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## **A Comparative Analysis of Poetic Structure as the Primary Determinant of Musical Form in Selected A Cappella Choral Works of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POETIC STRUCTURE AS THE PRIMARY  
DETERMINANT OF MUSICAL FORM IN SELECTED A CAPPELLA CHORAL  
WORKS OF GERALD FINZI AND BENJAMIN BRITTEN

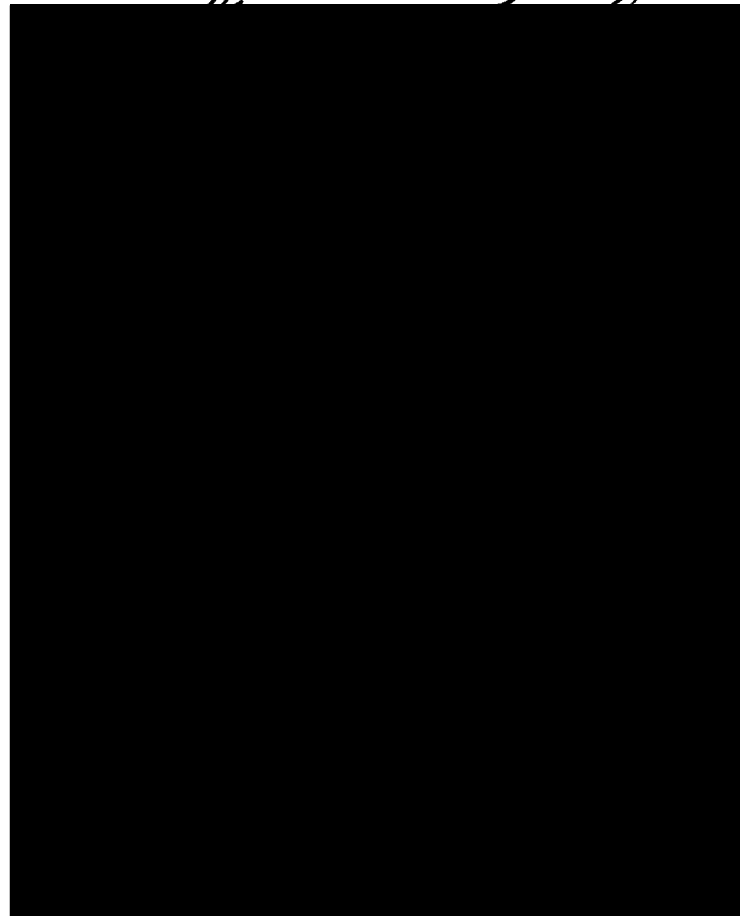
by

Andrew Malcolm Jensen

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved:



May 2008

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Abstract of a Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POETIC STRUCTURE AS THE PRIMARY DETERMINANT OF MUSICAL FORM IN SELECTED A CAPPELLA CHORAL WORKS OF GERALD FINZI AND BENJAMIN BRITTEN

by Andrew Malcolm Jensen

May 2008

Numerous scholars have identified the relationship linking words and music as the prime factor in the success of both Gerald Finzi's and Benjamin Britten's vocal music. However, few authors provide a satisfactory discussion concerning the specific musical elements used to achieve that success. Those that do, typically focus upon textual/musical correspondences that highlight poetic meaning at the phrase or single word level. Additionally, no known source draws connections between the text-setting practices of these composers. This dissertation seeks to identify the association of text and music on a larger scale: specifically, the influence of poetic structure as the primary determinant of musical form in selected a cappella choral works of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten.

Chapter II presents a chronological account (1901-1976) of significant people, places, and events that shaped both composers' lives and influenced their musical activities. The following section on historical perspective offers a critical examination of Finzi and Britten's compositional style and evaluates their respective identities in the landscape of twentieth-century English composers. The correlation of poetic structure and musical form is explored in Chapters III and IV through detailed poetic and musical

analyses of comparable works by each composer: Finzi's *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges*, *Op. 17* and Britten's *Five Flower Songs*, *Op. 47*. Each song is discussed in two distinct sections: *Poetic Form* and *Musical Form and Texture*. These analyses confirm that textural variation is used to articulate musical form: a form which itself is determined by the poetic structure of its text. In each instance, the composer sought to delineate divisions of poetic thought through an assortment of vocal textures including homophony, freely imitative polyphony, voice pairing, canon, fugato, instrumentally derived melody/accompaniment figures, rhythmic differentiation, and the purposeful use of metric space. Chapter V offers a comparative synthesis of ideas presented in Chapters II, III, and IV, resulting in the following conclusion: while both composers allow poetic structure to guide musical form, each employs textural variation in a distinctive manner, thus adhering to previously established compositional traits and maintaining their distinctive musical style.

## DEDICATION

To Cathy Jensen, my loving wife and perfect memory match.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 1953 a fascinating article by musicologist Herbert Antcliffe appeared in *The Musical Times* in which the author decried the disappearance of “pure” part-songs from contemporary British choral repertoire; “pure” part-songs being only those that conform to the nineteenth-century model exemplified by Elgar, Bantock, Coleridge-Taylor, and Boughton. Antcliffe proposes a number of plausible causes for the supposed demise of the part-song. In particular he points to the emergence of “ballads and jazz songs far inferior to the ‘shop ballads’ of the last century.” Although he admits his inability to prove a concrete line of reasoning, he states, “we cannot go deeply into the psychological explanation of this; but it is a psychological question, well deserving the attention of the scientists who study human nature and human activities.” Antcliffe does however provide a statement describing, “what a partsong is and should be.”

To be effective in its sphere the partsong must be a perfect miniature, alike in its words and music. This does not mean that it need necessarily be based on a perfect poem or that the quality of the music is such that the keenest critics will sit in ecstasy as it is performed. If a perfect marriage takes place between exquisite poetry and equally exquisite music, so much the better; but human capacity being what it is, this occurs extremely seldom.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently unaware of the inherent contradictions in the above quotation, Antcliffe eloquently described the primary merits of numerous twentieth-century part-songs and part-song sets. Two of these, Gerald Finzi’s *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges*, *Op. 17* and Benjamin Britten’s *Five Flower Songs*, *Op. 47*, not only exemplify the finest

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Antcliffe, “The Disappearance of the Partsong,” *The Musical Times* Vol. 94, No. 1330 (December 1953): 562-563.



in thoughtful English text setting and creative part-song composition but also represent a successful continuation of the nineteenth-century part-song tradition.

### Purpose of the Study

Both Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) have been praised for their treatment of text setting as composers of solo vocal and choral works. In fact numerous scholars have identified the relationship linking words and music as the prime factor in each composer's success in the realm of vocal music. In the introduction to her dissertation concerning word/music correspondences, Kathleen Robinson commends Finzi as a composer "almost universally regarded as one of the finest masters of his generation at setting English words to music."<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Maw made a similar statement regarding Britten in the March 1977 article, *Benjamin Britten: Tributes and Memories*. "His feeling for poetry...and the inflexions of language make him, I think, the greatest realizer of English."<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, several sources directly parallel the mastery of both composers' settings of English verse. To support his praise of Finzi, Alan Walker states, "In our own day perhaps Britten alone shows such regard for the poetical content of words, and prior to it I believe that there is no one until we come to Dowland who takes such care over the correct rhythmic stress of each syllable."<sup>4</sup> John Edmunds echoes this sentiment, asserting, "The fact remains that for inspired subtlety in setting English poetry Finzi was rivaled in

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<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Robinson, "A Critical Study of Word/Music Correspondences in the Choral Works of Gerald Finzi (Volumes I and II)" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1994) 4-5.

<sup>3</sup>Nicholas Maw, "Benjamin Britten: Tributes and Memories," *Tempo* 120 (March 1977): 4.

<sup>4</sup>Alan Walker, "Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)," *Tempo* 52 (Autumn 1959): 8.

the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century only by Peter Warlock and by Benjamin Britten today.”<sup>5</sup> In light of these comments, Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten present a logical pair for comparative study in the realm of vocal music. It is therefore shocking, in this author’s opinion, that no known source draws connections between the text setting practices of these composers.

Despite the existence of several separate analyses dedicated to both Finzi and Britten’s achievements linking words and music, few authors provide a satisfactory discussion concerning the specific musical elements used to achieve that success. Those that do, typically focus upon textual/musical correspondences that highlight poetic meaning at the phrase or single word level. This dissertation seeks to identify the association of text and music on a larger scale: specifically, the influence of poetic structure as the primary determinant of musical form in selected a cappella choral works of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten.

Again, the analyses in this dissertation are comparative in nature. Very few sources evaluate these composers in any direct or systematic way. Those that do, address them separately and invariably draw upon their instrumental, large-scale choral/orchestral, and sacred a cappella works. However it is the analytical study of the part-song, not the symphony, which is most applicable to the typical high school and/or collegiate choral conductor. It is only through direct, systematic comparison that the commonalities in the text setting practices of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten can be discovered and fully appreciated. This dissertation therefore seeks to add scholarly

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<sup>5</sup>John Edmunds, review of *I Said to Love, Six Songs for Low Voice and Piano* and *Till Earth Outwears, Seven Songs for High Voice and Piano*, by Gerald Finzi, *Notes* Vol. 17, No. 1 (December 1959): 154.

research that will aid in the evaluation and recognition of high quality secular a cappella literature of the twentieth century.

### Methodology

This dissertation employs both historical and analytical research techniques. Chapter II presents a chronological account (1901-1976) of significant people, places, and events that shaped each composer's life and influenced their musical activities. The following section on historical perspective offers a critical examination of Finzi and Britten's compositional style and evaluates their respective identities in the landscape of twentieth-century English composers. This chapter reflects an examination of a diverse body of literature, ensuring a balanced and academically sound representation of both composers' life and work.

The correlation of poetic structure and musical form is explored in Chapters III and IV through detailed analysis of both the poetry and music of comparable works by each composer: Finzi's *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges, Op. 17* and Britten's *Five Flower Songs, Op. 47*. Finzi's part-songs "make a finely-balanced and homogeneous set. The ardent lyricism of the music, a perfect match for the words...The whole set is a fine illustration of English lyricism at its highest."<sup>6</sup> "*Five Flower Songs*...is the work of a consummate virtuoso of composition," who displays "unsurpassed mastery in the use of every possible formal device towards the greatest variety of structure and colour within narrow madrigalian limits."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, both works represent a common musical idiom, the part-song set. This limitation offers a unique glimpse into the mind of each

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<sup>6</sup>E. R., review of *Seven Unaccompanied Partsongs*, by Gerald Finzi, *Music and Letters* Vol. 21, No. 4 (October 1940): 397.

<sup>7</sup>Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, eds., *Benjamin Britten: a Commentary on his works from a group of specialists* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1952), 90.

composer for it reveals vast differences, as well as startling commonalities, in style when addressing a similar compositional proposition.

Each song is discussed in two distinct sections: *Poetic Form* and *Musical Form and Texture*. An in-depth examination of each poem's structure is crucial to understanding its impact on both the composer and performer.

A conductor who knows a choral work's poetry is brought closer to that work. Just as an understanding of harmony enhances the conductor's ability to judge musical phrasing, climax, and sectional weight, so can the conductor's understanding of the composer's and poet's text enhance the rhetorical presentation of the musical work...But a genuine knowledge of the relationship between the original poetry and the composer's words—and the resulting understanding of the compositional process of the composer—will invariably bring the conductor into a more intimate relationship with the composition. This intimacy and understanding translate into better performances.<sup>8</sup>

The musical analysis that accompanies each part-song confirms that textural variation is used to articulate musical form: a form which itself is determined by the poetic structure of its text. In each instance the composer sought to delineate divisions of poetic thought through an assortment of vocal textures including homophony, freely imitative polyphony, voice pairing, canon, fugato, instrumentally derived melody/accompaniment figures, rhythmic differentiation, and the purposeful use of metric space. Chapter V offers a comparative synthesis of ideas presented in Chapters II, III, and IV, resulting in the following conclusion: while both composers allow poetic structure to guide musical form, each employs textural variation in a distinctive manner, thus adhering to previously established compositional traits and maintaining their distinctive musical style.

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<sup>8</sup>Beverly Jerold, "Benjamin Britten's Poetic Alterations," *The Choral Journal* (February 2000): 13.

## Review of Literature

Over fifty years and an incalculable amount of research later, prevailing opinions concerning twentieth-century British part-songs, not to mention their contemporary “ballads and jazz songs”, have, in the opinion of this author, improved drastically. However the vast majority of research devoted to twentieth-century British composers minimizes, if not altogether ignores, the importance of *secular* a cappella literature. Most scholarly research on choral literature is devoted to sacred a cappella and/or accompanied works.

A significant amount of credible research exists concerning the life and works of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten. In Britten’s case this is certainly not surprising considering his position as one of the most important British composers of the twentieth-century; a sentiment shared by nearly all scholars. Nick Strimple confirms this opinion stating, “Twentieth-century British choral music is dominated by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, two outstanding figures who not only created a large number of wonderful choral pieces but also profoundly influenced virtually every aspect of British music.”<sup>9</sup> Finzi’s assigned place in the hierarchy of twentieth-century British composers is less certain. This is due, in part, to his comparatively small output and his consistently conservative harmonic language. However, his contributions in the area of English song, in particular his settings of Robert Bridges and Thomas Hardy’s poetry, are considered first rate by many. Vaughan Williams himself wrote, “Finzi’s music shows an extraordinary affinity with this poet [Robert Bridges, author of the poetry used in op. 17] and with Thomas Hardy, both their language and their thought find an absolute counterpart in his settings. . . in all these works we find something absolutely personal, and

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<sup>9</sup> Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002), 76.

in my opinion they will last on when other more showy but less truly original compositions are forgotten.”<sup>10</sup>

The majority of existing research is essentially biographical, approaching the subject matter first from a historical perspective and providing musical analysis as a means to supplement and support this viewpoint. Stephen Banfield’s *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* and Diana McVeagh’s *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* constitute the only two extended biographies of Gerald Finzi. Both offer an in-depth, chronological account of the composer’s life, providing significant musical analysis that supports an overall picture of his compositional style. Yet neither book offers an adequate analysis of Finzi’s *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges*. Their analyses instead focus on his solo songs and choral/orchestral works, a common occurrence in biographical writings of this kind.

Owing to his immense popularity and well-documented importance as a leading twentieth-century British composer, an overwhelming amount of large-scale biographical studies on Benjamin Britten exist in various forms. Peter J. Hodgson’s *Benjamin Britten: A Guide to Research* served as an invaluable resource in identifying, locating, and acquiring the documents most pertinent to this study. Among the most applicable are Christopher Palmer’s *The Britten Companion*, Humphrey Carpenter’s *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, Michael Oliver’s *Benjamin Britten*, Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller’s *Benjamin Britten: a Commentary on his works from a group of specialists*, and Peter Evans’ *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. Of these books only the last devotes more than a few sentences to *Five Flower Songs*.

For the purposes of this study, the most important type of existing literature consists of detailed musical analysis of works by Finzi and Britten. This type of research

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.geraldfinzi.org/?page=about/article.html&id=5> on November 23, 2006.

exists mainly in the form of journal articles and dissertations. Although several articles offer analysis of Finzi and Britten's vocal music, only Chester Alwes' "Words and Music: Benjamin Britten's Evening Primrose" provides a detailed analysis of the works discussed in this dissertation. However, as the title suggests, Alwes' article focuses exclusively on "The Evening Primrose," the fourth setting in Britten's *Five Flower Songs*. Currently, only three dissertations exist concerning the choral music of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten that include analysis of either *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* or *Five Flower Songs*. George E. Hansler's study, published in 1957, sought to establish major compositional trends in the choral works of five twentieth-century British composers: Benjamin Britten, Gerald Finzi, Constant Lambert, Michael Tippett, and William Walton. While extensive, this dissertation fails to provide detailed analysis concerning the influence of poetic structure on musical form. The two remaining studies, Jerry McCoy's "The Choral Music of Gerald Finzi: A Study of Textual/Musical Relationships" and Douglass L. Jones' "Aspects of Textual Treatment in Benjamin Britten's Unaccompanied Choral Music; with Commentary On the History and Meaning of the Text," approach their subject purely from the perspective of textual/musical relationships. While McCoy's dissertation on selected choral works of Gerald Finzi is well executed and Douglas Jones' dissertation on Britten's unaccompanied choral music is well intentioned, both minimize, if not altogether ignore, the correlation of musical form and poetic structure and neither offers direct comparison with contemporary composers and their works, allowing for a much deserved expansion of existing analytical research.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter is not intended as a panoptic study on the lives of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it provides the reader with a chronological account (1901-1976) of significant people, places, and events that shaped their lives and informed their creative output. The section on historical perspective offers a critical view of Finzi and Britten's compositional style and place both as composers of their time and in the broader landscape of music history.

