

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SONATA IN C FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 65:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PERFORMANCE

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Benjamin Britten is a renowned and prolific English composer, well known for his operas and vocal works. He did, however, also compose five works especially for the cello as a solo instrument of which the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65 was the first. He was inspired by one of his musical contemporaries, the remarkable Soviet cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich. Rostropovich was famous for his amazing artistry which propelled him to become one of the most prominent cellists in the world during his time. Thus Britten, who had previously only composed for cello as part of ensembles, created this sonata specifically thinking of Rostropovich and his outstanding skill as a cellist. The premiere of the sonata took place in July 1961 at the Aldeburgh Festival and it was a great success.

However, despite Britten's reputation as an outstanding composer and the significance of the sonata, this sonata has been performed infrequently. Britten utilized many challenging techniques and adapted them innovatively in the composition, and perhaps performers may be reluctant to choose this work due to the complexity and challenge inherent in the composition itself. The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a practical guide for students and those who wish to learn and perform Britten's Sonata in C for Cello and Piano, Op. 65 by increasing understanding of the work, and by offering practical assistance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Britten is a renowned and prolific English composer, well known for his operas and vocal works. He did, however, also compose five works especially for the cello as a solo instrument, of which the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65 was the first. He was inspired by one of his musical contemporaries, the remarkable Soviet cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich.¹ Rostropovich was famous for his amazing artistry which propelled him to become one of the most prominent cellists in the world during his time. Thus Britten, who had previously only composed for cello as part of ensembles, created this sonata specifically thinking of Rostropovich and his outstanding skill as a cellist. The premiere of the Sonata took place in July 1961 at the Aldeburgh Festival and it was a great success.

However, despite Britten's reputation as an outstanding composer and the significance of the sonata, this sonata has been performed infrequently. Britten utilized many challenging techniques and adapted them innovatively in the composition, and perhaps performers may be reluctant to choose this work due to the complexity and challenge inherent in the composition itself.

Although there is a fair amount of information available related to the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op.65, most is not helpful to the musician from a practical performance perspective. There is a plethora of information relating to Britten's operas and vocal works. However, there is a dearth of information addressing his chamber works. As well, there are numerous biographical books and articles giving information about Britten himself, but that scarcely

¹ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 307.

mention his cello works. There are, however, a few dissertations that have been written related to Britten's cello works, and this particular Sonata, including the following:

- *Benjamin Britten and Chamber Music: The Sonata in C for Cello and Piano, Op 65*, by Yoko Hirota. This work provides an excellent overview of historical background and analysis of the sonata. It is interesting in that it was written from a pianist's point of view. It is definitely a useful reference of the cello sonata. Unfortunately, there is no application to the performance aspect.
- *Innovative use of technique in Benjamin Britten's Cello Works: The inspiration of Mstislav Rostropovich* by Elizabeth Shin-I Su, is a dissertation which does focus on the performance practice aspect. However, her research is directed towards Benjamin Britten's entire cello works and not specifically to this sonata. As a result, the portion of the discussion of this sonata is limited and the details sketchy.
- *An Analytical Study of the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano by Benjamin Britten*, written by Charles Baker. This work provides an excellent, in-depth analysis of the five movements of the sonata, as well as general application to performance. However, although it is an important reference for the cello sonata, its lengthy detailed theoretical analysis can be very overwhelming. As a result, it loses some of its usefulness for practical application.

What is missing is a practical guide for the musician to not only understand the work, but also provide practical assistance in learning techniques to achieve the desired sounds.

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a practical guide for students and those who wish to learn and perform Britten's Sonata in C for Cello and Piano, Op. 65 by increasing understanding of the work, and by offering practical assistance.

In the second chapter, a brief biographical sketch of Benjamin Britten, highlighting relevant and significant information is presented. This section introduces the “person” of the composer of this sonata. Then some background of the sonata is presented in chapter three, with a look at the interesting relationship between the composer and the performer, Mstislav Rostropovich, which greatly shaped the resultant music. In the fourth chapter, the focus is an in-depth, identification of the following:

- The overall characteristics of movements. The musical indication or vocabulary is defined so as to help understand the mood which the composer set for each movement.
- Techniques that are used in each movement and their definition are identified. Further, how to approach practicing and mastering the techniques are given.
- Challenging techniques, with an explanation for why they are hard to achieve and possible solutions are suggested.
- If applicable, specific exercises or studies that will improve technical ability are suggested.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

In order to gain a better understanding of a particular musical work, it is often helpful and interesting to look at the composer of that work. This chapter presents the person, Benjamin Britten, by summarizing some highlights of his life.

Benjamin Britten was born in the town of Lowestoft, in Suffolk, England on November 22, 1913. An interesting coincidence is that his birthday fell on the Feast of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music.² He was the youngest of four children born to Robert Britten (1878-1939), a dental surgeon, and Edith Rhoda (1874-1937), an amateur singer. Undoubtedly, his mother's love of music played an early role in nurturing the same in her son. By most accounts, his mother was a dominant influence on his early years, as she fully encouraged her children's love of music.³ Britten commenced piano lessons at the age of seven, with Ethel Astle, and viola lessons at age ten, with Audrey Alston. The latter quickly recognized that her pupil was unusually gifted, and later introduced him to a highly professional musician, Frank Bridge. Bridge agreed to take the young Britten on as a student. Bridge was his principal teacher in composition during the early years and became "the biggest single influence on Britten's musical life."⁴ From Bridge he acquired "the integrity of his technique, his professionalism and his awareness of the 'new' music in Europe."⁵ Britten never forgot his teacher, and dedicated

² Alan Kendall, *Benjamin Britten* (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1973), 9.

³ Donald Mitchell, "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin, Baron Britten (1913-1976)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30853> (accessed 27 Feb 2008).

⁴ Donald Mitchell, *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a group of specialists* (New York: Philosophical library, 1952), 2.

⁵ Mitchell, "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin, Baron Britten (1913-1976)" (accessed 27 Feb 2008).

several of his works to Bridge including *Sinfonietta* No.1, and *Variation on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, Op.10.⁶

As a child prodigy, Britten composed many musical compositions. When he was sixteen, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. At Bridge's suggestion, Britten studied composition with John Ireland. He also studied piano with Arthur Benjamin. At college, Britten was a highly ambitious student, writing a number of compositions and winning numerous awards. Of importance during those years, was that he first published his composition, the *Sinfonietta* No. 1 for Chamber Orchestra. These college years also were a disappointment to the ambitious young musical prodigy. Not many of his student colleagues were as advanced and ambitious as he was, and he found that he was not challenged enough. In his words, ““When you are immensely full of energy and ideas, you don't want to waste your time being taken through elementary exercises in dictation.””⁷ He was also frustrated by the general amateurish attitude of most of the students, as well as the fact that they displayed little interest in the style of music that he wished to write. Also disappointing for him was finding that the opportunities for performance at the college were very restricted. For example, only one of his compositions, the *Sinfonietta* No.1 for ten instruments, was ever performed,⁸ and, according to entries in his diary, he was displeased and frustrated with the quality of playing at rehearsals of his compositions.⁹

Britten left the Royal College of Music in December 1933, and two years later, joined the General Post Office Film Unit (GPO). As the unit's resident composer and music director, he

⁶ Kendall, *Benjamin Britten*, 11.

⁷ Eric Walter White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 23.

⁸ Kendall, *Benjamin Britten*, 12.

⁹ Donald Mitchell, ed. *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976*. Vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1991), 276.

produced incidental music for sixteen documentary films. This was a new and somewhat challenging direction for him. He learned to write rapidly, devising sound effects to match the visual aspects of films. This made a lasting impact on his own compositional style. Here Britten met and worked collaboratively with the English poet, W.H. Auden, who then worked for the GPO as script writer. Auden later became a very influential close friend to Britten. According to Donald Mitchell, the first two films, *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936) were considered to be the most memorable of British documentary films, and the scores that Britten wrote for these films made a highly original contribution to the history of music for the cinema.¹⁰

Several factors played a role in Britten's next major decision. It was 1939, and the political and economic climate, with increasing threat of war, was discouraging to the pacifist Britten. As well, the music of Britten's former teacher, Bridge, was achieving considerable success and recognition in the United States. A further influence was that his friend Auden had immigrated to the United States. Thus Britten, together with his friend, tenor Peter Pears, moved to the United States, hoping for "better opportunities for artistic development."¹¹

In the summer of 1939, Britten's composition for orchestra, *Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge*, written in 1937, was premiered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in New York. It was well received by the American audience. A number of other compositions were written by Britten during his stay in America, including:

- *Sinfonia da Requiem for orchestra*, Op. 20
- *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo for Tenor and Piano*, Op.23
- *String Quartet No.1 in D*, Op.25

¹⁰ Mitchell, "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin, Baron Britten (1913-1976)" (accessed 27 Feb 2008).

