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Assad Brothers, Barbosa-Lima: Guitarists for Our Time

by Josinaldo Costa

“Why do I love you so, Country of mine, I who have no
Country, I, seed born from wind ...”

– Vinícius de Moraes, *Pátria minha*, 1948

“The world is large and fits
within this window above the sea.”

– Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *O mundo é grande*, 1985

Only in hindsight, or after being physically removed from the homeland, do we sometimes realize the unique riches and privileges of our upbringing. As we celebrate the induction of three of the most distinguished Brazilian guitarists in history, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and Sérgio and Odair Assad, into the GFA Hall of Fame, I find myself reevaluating moments of my formative years through the lenses of their careers. These guitarists have triumphed solely through artistic integrity, demonstrating an extraordinary ability to learn throughout their lives and to regularly transform themselves into musicians that defy simple categorization. In this article I outline a few ways that we might learn from their experiences as well as contextualize their careers within our modern definition of what it means to be a guitarist. As a member of the Brazilian diaspora in the United States, having these musicians as models through my student and professional life was a great privilege and reminds me of important aspects of national identity. Therefore, I will approach my discussion from the subjective perspective of a South American guitarist, in hopes of providing a fresh viewpoint for readers.



Above: Convent of Saint Francis in Olinda, Pernambuco.

Architecturally, South American cities evolved in a manner similar to their European counterparts, where sections of the town were built in different time periods. Over the course of centuries, this process creates an urban environment resembling a quilt of history, and a short walk can take you from modern steel frame buildings to neoclassical houses and baroque churches. In historical downtown Recife, the capital of Brazil’s state of Pernambuco, such a walk once took me to a used book and record store at the Rua Sete de Setembro, where I first encountered a recording of the Assad Brothers: their 1978 issue of the complete works of Villa-Lobos. This seminal early album had a great impact on me, and I was forever changed by the time I finished listening. In Brazil almost everyone can play a few chords on guitar, and the instrument enjoys a ubiquitous cultural role. The bookstore had a guitar pinned to the wall for the patrons’ enjoyment, and while listening to the Assad recording, I watched the guitar pass among their hands. It is rare for a Brazilian household not to have a guitar, and first lessons are usually informally given by a family member or friend. Many guitarists growing up in Brazil and other parts of South America tell similar accounts of their experiences with the instrument.

However anecdotal, these points illustrate the ways in which guitar surrounds daily life in the region. In this context it is not a stretch to say that a clear connection exists between Barbosa-Lima and the Assads, their artistry on guitar, and an overarching sense of Brazilian national identity. Carlos Barbosa-Lima has often emphasized the importance of his early informal discovery of the instrument. His debut record at the age of thirteen, *Dez Dedos Mágicos Num Violão de Ouro* (1958), clearly displays not only his prodigious ability but also his candid enjoyment of playing. Similarly, the Assads found their love for guitar informally, first listening to their father’s mandolin and then learning their first chords from their uncle, who taught them the idiosyncratic method of *Américo Jacomino*. As we will observe, this is not the only affinity between these musicians.

South America, as remarked by Fábio Zanon, has always stood outside the mainstream of classical music, and perhaps as an indirect consequence of this, few Brazilian artists have achieved as much recognition in their fields as the Assads.¹ Furthermore, because of their relative isolation during their formative years, Barbosa-Lima, the Assads, and other guitarists were able to develop a distinct musical style that stood apart from their contemporaries such as Andrés Segovia and Julian Bream. Despite such distance from the main channels of classical music, South America, especially in the Rio del Plata basin, experienced an influx of many great guitarists due to the exodus of Spaniards during their civil war and the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. Miguel Llobet, Domingo Prat, the Anido family, Josefina Robledo, and other disciples of Tárrega were a few that permanently relocated or were present for extended periods of time in Argentina, Uruguay, and

¹ “Nossos intérpretes: Duo Assad,” *Violão com Fábio Zanon, Rádio Cultura FM de São Paulo*, July 12, 2006, <http://vcfz.blogspot.com/2006/07/28-duo-assad.html>.

² An even larger number of indirect disciples of Tárrega made their way to South America, such as José Carrion in Pernambuco, a student of Pujol.

the southern states of Brazil.² This fertile environment also included Isaías Sávio and Monina Távora, two of the most influential pedagogues of the twentieth century, who deserve much more attention outside South America. The encounter between these teachers and Barbosa-Lima and the Assads was momentous. This unique pedagogical environment, combined with the aforementioned cultural importance of the instrument, resulted in the extremely effective formula that fostered the development of the Assads and Barbosa-Lima.

The way in which the early careers of Barbosa-Lima and the Assad Brothers progressed from within this context, then, does not surprise us. The epoch-making status of Barbosa-Lima's Scarlatti recordings and arrangements, and the Assads' standard defining control of the guitar duo medium have been commented on many times. Nevertheless, maintaining the spontaneous "illusion of the first time" in performance, as they do, is not an easy task.³ It requires constant questioning and reinvention. Here one finds the truly remarkable aspect of these guitarists' artistic paths. Like the urban fabric of South American cities, the musical lives of the Assads and Barbosa-Lima are layered and always changing. The Assads, regardless of their immediate success in performing favorites of the repertory, quickly aligned themselves with eminent composers, such as Piazzolla and Marlos Nobre, and embarked upon genre-defying projects involving celebrated musicians like Yo-Yo Ma, Gidon Kremer, and Paquito D'Rivera. Similarly, Barbosa-Lima demonstrated his interest in music from outside the canon of classical guitar repertory from the onset of his career. His 1975 recording of meticulous arrangements of Catulo da Paixão Cearense testifies to his diverse musical interests. Moreover, his role in creating new repertory for the instrument cannot be overstated. Ginastera's *Sonata*, Mignone's *Studies* and *Concerto*, and Cordero and Gnattali's concerti are only a few of the guitar standards composed for and popularized by Barbosa-Lima. Today, Barbosa-Lima still maintains an active profile within the standard classical realm and also remains connected to jazz and folk music from around the world. Sérgio Assad's evolution as a composer is equally impressive. Correspondingly, Odair's turn to solo performance in 2011 was enthusiastically received, and audiences and guitarists alike will benefit from his new endeavor.

Thus, perpetual motion towards the new is a common line between these musicians, and yet this restlessness does not compromise their musical identity but enriches it. In the unpredictable fabric of old South American cities, the historical past comes to fruition in the present in the form of charming crisscrossed streets, alleys, and avenues, where being lost is more pleasing than being found. How to describe the experience of turning around a strange corner to witness a dramatic encounter between the gleaming Atlantic ocean and a baroque cathedral? One could use the same description to retell the experience of first listening to a performance of Barbosa-Lima or the Assads.



Above: Sérgio (left) and Odair Assad.

Just as we struggle to find words upon seeing a site of spectacular magnificence, so too have commentators tried to describe the impact of these guitarists. One such attempt underscores a central theme of this article. Reviewing one of their European performances in 1993 (from which I borrow the title of this present discussion), Colin Cooper vociferously declared the Assads a "duo for our time."⁴ 1993 was the centenary of Segovia's birth, and such a bold statement pointed to a new direction for the guitar. Decades later we see that audiences, industry, academia, and this Hall of Fame induction have agreed with Cooper.

Along with the impact the Assads and Barbosa-Lima have made on the classical guitar, their impact upon Brazilian identity, while perhaps less well known in the United States, is equally remarkable. In a region that has suffered severe growing pains through its whole post-colonial history, worries regarding the lack of resources and insecurities related to the quality of education are common. As a student, it was important for me to have proof of the value of our pedagogical and musical tradition. I found this validation in the careers of the Assads and Barbosa-Lima. It reassured me that I and others were not at a disadvantage to compete on an international level. In addition, the collaboration of the Assads and Barbosa-Lima with major South American composers solidified the guitar

³ This phrase, often associated with Russian dramatist Konstantin Stanislavski, was originally coined by American actor William Gillette and codified in his "The Illusion of the First Time in Acting" (New York: Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1915).

⁴ Colin Cooper, "A Duo for Our Time," *Classical Guitar* (January 1994): 11–16.

as a concert-level and contemporary instrument. Like elsewhere around the globe, the guitar suffered prejudice from the classical elite in Brazil through its association with popular music. The Assads and Barbosa-Lima legitimized the instrument and its Brazilian tradition both nationally and internationally.

Other ways in which these guitarists' influence was felt in the region are more indirect and yet equally important. In the specific case of the Assads, their relationship with Thomas Humphrey was critical to the development of a recent renewal in guitar building in Brazil. Finding a good classical guitar in South America during the last portion of the previous century, especially far from major cities, was often a challenge. Throughout the twentieth century, Brazil had import substitution policies in place in one form or another.⁵ These policies, instituted to protect domestic manufacturing, restricted imports and had the side effect of isolating the country from technical advancements in some fields, especially in niche sections of the market such as lutherie. Even important centers were underserved, as there were not enough concert-level instruments being made to supply the demand. In this context, artists traveling abroad served as a bridge, not only by filling in the gap with news and other resources from outside the country's boundaries but also by bringing back instruments to the homeland and performing on them. 1994 brought many economic changes to Brazil, including a strong reversal of the import regulations. Since that time, a flood gate has been opened, with many enthusiastic luthiers appearing throughout the country, and with building at the forefront of the guitar industry's standard. The Humphrey/Assad encounter was a world phenomenon, and although Humphrey's reputation was already solidified in the 1980s, the liner notes on the Assads' 1993 *Rameau, Scarlatti, Couperin, Bach* album marked the first time that many in South America heard about the Humphrey Millennium. These favorable coincidences sparked the guitar building fire in Brazil that still rages. The Assads were also very generous to Brazilian guitar makers, such as Jorge Raphael, who greatly benefited from having instruments commissioned by them.

Finally, as we consider the Assads and Barbosa-Lima within the musical expectations of the present day, we find that Colin Cooper's declaration remains valid. A decade-and-a-half into the twenty-first century, these musicians are still *guitarists for our time*. Moreover, they are the *guitarists we need*. It has been a long time since the guitar community has voiced concerns over the lack of artistry and the predisposition for an empty technical arms race within the millennial generation. In 2011, Marcelo Kayath related how this preoccupation was already present during his 1985 debut in London, and he raised the question: "If the guitar has never been played with such technical perfection, then why the relative lack of public interest in the classical guitar?"⁶ Although it should be weighed against



Above: Carlos Barbosa-Lima

the contemporary state of classical music's low popularity, Kayath's insightful discussion touches on important points that have been on every enlightened guitarist's mind the past few decades, namely, how to reconcile originality, technical precision, artistic integrity, and entrepreneurship in a healthy and spontaneous manner. It is perhaps fortunate that our generation's challenge is not at all dissimilar to the environment of the Assads' and Barbosa-Lima's artistic coming of age. Their catalogue of recordings and the span of their careers provide models of how to reach beyond the difficult trials of being a guitarist today while maintaining enthusiasm and spontaneity. This living legacy is perhaps their greatest gift to the guitar. To conclude, I present a few pertinent statements from Barbosa-Lima and Odair Assad that reflect their approach toward a life in music and serve as inspiration to all guitarists.

⁵ Werner Baer and Issac Kerstenetzky, *The American Economic Review* 54, no. 3, Papers and Proceedings of the Seventy-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association (May 1964), 411–425.