#### Biography

Gerald Finzi was born in London on July 14, 1901. The son of a successful shipbroker, Gerald's early life was that of any upper middle-class child. Because of his parents' fondness of music he took piano lessons and was taught the basics of music theory at a young age. The youngest of five siblings, with three brothers and a sister, Gerald's home life was busy and full until 1908. Jack Finzi, Gerald's father, died of cancer when the young boy was only seven years old. His mother, Eliza, was a strong willed woman who, after enduring the hardship of losing her husband, was soon to face far more pain in the near future.<sup>2</sup> In 1912 Douglas Finzi, Gerald's middle brother, died of pneumonia and was soon followed by Felix, the eldest, who committed suicide in 1913. It was at this point that Eliza moved the remaining members of her family to Harrogate, a rural community in the English countryside. Upon arriving there Gerald began studying

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<sup>1</sup>For a more comprehensive biographical study on the life of Gerald Finzi, the author suggests Stephen Banfield's *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* and Diana McVeagh's *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*. Humphrey Carpenter's *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* and Michael Oliver's *Benjamin Britten* are recommended as recent publications in reference to the life of Benjamin Britten.

<sup>2</sup>Diana McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2005), 3-9.



composition with Ernest Farrar, a former student of C.V. Stanford at the Royal College of Music. Still only a teenager, Finzi idolized Farrar and many of his early compositions display a direct influence by the elder composer.<sup>3</sup> Edgar Finzi, Gerald's sole remaining brother, was killed while serving in World War I. Still reeling from the loss of yet another sibling, Gerald was devastated by the news that Farrar had also been killed in action.<sup>4</sup> In the span of ten years, from the age of seven to seventeen, Gerald Finzi suffered the loss of his father, three brothers, and his musical mentor. It is widely agreed that this period greatly influenced him, not only in his personal philosophy, but also as a composer. "From this bleak beginning the prospect of the fragility and preciousness of life permeated Finzi's being and especially his compositional style to come."<sup>5</sup>

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft, Suffolk on St. Cecilia's Day, November 22, 1913; the same year Finzi moved to Harrogate and began his study of composition with Ernest Farrar. Britten too was the youngest of his siblings, two sisters and a brother. However the Britten family was never confronted with the staggering losses suffered by the Finzis. In contrast, Britten's sister recalled, "we had a secure home and loving parents...[the home was] always rather like a party...such a peaceful, very happy household."<sup>6</sup> Edith, Benjamin's mother, was an amateur mezzo-soprano who served as the honorary secretary of the Lowestoft Choral Society and "the family often held 'musical evenings' at home where Britten's mother sang German Lieder, arias by J.S.

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 15-16.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>5</sup>John C. Dressler, *Gerald Finzi: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>6</sup>Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 8.

Bach, Handel, Mozart, and English part-songs by Frank Bridge and John Ireland.”<sup>7</sup> By age five, Britten had begun “composing”. He once stated, “I remember the first time I tried [composing], the result looked rather like...hundreds of dots all over the page connected by long lines all joined together in beautiful curves...It was the look of the thing on the paper that fascinated me.”<sup>8</sup> However juvenile these first attempts must have been, by 1923, at the age of ten, Britten had amassed a remarkable list of authentic compositions including six string quartets, three piano suites, ten piano sonatas, an oratorio, and several songs for solo voice.

After Farrar’s wartime enlistment Finzi continued his studies in composition with Edward Bairstow beginning in 1916. “[W]hat a fresh practitioner had offered and what a strict pedagogue now demanded would prove at first acutely painful, and although he and Bairstow developed a respectful and productive relationship, Finzi never accepted his doctrinaire approach.”<sup>9</sup> In 1925, at the age of twenty-four, Finzi moved to London to study counterpoint with R.O. Morris. It was the composer’s first experience living on his own and he made the most of it. He spent the next eight years composing amid the bustling life found in London during the 1920’s. During that time he became friends with many important musicians of the day including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Edmund Rubbra, Arthur Bliss, and Howard Ferguson. These individuals, Ferguson in particular, perpetuated Finzi’s music and legacy after his death by establishing organizations such as

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<sup>7</sup>Douglas L. Jones, “Aspects of Textual Treatment in Benjamin Britten’s Unaccompanied Choral Music; with Commentary on the History and Meaning of the Text,” (D.M.A. diss., University of Houston, 2000), 8.

<sup>8</sup>Carpenter, 7-8.

<sup>9</sup>Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 15.

*The Finzi Trust*, organizing public performances, and encouraging the publication of the remainder of his works.

In October 1924, shortly before Finzi left for London, Britten attended the Norwich Triennial Festival at the encouragement of his viola teacher, Audrey Alston. It was during the 1924 festival that Britten first encountered the music of Frank Bridge who became one of his primary influences as a developing musician. Britten himself stated that he “heard Frank Bridge conduct his suite *The Sea* and was knocked sideways.”<sup>10</sup> Three years later when Bridge returned to the festival to conduct the premier of *Enter Spring* Britten was introduced to the elder composer and shortly thereafter he began a series of lessons in composition as well as general musicianship.

Britten was always at pains to acknowledge the debt he owed Bridge for these decisive years of tuition. He had already demonstrated precocious powers of musical invention, but these had now to be justified in the face of a constant rigorous scrutiny, to be measured against exacting technical criteria. While still in his mid-teens, Britten was required to develop a professional control of his musical material, yet he was encouraged to approach the task less through traditional academic disciplines than through the refining of his inner and outer ear and the exploration of some of the most adventurous music being written at that time. Even though this tuition could be carried out only during school holidays, the evidence is clear that by the time of his entry to the Royal College of Music in 1930, he already had a technical virtuosity which must have appeared alarming in an environment where basic contrapuntal skills were regarded as a compulsory preamble to composition, and the approved twentieth-century exemplars were essentially nationalist, if not parochial.<sup>11</sup>

In the Fall of 1930, as Britten began his studies at the Royal College of Music, Finzi was starting his recently accepted post at the Royal Academy of Music. Teaching, however, was never truly one of his ambitions. He felt stifled by the regimented schedule

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<sup>10</sup>Carpenter, 14.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 8.

and resented the formalized training he never received. To his friend Howard Ferguson, “he mocked ‘the Royal Crematorium...the theory of music, harmony, the first species and such things about which I know nothing and care less’.”<sup>12</sup> In 1933, after a three-year appointment as a lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, Finzi met and married Joyce Black. The new Mrs. Finzi was an artist who later in life created several important sketches of the famous musicians with whom the Finzis were friends. The newly married couple moved out of the city and eventually settled in Ashmansworth. This home in the country allowed Gerald to pursue one of his life-long hobbies: the preservation and cultivation of rare breeds of apple trees, of which he had almost four hundred different varieties in his orchard.<sup>13</sup>

Upon his graduation from the Royal College of Music in 1933, Benjamin Britten was in a far better position as a professional composer than the recently married Finzi. While Finzi struggled to have his pieces performed, let alone published, Britten had already obtained a considerable amount of success in his young life. He had twice won the Ernest Farrar Prize for composition (named for Finzi’s first teacher and mentor) at the Royal College of Music and was immediately offered a publishing contract by Ralph Hawkes after graduating. In 1934 he traveled to Italy for the premier of several of his new works, including *A Boy Was Born*, op. 3 (1933). While in Italy he first met the tenor Peter Pears. “Pears eventually became Britten’s life companion and greatest influence.”<sup>14</sup> After returning to England in 1935 Britten found steady employment composing

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<sup>12</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 63.

<sup>13</sup>Howard Ferguson, “Gerald Finzi (1901-1956),” *Music and Letters* Vol. 38, No. 2 (April, 1957), 134.

<sup>14</sup>Jones, 17.

incidental music for the General Post Office's documentary film unit. During this period Britten established a working relationship with the British poet W. H. Auden. This partnership, lasting throughout the late 1930's and early 1940's, would result in some of his finest vocal music during this period: *Our Hunting Fathers*, op. 8 (1936), *On This Island*, op. 11 (1937), *Ballad of Heros*, op. 14 (1939), and *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, op. 27 (1942). In March 1937 he was reacquainted with Peter Pears. As their relationship evolved he wrote in his diary that it was time to "decide something about my sexual life,"<sup>15</sup> and by September they were living together, though it is unclear whether or not they were lovers at this point. Throughout the remainder of his life Britten would collaborate with Pears on several new projects including the establishment of the Aldeburgh Festival (1948) and the operas *Peter Grimes*, op. 33 (1945), *Albert Herring*, op. 39 (1947), *Billy Bud*, op. 50 (1951), *The Turn of the Screw*, op. 54 (1954), and *Death in Venice*, op. 88 (1972-3).

The Finzis' move from London in 1933 provided a welcome respite from city life. For the first time in several years Gerald was free to focus solely on composition, completing and publishing several works including *Earth and Air and Rain*, op. 15 (1935), *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges*, op. 17 (1937), and *Dies Natalis*, op. 8 (1939). This period also saw an increase in the performance of Finzi's original compositions throughout England. *A Young Man's Exhortation*, op. 14 (1929) had its first complete performance in London on December 5, 1933.

On 2 July 1935 Finzi conducted for the first time, his *New Year Music*, [op. 7 (1926/rev.1950)] in a broadcast with a section of the BBC Orchestra.... Early that year there were three concerts of first performances.... On 23 March 1936 the *Elegies* [op. 5 (1926)] were

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<sup>15</sup>Carpenter, 98.

broadcast.... All this was music composed before Gerald's marriage, but the recognition now was welcome.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these successes Finzi had yet to gain the exposure and notoriety that a performance of his music at a significant national event would provide. That opportunity presented itself as an invitation to premier *Dies Natalis* at the 1939 Three Choirs Festival. However, larger world events would eclipse this small victory and rob Finzi of his first great opportunity for recognition. On September 1, the same day Nazi Germany invaded Poland, "[t]he Finzis were at the Royal College of Music in London, for the final Three Choirs rehearsals. As *Dies Natalis* was being sung, it was announced that the festival was cancelled."<sup>17</sup> At the outbreak of war Finzi was torn between his pacifism and his sense of duty to the protection and cultivation of a free society in which the arts could flourish.

How then, can I get an inner peace to work, whilst others are combating this partly for me, and when I know that if Nazidom does prevail – as it possibly may do – it will be the end of our culture for centuries; and that includes your music as well as mine... Still, as I've always believed, a song outlasts a dynasty, and I agree with every word you say about the real values in life. E.M. Forster, in a very good pamphlet called 'What I believe' says that some people call the absence of force and violence 'decadence' but he calls it 'civilization' and finds in such interludes the chief justification for the human experiment. Later on... I may be able to get down to music but it's difficult... with the foreknowledge of the useless and pitiful slaughter that will soon be beginning.<sup>18</sup>

He finally decided to accept a non-combative assignment and was temporarily relocated back in London to work in the Ministry of War Transport Office.

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<sup>16</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 76.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 107.

Meanwhile Britten and Pears, “influenced by economic depression and the threat of war,”<sup>19</sup> had followed W. H. Auden to the United States in early 1939. When war broke out in September 1939 Britten and Pears wanted to return to England but were told they would be more valuable if they remained in the States and increased sympathy for Britain there. After the United States entered the war they tried again for visas to return home but had such difficulty in gaining these that their ‘short stay’ lasted until March 1942.<sup>20</sup> “As a composer, he came to maturity in America: there can be little doubt that the works he wrote there show, not perhaps a new, but at least a more consistent sensitivity and depth.”<sup>21</sup> These works include *A.M.D.G.*, op. 17 (1939), *Sinfonia da Requiem*, op. 20 (1940), *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, op. 22 (1940), and on the transatlantic voyage home, *A Ceremony of Carols*, op. 28 (1942). Upon their return to England both Britten and Pears applied for wartime exemption from the Local Tribunal for the Registration of Conscientious Objectors. Like Finzi, Britten had always held strong pacifistic views yet his desire to aid the artistic community yielded a very different response.

Since I believe that there is in every man the spirit of God, I cannot destroy, and feel it is my duty to avoid helping to destroy as far as I am able, human life, however strongly I may disapprove of the individual’s actions or thoughts. The whole of my life has been devoted to acts of creation (being by profession a composer) and I cannot take part in acts of destruction...I realize however that in total war, it is impossible to avoid all participation of an indirect kind but I believe that I must draw the line as far away from direct participation as is possible. It is for this reason that I appeal to be left free to follow that line of service to the community, which my conscience approves & my training makes possible.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jones, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell and Keller, eds., 4.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kildea, ed., *Benjamin Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40-1.

Throughout the war years Britten performed with Pears on recital tours in support of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in addition to composing occasional music for various government functions. In June of 1945, with the war now over, the opera *Peter Grimes* was premiered in London. The late 1940's and 1950's saw Britten's emergence as an internationally recognized opera composer and one of the primary figures in modern British music. "[It] marked in many people's opinion the turning of the tide for British music: it certainly established Britten in public estimation as a major composer."<sup>23</sup>

Finzi's work at the Ministry of War Transport Office had slowed his compositional pace significantly. Although he finished several works including *Let Us Garlands Bring*, op. 18 (1942) and *Five Bagatelles*, op. 23 (1943), these were pieces conceived and essentially composed before the war. A June 1, 1943 entry in Joy Finzi's diary articulates the composer's frustration at this untimely interruption of his work. "This dead life without chance of writing music means a suffering deeper than torn flesh or bruised bone. The passing of time at such a vital moment in his life, when he was just achieving an easier technique is a constant remorse and the fear of never recapturing it again. Tunes do not even come to trouble him now."<sup>24</sup> As a means of expressing his creative instinct Finzi established The Newbury String Players, a group of predominantly amateur musicians attempting to fill the professional performance gap left by the war. That ensemble was only one example of many throughout his life that illustrated Finzi's

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<sup>23</sup>Mitchell and Keller, eds., 5.

<sup>24</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 131.



devotion to amateur musicianship.<sup>25</sup> Shortly before the end of the war in Europe the BBC Northern Orchestra aired a performance of his aptly titled *Farewell to Arms*, op. 9 (1925/44), sparking a period of creativity that lasted throughout the final decade of his life. In these final years, 1946-1956, Finzi received numerous commissions, composed prolifically, and secured performances for many of his finest works including *Lo, the Full Final Sacrifice*, op. 26 (1946), *For St. Cecilia*, op. 30 (1946/47), *Before and After Summer*, op. 16 (1932/49), *Clarinet Concerto*, op. 31 (1948/49), *Intimations of Immortality*, op. 29 (late 1930s/49-56), *Magnificat*, op. 36 (1952), *Grand Fantasia and Toccata*, op. 38 (1953), *In terra pax*, op. 39 (1954/56), and *Cello Concerto*, op. 40 (1951/55). Finzi was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in 1951. In response to the news of this terminal illness he wrote "Absalom's Place", a document containing a personal statement akin to the famous "Heiligenstadt Testament" written by Beethoven. In it Finzi made clear not only his feelings concerning music's power to connect us over the centuries but also his hope that the work he had completed would reach out to musicians in the future. He wrote,

As usually happens, it is likely that new ideas, new fashions & the pressing forward of new generations, will soon obliterate my small contribution. Yet I like to think that in each generation may be found a few responsive minds, and for them I should like the work to be available. To shake hands with a good friend over the centuries is a pleasant thing, and the affection which an individual may retain after his departure is perhaps the only thing which guarantees an ultimate life to his work.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ferguson, 133.

<sup>26</sup>Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 422.

