

Three Suites for Cello Opp. 72, 80, and 87 by Benjamin Britten

Transcribed for Guitar

by

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A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved March 2012 by the
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May 2012

ABSTRACT

This project covers the transcription of Three Suites for Cello, opp. 72, 80, and 87, by Benjamin Britten, for guitar. These suites were chosen because of the influence of Bach, which is seen in the texture of the pieces, and because they can be played on guitar with very few changes. Music for unaccompanied cello has a history of being transcribed for guitar, including the Bach cello suites, and is a means for guitarists to expand the repertoire. In addition to documenting the changes made in adapting these pieces for guitar, a brief biographical sketch of the composer and descriptions of each movement are included. Also explained are articulation symbols and terminologies that are uncommon in music written for the guitar, and suggestions on how to perform the multitude of ornaments Britten has written in the score.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Because of the inherent difficulties in composing for the classical guitar, its repertoire is largely comprised of material written by guitarists who are also composers. While non-guitarist composers have written for the guitar, their contributions are typically limited in quantity.¹ For this reason, the practice of transcribing or arranging music of other composers has been commonplace in the history of the guitar. For example, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Dvorak, Debussy, Albeniz, Granados, Brahms, and Satie are all composers whose works have been arranged by guitarists seeking to expand the repertoire of the instrument.

The focus of this project is a transcription of *Three Suites for Cello, opp. 72, 80, and 87* by Benjamin Britten. These suites were chosen because of Britten's use of "compound melodic" notation in which multi-voiced textures may be derived from what appears on paper to be a single voice, a notational style influenced by the solo cello works of Johann Sebastian Bach.

In this transcription for guitar, a primary objective was to stay as close to the original as possible; however, some changes were necessary to accommodate the idiomatic qualities of the guitar and its technique. These changes are documented and explained in the paper. The relationship these pieces have with Bach's notational style in his Cello

¹ These composers only wrote one work for solo guitar: Benjamin Britten, William Walton, Frank Martin, Darius Milhaud, and Michael Tippett.

Suites is explored as well as the selection of left-hand fingerings that help to realize “implied” or “hidden” polyphony. Britten’s written ornaments and bowing articulations are also defined and examined as to how these may be interpreted by guitarists. Lastly, a brief biography of Britten is included so that the reader is able to place the suites in context of Britten’s life.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY

Edward Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England, on November 22, 1913. His musical training started at the age of five with the help of his mother, an amateur singer. She taught him piano until the age of seven, when he started formal lessons with a local teacher, Ethel Astle. His music education continued at the age of ten when he entered the South Lodge Preparatory School, where he started taking viola lessons with Audrey Alston. She recognized Britten's formidable talents and encouraged him to study composition, taking him to the Norwich Triennial Festival where he heard Frank Bridge conduct one his own compositions, entitled *The Sea*. This experience was a pivotal moment for Britten, who three years later was introduced to Bridge at the same festival, consequently studying with him until 1930, when at 17 he decided to make music his career. Britten later said that Bridge insisted on his developing a solid technical foundation that would allow no barrier between what was in his mind and on the paper.²

Britten entered the Royal Conservatory of Music on scholarship in 1930, but felt dissatisfied with the challenges and restrictions placed upon him by the school. His reputation as a composer grew while at the school however, and he made a living through composition alone after completing his studies.

² Elizabeth Shin-I Su, "Innovative Use of Technique in Benjamin Britten's Cello Works: The Inspiration of Mstislav Rostropovich" (D.M.A. dissertation, University of Maryland, 2003), 5.

After finishing school, Britten created film music for the General Post Office Film Unit, starting in 1935. This opportunity to work on composing incidental music allowed him to write in a variety of styles that complement different styles of films, and also enabled him to meet the English poet W.H. Auden. Auden and Britten occasionally collaborated on music for films, with Auden writing lyrics.

Two years after Britten started work for the General Post Office Film Unit, he met the tenor Peter Pears. They shared an apartment in London a year later, and accompanied one another on the aforementioned trip to America in 1939. This relationship influenced Britten more than any other professional association; Britten wrote all his major-tenor roles and most of his solo-vocal works with Pears' voice in mind. Pears and Britten stayed in America from 1939-1942. Their visit started with a few weeks in Canada, later coming to the United States to hear a performance of Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* by the New York Philharmonic, and to meet with Aaron Copland in Woodstock. Their plans for returning to England were derailed by the start of World War II in 1939, and they remained in America until the spring of 1942. Britten's composed many pieces while in America, including *Violin Concerto in D minor*, *Les Illuminations*, *String Quartet No. 1 in D*, and *Sinfonia da Requiem*.