⁶ Marcelo Kayath, "Guitar—Small Orchestra or Grand Piano?" *Classical Guitar* 29, no. 6 (2011): 26–27.

Carlos Barbosa-Lima:

“You must listen to the great guitarists and other musicians that have come before you. I have heard and spoken to guitarists in countless masterclasses who are disoriented. They don’t know where to go musically.”

“First you have to have a deep passionate love for music ... I believe in what I do, and I love what I do. I love to work and I work smart and hard. I use all my potential when I work, I believe in that. And I am always open to suggestions. I am never too old to learn.”⁷

Odair Assad:

“[Egberto Gismonti] has something else that I also value in musicians, that it doesn’t matter whether they play fast or slow, they make you go somewhere during the interpretation ... it touches something. It goes to another world. Then there is another thing: the music itself has this power but you have to know what you’re doing in order to touch the power. This is something, which I don’t feel the new generation of guitarists really understands. What they do technically is so amazing and they play so cleanly, you go to so many festivals and you see them all playing at the same level. Maybe it’s because of these fast things happening, they miss the musical interpretation.”⁸



Josinaldo Costa is a Brazilian guitarist based in Orange County, California. Active in solo and chamber settings, he maintains a focus on historical performance practices and will be featured in the Karlovac International Summer Guitar School (Croatia) and in the Ritsos Project (Greece) this summer. He holds a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music and is currently Director of Guitar at Servite High School. For more information visit josinaldocosta.com.

⁷ Lawrence Del Casale, “Carlos Barbosa-Lima,” *Classical Guitar* 24, no. 10 (2006): 11–16.
⁸ Thérèse Wassily Saba, “Odair Assad Goes Solo,” *Classical Guitar* 30, no. 9 (2012): 11–17.





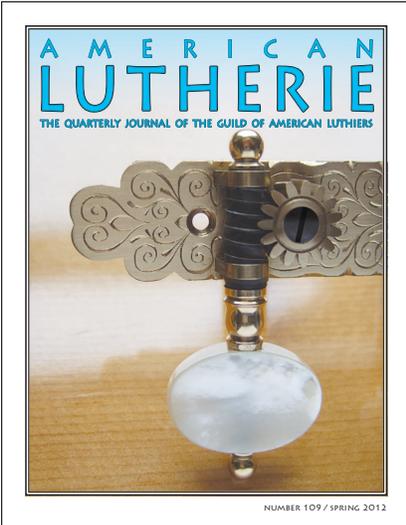
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The Guitar in Mixed Ensembles: Past and Present

By Josinaldo Costa

“The guitar—in contrast to other instruments—loses when reinforced in number. The sound of twelve guitars playing unison is almost ridiculous.”

With this abrasive statement, Berlioz closes the chapter on the guitar in his *Treatise* of 1844.¹ Notwithstanding the hyperbole of this remark, the opinion of one of the most celebrated guitarist-composers in history deserves careful consideration. Over the course of time, the judgment was that Berlioz’s approach toward the guitar was harmful for the development of the instrument. The reasoning was that, by declaring it to be necessary to play the guitar oneself in order to write “passages that require all the resources of the instrument,”² Berlioz was pushing away potential composers.

On further thought, one reaches the conclusion that this opinion is misguided. In focusing on the comparatively few observations on solo writing for the guitar, the above reasoning fails to appreciate the fact that Berlioz is championing the use of the guitar as an accompanying instrument and as a member of mixed instrumental ensembles. Even as he expresses the difficulties in writing appropriately for the soft tone of the instrument, Berlioz notes that “its charm is undeniable, and it is not impossible to write for it so as to make this manifest.” To support his claim, the example from the literature he provides in the *Treatise* demonstrates that the guitar belongs in large and diverse ensembles.³ For the contemporary guitarist, such a setting is an exception. Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, the guitar has distanced itself from the realm of chamber music and is now chiefly a solo instrument. My intent in this discussion is to provide a historical survey of this process and to advocate for the guitar as a collaborative instrument. Following Berlioz’s example, I will illustrate my argument with four new scores by composers Aristéa Mellos, David Clay Mettens, Daniel Pesca, and Zach Sheets in which the guitar is featured in a mixed ensemble.

Thinking of the guitar as an ensemble instrument was the standard in Berlioz’s time. Historically speaking, the idea of the guitar as principally a solo instrument is the actual novelty. Plucked-string instruments, although evidently suitable for all manner of solo performance, are by design intended for harmonic and rhythmic support, and throughout the Baroque era were familiar members of the continuo body. The extravagant 1589 Medici wedding epitomizes this use of plucked strings as it stood at the outset of the period. The full continuo retinue at this event included harps, psalteries, lutes, theorbos, citterns, and mandolas, alongside keyboards and other instruments. The guitar received a place of honor in the closing *Ballo* by Cavalieri, where singers accompanied themselves on guitars of different sizes.⁴ It was not without good reason, therefore, that Corbetta, Foscari, Sanz, Murcia, and other Baroque-era guitarists dedicated large parts of their publications to continuo instruction.⁵ Thus, however prominent the solo works of Dowland, da Milano, Kapsberger, Weiss, and many other lutenists and early guitarists may appear to us at present, varied types of ensemble playing were the natural environment for these instruments in their day.

This practice remained current in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and similar to other characteristics of style, only began to fall away as the twentieth century approached. Regarding improvisation and embellishment, Clive Brown notes that “throughout the period of 1750–1900 musical notation... was generally viewed as something much more flexible... than it has been for much of the twentieth century.”⁶ He goes on to say that “during the first half of the period the embellishment and elaboration of all kinds of music by performers was endemic and, in many aspects, fundamental to the aesthetic experience of composer, performer, and listener alike.” Like the earlier guitarists, Sor, Carulli, Giuliani, and their generation also gave great importance to the role of the guitar in ensemble playing. The third part of Sor’s method is largely dedicated

¹ Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss, *Treatise on Instrumentation Including Berlioz Essay on Conducting* ([New York]: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1948), 145–150.

² *Ibid.*, 147.

³ *Ibid.*; Verdi’s *Otello*, Act II, n. 54. The excerpt involves full woodwind and string sections, choir, and added guitar, bagpipe, and mandolin.

⁴ Nina Treadwell, *Music and Wonder at the Medici Court: The 1589 Interludes for La Pellegrina* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008), 166.

⁵ Harvey Turnbull et al., “Guitar,” *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, Oxford Univ. Press.

⁶ Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 415.

to the harmonic properties of the fretboard (fluency in sixths, thirds), to accompaniment, and to reading from scores in reduction. In addition to indirect instruction found in his methods, Carulli published a volume dedicated solely to harmony.⁷

Giuliani, today mostly valued for his brilliant solo repertoire, is the best practical example of the era's pervasive use of the guitar in ensembles. During the most significant portion of his career in Vienna, Giuliani's prominent appearances were invariably surrounded by virtuosos of other instruments, namely in the *Akademies* organized with Hummel, Moscheles, and Mayseder.⁸ The tastes of the era are represented in their programming choices, where solo pieces were limited to a few per evening, preference being given to works of varied character and instrumentation. Our contemporary opinion regarding authoring is also challenged by the compositions on which Giuliani collaborated. Works were liberally composed collectively, many times uncredited. Two such examples are Hummel's *Grandes Sérénades en Potpourri*, Opp. 63 and 66, where the guitar parts were composed by Giuliani.⁹

Additional evidence for the importance of the early nineteenth-century guitar in ensemble roles lies in the countless number of works published or circulated in manuscript by the period's lesser-known composer-players. In his 1983 dissertation on the guitar chamber trio of this period, Robert Liew states:

[The guitar chamber trio] accounts for between half and two-thirds of all guitar chamber music composed between 1780 and 1830. It is practically impossible to determine the exact number of chamber trios written during this period, as music of this nature circulated mainly by means of manuscripts rather than through printed forms. Although the catalogues of 19th century publishers list a great number of published chamber music works, only a small proportion of these have been found... The Bone biographical dictionary mentions over 140 chamber trios with guitar by about 50 different composers around the turn of the 19th century... The catalogues of Weimann and Whistling (and later, Hofmeister) also mention a large number of yet undiscovered works.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the abundance of descriptive evidence regarding the guitar's use in ensembles would not be fully reflected in the published or manuscript sources

of the era even if all of them were extant. Sor, whose catalogue is virtually dedicated to solo music, was in frequent collaboration with other musicians throughout his career, especially in London.¹¹ Nonetheless, as implied in Brown's quote above, this activity was left within the realm of undocumented oral tradition. It is very likely that professional guitarists extemporized their parts, or read from piano parts or scores, especially when working with a familiar ensemble. In this context, we understand that when Paganini declared in 1823 that all guitarists in Naples "hadn't any idea of a chord," he referred to the lack of skill in performing from shorthand parts such as one finds in his quartets.¹² May it be a direct relationship or not, as the era of improvisation and free elaboration ended, so did the guitar lose its place in the chamber ensemble. Compared to the output of early nineteenth-century guitarists, the ensuing transitional period is conspicuously devoid of chamber works for the guitar. Berlioz hints at a reason for this change, declaring that "since the introduction of the pianoforte at all houses where the least taste for music exists, the guitar has dropped into somewhat rare cultivation."¹³ The relationship between the two most popular harmonic instruments of the nineteenth century goes beyond competition, however. Romanticism brought the individual to the forefront of artistic expression, and the advent of the "solo piano recital" in the idealized form championed by Liszt also became a new standard for the guitar.

The reasons for this change are less important than the actual outcome. Although there is no shortage of guitar chamber music in the twentieth century, the change of paradigms produced a few generations of guitarists that have limited experience with this repertoire. Today, while other instrumentalists dedicate a substantial amount of time in their formative years to collaborative music, the typical guitarist will perform only a handful of mixed ensemble works for guitar throughout his or her studies. A vast majority will never play anything but guitar duos or quartets. I believe that the context in which the revival of the classical guitar in the twentieth century occurred made this model possible. The market was undeveloped, and audiences were eager to be reacquainted with the brilliant repertoire of the past and also interested in new works that made full use of the unusual resources of the instrument (which are chiefly solo works). This environment allowed for a guitarist to be successful without ever playing the type of collaborative repertoire that constituted the core of an early nineteenth-century performing career.

⁷ Ferdinando Carulli, *L'harmonie appliquée à la guitare* (1825).

⁸ Thomas F. Heck, *Mauro Giuliani: Virtuoso Guitarist and Composer* (Columbus, OH: Editions Orphée, 1995), chap. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

¹⁰ Robert C. Liew, "The Guitar Chamber Trio from 1780 to 1830," PhD diss. (Texas Tech Univ., 1983), 27–28.

¹¹ Brian Jeffery, *Fernando Sor: Guitarist and Composer*, 2nd edition (Penderyn, UK: Tecla Editions, 1994), 40–43, 46–48.

¹² Heck, 113.

¹³ Berlioz, 147.

The Guitar in Mixed Ensembles: (cont.)

This moment, however, has passed. In my experience, what the classical guitarist encounters in the professional world today is a mature environment. Around the globe standards of playing, instruction, and familiarity with the repertory have never been higher, and both the competition between guitarists and the expectations of the audience follow this trend. When the variation in proportion is excluded, differences between the world of Giuliani and our own are few. It follows that we should be aware of his example. For both Giuliani and the contemporary guitarist, maintaining a career exclusively as a soloist is unrealistic. There are multiple reasons why this is the case. For example, during the latter part of the twentieth century, a guitarist with a tertiary degree could more often rely on an academic position to support a life as a soloist. Today, fewer terminal degree holders will find this a viable option, and the trend is likely a lasting one.

