THE A CAPELLA CHORAL MUSIC
OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

THESIS

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By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHORAL MUSIC</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Boy Was Born</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Hymn to the Virgin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to St. Cecilia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Flower Songs, a Choral Cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Chord Structures</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Root Movement</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Melodic Intervals</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme,&quot; Measures 1-4.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Principal Motive of A Boy Was Born</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme,&quot; Measures 9-12.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme,&quot; Measures 30-35.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation I,&quot; Five Measures after 8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation I,&quot; Measures 38-40.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation I,&quot; Measures 56-64.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation II,&quot; Measures 1-3.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation II,&quot; Measures 18-20.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation II,&quot; Measure 27.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation II,&quot; Measure 66.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation III,&quot; Measures 6-3.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation III,&quot; Measures 30-33.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation IV,&quot; Measures 1-2.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme,&quot; Cadences of the A and B Sections.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation IV,&quot; Measure 48.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation V,&quot; Measures 1-7.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Diagram of the Rondo in &quot;Variation VI, &quot;A Boy Was Born.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI,&quot; Section A.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI,&quot; Measures 83-87.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI,&quot; Measure 76.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI&quot;</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI,&quot; Measures 287-289.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI,&quot; Measures 299-306.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme,&quot; Measures 44-46.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Theme, Measures 14-16.&quot;</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI-Finale,&quot;</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. A Boy Was Born, &quot;Variation VI-Finale,&quot; Last Cadence of the D Section of the Rondo.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measure 1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measures 19-21.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measures 1-2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measure 27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measure 4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. A Hymn to the Virgin, Measure 9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Hymn to St. Cecilia, Measures 1-5, Passacaglia of Section One.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 1-5, Soprano Melody Based on Passacaglia Motive.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 20-23.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Soprano Versions of the Theme in the B Section.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 47-50.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 68-72, Melody of Canon in the Second Section,</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Bass Melody of the A Part of Section Two.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 116-120.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 171-172.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Measures 192-193.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. <strong>Hymn to St. Cecilia</strong>, Solo Cadenzas.</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measure 1.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 1-8.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 17-23.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 25-27.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 37-39.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 40-44.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. <strong>To Daffodills</strong>, Measures 57-58.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58. <strong>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months</strong>, Measures 1-5.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months, Measures 20-21.</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months, Coda.</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Marsh Flowers, Measures 1-3.</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>Marsh Flowers, Measures 19-20.</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Marsh Flowers, Measures 32-33.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>The Evening Primrose, Measures 26-29.</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>The Evening Primrose, Measures 1-2.</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 5-10.</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 67-72.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 37-39.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 53-54.</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 80-82.</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom, Measures 102-103.</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century has witnessed a renaissance in the composition of choral music. Not since the Baroque, has choral writing held the prominent position with composers that it has today. At the same time, English composers have regained a stature and influence they have not held since the time of Purcell. It was not until the time of Edward Elgar, Gustave Holst, and Ralph Vaughn-Williams that English music began to recover from the decline of the nineteenth century. Benjamin Britten has played a large role in both the choral renaissance and the recovery of English music.

We have never had a composer of greater virtuosity, or with a stronger feeling of rhetoric. . . . There was a time when everyone used to say in a rather condescending way that he was "clever"; undoubtedly the cleverest thing he has done is, almost single-handed, of his own thought and effort, to have succeeded in the creation of a stylization acceptable to himself and intelligible to his audience where Purcell failed.

Born at Lowestoft, Suffolk on St. Cecilia's Day, November 22, 1913, Edward Benjamin Britten showed an interest in music from an

\[1\text{W. Mellers, "Trends in British Music," Music Quarterly, XXXVIII (April, 1952), 185.}\]
early age, beginning to compose at the age of five. By the age of fourteen he had to his credit "ten piano sonatas, six string quartets, three suits for piano, an oratorio, and dozens of songs."\textsuperscript{2} None of these pieces has been published. The first composition to be publicly performed and published was \textit{A Boy Was Born}, written at the age of eighteen.

He studied for three years at the Royal College of Music with John Ireland and Arthur Benjamin, and was guided from an early age by the composer Frank Bridge. While studying at the Royal College, he became interested in the techniques of Arnold Schoenberg and planned to study in Vienna with Alban Berg. He was prevented from doing so by officials of the college and his parents.\textsuperscript{3} By 1934 some of his music was being performed, and he had completed his formal education.

Even a casual glance at the catalog of Britten's music will show that his emphasis lies with vocal music, having written ten operas, seventeen song cycles and a large number of choral works, both a cappella and accompanied. The choral music includes seven cantatas and a choral symphony. The emphasis on vocal music by Benjamin Britten stems from several factors. Peter Pears, the tenor who has been a close associate of Britten's for many years and who has built his


\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 16.
reputation performing Britten's music, feels that his early environment had much to do with this:

It would be strange if Benjamin Britten had never written for the voice. He was surrounded by singing as a child. He was not brought up on a gramophone or a wireless set. . . . When music was wanted for parties or pleasure, he played the piano and his mother sang. . . .

Mrs. Britten was for some years Secretary for the Lowestoft Choral Society and used to entertain visiting singers in her house. They were still great days for the provincial Choral Societies. 4

In comparing Britten with Mozart, Hans Keller gives another reason for the large vocal output. Speaking of both instrumental as well as vocal music, he writes:

Both composers seem to derive much from melodic inspiration. Most materially, they are liable to be inspired by the human voice (as also by language, including foreign language), and indeed by individual voices (as well as instruments and instrumentalists). 5

H. F. Redlich believes that Britten's affinity for vocal music comes from an identification with an earlier tradition in music:

If Britten is not as exclusively vocal as Palestrina, Monteverdi, and Schutz (of whom not a single instrumental composition is recorded), he shares with his favourite Franz Schubert the numerical preponderence of vocal over instrumental works. With both Schubert and Monteverdi he further shares this basically important characteristic: that his music receives its specific shape and general inspiration from the poetic word. Among the

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fifty-odd opus numbers Britten has so far published [1952], there are hardly more than a half-dozen making use of traditional sonata form, which seems uncongenial to him. . . . In vain, too, one looks for the traditional vocal patterns of motet, anthem, and oratorio, with their fugal episodes, their wealth of mock-polyphonic orchestral splendor. . . . These familiar types of music seem to be increasingly replaced by two forms, both representative of vocal processes in music: the choral variation and the song cycle. 6

According to these sources, Benjamin Britten's large amount of choral compositions was a natural outgrowth of his early environment and his close identification with a musical spirit of the Baroque and classical eras.

Benjamin Britten has been criticised by many for his eclecticism. Those closer to his music feel that this criticism comes from a lack of understanding of the basic character of Britten and his music. Hans Keller is one of several who have compared Britten with Mozart in their relation to their own periods of music. Through this comparison an entirely favorable light is cast on what some critics have felt was Britten's lack of originality.

With regard to Britten's "eclecticism", the accusations are of course direct and numerous. Instead of allowing ourselves to be detained by them, let us look at the whole question from the other, understanding side. To begin with, Mozart again. Here is an eminent musicologist on his "eclecticism"; we shall see how it applies to Britten:

Mozart never created really new forms, but by regarding the existing styles not as unities but as phenomena which contribute towards a general style, he created a universal all-inclusive style.

We must not forget that Mozart was the child of an era called the "golden age" of musical art. Such a golden age offers to the genius the richest treasures of the various artistic forms. He simply takes the gifts of his epoch intact, and, as self-evident matter, utilizes them at his will. Mozart shuffled these like a pack of cards and the result was a strikingly original world.

This is all true, I suggest, except for the overstress on history: Britten is doing a similar shuffling without being the child of a golden age. 7

Whereas general conceptions of Britten's style are available, none of the previous writings on this subject have attempted to isolate the particular techniques of composition that bring a unity to all of Britten's choral music. This, then, is the purpose of this study.

Because of the large quantity of choral music Benjamin Britten has written, this paper will be limited to that music originally written as choral music only. This will exclude choruses from the operas, such as Choral Dances from Gloriana and Old Joe Has Gone Fishing from Peter Grimes, and arrangements from his solo works, such as Friday Afternoon. Further, this study will limit itself to the a cappella

music. This is done because the a cappella music contains the clearest examples of the techniques to be studied. There are five works in this category:

- **A Hymn to the Virgin** (1933)
- **A Boy Was Born** (1934)
- **Advance Democracy** (1939)
- **Hymn to St. Cecilia** (1942)
- **Five Flower Songs** (1951).

Of the above, special emphasis will be given to **A Boy Was Born**, as this work is considered by most authorities to be Britten's best choral work. Also, it contains the best examples of Britten's melodic construction. The rest, with the exception of **Advance Democracy**, will also be analyzed in detail. **Advance Democracy** will be omitted because it does not compare with his other works. Redlich refers to its "blatant harmonies" in discussing this work that other writers have passed over as being "trite." The a cappella music offers a complete cross-section of the choral music, including works from each decade in which Britten has composed.

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CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHORAL MUSIC

A Boy Was Born

A Boy Was Born established Benjamin Britten as a major composer on the British scene. It was only natural that his first important work should be vocal, as he was to show a great affinity for vocal writing in all of his later compositions. This composition is considered by many writers to be one of his best works:

His first really important work was a set of choral variations, A Boy Was Born, which still stands high among his compositions as an essay of great technical facility, a remarkable example of the variation technique, throbbing with a deep and youthful sincerity.¹

This cantata is indicative of the style of writing that was to follow. While the form, a theme and six variations, is unusual for a cappella choir, "it was not so in a manner that militated against traditional acceptance."² This bringing of order to a composition by an unusual technique, that in reality is not far removed from the traditional past, is an example of the classical nature that permeates all of Britten's music.

According to the score, Britten has drawn the texts from three sources: The Oxford Book of Carols, Ancient English Carols, and the Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti. Most of these poems are anonymous writings from the fifteenth century. The composer has retained the original spelling and words in most cases. In the poem "Herod," used in Variation II, the second stanza has been interchanged with stanza three.

The form of the cantata lends itself to a clear exploitation of one of Britten's main techniques of composition, that of deriving all of a work from a small amount of material. A Boy Was Born is a striking example of this conservation of material. The basis for all themes and harmonies can be found in the first four measures of the composition:

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Fig. 1--A Boy Was Born, "Theme," measures 1-4
Even the material in the remainder of the section marked "Theme" is based on this short exposition. Of particular importance are the soprano and bass lines, the contrary motion between the bass and tenor, the minor seventh chords at *, and the cadence on an open fifth.