¹¹ White, *Benjamin Britten*, 30.

- *Scottish Ballad for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, Op. 26
- *Hymn to St. Cecilia for Mixed Voices Unaccompanied*, Op .27
- *A ceremony of Carols for Treble Voices and Harp*, Op.28

During his time in America, Britten gained in maturity as a composer and his career seemed destined for success. Unfortunately, he suffered a period of mental illness, the details of which are sketchy in the literature. Following this difficult time, and with some nostalgia for his own country, he and his friend Pears returned to England in April 1942, where he “wanted to contribute something new and powerful to British musical life.”¹²

Britten and Pears returned to England, which was then involved in World War II, and they found their country heavily bombed. Old friends, including Frank Bridge, had died and several of Britten’s school friends had been killed in the war.¹³ Britten and Pears were pacifists. Baker relates how Britten and Pears, rather than join the war effort, chose to face a tribunal as pacifists, arguing that in the cultural field, they were devoting their energies fully to the national advantage.¹⁴ They were granted exemption from military service.

Britten channeled his great energy into prolific composing, as well as appearing at many concerts as pianist and accompanist for his friend, the tenor, Pears. In February 1945, Britten completed what was to become his first successful opera, *Peter Grimes*. On June 7, 1945, just one month after the war in Europe had ended, *Peter Grimes* was premiered at Sadler’s Walls Theatre, with Pears singing the title role. This first performance was a great success, and soon

¹² Philip Brett, et al. “Britten, Benjamin,” in *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg4> (accessed Feb 27, 2008).

¹³ Imogen Holst, *Britten* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 37.

¹⁴ Charles A. Baker, “An Analytical Study of the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano by Benjamin Britten,” (D.M.A. diss., Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1965), 3.

Peter Grimes became the most important opera by an English composer since Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, written two hundred and fifty years earlier.¹⁵ A number of famous other operas were written by Britten, including:

- *The Rape of Lucretia*, Op.37 (1946)
- *Billy Budd*, Op.50 (1951)
- *Gloriana*, Op.53 (1953)
- *The Turn of the Screw*, Op.54 (1954)
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op.64 (1960)
- *Owen Wingrave*, Op.85 (1971)
- *Death in Venice*, Op.88 (1973)

The same year as *Peter Grimes*' premiere, 1945, Britten was commissioned to write the music for what was to be an educational film about the instruments of the orchestra. He wrote a set of variations and fugue based on Purcell's theme. He called these *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Op. 34, which has influenced generations of the young people for whom it was written – both to edify and to entertain, as Britten's dedication characteristically puts it – as well as winning a permanent place in the orchestra repertory worldwide.¹⁶

In 1947, Britten moved to a house on the sea front in Aldeburgh. As Pears and Britten were traveling with the English Opera Group that summer, Pears suggested the idea of having a music festival at Aldeburgh. Thus the Aldeburgh Festival was founded, and on June 1948, the first Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts took place. Needless to say, many of Britten's

¹⁵ Boosey & Hawkes, "Benjamin Britten – In focus," <http://www.boosey.com/composer/Benjamin+Britten> (accessed Feb 27,2008).

¹⁶ Mitchell, "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin, Baron Britten (1913-1976)" (accessed 27 Feb 2008).

works were featured in the performances, and the festival provided an excellent venue for introducing Britten's new works for their first performances. As well, music by other composers was featured, often those works that had been neglected or overlooked. In addition, music by Bridge and Purcell were often included, along with that of other favorite composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Mozart and Tchaikovsky. The Aldeburgh Festival grew in popularity and renown as an institution within the music world. The significance to Britten, that Aldeburgh had, and its importance in his life, is reflected in his acceptance speech on receiving the Aspen Award in 1964:

I belong at home – there – in Aldeburgh. I have tried to bring music to it in the shape of our local festival, and all the music I write comes from it. I believe in roots, in associations, in backgrounds, in personal relationships My music now has its roots in where I live and work. . . .¹⁷

Initially, the festival focused on the residents of Aldeburgh, both for its performers as well as for its audiences. However, as the festival quickly grew in popularity, outsiders became aware of it, and both guests and musicians from distant places were attracted to the venue. More artists from abroad were invited to become part of the festival. It became a veritable feast of the best compositions presented by the most capable performers of the time. It was in this process that Britten came into contact with the musician who was to be of great inspiration to him and his music, specifically to the musical work featured in this dissertation. This visiting musician was the famous Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich. Britten was awed by Rostropovich's cello playing and was inspired to write a number of works for Rostropovich, including: Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65 (1961), the focus of this paper, Symphony in D for Cello and Orchestra Op. 68, and Three Suites for Cello, Op. 72 (1964), Op. 80 (1967), and Op. 87 (1971).

¹⁷ Kendall, *Benjamin Britten*, 45.

The Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65 was the first cello work composed by Britten. It was satisfying for both Britten and Rostropovich that this piece was premiered, with success, by Rostropovich with Britten at the Aldeburgh Festival. The relationship between these two musicians, and the musical outcomes will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

The year 1963, when Britten reached the age of fifty, was eventful. His friends wrote a tribute titled *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on his Fiftieth Birthday*. As well, he was named “the greatest composer alive” in a public tribute by Hans Keller.¹⁸ Perhaps the most exciting event was when he and Pears were invited to Russia for festivals featuring British music. A number of Britten’s compositions, including his cello sonata, were performed in Moscow and Leningrad, where his music received a very warm reception from Russian audiences.¹⁹ According to White, Britten expressed his gratitude to the Soviet public in an interview:

I must own that until my arrival in the USSR, I was assailed with doubts whether the Soviet audiences would understand and accept our musical art which had been developing along different national lines than the Russian. I am happy at having had my doubts dispelled at the very first concert. The Soviet public proved not only unusually musical – that I knew all along – but showed an enviable breadth of artistic perception. It is a wonderful public.²⁰

The Aldeburgh Festival had continued to grow beyond its existing facility, and by the mid – 1960’s had found a new, much larger concert venue in the Maltings. On June 2, 1967, at the beginning of the twentieth Aldeburgh Festival, it was formally opened by the queen. The

¹⁸ Brett, et al. “Britten, Benjamin,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg7> (accessed Feb 27, 2008).

¹⁹ White, *Benjamin Britten*, 95.

²⁰ Ibid.

new concert hall was generally acclaimed as one the finest in the country.²¹ The new large hall was able to accommodate major productions of opera as well as orchestral works.

In 1970, Britten accepted a commission from the British Broadcasting Corporation to compose his first opera to be written specifically for television, *Owen Wingrave*, Op. 85, and the opera was filmed at the Maltings, Snape, on November 1970. The world premiere broadcast took place on May 16, 1971, and the first “live” performance was given at Covent Gardens in 1973.²² In June of 1973, his last opera, *Death in Venice* was premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival. Sadly, due to a deteriorating heart condition, he was unable to attend the premiere of *Death in Venice*.²³

Britten’s health continued to deteriorate, and the last three and a half years of his life were those of an invalid. He was easily exhausted and could only summon up enough energy and strength to devote limited time to composing. However, despite these obstacles, he succeeded in composing several important new works, including, *The Death of St. Narcissus*, a canticle for tenor and harp, *Phaedra*, Op. 93, (1975), a dramatic cantata for mezzo-soprano and small orchestra, and *String Quartet No. 3*, Op. 94. 1975. Benjamin Britten died at his home, the Red House, Aldeburgh, on December 4, 1976. He was buried in the churchyard, within sight and sound of the sea he loved.²⁴

Benjamin Britten is known as a prolific composer. He was a man, displaying sensitivity in his personality, his music and in his social life. He sought to express the depth of his emotions in his music. He was also a great pianist, accompanist, and conductor, with great technical

²¹ Ibid., 102.