Gerald Finzi died on September 27, 1956. In the end it wasn't the leukemia that killed him; his condition led to the weakening of his immune system allowing the contraction of chickenpox, which eventually led to his death.<sup>27</sup>

In 1961 Britten composed his monumental *War Requiem*, op. 66, commissioned to commemorate the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral that had been bombed in 1940. In response to his growing stature as a composer and performer, Britten was honored with numerous honorary doctorates, medals, orders, and prizes throughout the 1960's and early 1970's; most notably the Aspen Award of 1964, which "takes pride of place, for it elicited in his speech of acceptance an important summary of his artistic beliefs, his aspirations and his fears."<sup>28</sup>

At many times in history the artist has made a conscious effort to speak with the voice of the people. Beethoven certainly tried, in works as different as the *Battle of Vittoria* and the Ninth Symphony, to utter the sentiments of a whole community. From the beginning of Christianity there have been musicians who have wanted and tried to be the servants of the church, and to express the devotion and convictions of Christians, as such. Recently, we have had the example of Shostakovich, who set out in his 'Leningrad' Symphony to present a monument to his fellow citizens, an explicit expression for them of their own endurance and heroism. At a very different level, one finds composers such as Johann Strauss and George Gershwin aiming at providing people – the people – with the best dance music and songs which they were capable of making. And I can find nothing wrong with the objectives – declared or implicit – of these men; nothing wrong with offering to my fellow-men music which may inspire them or comfort them, with intention. On the contrary, it is the composer's duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings.<sup>29</sup>

Britten was diagnosed with a defective heart valve and underwent corrective surgery on May 7, 1973. The operation left him extremely weak and he was only able to resume

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 479-482.

<sup>28</sup>Evans, 14.

<sup>29</sup>Kildea, ed., 256-7.

composing in the summer of 1974. “His health continued to deteriorate and it was revealed that the heart valve replacement had failed but that he was too weak to undergo a further operation.”<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Britten died in his Aldeburgh home on December 4, 1976, twelve days after his sixty-third birthday.

#### Historical Perspective

It has become fashionable to categorise composers as “major” and “minor”. This is to be deprecated for in so many cases the so-called minor prophet has become major. In what respects can this categorization be made? A composer may be important in one particular line and, therefore, undoubtedly “major” in that line – which, in itself, may not be a very permanent one. Important composers of ballet or film music may be quite insignificant as symphonists, but they cannot be called “minor”. . . . As far as Europe in general is concerned, even Vaughan Williams is “minor” – which is absurd. “Major” and “minor” are grades which simply do not justify their use and categorisation of this nature can only come in retrospect.<sup>31</sup>

This statement, written in 1952, is as true today as it was then. When considering matters such as historical perspective an attempt to classify the importance of a composer’s overall creative output seems natural. Yet the terms “major” and “minor” lose meaning under Demuth’s critical assessment. In the opinion of the author this argument is crucial to an unbiased evaluation of both Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten and the value of their respective contributions as composers of vocal music.

#### *Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)*

Throughout much of the twentieth century the mainstream academic community judged Gerald Finzi as a composer of little significance. “Finzi was considered by his peers to be a musical traditionalist, to be among that ‘small band of composers whom

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<sup>30</sup>Stewart R. Craggs, *Benjamin Britten: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>31</sup>Norman Demuth, *Musical Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Rockliff Publishing, 1952), 309-10.

neither personal inclination nor professional ambition have tempted them to experiment with the received language of music.”<sup>32</sup> The composer’s close alliance with this “received language of music” left him vulnerable to critics who often dismissed his work as an insignificant derivation of the “Second English Musical Renaissance” epitomized by Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Hubert Parry, and Gustav Holst. However, in the area of vocal composition Finzi developed a truly distinctive approach to text setting that distinguishes his compositions when compared with those listed above.<sup>33</sup>

One of the chief criticisms aimed at Finzi was his “dated” treatment of consonance and dissonance.

He always refused to avail himself of the higher range of dissonances which is a distinguishing feature of twentieth-century music... The fact that Finzi preferred to work in a ‘tension range’ which was lower than that of most of his contemporaries is an observation but it is not a criticism. Within this range he was able to achieve a power and conviction in his use of dissonance.<sup>34</sup>

Critics of the time reveal a peculiarly dual response to his music. Donald Mitchell, writing in 1954, regards Finzi as, “a most expert choral composer,” commenting on his work’s “excellence as musical sound” with which, “the ear is continuously rewarded.”<sup>35</sup> He continues, however, by questioning the authenticity of Finzi’s “musical personality,” adding, “[h]as he in fact added anything significantly new to the tradition initiated and exploited by the great Victorians?”<sup>36</sup> Over fifty years later, with a rapidly growing body

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<sup>32</sup> Jerry Michael McCoy, “The Choral Music of Gerald Finzi: A Study of Textual/Musical Relationships,” (D.M.A. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1982), 9.

<sup>33</sup>Edmunds, 154.

<sup>34</sup>Walker, 6.

<sup>35</sup>Donald Mitchell, “The Music of Gerald Finzi,” *The Musical Times* Vol. 95, No. 1339 (September, 1954), 491.

of research and writing to the affirmative, the answer is, in the opinion of this author, a resounding yes.

It would be inaccurate to denounce Finzi's conservative style as an outgrowth of his inability to understand or manipulate the *avant-garde* practices of his time. He was well versed, through private study and personal reflection, in the music of his contemporaries, even those with whom his music bears no immediate connection. This assertion is supported in an article by Alan Walker that recounts his first and only meeting with Finzi at his home in Ashmansworth.

I came to the conclusion that not only was he extremely interested in all new developments affecting music, but that he was also well versed in the minutiae of twentieth-century music. At that time I was a student, and he showed much interest in two songs which I had just composed. When we were able to repair to his music room he asked me to play (and sing!) them to him. I growled and thumped my way through them to the best of my ability, during which time he listened most intently, and after I had finished he got up and walked over to his bookshelves, pulled down a volume, and said, 'I wonder if you know this work? Play from the second page here.' I had never seen the music before, but as soon as I started to play it I recognised the style immediately as one almost identical with that of my songs. Finzi at once removed the sting by launching a discussion of the problems of word-setting, which I regard as one of the best composition lessons that I have ever received. Only later was I allowed to turn to the title-page of the work he had shown me. It was the early piano sonata, op. 1, of Alban Berg.<sup>37</sup>

Although he had vigorously studied the experimental techniques of the continental mainstream, particularly the Viennese serialists and the Parisian neo-classicists, he eschewed them, preferring older models as his vehicle for expression.<sup>38</sup> This practice held constant throughout his life. Finzi often began works in earnest only to be distracted by a

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 491.

<sup>37</sup>Walker, 10.

<sup>38</sup>Arthur Bliss, "Gerald Finzi: An Appreciation," *Tempo* 42 (Winter 1956-1957): 5.

new project. The piece was left, sometimes for years, before he felt adequately inspired to finish it. “This habit of spreading the composition of a work over as much as twenty or twenty-five years was feasible only because Finzi’s style (like Ravel’s or Elgar’s) changed comparatively little during his lifetime.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps his style changed so little, particularly in the vocal works, because his philosophy of text setting, established early in life during his study with Edward Bairstow, remained constant throughout his life.<sup>40</sup> Finzi’s greatest contribution to twentieth-century music resides in his “sensitive response to the cadences of the English language. There is perhaps a more intimate marriage of these to the pitch and rhythm of the music than in the work of any other British composer.”<sup>41</sup> This unique “marriage” of words with pitch and rhythm forms the basis of Finzi’s entire compositional approach. Decisions related to melody, harmony, texture, and form found their genesis in one question: how can each of these musical elements serve to better illustrate the meaning of the text?

In the traditional sense, Gerald Finzi’s classification as a “minor” composer is well deserved. He did not create a new musical language or reshape the landscape of modern composition. His contribution to English vocal music is well documented and in that respect alone he can be called “major”.<sup>42</sup> But the fact that he isn’t considered a giant among twentieth-century composers is irrelevant; he never envisioned himself as one. “None of his works has ever stirred listeners towards riotous abuse or excessive

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<sup>39</sup>Ferguson, 132.

<sup>40</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 16.

<sup>41</sup>John Russell, “Gerald Finzi: An English Composer.” *Tempo* 33 (Autumn 1954), 11.

<sup>42</sup>Frank Howes, “A Poet’s Musician, the Works of Gerald Finzi,” *The Times* (5 October 1956), 3.

enthusiasm; nor is it ever likely to do so, for Finzi himself is not by temperament ambitious for *réclame* nor likely to care greatly whether or not posterity will treasure his work highly.”<sup>43</sup> He knew who he was and what he wanted to communicate. This sense of self-awareness allowed him to compose music that continues to inspire today. “Out of his own world he sallied forth as a champion of the neglected, the young, and the troubled. Inside his own world he created the finer, private world of his imagination.”<sup>44</sup>

*Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)*

Benjamin Britten once quipped that it was impossible to tell yet whether he represented a “ripple or a wave” in the “river of music history.” Today, less than forty years after his death, Britten remains a prominent figure in British music of the twentieth century and one can only speculate as to his impact on future generations. In his own time Britten was as controversial as he was successful. To many of his countrymen he represented a firm break with the nationalistic style of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and later, Finzi, that had dominated English music in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the first time in several centuries a native born Englishman found widespread success throughout Europe as a composer, putting to rest that most unattractive sobriquet, *das land ohne musik*.<sup>45</sup>

Though we can easily enough take up an international vantage-point today, one of Britten’s own signal achievements in the years around Grimes was to demonstrate to his countrymen that musical insularity was no longer a necessary policy of self-defence. Not only did he show that an Englishman’s music could be taken up without a patronizing air by the rest of the Western musical world. In assimilating certain continental influences into his own work, he had also pointed towards some degree of

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<sup>43</sup>C. M. Boyd, “Gerald Finzi and the Solo Song,” *Tempo* 33 (Autumn, 1954), 18.

<sup>44</sup>Diana McVeagh, Forward to Boosey and Hawkes Publicity Catalogue, 1980.

<sup>45</sup>Translated as *the land without music*.

*rapprochement* with the principal forces of European music...No longer need the typical British composer feel deprived of stimuli from beyond his immediate environment.<sup>46</sup>

When Britten first garnered national attention in the 1930's, "British musicians remained amazed, if not disconcerted, by the imaginative precision with which Britten deployed a fluent technique."<sup>47</sup> He represented a new concept of professionalism in English music. Britten's regimented training, ceaseless work ethic, and prolific output as both performer and composer instilled skepticism in the older generation, who took the self-taught Elgar as their romanticized model. "Apart from a list of works longer than those of many composers who lived longer, he was a busy performer...and for much of his life the director of an important arts festival...he was unhappy and restless when not working...His work, in short, *was* his life."<sup>48</sup>

Like Finzi, Britten is remembered primarily as a composer of vocal music although his influence not only encompassed solo songs but also initiated the rebirth of English opera and a modern approach to choral writing.

It is as a *choral* composer – apart from his probably even more popular achievements as a musical dramatist – that Britten seems to stand head and shoulders above his contemporaries (on both sides of the Channel). It is here more than in any other sphere of his work that the break with Edwardian conventions in particular, and with the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general, has become completest. It is here that he sets a shining example by creating a new musical style of idiomatic inevitability within a sonorous medium of very real limitations.<sup>49</sup>

His style is typified by "a free tonality that can seldom be pinned down to a precise major, minor, or modal scale but is none the less always related to some...feature that

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<sup>46</sup>Evans, 3.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>48</sup>Michael Oliver, *Benjamin Britten* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>49</sup>Mitchell and Keller, eds., 85-6.



acts as a center...melody closely allied to sensitive word-setting...contrasting texts to provide a unified structure for musical forms...and...versatile use of thematic material.”<sup>50</sup> Britten’s approach to text setting, while markedly different than Finzi’s, earned him a similar reputation as a master of the English language. In fact one is struck by the similarity in language used by critics to praise each composer’s musical response to poetry. In his essay *Composer and Poet* Peter Porter went so far as to say, “[n]ot since the days when musician and poet were the same person has there been a great composer whose art is as profoundly bound up with words as Benjamin Britten’s...it can be said that what poets have prefigured in words, he has reworked in music.”<sup>51</sup>

Throughout most of his life Benjamin Britten was perceived as a divisive figure in British music, pitting the stalwart guardians of the nineteenth-century English renaissance against those more receptive to the continental *avant-garde*. As he aged, however, Britten’s position at the forefront of British musical innovation gave way “to a generation excitedly discovering Webern, Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen and Cage.”<sup>52</sup> However controversial in its own time, Britten’s music has come to represent a link between the ultra-conservatism of Victorian England and the hyper-experimentation of twentieth-century modernism. “This music has the power to connect the avant-garde with the lost paradise of tonality; it conserves and renovates in the boldest and simplest manner; it shows how old usages can be refreshed and remade, and how the new can be saved from mere rootlessness, etiolation, lack of connexion and communication.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Palmer, 329.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 271-2.

<sup>52</sup>Oliver, 6.

<sup>53</sup>Robin Holloway, “Benjamin Britten: Tributes and Memories,” *Tempo* 120 (March, 1977): 6.

## CHAPTER III

## SEVEN POEMS OF ROBERT BRIDGES, OP. 17

The origin of Gerald Finzi's *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* is similar to much of the composer's output prior to 1950. It was not the result of a commission but rather from a friend's suggestion: in this case a suggestion by Herbert Lambert.<sup>1</sup> The seven part-songs were completed and published separately throughout the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> This was also typical of the composer's general mode of operation. Finzi often began works in earnest only to be distracted by a new project. The piece would be left, sometimes for years, before he felt adequately inspired to finish it.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of his death Finzi had amassed a large collection of sketchbooks full of incomplete compositions. Amidst the sketchbooks, Joy Finzi discovered at least nine unfinished choral settings of Robert Bridges' poetry. It is thought that the existing set was originally intended to include ten part-songs with an additional set designated as *Op. 32*.<sup>4</sup> *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* was not composed as a cycle or narrative set of songs. Similar to his approach concerning solo vocal works, Finzi would compile a group of separate compositions over the course of several years that he felt reflected a common poetic or artistic design.<sup>5</sup> The entire set was first published in September 1939, specifying that the volume's order be adhered to if the songs were sung as a group.

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<sup>1</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 193.

<sup>3</sup>Howard Ferguson, "Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)," *Music and Letters* Vol. 38, No. 2 (April 1957): 131-132.

<sup>4</sup>Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 193.

<sup>5</sup>Ferguson, 131-132.

*Op. 17*'s poetry is drawn from *Shorter Poems of Robert Bridges: Books I – IV*. In his lifetime Bridges enjoyed financial success and critical acclaim, serving as the English Poet Laureate from 1916 until his death in 1930. Like Finzi, Bridges has been remembered primarily as a conservative traditionalist. Finzi apparently preferred the poems of Robert Bridges in the realm of choral composition whose texts account for nearly one half of Finzi's overall output in this genre. These poems, like the majority of Finzi's secular settings, are of a particularly Romantic character. They deal with "idyllic visions of a better but somewhat unretainable world, memories of days past, loves shared or lost, and the joy to be known in the unity of Man and Nature."<sup>6</sup>

Any discussion of Finzi's compositional style must first consider his unique approach to text setting. As a composer of vocal music Finzi insisted that all musical elements derive from a specific poetic inspiration.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore impossible to analyze his music in a clear, systematized manner without first considering the poetic content itself. Musical elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, and form all derive from the text and therefore cannot be easily separated. To compound matters one must also consider Finzi's careful layering and development of several strata of musical/textual relationships. As we shall see, simple word painting is rarely used to highlight or call undue attention to a single word or phrase. Rather, Finzi conveys his profound understanding of the text through the amalgamation of several distinctive compositional techniques.

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<sup>6</sup>Jerry Michael McCoy, "The Choral Music of Gerald Finzi: A Study of Textual/Musical Relationships," (D.M.A. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1982), 17.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-21.

In his vocal works syllabic stress is always maintained within a single word and phrases are constructed in such a way that the natural word stress within each phrase is left unaltered. This attention to the natural ordering of syllabic and word stress led Finzi to adopt strict compositional practices, severely limiting the variety of traditional polyphonic textures (i.e. fugue, canon) used in his choral works. His vocal writing is almost entirely syllabic. In order to preserve meaning and syllabic stress he felt that each syllable of a poem required its own note and that melismas should be avoided.<sup>8</sup> His solo songs contain only one melisma: a twelve-note descent on the word “weep” in the song *Come away, Death*.<sup>9</sup> Melismas do exist in his accompanied choral works though they are few and far between. In a cappella works such as *Op. 17* he developed an entirely syllabic approach that is consistently used throughout the set. Finzi himself spoke of *Op. 17* as a series of “3-part, 4-part, and 5-part *songs*, rather than part-songs that divide at any moment, – the difference is in the hyphen.”<sup>10</sup> In order to maintain poetic integrity, each word is recited only once in each voice part. Therefore, regardless of the importance of any single word or phrase the composer refused to add emphasis by mere repetition. To achieve repetition of key words and phrases Finzi had to construct a polyphonic texture in which imitation rather than simple duplication achieved the desired result.