For purpose of clarity in the following analysis, the following terms will be used to designate specific parts of the music only:

I. Theme: Because "theme" usually refers to a melody, and because "theme" in this composition is the title of the first division, this analysis will use "theme" to refer to the first division (forty-six measures) of the cantata only.

II. Four-note motive: This will be used in reference to the principal motive upon which this composition is based:

![Graphical representation of a four-note motive](image)

Fig. 2--Principal motive of *A Boy Was Born*

III. Exposition: This term will be used to specify material found in all four voices of the first four measures as shown in Figure 1.

IV. Section: This will refer to a division of an individual movement.
As the harmony in this work is primarily a result of the contrapuntal lines, and because the counterpoint arises from the working out of the expositional material, it is necessary to begin this analysis with a study of the different ways in which this material is used. This in turn requires an understanding of the form involved in the cantata and its various parts.

The form of the cantata is a set of free variations as defined by Willi Apel in the Harvard Dictionary of Music. He refers to this kind of variation as type D or a set of variations in which a motive is retained: "a fourth category, D, should be reserved for the entirely free variations of recent date in which even the structural outlines of the theme are no longer recognizable."³ Both George Hansler⁴ and H. F. Redlich⁵ refer to this as a variation on a four-note theme. While this is true, closer examination will show that all of the material in all four voices of the first four measures is used throughout the entire composition. For example, if Figure 3, page 11, is compared with Figure 1, page 8, it will be seen that all voices in Figure 3 have the same lines as in Figure 1.


⁵Redlich, "The Choral Music," p. 86.
The Theme itself is a continuous variation of these first four measures, written in such a way as to suggest ternary form (ABA'). Measures five through eight are a repetition in all four voices of the first four measures a whole step higher, with accidentals used to maintain the exact intervallic relationships between the voices. A five-measure section based on the first four measures closes the A section of the Theme. These five measures are constructed in the following manner: the first four notes in all four voices are repeated twice, followed by all voices in unison singing a version of the four-note motive in which the interval of a minor third is changed to a fourth. A rhythmic shift in these five measures places emphasis on the third and highest note of the four-note motive, rather than on the second note as at the beginning:

![Sheet Music](image)

Fig. 3--*A Boy Was Born*, "Theme," measures 9-12

The B section of the Theme is similar to the first in construction, having a four-measure phrase, a repetition of this phrase, and a closing
section. The difference is an interchange of parts. The bass part is given to the soprano, the bass sings the original soprano line, and the tenor is given the original alto part. The alto line is not taken from any part of the exposition, but rather is primarily harmonic filler:

![MIDI notation image]

Fig. 4--A Boy Was Born, "Theme," measures 15-19

The third section of the Theme is constructed in the same manner as the first two. The closing phrases contain a two-measure extension. Each voice returns to the line it had in the first section, the variation here being one of pitch level and rhythm. The contrary motion between the bass and tenor develops here into a mirroring of the two lines. This mirror is not strict, but the effect is the same. (See Figure 5.)

Variation I, "Lullay, Jesu," could be termed strophic-variation, as it consists of four stanzas, each a variation of the first. The material for this variation can be found in the original exposition. There are three elements from the exposition that form the basis for this variation: (1) a two-note ostinato on the interval of a fifth, which might
have been derived from the cadence of the exposition, (Figure 6a); (2) a figure that is derived by extension from the four-note motive, (Figure 6b); (3) a melody that is sung by the part or parts with the text of "Lullay, Jesu," (Figure 6c). (See Figure 6.)

This last melody (Figure 6c) could have been taken from the four-note motive, as the important interval of this melody, a minor third, is the essential interval of the four-note motive. All four notes of the four-note motive are present between the first and second phrases of this melody (bracketed in Figure 6c).

Each of these three elements maintains its distinctive character throughout the variation, while being treated and worked out in different ways. The ostinato continues without a break throughout this variation. It is varied by changes in rhythmic placement, overlapping of parts, switching of ostinato from voice to voice, and by changing the interval of the ostinato. This interval is changed twice: once to a fourth, and
A Boy Was Born, "Variation I," measures 1-14
a) Ostinato figure, measures 2-3
b) Figure derived from four-note motive, measures 3-7
c) Melody with verse, measures 8-14

once to a third before the beginning of the fourth verse. The ostinato is always a descending interval.

The first two times that the second element (Figure 6b) occurs, it is heard in its complete form. However, Britten uses this figure in many different ways to create some interesting counterpoint. Five measures after a fragment of this theme is heard:
Stretto developments of this second element occur four measures before [10] and one measure after [12]. The second stretto is much more complex than the first one. The first involves only three of the women's parts, entering at pitches a fourth apart and at the time interval of one-half measure:

The second stretto involves six voices, fourteen entrances, and four different versions of the second element. Entrances six, seven, eight,
and thirteen have the second interval of this motive reduced from a third to a second. With the exception of the entrances before and after the two rhythmically augmented versions of the theme (six and thirteen), the time interval between the entrances is one-half measure.

The intervallic relationships between the entrances are as follows:

One-two: fourth up.
Two-three: major sixth up.
Three-four: major third down.
Four-five: octave down.
Five-six: major sixth up.
Six-seven: minor sixth up.
Seven-eight: octave up.
Eight-nine: major third up.
Nine-ten: minor sixth up.
Ten-eleven: minor third down.
Eleven-twelve: octave down.
 Twelve-thirteen: minor sixth up.
Thirteen-fourteen: minor sixth up.

The entrances are numbered in Figure 9 on pages 17 and 18.
Fig. 9--A Boy Was Born, "Variation I," measures 56-64

(This illustration is used by permission of Oxford University Press.)
After this series of stretti, all other statements of this figure are complete, as found in Figure 6b.

The two elements discussed above form a background for the melody that is used with the text (Figure 6c, page 14). This melody is used, with very few changes throughout each of the four stanzas. It has already been shown how this melody could have been derived from the four-note motive.

In Variation II, the expositional material is used in several different ways. The first, which is a division between several voice parts, gives rise to a variation of the ostinato of Variation I. The two eighth notes in Tenor I and Bass II are used later in this variation for an ostinato similar to the one in Variation I, although it is not as strict:

![Musical notation](image)

*Fig. 10--A Boy Was Born, "Variation II," measures 1-3*

In Figure 10 the two tenor lines have the four-note motive. This four-note motive is found complete in one voice at and at two measures before . At two measures before , while Bass I has the
original version of the four-note motive, Tenors I and II have a divided version similar to that in Figure 10:

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 11--A Boy Was Born, "Variation II," measures 18-20

A retrograde of the first three notes of the four-note motive is used in a pattern of eighth notes that is of little importance in this variation, but which is the basis for Variation IV. It occurs first in the fourth measure after 21:

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 12--A Boy Was Born, "Variation II," measure 27

At one measure before 26, the motive inverted is combined with the four-note motive forward to make the pattern that will be used as an ostinato in Variation IV:
Variation III presents the expositional material in still a different manner. Over a static background sung by a four-part choir on a B pedal-tone, the boy's choir sings a pattern that is based on the four-note motive:

It can be seen from Figure 14 that this melody is constructed from the four-note motive by using the first three notes of the motive twice, the last note of the first three being the first note of the second three, and an inversion of the motive's first three notes for the last three notes. This melody is heard three times in this form. The fourth and last statement by the boy's choir is this melody with an extension constructed in the same manner as before:
Fig. 15--A Boy Was Born, "Variation III," measures 30-33

In Variation IV the eighth-note pattern introduced in Variation II and extended in Variation III reaches full fruition. An ostinato figure taken from the four-note motive and consisting of a whole step, moving either up or down and back to the starting note, and a minor third, both up and down and return, is passed without a break from voice to voice throughout the variation. The two forms this pattern makes are these:

Fig. 16--A Boy Was Born, "Variation IV," measures 1-2

Figure 16b is an inversion of 16a. An augmentation of this ostinato is found in the bass part between 36 and 38. This augmentation occurs at the same time that the eighth-note ostinato is being sung in the other parts. Other uses of the four-note motive and other material from
the Theme can be found in this variation. The octave leaps in the second and fifth measures are one of the characteristics of this variation and can be traced back to the cadences at the end of the A and B sections of the Theme:

![Musical notation image]

*Fig. 17--A Boy Was Born, "Theme," Cadences of the A and B Sections.*

- a) "Theme," measures 12-14
- b) "Theme," measures 28-29

The argument that these cadences are the source of this melodic material is supported by the fact that there are no other exposed and important octave skips, other than at these cadences, before the fourth variation. Additional support for this is found when the bass line at two measures before 35, where two voices leap an octave at the same time, is compared with the cadences of the Theme (Figure 17). (See Figure 18.) Isolated fifths that occur periodically in voice parts over the eighth-note ostinato could have been taken from the cadence in measure 4 of the Theme or from the ostinato of Variation I. The four-note motive itself, both in the original and inverted forms, is found in
the voice with the text. An example of how this material is used is found in the alto line at \[32\]:

Material from the Theme is used so subtly in Variation V as to be unrecognizable to the ear. However, on paper the four-note motive can be seen. Because it is used in inversion with a slow tempo and is divided among several voices, it is not heard as thematic material. An example of this use is found in the first seven measures of Variation V. Dotted lines in Figure 20 show inversion of the four-note motive. (See Figure 20.) This slow moving version of the motive provides a background for the boy's choir, which sings the text of this section. Although there is no obvious connection between any of the preceding thematic material and the melody sung by the boy's choir, there is a
Fig. 20-- A Boy Was Born, "Variation V," measures 1-7

similarity of sound. This arises from the fact that the essential intervals of this melody are major seconds and minor thirds, the same as the intervals of the four-note motive.

Variation VI-Finale comprises almost one third of the entire cantata. The form of this variation, suggested by the music, as well as the text, is that on an extended rondo, although not a strict one.

Following is a diagram of the form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1-72</th>
<th>72-123</th>
<th>123-188</th>
<th>188-224</th>
<th>224-287</th>
<th>287-323</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A''</td>
<td>CODA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>147-188</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>231-287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B'</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 21--Diagram of the rondo in "Variation VI," A Boy Was Born.

Notice the unusual return of the B section in measures 147-188 while the A' section continues, and the telescoping of the D section upon the returning A section at measure 231, so that the A and D sections are heard
together in measures 231-287. This is an excellent example of Britten's adaptations of old forms to fit his own needs. After the coda of the rondo there is an extended coda to the cantata, beginning at the Andante molto maestoso six measures before 76.