Upon his return to England, Britten contracted measles, and his compositional output slowed for a time. After his recovery, he began composing the opera *Peter Grimes* in 1944. The work, which premiered in

1945, garnered critical and popular success, and spurred Britten to write many other operas, including *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and chamber operas *The Beggar's Opera*, *Turn of the Screw*, and *Curlew*. His focus remained on composing operas throughout the 1950s, aided by the Arts Council of Britain commissioning an opera in 1951. By the mid-1950s Britten suffered from exhaustion and placed composing on hold to go on tour with Pears. During their tour, which mostly occurred in Asia, Britten immersed himself in the culture, absorbing indigenous dance, music, and drama from Japan, and also heard various Gamelan styles while in Indonesia.

In 1960, Britten attended the premiere of Shostakovich's cello concerto in London. Mstislav Rostropovich, the cellist to whom Shostakovich had dedicated the concerto and the performer featured that evening, met with Britten after the concert and asked the composer to write a cello sonata for him. Britten had not written any solo cello music throughout his career, but after hearing Rostropovich's performance he agreed to the commission. This meeting with Rostropovich would influence Britten's compositional output until the composer's death in 1976. Starting with the *Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, op. 65*, in 1961, Britten dedicated five pieces to Rostropovich over the next ten years; *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, op. 68*, *Suite for Cello, op. 72*, *Second Suite for Cello, op. 80*, and *Third Suite for Cello, op. 87*. In the midst of writing these pieces for cello, Britten also composed several other

pieces, notably: *War Requiem* in 1961, which is widely considered his finest work; *Nocturnal after John Dowland* in 1963, his only solo-classical guitar work and widely considered a masterwork of theme and variations; *Curlew River*, *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, and *The Prodigal Son*, three operas that form the Church Parable triptych; and an opera, *Owen Wingrave*, in 1971.

After 1971, Britten's health began to decline. Doctors recommended surgery to replace a heart valve, which Britten agreed to after completion of *Death in Venice*, his last opera for Peter Pears. The surgery took place in December of 1973 and was successful, but caused a slight stroke. The stroke temporarily disabled his speech and permanently affected his right hand, making him unable to ever play piano again. In 1976, at the Aldeburgh Festival, Britten was awarded a life peerage. He died on November 4, 1976.

CHAPTER 3

THREE SUITES FOR CELLO

Britten's cello suites are complex pieces on many different levels. Their structure is difficult to hear, and their technical difficulty makes them challenging to play well. Because of this, the organization and content for each movement will be briefly described,³ as well as some of the important techniques that Britten incorporates in the suites.

Britten composed *Suite for Cello, op. 72* in November and December of 1964, four years after meeting Rostropovich at the premiere of Shostakovich's *Cello Concerto no. 1*. The first suite was premiered by Rostropovich at the Aldeburgh Festival on June 27, 1965. It is comprised of nine movements: *Canto primo, Fuga, Lamento, Canto secondo, Serenata, Marcia, Canto terzo, Bordone, and Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto*. The canto movements function similarly to ritornello sections in the baroque ritornello form, acting as unifiers for the music that surrounds them, and all share a multi-voiced texture, similar melodic contours, and harmonies that are predominated by diatonic sevenths and ninths.

Between each canto section, Britten places two movements that are different in character. In the *Fuga*, Britten follows the traditional structure of a fugue. The expository section, measures 1- 36, consists of a subject in the key of G major, and an answer in the dominant key of D major accompanied by a countersubject. The middle section, measures

³ I chose to leave out musical examples in this section because of their length, so please use the score for each reference.

37-107, features motivic material from the subject and re-entries of the subject in different keys. The concluding section, measures 108-131, presents the subject in the original key of G major, although fragmented by harmonics.

The *Lamento* is comprised of single-line melodies always concluding in an arpeggiated E minor triad. In the first section, measures 1-6, Britten uses descending motion for the triad. He uses ascending motion for the triad to differentiate the second section, measures 7-10, and resumes descending motion for the last section of this short movement, from measure 11-16.

The two movements that follow *Canto Secondo* are *Serenata* and *Marcia*. *Serenata* is played *pizzicato* throughout the movement, even on three- and four-note chords, requiring the cellist to strum these like playing a guitar. The movement is divided into three sections. After a five-measure introduction, the first section, measures 6-27, begins. The second section, measures 28-36, is differentiated by rhythmic change in the accompaniment and the use of 4:3 rhythm in the upper voice. The third section, measures 37-48, sees a return of material from the first section followed by use of the 4:3 rhythm from the second section. Britten employs the sounds of bugle calls and drum rolls in the next movement, *Marcia*. The bugle is emulated through harmonics and the drum by *col legno*, a technique where the cellist uses the wooden part of the bow to strike the strings. These elements make up the first section of the

movement, measures 1-29. The second section, measures 30-47, leaves behind the bugle calls and drum rolls, replacing them with wide-ranging arpeggios. The third section recalls the first section, from measure 48-71.