Rather than dwelling on these negative aspects, this is an opportunity for a change in paradigms. Our economy values sharing and collaboration, and it is time for the guitar community to modernize itself in this regard. Similarly to Giuliani, the independent contemporary guitarist relies on self-promoted performances, private funding, institutional support, and on variable income derived from private and adjunct instruction. All of these activities are greatly facilitated when the effort is shared with other artists in a similar position. Grants and residencies, for instance, are much more likely to be accepted or funded if applied for as part of a collaborative effort. Most importantly, the rewards in performing in mixed ensembles are obvious. The guitar's notorious isolation has limited its audience, whereas performing in mixed ensembles broadens the instrument's visibility and benefits the community as a whole. Moreover, there is no good explanation for why we should keep Webern, Schoenberg, Boulez, Takemitsu, and other preeminent composers who have written ensemble works for the guitar as rare program features.

In closing this discussion, I would like to present the product of my own collaboration with four composers during the 2015 Ritsos Project. The Ritsos Project is a multidisciplinary festival that is on track for its third iteration in Samos, Greece. An example of how collaborative efforts can be successful, it required the combined efforts of musicians, visual artists, actors, and other personnel to secure funding provided by the Eastman School of Music and the Presser Foundation. The two first excerpts presented here by Aristéa Mellos and Zach Sheets

feature opposite poles of the guitar's expressive spectrum. Mellos's impressionistic orchestration in *Into the Moonlight* (**Figure 1**, Mvt. II: Chanconne, measures 19–26, page 31) allows the guitar to create a colorful harmonic ground alongside the piano, sporadically interrupted in a pictorial manner by the other instruments. Sheets's *I Am Sinking in a Sea of Copper Ships* makes use of extended techniques in a brilliant manner (**Figure 2**, measures 3–6, page 32), while also presenting the guitar as a protagonist of change in the musical narrative (**Figure 3**, measures 68–69, page 33). Observing Berlioz's advice that the guitar's "melancholy, dreamy character... might be used more frequently,"¹⁴ David Clay Metten's *Down the Moon's Marble Well* (**Figure 4**, measures 1–23, page 34) and Daniel Pesca's *Suite* (**Figure 5**, Mvt. II: Bear Dance, measures 50–58, online, see below) share an aphoristic quality suitable for the guitar in their concise treatment of orchestration (allowing the guitar to speak through the texture) and musical materials. They also make use of the guitar's rhythmic characteristics effectively, as in Metten's measures 77–end (**Figure 4**, online) and Pesca's measures 31–49 (**Figure 5**, online). **Figure 5**, as well as the full excerpts of **Figures 1–4**, are viewable on the GFA website at: guitarfoundation.org/?page=Scores.

It was a great pleasure for me to participate in this project. Being a product of the soloist bias of my generation, it was a process of self-discovery to be part of an effort with so many moving parts. It is a rewarding endeavor that I believe all guitarists should enjoy as an integral part of their life in music and not as an exception to the rule of today.



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¹⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1: Aristéa Mellos, *Into the Moonlight*, Mvt. II: Chanconne, mm. 19–26.

B
II. Chanconne
♩ = 32

6

19

Fl. *espress.*
p

B. Cl.

Alto Sax.

Gtr. *pp* *legato e dolcissimo*
p

Vln.

♩ = 32

B *ppp* *pp* *p*

Pno. *sempre pp*
— \wedge etc...

23

Fl. *mf* *pp* To A. Fl. Alto Flute

B. Cl. *legato e dolcissimo*
p *p* *pp*

Alto Sax.

Gtr. *p* *mp* *p* *mp*

Vln. *legato e dolcissimo*
ord. *ppp* *p* *pp* *mp* *pp*

Pno. *pp* *p*
dampen strings with left hand so that they sound muted and distorted
p *pp*

7

Figure 2: Zach Sheets, *I Am Sinking in a Sea of Copper Ships*, mm. 3–6.

2

rit. G.P.

Fl. *sfz*

Cl. key clicks
p → *f* → *p*

Vln. (pizz.)
pizz. behind bridge
f. marcato
pizz. ord.

Perc. fingertips on wood planks
p → *f*
wd. planks
f
bottles
mp l.v.
(bottles)

A. Gtr. *<mf l.v.*
damp with L.H.
high: tapping:
mid: *f*
low: *mp*
f
f l.v.

Pno. *sfzpp < f > pp*
rit. G.P.
release left hand slightly to let a little bit of pitch resonate

Figure 3: Zach Sheets, *I Am Sinking in a Sea of Copper Ships*, mm. 68–69.

26

The musical score for measures 68-69 is arranged in a system with six staves. The Flute (Fl.) part begins at measure 68 with a *pp* dynamic and a *f* dynamic, featuring a 5-measure phrase and a 3-measure phrase. The Clarinet (Cl.) part features a 3-measure phrase and a 6-measure phrase, with dynamics of *f* and *p*. The Violin (Vln.) part includes a *sul pont.* instruction and a 5-measure phrase, with dynamics of *ff*, *sfz*, *f*, and *p*. The Percussion (Perc.) part is marked with a double bar line. The Acoustic Guitar (A. Gtr.) part starts with a *f* dynamic and a *p* dynamic, ending with a *f l.n.* dynamic. The Piano (Pno.) part begins with a *f* dynamic.

Figure 4: David Clay Metten, *Down the Moon's Marble Well*, mm. 1–23.

"Down the moon's marble well"

Score

David Clay Mettens

♩ = 76

Flute

ppp

Guitar

mp

Piano

p

Ped. →

9

Fl.

ppp

Gtr.

ppp

Pno.

9

17

B♭ Cl.

Pno.

pp

Gtr.

p

Pno.

mp

t. sfz

A

B

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TRADITION AND MODERNITY, EAST AND WEST: The Guitar Works of Tōru Takemitsu

By Josinaldo Costa

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Tōru Takemitsu's death. In 1996 we lost an artist widely regarded as one of the world's "leading and most active composers," whose work "represents a philosophical trend in contemporary music and defines, to a large extent, the role of the cosmopolitan artist."¹ A composer of eclectic interests, Takemitsu's oeuvre covers a multitude of disciplines from music, to philosophy, to music criticism.² The cosmopolitan character of his output was one of his foremost objectives. Reticent about the ethnical boundaries through which his music was at times seen, Takemitsu did not define himself as "a composer who represents Japan, not even a 'Japanese' composer."³ A universalist, he was instead preoccupied with the fact that "the airplane era laid a new cosmic egg in the nest of everyday reality, integrating all the previously separate civilizations' experiences in one history and one geography."⁴ Takemitsu sought to break this shell, performing his part in "a journey toward the geographic and historic unity of all people," a responsibility that "now all of us, individually and collectively, share in incubating that vast universal cultural egg."⁵

For the guitar, the works of Takemitsu are particularly important. Few other major composers of the 20th century wrote so consistently for our instrument throughout their careers. These works reflect his diverse interests, ranging from jazz and pop arrangements to works that form the cornerstones of 20th-century concert repertoire. Moreover,

they are important examples of Takemitsu's style within his overall catalog. With this in mind, and in celebration of his anniversary, this article will survey Takemitsu's career while giving particular attention to his music for guitar. For each period (**Table 1**), I will analyze a representative guitar work for comparison and discussion.

Early Years: First Guitar Works

Takemitsu was largely a self-taught musician. Although exposed to Western popular music by his father, it was later, by way of two serendipitous experiences, that he decided to compose. The first was his clandestine listening to Lucienne Boyer's recording of *Parlez-moi d'Amour* during World War II;⁷ the second, hearing a radio broadcast of César Franck's *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*. These two experiences are significant, as they point toward Takemitsu's early interest in French music. Alongside the American jazz of his childhood and postwar years, French impressionism was a lifelong inspiration. Many elements of the French school resonated with Takemitsu: the contemplative and introspective character of the musical narrative, the use of non-functional

Table 1: Takemitsu's creative periods (according to Peter Burt).⁶

Period	Juvenilia (1948–50) / Journeyman (1950–60)		Modernist apogee (1960–76)	Maturity (1977–96)
Characteristics	Under influence of the French School. Developed a language based upon modally based non-functional harmony and fondness for timbral finesse and extra-musical reference (Burt, 14).	Marked by modernist and experimental traits explored during his involvement with the Jikken Kōbō collective.	Developed an individual voice characterized by the assimilation of modernist avant-garde traits, combined with the rediscovery of Japanese traditions through the external mirror of John Cage.	A shift toward post-modernist simplicity and a self-declared Romanticism. Diatonic pan-tonalism. "Sea of Tonality"
Representative works	Lento in due movimenti (Litany)/Distance de fée	Requiem for Strings/Uninterrupted Rests	Green/November Steps/Ring/Valeria/Quatrain	A Flock Descends to a Pentagonal Garden/Toward the Sea/In the Woods

¹ Noriko Ohtake, *Creative Sources for the Music of Tōru Takemitsu* (Aldershot, Hants, UK: Scholar, 1993), xvii.

² His writings also include a mystery novel and a screenplay for the film *Double Suicide* (1969).

³ Tōru Takemitsu, Yoshiko Kakudo, and Glenn Glasow, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings* (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf, 1995), 142.

⁴ R. Buckminster Fuller, foreword to *A Sculptor's World*, by Isamu Noguchi, 7; quoted in *Confronting Silence*, 70. Interestingly, this concept resonates with the Buddhist concept of "cosmic egg."

⁵ *Confronting Silence*, 91–92.

⁶ Peter Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

⁷ An experience that, according to Takemitsu, marked the very moment he wanted to become a composer. See Burt, 23.

modal harmonies, careful attention to timbral control, frequent use of extra-musical references, and other features. Composed while under a brief period of instruction with Yasuji Kiyose, the early *Lento in due movimenti* (1950) and *Distance de fée* (1951) display these characteristics alongside an aphoristic, subdued character, frequent repetition of thematic material, and a propensity for an *in medias res* narrative. Despite appearing in the early period of his juvenilia, these elements remained part of Takemitsu's mature style.