In the A section of the rondo, three melodic fragments are heard against each other. The manner in which they are used suggests three ostinatos, except that there is nothing else in this section. The first of these fragments is an inversion of the ostinato figure of Variation I (Figure 22a). The second fragment is based on the four-note motive in a manner similar to the ostinato Figure in Variation IV (Figure 22b). The third melodic fragment of this section consists of two lines in contrary motion, the top voice being the four-note motive (Figure 22c). (See Figure 22.) Britten, using only these three fragments exactly as they appear in Figure 22, and changing only voice part and pitch level, weaves an interesting contrapuntal fabric of seventy-two measures.

The B section of the rondo contains only hints of material from the exposition. A melodic figure in the alto line at 53 bears a definite resemblance to the four-note motive. (See Figure 23.) This figure is heard only once in the form shown below. An inversion of this figure is heard twice after this first statement.
Fig. 22--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI," section A
a) measures 1-2
b) measures 2-5
c) measures 24-25

Fig. 23--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI," measures 83-87

One other melodic fragment is essential to this section:

Fig. 24--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI," measure 76
This can be related to the exposition. The fragment consists of two parts: (1) an octave leap, and (2) a scale passage of four notes. Both of these are found in the Theme. There is a four-note descending scale passage that is important in the bass line of the first two measures (Figure 1, page 8); and the source of the octave leap has been discussed in connection with Variation IV as being the cadences at the end of the A and B sections of the Theme. When the A and B sections of the rondo are heard together, the material used is the same as in their first appearance.

The C section bears a great resemblance to Variation III. As the choir chants a somewhat static harmony, the boy's choir sings three versions of the four-note motive, the second two being similar to the first with melodic elaborations.

![Musical notation]

Fig. 25--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI"

a) Measures 199-203
b) Measures 214-218
c) Measures 220-225
It can be seen that these versions contain the interval of a fourth as the second interval instead of a minor third.

The D section of the rondo is superimposed upon a return of the A section and contains no material from the exposition, as this is heard under it in the A section. Scale passages and elaborations on these scale passages are the only material used in the D section.

The coda of the rondo itself is in three sections. The first section is a two-part counterpoint with octave doublings covering two octaves. Each of the lines is constructed in the same manner as the ostinato of Variation IV (Figure 16, page 22), and they move in contrary motion. Brackets in Figure 26, a reduction of this counterpoint, show how this melody was constructed by dove-tailing different versions of the four-note motive in a single line.

Fig. 26--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI," measures 287-289

The second part of the coda consists of a complex stretto based on the four-note motive. There are two voices involved in each entrance; the
lower of which has the four-note motive with the correct intervals, while the higher of the two has a melodically augmented version of the motive. The lower voices are spaced at the time interval of one measure, two measures, and finally one measure. Distances between the entrances of the upper voices are in reverse of this order. Dotted lines in Figure 27 indicate number of measures between entrances of the voices in each stretto. (See Figure 27.) The final section of the coda is seven measures long, and contains no material from the exposition; but rather is a florid, cadenza-like passage in all voices. Although the same material is not involved, this cadenza resembles the first section of the coda, and it may have been based on it. There is just enough similarity to this first section to give the coda ternary form (ABA').

The coda of the cantata (Finale) begins with a curious version of the four-note motive, which has the first note ($d^1$) extended over eleven measures and spread through all of the voice parts. (See Figure 28.) Over this extended version of the motive that is repeated four times, the boy's choir sings melodies from each of the variations. This leads to

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6It is interesting to compare this scoring of a single note in many voices with the third of Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces. Whether or not this was an influence on the eighteen-year-old composer is not known. It is known that Britten, at the time this composition was written, was studying the techniques of Schoenberg and undoubtedly knew the Five Orchestral Pieces.
Fig. 27--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI," measures 299-306

(This illustration is used by permission of Oxford University Press.)
Fig. 28--A Boy Was Born, "Finale," measures 323-356

(This illustration is used by permission of Oxford University Press.)
the final section of the work which is based on preceding material, but contains no new uses of the expositional material.

In summary of this discussion of Britten's handling of thematic material, it has been shown that almost all of the melodic material can be traced back to the Theme, especially to the four-note motive. This motive was found to have been altered in the following ways:

1. By change of rhythm and rhythmic placement.
2. By melodic elaboration.
3. By sequential repetition.
4. By inversion and retrograde.
5. By distribution among several voices.
6. By melodic augmentation.
7. By dovetailing and juxtaposition.

It was also found that some of the material that could not be traced to this four-note motive could have been taken from other parts of the Theme, or was in some way related to the expositional material.

A Boy Was Born exhibits certain of Benjamin Britten's melodic characteristics. The first, and possibly most important, is his consistent use of small intervals. Because of this, his melodies are conjunct. An example of this is the melodic construction in the Theme, where the melodic intervals of seconds and thirds comprise more than 80 per cent of all intervals. Seldom does Britten use any diminished or augmented intervals. There is only one such interval in the Theme,
and it occurs at a cadence. This interval is a diminished fourth between A sharp and D natural (Figure 17a, page 23).

The first evidences of another characteristic that was to become more pronounced in his later compositions are found in *A Boy Was Born*. This melodic characteristic is a leap in the same direction as the stepwise motion preceding it. For example:

Fig. 29--*A Boy Was Born*

a) "Variation II," measures 13-15
b) "Variation VI-Finale," measures 364-367

Even the four-note motive uses this same device on a limited scale, where a third is found progressing in the same direction as the second it follows. At this stage in Britten's composing, this characteristic is hardly worth noticing. It is in the later works that this type of melodic construction becomes important. It is mentioned here only to show the beginnings of this trait.

Typical of Britten's harmony is the opening division of *A Boy Was Born*, the Theme. A close study of this movement will show the basis,
not only for this cantata, but of much of Britten's later compositions as well. The tonic-dominant relationship of traditional harmony is almost absent in Britten's works; in *A Boy Was Born* it does not exist. This arises, not from a deliberate attempt to destroy tonality, but from the very basis of the cantata itself. This composition is primarily a contrapuntal work, and the harmony is a result of combining the individual lines. This is seen clearly in a study of the chord structure, which reveals that any non-tertian structure that occurs is the result of a more important item: the working out of the motive.

Modal harmony prevails throughout this composition, characterized by many shifts in the key center, with accidentals used to maintain the same mode. The Theme, being homophonic, offers the clearest example of this. Two modes are found in this movement that are favorites of Britten, and which are used extensively throughout many of his compositions: the Aeolian or pure minor, and the Mixolydian.

The A section of the Theme, measures 1-13, is constructed in the Mixolydian mode, beginning on the key center of D (Figure 1, page 8). The cadence on E at the end of the first four measures serves to strengthen the argument for the key center of D, when Britten's cadential practices are taken into account. Instead of a dominant, Britten often supports his tonic with a chord one step above. This would, in a sense, make this open fifth on E a half-cadence. Two other reasons supporting D as the key center are the key signature, although this in
the twentieth century is seldom a good guide, and the final cadence of the Theme:

Fig. 30--A Boy Was Born, "Theme," measures 44-46

It will be seen that this cadence outlines a D major triad, ending in first inversion. The D is further cemented as the key center as this movement continues without a break into the ostinato figure of the first variation, which outlines a D chord with the notes A and D.

The shifting of key centers in the Theme follows a definite pattern. In the A section the first four measures are centered on D. When these measures are repeated in measures 5-8, the mode remains Mixolydian while the key center moves to E. The closing five measures of this section are still in the Mixolydian mode, but are on the key center of G sharp. Section B of the Theme is in a different mode, the Aeolian. It also has three different key centers, changing as in the corresponding parts of the A section. The first four measures of the B section are in the Aeolian mode on B (Figure 3, page 11), the second four are in the
Aeolian mode on D, and the closing measures are in this same mode centered on C. In the A' section, the Mixolydian on D returns. The key centers of the three parts of this section are D, A, and D.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most material in this composition can be related to the opening measures. This applies to harmonic structures as well as melodic. If any one chord structure can be considered characteristic of this composition, it is the seventh chord constructed of a minor triad and a major or minor seventh. Such chords account for half of the harmonic structures of the first four measures. In the Theme as a whole, this type of seventh chord accounts for over 64 per cent of all chord structures. The remaining chords are triads, both complete and incomplete; there are no seventh chords built on a major or diminished triad. There are several chords which have the appearance of being something other than tertian in construction. However, examination shows that they are really a triad with a non-harmonic tone. An example of this is the first chord in measure 15:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Fig. 31--A Boy Was Born, "Theme," measures 14-16}
\end{array}
\]
The chord marked * is an A minor triad in first inversion with a B pedal tone.

As in the Theme, two modes dominate the entire cantata, the Aeolian and Mixolydian. One other mode, the Lydian, is found with some frequency and is the harmonic basis for Variation V, in which the Lydian mode on B flat alternates with the key of B flat major by means of an occasional E flat. The key center of B flat is established, not so much by melodic material and chord structure, but rather by a pedal on B flat that is heard throughout the most of the fifth variation.

Harmonic progressions found in the Theme are typical of harmonic material used in the rest of this cantata. These progressions also point to another difference between this harmony and the traditional harmony of the last century, --the lack of root movements by fifths as the dominating characteristic. Movement of the fundamental bass by seconds instead of fifths is the most common type of progression in this work, accounting for over 50 per cent of all progressions. (See Table II, page100.)

George Hansler says that the cadences are created mainly by means of duration, or by the cadence chord being held longer than the other chords.7 This is partially true; however, it is also true that most of the cadences are supported by movement from the chord a second

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7Hansler, Stylistic Characteristics, p. 428.
above the cadence chord. This is seen in the final cadence of the composition, where the cadence progression is from an incomplete triad on E to a D major triad.

Fig. 32--A Boy Was Born, "Variation VI-Finale," final cadence.

Another example of a cadence chord supported by a second above is found before the coda of the rondo:

Fig. 33--A Boy Was Born, "Variation V-Finale," last cadence of the D section of the rondo.

This cadence consists of a C major chord in first inversion moving to a seventh chord on B. These chords also are examples of a common
type of non-tertian structure found in *A Boy Was Born*, the tertian chord with an added note. Both of these chords have an added major second, a D in the C major chord and a C sharp in the B chord.

An example of a cadence created primarily by duration is found at the end of the third variation. This variation ends on a G seventh chord consisting of a minor triad and a minor seventh. This cadence sounds final because this chord is sounded as a pedal below a single melodic line for the final six measures.