²² Ibid., 106.

²³ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 13.

²⁴ White, *Benjamin Britten*, 107.

ability as well as a heightened understanding towards those who played with him. In his directing, he was practical and efficient, as evidenced by his skill in directing the festival. Overall, he emerges as an incredible musician, a hard worker and perfectionist, who always strove to produce the best of what he was capable. This is the man who composed the musical work to be studied in subsequent chapters of this paper. Much has been written about Benjamin Britten. Included here are some snippets taken from *Remembering Britten* by Alan Blyth. They represent a range of persons who voiced opinions of the man based on their own experience with him:

Ben was extraordinarily sensitive as a pianist, both to what I wanted to do with a song and in what he wanted to achieve. He could make lighter sounds than anyone else. I can recall . . . he knew precisely what color he wanted to project, and he managed to do it because of the speed with which his brain could communicate with the tip of his fingers. That was an extraordinary phenomenon: mind and hand seemed in constant touch. . . .²⁵

By Peter Pears (his close friend, singer)

Ben was a very loving brother . . . in spite of pressure of work, Ben always had time to stop and listen to any problems we might have and help if he could. . . . He had so much compassion for everyone, also humor and a great deal of fun.²⁶

By Beth Welford (his sister)

Britten has been for me the most purely musical person I have ever met and I have ever known. . . . Through his extraordinary musicality and fantastic technical equipment, Britten was probably one of the finest accompanists on the piano of anyone of his generation.²⁷

By Michael Tippett (his contemporary composer)

²⁵ Alan Blyth, *Remembering Britten* (London: Hutchison, 1981), 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

Britten knew precisely what he could do in terms of shaping his music and what he was going to put in those shapes. . . . He had great inner confidence. . . .²⁸

By Lord Havewood (his friend)

He never gave himself enough rest Pencil and paper were seldom out of his hands²⁹

By Miss Hudson (his housekeeper)

Britten would go on rehearsing until he achieved the performance he had in his mind's ear; as conductor, player, composer and friend, Britten was a singular sounding-board with an ear for sensitive perfection.³⁰

By Mstislav Rostropovich (performer, cellist and friend)

He was always aware of every detail of scoring in a work, and also of the extreme economy needed to make the festival a success.³¹

By Imogen Holst (who worked closely for Britten)

Britten had a low opinion of writers in newspapers, whom he considered to show a pretty poor standard of competence . . . whereas he would have welcomed sympathetic and constructive criticism He felt that a work either communicated with an audience or it did not.³²

By Donald Mitchell (editor)

There certainly was an aura about him There was something special that made you give of your best From those who worked with him he demanded absolute loyalty If anybody fell below his standards, they were asking for trouble.³³

By Dame Janet Baker (singer)

²⁸ Ibid., 79.

²⁹ Ibid., 97.

³⁰ Ibid., 151.

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² Ibid., 133.

³³ Ibid., 136, 139.

Britten's own programs were always at the heart of the planning, and were naturally the most popular events, Where the expense of an event or the numbers needed for a program were concerned, Britten was supreme. He was also tenacious in maintaining standards and originality in programs. . . .³⁴

By Stephen Reiss (personal manager)

He was the first British composer to capture and hold the attention of musicians and their audiences the world over, as well as at home; he was the first British composer to center his mature work prolifically on the musical theatre – grand opera, chamber opera, sacred music – drama.³⁵

By Peter Evans (author of *The Music of Benjamin Britten*)

³⁴ Ibid., 125.

³⁵ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 1.

CHAPTER 3

THE BACKGROUND OF THE SONATA

This section will briefly address the circumstances that led to the composing of the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65. As mentioned in the previous chapter, encounters between Britten and Rostropovich were the catalyst.

The first encounter of these two musicians occurred in September, 1960, in the green room at the Royal Festival Hall in London. At the festival, Rostropovich played a cello concerto by the Russian composer, Shostakovich, who happened to be a fellow composer of Britten's. Following the performance, Shostakovich introduced Rostropovich to Britten. Britten highly praised Rostropovich's performance, stating that it was "the most extraordinary cello playing" that he had ever heard.³⁶ At the same time, Rostropovich asked Britten to compose a cello piece for him. The next day, Britten visited the hotel where the cellist was staying, and the two musicians further discussed the proposal that had been made. Britten agreed to compose a sonata for Rostropovich with the condition that the premiere of this work would occur at the following Aldeburgh Festival, with Rostropovich performing the Cello Sonata, accompanied on the piano by Britten, the composer. Britten sent the score of the cello sonata to Rostropovich in Moscow with this humble message: "I hope you can make something of it. I have put some suggestions of bowing, but I haven't had much first-hand experience of the cello and may have made some mistakes. The pizzicato movement (second movement) will amuse you; I hope it's possible!"³⁷

When Rostropovich had reviewed the proposed Sonata, he expressed this praise of the work: "This is a sonata full of surprises, innovations for any cellist, gift for the musician

³⁶ Humphery Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1992), 398.

³⁷ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 400.

flowing freely from the horn of plenty. We meet not merely a novelty in finger work but, what is most important, a new kind of expressive and profound dramatic composition.”³⁸ At a later occasion, Rostropovich voiced praise regarding the composer’s ability, as his composition had required only minor corrections or alterations: ““He was on a par with Shostakovich. Both were so meticulous in their scoring that changes were minimal. Britten apparently wrote for the cello as if he had played the instrument himself.”³⁹ The first rehearsal of the sonata occurred in 1961, in London, several months before the festival. Rostropovich went on a concert trip to South America, and in route, stopped at London for a day in order to rehearse the cello sonata with Britten. Rostropovich recalled his excitement over this first rehearsal with Britten, saying: “I was jubilant after each movement and I was on the verge of exploding with the ecstasy that filled my very being, so intense was the inspiration aroused by the music.”⁴⁰ Britten also expressed his positive feelings over the first rehearsal in a letter to Galina Vishnevskoya, Rostropovich’s wife: “. . . how much I enjoyed working with Slava. . . he had understood the work perfectly, and of course played it like no-one else in the world could.”⁴¹

In June, 1961, Rostropovich returned to London, England for the Aldeburgh Festival. The premiere of the Cello Sonata took place on July 7, 1961, in the Jubilee Hall. The performance was a great success, and the last two movements of the sonata were played by Rostropovich and Britten, for an encore. Later, Rostropovich praised Britten, not only as a great composer, but also as an excellent pianist.⁴² Two days after the premiere of the sonata, a review appeared in the *Times*, written by William Mann, the music critic for the paper: ““There is a

³⁸ Anthony Gishford, ed., *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 16.

³⁹ Blyth, *Remembering Britten*, 150.

⁴⁰ Gishford, ed., *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday*, 17.

⁴¹ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 401.

⁴² Gishford, ed., *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday*, 18.

suggestion in the nature of the sonata that Britten may have intended it . . . to reflect his own impression of the character of the player to whom it is dedicated: gay, charming, an astonishingly brilliant executant, but behind all these qualities a searching musician with the mind of a philosopher.””⁴³

A month after the premiere, Noel Goodwin, a music critic, praised the sonata as “one of several memorable events there this year” and “the work as a whole is rich in inspiration and rewarding in its impact.”⁴⁴ That same year the new sonata was confirmed as a “confident mastery” by John Warrack, another music critic, in *The Musical Times*:

The Cello Sonata which was the climax of the Aldeburgh Festival this year is on the face of it a light piece written for the dexterity of the Russian Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich . . . The work is, in fact, beautifully evolved from the opening movement, Dialogo The sonata form opening is a strange little miracle – so much originality in so short a space is witness of confident mastery. . . .⁴⁵

⁴³ William Mann, “rev. of the Cello Sonata,” *The Times* (July 9, 1961): A1.

⁴⁴ Noel Goodwin, “Great Britain,” *Musical Courier* 163 (Aug. 1961): 31.