After *Canto Terzo* is the two final movements of the piece, *Bordone* and *Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto*. *Bordone* incorporates a drone on the second string of the cello that is played throughout the entire movement without pause. The movement is split into two sections with the first half containing flurries of notes that surround the drone, measure 1-15, and the second half presenting a serene melody that is accompanied by the drone, measure 16-31. The final movement, *Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto*, begins with running sixteenth notes that continue without pause until the canto theme from the first movement emerges at measure 114, concluding the first section. The second section alternates between passages from *Canto Primo* and the constant sixteenth notes from the first section of this movement, measures 114-139. It concludes with a variation of the canto theme using the sixteenth-note rhythm of the movement, measures 140-155.

The second suite was written in 1967 and premiered by Rostropovich on June 17, 1968, at the Aldeburgh Festival. It is comprised of five movements, *Declamato*, *Fuga*, *Scherzo*, "Andante Lento," and *Ciaccona*. Although this work contains four fewer movements than the first suite, they are close to the same length. Britten also places the *Fuga* as the second movement, the same position it held in the first suite.

Declamato is the first movement in the second suite. A three-measure long theme opens the movement that recalls Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony*. It is restated with variations four other times: measures 7-9, 16-18, 23-25, 32-36. Britten links the varied repeats of the theme with motivic material taken from the theme.

In *Fuga*, Britten strategically places rests in the fugue subject to allow for insertion of a countersubject while the answer is being stated. It also allows for the fugue to be comprised of two and sometimes three voices without ever sounding more than one note at a time. The fugue features standard sections; an exposition from measure 1-23, episodes alternating with middle entries from measure 24-53, and a final entry from measure 54-58. There is also another episode from measure 59-65 and a coda from measure 66-70.

Scherzo begins with a five-measure theme that Britten uses to form the movement's sections. The theme, measures 1-5, is stated multiple times in the first section, measures 1-21, with interruptions in the second section, measures 22-71, and disintegrated in the third section, measures 72-95. The interruptions that take place in the second section involve new material inserted in the middle of the theme, happening first at measure 25.

The fourth movement is untitled but does bear the tempo designation of "Andante Lento." It can be divided into four sections; the first section, measures 1-29, contains a six-measure theme that is

repeated three times; the second, measures 29-44, consists of new material that contrasts the first section, the third, measures 45-64, develops material from the first two sections, and the fourth, measures 65-79, provides a return to the first section.

The final movement, *Ciaccona*, contains frequent use of ornamentation, including trills, slides, glissandi, fingered tremolo and turns. There are three sections in the movement. Before the first section there is an eight-measure introduction, and there is a coda after the last section, from measure 162-165. The first section is from measures 9-72, and consists of twelve variations on the ground bass. The second section develops the motives from the ground bass and is from measure 73-108. The third section, measures 109-161, contains a return of the ground bass from the first section, but with slight modifications, including different starting pitches, intervals, and use of inversion.

Britten completed *Third Suite for Cello*, *op. 87* in early 1971 and gave it to Rostropovich while visiting Russia in April 1971. Its premiere was restricted until 1974 due to the Soviet government preventing Rostropovich from leaving the country. This was due to Rostropovich's support for the subversive novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who was responsible for writing about the Soviet forced labor camps, called *gulags*. When the premiere finally took place, it was at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall, on December 12, 1974. Like the first suite, there are nine movements; *Introduzione*, *Marcia*, *Canto*, *Barcarola*, *Dialogo*, *Fuga*,

Recitativo, *Moto perpetuo*, and *Passacaglia*. Britten uses the same structure for the suite as he did for *Nocturnal after John Dowland*; theme and variations, with the theme placed at the end of the piece and the variations preceding it. There are four themes used for the piece; the first three are taken from Tchaikovsky's volumes of folk song arrangements, and the fourth is a hymn tune from the *Kontakion* class of hymns, taken from the English Hymnal. The folk songs are *Mournful Song (Under the little apple tree)*, *Autumn*, and *Street song (The grey eagle)*, and the hymn tune is *Hymn for the Departed*, which Britten titles *Grant repose together with the saints* in the score. Britten wrote two versions of the first three measures of the *Kontakion*, because he found that Shostakovich had been brought up on a different version. Britten's version contains these notes; C, B, C, E flat, D, C, B, G, while Shostakovich's version contains these; C, B flat, C, E flat, D, C, G, G.

The opening movement of the suite, *Introduzione*, derives its upper voice from the *Kontakion*. Britten uses accelerating rhythms in the upper voice, a Japanese influence that can be seen in his other works. The structure of the movement is based around the chant-like phrase that is repeated five times.

The second movement, *Marcia*, is based on two of the folk songs, *Street song* and *Autumn*. The structure of the movement is ternary; the A section, from measure 1-21, uses rhythmic motives from *Street song*, and the B section, measures 22-49, uses an arpeggio from *Autumn*. The return

of the A section, measures 50-70, is not an exact repeat of the first A section.