Even though Britten uses in this cantata an eight-part choir and a boy's chorus, the texture throughout is thin and clear. This is partially due to the harmonic emphasis on open fourths and fifths, but this clarity stems even more from the scoring. Seldom does he use all nine voices as chamber ensembles. Variation I, in which all nine voices are used is an example of the scoring typical of this composition. Figure 9, pages 17-18, shows how Britten maintains a clear and open texture while using all voices. It will be seen in Figure 9 that the two soprano lines have the ostinato figure written in such a manner that the voices never sound together. The remaining six voices have entrances in the stretto scored so that no more than four of these voices are ever heard at once.

In addition to the scoring discussed above that uses different groups of voices within each movement, the different combinations that
are used in each separate variation add to the variety of the texture.

The voices used in each section are as follows:

   Theme:    SATB.

   Variation I: Boy's choir and SSAATTBB.

   Variation II: SSAATTBB; TTBB only for first half.

   Variation III: Semi-chorus using one-third of the Boy's choir
and one-third of the other voices (SATB).

   Variation IV: SSAATTBB.

   Variation V: Boy's choir and women's voices (SSAA).

   Variation VI: Boy's choir and SSAATTBB.

Redlich, commenting on this scoring, says: "Only the very greatest
composers... have achieved infinite variety of tone colour and
structural design within the narrow limits of unaccompanied choral
singing."8

A Boy Was Born, composed at the age of eighteen, still stands as
one of Britten's best works. Certainly, there are few examples in music
of a composition of this length written with such limited material and ex-
hibiting such variety of sound. This early work is remarkable in that
for all its youthful freshness, it contains many of the techniques that are
to be found in Britten's mature compositions of a more recent period.

A Hymn to the Virgin

This short work of twenty-nine measures was the first of Britten's choral music to be published. It was composed in 1930 and revised in 1934. Its publication date of 1935 places it after A Boy Was Born, Lift Boy, and I Lov'd a Lass; even though it was written first. Jack Diether writes concerning this piece: "The hymn is a pure polyphonic piece of great beauty, and at the same time is as individual as his early chamber works of the same period."9

This text is an anonymous macaronic poem of the fourteenth century which, as Britten has indicated in the score, was taken from The Oxford Book of English Verse.10 For purposes of his composition, the composer has modernized the spelling of the old English text, while leaving the Latin text in its original form. A Hymn to the Virgin is written for double chorus (SATB), the second of which may be performed by a solo quartet. The macaronic character of the text is emphasized by splitting the Latin and English between the two choirs. The first choir sings the English text throughout, while the second choir sings in Latin. Only at the end of the third verse does the first chorus sing a Latin text. Except for a few two-note melismas, the text is set syllabically. The cadences at the end of each verse are set on a five-note melisma.


George Hansler suggests that the form of *A Hymn to the Virgin* might be called "strophic-variations." There are three stanzas, the second of which is a repetition of the first with minor rhythmic changes to fit the text. The third stanza is more varied, breaking from the strict chordal texture of the first two stanzas. Within each stanza, the form is a variation of the hymn-tune formula AA'B'A. Each section is two measures in $\frac{4}{4}$, except B, which contains a $\frac{2}{4}$ measure extension. H. F. Redlich says that this composition "with its regular four-bar periods and antiphonal echo effects, comes nearest to the conventional conception of English devotional music."12

While the harmony is probably the most important aspect of this piece, the individual lines cannot be overlooked; as Britten has managed to maintain a high degree of interest in each of the vocal parts. Contrary motion between the bass and the upper voices, as seen in the first measure, is characteristic of the counterpoint used. (See Figure 34.) Another example of the importance of the individual lines is found in the overlapping of the choruses in stanza three. (See Figure 35.)

An important aspect of Britten's technique that was seen in a more highly developed form in *A Boy Was Born* is the working out of


all melodic material from one short motive. In this piece, the two-measure melody of the soprano line is the important melodic element. (See Figure 36.) In this composition, Britten repeats this melody over and over, with some variation to fit the text. There is occasional variation to heighten the effect of a line, as in the A' section of stanza two,
where the fourth through the sixth notes are raised a third. However, 

*A Hymn to the Virgin*, does not contain the detailed spinning out of 

material that occurs in *A Boy Was Born*. The relationship of all parts 

to this melody is seen in the fact that the melodic intervals are used in 

proportion to their use in this first melody. That is to say, the melodic 

intervals are almost all seconds and thirds, with a few fourths, and no 

intervals larger than a minor sixth, except for the octave.

A melodic device characteristic of Britten, that of skipping in 

the same direction as the preceding stepwise movement, is seen 

throughout this work. In the examples already shown from *A Hymn to 

the Virgin*, melodic lines exhibiting this characteristic have been 

bracketed (Figures 34, 35 and 36). Another example, taken from the 

soprano line of the first choir near the end of the composition, shows 

this characteristic both ascending and descending;

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Fig. 36--A Hymn to the Virgin, measures 1-2

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Fig. 37--A Hymn to the Virgin, measure 27
The Aeolian mode on A predominates throughout, with three brief modulations to a major key. There is very little chromaticism to disturb this mode, except at the cadences. The cadences at the end of the A' section of stanza one and two and the final cadence of the composition consist of a G minor triad in first inversion progressing to an A major triad, giving a momentary feeling of the Phrygian mode:

![Fig. 38--A Hymn to the Virgin, measure 4](image)

The final cadences of stanzas one and two do not contain this B flat and end on an A minor triad:

![Fig. 39--A Hymn to the Virgin, measure 9](image)
Hansler says that the B flat is used mainly for harmonic color rather than for modulation. Following the first two uses of this cadence, there is a modulation to F major, in which case the B flat might be considered a preparation for the modulation. However, its use in the final cadence where no modulation occurs, lends weight to Hansler's statement. The modulation to F major occurs at the B section of stanzas one and two. In the corresponding section of stanza three, the modulation is to the key of C major. All of these modulations are effected by the "direct" or "phrase" method.

The harmony is constructed mostly of triads, with a few seventh chords. Of all the chords used, triads occur 77 per cent of the time. (See Table I, page 99.) In the C major section of stanza three, there is a chord that Hansler describes as an eleventh chord, but as the fifth and seventh of the chord are not present, this chord sounds like a triad with non-harmonic tones. These non-harmonic tones resolve correctly.

As was seen in A Boy Was Born, Britten's harmony has a characteristic movement of the fundamental root by seconds. This is true of A Hymn to the Virgin, where root movement by seconds occurs in over 50 per cent of the progressions. (See Table II, page 100.) The use of a

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13 Hansler, Stylistic Characteristics, p. 417.

14 All theoretical terms used in this thesis are as defined in Robert Ottman, Elementary Harmony and Advanced Harmony (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961).

15 Hansler, Stylistic Characteristics, p. 418.
harmonic and melodic formula at each cadence point tends to give the work a static quality. At eighteen of the twenty-four cadences, the soprano closes with an E above middle C. The chord progression at every cadence has fundamental root movement by seconds.

**Hymn to St. Cecilia**

By the time this work was written, Benjamin Britten was an established composer, noted mainly for his instrumental works, which until the early 1940's outnumbered his vocal music. However, in 1942, when the *Hymn to St. Cecilia* was composed, Britten also wrote *Peter Grimes* and *A Ceremony of Carols*. From this point in his career, Britten has composed almost exclusively for the voice. Since this time there have been only a few instrumental compositions, the most important of which is the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. Norman Demuth, an author who is a severe critic of Britten's music, points out an important aspect of the *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, its singability:

Britten is more likely to survive through the medium of works as *Our Hunting Fathers* and *A Hymn to St. Cecilia* (1942) than through the more pretentious and large scale works. . . . He has provided our English choral societies with the very things that lie within their scope, and here we sing more than they do elsewhere.\(^\text{16}\)

There is an interesting coincidence behind the composition of the *Hymn to St. Cecilia*. Britten was born on November 22, the feast day

of St. Cecilia. Whether or not this had anything to do with Britten's receiving a commission from the British Broadcasting Company for this work is unimportant. The commission did, however, give Britten the opportunity to revive the old custom observed by Purcell and Handel of writing a musical work for the occasion, as well as allow Britten to celebrate his own birthday in this unusual manner.

W. H. Auden, the British poet who has collaborated with Britten for many years since they met while making documentary films for the British government before World War II, is the author of the text. The poem, like the music, was commissioned by the British Broadcasting Company.

The further pleasure of setting words by his friend Auden supplied in good measure the musical inspiration which the text entreats of the "translated Daughter;" for Britten is often at his best in the smooth and natural handling of literate free verses, of an intellectual complexity such as experienced composers tend to shun like the plague. It would be hard to imagine, from the two pages of text that preface the score, how any composer could mold it into a work both moving and coherent, lasting only ten minutes, but Britten does it with ease, isolating and repeating the tranquil refrain of the central invocation after the contrasting movements. 17

Britten's setting of this text is commented on by Anthony Milner in a discussion of contemporary English music:

After these [the song cycles Les Illuminations and the Michelangelo Sonnets] Britten returned to English in

the masterly and wonderfully beautiful Serenade (1943) and The Holy Sonnets of John Donne (1945) in which he displays the most delicate, expressive, and varied songwriting to be found anywhere today. The same high standard is revealed in the choral works from the unaccompanied Hymn to St. Cecilia (1942) to the Spring Symphony (1948), in which occasional polyphony is never allowed to obscure the poetry and whose melodies are truly vocal.  

The Hymn to St. Cecilia shows many of the same style characteristics that were seen in A Boy Was Born. This composition is a fine example of Britten's methods of adapting old devices to his music in unusual manners. Three such devices, the ostinato, the chorale prelude, and the passacaglia are seen in Hymn to St. Cecilia. All of these devices are used in a free form that allows them to unify the work without dominating the music. Hymn to St. Cecilia, is also an excellent example of Britten's development of a composition from a motive so small that by itself does not seem important enough to become the basis for an entire work.

Hymn to St. Cecilia is in three sections, each with a codetta based on the opening of section one. Each of these sections exhibits one of the devices mentioned above and in some manner derives its melodic material from a central motive that serves to unify the whole composition. Section one (measures 1-67) is a freely formed passacaglia. The second section (measures 67-170) has an unusual form

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for an a cappella choir, in that it is based on an old instrumental form, the chorale prelude. This section might in reality be related to a practice much older, that of the tenor or cantus firmus being sung in long notes, while the other voices sing faster, more flowing melodies above it. This latter may be closer to the actual basis for this section, but since the previous and following sections are based on Baroque instrumental devices, relating the second section to the chorale prelude, gives the composition another unifying element. The third section (measures 170-254) is constructed on an ostinato.

