douglas Fisher, and Paula Robison.

CONCLUSION

Benjamin Britten is widely regarded as one of the most prominent composers of the Twentieth Century. During his lifetime, Britten earned the admiration of his contemporaries throughout the musical world. His music covers a wide range of musical genres. Today, Britten's music is popular in opera houses, orchestral concerts, and recitals of all types. In addition, the world's foremost virtuosi have extensively recorded numerous compositions by Britten.

Benjamin Britten became one of the most, if not the most, prominent English composers of his time. In addition to his efforts as a composer Britten worked to revive English opera, worked to ensure the future and security of British music drama, and strived to boost musical outreach to English schoolchildren in an effort to help national musical awareness and future musical literacy among the population. Benjamin Britten is also responsible for the creation of the Aldeburgh Festival, which exists to this day.

The pieces that Britten wrote for the oboe are significant parts of the oboe repertoire. The *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Opus 49*, is currently the most commonly performed piece for unaccompanied oboe. *The Phantasy Quartet, Opus 2*, is also a standard in the repertoire for oboe and strings, enjoying frequent performance. The *Two Insect Pieces* are commonly performed lighter pieces on oboe recitals and the *Temporal Variations* have gained much popularity—now a standard of the twentieth century repertoire for the oboe. All four works exhibit characteristics that are common in the music of Britten such as accessibility and a relationship to larger-scale works composed in their proximity. In addition to these traits, all of Britten's oboe works are written in a highly detailed manner with much specificity given to their expressive markings. It is because of this detail and specificity that correct performance practice of Britten's pieces demands close attention to the many details given to the performer by Britten himself.