Canto is the third movement of the suite. It shares a melodic contour with *Mournful Song*. The structure of the piece is very similar to *Lamento* from the first suite. In *Lamento*, phrases end on a descending minor triad, and the second section used an ascending triad. In *Canto*, all the phrases in the first section, measures 1 through the downbeat of 7, conclude with a note from the G-major triad. In the second section, measures 7-15, all phrases end with G sharp. The movement's final section, measures 16-20, concludes with wedge-shaped dyads converging on single notes that once again outline the notes of the G major triad. The wedge shape is produced by using successively smaller intervals between two notes that are sounded together; these literally look like a wedge shape in the score.

Barcarola is the fourth movement of the suite and shares a melodic contour with *Autumn*. The movement consists of arpeggios that outline chord progressions in G major for the first two sections, with the first section being from measure 1-15, and the second from measure 16-28. Britten introduces octatonic material in the third section,⁴ measure 29-42, and replaces the arpeggios from the first two sections with scalar passages. A "barcarola" is meant to evoke images of Venetian gondoliers,

⁴ Hui-Ju Hsieh, "Britten's Most Russian Tribute to Rostropovich: The Cello Suite No. 3, Opus 87," (D.M.A. dissertation, Boston University, 2007), 55.

and Britten does this by using a steady melodic contour that rises and falls within each measure in accordance with the pulse.

Dialogo is the fifth movement of the suite. The dialogue reveals a series of quotations from previous movements. In the first section, measures 1-18, the upper voice consists of a bowed line that uses parts of *Autumn* and *Mournful song*, and a lower voice comprised of *pizzicato* chords that use elements of the *Kontakion*. In the second section, measure 19-33, the upper voice retains characteristics of the first section, but the lower voice is now a single note instead of three- and four-note chords.

Fuga is positioned as the sixth movement of the suite and starts by quoting *Mournful song* as the fugue subject. The expository section of the piece, measure 1-14, presents a subject and an answer, however not clearly with the traditional tonic-dominant relationship. The middle section begins at measure 15, and contains entries of the subject in different registers, accompanied by motives from the subject. Britten does not bring back the subject in the original key area, but does place an inversion of the fugue answer in measure 34 by itself, marked *tranquillo*.

Recitativo is the sixth movement and makes references to *Autumn* and *Street song*. It begins with a restatement of the last three notes from the previous movement, and contains a wider variety of cello techniques than any of the other movements. The movement is essentially one fragment after another, each separated by a fermata.

Moto perpetuo follows, containing elements from the *Kontakion*.

This movement is highly chromatic, and its structure is not very obvious. The first section, measure 1 through the downbeat of 14, consists of two phrases that alternate with each other. The first phrase contains an ascending chromatic line coupled with a line that leaps a third and falls a step, with both lines converging on the same note by the phrase's end. The second phrase is a chromatic scale that winds around and back into the starting note of the next phrase. The second section's main difference is that the first phrase is descending. This section lasts from measure 14-26, until the first phrase's motion becomes static, neither trending up or down, from measure 27-34.

The final movement is *Passacaglia*. At the end, the three-folk songs are presented together with the *Kontakion*. Britten uses material from *Mournful song* for the movement. The *Passacaglia* theme is presented in measures 1 through the downbeat of 3, when an upper voice is introduced that interacts with the theme in various ways. Overall, the theme is played eleven times throughout the movement.

CHAPTER 4

ALTERATIONS

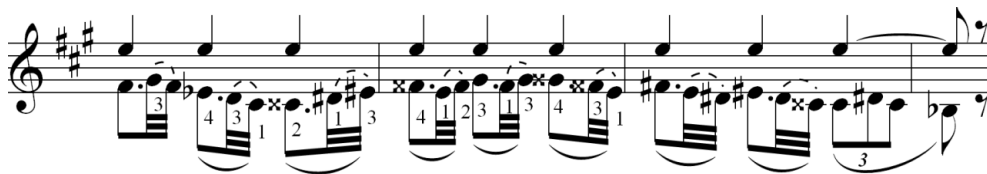
Whenever a piece for the cello is transcribed for guitar, one of the first things that must be considered is the *tessitura*, because the cello's lowest string is tuned a major third below the guitar's lowest string. Britten's cello suites make use of the full range of the instrument; therefore I decided that the most advantageous transposition for the guitar, where all notes could be incorporated, would be a major second higher, which is used for all three suites. Additionally, a common *scordatura* tuning for the guitar in which the sixth string is tuned a whole-step down to D is used for all three suites. This combination allows the open fourth, third, and first strings of the cello to match the open sixth, fifth, and second strings of the guitar.⁵ Besides being helpful to use open strings in the same manner that the cellist would play them, this also enables the guitarist to match many of Britten's natural harmonics in these suites that otherwise would be unplayable.

Nineteen out of the twenty-three movements of the suites require no changes in the transcription for guitar. The four movements that did require changes all revolved around the lack of an equivalent open string on the guitar to match the cello's open second string. The closest option is the open first string, which is an octave higher than the cello's second

⁵ The strings of the cello are tuned to C2, G2, D3, and A3; fourth, third, second, and first strings respectively. The strings of the guitar are tuned to E2, A2, D3, G3, B3, and E4; sixth through first strings, respectively.

string, but this at least matches the cello's *bariolage*⁶ technique without requiring the left hand to stop a note. Below are examples of each case of octave displacement and the reasons for their necessity.