The passacaglia of the first section and the first melody derived from it provide most of the melodic material for the remainder of the composition. This passacaglia consists almost entirely of descending fourths and ascending seconds:

![Passacaglia notation]

Fig. 40--Hymn to St. Cecilia, measures 1-5, passacaglia of section one.
A melody derived from this motive is heard at the same time as this motive. This derived melody itself provides some of the melodic material for later portions of the composition:

![Fig. 41--Hymn to St. Cecilia, measures 1-5, soprano melody based on passacaglia motive.](image)

Section one, the passacaglia, is divided into three parts (ABA'), the A' being a codetta. The A part of section one is constructed of four phrases, the second of which is a repetition of the first with a few changes. The third phrase (measures 12-19) is similar to the first in a different key. The fourth phrase contains the passacaglia theme in inversion at the same time as the theme is heard in the original:

![Fig. 42--Hymn to St. Cecilia, measures 20-23](image)
In the B part of section one, there are two different versions of the theme in the first soprano line. These are heard between phrases sung by the remainder of the chorus. The first version (Figure 43a), an inversion, is heard twice, the second being similar to the first. The other version of this theme (Figure 43b), while considerably different, is related to the passacaglia theme in inversion. Brackets in Figure 43b show the theme in inversion:

![Figure 43--Hymn to St. Cecilia, soprano versions of the theme in the B section.](image)

In measure 47, the theme is begun in its original form, but changes as the third and fourth notes of the theme are repeated several times in the upper voices. As this repetition ends, the men enter with the theme in inversion. (See Figure 44.)

The A' part is the last twelve measures of section one. This part consists of the theme heard once and repeated. With the exception
of a third and a second in measures 62 and 63, this section is all in unison.

The section that has been compared with a chorale prelude is also in ternary form (ABA'). The voices that are given the flowing melody above the slow melody that appears in the bass and alto at different points sing a freely formed canon. The canon's melody is related to the first passacaglia theme in that it has been derived by filling in the intervals of an ascending and descending version of the theme. The passacaglia theme consisted of descending fourths followed by ascending seconds, and was used in its original and inverted forms. The circled notes in Figure 45 show the notes of the theme. (See Figure 45.)

This melody is heard eighteen times in the exact form and in the same key as shown below. The first part of section two is in canonic imitation. The entrances sometimes come close enough together to
Fig. 45--Hymn to St. Cecilia, measures 68-72, melody of canon in the second section.

cause the melody to be heard against itself for almost its entire length. Most of the entrances, however, are timed so that a new statement of the melody begins as another one finishes. In addition to complete statements of the melody, fragments of the melody are scattered in different voices throughout the canon. Three voices are involved in this free canon, but rarely are the entrances of the complete statements close enough together to have all three of these voices singing together.

Beneath this canon, the alto and bass lines sing a four-phrase melody:

Fig. 46--Hymn to St. Cecilia, bass melody of the A part of section two.

After the canon cadences in measure 114, the voices that had the canon (Soprano I and II and Tenor) are given a four-note motive that is
heard between statements in the bass and alto. The seventeen measures in which this occurs is the B part of this section. The bass and alto lines are in unison and have a melody that is related to the passacaglia motive in the same manner as the canon melody. The circled notes in Figure 47 show the notes of the passacaglia motive:

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 47--Hymn to St. Cecilia, measures 116-120

As the B part cadences, the twenty-seven measures that constitute the A' part begin. In this part, the voices return to lines similar to the A part. The canon is written above a slow melody in the bass and alto. Following this return of A', there is a twelve-measure codetta that is a variation of the A' part of the passacaglia.

An ostinato is the basis for the final division of the work that is seventy measures long. This ostinato is not related to the preceding material as was the second division. However, melodic material in this last section is all related to the ostinato. This ostinato consists of stepwise movement covering the interval of a fifth. (See Figure 48.) For the first twelve measures of this division, the ostinato is strict in its continuous repetition. In measure 183 the ostinato is written in inversion.
This final section of *Hymn to St. Cecilia* is in ternary form (ABA'). The A section (measures 171-191) consists of three-part counterpoint written above the ostinato described in Figure 48. The ostinato itself is dropped in the B section (measures 192-215), but melodic material in this section is based on the ostinato. This relationship is obvious from the rhythm and the repeated notes in the second measure of each phrase:

The melody in Figure 49 is used throughout the B section in one form or another. At measure 216, the ostinato returns, this time used in all voices to create a section of four-part counterpoint twenty measures long. This is followed by a nineteen-measure coda that is a variation of the opening measures of the composition.
The section of four-part counterpoint mentioned above is broken up by four solo cadenzas. These cadenzas are written to imitate different instruments, --the violin by the alto, the tympani by the bass, the flute by the soprano, and the trumpet by the tenor:

Each of these cadenzas is characteristic of the instrument imitated, like the trumpet calls in Figure 50c.

Melodic characteristics seen in *A Boy Was Born* and *A Hymn to the Virgin* are also found in this composition. Examples of the characteristic leap after a scalewise passage in the same direction can be seen.
in the last measure of Figure 41 and the second measure of Figure 45. The melodies for the most part are conjunct. They are at times less so than in his other pieces because of the passacaglia motive which consists primarily of fourths. Also, the harmonic emphasis on major chords creates several melodic lines that are nothing more than outlines of chords (Figure 46, page 55). Britten carefully avoids the use of the augmented fourth or diminished fifth, sometimes outlining it in a scale passage by beginning and ending on the notes of this interval but never writing the interval by itself.

Harmonically, Hymn to St. Cecilia does not fit the pattern of root movements found in the other works. In the opening division of this composition, the passacaglia, root movements by thirds instead of seconds predominate, accounting for 38 per cent of all progressions. However, in the second division and in the ostinato, Britten returns to his characteristic harmony by using root movement by seconds over 57 per cent of the time. (See Table II, page 100.) This difference in root movements stems from the passacaglia motive constructed of a descending fourth followed by an ascending second, which causes every other note to be a third apart.

The passacaglia is primarily homophonic with some contrapuntal considerations as discussed earlier. In the remainder of the composition, except for the two codas based on the opening passacaglia, the divisions are linear in construction. Throughout, the major triad is the
dominating chord. There are a few seventh chords, but no tertian
structures beyond the seventh are used. Dissonance is at a minimum,
and the dissonant notes are usually resolved in a traditional manner.

In the opening and closing sections of the passacaglia, feeling for
a key center is lacking. This is not because of dissonant structures,
but rather is due to the progression of major chords that are not re-
lated to one another in any key. This progression is as follows:
E major, C major, A major, D minor, G major, B major (with a
minor seventh), E major. As this passage begins and ends on E major,
and because the major IV and major V\(^7\) chords of the key of E major
are present in the progression, there is a strong argument for the key
center of E major. However, this progression contains three chords
that are far removed from E major, and which are far too important in
the progression to be passed over as chords used in the sense of non-
harmonic tones. This progression is typical of harmonic material
found in the remainder of the passacaglia and the sections based on this
opening division.

The harmony of the division that has been termed a chorale pre-
lude and the harmony of the ostinato section are dominated by pedals,
both actual and implied. Each statement of the melody of the canon,
found in measures 68-114 (Figure 45, page 55) begins and ends on E
with a top note of E. This melody is centered on the key of E major.
Each phrase of the four-phrase melody sung by the bass and alto under
this canon begins and ends on E. When all of these factors are put together, there occurs the effect of a pedal on E, although none is actually written. Following the canon, the B section contains three written pedals, an E major chord, a C major chord, and an E major chord. The common note of E in these chords actually maintains the implied pedals of the canon. After this section, the canon returns still centered on E with all the elements discussed previously that created the implied pedal.

The ostinato has much the same effect as found in the canon discussed above. This section (measures 171-191) begins in the Aeolian mode on A, with a modulation to the Phrygian mode on A at measure 182. Measures 183-184 are in the key of A flat major, but the Phrygian mode on A returns in the next measure. The A is heard throughout most of these first twenty measures. As in the preceding division, the A pedal is actually written in the contrasting section (B). At measure 206, the A pedal is dropped and replaced by a D pedal in measure 209. The final section of the ostinato is very chromatic modulating in the space of twenty measures from the Dorian mode on A to C minor, to A flat major, to G flat major, and finally ending on E major.
Five Flower Songs, a Choral Cycle

The Five Flower Songs, written in 1950, represent the last of Britten's essays in the field of a cappella choral music. They contain, in more subtle forms, techniques that were seen in the earlier music in this genre. Evan John writes of these pieces, "They deserve the highest praise for their never-failing imagination and vitality, shown not only in the melodic and rhythmic subtleties of the vocal lines; but also in the harmony and scoring." 19

A study of these pieces reveals a consistency of style that has grown from the earlier works, such as A Boy Was Born. In one or all of these songs, three style characteristics that are found in all of Britten's music are evident: (1) the technique of building the whole of a composition by developing a small motive; (2) the fresh and unusual uses of old forms and devices; (3) the use of harmonic techniques based on nineteenth-century materials treated in a fresh manner. Concerning Britten's treatment of form, George Hansler writes, "Britten has adapted his material to established forms in a very free manner, but without sacrificing formal unity." 20

As Britten has done in other works in the nature of a song cycle, such as the Spring Symphony and A Boy Was Born, he has taken a group

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20 Hansler, Stylistic Characteristics, p. 627.
of texts, related only by the mention of some kind of flower, and molded them into a unified whole. Poems by Robert Herrick provide the text for To Daffodills and The Succession of the Four Sweet Months. Marsh Flowers, a description of some ugly flora, is a poem by George Crabbe, the English poet whose poem The Borough provided the basis for Britten's first opera, Peter Grimes. John Clare is the author of the poem, The Evening Primrose, while the author of Ballad of Green Broom is anonymous.

To Daffodills

To Daffodills, the first of the Five Flower Songs provides an example of Britten's technique of constructing whole compositions from short motives. In addition, this work shows one of Britten's unusual methods of scoring. To Daffodills was written nearly twenty years after A Boy Was Born; yet there are many similarities in construction.

To Daffodills is in two parts; the second of which is based on material from the first part. Part one extends from measure 1 through measure 39; part two is the last thirty-eight measures. The principal motive from which the first melody is constructed and which provides material for the remainder of the composition is shown in Figure 51. This motive is constructed like the four-note motive of A Boy Was Born, in that it consists of minor thirds and seconds. Examples of how this motive is used throughout part one are found in the first eight measures.
In Figure 52 the motive itself is bracketed wherever it occurs. Numbers on the brackets refer to notes of the motive in Figure 51. It will be seen that the notes outside of the brackets (measures 5-8) make intervals of seconds and thirds only; thus, even these notes could be related to the motive. As in these first eight measures, all melodic material of part one can be related to the motive in Figure 51.