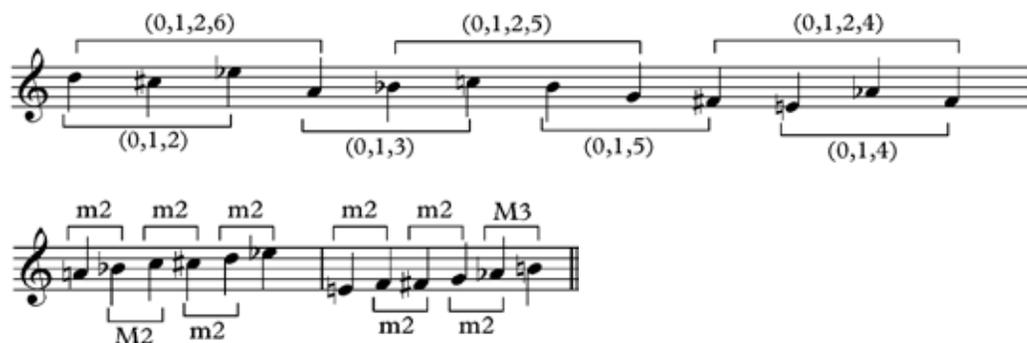
Distance de fée is also remarkable in its extra-musical inspiration: a homonymous poem by the surrealist Shuzo Takiguchi. A multifaceted personality, Takiguchi was the creative catalyst behind an experimental, multidisciplinary collective in which Takemitsu participated from 1951 to 1958, the Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop). As a member of the Jikken Kōbō, Takemitsu composed for various purposes, such as radio dramas, incidental music, and concert works. The latter comprised similarly diverse mediums and styles, from solo instrumental pieces (*Uninterrupted Rest*, 1952–59) to *musique concrète* for tape (*Static Relief*, 1955).⁸ Through this connection to the avant-garde community, Takemitsu started writing music for the movies, a pursuit that would occupy his entire creative life. The Jikken Kōbō also served as a channel into the mainstream concert environment. For example, his first important commission, the *Requiem* (1957, in memory of film composer Fumio Hoyasaka), came while involved in the group.

Assimilation of external influences is a recurring theme in Japan, a country whose history was likened to “an oyster,

opening itself to repeated onslaughts from the ocean and transforming grains of continental grit into pearls.”⁹ Through the experiments of the 1950s Takemitsu found an individual voice and, in this first mature phase (1960–75), he emerged as a composer fluent in 20th-century compositional techniques. Of all external influences, perhaps the most consequential was John Cage. Although the ideas of the New York School surrounded Takemitsu in the previous decade, after 1961 the influence of Cage can be more clearly observed in his music.¹⁰

1961 is also the year of Takemitsu's first concert work for guitar: *Ring*, a trio for terz-guitar, flute, and lute (tuned in E). *Ring* is remarkably eclectic, exploring many modernist traits. The first movements of the work derive their titles from the serial techniques of (R)etrograde and (I)nverson. These are transformations of the final movement, (G)eneral Theme, but only in the third movement, (N)oise, is an actual series found. *Ring* features metrically indeterminate notation, extended techniques, and full-fledged graphic notation, which is used in solo interludes for each instrument.¹¹ Harmonically, the material is mostly derived from the octatonic scale and other modes of limited transposition. Although used intuitively by Takemitsu in earlier works, these devices were clearly integrated into his language after contact with the music of Messiaen. The music of Webern, overtly referenced during this period, can also be heard in the pointillism of the motivic lines.¹² Similar to other larger works of this period, such as *Music of Tree* (1961) and *Le Son Caligraphie* (1958), the series used by Takemitsu in “N” displays carefully designed properties (**Figure 1**). When analyzed as sets, each hexachord of the

Figure 1: *Ring*: series found in movement “N” (flute) and dyads derived from hexachordal division in prime form.



⁸ Burt, 41.

⁹ Joan Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 17.

¹⁰ This occurred when the pianist/composer Toshi Ichyanagi returned from eight years of study in the United States, which included instruction with Cage (Burt, 92–93). The relationship of Ichyanagi and Takemitsu went back to 1950, when Ichyanagi presented Takemitsu with a copy of Messiaen's *8 Préludes* (*Confronting Silence*, 141).

¹¹ Takemitsu collaborated with the prominent designer Kōhei Sugiura in the score of *Corona*, and the similarity between this and the graphic scores for *Ring* should be noted. Graphic scores are also used for extended sections of music written for traditional Japanese instruments in *November Steps*.

¹² Ohtake, 81.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY: (cont.)

series is formed of dyads distanced by a minor second, excluding a single interval of a major second in the first hexachord and a major third in the second one. Similarly, in P0 form, the trichordal and tetrachordal divisions of the series reveal closely related pitch sets that differ by minor-second intervals. Thus, unified variation is an inherent quality of the series. Such seemingly arbitrary, minute variations were of importance to Takemitsu throughout his career.

Although carefully designed, the series of *Ring* is never used in a normative manner. After the statement of P0 by the flute (mm. 1–10), no other transposition can be identified clearly. Throughout *Ring*, Takemitsu develops the smaller subdivisions of the series in free manner, a typical strategy in his other guitar works of the decade: *Sacrifice* (1962), *Valeria* (1965), *Stanza I* (1969), and *Crossing* (1970). The fact that these are all ensemble works of varied size is worthy of note. Moreover, as an example of Takemitsu's chameleonic ability, *Bad Boy*, a work of light character originally written as a movie soundtrack in 1961, appeared in the same year as the clearly experimental *Ring*.

Folios, Cage, and the “Japanese”

The influence of Cage, however relevant to Takemitsu's modernist explorations, was perhaps most consequential as the catalyst for Takemitsu's rediscovery of Japanese tradition. Initially ignoring traditional music, over the course of the 1960s Takemitsu became increasingly preoccupied with the tension between Eastern and Western aesthetics. Cage's interest in the Eastern cast a mirror in which Takemitsu could see his own culture, distanced from his own bias. Eventually, Takemitsu would realize that as a composer “growing up in Japan I could not be independent of my country's traditions. But that awareness of my own national tradition has special meaning, since it came to me after I had studied modern Western Music.”¹³

The quintessential example of Takemitsu's efforts in dealing with this tension, and the most conspicuous product of the “Cage Shock,” is *November Steps* (1967), for *biwa*, *shakuhachi*, and orchestra. Although traditional Japanese instruments had been used in his soundtracks, this was Takemitsu's first concert work that combined them with Western classical instruments. Aware of the problems in

such an approach, Takemitsu avoided mixing idioms, as “nothing that truly moves us will come from the superficial blending of the East and West. Such music will just sit there.”¹⁴ Rather, a path can be found “not by resolving the contradiction between the two traditions, but by emphasizing the contradictions and confronting them.”¹⁵ Although this search for a “single sound” eventually leads Takemitsu away from using traditional instruments, it is most important to our discussion that *November Steps* brings many aspects of the “Japanese” to the forefront of Takemitsu's language.

In *November Steps* Takemitsu stratifies the statements of Western and Japanese instruments, seldom featuring both at the same time.¹⁶ More than an example of the confrontation mentioned above, this manner of “definition through opposites” can be related to the concept of *ma* (space). Stanley-Baker, in discussing the japanization of Chinese art, compares two similar subjects portrayed in Chinese and Japanese styles.¹⁷ While the first aims for literal portrayal, the latter is less focused on the thing itself and rather on what the absence of the thing implies. This concept (which the French Impressionists imported) is in fact the realization that perfect representation is impossible and that the suggestion of the impression is a much more powerful experience. Therefore, in leaving space (*ma*) to be filled by imagination, the artist conveys an idea much more effectively than by attempting a literal representation of the subject. In fact, Takemitsu believed that “only in the nest of accumulated individual imaginations will our universal egg hatch.”¹⁸ The guitar is an appropriate medium for this approach, since suggestion, I would maintain, is its greatest attribute. Writing for the guitar is the art of writing less, of leaving space to be filled in by the audience.

Another reference to Japanese tradition in *November Steps* can be found in its form, which Takemitsu describes as a set of eleven variations, or *dan*.¹⁹ The apparent simplicity of this description does not impart a complete picture, and this reference appears to have multiple levels of connotation. In another work of the period, *Arc* (1963), Takemitsu uses a fluid form, which allows the soloist to “stroll through [a] garden with changing viewpoints.” This free structure “becomes a mobile strongly reminiscent of the Heian period

¹³ *Confronting Silence*, 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶ Alain Poirier, *Toru Takemitsu* (Editions TUM/Michel de Maule, 1996), 80. Cited by Burt, 116.

¹⁷ Stanley-Baker, 17.

¹⁸ *Confronting Silence*, 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 63. In traditional context, the term *dan* is more commonly used in reference to scenes of *nō* plays or sections of ballads (Burt, 125).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96. An item of private aristocratic luxury, the handscroll is a long landscape format painting typically depicting action. It is stored closed, revealing its content progressively as one or two viewers unroll it.

[794–1185] handscroll painting.”²⁰ More than describing the listening experience of *November Steps*, a correspondence between the handscrolls and fluid forms is applicable to Takemitsu’s work from as early as *Distance de fée*.

On a harmonic level, *November Steps* is initially perceived as an example of modernist chromaticism. However, “this ‘freely chromatic’ surface is—once again—largely generated by the juxtaposition and superimposition of harmonic structures which in themselves have a modal basis.”²¹ Modes of limited transposition are once again featured prominently, carrying a different symbolism from earlier works. Instead of emulation, the modes have now been assimilated in Takemitsu’s narrative of the East/West dichotomy. Although branching from the same trunk, Western music has progressed in an individualist direction, whereas Eastern music still favors a collective mindset. Takemitsu was aware of this difference. Therefore, through assimilation of Messiaen’s *Technique* (1966), Takemitsu found a bridge over the East/West gulf. Messiaen and Takemitsu would eventually meet for a lesson on Messiaen’s *Quatour*, and Takemitsu’s *Quatrain* of 1975 closes this first mature phase.

Takemitsu’s first solo guitar work, *Folios*, comes in the preceding year (1974) and is representative of this climactic point of his career. *Folios* is highly condensed. Although minute in size (each movement lasting about three minutes), it utilizes the full potential of Takemitsu’s musical apparatus. Already well established in earlier works, here one also finds the “Heian handscroll” free-flowing form alongside the expected pointillist melodic lines; harmonically, the octatonic mode is ubiquitous. Takemitsu derives several trichords and tetrachords from the octatonic set, creating a pan-tonal texture of chromatic character. The initial gestures of movements I and II exemplify his technique (Figure 2).

In addition to the characteristics derived from the Japanese concepts listed above, *Folios* brings the similarities between the sound worlds of the classical guitar and the *biwa* to the forefront.²³ Favored *biwa* tunings have doubled pitches on the two highest strings. As the gauge (and fret thickness!) differs between the strings, slightly mistuned unisons result, which is desirable within the Japanese intonation system.²⁴ Takemitsu mimics this effect by using the natural mistuning of natural harmonics versus fretted notes on the guitar;

Figure 2: Trichord subsets from the octatonic scales in *Folios*, mvts. I and II.²²

Mvt. I (page 1, system 1)

Mvt. II (page 1, system 1)

The figure displays two systems of musical notation for guitar. The first system, labeled 'Mvt. I (page 1, system 1)', shows a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. It features four boxed trichord subsets: (0,1,3) at the beginning, (0,1,4) in the middle, (0,1,5) at the end, and (0,1,6) below the staff. The second system, labeled 'Mvt. II (page 1, system 1)', also shows a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. It features four boxed trichord subsets: (0,1,4) at the beginning, (0,1,5) in the middle, (0,1,4) at the end, and (0,1,5) at the very end. Arrows point from the labels to the corresponding notes in the boxes.

²¹ Burt, 115.

²² Tōru Takemitsu, *Folios: for Guitar* (New York: Editions Salabert, 1974).

²³ A procedure also present in *November Steps*, where different sections are transitioned through mimicking between Western and Eastern instrument groups (Burt, 116).

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the *biwa*, see Minoru Miki, Marty Regan, and Philip Flavin, *Composing for Japanese Instruments* (Rochester, NY: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2008), 71.