In these syllabic settings the rhythmic character of any given poetic phrase is generally common to all voice parts. Often a single voice completes a rhythmic pattern associated with a poetic phrase and awaits the completion of that pattern by the remaining voices before beginning a new pattern. In this manner rhythmic integrity is maintained within and between complete thoughts and phrases.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>9</sup>C. M. Boyd, “Gerald Finzi and the Solo Song,” *Tempo* 33 (Autumn 1954): 17.

<sup>10</sup>Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 192.

<sup>11</sup>McCoy, 24.

Finzi tends to use this technique as a means of building intensity, culminating in a homophonic, and therefore more clear and focused declamation of the most important section of a phrase or stanza.

Finally, the rhythmic motives of *Op. 17* mirror the natural speech rhythms of the text and illuminate the meaning of each word, phrase, stanza, and poem on multiple levels. As a result the chosen rhythms flow directly from the natural speech patterns of the English language. In 1982, Jerry McCoy completed a dissertation concerning textual/musical relationships in the choral music of Gerald Finzi. In his fourth chapter McCoy outlined a set of rhythmic formulas that permeate the entire set. Finzi generates the rhythmic content of *Op. 17* through the transformation and combination of these few basic units of rhythm. These figures are often applied at the opening of poetic phrases or sub-phrases and serve as the rhythmic genesis for the subsequent section of music. "In this manner virtually all of the major structural divisions of text are delineated by contrast of the overall rhythmic character associated with each section of text; a character derived from the rhythmic content of the words themselves."<sup>12</sup> By allowing the inherent characteristics of the text itself to generate each section's rhythmic content Finzi created a unique style of textural variation focused on rhythmic differentiation. Each poetic section is distinguished by its overall rhythmic character rather than the implementation of a wide variety of standardized polyphonic techniques. The term rhythmic differentiation is used throughout this document in reference to this particular technique. Finzi used his distinctive method of textural variation and purposeful use of metric space

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 29.

to reveal each poem's internal construction and meaning as the primary determinant of musical form in his settings.

I Praise the Tender Flower

- 1 I praise the tender flower,
- 2 That on a mournful day
- 3 Bloomed in my garden bower
- 4 And made the winter gay.
- 5 Its loveliness contented
- 6 My heart tormented.
  
- 7 I praise the gentle maid
- 8 Whose happy voice and smile
- 9 To confidence betrayed
- 10 My doleful heart awhile:
- 11 And gave my spirit deploring
- 12 Fresh wings for soaring.
  
- 13 The maid for very fear
- 14 Of love I durst not tell:
- 15 The rose could never hear,
- 16 Though I bespake her well:
- 17 So in my song I bind them
- 18 For all to find them.<sup>13</sup>

*Poetic Form*

“I Praise the Tender Flower” is the eighth poem in Bridges’ *Shorter Poems, Book III*. Like each of the poems selected for *Op. 17* it is not representative of a standard poetic form such as the sonnet or ballad. Yet Bridges poetry is highly formalized, lending itself well to musical setting. The poem consists of three symmetrical stanzas of six lines. Each stanza contains a single quatrain followed by a rhymed couplet.<sup>14</sup> Table 3.1 highlights this poetic structure. Bridges uses this particular rhyme scheme to create a two-part

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<sup>13</sup>Humphrey Milford, ed., *Poetical Works of Robert Bridges: Excluding the Eight Dramas*, 272.

<sup>14</sup>The term *quatrain* refers to a four-line grouping. Quatrains typically feature an alternating rhyme scheme. *Couplet* refers to any two-line grouping, however, most couplets contain rhyming lines of equal length and form a completely independent syntactic unit.

stanzaic formula in which the couplet functions as an independent poetic thought, commenting upon and summarizing the preceding quatrain. In stanza three, however, the rhymed couplet serves an additional purpose as it not only reflects upon lines 13-16 but also serves as a summation of the entire poem.

Table 3.1. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/7/13	6	A
2/8/14	6	B
3/9/15	6	A
4/10/16	6	B
5/11/17	7	C
6/12/18	5	C

### *Musical Form and Texture*

Finzi's setting clearly reflects the three-part structure of Bridges' poem. Each major section is delineated through a combination of metric space (m. 7, 14) and subtle rhythmic differentiations. While this work is essentially through composed it contains several textural elements designed to evoke an implied strophic form. Table 3.2 illustrates this structure detailing major sections, subsections, and corresponding measure numbers and poetic lines.

Table 3.2. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Musical Form

Section	Subsection	
I m. 1-7	A m. 1-4 Lines 1-4	B m. 5-7 Lines 5-6
II m. 8-14	A m. 8-11 Lines 7-10	B m. 12-14 Lines 11-12
III m. 15-22	A m. 15-18 Lines 13-16	B m. 19-22 Lines 17-18

All three sections conform to the two-part organization of each stanza; a single quatrain followed by a rhymed couplet. Finzi's setting is equally measured and consistent. Each stanza's quatrain is predominantly set in freely imitative counterpoint. In Sections I and III this culminates in four-part homophony for the final line of the quatrain (Example 1). This same technique is applied in Section II with an important distinction. Finzi sets the third line, rather than the fourth, homophonically (Example 2). He does this in order to emphasize the first syllable of the word "doleful," due to its special significance as the dramatic focal point of the quatrain. This serves as a prime example of Finzi's willingness to alter compositional formulae in order to accommodate syllabic and word stress within a poetic phrase.

bow-er And made the win-ter gay...  
 And made the win-ter gay...  
 1 bow-er And made the win-ter gay...  
 bow-er And made the win-ter gay...

Though I bespake her well...  
 Though I bespake her well...  
 2. Though I bespake her well...  
 3. Though I bespake her well...

Example 1. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 4 and 18  
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To con-fi-dence betrayed My  
 smile To con-fi-dence betrayed My  
 To con-fi-dence betrayed My  
 To con-fi-dence betrayed My

dole-ful heart a-while: A  
 dole-ful heart a-while:  
 dole-ful heart a-while:  
 dole-ful heart a-while:

Example 2. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 10-11  
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Finzi addresses the rhymed couplet that closes each stanza in a similar fashion. The first line of each couplet is distinctly set using two-part voice pairing. Subsections IB and IIB set soprano/alto against tenor/bass (Examples 3 and 4). Subsection IIIB employs a soprano/tenor, alto/bass grouping (Example 5). The final line of each stanza is essentially homophonic.<sup>15</sup>

Example 3. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 5-7. The score consists of four staves. The first staff is marked 'Poco rit.' and the second 'A tempo'. The lyrics are: "Its love - li-ness con - tent - ed My heart tor - ment - ed. I". The music features two-part voice pairing in the first line.

Example 3. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 5-7  
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Example 4. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 12-14. The score consists of four staves. The first staff is marked 'Poco rit.' and the second 'A tempo'. The lyrics are: "And gave my spi-rit de-plor-ing Fresh wings for soar-ing. The". The music features two-part voice pairing in the first line.

Example 4. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 12-14  
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<sup>15</sup>The closing line of stanza one (m. 6-7) contains a moment of rhythmic variation. This is carried out through soprano/tenor, alto/bass voice-pairing that seems to foreshadow the closing of Section III.

Finzi's setting of the final couplet reveals an innate ability to simultaneously express both poetic form and meaning through simple textural variation. In his typical manner Finzi uses homophony to express lines that comment upon and/or summarize the preceding text. However, in the final stanza homophony is also used to elucidate Bridges' poetic imagery. Just as the poet "binds" the flower and maid through his song, Finzi unites all four voices to reinforce the poet's solidarity. Examples 3, 4, and 5 illustrate Finzi's setting of all three couplets.

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a single system. The music is in a common time signature and features a key signature of one flat. The score includes dynamics such as *mp*, *ff*, and *p*, and a *Ritardando* marking. The lyrics are: "So in my song I bind them For all to find them." The lyrics are repeated for each voice part, with some words underlined to indicate emphasis or phrasing.

Example 5. "I Praise the Tender Flower" Measures 19-22  
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### I Have Loved Flowers That Fade

- 1 I have loved flowers that fade,
- 2 Within whose magic tents
- 3 Rich hues have marriage made
- 4 With sweet unmemoried scents:
- 5 A honeymoon delight, —
- 6 A joy of love at sight,
- 7 That ages in an hour: —
- 8 My song be like a flower!
  
- 9 I have loved airs, that die
- 10 Before their charm is writ
- 11 Along a liquid sky

12 Trembling to welcome it.  
 13 Notes, that with pulse of fire  
 14 Proclaim the spirit's desire,  
 15 Then die, and are nowhere: –  
 16 My song be like an air!

17 Die, song, die like a breath,  
 18 And wither as a bloom:  
 19 Fear not a flowery death,  
 20 Dread not an airy tomb!  
 21 Fly with delight, fly hence!  
 22 'Twas thine love's tender sense  
 23 To feast; now on thy bier  
 24 Beauty shall shed a tear.<sup>16</sup>

*Poetic Form*

“I Have Loved Flowers that Fade,” the thirteenth poem in *Shorter Poems, Book II* contains three symmetrical stanzas. In this instance all three stanzas contain eight lines consisting of six syllables each. The poem's rhyme scheme, a single quatrain followed by two distinct couplets, suggests a three part stanzaic formula in which lines 1-4, 5-6, and 7-8 function as independent poetic thoughts. This structure is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. “I Have Loved Flowers that Fade” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/9/17	6	A
2/10/18	6	B
3/11/19	6	A
4/12/20	6	B
5/13/21	6	C
6/14/22	6	C
7/15/23	6	D
8/16/24	6	D

The matter is complicated, however, as Bridges uses definitive and exclamatory punctuation along with enjambment to unite poetic thoughts that belie the established

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<sup>16</sup>Milford, 263.

rhyme scheme.<sup>17</sup> Following lines 7 and 15 a colon followed by a dash distinguishes each stanza's final line as an independent statement. In stanza three a colon divides lines 17-20 into two distinct statements and a semicolon is inserted into the middle of line 23, connecting lines 22-23 and allowing the final poetic thought to carry over into the last line through enjambment. Table 3.4 clarifies the poetic phrasing of each stanza. In this manner Bridges creates a textual complexity beyond the poem's rather simple rhyme scheme and prescribed syllabic count.

Table 3.4. "I Have Loved Flowers that Fade" Poetic Phrasing

Stanza	Lines			
	I	1-4	5-7	8
II	9-12	13-15	16	n/a
III	17-18	19-20	21	22-24

#### *Musical Form and Texture*

"I Have Loved Flowers That Fade" is the only setting in *Op. 17* to use three voices: soprano, alto, and tenor. The reason for this unique voicing is unclear but a deliberate poetic and/or musical reasoning seems likely when one considers Finzi's purposeful use of texture throughout the set. Bridges' poetic structure is maintained throughout the piece. Each successive stanza is clearly distinguished. This is achieved primarily through the implementation of metric space and rhythmic differentiation (Examples 6 and 7).

Finzi also accounts for the variable number of subsections within each stanza. In these instances metric space and rhythmic differentiation are used in conjunction with changes in tempo/style. Table 3.5, an expansion of Table 3.4, identifies subsections

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<sup>17</sup>The term *enjambment* refers to the continuation of a poetic phrase from one line of a poem to the next without pause.

within each stanza, their corresponding poetic lines, measure numbers, and any significant changes in tempo/style.

Example 6. “I Have Loved Flowers That Fade” Measures 8-10  
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Example 7. “I Have Loved Flowers That Fade” Measures 19-21  
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Table 3.5. “I Have Loved Flowers that Fade” Musical Form

Stanza	Subsections			
I	IA Lines 1-4 m. 1-4	IB Lines 5-7 m. 4/5-8 <i>Animato</i>	IC Line 8 m. 8/9-10	n/a
II	IIA Lines 9-12 m. 11-14/15	IIB Lines 13-15 m. 15-19 <i>Animato/Tranquillo</i>	IIC Line 16 m. 19/20-21	n/a
III	IIIA Lines 17-18 m. 22-25	IIIB Lines 19-20 m. 25-27/28	IIIC Line 21 m. 28-29 <i>Animato</i>	IIID Lines 22-24 m. 29-35 <i>Allargando</i>

Stanza III opens with an uncharacteristic moment of canonic word painting. The descending perfect fifth on “Die, song” in subsection IIIA serves as an echo of the descending minor seventh figure in IIB. This technique is continued in Finzi’s setting of “Fear not” and “Dread not” in subsection IIIB. In subsection IIIB the melodic motive returns to the descending minor seventh of IIB. In this instance, however, Finzi manipulates the rhythmic motive in order to preserve word stress within the poetic phrase. The 1:2 rhythmic ratio, established in subsection IIB, is maintained in IIIA and IIIB. However, Finzi varies between strong and weak beat placement of the motive according to each word’s poetic importance. In subsection IIB the motive begins on beat four, placing “die” on beat one. Subsection IIIA begins with the word “Die” on beat one and in subsection IIIB “Fear” and “Dread” fall on the beat, while “not” is relegated to a subdivision. In each instance the word with the most dramatic potential is placed on a strong beat thus ensuring an accurate rendering of the poetic phrase. This represents a clear example of Finzi’s desire to connect similar poetic thoughts through a series of compositional methods. In this instance Finzi utilizes three concepts to draw the listener’s attention to the common themes of death, fear, and dread: a descending melodic contour, a text-driven rhythmic motive, and canonic texture (Examples 8 and 9).

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system has two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It contains the lyrics "Die, song, die like a" and "breath,". The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains the lyrics "Die, song,". The second system also has two staves. The top staff continues the melody with lyrics "Die, song, die like a breath" and "die like a breath, And". The bottom staff contains the lyrics "die like a breath, And". The score includes dynamic markings like *mp* and *mf*, and a measure number 23.

Example 8. “I Have Loved Flowers That Fade” Measures 22-23  
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25 *mp* bloom: Fear not a flower-y death, Dread not an air-y tomb!

27 *Poco rit.* bloom: Fear not a flower-y death, Dread not an air-y tomb!

Example 9. "I Have Loved Flowers That Fade" Measures 25-27  
 SEVEN UNACCOMPANIED PART SONGS ON POEMS OF ROBERT BRIDGES by Gerald Finzi  
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### My Spirit Sang All Day

- 1 My spirit sang all day
- 2 O my joy.
- 3 Nothing my tongue could say,
- 4 Only My joy!
  
- 5 My heart an echo caught –
- 6 O my joy –
- 7 And spake, Tell me thy thought,
- 8 Hide not thy joy.
  
- 9 My eyes gan peer around, –
- 10 O my joy –
- 11 What beauty hast thou found?
- 12 Shew us thy joy.
  
- 13 My jealous ears grew whist; –
- 14 O my joy –
- 15 Music from heaven is't,
- 16 Sent for our joy?
  
- 17 She also came and heard;
- 18 O my joy,
- 19 What, said she, is this word?
- 20 What is thy joy?
  
- 21 And I replied, O see,
- 22 O my joy,
- 23 'Tis thee, I cried, 'tis thee:
- 24 Thou art my joy.<sup>18</sup>

### *Poetic Form*

<sup>18</sup>Milford, 281-282.

The six stanzas of “My Spirit Sang All Day,” the second poem in *Shorter Poems, Book IV*, share a common phrase, “O my joy.” This phrase is repeated as the second line of each stanza, serving as a “central pivot around which each stanza revolves.”<sup>19</sup> Each stanza contains a single quatrain with a 6-3-6-4 syllabic scansion.<sup>20</sup> This poetic structure is displayed in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6. “My Spirit Sang All Day” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/5/9/13/17/21	6	A
2/6/10/14/18/22	3	B
3/7/11/15/19/23	6	A
4/8/12/16/20/24	4	B

Bridges’ poem contains a progressive relationship in each stanza as the “spirit,” “heart,” “eyes,” “ears,” and lastly, “she,” search for the source of the poet’s joy, which is revealed only in the final stanza. The progressive nature of the poem’s format coupled with the reoccurrence of a central phrase/theme offer a clearly discernable structure that is illuminated by Finzi’s setting.

#### *Musical Form and Texture*

Finzi’s setting once again mirrors the formal structure of Bridges’ poetry. Table 3.7 illustrates the six sections with their corresponding poetic lines, measure numbers, and subsections. “O my joy,” the second line of each stanza, is consistently set in an asymmetrical 5/4 meter. Since the remaining measures are duple (4/4 and 2/4), “the association of irregular meter with “O my joy” lends the phrase notable musical

<sup>19</sup>McCoy, 60.