Part one is constructed essentially of two-part counterpoint of an unusual variety. Although there are four voices, it will be noticed in Figure 52 that the soprano and bass lines are coupled together, as are the alto and tenor lines. It becomes obvious that these were intended to comprise two separate parts when the sharp contrast between the soprano-bass and the alto-tenor lines is seen. The alto and tenor lines move in parallel sixths or thirds almost all of the time. Out of ninety-six intervals between these voices, only nine are not thirds or sixths. Of these nine, two are octaves, two are sevenths, four are fourths, and one is a second. Only once (in measure 21) is there a rhythmic difference in the two lines.
Fig. 52--To Daffodills, measures 1-8
This extreme consonance of the alto and tenor lines is sharply contrasted by the soprano and bass parts. Rhythmically, the soprano and bass lines are identical, moving most of the time in parallel octaves, sevenths, and fifths. Out of ninety-four intervals between the soprano and bass, only ten are sixths or thirds. To add to the dissonant effect of these two outer voices, there are several cross-relations, whereas, only one cross-relation is found between the two inner voices.

To Daffodills begins in the key of E flat major. This key center is disturbed only once by a D flat in the soprano line of the third measure. Otherwise, the key of E flat is clearly marked up to a cadence on an E flat major triad in the sixteenth measure. In the seventeenth measure, there is a modulation to the key of B flat major. This is established by the movement in the bass line from A natural and C natural to B flat. The A flat in the alto line of the eighteenth measure is an indication of a minor mode on B flat that is firmly established in the twenty-second measure. (See Figure 53.) The A flat and G flat found in the alto and soprano lines against the A natural in the bass line is merely the result of combining the ascending and descending forms of the melodic minor scale, with the single exception of the A flat in the eighteenth measure. After the cadence on B flat minor, the key center shifts to the relative major on D flat. After the key of D flat major is firmly established in measure 26, there is a sudden shift to A flat major in measure 27 by use of a cross-relation between the alto and tenor lines. (See Figure 54.)
Fig. 53--To Daffodils, measures 17-23

Fig. 54--To Daffodils, measures 25-27
In measure 29, another cross-relation between a D flat in the soprano and a D natural in the bass brings the key center back to E flat for the duration of the first part.

Harmonic progressions in *To Daffodills* follow the same general pattern that has been found in most of Britten's choral music. Root movement by seconds accounts for over 53 per cent of the progressions. In most of the previous pieces discussed, the tonic-dominant relationship has either been absent or thoroughly disguised. This is not true in *To Daffodills*. The cadence ending part one is as straightforward an example of tonic-dominant harmony as will be found in Britten's choral works; even though this cadence violates important rules of this type of harmony with its parallel octaves, doubled leading tone, and diminished chord in root position:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 55--*To Daffodills*, measures 37-39**

In part two, the harmonic motion is slowed down, resulting in a harmony that is somewhat static. This slowed harmonic motion comes
from the use of an old device in this section, the ostinato. As the term "ostinato" is normally used, referring to a motive repeated over and over as the unifying element of a composition, it does not really fit this piece. However, this is the closest term that can be applied. As the upper three parts sing chant-like phrases, the bass sings the opening motive seven times, always different from the last in rhythm or pitch. An example of this use is found in the first four measures of section two:

![Musical notation]

Fig. 56--To Daffodills, measures 40-44

It is this bass line that appears to dictate the harmony, the key center always being the key center of the bass line alone. This holds true even in the coda, the last nine measures, where the bass voice, with a modified version of the motive moves around the key center of E flat, the tonic of this section.
The two-part feeling of section one is not entirely lost in this section, as the upper three voices move together in chordal style while the bass voice is independent of them. This, of course, does not create two-part counterpoint as did the coupling of two pairs of voices in section one. In the coda, the two-part idea is broken up completely. There, the alto and tenor move together as at the first, but the bass and soprano are independent voices.

Melodic characteristics of *To Daffodills* are dictated by the motive upon which this composition is based. There is nothing in the individual melodic lines that differs from the other works that have been discussed. As the motive is made of seconds and thirds, these intervals predominate in the composition. There is very little use of any interval longer than a fifth, and augmented and diminished intervals are almost non-existent, being used only once. A diminished fifth is found in the tenor line in measure 57:

Fig. 57--*To Daffodills*, measures 57-58
Because the characteristic turns of the motive prevent any leaps after scalewise motion in the same direction, there is very little of this type of melody in *To Daffodills*. Two examples are found in the alto and tenor lines in measures 7-8 (Figure 52, page 65) and in the soprano and alto lines of measures 57-58.

**The Succession of the Four Sweet Months**

This piece is an example of Britten's use of an old form in a new and different way. The *Succession of the Four Sweet Months* is a fughetta, a form which may have been suggested by the poem. The text consists of four couplets, each describing one of the four months of April, May, June and July. Each couplet is given to a different voice and is the only part of the text sung by that voice.

The exposition of the fughetta (measures 1-20) is not strict other than in key relationships involved in the entrances of the subject. This subject is stated first by the soprano in the key of G major, the key of the signature. (See Figure 58.) As this statement ends, there is a modulation to D before the entrance in the alto. The statement by the alto is in the Lydian mode on D, as both G and C are sharp throughout. After the complete statement of the answer by the alto, there is a two-measure episode that modulates back to G major. During the statement of the subject by the tenor, both C natural and C sharp are found in the accompanying voices, leaving the exact mode in doubt, as it could be G major
or the Lydian mode on G. The entrance of the bass begins with an augmented version of the answer on the dominant, being in quarter-notes instead of eighth-notes. In the measure following the entrance of the bass voice, a B flat and an F natural take the piece temporarily into the Lydian mode on B flat. This ends three measures later as the exposition cadences on a D major triad.

Each of the entrances is different from its preceding statement in that some of the notes are different and the rhythm is altered. The first statement of the subject by the soprano contains the basis for all melodic material in the fughetta:

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 58**--The Succession of the Four Sweet Months, measures 1-5.

There is no real counter-subject, as different material is heard with each new entrance.

Following the exposition, there is a ten-measure section consisting of three stretti, all similar to each other. The first and second stretti have entrances in the following order, --soprano, tenor, alto, and bass. In each stretto, the different voices enter on the same pitch as the preceding stretto. All of these are in the key of D major. The first stretto is an example of this section. (See Figure 59.)
After the ten measures of stretto development, there is a four-measure coda. This coda ends on a G major triad after the tenor line has given a feeling of the Phrygian mode on G with an A flat and a B flat. (See Figure 60.)

![Figure 59](image1.png)

Fig. 59--The Succession of the Four Sweet Months, measures 20-21.

![Figure 60](image2.png)

Fig. 60--The Succession of the Four Sweet Months, coda

Melodic characteristics that have been seen before are again in evidence in The Succession of the Four Sweet Months. Examples of the leap after a scale passage in the same direction are bracketed in Figures 58 and 59. The augmented fourths and diminished fifths are again
avoided, occurring only in the alto line of the three stretti. The melodies are not as conjunct as in the previous works of Britten that have been analyzed, although seconds and thirds account for 70 per cent of all melodic intervals. (See Table III, page 101.) There is a considerable amount of chord outlining. Also, the opening four notes of the subject with the large leap, appear enough times to detract from a conjunct melodic style.

All of the chord structures found in The Succession of the Four Sweet Months are tertian. Other than one eleventh chord and a few ninth chords, the only structures used are the triad and seventh chord. The writing is linear throughout, and the chord structures are a result of a combination of the four lines.

**Marsh Flowers**

While Marsh Flowers is written for four-part chorus, it is essentially two-part counterpoint doubled at the octave. The method of scoring in this piece is similar to that of number one in this opus, To Daffodills. As in To Daffodills, the two-part counterpoint is carried strictly throughout the first section of the composition. In the remainder of the piece, each line becomes more independent, and the composition comes closer to being constructed of four separate parts, although the basic two-part idea is retained somewhat.
Marsh Flowers is written in a manner that suggests ternary form; although it is really through-composed. The ternary form is suggested by the contrasting homophonic section of four measures, which begins in measure 17. After this short, contrasting section, the melodic style and scoring return to that of the first section. Although the actual material used is different, the abrupt change of style in measure 17 and the return to the style of the first in measure 20 give Marsh Flowers a three-part feeling. However, closer examination will show that for each of the flowers listed, there is a different setting in the music. This difference in the music for each flower becomes more obvious after the contrasting middle section.

Throughout the first section (measures 1-16), which is divided into four smaller phrases to describe four different flowers, the tenor doubles the soprano at the octave. The bass is similarly coupled with the alto. The combination of these two parts produces mostly octaves, fifths, and seconds, resulting in a stark and open texture. In the beginning section there is very little counterpoint, as one part is holding a pedal while the other part has the melody. The first phrase (measures 1-3) contains a melody that will be used in several ways in later portions of the composition:

Fig. 61--Marsh Flowers, measures 1-3
The second phrase, describing the nightshade, begins with an upward leap of an octave. Its second and third measures have the same melody as the corresponding measures in Figure 61. Both the third and fourth phrases begin with a leap of an octave down.

The contrasting section begins homophonically without any apparent linear consideration. The last two measures of this section contain some unusual four-part counterpoint in which each voice has a range of three notes. However, this limited range does not hurt the interest in these two measures, as they are made extremely complex by the completely different rhythm patterns in each voice:

Fig. 62--Marsh Flowers, measures 19-20
Britten's fondness for canons is seen again at the beginning of the third section, where a strict double canon of nine measures is found. Kent Kennan points out that in a double canon, one pair of voices often takes on the character of an accompanying part. The canon in the alto and bass lines is the accompanying canon. In the soprano and tenor lines the canon is of a different style and assumes a more important role. The accompanying canon is written in eighth notes slurred so as to be sung legato, while the lead canon is unslurred and written in a pattern of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes.

In the final section of Marsh Flowers (measures 31-38), Britten returns to the melodies and voicing of the opening. The melody that was shown in Figure 61, page 75, is not repeated exactly, but the outline of the melody and the rhythm are similar. The dotted rhythm of the second and third measures of this melody is replaced in the closing section (measures 32-33) with triplets. The final four measures have the dotted rhythm and melodic outline similar to the second and third measures.