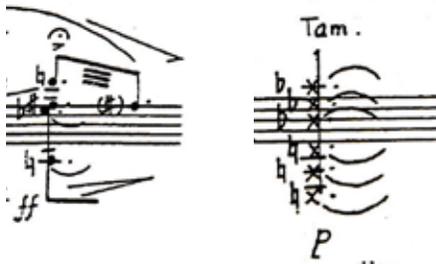
TRADITION AND MODERNITY: (cont.)

these moments overlap with the octatonic trichords, due to the inclusion of the minor second (0,1). Pitch bending, another part of *biwa* technique, achieves a similar result (Figure 3.1). Tremolos on multiple strings and hitting the body of the instrument are also common. Takemitsu deploys both effects in *Folios* (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1: *Folios*, mistuned unisons, harmonic + natural notes, pitch bending, mvt. I (page 2, system 3).



Figure 3.2: *Folios*, tremolo (page 1, system 5) and percussion (page 2, system 2).



Through the 1970s, an embryonic flourishing of tonality enters the music of Takemitsu, which after *Quatrain* brought a dramatic shift to his musical language. In *Folios* this is most conspicuous in the quotation of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in movement III (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: *Folios*, J. S. Bach quotation, mvt. III (page 2, systems 3–4).

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), with a 'p' dynamic marking below it. The bottom staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), with a 'mf' dynamic marking below it. The notation includes various note heads, some with a '1' above them, and a 'rall.' label above the staff. The text 'Quoted from Matthew Passion Choral No. 72 by J. S. Bach' is written above the top staff. The tempo markings '♩ = 100' and '♩ = 60' are present. The dynamics 'mf', 'f', 'mp', 'p', and 'mf' are marked below the bottom staff. The text 'rall., molto' is written above the bottom staff.

Final Years: Toward the “Sea of Tonality”

After *A Flock Descends* (1977) Takemitsu took the path of self-declared Romantic post-modernism that characterizes his final period.²⁵ No new elements are found in this phase, novelty instead residing in the “organic integration of seemingly conflicting concepts within an eclectic harmonic language.”²⁶ Takemitsu refers to these developments as a move toward a “sea of tonality.” This expression, now widely used in reference to Takemitsu’s last creative period, is reflected in a seminal work of the 20th century, *Toward the Sea*, for alto flute and guitar (1981). This monument of the repertoire displays several important characteristics of Takemitsu’s mature style:

- *Form*: Use of cyclical forms and/or self-referential repetitions; the “Heian scroll” narrative is even more conspicuous than before; both aspects can be related to the design of Japanese gardens.²⁷
- *Harmony*: Marked use of “octatonic pitch collections... an essential background from which a variety of other tonal and motivic colors and structures emerge.”²⁸ These devices are used in a neo-tonal manner. Takemitsu develops an idiosyncratic way of establishing his tonal center through pedal tones and the reiteration of harmonic and melodic material. In the latter case, the omnipresence of the “SEA motif” (E♭-E-A) is of special importance.
- *Extra-musical references*: Although Takemitsu had previously resorted to non-musical sources of inspiration, now these references are made overtly. There

²⁵ Preface to Tōru Takemitsu, *Rain Coming: for Chamber Orchestra* (Mainz: Schott, 1983).

²⁶ Wataru Miyakawa, *Toru Takemitsu: Situation, Héritage, Culture* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013), 28.

²⁷ Takemitsu in *Dream Window: Reflections on the Japanese Garden* (n.p.: Public Media Video, 1992), videorecording.

²⁸ Matthew Gould, “Toward the ‘SEA’ of Toru Takemitsu,” *Ex-Tempore Journal*, <http://ex-tempore.org>.

is, however, a clear effort to handle these references in a symbolic manner. Many of Takemitsu's aesthetic ideals are found in diverse fields, such as landscape design and sculpture (Naguchi), literature (Maria-Rilke, Le Clezio), engraving and painting (Odilon Redon, Sam Francis, Jasper Johns), and dance (Cunningham).

- *Melody*: New lyricism is combined with the *klangfarbenmelodien* of the previous decades. Handling of timbre reaches a virtuosic state during this period.
- *East/West conflict*: Takemitsu continued to optimistically address the idea of an international style in his music. In the 1980s he remarked that “eventually there will be a universal music of the entire human race.”

Toward the Sea can be classified within what Takemitsu calls his “Waterscape” series.²⁹ This is one of a number of thematic groups that serve as important hermeneutic tools in understanding the composer's music. Similar to his approach toward the East/West conflict, these themes are used on deeper levels of symbolic representation. The aim “is not a verbatim portrayal... rather, Takemitsu deals with some aspect of the theme-item that makes an emotional, or intellectual, or sensual impression on the viewer-listener.”³⁰ These theme groups are:

- *Garden, Tree*: Fascination with the natural, aside from being an aspect of Japanese culture, was always important to Takemitsu. This interest was grouped into a few complementary themes. Trees were especially fascinating to the composer due to their ability to adapt. Likewise, Japanese gardens were meaningful, as their basic objective is the construction of an artificial environment that dissembles as natural. The garden's design is also translatable into literal musical elements. Takemitsu's own description of *A Flock Descends to a Pentagonal Garden* exemplifies this process.³¹ In the guitar works, the best example is *Muir Woods*, where both the “Garden” and “Tree” themes are present.
- *Dream, Number*: Another theme present since earlier periods, “Dream” as a source of musical material was precipitated by his introduction to the work of the French symbolist painter, Odillon Redon. Takemitsu uses this source of inspiration in a balanced manner and

while “‘Dream’ represents the undefined [,] ‘Number’ [represents] the antagonistic, conscious desire for form.”³² In one of the few instances when Takemitsu explains his compositional process,³³ he cites the use of “magic squares,” which offers a rather rational backbone to an otherwise variable concept. Guitar works in this series: *All in Twilight* (1987), *To the Edge of Dream* (1983).

- *Waterscape*: A series of works “which like their subject [rain], pass through various metamorphoses, culminating in a sea of tonality.”³⁴ Examples in the guitar works: *Toward the Sea*, *Wainscot Pond*, *Folios n. II*.³⁵
- *Stars*: Mostly associated with works of the 1970s that share a pictorial character, bordering the idea of *augenmusik*, e.g., *Cassiopeia*, *Pleiades*. Passages of the style reminiscent of these works can be found in guitar works such as *L'arc en ciel* (1984) and *To the Edge of Dream*.

In the last two decades of his life, Takemitsu enjoyed wide international recognition. Frequent commissions from important ensembles, orchestras, and soloists established him as an icon of late 20th-century music. Growing out of the previous decade, his music of the 1990s continued his exploration of tonality. Various examples of this unapologetic neo-tonality are found within the guitar works from the period, such as *In the Woods*.

A true masterpiece of the repertoire, *In the Woods* is virtually a compendium of Takemitsu's mature language. The titles of all of its movements reference natural locations. *Wainscot Pond*, however, is named after a painting by Cornelia Foss, of a location never visited by Takemitsu.³⁶ Like *All in Twilight* (1988, inspired by Paul Klee), in *In the Woods* extra-musical sources of inspiration combine with Takemitsu's thematic series, adding a layer of symbolism. All movements of the piece relate to a thematic series: *Wainscot Pond* to “Waterscape,” *Rosedale* to “Garden,” and *Muir Woods* to “Garden” and “Trees.” Featuring the Heian handscroll narrative form, each movement is also a self-contained work. Nonetheless, the resurfacing of particular motivic themes and complete sections occurs both within

²⁹ Preface to *Rain Coming*.

³⁰ James Siddons, *Toru Takemitsu: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 14.

³¹ *Confronting Silence*, 97.

³² Burt, 190.

³³ *Confronting Silence*, 97.

³⁴ Preface to *Rain Coming*.

³⁵ *Folios II* was described as “rain music” by Takemitsu in the program notes of the original LP release.

³⁶ The painting was in a postcard he received at the hospital, where he composed the three movements. See Graham Wade, liner notes for Shin-ichi Fukuda, *Japanese Guitar Music*, Vol. 1, Naxos 8.573153, 2014.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY: (cont.)

single movements and across the entire suite. This cyclical characteristic parallels the circular perambulation integral to the design of Japanese gardens. Takemitsu himself said that the experience of a Japanese garden is “like the cyclical rings of karma, one always comes back.”³⁷ *Muir Woods* illustrates well how Takemitsu makes use of this form. Located in a humid valley nestled in the mountains of Marin County outside San Francisco, Muir Woods National Monument is crossed by a figure-8 trail that loops around a grove of *Sequoia Sempervirens*. This characteristic, and its similarity to the Japanese garden, was surely not missed by Takemitsu. The trail also crosses a stream that runs through the grove, and perhaps for this reason Takemitsu restates a theme from *Wainscot Pond*, referencing “Water” within the “Garden” theme (Figure 4). This theme is never repeated identically. Minute differences are always present, reminiscent of the way Takemitsu manipulated his pitch set series of the 1960s. The effect is that of a dreamlike remembrance.³⁸

Figure 4: “Water” theme from *Wainscot Pond* (mm. 45–47) and *Muir Woods* (mm. 49–51).³⁹



The aspect of reminiscence across movements is also supported by the tonal organization of the work: Mvt. I, D \flat major to B minor; mvt. II, chromatic octatonic to A minor; mvt. III, D \flat major. Despite their clear tonal structure, movements I and II are tonally open-ended. It is only upon hearing the complete work that a sense of tonal closure is achieved. One could argue that Takemitsu creates

a triptych with three open-ended handscrolls, each one self-contained but only made whole alongside the others. Moreover, this aspect of cyclical unity is also reinforced on a small scale, as many of the overall centers described above are foreshadowed or recapitulated in important themes across movements (Figures 5.1–5.3).

Figure 5.1: *Muir Woods*, mvt. III: A-minor theme (mm. 26–28); recapitulates final key of *Rosedale*, mvt. II.

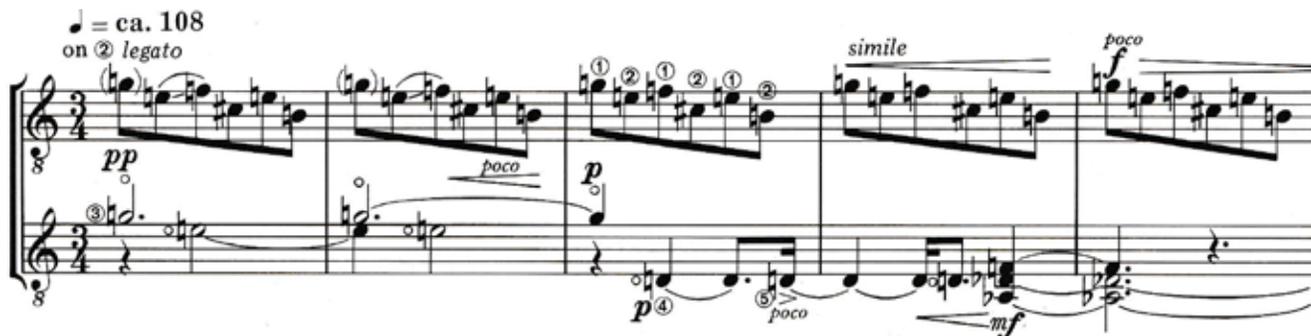


Figure 5.2: *Muir Woods*, mvt. III: B-pedal reiteration (mm. 21–25); recapitulates B-minor theme of *Wainscot Pond*, mvt. I (mm. 37–41).