<sup>20</sup>*Scansion* can refer both to the process of poetic metrical analysis and its resulting patterns.



emphasis, which in turn supports the poetic function.”<sup>21</sup> Finzi’s customary use of freely imitative polyphony is noticeably lacking throughout “My Spirit Sang All Day.” In fact, it marks the only piece in the entire set that does not prominently employ this distinctive feature. Textural variation is instead achieved through the alternation of three and four-part homophony, two-part voice pairing, and solo sections set against a static three-part accompaniment. Throughout the work Finzi arranges and rearranges these few textures to create a sense of instability, reflecting the poet’s inquiry into the source of his “joy”.

Table 3.7. “My Spirit Sang All Day” Musical Form

Section	Lines	Measures	Subsections			
I	1-4	1-6	Four-Part Homophony m. 1	“O my joy” m. 2	Two-Part Voice Pairing m. 3-4	Four-Part Homophony m. 5-6
II	5-8	6/7-13	Alto Solo m. 6/7-7	“O my joy” m. 8-9	Three-Part Polyphony m. 10-11	Four-Part Homophony m. 12-13
III	9-12	13/14-20	Tenor Solo m. 13/14-15	“O my joy” m. 16	Three-Part Homophony m. 17-20	
IV	13-16	20/21-27	Four-Part Homophony m. 20/21-22	“O my joy” m. 23	Two-Part Voice Pairing m. 24-26	Four-Part Homophony m. 26-27
V	17-20	28-35	Four-Part Homophony m. 28-29	“O my joy” m. 30	Four-Part Homophony m. 31-32	Two-Part Voice Pairing m. 33-35
VI	21-24	35/36-44	Four-Part Homophony m. 35/36-44			

Sections I, II, IV, and V contain four subsections that correspond to the four lines of each stanza. Sections I and IV are distinguished by a four-part homophonic opening, the customary 5/4 setting of “O my joy,” a brief moment of two-part voice pairing (women/men), and a return to the four-part homophony of the opening. Section V functions in a slightly different manner. Following the 5/4 measure Finzi continues with

<sup>21</sup>McCoy, 68.

four-part homophony for two measures only to close using two-part voice pairing (Example 10).

Example 10. "My Spirit Sang All Day" Measures 31-34  
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Sections II and III begin with a solo supported by a stationary three-part accompaniment. In Section II the alto is supported by a root position E major triad while the tenor is set amidst an open fifth in the opening of Section III. Following the alto solo Finzi sets a brief moment of three-part polyphony and then closes with an echo of the four-part homophony of Sections I and IV. Section III differs in three particular ways. Aside from the closing it is the only section that contains fewer than four subsections and remains completely homophonic following its opening statement. Additionally, Section III employs only three voices rather than the full four-voice compliment established at the opening of Section I (Example 11). Perhaps this is Finzi's attempt at a subtle joke: only using three voices for the third stanza.

Section VI is texturally unique for it remains homophonic throughout and is a clear return to the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic motives of Section I. It seems plausible that Finzi chose this particular textural scheme to literally represent the conclusion of the poet's quest. In the final stanza the poet has found his "joy," offering a sense of unity and finality. It seems Finzi responded to poetic inspiration in his customary manner; through

the layering of multiple compositional techniques designed to subtly lead listeners, singers, and conductors closer to the poet's intended meaning.

The image shows a musical score for two voices and piano accompaniment. The top two staves are vocal parts, and the bottom two are piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "O my joy- What beau-ty hast thou found?" and "O my joy- What beau-ty hast thou found?". The score includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *mp*.

Example 11. "My Spirit Sang All Day" Measures 16-18  
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### Clear and Gentle Stream

- 1 Clear and gentle stream!
- 2 Known and loved so long,
- 3 That hast heard the song
- 4 And the idle dream
- 5 Of my boyish day;
- 6 While I once again
- 7 Down thy margin stray,
- 8 In the selfsame strain
- 9 Still my voice is spent,
- 10 With my old lament
- 11 And my idle dream,
- 12 Clear and gentle stream!
  
- 13 Where my old seat was
- 14 Here again I sit,
- 15 Where the long boughs knit
- 16 Over stream and grass
- 17 A translucent eaves:
- 18 Where back eddies play
- 19 Shipwreck with the leaves,
- 20 And the proud swans stray,
- 21 Sailing one by one
- 22 Out of stream and sun,
- 23 And the fish lie cool
- 24 In their chosen pool.

25 Many an afternoon  
 26 Of the summer day  
 27 Dreaming here I lay;  
 28 And I know how soon,  
 29 Idly at its hour,  
 30 First the deep bell hums  
 31 From the minster tower,  
 32 And then evening comes,  
 33 Creeping up the glade,  
 34 With her lengthening shade,  
 35 And the tardy boon  
 36 Of her brightening moon.  
  
 37 Clear and gentle stream!  
 38 Ere again I go  
 39 Where thou dost not flow,  
 40 Well does it beseem  
 41 Thee to hear again  
 42 Once my youthful song,  
 43 That familiar strain  
 44 Silent now so long:  
 45 Be as I content  
 46 With my old lament  
 47 And my idle dream,  
 48 Clear and gentle stream.<sup>22</sup>

*Poetic Form*

“Elegy,” as it is titled in *Shorter Poems, Book I*, is the longest poem chosen for *Op. 17*. It is set in four stanzas. Each contains twelve lines made from five syllables. The poem’s rhyme scheme, while more complex due to each stanza’s length, is distinguished by two quatrains followed by two rhymed couplets. Table 3.8 highlights this poetic structure.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Milford, 225-226.

<sup>23</sup>The final couplet in stanza two does not follow the prescribed rhyme scheme. Thus, “F” indicates a new rhyme only applicable in the closing two lines of stanza two.

Table 3.8. “Clear and Gentle Stream” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/13/25/37	5	A
2/14/26/38	5	B
3/15/27/39	5	B
4/16/28/40	5	A
5/17/29/41	5	C
6/18/30/42	5	D
7/19/31/43	5	C
8/20/32/44	5	D
9/21/33/45	5	E
10/22/34/46	5	E
11/23/35/47	5	A/F
12/24/36/48	5	A/F

Just as “My Spirit Sang All Day” features a repeated phrase in each stanza to provide continuity of thought, Bridges uses the opening line, “Clear and gentle stream,” to bookend both the opening and closing stanzas. This technique, while relatively straightforward in nature, signifies in the opinion of this author a return to the “stream” both physical and metaphorical that is mirrored in Finzi’s setting.

#### *Musical Form and Texture*

“Clear and Gentle Stream” serves as the fourth, and therefore central, song of *Op. 17*. Finzi’s distinctive use of freely imitative counterpoint dominates the setting. In each of the four sections, which correspond to the poem’s four stanzas, homophony is rarely used for more than one or two beats. Each section and subsection is instead delineated through rhythmic differentiation, metric space, variation in the number of voices being used, and in one instance a change of meter.

The length of each stanza creates interpretive complexities not encountered in the first three selections. Within each stanza Bridges uses several compound clauses or thoughts to define, describe, and comment upon a particular aspect of the “stream” and the poet’s feelings towards it. These lines do not fit a prescribed format in each instance.

Therefore the divisions of poetic thought and thus the number of musical subsections are not balanced from stanza to stanza. In order to distinguish one subsection from the next, Finzi subtly applied the techniques listed above being careful not to disturb the flow of one poetic thought to the next. Table 3.9 clarifies this structure, labeling each section and subsection with corresponding measure numbers and poetic lines.

Table 3.9. "Clear and Gentle Stream" Musical Form

Section	Subsection	
I m. 1-12	A m. 1-5 (Lines 1-5)	B m. 6-12 (Lines 6-12)
II m. 13-23	A-1 m. 13-15/16 (Lines 13-17)	B-1 m. 18-21 (Lines 20-22)
	A-2 m. 16-17 (Lines 18-19)	B-2 m. 22-23 (Lines 23-24)
III m. 24-35	A-1 m. 24-26 (Lines 25-27)	B-1 m. 30-32 (Lines 32-33)
	A-2 m. 26/27-29 (Lines 28-31)	B-2 m. 33-35 (Lines 34-36)
IV m. 36-48	A-1 m. 36-39 (Lines 37-39)	B m. 44/45-48 (Lines 45-48)
	A-2 m. 39/40-44 (Lines 40-44)	

Section I contains the fewest number of subsections. The opening measures establish rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic motives that appear each time the phrase "Clear and gentle stream" reoccurs. Section IB is distinguished through textural variation; a new melodic motive carried by the altos with a two-part accompaniment provided by the tenor and bass (Example 12). This marks the first of many instances in which Finzi varies the number of voices being used to designate a change in poetic thought. Section IB closes using a variation of the "Clear and gentle stream" motive, providing closure to Section I.

Example 12. "Clear and Gentle Stream" Measures 5-6  
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Section II contains two contrasting poetic/musical segments labeled IIA and IIB. Each segment is further divisible by two yet these secondary divisions are less poetically and musically significant. The lines set in IIA provide a physical description of the stream's surroundings and depict the stream itself for the first time. IIB focuses on two specific objects, the swans and fish, and the ways in which they interact with the stream. Finzi begins Section II using another three-voice texture, this time omitting the bass. The transition from IIA-1 to IIA-2 includes a metric shift from 4/4 to 12/8 (Example 13).

Example 13. "Clear and Gentle Stream" Measures 15-16  
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This provides another example of Finzi's understated brand of text painting. The triple subdivision of 12/8 appears just in time to buoy the poet's description of the stream's rippling undercurrent. This transition is noteworthy also because of the seamless

manner in which it is achieved. Finzi begins the transition from duple to triple subdivision through a series of alternating triplets and duplets in the measures surrounding the meter change.

Subsection IIB opens with alternating soprano, tenor, bass, and alto entrances in canonic imitation. Although the bass and alto quickly desert the motive established by the soprano it is maintained in its entirety by the tenors. IIB-2 is distinguished by the absence of female voices; Finzi uses only the tenor and bass to set the final two lines of the second stanza.

Subsection IIIA recalls the poet's memories of lazy childhood afternoons by the stream and the anticipation of the tower's bell and impending dusk of IIIB. IIIA-1 opens with another arrangement of voices: soprano, alto, and tenor in a brief moment of homophony. New rhythmic and melodic motives coupled with another collection of voices (soprano, tenor, and bass) delineate IIIA-2. IIIB functions in much the same way. Finzi highlights poetic form and meaning through rhythmic differentiation, multiple voice combinations, and restrained, yet effective, word painting. The melodic contours of "creeping up the glade" (m. 30-32) and the prolongation of "tardy" (m. 33-34) present a pair of surface-level instances. Of greater interest is the symbolism of subsection IIIB-2 in which Finzi uses only the upper three voices to confront the hastening dusk and rising of the moon. Here again Finzi uses texture to heighten poetic suggestion by using only the lightest voices, a rising melodic motive, and the pale timbre of an open fifth to represent the moon's rising (Example 14).

Section IV marks a return to 4/4 meter and opens with the "Clear and gentle stream" motive of Section I. In fact, barring rhythmic alterations that account for changes



in text, IVA-1 is an exact repetition of the first two and a half measures of the piece. IVA-2 is delineated by a shift in rhythmic and melodic character set in a short-lived, three-voice texture. The subsection closes with a rare moment of homophony and the transparent use of metric space for dramatic effect following the word “silent” (m. 43). The final subsection, IVB, also functions as a near-exact repetition of material from section I (m. 8-12). It is important to note that while IVB functions as an independent poetic/musical subsection; the material it is drawn from does not. Bars 8-12 serve as a continuation of the poetic and musical ideas initiated at the opening of IB.

Example 14. “Clear and Gentle Stream” Measure 35  
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### Nightingales

- 1 Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,
- 2 And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
- 3 Ye learn your song:
- 4 Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
- 5 Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
- 6 Bloom the year long!
  
- 7 Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
- 8 Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
- 9 A throe of the heart,
- 10 Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
- 11 No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
- 12 For all our art.

13 Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men  
 14 We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,  
 15 As night is withdrawn  
 16 From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,  
 17 Dream, while the innumerable choir of day  
 18 Welcome the dawn.<sup>24</sup>

*Poetic Form*

“Nightingales,” the twelfth poem in *Shorter Poems, Book V*, consists of three six-line stanzas. Although containing six lines each stanza is structured as two independent poetic statements. As with “Clear and Gentle Stream” these statements do not always conform to the prescribed syllabic count and rhyme scheme. Bridges sets each stanza with an A-A-B-C-C-B scheme, indicating a two-part structure held together by the returning rhyme in the final line of each three-line grouping. This poetic formula is detailed in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10. “Nightingales” Poetic Structure

Phrase I			Phrase II		
Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme	Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/7/13	11	A	4/10/16	12	C
2/8/14	12/12/11	A	5/11/17	10	C
3/9/15	4/5/5	B	6/12/18	4	B

However, in this instance Bridges allows formal symmetry to cloud poetic meaning. To understand the poem one must group lines together while dividing others, regardless of the established syllabic scansion and rhyme scheme. Table 3.11 displays the poem’s text as it would be read thus providing the formal organization represented in Finzi’s setting.

<sup>24</sup>Milford, 311.

Table 3.11. “Nightingales” Poetic Phrasing

Stanza	Subsections	Text
I	IA-1	Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come, And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom Ye learn your song:
	IA-2	Where are those starry woods?
	IB	O might I wander there, Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air Bloom the year long!
II	IIA-1	Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
	IIA-2	Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams, A throe of the heart, Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
	IIB	No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound, For all our art.
III	IIIA	Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men We pour our dark nocturnal secret;
	IIIB-1	and then, As night is withdrawn From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
	IIIB-2	Dream, while the innumerable choir of day Welcome the dawn.

### *Musical Form and Texture*

“Nightingales” serves as the first of two settings in *Op. 17* that feature a five-voice texture. “The addition of a second soprano part allows Finzi to work from a fuller, richer harmonic palette and contributes a greater intensity to imitative passages.”<sup>25</sup> However, it is the use of homophony in a variety of four and five-part combinations that dominates the work.

Subsection IA consists of two homophonic statements delineated by metric space. IA-1 portrays the nightingales’ descent through a generally downward melodic contour observed in all five voices. The metric space at the end of measure five is used to separate IA-2, which functions as a question concerning the terrain described in lines 1-3 (Example 15). In IB Finzi employs his standard use of freely imitative counterpoint to

<sup>25</sup>McCoy, 104-105.

distinguish the remainder of the stanza's text. Measure 11 provides yet another creative display of subtle text painting. The initiation of "Bloom" in four successive voices on consecutive eighth notes cleverly alludes to the image of budding flowers (Example 16).

Example 15. "Nightingales" Measures 5-6

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Example 16. "Nightingales" Measures 11-12

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Section II, demarcated by metric space, opens with another homophonic statement. However, in this instance only the lower four voices are used. The first sopranos join the throng to establish IIA-2 and continue in a predominantly homophonic

manner, setting lines 8-10. Subsection IIB is marked by a first soprano entrance that anticipates the supporting voices, effectively drawing the listener's attention to the next poetic thought (Example 17). IIB continues without the bass as the middle three voices support the first soprano's melody through the resourceful alternation of voice pairing and homophony.

19

dim, for-bid-den hopes pro-found, No dy-ing ca-dence

dim, for-bid-den hopes pro-found, No dy-ing ca-dence

dim, for-bid-den hopes pro-found, No dy-ing ca-dence

dim, for-bid-den hopes pro-found, No dy-ing ca-dence

dim, for-bid-den hopes pro-found,

Example 17. "Nightingales" Measures 19-20  
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Section III opens with an extended unaccompanied tenor solo; a singular occurrence in the entirety of *Op. 17*. This is clearly another instance of word painting. Finzi employs a single voice to set a phrase beginning with the word "Alone" only to be joined by the alto and bass on the word "We." IIB is characterized by a return to the style of freely imitative polyphony that dominates "I Praise the Tender Flower," "I Have Loved Flowers That Fade," and "Clear and Gentle Stream." "The additive textural character of the final musical phrase of stanza III is not only clearly indicative of 'the

innumerable choir of day' but it also imparts a sense of cumulative rhythmic drive crucial to the arrival of the final cadence."<sup>26</sup>

Haste on, My Joys!

- 1 Haste on, my joys! your treasure lies
- 2 In swift, unceasing flight.
- 3 O haste: for while your beauty flies
- 4 I seize your full delight.
- 5 Lo! I have seen the scented flower,
- 6 Whose tender stems I cull,
- 7 For her brief date and meted hour
- 8 Appear more beautiful.
  