In the *Fuga* movement of *Suite for Cello, op. 72*, from measures 19-22, Britten uses the cello's open second string as a drone while a motive from the subject of *Fuga* is intertwined around it. Leaving this note at the original octave would require playing it as a stopped note on the guitar, which creates much difficulty in conveying the 32nd-note rhythm and the phrase markings. By using the open first string on the guitar it is much easier for the left hand while being harmonically the same, with intervals becoming either inverted or compound (Example 1).

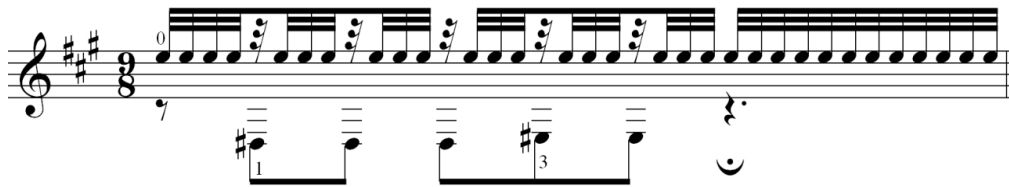


Example 1: *Fuga*, mm. 19-22

The most significant alteration that was necessary for transcription involved the *Bordone* movement from the first suite. "*Bordone*" literally means "drone," and Britten uses the open second string to create the drone by bowing the string throughout the entire movement. While the drone is being played there are flurries of notes above and below it that reach into the higher registers of the guitar so using an open string for this is essential to the playability of the piece (Example 2). In addition to the

⁶ Term used to describe mixing open strings and stopped notes together in passages for string instruments.

octave displacement of the drone, the technique for creating it had to be modified due to the lack of a bow. When guitarists want to create a sustaining line, the right-hand technique of tremolo is most commonly used, so it is the best alternative to bowing. The sustained effect is created by subdividing the note values in a melody to 32nd notes, and using the right-hand fingers *a*, *m*, and *i* to play them.⁷ The thumb of the right hand, *p*, usually plays the chordal arpeggio that accompanies the melody and this occurs in alternation with the other fingers. Britten's use is different as a drone and demands a slightly adapted tremolo technique. In order to accommodate the constant sound of the drone, the *p* finger needs to play on the first string with *a*, *m*, and *i*, in cases where the other voice has a rest, as on beat 1 and beats 7-9 of example 3.

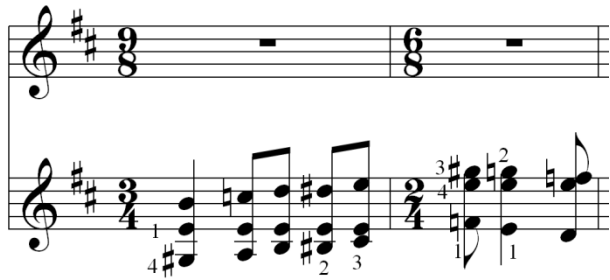


Example 2: *Bordone*, m. 1

The third movement that requires alteration for playability is “Allegretto” (*dialogo*) from the third suite. In this case (Example 3), the second string of the cello is being used as a pedal in chords from measures 6-9, which does not create any technical problems until

⁷ The letters *p*, *i*, *m*, and *a*, are derived from the Spanish words for each finger: *pulgar*, *indicio*, *medio*, and *anular*, or thumb, index, middle, and ring, in English.

measure 9 where, without octave displacement, a left-hand stretch is required that would be impossible for most guitarists.



Example 3: “Allegretto” (*dialogo*), mm. 8-9

The fourth and final movement that required octave displacement is “Presto” (*moto perpetuo*) from the third suite (Example 4). Again the open second string of the cello, if transcribed at the original octave, creates a left-hand stretch that is too great; therefore, it had to be raised an octave to the open first string.

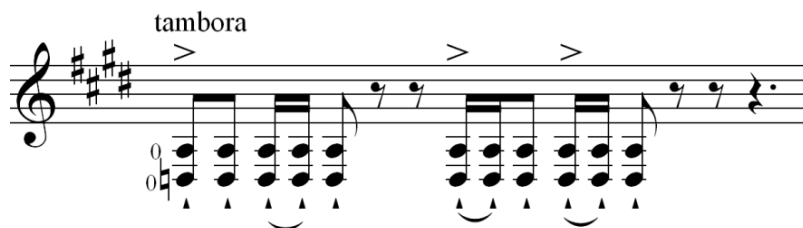


Example 4: “Presto” (*moto perpetuo*), mm. 32-34

In addition to octave displacement, some coloristic effects that are specific to bowed-stringed instruments, *con sordino*, *col legno*, and *pizzicato*, required an alternative effect for guitar. *Con sordino* literally means “with mute,” and is accomplished by the string player placing a plastic, wooden, or metal object on the bridge that absorbs vibrations and softens the sound. All *con sordino* indications are left out of the

transcription for two reasons. First, there is no satisfactory equivalent to this effect on guitar; no one makes an apparatus that attaches to the bridge to dampen the strings and reduce the bridge's vibrations. Also, the guitar's dynamic range is much narrower than the cello's, so passages with the mute are not as effective once the dynamic range is further restricted. The effect is removed from two movements; *Bordone*, from the first suite, and *Introduzione*, from the third suite.