This neo-tonality, however, is colored by the harmonic language that Takemitsu mastered over the course of the

Figure 5.3: *Wainscot Pond* (mm. 1–5), foreshadowing key (D \flat major) of final movement of *Muir Woods*.



³⁷ *Music for the Movies: Takemitsu*, directed by Charlotte Zwerin (Sydney, Australia: Special Broadcasting Service, 1996).

³⁸ Burt calls this procedure a “paramnesic” recollection (p. 35).

³⁹ Tōru Takemitsu, *In the Woods: Three Pieces for Guitar* (New York: Schott, 1996).

previous decades. Extended areas, and even complete thematic motives, are still constructed within his favored octatonic mode and its derivative. The most chromatic movement, *Rosedale*, opens with a complete octatonic set and the characteristic minute alteration: an extra pitch F (Figure 6). Finally, the overall tonal center is itself colored by the octatonic mode, as the D \flat -major harmony is always accompanied by pitches B and E, completing a subset of that mode (0,1,4,6,9).

Conclusion

Although it was his last published work, *In the Woods* was not Takemitsu's last piece for guitar. In fact, his very last composition was a double concerto for guitar and violin,

Spectral Canticle (1995). Despite his prolific output for our instrument, the guitar community has been slow in embracing the gifts of this vast literature. With the sole exception of *Toward the Sea*, the other ensemble works for the guitar are noticeably absent from recordings and seldom featured in performance. Moreover, there are gaps to be filled in scholarly research, such as a survey of the presence of the guitar in Takemitsu's movie soundtracks. Twenty years have passed since Takemitsu's death, yet unexplored treasures remain in his music. Like the Heian period handscrolls, this article finishes in open-ended form: I invite the guitar community to discover and hatch a few of those "universal eggs" left to us by this great composer.

Figure 6: *Rosedale* (page 1, system 1).⁴⁰



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⁴⁰ Ibid.

THE NOCTURNAL, OP. 70, AND BRITTEN'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

By Josinaldo Costa

"It won't be madly popular because it is the strangest and remotest thing—but then dreams are strange and remote."

—Benjamin Britten to Lady Harewood regarding *Nocturne*, 1958.¹

1. Introduction

In any musical instrument's history, a dialectic exists between moments in which development reaches a standard, and those in which revolutionary steps bring about dramatic changes to the status quo. Most often, individuals are the actors in this dynamic. One can simply look at the contributions of Andrés Segovia and Greg Smallman to find examples of this *thesis* and *antithesis*. In rarer instances, particular compositions perform these roles. Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal after John Dowland*, Op. 70 (1963) is one such case. While paying an undeniable compliment to Bream in composing a piece that assumes technical mastery devoid of ostentatious displays,² Britten made no artistic compromises. In the *Nocturnal* he deployed the full power of his musical language, writing not only one of the guitar's most loved masterpieces but a work that expanded our instrument's expressive boundaries.

Much has been said about the *Nocturnal's* intricate compositional procedures. Despite its simple premise of a reverse variation form upon Dowland's *Come heavy sleep*, each of the *Nocturnal's* episodes are archetypal examples of Britten's mastery of the variation principle. Another defining characteristic of the *Nocturnal* is its veiled programmatic nature. While this is often found in other Britten works, the *Nocturnal's* programmatic principle most importantly underscores its association with his vocal music. Avoiding the telling of a particular story, as in Britten's song cycles, the program in the *Nocturnal* is a succession of "states of mind, and the ways in which physical and emotional factors interact."³

Stephen Goss has noted the importance of vocal music to the *Nocturnal*, especially through the relationship between rhetoric in music of the Elizabethan era and Britten's motivic manipulation.⁴ Different from other analysts,

who most often focus on a descriptive genealogy of variation, Goss carefully dissects each section of the *Nocturnal* in relation to rhetorical gestures of *Come heavy sleep*. In doing so, he successfully argues that the pathos of melancholy is translatable from Dowland into the *Nocturnal's* programmatic features. This type of hermeneutics has been attempted by scholars of Britten's music in more expanded forms. Arnold Whittall has found that the use of key area relationships can be cross-referenced not only within a work but also between different works.⁵ Philip Rupprecht, through a more comprehensive and eclectic approach, has been able to describe how Britten created his own grammatical symbology: "a kind of wordless language—a characteristic way of presenting and shaping the interplay of essentially musical ideas within an unfolding discourse."⁶

In this article I will follow Rupprecht's example. While acknowledging what other authors have noted in analytical discussions, I will compare the *Nocturnal* to other works by Britten in search of shared characteristics that can help us in understanding implied meaning. I do not intend to provide a route towards any specific interpretation, let alone a scripted program. Rather, I expect that this investigation will elucidate how Britten's musical language is deployed in the *Nocturnal* in a breakthrough manner. Finally, I hope that this discussion can be of help to performers. As William Primrose noted, "a comprehensive study and knowledge of Britten's style of composition... might lead the performers to decorous conclusions."⁷

2. Wordless Speech

Britten's time-consuming task of composing and producing several works for the stage means that the decades of the 1950s and '60s were markedly absent of published instrumental and chamber works by him. The lone examples before *Nocturnal* are *Lachrymae*, Op. 48 (1950) and the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, Op. 49 (1951). The *Cello Suite No. 1* (1964) and *Cello Suite No. 2* (1967) appear alongside *Gemini Variations*, Op. 73 (1965) and the *Suite for Harp*, Op. 83 (1969) in the subsequent years of the

¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 387.

² Peter Evans, "Britten's Cello Symphony," *Tempo* 66/67 (1963): 2. I here paraphrase Evans regarding Rostropovich.

³ Arnold Whittall, "Tonality in Britten's Song Cycles with Piano," *Tempo* 26 (1971): 11.

⁴ Stephen Goss, "Come Heavy Sleep: Motive and Metaphor in Britten's Nocturnal for Guitar Op. 70" *Guitar Forum* 1 (2001): 58.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Philip E. Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 1.

⁷ Quoted in David L. Sills, "Benjamin Britten's 'Lachrymae': an Analysis for Performers," *Journal of the American Viola Society* 13, no. 3 (1997): 1.

sixties. The most conspicuous quality shared between these compositions is their reliance upon the variation form. In these works (and in other instances in Britten's work where variation comes to the fore) the usage of the variation principle is characterized by "the development of variations from fragments or motives, rather than from the themes directly; incorporation of parody elements; the overlapping of variations; the combination of variation technique with other compositional devices, especially fugues and grounds."⁸ The idiosyncratic manner in which Britten handles the idea of variation is clear in the language he uses to refer to this process: "reflexion" (in *Lachrymae*) and "metamorphoses" (in Op. 49).

In reverse variation forms, such as the *Nocturnal* and *Lachrymae*, the opening section performs the double task of foreshadowing the theme itself, while also providing thematic building blocks utilized in the process of revealing the theme. In *Nocturnal's* first section, "Musingly," elements of Dowland's *Come heavy sleep* are dissected and paraphrased, providing harmonic and motivic content to this rhapsodic opening (Figure 1). Of these, the falling fourth motive (B-F#) and the semitone motive (E-F) are of clear structural importance. Most of the raw pitch material

can be inferred as being from the key centers of C major, E major, and F minor (C-F being a transposition of the B-F# motive). Moreover, these motivic relationships are also significant in regard to the semantics of the work. As described above, Goss points out that the falling fourth is a mark of "melancholy" in 16th-century musical rhetoric (the "tear"); the semitone, of which several examples are easily found in Dowland, is referred to as "yearning/anguished hope" (when ascending) and "grief" (descending). The tension generated by the semitone E-F that closes "Musingly" and its expansion to the polychord E major/F minor is a process that can be found elsewhere. In *Metamorphoses*, for example, Britten represents the "sweet unknown words of Pan... and scorning return of Syrinx" through a collision of A major and A# major/minor respectively (Figure 2).⁹

In Britten's vocal works, this type of superimposition of key centers (often distanced by an interval of a second) opens interesting paths to the interpretation of meaning. Works such as *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes* make extended use of this device, an *Urmotiv* of dramatic conflict.¹⁰ In *Nocturne*, Op. 60, a cycle of seven songs for tenor, strings,

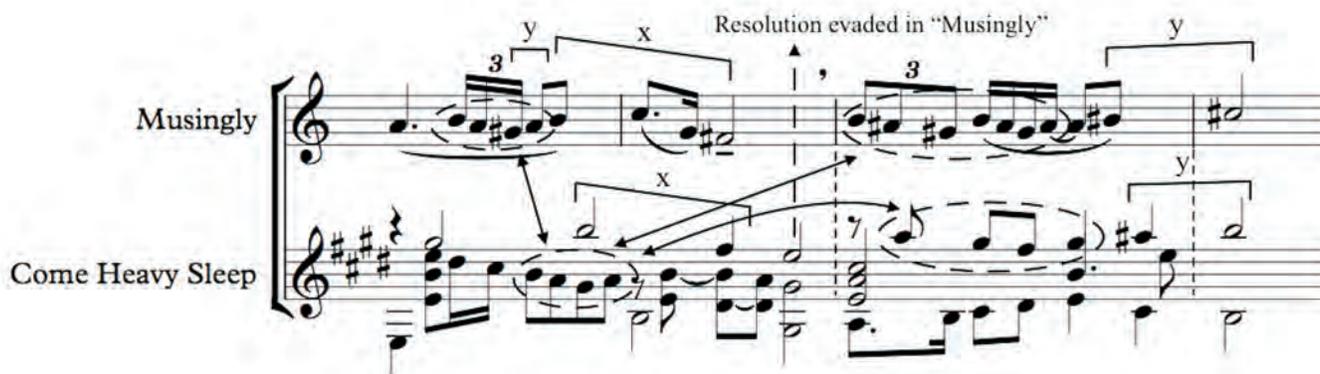


Figure 1: Elements of "Musingly" derived from *Come heavy sleep* (X - "tear" motive; Y - "yearning" motive).



Figure 2: *Metamorphoses after Ovid*: the voices of Pan (mm. 1-2) vs. Syrinx (mm. 7-8).

⁸ Siân Pouncy, quoted in Sills, 20-21.

⁹ Quote from Frank Mulder, "An Introduction and Programmatical Analysis of the 'Six Metamorphoses After Ovid' by Benjamin Britten," *Journal of the International Double Reed Society* 20 (1992): 1.

¹⁰ Goss, 67.

THE NOCTURNAL, OP. 70: (cont.)

English Horn: Voice:
She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms Out...