- 9 O youth, O strength, O most divine
- 10 For that so short ye prove;
- 11 Were but your rare gifts longer mine,
- 12 Ye scarce would win my love.
- 13 Nay, life itself the heart would spurn,
- 14 Did once the days restore
- 15 The days, that once enjoyed return,
- 16 Return – ah! nevermore.<sup>27</sup>

*Poetic Form*

“Haste on, My Joys!,” the sixth poem in *Shorter Poems, Book III* marks a return to the symmetrical stanzaic formulae of songs one through four. Its two stanzas contain eight lines that in turn consist of an alternating 8-6 syllabic scansion. Bridges’ symmetrical poetic structure is further established as each stanza contains two distinct quatrains, the first of which being equally divisible. Major textual punctuation points delineate these subsections. Table 3.12 highlights this poetic scheme. Thus each stanza contains three complete poetic thoughts; a formula supported and clarified through Finzi’s use of textural variation.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>27</sup>Milford, 269.

Table 3.12. "Haste on, My Joys!" Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/9	8	A
2/10	6	B
3/11	8	A
4/12	6	B
5/13	8	C
6/14	6	D
7/15	8	C
8/16	6	D

### *Musical Form and Texture*

For the sixth selection of *Op. 17* Finzi again employs the five-voice format of "Nightingales." In this setting Bridges' poetic structure is clearly maintained and articulated through multiple homophonic voice combinations and three, four, and five-part counterpoint differentiated by an assortment of voice pairings. Table 3.13 clarifies this structure, labeling major sections, subsections, corresponding measure numbers and poetic lines, and the dominant texture used to delineate each subsection.

Table 3.13. "Haste on, My Joys!" Musical Form

Section	Subsections		
I	A-1 m. 1-4 Lines 1-2 3-Part Imitation	A-2 m. 8-9 Lines 3-4 4-Part Imitation	B m. 10-19 Lines 5-8 5-Part Homophony
II	A-1 m. 20-25 Lines 9-10 5-Part Homophony	A-2 m. 26-31 Lines 11-12 5-Part Imitation	B m. 32-48 Lines 13-16 2-Part Voice Pairing/Homophony

The piece opens with a flurry of excitement and activity. For his setting of Subsection IA-1 Finzi employs all five voices in an imitative, three-part polyphonic texture: first sopranos, followed by two distinct voice pairings of second soprano/alto and tenor/bass. Subsection IA-2 functions in a nearly identical manner. Yet in this instance

the polyphonic texture contains four distinct parts: second soprano, an alto/tenor voice pairing, first soprano, and bass. Subsection IB is distinguished by the metric space in measure nine and the establishment of the work's first appearance of homophony (Example 18). This subsection, while principally homophonic, temporarily breaks into a moment of imitative counterpoint at the line, "Whose tender stems I cull."

The image shows a musical score for five voices: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto/Tenor, Soprano 3, and Bass. The music is in 3/4 time and G major. It features a homophonic texture with lyrics: "Lo! I have seen the scent-ed flower, Whose ten-der stems I". Dynamics include *f*, *mp*, and *fz*. The score is numbered 10 at the beginning.

Example 18. "Haste on, My Joys!" Measures 10-13  
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Subsection IIA-1 maintains the chordal texture of the previous section's closing. The ascending octave leap associated with "O youth" and "O strength" constitutes another compositional element taken from Section I (Example 19). The same interval is used as the fundamental melodic unit of both Subsection IA-1 and IA-2. In this instance, however, the octave leap is used to convey the words "Haste on" and "O haste." This relationship provides musical continuity between major sections and strengthens the poetic association of haste, youth, and strength, reflecting the poet's, and Finzi's, perspective on the transient nature of life. Subsection IIA-2 marks a drastic textural change as densely scored, five-part imitative counterpoint conveys the passionate pleas of lines eleven and twelve. The final subsection is distinguished by a shift towards two-part



voice pairing: tenor/bass followed by first soprano/second soprano/alto (Example 20). At measure 37 the two voice pairings converge, establishing the predominantly chordal texture of the final twelve measures.

- A tempo

O youth, O strength, O

-pear more beau-ti-ful. O youth, O strength, O

Ap-pear more beau-ti-ful. O youth, O strength, O

Ap-pear more beau-ti-ful. O youth, O strength, O

Ap-pear more beau-ti-ful. O youth, O strength, O

**Example 19. "Haste on, My Joys!" Measures 17-21**  
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A tempo

my love. *mf cresc.* Nay, life it-self the

my love. *mf cresc.* Nay, life it-self the

my love. *mf cresc.* Nay, life it-self the

love. *mf cresc.* Nay, life it-self the heart would spurn, *f*

love. *mf cresc.* Nay, life it-self the heart would spurn, *f*

A tempo

**Example 20. "Haste on, My Joys!" Measures 31-33**  
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### Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care

- 1 Wherefore to-night so full of care,
- 2 My soul, revolving hopeless strife,
- 3 Pointing at hindrance, and the bare
- 4 Painful escapes of fitful life?

5 Shaping the doom that may befall  
 6 By precedent of terror past:  
 7 By love dishonoured, and the call  
 8 Of friendship slighted at the last?  
  
 9 By treasured names, the little store  
 10 That memory out of wreck could save  
 11 Of loving hearts, that gone before  
 12 Call their old comrade to the grave?  
  
 13 O soul, be patient: thou shalt find  
 14 A little matter mend all this;  
 15 Some strain of music to thy mind,  
 16 Some praise for skill not spent amiss.  
  
 17 Again shall pleasure overflow  
 18 Thy cup with sweetness, thou shalt taste  
 19 Nothing but sweetness, and shalt grow  
 20 Half sad for sweetness run to waste.  
  
 21 O happy life! I hear thee sing,  
 22 O rare delight of mortal stuff!  
 23 I praise my days for all they bring,  
 24 Yet are they only not enough.<sup>28</sup>

### *Poetic Form*

“Dejection,” Bridges’ title for the eleventh poem in *Shorter Poems, Book II* serves as a fitting conclusion to *Op. 17*. “In choosing the poem as the final one of the set, Finzi strengthens the sense of impermanence associated with joy and gloom, youth and beauty, love and rejection, fear and trust.”<sup>29</sup> The symmetry of its poetic construction is also indicative of Finzi’s textual choices. “Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care” is set in six stanzas. Each contains a single quatrain with eight syllables per line. Its poetic structure is detailed in Table 3.14.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 260-261.

<sup>29</sup>McCoy, 122.

Table 3.14. “Wherefore To-night So Full of Care” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/5/9/13/17/21	8	A
2/6/10/14/18/22	8	B
3/7/11/15/19/23	8	A
4/8/12/16/20/24	8	B

Stanzas four, five, and six serve as a reflection upon the first three, creating a two-part structure naturally derived from the poem’s meaning. Bridges provides further poetic balance through additional phrase divisions by inserting major textual punctuation points following line two in stanzas two, four, and six. These divisions, shown in Table 3.15, clearly influenced Finzi’s setting and provide a final example of his subtle yet effective use of textural variation to highlight poetic form.

Table 3.15. “Wherefore To-night So Full of Care” Poetic Phrasing

Stanza I	Stanza II		Stanza III	Stanza IV		Stanza V	Stanza VI	
1 Phrase	2 Phrases		1 Phrase	2 Phrases		1 Phrase	2 Phrases	
Lines	Lines		Lines	Lines		Lines	Lines	
1-4	5-6	7-8	9-12	13-14	15-16	17-20	21-22	23-24

### *Musical Form and Texture*

“Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care,” the seventh and final selection of *Op. 17* is set using the four-voice ensemble of songs one through four. Once again Finzi’s musical form adheres to the prescribed structure established by Bridges. Table 3.16 provides a musical/poetic outline that includes major sections, subsections, corresponding measure numbers, and poetic lines. “The entire work is set homophonically except for brief passages associated with words or phrases indicative of motion: “wrecked,” “strain of music” and “run to waste.””<sup>30</sup> Phrases of this nature contain an implicit sense of

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 136.

discord and are treated accordingly: either through passing moments of four-part imitation or two-part voice pairing.

Table 3.16. "Wherefore To-night So Full of Care" Musical Form

Section	Subsections		
I	A m. 1-8 Lines 1-4	B-1 m. 9-11 Lines 5-6	C m. 16-21 Lines 9-12
		B-2 m. 12-15 Lines 7-8	
II	A-1 m. 22-25 Lines 13-14	B m. 30-35 Lines 17-20	C-1 m. 36-38 Lines 21-22
	A-2 m. 26-29 Lines 15-16		C-2 m. 39-41 Lines 23-24

Section I opens with a three-voice homophonic texture distinguished by a recurring triplet motive. Subsection IB-1 maintains the homophonic texture and triplet motive from the opening. Texturally, it is only delineated by the metric space of measure eight. IB-2 marks the first of the imitative passages used to designate text of a particularly discordant nature (Example 21).

Example 21 shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics. The lyrics are: "past: By love dis-honoured, and the call Of friend-ship slight-". The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a triplet motive in the first staff, which is repeated in the second and third staves. The fourth staff shows a more complex texture with overlapping lines.

Example 21. "Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care" Measures 11-13  
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Here Finzi sets the upper three voices in a flash of canonic imitation. Each voice enters on successive eighth notes, while the bass proceeds, unaffected, along a stepwise descending octave. At Subsection IC Finzi briefly returns to a principally chordal texture before embarking on an imitative flourish reminiscent of the previous subsection. In this instance, however, two consecutive statements, “That memory out of wreck could save” and “Of loving hearts, that gone before,” are set polyphonically before returning to homophony for the final two measures.

Section II begins in the same homophonic manner as Section I. Again the soprano is conspicuously absent, this time for the entirety of Subsection IIA-1. Two-part voice pairing (soprano/alto and tenor/bass), coupled with metric space distinguish the opening of Subsection IIA-2 (Example 22).

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a homophonic setting. The lyrics are: "Some strain of mu-sic to thy mind, Some all this; mend all this; mat-ter mend all this; Some strain of mu-sic to thy mind, Some strain of mu-sic to thy mind, Some strain of mu-sic to thy mind, Some strain of mu-sic to thy mind." The score includes dynamic markings like *p* and *f*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs.

Example 22. “Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care” Measures 25-27  
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Subsection IIB marks a significant turning point, both poetic and musical. It is only at line 17 that one begins to believe the poet’s newfound sense of hope that the “Dejection” of Bridges’ title can be overcome; that truly, “thou shalt taste nothing but sweetness.” A key change coupled with the resolute return of homophony confirms

Finzi's response (Example 23). Subsection IIC-1 continues this chordal texture following a brief imitative interlude on the text "sweetness run to waste" at the conclusion of IIB. The final subsection marks the third appearance of the texture used at the work's opening. Finzi sets line 23 using only the lower three voices. For the final line they are joined by the sopranos, providing a dramatic conclusion to the entire set.

The image shows a musical score for four voices, likely SATB. Each staff contains a line of music with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "spent a - miss. A - gain shall pleas-ure o - ver-flow Thy cup". The music is written in a single system with four staves. The lyrics are aligned with the notes on each staff. The first staff has a long note under "miss." and "A -". The second staff has a long note under "miss." and "A -". The third staff has a long note under "miss." and "A -". The fourth staff has a long note under "miss." and "A -".

Example 23. "Wherefore To-Night So Full of Care" Measures 29-30  
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## CHAPTER IV

## FIVE FLOWER SONGS, OP. 47

As the score's dedication attests, Benjamin Britten composed *Five Flower Songs* in the early months of 1950 to celebrate the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst, longtime friends and financial benefactors. According to Britten the work was "written about flowers because they [the Elmhirsts] are both amateur botanists."<sup>1</sup> The set contains five unaccompanied four-part settings of works by three English poets: Robert Herrick, George Crabbe, and John Clare.

Academically the set has been virtually ignored throughout the half century since its composition. This may be due, in part, to the perception that "these songs do not convey much of the quintessential Britten."<sup>2</sup> However several sources offer strikingly different opinions. Vicki Strocher asserts, "*Five Flower Songs* captures at once the essence of English part song, the flexibility of young voices, and the joy of singing beautiful, poignant melodies and rollicking ballads. Each setting is wholly fitting to its subject and sensibility."<sup>3</sup> A review from 1951, the year the set was first published, stated, "They deserve the highest praise for their never-failing imagination and vitality, shown not only in the melodic and rhythmic subtleties of the vocal lines but also in harmony and scoring."<sup>4</sup> Finally, in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* Ralph Woodward declares, "The *Five Flower Songs* are almost universally undervalued; as demonstrations

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, 249.

<sup>2</sup>Evans, 431.

<sup>3</sup>Vicki Strocher, "Benjamin Britten: Sacred and Profane, A.M.D.G., *Five Flower Songs*, Old French Carols, Choral Dances from *Gloriana*," *The Choral Journal* Vol. 43, No. 10 (May 2003), 59.

<sup>4</sup>E. J., review of *Five Flower Songs*, by Gerald Finzi, *Music and Letters* Vol: 32, No. 4 (October 1951), 387.

of how to write twentieth-century madrigals they could scarcely be bettered, particularly in the diversity of their choral textures.”<sup>5</sup> Yet none of these sources offer significant analysis to support these claims. Therefore a thorough investigation of the relationship linking its poetry, textures, and compositional structure is long overdue.

Throughout *Five Flower Songs* Britten used textural variation as a means of articulating each poem’s internal construction as well as illuminating its meaning. Although the set rarely uses more than four voices, Britten’s imagination, ingenuity, and technical mastery are ever-present in a myriad of textural variations including homophony, voice pairing, canon, fugato, and instrumentally derived melody/accompaniment figures.<sup>6</sup>

#### To Daffodils

- 1 Fair daffodils, we weep to see
- 2 You haste away so soon;
- 3 As yet the early-rising sun
- 4 Has not attain’d his noon.
- 5 Stay, stay
- 6 Until the hasting day
- 7 Has run
- 8 But to evensong;
- 9 And, having pray’d together, we
- 10 Will go with you along.
  
- 11 We have short time to stay, as you,
- 12 We have as short a spring;
- 13 As quick a growth to meet decay,
- 14 As you, or anything.
- 15 We die
- 16 As your hours do, and dry
- 17 Away
- 18 Like to the summer’s rain;

---

<sup>5</sup>Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 268.

<sup>6</sup>Only *The Ballad of Green Broom* calls for four-part *divisi*.



19 Or as the pearls of morning's dew;  
20 Ne'er to be found again.<sup>7</sup>

*Poetic Form*

The first two songs, “To Daffodils” and “The Succession of the Four Sweet Months,” employ poems by Robert Herrick, a prolific 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet who wrote over 1,400 works. Apart from a few insignificant changes such as the modernization of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, Britten’s settings of the poems are unaltered from their original state.

Although “To Daffodils” is not representative of a standard poetic scheme, in it Herrick established a highly refined organizational structure. Analysis reveals a symmetrical two-stanza structure consisting of ten lines each. Each stanza contains two complete thoughts in which the second statement functions as a comment upon or continuation of the first statement. Thus each stanza includes two distinct quatrains interrupted by a single rhymed couplet. Table 4.1 highlights this poetic structure.

Table 4.1. “To Daffodils” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme	Final Word
1/11	8	A	see/you
2/12	6	B	soon/spring
3/13	8	C	sun/decay
4/14	6	B	noon/anything
5/15	2	D	stay/die
6/16	6	D	day/dry
7/17	2	C	run/away
8/18	5	E	evensong/rain
9/19	8	A	we/dew
10/20	6	E	along/again

<sup>7</sup>Boris Ford, ed., *Benjamin Britten's Poets: The poetry he set to music*, 157.

*Musical Form and Texture*

Britten sets each stanza as an independent section comprised of two distinct musical phrases that align with major textual punctuation points. In this manner Britten's setting mirrors Herrick's two-part structure both within each stanza and in the broader context of the entire poem. Both sections also close with a coda reminiscent of the opening phrase providing textural continuity throughout the entire work. Table 4.2 displays this structure, labeling sections, subsections, and their corresponding measure numbers and poetic lines.

Table 4.2. "To Daffodils" Musical Form

Section	Subsections		
I m. 1-39	A-1 m. 1-8 Lines 1-2	B-1 m. 17-23 Lines 5-8	Coda-I m. 33-39 Free repetition of Line 10
	A-2 m. 9-16 Lines 3-4	B-2 m. 24-32 Lines 9-10	
II m. 40-77	A m. 40-56 Lines 11-14	B m. 57-69 Lines 15-19	Coda-II m. 70-77 Line 20

Section I features strict two-part voice pairing. This technique is utilized throughout *Five Flower Songs* and is indicative of Britten's attempt to distinguish this set from his previous work as belonging to the British part-song tradition of earlier generations. The two voice pairings, soprano/bass and alto/tenor, interact through imitative counterpoint, creating a rhythmic conflict that characterizes the entirety of Section I and both codas (Example 24).