Col legno is achieved by using the wooden part of the bow to sound the string, either by dragging the wood across the strings, *col legno tratto*, or striking them, *col legno battuto*. All instances of *col legno* in the cello suites are *col legno battuto*. This effect can be found in the fourth movement of the first suite, *Marcia*, where it is used to simulate drum rolls, and alternates with harmonics that simulate bugle calls. The equivalent effect on guitar is *tambora*, which is produced by striking the strings with either the thumb or index finger of the right hand. The sound produced is very percussive, and I believe a good match for a drum roll simulation (Example 5).



Example 5: *Marcia*, m. 2

The cello suites contain several passages where Britten calls for the use of *pizzicato*, which involves plucking a string or strings either with the left- or right-hand fingers, instead of the usual method of bowing. This is often used in guitar repertoire; however, the resulting sound is slightly different than what is produced on the cello and the technique is different. Because sound is normally created on a guitar by plucking the string, the term "*pizzicato*" might better be thought of as "*pizzicato* effect." This is a specialized technique in which the heel of the right-hand palm is placed on the string or strings, close to the bridge, to muffle the strings and produce an effect that is similar to the sound of a bowed instrument playing *pizzicato*.

The third movement of the first suite, *Serenata*, is the first appearance of the effect, and Britten chooses to use it for the entirety of the movement, all of which is possible on the guitar. The effect is next heard in the fifth movement, *Bordone*, where it is employed for technical reasons. As mentioned before, this movement contains a drone played on the second string of the cello for the entirety of the movement. Because of the necessity for the cellist to continually bow the second string, it is impossible to simultaneously use the bow on the fourth string. Britten solves this problem by having the cellist play all notes that occur on the fourth string *pizzicato* with the left hand. The drone is accomplished differently on the guitar, through the use of tremolo, leaving the right-hand thumb free to play bass notes. Because of this and the fact that tremolo is

much more difficult, if not impossible, while the right hand is in the position required to create *pizzicato*, the effect is left out of this movement.

The fourth movement of the second suite, which is untitled but has the tempo designation of “Andante Lento,” contains the next appearance. The texture of this movement is comprised of a *pizzicato* accompaniment with an *arco*, meaning played with the bow, melody (Example 6). In order to retain contrast between the two—and because it does not make the movement too difficult—all of Britten’s *pizzicato* indications for the movement are transcribed.



Example 6: “Andante Lento,” mm. 3-4

In “Lento” (*introduzione*) and “Lento solenne” (*passacaglia*), the first and ninth movements of the third suite, respectively, the effect is transcribed. In “Allegretto” (*dialogo*), the fifth movement of the third suite, the effect is used on three- and four-note chords. The difficulty arises when the notes of these chords are not on adjacent strings, which makes producing the effect much more difficult. Therefore, *pizzicato* is not transcribed for this movement.

Harmonics, another effect, are employed by Britten in almost every movement of the three suites. They are used both naturally and artificially,

and Britten uses them in melodies, as part of fugue subjects, to enhance decrescendos, and facilitate passages for the cello. The present transcription employs as many of the harmonics as possible, regardless of Britten's reason for choosing them, for the sole purpose of keeping the transcription as close to the original as possible.

For this transcription diamond-shaped note heads, positioned on the staff at the resultant pitch, are used to notate harmonics. Additionally, string indications are placed next to the harmonic to aid in determining their location. Example 7 illustrates the diamond-shaped note head signifying the harmonic, the string indication by the circled number, and the resultant pitches. On an open string, the resultant pitch can be determined by the interval between the open string and the resultant pitch that is created by playing a harmonic at a specific fret. For example, playing a harmonic at the twelfth fret produces a resultant pitch that is an octave above the open string; playing a harmonic at the seventh or nineteenth fret produces a resultant that is an octave and a fifth above the open string; playing a harmonic at the fifth or twenty-fourth fret produces a resultant that is two-octaves above the open string; and playing a harmonic at the fourth or ninth fret produces a resultant that is an octave and a major-third above the open string. In example 7 the B on beat one is produced at the twelfth fret, the F sharp is produced at the seventh fret, the upper-octave B on beat three is produced at the fifth fret, and the D

sharp can be produced either at the fourth or ninth frets, depending on the performer's preference.



Example 7: *Marcia*, m. 1

Below is a list of harmonics that were changed to stopped notes, because of the technical difficulty in playing them on guitar.