⁴⁵ John Warrack, “Aldeburgh: Britten’s Cello Sonata,” *The Musical Times* 102 (August 1961): 495.

CHAPTER 4

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SONATA IN C FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP.65: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PERFORMANCE

In this chapter, the sonata is looked at in more depth. Each of the five movements are discussed in relation to definition, techniques used and the difficulties of playing them, along with instruction on how best to achieve the desired effects.

I. First Movement: *Dialogo*

The first movement of the sonata is a dialogue between the cello and the piano.

According to Rostropovich, it is defined as

A sweet, yet stirring literally human conviction between two instruments . . . a conversation not in words, but one that is finer and more intricate, a conversation of capricious change of mood, a conversation embracing not words but a whole world of intermingled feelings attached to every note.⁴⁶

Britten often used his dramatic sense to create his instrumental writings, and this movement of the sonata is a good representation of the style of his works.

According to Rupprecht, in his book *Britten's Musical Language*, he states that "Britten's music is itself a kind of wordless language – a characteristic way of presenting and shaping the interplay of essentially musical ideas within an unfolding discourse."⁴⁷

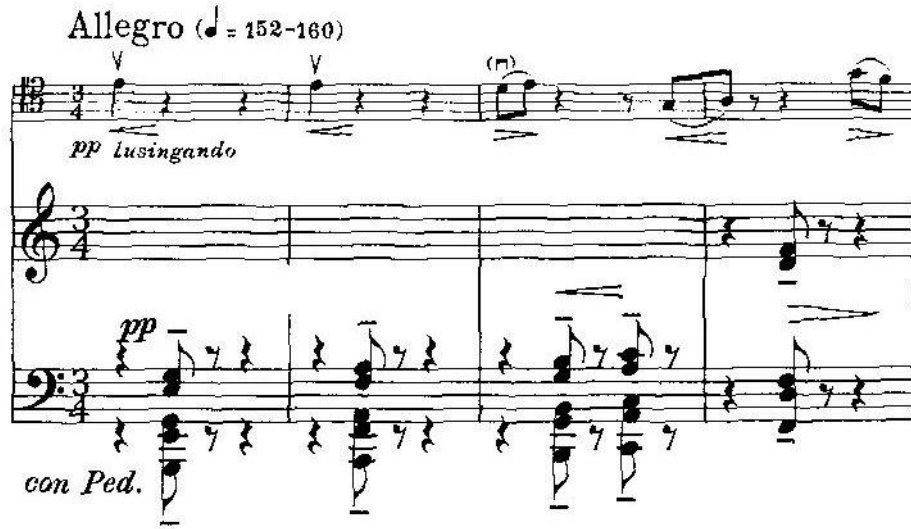
A. Different style of Bowing and Vibrato in three different sections

This movement consists of repetition of three distinctly different sections characterized by the following musical indications: *lusingando*, *animato*, and *tranquillo*. Further, different bowing and vibrato techniques should be applied to each section.

⁴⁶ Gishford, ed., *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday*, 16.

⁴⁷ Philip E. Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

1. *Lusingando* section



Example 1. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 65, I. Dialogo, Mm. 1-4*⁴⁸

Lusingando is an Italian word that means “coaxing, wheedling, caressing.” It is the gerund of *lusingare* which means “to flatter.”⁴⁹

As so eloquently expressed in the statement by Rostropovich, this conversational exchange between cello and piano is clearly illustrated in the above musical example. For the cello line, an expressive soft bow stroke at the upper part of the bow, with warm vibrato is suitable to express a coaxing and caressing mood. At the same time, the piano is responding in a firmer and sustained manner using the pedal. It is almost as if a woman is questioning in a wheedling manner, and is answered by her man in a gentle, yet firmer and definite voice. Here, the timing between the cello and the piano is important to portray the question and answer type of dialogue. The piano must promptly respond to the cello - it is almost as if the piano’s answer anticipates the end of the cello’s question.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*. (London: Boosey & Hawkes Ltd., 1961), 1.

⁴⁹ “*Lusingando*,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17203> (accessed July 24, 2008).

2. *Animato* section



Example 2. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, op. 65, I. Dialogo, Mm. 26-32*⁵⁰

Animato means “lively” and “enlivened” in Italian.⁵¹ In this section, the mood becomes more lively and energetic. Thus, a slightly faster tempo is required. A stronger and more energetic bow stroke, combined with more intense vibrato is suitable for this *Animato* section. For example, in measure 26, a strong and sustained bow stroke with *subito forte* is needed. Here, an ‘up bow’ is marked in the score. However, a ‘down bow’ seems more suitable to execute the strong and intense sound, almost like an attack with *subito forte*. To further produce the sustained sound and make *crescendo* using a down bow stroke, one must increase the pressure of the bow as well as the speed of the bow, as the frog part of the bow goes further from the string. Further, increasing the speed of the vibrato will also help to intensify the sound.

From the measure 30, there is an array of slurred eighth note duplets. In order to make a more articulated sound, emphasis (weight) is placed on the beginning of the slur and the end of the slur is played slightly shorter with less weight for each of them.

⁵⁰ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65, 2*.

⁵¹ David Fallows, “Animato,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/00953> (accessed July 24, 2008).

tranquillo

3a

p dolce *pp*

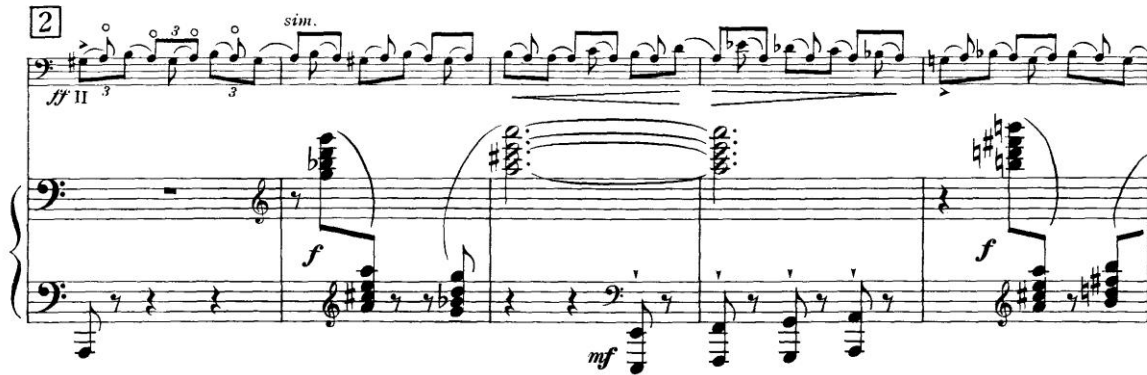
Tranquillo is an Italian word for “quiet”. It is usually used to indicate the mood of the arrangement, but it occasionally appears as a tempo designation.⁵³ In this case, the term *tranquillo* refers to both mood and tempo. Here, it moves from the louder, lively, and animated mood of the previous *animato* section. This section demonstrates great contrast from the previous mood. It is quieter, calmer, and peaceful. Not only is the mood here a contrast, but also the tempo slows somewhat, enhancing the overall serene mood.

⁵² Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano* Op. 65, 4.

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28267> (accessed July 24, 2008).

produce the clear ringing harmonic sound, the bow should be placed close to the bridge, and the precise placement of the left hand finger, in this case the third cello finger, is essential.

A. *Bariolage*



Example 4. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, I. Dialogo, Mm. 42-46* ⁵⁴

Bariolage is a French word for “odd mixture of colors.” It was a “19th century term used in bowed instruments to describe several slightly unorthodox ways of mixing open strings with stopped notes for special effect.” ⁵⁵ In this case, it is a repetitive string crossing between stopped notes (moving notes) on the D-string and an open A-string. The actual technique itself is not too difficult. However, an ensemble between the cello and piano in a fast tempo can be very challenging because the cello part has a triple rhythmic figure against a piano part which has a duple rhythmic figure. Further, the triple rhythmic figure of the cello part is made up of slurred duplets which have the effect of creating an accent on every other note of the triplets. The difficulty comes from the effect of the slurred duplets, which can easily throw a player off from the triple rhythmic pulse.