This texture is described in further detail in Peter Evans' *The Music of Benjamin Britten*.

At least three sources of tension are operating simultaneously: the derivation of every line from a single four-note shape, the drag of the middle two parts behind the outer two, and the ostinato-like bass's resistance to the downward, then upward, movement of the rhythmically identical soprano part.<sup>8</sup>

Allegro impetuoso

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The tempo is marked 'Allegro impetuoso'. The lyrics are: 'Fair daf-fo-dils, we weep to see You haste....'. The score shows the first four measures of the piece. The Soprano part starts with a four-note shape (F4, A4, B4, G4) and repeats it. The Alto and Tenor parts follow a similar pattern but are slightly behind. The Bass part has a more complex rhythm, with a four-note shape (F3, A3, B3, G3) that is repeated. The lyrics are: 'Fair daf-fo-dils, we weep to see You haste....'. The score is in 4/4 time and has a key signature of one flat (Bb).

Allegro impetuoso

Example 24. "To Daffodils" Measures 1-4

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In stanza two the poem's subject turns to the brevity of the daffodil's, and metaphorically, our life. Britten articulates this poetic shift through textural variety. In Section II he abandons two-part voice pairing in favor of three-part homophony in the upper voices offset by an independent bass line constructed of fragmented phrases that imitate the melodic and rhythmic content used in the opening section and both codas (Example 25). These "snatches of homophony" are highlighted by staccato articulation and serve to further illustrate Herrick's commentary on the transient nature of life.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Evans, 430.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 431.

pp  
We have short time to stay, as

pp  
We have short time to stay, as

pp  
We have short time to stay, as

pp sotto voce  
Fair.....

Example 25. "To Daffodils" Measures 40-42  
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### The Succession of the Four Sweet Months

- 1 First, April, she with mellow showers
- 2 Opens the way for early flowers;
- 3 Then after her comes smiling May,
- 4 In a more rich and sweet array;
- 5 Next enters June, and brings us more
- 6 Gems, than those two, that went before:
- 7 Then (lastly) July comes, and she
- 8 More wealth brings in, than all those three.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Poetic Form*

Although more simply constructed than "To Daffodils," "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" is also structured in a clear, systematized manner. Its single stanza contains four rhymed couplets of iambic tetrameter.<sup>11</sup> This creates a perfectly symmetrical structure; eight lines each containing eight syllables. Table 4.3 illustrates this structure.

<sup>10</sup>Ford, 157-8.

<sup>11</sup>In poetic analysis, the *metrical foot* is the basic metric unit used to group together stressed and unstressed syllables. The term *iamb* refers to a metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Therefore, *iambic tetrameter* refers to a line of poetry containing four iambic metrical feet.

Table 4.3. "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1	8	A
2	8	A
3	8	B
4	8	B
5	8	C
6	8	C
7	8	D
8	8	D

### *Musical Form and Texture*

In "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" Britten implements a straightforward binary structure, mirroring Herrick's forthright poetic form. Table 4.4 clarifies the following formal analysis.

Table 4.4. "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" Musical Form

Section	Subsections			
I m. 1-19	A m. 1-4 Lines 1-2 Soprano	B m. 5-10 Lines 3-4 Alto	C m. 11-14 Lines 5-6 Tenor	D m. 15-19 Lines 7-8 Bass
II m. 20-29	m. 20-29 Soprano/Tenor/Alto/Bass			
Coda m. 30-33	m. 30-33 Soprano/Alto/Tenor/Bass			

In Section I the four voices enter separately in a fugal manner. Each voice represents one of the four months described in the poem. The sopranos begin, followed by the altos who establish the fugato with a real answer of the first four pitches in the soprano subject (Example 26). The tenors and basses continue this pattern, beginning in measures 11 and 15 respectively. In accordance with their designation as a representation of distinct months each voice develops a unique melodic/rhythmic character following the initial four pitches. After their initial statement each voice remains in the texture to

support the newly added voices yet retaining its distinctive character through various mutations of its melodic and poetic content. Only the bass, which enters last and makes one complete poetic statement, does not engage in the phrase mutation technique used in the upper three voices.

Andante legato

SOPRANO *pp*  
First, A-pril, she with mel-low showers O-pens the way for ear-ly

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

PIANO (rehearsal only) *pp*  
Andante legato  
flowers, for ear-ly flowers, First, A - pril, she.....  
Then af-ter her..... comes smil-ing...

Example 26. "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" Measures 1-6  
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Section II contains a full flowering of the four voices. Britten employs a variety of phrase mutations in all four voices before closing with a short coda in which each voice simply states the name of its representative month (Example 27). Britten's use of a two-part binary form delineated by textural intensity illustrates a subtle reiteration of Herrick's poetic intent. "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" describes the natural progression of spring from April showers to the wealth of a beautiful July afternoon.

Each month carries its own distinct characteristics but is intrinsically linked to those that came before. Although Section II does not function as a carrier of new text it is needed to convey the duality Herrick's purpose.

Example 27. "The Succession of the Four Sweet Months" Measures 30-33

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### Marsh Flowers

- 1 Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,
- 2 Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly fruit:
- 3 On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,
- 4 And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen;
- 5 Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,
- 6 Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume;
- 7 At the wall's base the fiery nettle springs,
- 8 With fruit globose and fierce with poison'd stings;
- 9 In ev'ry chink delights the fern to grow,
- 10 With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below;
- 11 The few dull flowers that o'er the place are spread
- 12 Partake the nature of their fenny bed;
- 13 These, with our sea-weeds, rolling up and down,
- 14 Form the contracted Flora of our town.<sup>12</sup>

### *Poetic Form*

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 158.

In “Marsh Flowers” Britten created a new poetic composition by extracting and combining lines from two pre-existing works by George Crabbe: “Letter XVIII, The Poor and their Dwellings” from *The Borough* (1810) and “Tale X, The Lover’s Journey” from *Tales* (1812).<sup>13</sup> The result is an English sonnet: seven rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter.<sup>14</sup> Table 4.5 highlights this poetic form.

Table 4.5. “Marsh Flowers” Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1	10	A
2	10	A
3	10	B
4	10	B
5	10	C
6	10	C
7	10	D
8	10	D
9	10	E
10	10	E
11	10	F
12	10	F
13	10	G
14	10	G

The unique quality of this setting lies in the liberties taken by Britten when rearranging the extracted lines within the context of a newly constructed poem. Lines 4, 7, and 8 of “Marsh Flowers” occur consecutively in their original setting. However, in Britten’s newly constructed poem they are interrupted by lines 5 and 6, extracted from “The Lover’s Journey”. Conversely, Britten eliminates the two lines that separate lines 8 and 9 in “The Poor and their Dwellings”. In addition Britten altered the word “the” in line 14 to “our”.

<sup>13</sup> George Crabbe was born in Britten’s hometown of Aldeburgh, Suffolk. His poetry is known for its realistic description of life in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century English village.

<sup>14</sup> *Pentameter* refers to a line of verse containing five metrical feet. Therefore, *iambic pentameter* simply indicates that a poem contains of five iambic feet per line.



As innocuous as this alteration may seem, it changes the entire perspective from which the poet tells his story. Prior to this modification, an anonymous narrator portrays the poem's description of the region's unsightly plant life. Yet when the first person plural pronoun "our" is introduced, the poem takes on an unexpected personal character. Perhaps Britten sought to heighten the regional connection between the poet and himself and, in doing so, invited the performer and listener into the landscape of his beloved Aldeburgh. Example 28 presents all fourteen lines in their original context.

1 Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,  
 2 Here the dull night-shade hangs her deadly fruit;  
 3 On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,  
 4 And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen:  
 7 At the wall's base the fiery nettle springs,  
 8 With fruit globose and fierce with poison'd stings;  
    Above (the growth of many a year) is spread  
    The yellow level of the stone-crop's bed;  
 9 In every chink delights the fern to grow,  
 10 With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below:  
 13 These, with our sea-weeds, rolling up and down,  
 14 Form the contracted Flora of the town.

11 The few dull flowers that o'er the place are spread  
 12 Partake the nature of their fenny bed;  
 5 Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,  
 6 Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume;<sup>15</sup>

Example 28. Selections from "The Poor and their Dwellings" and "The Lover's Journey"<sup>16</sup>

In this manner Britten succeeded in designing a unique artistic creation divorced from the poet's creative participation. As a result, "Marsh Flowers" exists more as an expression of Britten's artistic persona than that of Crabbe.

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<sup>15</sup>Ford, 158-9.

<sup>16</sup> Numbers refer to the line's place in Britten's composite poem, *Marsh Flowers*.

### *Musical Form and Texture*

Britten's setting contains four distinct sections delineated by textural variation. These musical sections align with major textual punctuation points and highlight the poem's unique composite structure. The first and last textural changes (m. 17, 31) occur after the insertion of lines from *The Lover's Journey* discussed above. The second textural change (m. 21) follows the deletion of two lines from *The Poor and their Dwellings*. Again Britten's formal design is influenced by and adheres to the poetic structure of his chosen text. However, in this instance it was a structure he helped to create. Table 4.6 illustrates this structure.

Table 4.6. "Marsh Flowers" Musical Form

Section	Subsection			
I m. 1-16	A-1 m. 1-3 Line 1	A-2 m. 4-6 Line 2	A-3 m. 7-11 Lines 3-4	A-4 m. 12-16 Lines 5-6
II m. 17-21	A m. 17-18 Line 7		B m. 18/19-21 Line 8	
III m. 21/22-30	m. 21/22-30 Lines 9-12			
IV m. 31-38	A m. 31-34 Line 13		B m. 35-38 Line 14	

Section I features four distinct subsections set with strict voice pairing: soprano/tenor and alto/bass. Subsections IA-1 and IA-2 set a single line of text in harmonically sparse homophonic octaves accompanied by a one-measure drone on the opening pitch (Example 29). Line one is carried by the alto/bass while line two is sung by soprano/tenor. Subsections IA-3 and IA-4 begin in the same vein yet Britten prolongs each phrase by reintroducing the drone voices as an independent melodic line that carries the following line of text. In Subsection IA-3 the introductory voice pair (alto/bass)

retains its own poetic line throughout. However, this technique is abandoned in Subsection IA-4. Once the introductory voice pair (soprano/tenor) makes their poetic statement (line 5) they join the alto/bass, closing Section I with a brief moment of musical and poetic homophony.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in 4/4 time and G minor. The lyrics are: "Here the strong mal-low strikes her sli - my root, her sli - my". Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *f* (forte). The Soprano and Tenor parts have a melisma on the word "Here".

Example 29. "Marsh Flowers" Measures 1-2

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The closing moments of Section I serve as an appropriate transition to the four-part homophony of Section II. Textually, this section contains only lines 7-8, which are set as two distinct phrases. Both phrases begin on a G minor triad set in a low register before culminating in an upward octave glissando on the final word of the phrase (Example 30). Britten expands Subsection IIB with an extended melisma on the word "poison'd." This is the first melisma in the entire piece and the only moment of rhythmic variance in Section II. By applying these techniques so judiciously Britten draws the listener's attention to the text's inherent expressive potential.

At the wall's base the fie - ry net - tle springs... With fruit glo-

At the wall's base the fie - ry net - tle springs... With fruit glo-

At the wall's base the fie - ry net - tle springs... With fruit glo-

At the wall's base the fie - ry net - tle springs... With fruit glo-

Example 30. "Marsh Flowers" Measures 17-18

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In Section III Britten divides the four voices into the two-voice pairs of Section I. Each pair functions as an independent canon set apart by a single measure (Example 31). The resulting double canon creates a highly complex musical texture and serves as another illustration of Britten's facility in seamlessly incorporating a variety of contrapuntal techniques.

..... With glos - sy leaf and taw - ny bloom be - low;..... The few dull

..... With... glos - sy..... leaf,..... The.....

- lights the fern to grow, With glos - sy leaf and taw - ny bloom.....

- sv..... leaf..... With bloom be - low;.....

Example 31. "Marsh Flowers" Measures 23-24

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The final section of "Marsh Flowers" contains an amalgamation of techniques used throughout Sections I and II. Section IV begins with a truncated reiteration of the

technique used in the opening section in which the soprano/tenor voice pair begins the melodic phrase but is interrupted by the alto/bass, who restate the same text. Both pairs continue with a homo-rhythmic triplet gesture recalling the melismatic passage of Section II. In this instance Britten simultaneously applies the octave doubling of each voice pair used in Section I (Example 32). The final phrase begins with the four-part homophony of Section II only to conclude using the two-voice pairs of Section I; soprano/tenor followed by alto/bass, once again set in octaves.

Example 32. "Marsh Flowers" Measures 32-33

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The Evening Primrose

- 1 When once the sun sinks in the west,
- 2 And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;
- 3 Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
- 4 Or its companionable star,
- 5 The evening primrose opes anew
- 6 Its delicate blossoms to the dew;
- 7 And, hermit-like, shunning the light,
- 8 Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,
- 9 Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
- 10 Knows not the beauty he possesses;
- 11 Thus it blooms on while night is by;
- 12 When day looks out with open eye,

13 Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,  
14 It faints and withers and is gone.<sup>17</sup>

*Poetic Form*

Despite Britten's manipulation of Crabbe's poetry in his creation of "Marsh Flowers," the greatest confusion associated with *Five Flower Songs* concerns the composer's setting of John Clare's "Evening Primrose". Clare is remembered as one of the most significant pastoral English poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although "The Evening Primrose" fits no standard poetic form its fourteen lines, made up of seven rhymed couplets, harkens once again to the English sonnet. It is the general use of iambic tetrameter, rather than iambic pentameter, which distinguishes this poem from the typical sonnet. Table 4.7 illustrates this structure.

Table 4.7. "The Evening Primrose" Poetic Structure

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1	8	A
2	8	A
3	8	B
4	8	B
5	8	C
6	9	C
7	8	D
8	8	D
9	9	E
10	9	E
11	8	F
12	8	F
13	8	G
14	8	G

At first glance Britten's setting appears to contain several poetic alterations of Clare's original text. These changes are highlighted in the article *Words and Music*:

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 160-1.

*Benjamin Britten's "Evening Primrose"*, which appeared in the August 2004 issue of *The Choral Journal*. The author, Chester Alwes, asserts,

...in the "Evening Primrose," interesting liberties are taken with Clare's original poem...Discounting some inconsequential differences of punctuation, Britten's text contains two outright word changes--"till" becomes "while" and the final word is changed from Clare's "done" to "gone" in the final four lines of the poem. But the most radical change is the rearrangement of line 7. Clare's original, "And shunning, hermit-like, the light," becomes "And hermit-like, shunning the light".<sup>18</sup>

However, further investigation revealed surprising results. At least four handwritten manuscripts and five published editions of "Evening Primrose" survive. Each contains variations in spelling, punctuation, word choice, and phrase structure. The edition cited in Alwes' article, presented as Example 33, appears in the book *The Poems of John Clare*, first published in 1935 and re-issued in 1953.

1 When once the sun sinks in the west,  
 2 And dew drops pearl the evening's breast,  
 3 Almost as pale as moonbeams are,  
 4 Or its companionable star,  
 5 The evening primrose opes anew  
 6 Its delicate blossoms to the dew;  
 7 And shunning, hermit-like, the light,  
 8 Wastes its fair bloom upon the night;  
 9 Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,  
 10 Knows not the beauty he possesses.  
 11 Thus it blooms on till night is by;  
 12 When day looks out with open eye,  
 13 'Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,  
 14 It faints and withers and is done.

Example 33. "Evening Primrose" from *The Poems of John Clare*, p. 517 (1953)

The first published edition of "Evening Primrose" appeared in *The Rural Muse*, a collection of Clare's poetry published in 1835. This version, listed as Example 34, pre-

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<sup>18</sup>Chester Alwes, "Words and Music: Benjamin Britten's Evening Primrose," *The Choral Journal* Vol. 45, No. 1 (August 2004): 27-28.

dates the edition cited in the article by 118 years and contains all the supposed “interesting liberties” proffered by Alwes.

1 When once the sun sinks in the west,  
 2 And dew-drops pearl the Evening’s breast;  
 3 Almost as pale as moonbeams are,  
 4 Or its companionable star,  
 5 The Evening Primrose opes anew  
 6 Its delicate blossoms to the dew;  
 7 And hermit-like, shunning the light,  
 8 Wastes its fair bloom upon the Night;  
 9 Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,  
 10 Knows not the beauty he possesses.  
 11 Thus it blooms on while Night is by;  
 12 When Day looks out with open eye,  
 13 ’Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,  
 14 It faints, and withers, and is gone.