Suite for Cello, op. 72

- Canto Primo* m. 14
- Fuga* mm. 24, 28, 31
- Canto Terzo* m. 3
- Moto Perpetuo* mm. 133, 134

Second Suite for Cello, op. 80

- Fuga* mm. 22, 23, 24, 27, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, 52, 63, and 64
- Scherzo* mm. 8, 24, 41, 56
- "*Andante Lento*" mm. 19
- Ciaccona* mm. 2, 3, 4, 36, 38, 64

Third Suite for Cello, op. 87

- "*Allegretto*" (*dialogo*) mm. 21, 27

CHAPTER 5

IMPLIED POLYPHONY

The influence of Bach in Britten's suites is seen in his use of "implied" polyphony. Because cellists are unable to sustain more than two notes at a time, Bach used larger intervals within a single-note line to indicate a multi-voiced texture. The larger intervals do not always indicate the presence of another voice, however, and can also be melodic gestures. This leaves it to the performer to make an interpretive decision, and consequently allows the possibility of having many different interpretations. Britten uses "implied" polyphony in several movements of *Three Suites for Cello*, not only in the fugues.

Because the guitar is a harmonic instrument and capable of sustaining multiple voices, it is possible to more fully realize the polyphony on a guitar than on the cello. Doing this requires careful selection of a left-hand fingering that allows individual voices to overlap. In *Canto Primo*, the opening movement from the first suite, Britten uses a three-voiced texture for the duration of the suite and uses different registers for each voice to clearly separate them (Example 8).



Example 8: *Canto Primo*, mm. 1-2

In Example 8, three voices are present; a bass voice consisting of A3, a middle voice that starts on B4, and an upper voice that begins on G sharp. Large intervals create a clear separation of voices as in Bach's string music. When this is played on the cello, the upper voice cannot be sustained over the bass voice because only two-adjacent strings can be bowed at the same time. The guitar is capable of sustaining all voices until the end of the phrase through the left-hand technique called a barre.⁸ The barre sustains the upper voice over the entry of the bass voice, and also sustains the middle voice until it rises to C sharp. An open string is selected for the bass voice that allows it to sustain without being stopped by the left hand.

The three *canto* movements that are in the first suite all feature a multi-voiced texture. *Canto Secondo* is just *Canto Primo* transposed down a fifth, and the length has been truncated. Therefore, left-hand fingering that allows voices to overlap is the same as for *Canto Primo*, but on other strings. *Canto Terzo* is considerably different from the other *canto* sections, although it does share their texture. A particularly interesting passage from the movement involves all voices converging on a single E note (Example 9).

⁸ A barre is executed by using one of the left-hand fingers, usually the first finger, to depress more than one string simultaneously, and as many as all six.



Example 9: *Canto Terzo*, mm. 13-14

This example demonstrates the multi-voiced texture that Britten employed in all of the *canto* movements. One voice uses an E pedal for both measures, the bass voice begins on B flat in measure 13 and rises to C natural, and then re-enters on beat seven with C, D, and D sharp, leading into the middle voice E. On beat 4 two voices begin, D in the upper voice, and G descending to E in a middle voice. To create an overlap of voices, a left-hand fingering is used that allows the last note of the bass voice, C, to be held over the entrance of the upper voice D and the middle voice G, by placing each voice on a separate string.

Each suite has one *Fuga* movement. Fugues are inherently polyphonic and therefore require careful attention to left-hand fingering, so that the listener can perceive the individual voices. Allowing the final note of one voice to overlap the entrance of another voice by placing them on different strings clearly defines the voices for the listener and is the method that I tried to use. During the middle-entry section of *Fuga* from the first suite, Britten varies the fugue subject by disguising it in a sixteenth-note rhythm (Example 10).



Example 10: *Fuga*: mm. 38-40

The fugue subject starts on the second beat of measure 38, on D. Vertical lines are placed above notes that are part of the original fugue subject to make it easier to identify, although these are not in the score. The first three notes of the subject are placed on a different string than the A note that is in the other voice to allow the voices to overlap and create an impression of two-independent voices. In measure 40 different strings are again used for voice overlap, and also a left-hand *barre* to let the voices sustain.

In the *Fuga* movement from the second suite Britten uses multiple rests in the subject. When the answer begins, the notes of the countersubject are placed where the rests are located in the subject. This allows the cellist to play to two independent voices by only playing one note at a time. Britten does change note values from the subject to the answer so the cellist will only have to play one note at a time however on guitar the original values can be performed. Example 11 displays the first-four measures of the subject with the initial note values and Example 12 displays the first-four measures of the answer with the countersubject.



Example 11: *Fuga*, mm. 1-4



Example 12: *Fuga*, mm. 8-11

Britten changes the value of the quarter note on beat one, measures 2 and 4 of the subject, to an eighth note in measures 9 and 11 of the answer. Because the goal was to transcribe the suites with as few changes as possible, Britten's choice for note values is retained. A left-hand fingering was selected, however, that would allow the original values of the subject to be played during the answer, again by positioning them on different strings.