These different melodic and contrapuntal devices are part of Britten's description in music of some unmusical flowers. The "contracted Flora of our town" described in the text include the "strong mallow," the "dull nightshade," some "faded green henbane," salt

\[21\] Kent Kennan, **Counterpoint** (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1959), p. 117.
lavender that "lacks perfume," the "fiery nettle," fern, and seaweed. The melodic line in measure 1 (Figure 61, page 75), with its accents and syncopation, is suggestive of the "strong mallow." The henbane's "faded green" is described by a four-note melisma covering the interval of a minor third. The salt lavender's "rigid bloom" comes forth in the music in a rigid pattern of dotted eighth-notes and sixteenth-notes.

This flower's lack of perfume is aptly shown by a dissonance (C sharp against D sharp) moving to a unison on D, then fading away to a pianissimo. The "spring" of the nettle is set on an octave leap upward in all voices, and the setting for the nettles "fierce poison" is the complex contrapuntal section shown in Figure 62. A double canon creates the "fenny bed" of the fern. The "rolling" motion of the seaweed is depicted by rolling triplets in all voices. This would be an example of a trite cliche were it not for the many cross-relations and sharp dissonances. As it stands, this "rolling of the sea" is an example of Britten's ability to adapt worn-out devices and infuse them with new life. (See Figure 63.)

The nature of the flowers described in this composition may account for a change in some of Britten's melodic characteristics. In Marsh Flowers, instead of avoiding the augmented and diminished intervals, Britten uses a few of them as part of melodies that are exposed with little or no harmonic support. The diminished fifth in the alto and bass line of measure 1 is an example of this use. (See Figure 61,
There are also some spellings of intervals that create diminished fourths.

The melodic style gives the impression of being disjunct when this piece is sung. However, seconds and thirds account for nearly 90 per cent of all melodic intervals. The disjunct feeling comes from the use of large leaps, particularly sixths and octaves, at the beginning of phrases.

Two features characterize the harmony of Marsh Flowers. The most important of these features is the root movement by seconds. This harmonic characteristic is used for 49 per cent of the progressions. Most of the cadences in Marsh Flowers are also constructed on the progression of root movement by seconds. The second feature of the harmony is the dissonance, at times quite sharp as the result of
cross-relations. An example of this is found in Figure 68. This unusual use of dissonance may stem from the text of the work, as was suggested concerning the use of augmented and diminished intervals.

The Evening Primrose

The fourth of the Five Flower Songs offers a contrast to the others in that it is primarily homophonic. The Evening Primrose is divided into three sections, each with two parts. The first section is seven measures long, with a four-measure homophonic phrase followed by three measures of counterpoint constructed entirely from outlines of seventh chords. The next two sections are variations of this first section. Both sections two and three have two four-measure phrases of a homophonic nature. These phrases are followed in section two by contrapuntal outlines of a ninth chord for four measures, and in section three by six measures of counterpoint outlining two seventh chords. The term "strophic-variation" does not apply to this composition other than to the form of the individual sections. There is little or no melodic relationship between the various sections, other than the counterpoint at the end of each homophonic section.

The melodic writing in this composition is characterized by outlining of chords. Each of the three contrapuntal sections is based solely on chord outlines. An example of this counterpoint, as well as the melodic style of this piece is found in measures 26-29:
In measure 26, the soprano and tenor outline a seventh chord on F sharp. The bass and alto melody in measure 27 consists of a seventh chord on C sharp. This example shows also an interesting use of a double canon. The soprano and tenor have a canon at the octave one quarter-note apart. In measure 27, the bass and alto have an exact inversion of the canon in the soprano and tenor lines.

H. F. Redlich refers to this work in his survey of Britten's choral music by saying, "The Evening Primrose, with its immaculate four-part harmonies in the blandest B major, conjures up a sonorous fata morgana of tonal beauty such as is almost extinct in contemporary music, ..." 22 This work does definitely show that Britten was

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making an effort to create a beautiful composition and that he succeeded in accomplishing this, but this work is hardly in the "blandest B major." The key center at the beginning is B, but it quickly moves to the key of F sharp minor. By way of D major in the second section, the tonality moves to the Mixolydian mode on F sharp and reaches its final cadence in this mode and on this key center. The blandness that Redlich speaks of is most certainly not in evidence in the opening section, which is the only part of this work in B major. The B major section is far removed from traditional harmony in that root movement by fifths and thirds is entirely absent. Chord progressions such as found in the first two measures, where a major chord with a minor seventh on I progresses to a major chord on the lowered seventh scale step, are not bland. This progression is marked * in Figure 65. (See Figure 65.)

As was mentioned in the above discussion of the harmony of the opening section, this work exhibits a large amount of root progression by seconds. This type of movement accounts for over 44 per cent of all the progressions. Root movement by fifths accounts for less than 30 per cent of the progressions. (See Table II, page 100.) This root movement removes The Evening Primrose from traditional harmony, even though the tertian structures of seventh and ninth chords at times give this work a "traditional" sound.
Ending this opus is a delightful parody of the traditional folk ballad. The mainstay of the folk song is simple harmony. An important compositional technique of Benjamin Britten is the ostinato. These two elements, simple harmony and the ostinato, are combined to produce this interesting piece. Throughout the one hundred and three measures of Ballad of Green Broom an harmonic ostinato of alternating I and V\textsuperscript{7} chords provide the background for the text. Britten shows in this work that it is still possible to construct interesting and fresh compositions from material as old and limiting as this harmony.
There are eight stanzas in the text concerning "young John" who married a lady in order to avoid cutting green broom. The seven stanzas following the first stanza are variations of the first. The melody in Figure 66, heard first in the tenor, moves through this piece almost unchanged.

\[\text{Fig. 66--Ballad of Green Broom, measures 5-10}\]

The folk-like character of the principal melody derives from the fact that it is constructed of simple stepwise motion and contains no chromatic alterations. The only interval larger than a second in the melody is a fourth. This interval emphasizes the movement of the ostinato from V to I, as it is harmonized with this progression.

In the first stanza, the melody is assigned to the tenors while the other voices have the harmonic ostinato with the words "green broom." In each of the three stanzas following this one, the melody is sung by one of the remaining voices,--stanza two by the bass, stanza three by the soprano, and stanza four by the alto. In the fifth stanza, Britten uses one of his characteristic devices, the canon. The melody, changed only
in key from the opening version, becomes a canon at the fourth between the bass and tenor:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 67—Ballad of Green Broom, measures 67-72**

In measure 73, this canon is taken up by the alto and soprano to end this stanza.

**Melodic construction in the Ballad of Green Broom** is strange in that the melodic intervals are almost all seconds and fourths. The other intervals (thirds, fifths, sixths, sevenths and octaves) combined account for only 4 per cent of the melodic intervals used in all four lines. The melodies are conjunct, even more than in Britten's other choral works, as there are many more seconds than fourths in the melodic lines.
The harmonic ostinato, which is introduced in block chords sung by the soprano, alto, and bass, is varied in many ways to maintain the interest of the composition. In the third stanza, the placement of the tenor one beat ahead of the bass and alto in the ostinato creates suspensions and retardations:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 68--Ballad of Green Broom, measures 37-39**

The variation in the fourth stanza (Figure 69) is more complex than the one shown in Figure 68. The melody is in the key of C major. However, the ostinato is constructed around the tonic and dominant of F giving this section the sound of the Mixolydian mode on C. The bass and tenor have the bottom lines of the ostinato, each line consisting of a four-note figure. As it is heard first in the bass, the figure in the tenor can be described as being an inversion of the bass motive:
The final form taken by the harmonic ostinato is a variation of the block chords of the first section. Alternating between the soprano and tenor are notes of the chords I and V\(^9\). The C sharp and B natural are identified as being part of the V\(^9\) chord because, as this section progresses, the remaining notes of this chord (A natural, E natural, and G natural) are added:

The form of the ostinato found in Figure 70 becomes the basis for the coda, where the men alternate with the women singing the chords I and V\(^9\). As a result of this, the coda resembles the traditional
instrumental coda constructed by hammering out the dominant and tonic.
The final two measures of this coda use another instrumental device used in codas, a rapid scale passage. It is interesting to note that although this composition is traditional in its tonic-dominant harmonies, the final chord is definitely not traditional, as the last chord is the tonic chord in second inversion:

![Fig. 71--Ballad of Green Broom, measures 102-103](image)

Chord structure and harmonic progression are both governed in this composition by the ostinato. In the Ballad of Green Broom no chord structures other than tertian are used. Of the tertian structure, the only ones used are triads and seventh chords, plus an occasional ninth chord. The characteristic root movement of Britten's harmony by seconds is not found in this work. This is a result of the harmonic ostinato of tonic and dominant chords.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

The choral music of Benjamin Britten is characterized by a texture that stems from Mahler and the Viennese school of the early twentieth century, a style of vocal writing that returns to Purcell, and forms and devices that are adapted from the Baroque and classical eras. A distaste for massive, tutti writing led Britten to a study of the orchestration of Mahler, which resulted in his handling of large ensembles as combinations of chamber groups. This is true, not only of the works with orchestra, but of the a cappella music as well.\(^1\)

An example of this clarity of texture achieved by writing for large ensembles in this manner is *A Boy Was Born*. Throughout this cantata, the large chorus is seldom heard singing all at the same time. When the entire chorus is used, the texture is kept thin by dividing the chorus into nine different contrapuntal lines.

Britten's music, although clearly of the twentieth century, is closely allied with the vocal tradition of Purcell and his contemporaries.

Wilfrid Mellers points to this influence in a discussion of Britten's style:

Neither the pure polyphonic conception nor the idea of dramatic tonal conflict play much part in his music. . . . He is essentially a rhetorical composer, bringing our seventeenth century rhetorical period to a belated consumation. 

Mitchell also says that "Britten owes much more to the dramatic, rhetorical stylization of the seventeenth century, especially to Purcell," than to the generation of English composers that preceded Britten. One of the evidences of this influence is the affinity for vocal cadenzas that Britten shows in much of his music. The four solo cadenzas found in the Hymn to St. Cecilia (Figure 50, page 58) are an excellent example of this. When the cadenzas are not set apart and as clearly defined as those in Hymn to St. Cecilia, the influence of them is seen in other ways. For example, the coda of the rondo in Variation VI of A Boy Was Born ends with a passage that might be described as a cadenza for eight-part chorus. One other evidence of the influence of Purcell is Britten's use of dotted rhythms in the manner of Purcell. An example of this is the third of the Five Flower Songs, Marsh Flowers. Marsh Flowers also contains an example of the cadenza-type of writing. (See Figure 62, page 76.)