Figure 3: Nocturne, Op. 60/*The Kind Ghosts* (Owen).

and seven obligato instruments, Britten sets the disturbing text of the war poet Wilfred Owen (*The Kind Ghosts*) to a recurring D-minor chord superimposed over an E pedal, while singer and English horn shift ambiguously between D major/minor and E major/minor triadic material. Fitting for Britten's language, the transformation of pure triads into dissonances can be interpreted as "supporting the metaphor in the poem: an illusion of peace, built on a foundation of conflict and violence" (Figure 3).¹¹

Nocturne is grouped by Britten within a series of works on the theme of sleep and dreams, alongside the *Nocturnal* and the *Serenade*, Op. 31 (1941) for tenor, horn, and strings. These works deal with troubling aspects of sleep, and Britten has been explicit in regard to the *Nocturnal's* "very disturbing images," which are directly "inspired by the Dowland song, which of course itself has very strange undertones in it."¹² The inclusion of the *Nocturnal* in the programmatic theme of sleep alongside these two major song cycles, as well as its basis in a texted vocal work by Dowland, further reinforces the idea that wordless speech is an important aspect of the *Nocturnal's* mode of narrative. The guitar, similarly to the viola in *Lachrymae*, attempts to replace an orator and is given the role of dramatizing "the gulf—central to Britten's art—between instrumental utterance that is complete in itself and an articulate utterance, grounded more directly in the expressive capabilities of verbal language."¹³

3. The Form of Dream

As British composers in the 20th century dealt with issues of national identity, they often looked back to their

country's history for inspiration. Like Dowland, Purcell became an important touchstone for Britten, and it is natural that elements of Purcell's music would become part of Britten's language.¹⁴ *Serenade* and *Nocturne* display a formal organization reminiscent of Purcell, which Britten himself described as "the continuous movement made up of independent, short sections mysteriously linked by subtle contrasts of key, mood, and rhythm."¹⁵ Although this could simply mean that there are no stops between songs of the cycle, Britten goes further and uses this gambit to create the effect of a dreamlike suspension of time. As remarked by Holst,¹⁶ there is no room for "time-by-the-clock" in *Nocturne*, and the same type of effect seems to be at play in *Nocturnal*.

Other formal aspects of *Serenade* and *Nocturne* contribute to the sleep atmosphere. Like *Nocturnal*, these song cycles describe a parabolic arch of dramatic intensity. Reminiscent of the palindromic "night music" of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, the most active sections in Britten's sleep music are the ones reaching/leaving the more static points of the parabola (beginning, vertex, end). Although of limited utility as a musical argument, it is unavoidable to note how similar this organization is to the REM sleep cycle. Relating the form of *Nocturnal* to archetypes of the Jungian collective unconsciousness has also been attempted.¹⁷

4. Mysterious Links

Purcell's "mysterious links" also account for Britten's transformation of motivic material within different parts of sectional works. In *Lachrymae*, the first tetrachord of Dowland's *If my complaints* can be identified throughout

¹¹ Anna Grace Perkins, "Expanded Perceptions of Identity in Benjamin Britten's Nocturne, Op. 60" (Master's thesis, University of North Texas, 2008).

¹² Benjamin Britten and Paul Kildea, *Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 326.

¹³ Rupperecht, 15.

¹⁴ Fifty Purcell song realizations and editions of *The Fairy Queen* and *Dido and Aeneas* appear in Britten's published catalog.

¹⁵ Imogen Holst, "Britten's 'Nocturne,'" *Tempo* (1959): 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Iznaola according to Goss, 55.

the whole work as a source of both harmonic and motivic material. This tetrachord ends on the familiar semitone of “sigh/yearning,” a clear case of text depiction on the word “complaints.” Taking note of this built-in quality of the tetrachord, Britten exploits this feature to great effect. In *Lachrymae*’s Variation 2, the final measure displays an expansion of the semitone to a major/minor conflict, and the imaginary narrator “cannot seem to decide: should the viola’s minor third prevail, or the piano’s Piccardy third?” (Figure 4). In *Nocturne*, through similar exploration of word painting, one is able to find interesting relationships, such as “the low repeated notes of midnight’s bell (song 4: Middleton) [that] become transformed into the nightmare sound of distant drum-beats of an approaching army (song 5: Wordsworth).”¹⁸

The first instance of this manipulation in the *Nocturnal* is found in the transformation of the E-F semitone from “Musingly” to “Very Agitated.” As described above, the intrusion of the pitch F disrupts the E-major final cadence of “Musingly,” delaying the arrival of this key center that seemed omnipresent and yet altogether elusive. This disruption is accompanied by a rhythmic component, a rocking rhythm implying hemiola (Figure 5). While appearing only briefly in “Musingly,” these two elements are developed to a great extent in “Very Agitated,” and



Figure 4: *Lachrymae*, Variation 2, ending.

the whole variation can be derived from the harmonic/motivic and rhythmic materials of the E-major/F-minor cadence. In conjunction with the information that we have from the above works by Britten, we are able to reach a few conclusions regarding this process. Foremost, it is unarguable that an aspect of harmonic and motivic conflict is being manipulated to convey meaning: from a purely musical issue that causes the delay of resolution, to a psychological state of instability that is the actual focus of the narrative. This hermeneutic process takes an

interesting turn when we explore the text that accompanies Dowland’s song.

5. Conflict and Identity

As expected within the paradigms of 16th-century rhetoric, all instances of the semitone motive in Dowland’s *Come heavy sleep* are used to paint particularly significant words: “true death,” “vital breath,” “thought-worn soul.” Of these, the gesture that accompanies “thought-worn soul”

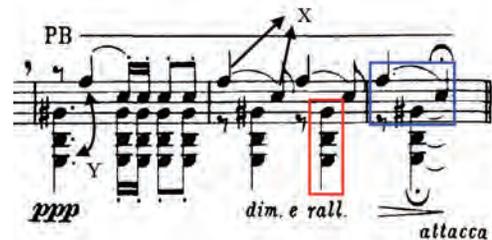


Figure 5: *Nocturnal*, “Musingly” ending: implied hemiola; E-F semitone (Y) and “tear” motive (X); E major/F minor conflict (red/blue).

is restated at both the opening “Musingly” as well as in the final appearance of the theme at the end of *Nocturnal*, ranking it in a place of higher importance (Figure 6, next page).

At this point, given the structural importance of the musical gesture (and the extent in which it is developed) and the text that it accompanies, it is possible to argue that Britten is establishing a narrative that focuses on a central idea of “conflict” as a topic. In this conflict, one finds two opposite poles, “true death” and “vital breath,” and the narrative person is placed in a “thought-worn” condition. This thematic plot is, in fact, one that is frequently found in Britten’s works. Various scholars and biographers have noted that conflict in Britten is not simply a matter of pure musical drama but rather a multilayered manifestation

¹⁸ Holst, 16.

THE NOCTURNAL, OP. 70: (cont.)

of inner struggles of sexual orientation and acceptance, a preoccupation and source of great anguish in Britten's life.¹⁹ Although the specificity of this representation, especially in the subjective realm of *Nocturnal*, is not essential to the appreciation of the work, it is important to acknowledge the role that ambiguity and implicit messages play in the music of Britten.

- *Lachrymae's* Variation 6: The metrical uncertainty created by shifted accents and eighth-note groupings in the piano part is the most conspicuous similarity. Floating above the piano, the metrically displaced quotation of Dowland's *Flow my tears* is almost parenthetical within this rhythmic organization (Figure 7, next page).

- *Serenade* "Elegy": In this setting, Britten creates a tridimensional texture that closely resembles the texture

The image shows a musical score for the end of the Nocturnal theme. It features two staves: a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part begins with a fermata and is marked 'ppp'. The violin part has a fermata and is marked 'as soft as possible (quasi niente)'. Above the piano part, there are performance instructions: '- slower and dying away - (più lento e morendo)'. A bracket with the number '5' is placed under the piano part. The score is dated 'Aldeburgh - Nov. 11th, 1963'.

Figure 6: End of *Nocturnal* theme (first fermata marks ending of the Dowland original).

6. Searching for Resolution

After its introduction in the opening variations of the *Nocturnal*, tonal conflict becomes an obsessive problem. As Britten describes a tour of different manifestations of this conflict, the dominant narrative of the piece is ultimately one of search for resolution—of “true death.” Comparable to the $C\flat$ of Mozart's *Andante* from *Symphony No. 39*,²⁰ the E-F major/minor harmonic conflict, alongside the quartal “tear” gesture, dominates the musical discourse. In going through this process, many of Britten's favorite devices are utilized. Below I provide a list of each subsequent variation of *Nocturnal*, a short description of their foremost characteristics, alongside excerpts from other works by Britten that can be associated with them. This exercise is especially helpful in instances of texted works, where Britten's manner of representation is most clearly revealed.

“III. Restless”

This variation develops the rhythmic conflict of two against three that is created by the hemiola/rocking rhythm of the final cadence of “Musingly.” A recurring drone provides the background to a dialog between low and high voices, frequently clashing in key center and alternating between a focus on the “tear” and “yearn” motives. Compare:

of “Restless.” Parts imply different key centers and display contrasting metric accentuation and predominant rhythm. The semitone motive is featured in the forefront of the texture (horn). This familiar trait receives the usual treatment, and a triple cross-relation $A\flat$ vs. $A\sharp$ vs. $A\#$ ($B\flat$) is mirrored by the harmonic progression of F major/minor to F# major/minor. The text is a poem by William Blake that speaks of sick, secret, and predatory love (Figure 8, next page).²¹

“IV. Uneasy”

“Uneasy” is the most epigrammatic variation of *Nocturnal*. Short gestures based upon the rocking rhythm of “thought-worn soul” and the quartal “tear” dominate the outer portions of the variation, while a central scalar section develops the semitone motive. The almost onomatopoeic nature of this variation is reminiscent of Britten's representation of animals/creatures, particularly within a context of fear and repulsion. The tremolando chords that punctuate this variation are commonly found in nocturnal and non-human passages in Britten's stage and vocal works. Compare:

- *Our Hunting Fathers*, Op. 8 (1936) “Rats”: The puzzling theme of animals mixed with pacifist undertones kept this

¹⁹ A number of studies have focused on the matter of sexuality in Britten's life and music. A good starting point is Philip Brett, Jenny Doctor, George E. Haggerty, and Susan McClary, *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays* (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 2006).

²⁰ The movement is in $A\flat$ major. The introduction of a $C\flat$ creates a disruption and change to the minor mode that will be taken to great harmonic lengths, reaching as far as enharmonic B minor.

²¹ Lloyd Whitesell, “Translated Identities in Britten's *Nocturne*,” *Repercussions* 6, no. 1 (1997): 109–34.



Figure 7: *Lachrymae*, Variation 6: *Flow my tears* quotation.

song cycle from becoming popular.²² However, some truly virtuosic writing can be found in it, such as the opening “Rats.” A scattering of rodents roaming under floorboards and behind walls is depicted; the similarity to the short rhythmic gestures of “Uneasy” is apparent (Figure 9, next page).

- *Midsummer Night Dream*, Op. 64 (1958) “Act I - Slow and Mysterious”: String tremolandi and glockenspiel tintinnabulation—representing midnight clock chimes, reminiscent of the repeated notes of “Uneasy”—create the night atmosphere to the entrance of the fairies in the woods during twilight (Figures 10 & 11, next page).

“V. March-like”

Although ubiquitous in the music of Britten, in few instances is the march presented in direct reference to its military affect. A conscientious objector during World War II, Britten saw the march as an opportunity to compound symbols and articulate more

complex meanings. This occurs through the derivation of a march’s underlying rhythmic element from a motive that appears in different contexts within the same work. In *Nocturnal*, we can track the final “Musingly” rocking rhythm; first becoming the aforementioned tintinnabulation of “Uneasy”; these bells morph into a muted snare drum (*pizzicati*), and are eventually revealed as the obsessive rhythmic force of “March-like.” This interesting manipulation of the “thought-worn soul” motive underscores the idea of a narrator that is conflicted by antagonizing positions and continuously scrutinizes the same problem through different perspectives. The aforementioned example, from *Nocturne’s* songs 4 and 5, is a close equivalent.