CHAPTER 6

ORNAMENTATION

Britten wrote many ornaments in the suites, including: grace notes, trills, turns, glissandos, portamentos, and tremolos. Because these ornaments are used in a non-tonal setting, a clarification is necessary for potentially confusing ornaments that are not defined in the score.⁹

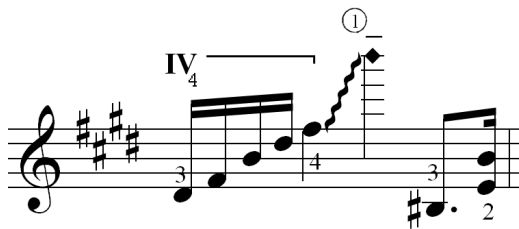
The fifth movement of the second suite, *Ciaccona*, is where the majority of ornamental usage is concentrated. In this movement Britten uses each ornament listed above. The first occurs in measure thirteen where Britten has written a trill with a flat symbol above it (Example 13). Because Britten's harmonic language involves abundant use of chromaticism, ornaments frequently have accidentals placed above or below them. If the accidental is placed above the ornamental symbol, it affects the note above the main note; in Example 13 the main note is D and the flat symbol is placed above the trill symbol so the trill would alternate between D and E flat, starting on the main note.



Example 13: *Ciaccona*, m. 14

⁹ While ornaments are open to interpretation, all ornamental performance suggestions are taken from Mstislav Rostropovich's recordings of the first two cello suites

Portamentos are first used in measure thirty of *Ciaccona* (Example 14). Portamentos and glissandos occur when two pitches are connected by sliding from one to the other. The difference between the two terms is that “portamento” is used to describe a slide where the intervening notes cannot be distinguished, while a “glissando” describes a slide where the intervening notes can be distinguished. The voice, string instruments such as the violin, viola, cello, and double bass, and the trombone are capable of portamentos, while other instruments such as the piano, harp, and guitar can only perform glissandos.¹⁰ The glissando in Example 14 is performed by playing the F sharp on beat two and beginning the slide to the B harmonic in between the two beats, so that the arrival to the B harmonic occurs directly on beat three.



Example 14: *Ciaccona*, m. 30

Turns are used primarily in the middle section of *Ciaccona*. They are placed either directly over the note they affect or just in front of the note they affect. The position indicates when the turn should begin; if it is directly over the note the turn starts during that beat (Example 15), if the turn is after the note the turn starts during the next beat (Example 16). In

¹⁰The guitar can perform a limited version of a portamento through what is referred to as a “bend”, where the string is stretched to raise the pitch. The application is limited to the distance of a whole step, though.

Example 15, the placement of the accidental below the turn affects the lower auxiliary note, and indicates that it is one-half step below the main note. Examples 15 and 16 display how the turn is written in the score, followed by a written out example of how Rostropovich interprets the ornament.

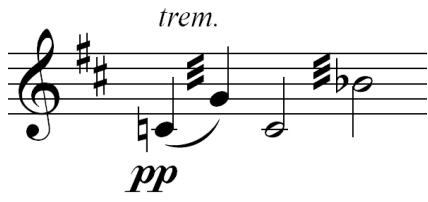


Example 15: *Ciaccona*, m. 86



Example 16: *Ciaccona*, m. 74

Tremolo, the rapid alternation between two notes, is first seen in measure 101 (Example 17). The effect is produced by alternating between *p* and either *i* or *m*, on the lower voice and higher voice, respectively. Also important to note is that the first tremolo between C and G lasts for the duration of a quarter note, and the second between C and B flat lasts for the duration of a half note.



Example 17: *Ciaccona*, m. 101

Saltando is indicated in the suites by the word written directly in the score (Example 20). The symbol is represented by a dashed line with a dot that is placed either above or below the notehead. *Saltando* is performed on a stringed instrument by letting the bow bounce off of the string. The resulting sound is energetic and in this case is performed on the use of *tambora*.

pp saltando

Example 20: *Marcia*, m. 2

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Transcriptions and arrangements are valuable tools for expanding the repertory of an instrument. They give performers access to masterpieces, such as Bach's unaccompanied violin and cello music. Sometimes they even outdo their original medium, as with Isaac Albeniz' *Asturias*, transcribed for the guitar from piano.

Three Suites for Cello, opp. 72, 80, and 87, is a worthy addition to guitar repertoire for two reasons. First, the work has extremely few alterations; there are only five instances of octave displacement, no chords are re-voiced, and no notes are omitted. Second, the guitar can fully realize the many sections of "implied" polyphony in the work. Bach's influence is seen in nearly every movement of the work and the guitar, as a harmonic instrument, is potentially better at realizing these textures than the cello.

The transcriptions of the Bach cello suites have become mainstays of the guitar repertoire due to the similar range and technical capabilities of the two instruments. It is the writer's hope that these transcriptions of Britten's works for solo cello will hold a similar place in the guitar repertoire.

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