The influence of the classical and Baroque composers is most evident in Britten's emphasis on form. While the forms may be unusual, as the set of choral variations of *A Boy Was Born*, the fact that all of his choral works are molded within formal frameworks is indicative of the influence of early music. Britten's music abounds with his adaptations of forms and devices from these earlier periods. The constant use of an ostinato, as in every variation of *A Boy Was Born*, *To Daffodills*, and *Ballad of Green Broom*, the passacaglia and chorale prelude in *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, and the fughetta in *The Succession of the Four Sweet Months* are all examples of Britten's use of these devices and forms.

Melodic construction in the choral works of Britten is always simple and uncluttered. Edward Canby says that "Britten is a master of the simple melodic line. His settings of the English language itself are the work of genius if there is genius today."Britten's melodies are, for the most part, conjunct, with relatively little chromaticism. Because of this, they are always very singable.

A discussion of the ways that Britten uses these melodies and the manner in which he derives them from small motives leads inevitably to the one facet of Benjamin Britten that continues to give him the image of a prodigy, even though he is now fifty years old,—his immense

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technical facility. Aaron Copland, in a discussion of Britten's opera The Rape of Lucretia, describes this image of Britten as a "boy wonder." Copland continues:

I know of no other composer alive today who writes music with such phenomenal flair. Other composers write with facility, but Britten's facility is breath-taking. He combines an absolutely solid technical equipment with a reckless freedom in handling the more complex compositional textures. The whole thing is carried off with an abandon and verve that are irresistible.

... Probably the most striking single factor in his operatic writing is the richness, variety, breadth, and sweep of his melodic lines. This same richness of melodic invention, when applied to choral writing, produces brilliant results.5

This technical facility that Copland discusses is mentioned by most writers on Britten's music. The technique does not cover and dominate the music, as might be suspected from the emphasis on it. Rather, "it makes itself felt, ... prior to its formal recognition."6

The most important aspect of Britten's melodic construction is the spinning out of these melodies from small motives. One of the best examples of this kind of writing since Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is A Boy Was Born. Throughout his cantata almost all melodic material can be related to a four-note motive. This technique is also seen in Hymn to St. Cecilia, where much of the melodic material is based on the passacaglia motive. To Daffodills has a five-note motive as the basis for its

melodic development. All of these motives seem unimportant when considered by themselves. However, they seldom turn out to be unimportant. Milner warns against passing by these motives when he says, "It is never safe to ignore a figurative pattern in his works; however unassuming it may sound when first heard it will nevertheless probably prove to be vitally important for textural development."\(^7\)

This development of melodic material from small motives serves to unify each composition. Even in a work like Ballad of Green Broom, where this motivic development is absent, this style characteristic is felt. In the Ballad of Green Broom, the only melodic intervals used in the twelve-measure melody are seconds and fourths. Later in the composition, a short linking passage "Go fetch me the boy!" is constructed entirely of fourths. It is small, seemingly unimportant techniques such as this, that bring a high degree of unity to all of Britten's music.

Two contrapuntal devices play a large part in almost every one of Britten's a cappella choral music,--stretto and canon. These two are, of course, very closely related, in that both are based on imitation. Examples of very complex stretti can be seen in Figure 9, pages 17-18, and Figure 27, page 31. Figure 27 is actually two stretti occurring at the same time. Other examples of less complicated stretti are found throughout A Boy Was Born, Hymn to St. Cecilia and The Succession of the Four Sweet Months. (See Figure 59, page 73.)

\(^7\)Anthony Milner, "English Contemporary Music," p. 141.
Canon is possibly Benjamin Britten's favorite device. Almost every melody he writes eventually becomes a canon at some point in the composition. The most involved canon at the unison is found in section two of *Hymn to St. Cecilia*. This canon is discussed at some length on page 54. A canon at the fourth is found in the *Ballad of Green Broom*. It is this canon that prompted the statement about every melody becoming a canon. This melody is first heard as an imitation of a folk-song, and is heard without a change, except in key, through four stanzas. The surprise comes in the fifth stanza, when the melody is heard in its entire length as a two-voice canon at the fourth.

Examples of double canons are also found in two of the *Five Flower Songs*. In *Marsh Flowers* a nine-measure double canon is found that conforms to tradition, in that one of the canons is an accompanying canon. (See page 77.) The double canon found in *The Evening Primrose* is an example of the "cleverness" of Britten that has at times brought him criticism from those who feel his technique causes his music to be superficial. As is described on page 81, the second canon in this double canon is an exact inversion of the first canon at the interval of a fourth. The scale passages that form the D section of the rondo in the sixth variation of *A Boy Was Born* are frequently written in canonic imitation. In this D section, material from the A section is heard under the scale passages, sometimes in canon, and sometimes creating double canons with the scale passages.
D. H. Ottaway, in a discussion of Britten's music in general, makes a statement that is applicable to Britten's harmony. He says, "His music has an originality that is unmistakably of the twentieth century, though not obsessed with violence and frustration." This is especially true of the structures used by Britten. Non-tertian chords are seldom found in his music. Tertian structures above the seventh chord are rare, and eleventh and thirteenth chords are found so seldom as to be considered non-existent. Table I, page 99, shows the chord structures used by Britten and the percentage of their use.

Chord progressions found in Britten's music clearly place his harmony in the twentieth century. With a remarkable consistency, root movement by seconds dominates progressions in the choral music. It has been found that root movement by seconds accounts for nearly 50 per cent of all progressions. Progressions by fifths are used more than thirds. The only two compositions analyzed that deviated from this pattern were the sections of Hymn to St. Cecilia based on the passacaglia and Ballad of Green Broom. The reason for a majority of the progressions being root movement by thirds in the Hymn to St. Cecilia is explained on page 59. In the Ballad of Green Broom, Britten's satirizing of the folk-ballad results in a return to more traditional

progressions in that the majority of root movements are by fifths.

Table II, page 100, contains the percentage of root movement by seconds, thirds, and fifths found in each of the compositions studied.

Another important characteristic of Britten's harmony is his use of modality. "Britten, like many Britons, uses modal melodies, but unlike his older contemporaries, he is not preoccupied with folk-song material."9 The Aeolian, Lydian, and Mixolydian modes are found in Britten's music more often than any of the other modes. In some of his music the exact mode is often unclear, especially when he uses the Lydian mode. A typical example of Britten's use of the Lydian mode is found in The Succession of the Four Sweet Months where the use of both the diatonic and raised fourth scale degrees in G major leaves the exact mode in question. In Hymn to the Virgin, the Aeolian mode is used except at the cadences, where Britten employs the Phrygian mode. The Phrygian mode seldom appears in the a cappella music, except at the cadences. In addition to the cadences in Hymn to the Virgin, Figure 60 shows an example of a cadence in the Phrygian mode from The Succession of the Four Sweet Months.

In the a cappella choral music, the compositional techniques that are part of the factors that make Britten's music Britten are clearly seen. The techniques that have been studied in this paper are to be found in

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most of Britten's music. Together with the nebulous element of the individual composer's genius which created them, these techniques help give the music of Benjamin Britten a youthfulness and zest that are rare in music of this century.
APPENDIX
## TABLE I

**CHORD STRUCTURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Triads</th>
<th>Seventh Chords</th>
<th>Ninth Chords</th>
<th>Eleventh Chords</th>
<th>Thirteenth Chords</th>
<th>Non-Tertian Chords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Boy Was Born</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to the Virgin</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to St. Cecilia</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Daffodills</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh Flowers</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evening Primrose</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>All works analyzed*</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures indicate the percentage of chord structures of the above classifications in each composition.

*These figures are not averages of the percentages, but rather percentages of the combined totals of all chord structures.
TABLE II
ROOT MOVEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Seconds</th>
<th>Thirds</th>
<th>Fifths</th>
<th>Tritone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Boy Was Born</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Hymn to the Virgin</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to St. Cecilia (Passacaglia and Chorale Prelude)</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to St. Cecilia (Ostinato section)</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Daffodills</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh Flowers</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evening Primrose</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All works analyzed*</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures indicate the percentage of chord progressions using root movements of the above classifications in each composition.

*These figures are not averages of the percentages, but rather percentages of the combined totals of all progressions.
### TABLE III

**MELODIC INTERVALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Minor Second</th>
<th>Major Second</th>
<th>Minor Third</th>
<th>Major Third</th>
<th>Perfect Fourth</th>
<th>Tritone</th>
<th>Perfect Fifth</th>
<th>Minor Sixth</th>
<th>Major Sixth</th>
<th>Minor Seventh</th>
<th>Major Seventh</th>
<th>Octave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Boy Was Born *</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to the Virgin</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to St. Cecilia</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Daffodills</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Succession of the Four Sweet Months</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh Flowers**</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Evening Primrose</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad of Green Broom</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All works analyzed***</td>
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<td>45.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures indicate the percentage of melodic intervals of the above classifications in each composition.

*There are a few diminished fourths in **A Boy Was Born**, but the percentage is negligible.

**Figures for **Marsh Flowers** do not contain the diminished fourth which accounts for 2.1 per cent of melodic intervals in this composition.

***These figures are not averages of the percentages, but rather percentages of the combined totals of all melodic intervals.
Complete List of the Choral Works
of Benjamin Britten*

**
1932 Three Two-Part Songs***
   I. The Ride-by-nights
   II. The Rainbow
   III. The Ship of Rio

1934 Lift Boy

1934 A Boy Was Born (a cappella)***

1934 I Lov'd A Lass

1935 Te Deum in C Major***

1935 A Hymn to the Virgin (a cappella)

1939 Advance Democracy (a cappella)

1939 Ballad of Heroes (with orchestra)

1942 Hymn to St. Cecilia (a cappella)

1943 A Ceremony of Carols

1943 Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard

1943 Rejoice in the Lamb

1945 Festival Te Deum

1948 Saint Nicolas (with orchestra)

1949 Spring Symphony (with orchestra)

1950 A Wedding Anthem
1951  **Five Flower Songs** (a cappella)

To Daffodills
The Succession of Four Sweet Months
Marsh Flowers
The Evening Primrose
Ballad of Green Broom

1955  **Hymn to St. Peter**

1956  **Antiphon**

1959  **Cantata Academica** (with orchestra)

1959  **Missa Brevis in D**

1961  **Jubilate Deo***

1962  **War Requiem** (with orchestra)

* Does not include choruses from the operas or arrangements from his solo works.

** Indicates year of publication.

*** Published by Oxford University Press. All other works are published by Boosey and Hawkes.
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Articles