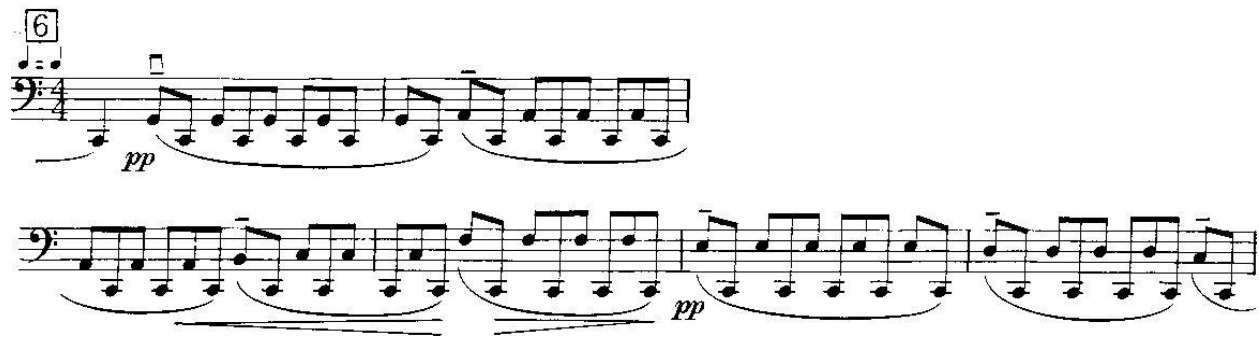
⁵⁴ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op, 65, 3.*

⁵⁵ David D. Boyden and Peter Walls, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02060> (accessed July 27, 2008).

In this case, it is important for both players to keep the pulse of quarter notes. In addition, from the ensemble perspective, it is helpful to take each of the four measures as a phrase and utilize, as a cue, the indicated accent at the beginning of the four measure grouping.

B. Repetitive String Crossing (in a Duple and Triple Rhythmic Figure)

In measures 207 to 225, Britten wrote a repetitive string crossing in a duple and triple rhythmic figure.



Example 5. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, I. Dialogo, Mm. 207-212* ⁵⁶

This section must be performed in a calm and peaceful manner. To create the peaceful movement of the string crossing, the bow should cross two strings back and forth very gently with the least angle between the two strings. Further, the right hand should draw a gesture of a gentle wave. Gentle vibrato will be pleasant for the first note of each slur.

C. Natural Harmonics

At the end of this movement, Britten finalizes his dialogue using an array of natural harmonics. Diran Alexanian described the natural harmonics as follows:

If, with a finger of the left hand one divides by a light touch into two vibrating parts of equal length that part of a string comprised between the nut and the bridge, one will obtain a harmonic sound that will be an octave above the note that is given by the same, open. Only one finger, the one used for the harmonic, should touch the string during its execution. ⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*, 6-7.

⁵⁷ Diran Alexanian, *Complete Cello Technique: Classic Treatise on Cello Theory and Practice* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), 103.



Example 6. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, I. Dialogo, Mm. 261-267*⁵⁸

First of all, finding the accurate pitch of each harmonic note is essential. To help the note to “speak,” the placement of the bow, as well as a slight re-articulation on the bow hand is important. In other words, the bow should be placed closer to the bridge and a slight accent on the beginning of each harmonic note should help each note to ring clearly. In addition, the speed of the bow should not be too slow.

Secondly, in the score, it is indicated to use an up bow from the measure 263 to the measure 265 and a down bow from the measure 266 to measure 267. However, in order to prevent the “choking” sound, and to produce clear resonance, it can be helpful to change the bow to a down bow for the harmonic note G, in the measure 264, and an up bow for the harmonic note B-flat in the measure 266, and a down bow for the harmonic note C, in the measure 267.

II. Second Movement: *Scherzo-Pizzicato*

The second movement is a *scherzo* and its overall characteristic is light, lively and humorous. According to Apel,

The distinguishing features of the *scherzo* are rapid speed in $\frac{3}{4}$ -meter, vigorous rhythm, a certain abruptness of thought involving elements of surprise and whim, and a character of bustling humor which may veer from the playful to the ominous⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁹ Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 12th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 644, quoted in Charles A. Baker, “An Analytical Study of the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano by Benjamin Britten.” (D.M.A. diss., Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1965), 92.

The indication on the entire second movement is to play without the bow but with pizzicato. In this movement, Britten utilized pizzicato in various unique and challenging ways. The technical demands increase and consequently the difficulty increases for performers.

Britten started with the rhythmic motive that is composed of ascending two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note.



Here, in the second measure, two consecutive sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note are slurred. This means that one must use the right hand to pluck only the first note in the slurred group, and not all three notes are plucked. Here, a strong percussive left finger stroke is important to create clear articulation. A *poco vibrato* on the note D-flat, will be a nice touch.

At the pick up to measure 6, the descending consecutive sixteenth-note *pizzicati* follows.

25



Example 8. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, II. Scherzo-Pizzicato, Mm.5-7* ⁶¹

Here, the technique is slightly different than the previous ascending passage since the performer is lifting the finger off of the finger board. For the slurred descending consecutive sixteenth-note *pizzicato*, only the first note is plucked. However, this time, left-hand *pizzicati* is indicated with a “+” by the composer as the notes descend. To create a clear utterance of the D-flat sound, as the performer takes his finger off from the note E-flat, the fourth finger should pluck the string sideways, slightly downwards to successfully produce the note D-flat. To produce a clear articulation of the next note C, as the performer removes the second finger from the note D-flat, the second finger should pluck the string sideways and slightly downwards. In addition, the previous passage calls for a *crescendo*, so in order to increase the intensity of each successive note, it is recommended to utilize the left hand *poco vibrato*.

C. Two, Three and Four Note Chords *Pizzicati*

In measure 12, the two-note chords *pizzicato* is to be played by plucking with the first (thumb) and third fingers.



Example 9. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, II. Scherzo-Pizzicato, Mm.12-18*

⁶¹ Ibid.,10.

Since the *pizzicato* are written in fast tempo, both fingers need to stay very close to the strings and maintain a relaxed movement (similar to guitar technique). It is also helpful to use the same finger for the repeating single *pizzicato* as the finger used for the previous two-note chord *pizzicato*. For instance, after the notes C and E are plucked simultaneously, the next note E should be plucked with the third finger. Similarly, after the notes E and A-flat are plucked, the next note A-flat should be plucked with the thumb.

The next three-note chords and four-note chords *pizzicati* have the “non-arpeg.” indication. In this case, one should strike the chords from the higher string to the lower string within a diagonal direction simultaneously with the index finger or third finger – whichever provides the player with a better and richer sound. Here it is recommended to play the *pizzicati* on the bottom part of the finger board, in order to generate a stronger sound as the *crescendo* occurs. In addition, the accurate interval of the left hand fingers provides a precise intonation of the chords, which is essential in maximizing the clear resonance. Important to note here, is that one must counteract the natural tendency to tense up the fingers when pressing the chords. As fingers become tense, they move closer together, impeding the intonation of the chords. Instead of pinching with the thumb to apply the necessary pressure, (thereby tensing the fingers), one should use the weight of the arm to apply the required pressure, thereby keeping the fingers relaxed. In this way, one may achieve the precise intonation, producing optimum resonance more effectively.

⁶² Ibid.

D. *Pizzicati* that are Rapidly Combined with the Right and Left Hands

Starting at measure 41, Britten adopted the rapid open string *pizzicati* that are combined with right hand and left hand. Here the left hand *pizzicato* is marked by a “+” in the score.



Example 10. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, II. Scherzo-Pizzicato, Mm.40-51*

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The challenge in this passage is to play the consecutive sixteenth-note rhythm precisely at a fast tempo while alternating between the right and left hand *pizzicati*. In order to achieve a precise, yet natural flowing *pizzicati*, the right hand and the left hand should coordinate with each other. The thumb of the left hand should be rested on the neck of the cello, (in fourth position) while the left third finger (or the index finger) plucks the string. Meanwhile, the right hand (even the right arm) must remain very relaxed. It is as if the right hand draws a gentle circular gesture as it moves from the A-string, then to the D-string, then to the G-string, back to the D-string and finally returns to the A-string. Here, for the right hand *pizzicati*, either the index finger or the third finger can be used

⁶³ Ibid., 11-12.