“VI. Dreaming”

This is the first and only variation whose title directly refers to sleep, and one is inclined to wonder if the narrator was in

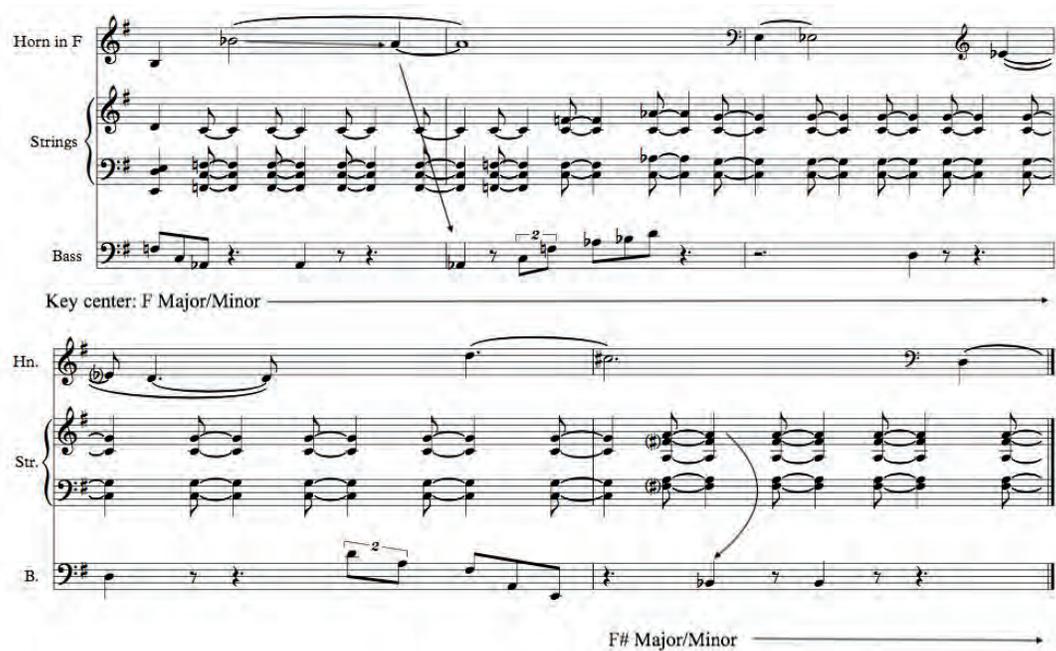


Figure 8: *Serenade*, “Elegy” (Blake): tonal conflict based upon the semitone motive.

an insomniac state through the first stages of the *Nocturnal*. Whatever may be the case, “Dreaming” marks the middle

²² Britten and his collaborator W.H. Auden had an awareness of the complex relationships between men and animals, and that men had something to learn from them. See Donald Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell, 2000), 32.

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of the work, and its still character fits within the framework of an arch form. It is the least ambiguous of all variations in its clear manner of representation of sleep and dreamlike sounds. The sonorous colors achieved by the contrast

between open-string dominated harmonies versus harmonics is of an almost orchestral richness. Compare:

- *Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 2: Introduction "The Wood"*: The resemblance of this opening to "Dreaming" is

This musical score shows the string section (Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass) for the 'Rats' section of 'Our Hunting Father'. The music is characterized by short, rhythmic gestures that imitate the sounds of rodents. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'pizz.' (pizzicato), 'arco' (arco), and 'Sul C' (Sul tasto). A box with the number '5' is present above the first measure of the Violin I part.

Figure 9: *Our Hunting Father*, "Rats" (string section): short rhythmic gestures representing rodents in onomatopoeic manner.

This musical score shows the string section (Violin I and II) for the 'Act I - Slow and Mysterious' section of *Midsummer Night Dream*. The music features tremolandi (tremolos) in the strings, creating a slow and mysterious atmosphere. The score includes performance instructions such as 'dim.' (diminuendo).

Figure 10: *Midsummer Night Dream*, "Act I - Slow and Mysterious": string tremolandi.

This musical score shows the percussion and harp sections for the 'Act I - Slow and Mysterious' section of *Midsummer Night Dream*. The score includes performance instructions such as 'Tri.' (Tintinnabulation), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'Glock.' (Glockenspiel), 'f' (forte), and 'p cresc.' (piano crescendo). The percussion part features a rhythmic pattern of triangles, and the harp part features a rhythmic pattern of chords.

Figure 11: *Midsummer Night Dream*, "Act I - Slow and Mysterious": tintinnabulation.

unmistakable. Here, Tytania is lying asleep in the woods, and the procedure that has been established in this opera of a dichotomy between human sounds (strings) and the nonhuman sounds of the fairies' orchestra (high percussion/woodwinds/harps) is displayed in the same declamatory manner of "Dreaming" (Figure 12, viewable online).²³

"VII. Gently Rocking"

At first sight, the high register tremolando and pianissimo dynamics are a clear depiction of a dreamlike suspension and cradling movement. This innocent gesture is, however, almost cynical when the key center of D \flat is taken into account. The tension in regard to the other dominant key centers of the *Nocturnal* (expressly C and E) is aggravated by the ominous ringing of the open lower strings. Here one finds not only an implied clashing key (C major-derived quartal leaps) but also an almost random nondescript bell-like metrical organization. Compare:

- *Midsummer Night's Dream Act 1: Oberon is passing:*

The slow march that marks the entrance of Oberon is announced by the fairies orchestra of bright timbres. The footsteps of Oberon and Tytania's (and their meddling nature) is heard in the menacing sounds of low percussion and brasses (Figure 13, viewable online).

- *Lachrymae*, Variation 10: A close equivalent in texture to "Gently Rocking," this portion of *Lachrymae* is, however, devoid of the same tonal and metrical conflicts. Nonetheless, it provides a context in regard to what type of sound palette

Britten might have had in mind when writing this passage for the guitar (Figure 14).

7. Come Heavy Sleep

When the *Nocturnal's* "Passacaglia" arrives, we understand that the ominous bells of "Gently Rocking" were foreshadowing this critical point in the narrative, where seemingly all of the problems of the narrator's "thought-worn soul" reach a breaking point. The guitar shifts to the declamatory first-person "wordless speech" for the first time since "Musingly," the inversion of the initial B-F# "tear" motive into the passacaglia's incipit F#-B leap seems like a desperate attempt to finally state the theme, and thus end the excruciating psychological torture the narrator has endured. However, the passacaglia ground acts as an element of disruption, and the wordless call of "Come heavy sleep" will go through an all-consuming development before the final arrival of the complete Dowland song.²⁴

The interpretation of implied meaning in elements of the *Nocturnal's* "Passacaglia" finds support in Britten's use of this ground bass form in his vocal works. The passacaglia performs the role of "expressing and intensifying certain moods in his operas and vocal works... [where] the contrapuntal polarity between the ground and the expressive flow of the vocal line is one that is carefully controlled to convey the text's innermost expression." Additionally, like its placement at the ending in *Nocturnal*, the passacaglia is often at a "crucial dramatic high point of

Figure 14: *Lachrymae*, Variation 10, tremolando over metrically uncertain chordal accompaniment.

Figure 15: *Serenade*, "Dirge": semitone-derived ground stated by singer.

²³ Figure 12 is viewable online at "See the Latest Issue" page at guitarfoundation.org.

²⁴ The repetition of words and phrases is a feature of Elizabethan musical rhetoric (subjunctio). See Benjamin Dwyer, "'Within It Lie Ancient Melodies': Dowland's Musical Rhetoric and Britten's 'Songs from the Chinese,'" *The Musical Times* 153, no. 1919 (2012): 87–102, for an extended discussion of this and other rhetorical devices.

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an opera or song cycle to reflect on a tragedy or intensify a dialogue.”²⁵ Darrell Handel also points out that the passacaglia is typically used in association with the topic of death in Britten.²⁶ “Dirge” from the *Serenade* is an exceptional example, where the passacaglia ground is stated by the singer over a fugal statement by accompanying strings and horn. The ground, most notably, is saturated with the semitone motive that the *Nocturnal* so forcefully associates with death (Figure 15, previous page).

The delayed arrival of the pure E-major triad at the end of the passacaglia in the *Nocturnal* is a moment of great relief. The lifting of the burden is almost physical, when Dowland’s *Come heavy sleep* arises out of the irregular metrics of “with force.” The musical result is similar to the ending of *Nocturne* (Shakespeare’s “When most I wink”), where the song cycle’s initial overlapping of tonal centers eventually defuses in an ethereal D \flat -major harmony (over the text “nights [are] bright days when dreams do show thee me”) (Figure 16).²⁷

In the *Nocturnal*, however, the relief brought by the resolution of the musical drama and the statement of *Come heavy sleep* is never completely fulfilled. Britten’s decision to restate the ending strain of the text ultimately finds the “thought-worn soul” D \sharp as the final sounding pitch, instead of the “death be stole” E found in the Dowland original (Figure 6). The narrative concludes in an open-ended statement, with yet another iteration of the yearning semitone (E-D \sharp) and its companion, the “tear” quartal leap (here transposed to G \sharp -D \sharp).

8. Conclusion

The guitar, perhaps unlike any other instrument, has benefited from a nonlinear historical progression of its repertoire. Particularly during the 20th century, composers have drawn from a multitude of historical and stylistic sources—from 19th-century pastiches to the contemporary avant-garde—with varying degrees of success. These contrasting facets of the instrument’s personality seemed poised for antagonism, a Janus-like head looking in opposite directions. Works for the guitar by major composers in the earlier part of the 20th century

(such as Boulez’s *Le marteau sans maître* of 1955) frequently featured the instrument as part of ensembles, perhaps evidence that the guitar’s individual voice was not deemed appropriate for the complete utterance of a composer’s ideas. Britten’s musical language and propensity to a historically unified oration found its near-ideal medium in the guitar.²⁸ Neither *thesis* nor *antithesis*, the *Nocturnal* merged these multiple facets in a new *synthesis*, and the consequences vis-à-vis the approach other composers took to the guitar were truly momentous. In a certain sense, the inconclusive manner in which *Nocturnal* ends was an invitation to others to explore the guitar as a fully formed vehicle of expression. One has to wonder if works such as Berio’s *Sequenza*, Maw’s *Music of Memory*, and Henze’s and Takemitsu’s collections of works would exist in the absence of Britten’s crucial contribution to our repertoire.

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Figure 16: Nocturne “When most I wink” (Shakespeare), ending.



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²⁵ Darrell Handel, “Britten’s Use of the Passacaglia,” *Tempo* (1970): 2

²⁶ Along with *Peter Grimes*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Billy Budd*, and *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, where an association with death can be found, other instrumental works such as the *Violin Concerto*, *Cello Symphony*, *Cello Suite No. 3*, *String Quartets Nos. 2 and 3* are additional instances of instrumental passacaglias in Britten.

²⁷ See Whitesell, 112, for a discussion of this opening.

²⁸ Interestingly, Britten never wrote a piece of the same scope as the *Nocturnal* for his own instrument, the piano. However, in the same year of 1963, he wrote a *piece de concours* for the Leeds Piano Competition on the familiar theme *Notturmo*.