(which ever finger produces the player's best sound). Both hands should remain very close to the strings.

III. Third Movement: *Elegia*

Elegia is an Italian word for an "elegy." An elegy is a song or instrument composition that laments a death or another melancholy event.⁶⁴

In this section of the composition, a mood of sadness and lamentation is conveyed through the D minor tonality, together with the slow tempo (*Lento*). Of interest is that this movement is placed in the center of the work, and is the most expressive of emotional intensity. It is as if this movement is the "heart" of the sonata, giving meaning to the entire composition.

A. *Legato*

Legato is the Italian word for "bound" and it means "to play smoothly with no noticeable breaks between the notes."⁶⁵ *Legato* can be indicated with a slur line and on string instruments, it means that the player is expected to play smoothly with no perceptible breaks between the notes within one bow stroke.



Example 11. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, III. Elegia, Mm. 4-5*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ "Elegy, Elegie," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. Rev., edited by Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e3344> (accessed July 24, 2008).

⁶⁵ "Legato," in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3896> (accessed July 24, 2008).

⁶⁶ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*, 17.

In this case however, Britten starts with a separate bow stroke indicated by *legato* at the beginning of the third movement. The player must take extra care when the direction of the bow changes in order to maintain the continuity in the melody line and minimize the break in tone. According to Christopher Bunting's *Cello Technique*, the sensitive contact of the fingers, as well as the unbroken flow of the arm-weight is so essential for the continuity of the music.⁶⁷ Bunting describes this technique as “looping.”⁶⁸

For example, in measure 4, each note should be played with a continuous flow of arm weight using a circular motion rather than an “up to and return” motion. An “up to and return motion” includes an acceleration of the bow at each change of the bow's direction, and it will create an accent that will interfere the flow of the melody line.

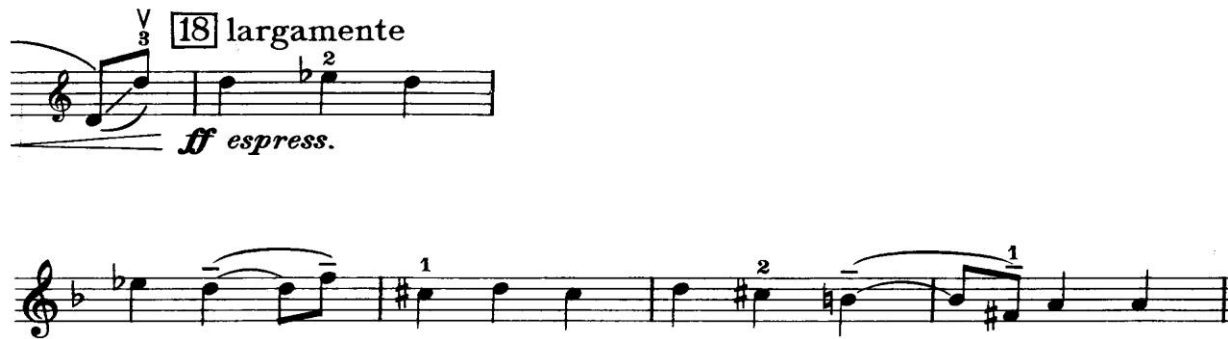
One must also consider the nature of the instrument which has a delayed resonance. The natural tendency is that after playing the tied-note, one plays the next note in delayed fashion. To avoid doing so, the slurred eighth-note C should be played a little sooner than expected, as the player anticipates the delayed resonance of the note. However, the note C should not be accentuated, since the *decrescendo* is marked. This will help prevent a rushed feeling and a rhythmic delay.

⁶⁷ Christopher Bunting, *Essay on the Craft of Cello Playing*. Vol. 1, *Prelude, Bowing, Coordination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 26.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

B. *Largamente*

Largamente is an Italian word for “broadly” and is derived from the term *largo* which means “slow”. It is used more as “an expression mark to denote a more stately manner of playing”⁶⁹ than as a specific tempo marking.



Example 12. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, III. Elegia, Mm. 44-48*⁷⁰

This section is very intense and reaches an emotional climax. At this point, *marcato*, yet with a sustained bow stroke and intense vibrato is needed. Pick up to measure 44, one should use the expressive audible shift, using a new finger. Further, the following notes should be executed with initial emphasis, and a sustained bow stroke near the bridge. In addition, in measure 45, the note F after the tied-note D, should be played a little sooner than it seems it should, keeping in mind delayed resonance.

C. Three and Four Note Chords

According to Alexanian, “the chords on three and four strings are generally divided, from the lower to the higher register, into two consecutive groups of two

⁶⁹ David Fallows, “Largamente,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16029> (accessed September 8, 2008).

⁷⁰ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*, 19.

strings.”⁷¹ However, in this movement, Britten utilized the chords innovatively by executing the chords in three different ways.

1. Chords Moving from Lower to Higher Notes



Example 13. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, III. Elegia, Mm. 34-35*⁷²

For example, in measure 34, each chord should be played from the lower to the higher register since the upper two notes are written as quarter notes and the bottom note is an eighth note. In other words, one should start by using a down bow with the bottom two notes, A and E-flat, and make an alteration to the upper two notes, E-flat and C. The notes should be sustained until the execution of the next chords which start with an up bow.

2. Chords Moving from Higher to Lower notes



Example 14. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, III. Elegia, Mm. 36-37*⁷³

In measure 36, the chords on the second beat should be played from the higher to lower register since the bottom two notes are written in quarter notes and an upper note is written as an eighth note. In other words, one should start using a down bow with the upper two notes, C and E-flat, and make an alteration to the bottom two notes, E and G-

⁷¹ Alexanian, *Complete Cello Technique*, 81.

⁷² Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op, 65*, 18.

⁷³ Ibid.

sharp. The notes should be sustained until the execution of the next chords which start with an up bow.

3. Chords Moving from Lower to Higher Notes and to the Inner Two Notes

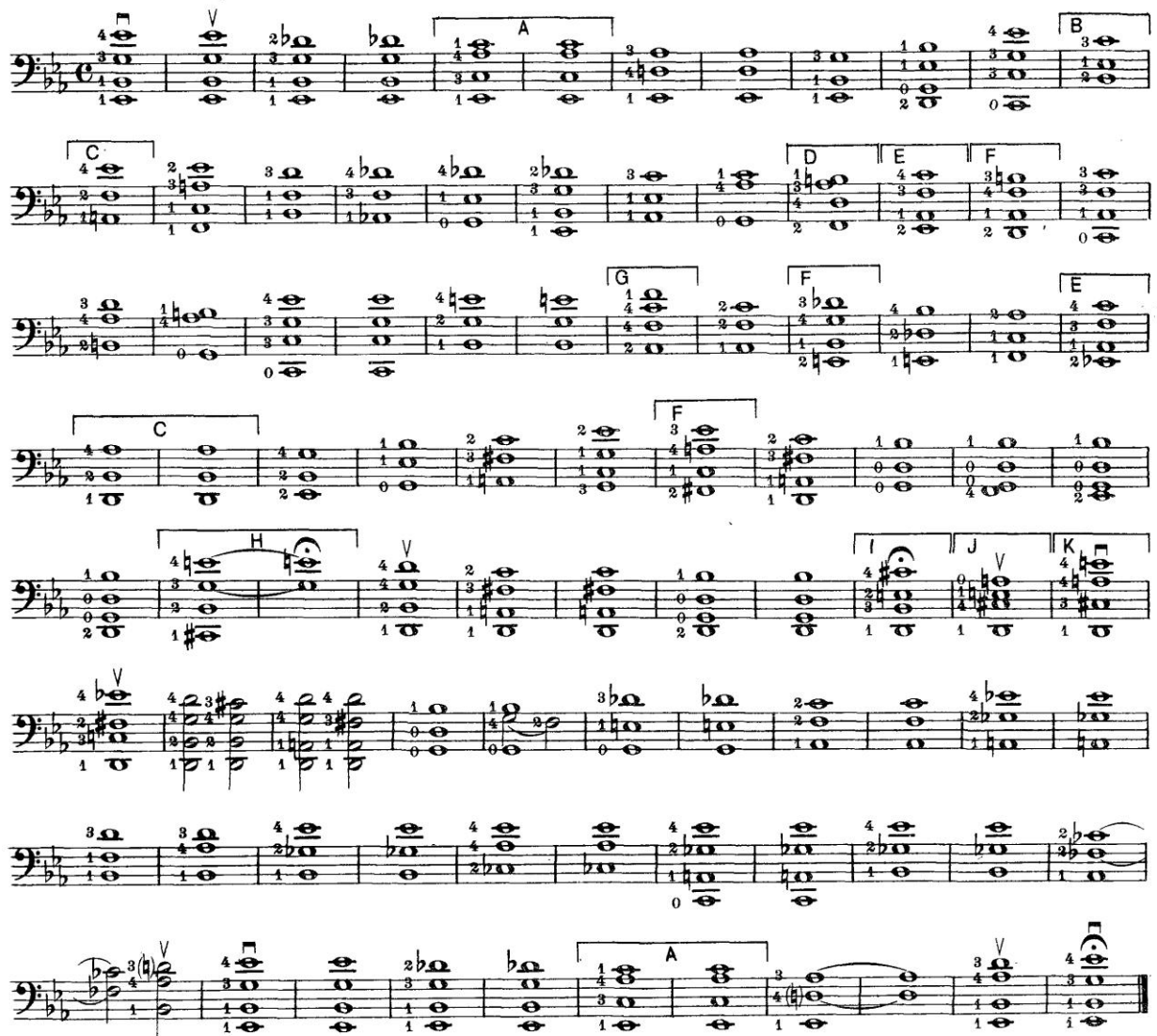


Example 15. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, III. Elegia, Mm. 41-43* ⁷⁴

In measure 41, the chords on the second beat should be played from the lower to higher notes and to the inner two notes, since the outer two notes are written as eighth notes and the inner two notes are written as quarter notes. One should start with a down bow with the bottom two notes, D and B, and make a change to the upper two notes, F-sharp and D. A further alteration to the inner two notes, B and F-sharp should occur, and the notes should be sustained until the next chords occur, using an up bow. Accurate intonation is essential, and to achieve this, one must have the precise interval between the fingers. As previously mentioned, (II. *Scherzo – pizzicato*, under C. two, three and four note chords *pizzicati*), for the execution of the chords, one should utilize the weight of the hand and arm to apply the required pressure to keep the fingers relaxed, as opposed to pinching with the thumb, and thereby tensing the left hand. Further, balance must be maintained between the bow and two strings. An equal weight distribution is fundamental.

If necessary, the following exercise taken from Alexanian's *Complete Cello Technique: Classic Treatise on Cello Theory and Practice* might be of assistance.

⁷⁴ Ibid.,19.



Example 16. The study of chords from the E-flat Prelude by Bach ⁷⁵

IV. Fourth Movement: *Marcia*

Britten wrote a “rousing and temperamental March”⁷⁶ which is a “brilliant contrast to the Elegy.”⁷⁷ A march is a form of music that has strong repetitive rhythms that are usually used to accompany orderly military processions or the progress of a large

⁷⁵ Alexanian, *Complete Cello Technique*, 78.

⁷⁶ Gishford, ed., *Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday*, 16.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

group of people.⁷⁸ It is essential to keep the steady march rhythm in the marked tempo (Quarter note =144) with an energetic manner. A *marcato* stroke would be suitable for the opening of the March.

A. *Marcato*

Marcato is a performance instruction which applies to the bow stroke. It has the meaning of “marked,” or “stressed,” or “accented.”⁷⁹ It is efficient to use the lower part of the bow with heavy initial pressure through using the weight of the arm. For example, in measures 28 through 31, a *marcato* stroke should be played using the lower portion of the bow with each note accented or stressed by heavy initial pressure from the weight of the arm.



Example 17. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 65, IV. Marcia, Mm. 28-31*⁸⁰

In measure 28, the first chord is marked with *sf* (*sforzando*) which means “compelling,” or “reinforced.” It is a direction that a note or chord be strongly accented or played in a forced manner.⁸¹ Thus the first chord should be played with a strong initial pressure, using the weight of the arm, and the chord should be sustained with really attached (as if it is sticky) bow stroke until the next chord occurs. Here one should avoid

⁷⁸ Erich Schwandt and Andrew Lamb, “March,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40080> (accessed August 11, 2008).

⁷⁹ J.A. Fuller Maitland and David Fallows, “Marcato,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17712> (accessed August 11, 2008).

⁸⁰ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*, 24.

⁸¹ “Sforzando, Sforzato,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd. Rev., edited by Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/por/t237/e9336> (accessed Aug 11, 2008).

using too much bow for the first two chords, so that the following chords can be played at the lower part of the bow with the *marcato* stroke.

B. *Martelé*

The literal meaning of the term '*Martelé*' is 'hammered,' referring to a percussive on-string stroke produced by an explosive release following heavy initial pressure (pinching) on the string, and a subsequent stop of the arm (and tone) before the next 'pinching.' The result is a sharp, biting *sforzando*-like attack and a rest between strokes. *Martelé* is indicated by dots or arrow-head strokes.⁸²

For example, in measures 21 to 24, this triplet passage can be described as an imitation of the snare drum and the *martelé* stroke is suitable as percussive bow stroke.



Example 18. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, IV. Marcia, Mm. 21-24*⁸³

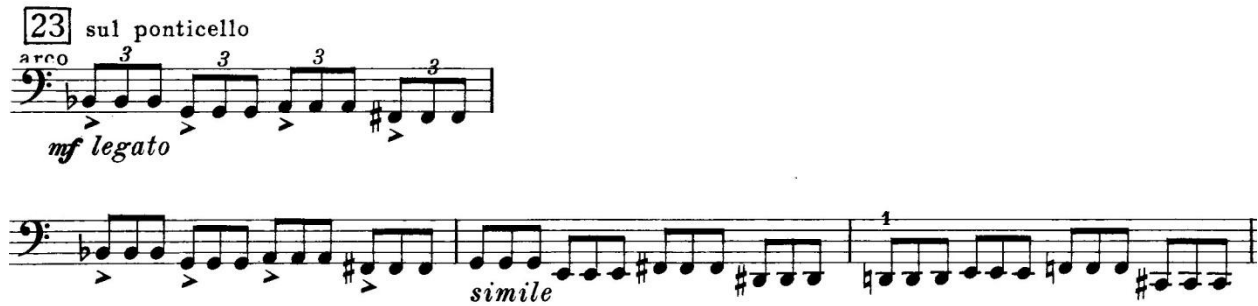
Since *pesante* is indicated, a heavy initial pressure using the arm weight at the lower part of the bow is necessary. It is very similar to a *marcato* stroke with a manner that is a little more separated.

C. *Sul ponticello*

The literal meaning of the term *sul ponticello*, in Italian, is "on the bridge." It is an instruction to the string player to place the bow as close as possible to the bridge to produce a "metallic" sound for the special effect.

⁸² Werner Bachmann, et al. "Bow," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03753> (accessed August 12, 2008).

⁸³ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op, 65, 24*.



Example 19. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, IV. Marcia, Mm. 43-46*⁸⁴

Here Britten utilized the *sul ponticello* in legato with an accent on each initial note of the triplets. Technically, it should not be difficult to execute this passage. However, one should pay attention to using the middle part of the bow and have it remain very close to the bridge for the whole passage, in order to create the *sul ponticello*. Further, smooth shifting with the left hand helps in coordinating both the left and right hands.

D. Artificial Harmonics

In the fourth movement of the sonata, *Marcia*, Britten adopted ‘artificial harmonics’ as one of his techniques.



Example 20. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, IV. Marcia, Mm. 65-69*⁸⁵

“The Artificial harmonics are the result of a simultaneous combination, on one and the same string, of a nut finger and a ‘light touch’ finger.”⁸⁶ and often used by composers to create special

⁸⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 26-27.

⁸⁶ Alexanian, *Complete Cello Technique*, 113.

effects. However, in this movement, Britten uses the artificial harmonics in a very unique and innovative way. To produce the artificial harmonics, the lightly touched note, using the third cello finger, is placed a fourth above the firmly fixed note. In this case, the thumb is placed as the firmly fixed note, and the actual sound that is executed will be two octaves higher than the firm fixed note. What is challenging, in this case, is that Britten utilizes *glissando* from one artificial harmonics to the other harmonics in a see-sawing ascending form. To execute these harmonics to resonate clearly can be a real challenge. To maximize success in achieving this clear resonance, maintaining the accurate interval between the thumb and the third finger is essential. In addition, placement of the bow, as well as the speed of the bow is important. The bow should be placed closer to the bridge, and its speed should be fairly rapid. Further, slightly accentuating the harmonic note using the bow will help the note to “speak” clearly. It is interesting that Britten used an array of artificial harmonics connected by *glissando* set into a march. It brings to mind a sound akin to soldiers whistling while they march.

If necessary, to further perfect this technique, the following exercise taken from Alexanian’s *Complete Cello Technique: Classic Treatise on Cello Theory and Practice*, might be of assistance.



Example 21. The Exercises for artificial harmonics ⁸⁷

To practice following harmonics, one should become familiar with the spacing of intervals as the note changes to higher or lower pitch. (the higher the position, the narrower the interval.) Thus, it is necessary to practice shifting from one harmonic note to the other repeatedly in slow tempo, until the technique becomes comfortable and natural. Then the tempo can be gradually increased.

V. Fifth Movement: *Moto Perpetuo*

The last movement of the sonata is *Moto Perpetuo*, which means “perpetual motion” in Italian. Michael Tilmonth defines it as “a title sometimes given to a piece in which rapid figuration is persistently maintained.”⁸⁸ In this movement, a persistent eighth-note figuration is punctuated by insertion of the consecutive sixteenth-note configuration in *Presto tempo*. However, Britten utilizes a few different techniques within this rhythmic perpetual motion to express different characteristics which are as follows:

A. Combination of *Saltando* and *Recochet*

B. *Marcato*

⁸⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁸⁸ Michael Tilmonth, “Moto perpetuo,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19224> (accessed August 12, 2008).

C. Legato

A. Combination of *Saltando* and *Recochet*

In the beginning of the *Moto perpetuo* movement, Britten starts this eighth-note rhythmic figuration punctuated by the consecutive sixteenth-note configuration, with the indication of an off-string stroke called *saltando*, also known as *sautille*.



Example 22. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, V. Moto Perpetuo, Mm. 1-4*⁸⁹

What is important to understand in order to execute this passage for the desired effect, is that there is more to the technique than the term, *saltando* indicates. In actual fact, the technique here is a combination of *saltando* and *recochet*. In other words, the slurred consecutive sixteenth-note figure should be played with a *recochet* stroke and the continuing eighth-note figure should be played with *saltando* stroke. To further clarify, the following definition may be of assistance:

1. *Saltando* (*Sautille*)

Saltando, in Italian, and *Sautille*, in French, are described as:

A bow stroke played rapidly in the middle of the bow, one bow stroke per note, so that the bow bounces very slightly off the string of its own accord. It is not indicated in any consistent manner. Sometimes dots are placed . . .⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op. 65*, 28.

⁹⁰ David D. Boyden and Peter Walls. "Sautillé," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24643> (accessed, August 12 2008).

2. *Recochet (Jeté)*

The literal meaning of the term is “thrown”. The bow is thrown on the string, making contact with the bows upper half, so that it bounces or ricochets off the string from two to six (or more) times. The term is rarely used as a direction, the bowing being implied by the context and indicated by dots within a slur.⁹¹

For example, in the first measure, after the pick-up note, the consecutive sixteenth notes and the following eighth note are indicated by dots within a slur. Thus, the *Recochet* stroke is suitable for this particular passage in which the bow should be thrown gently and bounced naturally. Here, in order to utilize the maximum elasticity of the bow (stick and hair) and the string of the cello, it is recommended to use the lower portion of the upper half of the bow. Christopher Bunting suggests the following three tips to execute the *Recochet* stroke effectively:

1. The bouncing should occur on the same point of contact
2. The first bounce should be significant and the bow should fall from an angle of 10 o’ clock
3. The first finger of the right hand should provide the upper constraint which requires practicing control between tightness and limpness.⁹²

Then, the following eighth-note figuration passage should be executed by *Saltando* stroke between the middle and the lower portion of the upper half of the bow. Here, the bow should be lightly dropped on the string “with a slightly off- axis pulsing of the hand.”⁹³

The characteristic of this whole passage can be light, and the measure 35 to the measure 48 can be played in a more elegant manner.

⁹¹ Bachmann, et al. “Bow,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* (accessed August 12, 2008).

⁹² Bunting, *Essay on the Craft of Cello Playing*. Vol. 1, 44.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 79.

B. *Marcato*



Example 23. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, V. Moto Perpetuo, Mm. 61-64*⁹⁴

In measures 61 to 73, the dynamic mark of *subito f e ruvido* –which means “suddenly or immediately,”⁹⁵ “strong,”⁹⁶ and “rough,”⁹⁷ is used, without the slur for the consecutive sixteenth note figure. It is expected to be played with a separated bow stroke, and a *Marcato* stroke is suitable for this section. As mentioned previously in the fourth movement above, to play each note, the lower part of the bow should be placed on the string and a heavy initial pressure applied by the weight of the arm. The consecutive sixteenth note and the following eighth note should be accentuated and articulated. The characteristic of this section is strong, heavy, and rough.

⁹⁴ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op, 65*, 31.

⁹⁵ “Subito,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27057> (accessed August 11, 2008).

⁹⁶ “Forte,” in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2630> (accessed August 11, 2008).

⁹⁷ “Ruvido,” in *Italian-English Collins Dictionary*, <http://www.dictionary.reverse.net/Italian-english/ruvido> (accessed August 11, 2008).

C. Legato



Example 24. *Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.65, V. Moto Perpetuo, Mm. 90-94*⁹⁸

This *Legato* section greatly contrasts to the previous *Marcato* section. The characteristic of this section can be described as tender and gentle. Here, maintaining a flowing melodic line, like singing, is important. In order to achieve the seamless line within a slurred line, very relaxed left hand shifting gesture is essential. For example, in measure 90, shifting occurs between the eighth note F and E. In this case, one should use an inaudible shift. In order to execute the inaudible shift successfully, three steps should be followed:

1. Lift the weight generated by the wrist of the left hand from the string. The wrist leads the movements), yet the finger on the previous note, in this case the finger on the note F which is the index finger, still touches the string slightly.
2. Shift the left hand allowing the finger to slightly touch the string without the weight of the hand. Here, the finger that was on the previous note F (the index finger) is shifting.
3. Put the weight back on the string when the second cello finger (the middle finger) arrives on the next note E.

⁹⁸ Britten, *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano Op, 65, 33.*

Further, a slight accent on the bow hand at the beginning of each slur will help in articulating the rhythm of the consecutive sixteenth notes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been a study of the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano, Op. 65, written by the twentieth-century English composer, Benjamin Britten. The intent of the writer has been to increase the reader's understanding of the piece, and to encourage performers to include this composition in their performance repertoires. To accomplish this, in chapter 2, a review of the life of the composer was presented, and the reader has been given a glimpse into the man and his musical passion. In chapter 3, the background and circumstances surrounding this particular musical composition was presented, with focus on how the unique relationship between the composer and performer was a driving force in the resultant work.

Chapter 4 addressed the primary goal of the writer for this paper. The goal was to provide a manual of practical instruction to students and others who wished to learn and perform this distinctive musical composition. In doing so, attention was given to each of the five movements of the sonata. Techniques used in each movement were identified, defined and discussed as to difficulty, and then specific instruction was given as to how to execute them to achieve the desired effects. For the couple of techniques, further exercises to practice the techniques were provided.

By obtaining a greater understanding of this work, performers should be less intimidated by its apparent difficulty, and be challenged to learn and perform this composition to more and more audiences.

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