Example 34. “Evening Primrose” from *The Rural Muse*, p. 137 (1835)

It seems highly unlikely that Britten, composing “The Evening Primrose” in 1950, would enact poetic alterations to an edition published in 1953 as purported by Alwes. It is equally improbable that these alterations would exactly mirror the first edition, published in 1835. While the existence of this edition does not discredit the entire article, for it contains an interesting assessment of Britten’s use of texture as a formal determinant, it does call into question our perceptions regarding Britten’s willingness to alter phrase structure within an individual poem selected for musical setting.

#### *Musical Form and Texture*

In Britten’s setting texture is again used to articulate Clare’s poetic form at multiple levels. “The Evening Primrose” is divided into three primary sections, setting lines 1-6 (mm. 1-11), 7-10 (mm. 12-19), and 11-14 (mm. 20-31) respectively. Based on the assumption that Britten was aware of and working from the 1835 edition discussed



above these structural divisions align with major textual punctuation points and support the notion that Britten's compositional form is directly related to the poetic form established by Clare. Table 4.8 clarifies this structure.

Table 4.8. "The Evening Primrose" Musical Form

Section	Subsection	
I m. 1-11	A-1 m. 1-4 Lines 1-2	B-1 m. 8-9 Line 5
	A-2 m. 5-7 Lines 3-4	B-2 m. 10-11 Line 6
II m. 12-19	A m. 12-15 Lines 7-8	B m. 16-19 Lines 9-10
III m. 20-31	A m. 20-25 Lines 11-13	B m. 26-31 Line 14

Each section follows a common textural pattern: four-part homophony followed by an imitative passage typically utilizing three or fewer voices. Britten departs from this scheme only once. Section I differs from following sections in that it sets six lines of poetry rather than four. He compensates by inserting an additional textural division labeled Subsection IB. This subsection is initiated using the standard four-part homophony that begins each textural division but abandons the formula in measure 10, setting the tenor as a non-imitative melodic voice amidst a three-part (SAB) homophonic texture that prolongs the harmony sung in measure 9 (Example 35). "The use of the same bipartite texture for all three sections of 'Evening Primrose' demonstrate a consciously, planned musical structure, clearly aligned with and derived from the form of the poem."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Alwes, 29.

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in G major, 4/4 time. The lyrics are: 'opes a - new ..... Its blos - soms...' (Soprano and Alto), 'opes a - new ..... Its blos - soms...' (Tenor), 'opes a - new Its del - i - cate blos - soms to ..... the dew' (Bass), and 'opes a - new ..... Its blos - soms...' (Bass). Dynamic markings include *ppp* and *p*.

Example 35. "The Evening Primrose" Measures 9-11

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Despite Britten's adherence to the homophonic/imitative structure he avoids monotony by differentiating each imitative section through a variety of voice combinations. The first imitative section, labeled Subsection IA-2, pairs the soprano and alto voices. As we have already seen, Subsection IB-2 sets the tenor against a three-part homophonic texture. The third instance, IIB, begins by returning to the two-part soprano/alto texture found in Subsection IA-2 but is interrupted by the bass, which enters on the final beat of measure 17 (Example 36). The final subsection incorporates all four voices yet each is paired (soprano/tenor and bass/alto), creating a tightly controlled double canon that serves as an exact repetition of the melodic content sung by the soprano and alto voices in measures 5-7 (Example 37). By adhering to a consistent musical format and reincorporating material from Section I Britten applies both melodic and textural connections that reinforce Clare's poetic structure and increase the listener's potential for textual understanding.

- res - ses, ..... ca - res - ses.....

to its fond ca - res - ses, ..... ca - res - ses.....

Knows not the beauty.... he..... pos - ses - ses.

### Example 36. "The Evening Primrose" Measures 17-19

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is gone... It faints and wi - thers and

It faints and wi - thers and is gone...

and is gone... It faints and wi - thers

It faints and wi - thers and is gone...

### Example 37. "The Evening Primrose" Measures 27-28

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### The Ballad of Green Broom Anonymous

- 1 There was an old man lived out in the wood,
- 2 His trade was a-cutting of Broom, green Broom;
- 3 He had but one son without thrift, without good,
- 4 Who lay in his bed till 'twas noon, bright noon.
  
- 5 The old man awoke, one morning and spoke,
- 6 He swore he would fire the room, that room,
- 7 If his John would not rise and open his eyes,
- 8 And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.

9 So Johnny arose, and he slipped on his clothes,  
 10 And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom,  
 11 He sharpened his knives, for once he contrives  
 12 To cut a great bundle of Broom, green Broom.

13 When Johnny passed under a lady's fine house,  
 14 Passed under a lady's fine room, fine room,  
 15 She called to her maid, 'Go fetch me', she said,  
 16 'Go fetch me the boy that sells Broom, green Broom.'

17 When Johnny came in to the lady's fine house,  
 18 And stood in the lady's fine room, fine room;  
 19 'Young Johnny,' she said, 'Will you give up your trade,  
 20 And marry a lady in bloom, full bloom?'

21 Johnny gave his consent, and to church they both went,  
 22 And he wedded the lady in bloom, full bloom,  
 23 At market and fair, all folks do declare,  
 24 There's none like the Boy that sold Broom, green Broom.<sup>20</sup>

### *Poetic Form*

Although Britten's composite poem "Marsh Flowers" is identified as an English sonnet, "The Ballad of Green Broom" is the only unaltered poem used in *Five Flower Songs* that fits a preexisting poetic scheme; the ballad. Ballads are typically plot-driven, involving one or more characters in a fast-paced, farcical adventure that culminates in a dramatic conclusion. Ballads are often structured with successive four line stanzas, or quatrains, in which the second and fourth lines rhyme. Curiously, in "The Ballad of Green Broom," the rhyme scheme is maintained not only within each stanza, but also throughout the entire poem; the final word in lines two and four of each stanza utilize the "oo" or [□] vowel sound. It is worth noting, however, that the individual lines of a typical ballad are much shorter than those found in "The Ballad of Green Broom."

### *Musical Form and Texture*

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<sup>20</sup>Ford, 161.

In terms of texture “The Ballad of Green Broom” provides a surprising conclusion to *Five Flower Songs*. Throughout the set Britten displays his mastery of a variety of textural devices. Not once does he repeat or duplicate a chosen textural pattern in successive stanzas or poetic sections. However, in “The Ballad of Green Broom” Britten uses a modified strophic form to link the six stanzas of the longest poem chosen for the set.

Britten’s setting consists of seven distinctive sections again delineated by textural variation. Sections I-V each carry a single stanza of text. The final two sections share the concluding stanza, each setting two lines. Table 4.9 illustrates this structure, including major sections, subsections, and corresponding measure numbers and poetic lines.

Table 4.9. “The Ballad of Green Broom” Musical Form

Section	Subsection	
I m. 1-18	Stanza 1: Lines 1-4	
II m. 19-35	Stanza 2: Lines 5-8	
III m. 36-53	Stanza 3: Lines 9-12	
IV m. 54-66	Stanza 4: Lines 13-16	
V m. 67-79	A m. 67-72 Lines 17-18	B m. 73-79 Lines 19-20
VI m. 80-87	Lines 21-22	
VII m. 87/88-103	Lines 23-24	

In the first four sections Britten sets a single melodic voice against an instrumentally derived three-part accompaniment (Example 38). This melody/accompaniment technique, conspicuously missing throughout *Five Flower*

*Songs*, is distinctive because it represents a direct link to Britten's typical style in his a cappella choral settings, most notably *Hymn to St. Cecilia* and *Advance Democracy*. Here Britten applies the technique as an efficient means of setting a lengthy text and as a clever gesture of text painting that carries dual significance. Douglas L. Jones describes it as "an incessant rhythmic drive which imitates the sweeping motion of a broom,"<sup>21</sup> while Peter Evans assigns another meaning altogether. "The indiscriminately alternating tonics and dominants of the ballad-singer's guitar strum in the accompanying voices of the first two verses; thereafter their texture is disintegrated progressively so that each voice acquires more independence until the imitative writing of verse 5."<sup>22</sup>

Example 38. "The Ballad of Green Broom" Measures 14-16

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Britten also guides the listener's understanding of the poem's story format by carefully selecting which melodic voice carries each successive stanza. The tenor functions as the anonymous narrator of the first stanza set in Section I. Section II turns to the bass who serves the role of the "old man" in stanza two. Stanza three, again the

<sup>21</sup>Jones, 119.

<sup>22</sup>Evans, 430.

anonymous narrator, is sung by the sopranos while stanza four, which introduces the “lady in full bloom” is aptly sung by the alto, the more “mature” female voice.

In Section V Britten abandons the melody/accompaniment texture of previous sections in favor of two-part canonic imitation, first the bass and tenor followed by the alto and soprano (Examples 39 and 40).

Example 39. “The Ballad of Green Broom” Measures 67-69  
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Here again Britten uses textural variation to direct the listener’s attention to plot development. It is no coincidence that the subject of marriage, initiated in stanza five, is accompanied by the sudden joining of voices in a musical altercation in which the female voices have the last word. Britten is also careful to save the female canon for the second half of stanza five in which the “lady in full bloom” speaks directly.

“Young John - ny” she said, Will you  
 “Young John - ny” she said, “Will you give up your  
 room.....  
 room.....

Example 40. “The Ballad of Green Broom” Measures 73-75

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The final two sections share stanza six, beginning with a variation on the melody/accompaniment texture used in the opening. This time, however, the melody is carried by the alto and bass in octaves while the soprano and tenor serve as accompanying voices on alternating block chords (Example 41). This “marriage” of the alto and bass voices accurately symbolizes the text as Johnny gives his consent and marries the lady thus forfeiting his youth and adopting a newfound “maturity” as a bass. In Section VII all four voices unite for a homophonic *accelerando* finale distinguishing the final two poetic lines’ return to the voice of the narrator and serving as a summation of the entire poem.

La - dy in full bloom?" Green..... Broom,.....  
 La - dy in full bloom?" John - ny gave his con-sent,  
 Green Broom,  
 John - ny gave his con-sent,

Example 41. “The Ballad of Green Broom” Measures 79-81

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## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study I have sought to elucidate a heretofore-unexplored commonality in the text setting practices of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten. Both are generally regarded as two of the finest composers of English vocal music in the twentieth century. Yet nearly all scholarly analysis of their works avoids, if not altogether refutes, their inherent stylistic similarities. Most writing that comments on both composers instead focuses upon their differences. In certain ways this makes perfect sense for in their own time Finzi's contribution, like many other contemporary British composers, was overshadowed by Britten's "imaginative precision" and "fluent technique," thus distinguishing him as "the first British composer to capture and hold the attention of musicians and their audiences the world over, as well as at home."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, both men held strong, often critical, opinions concerning the other's music. After attending a Newbury String Players concert in 1942, Britten wrote to Peter Pears describing the event. "Sophy [Wyss] sang with an amateur (and how) orchestra under Finzi" and caricatured Finzi's attitude stating, "I prefer this to those horrible professionals' sort of thing – ugh!"<sup>2</sup> Similarly, upon hearing a December 1951 broadcast of Britten's *Billy Bud*, Finzi called the music "almost worthless."<sup>3</sup>

Despite their mutual disdain for each other's work both men shared several values that, had they been more aware, could have fostered a shared personal respect if not a

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<sup>1</sup>Evans, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Donald Mitchell, ed., *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976, Volume Two*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1056.

<sup>3</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 201.

meaningful friendship. “[T]hey were at one – did they but realize it – in their passionate sympathy with minorities and victims of prejudice, in their pacific outlook, their love of England, and of English poetry.”<sup>4</sup> It is McVeagh’s final supposition, their shared love of English poetry, that I believe unconsciously led them to an analogous musical response in which poetic structure functions as the primary determinant of musical form. This similarity in Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten’s vocal music exists as a shared response to their love of poetry on its own merit.

The poetry chosen for *Op. 17* and *Op. 47* reflects both the poetic sensibility of their authors and the circumstances in which they were composed. *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* was not originally created as a unified set. As was his custom when seeking publication, Finzi collected a number of settings that he felt reflected a common poetic design. Thus any concern for the presentation of these songs as a set came as an afterthought. He never considered the circumstances of performing these works such as the musicians’ limitations or the tastes of the audience. Finzi himself admitted his indifference towards the set’s complexity. “These at least have the merit of being too difficult to be sung except by expert choirs!”<sup>5</sup> As a result the set lacks both musical and poetic variety. Although these settings were written over several years they reveal a surprisingly consistent representation of Finzi’s general attitude concerning life and death. As discussed Chapter II the early loss of his father, brothers, and musical mentor profoundly influenced his perspective concerning the transience of life. These songs consequently offer a unique glimpse into Finzi’s mind and perhaps bring us closer to knowing his true personality.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>5</sup>Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 190.

Conversely, the poems used in *Five Flower Songs* reveal very little concerning the emotional state of Benjamin Britten. They instead demonstrate the practical nature of the vast majority of his compositions. Britten rarely composed music simply to express his innermost feelings. He considered himself, first and foremost, a *professional* composer. Therefore most of his works were either commissioned or stem from a specific, purpose-driven inspiration. Britten rarely wrote new music without taking into account the circumstances of its first scheduled performance. Thus a realistic consideration of the musicians' abilities, the acoustics of the performance venue, and the artistic expectations of the listener always governed his compositional procedure. *Five Flower Songs* is no exception. Britten composed the set as a gift to commemorate the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Leonard and Dorothy Elmhurst. The poems he chose, while clearly representative of his personal tastes, primarily serve as a response to his knowledge of the Elmhurst's fondness for all types of flowers. A student choir led by Imogen Holst premiered the work in an outdoor concert on July 23, 1950. "Britten almost certainly knew of the outdoor arrangements and the inherent difficulties they would present, and the potential limitations of the student vocalists."<sup>6</sup> Although *Five Flower Songs* presents many challenges to the performer they are never outside the reach of a competent amateur choir. Like the majority of Britten's music, *Op. 47* fulfills the needs of its compositional genesis. "Singers will undoubtedly find that Britten's settings can be...securely mastered, and that they always 'sound' well."<sup>7</sup>

Both Finzi and Britten felt compelled to express their understanding of a poem's meaning through a musical/poetic partnership meant, "to embellish, underscore, and

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<sup>6</sup>Stroeher, 59.

<sup>7</sup>Evans, 432.

reflect the poetry so that it would touch the heart and soul of the listener.”<sup>8</sup> While each developed a distinctive musical language, both maintained a musical/poetic relationship in which “the composer should court his text, designing a musical structure compliant to his purpose while according the words the care of the poet whose art they first were.”<sup>9</sup> According to Britten, “The music stems directly from the words, deriving from the poem’s color and rhythm as well as from its meaning. The result is certainly a new entity with its own individual life, but in no way replacing the poem in its naked form.”<sup>10</sup> In the words of Howard Ferguson, Finzi’s longtime friend and musical associate, “He didn’t do things because he thought them out, he did them because he felt them,”<sup>11</sup> a sentiment that I feel is equally applicable to Britten.

This is not to say, however, that their musical response was purely emotional or unplanned. Each composer developed highly organized methods of text setting employed in response to “feelings” elicited by the text. As discussed in Chapters III and IV Finzi and Britten sought to articulate each piece’s musical/poetic form through distinctive implementation of textural variation. Throughout *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* Finzi employed rhythmic differentiation, metric space, and variation in the number and grouping of voice parts to distinguish the overall rhythmic character and initiation of each successive poetic thought. In *Five Flower Songs* Britten’s textural variation is distinguished by the implementation of a variety of standard polyphonic techniques

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<sup>8</sup>McCoy, 191.

<sup>9</sup>Barbara Docherty, “Sentence Into Cadence: The word-setting of Tippett and Britten,” *Tempo* 166 (September 1988): 2.

<sup>10</sup>Jones, 148.

<sup>11</sup>Edward Cline, “The Composer’s Use of Words: The language and music of Gerald Finzi,” *British Music* Vol. XIV (1992): 18.

including canon, fugato, and instrumentally derived melody/accompaniment figures. Additionally, Finzi adhered to an entirely syllabic approach in which each word is recited only once in each voice part; a technique completely avoided in *Five Flower Songs*. “Britten...is a composer in the Purcell mould – he is not interested in Wolf’s Poetic Supremacy Act, no matching of one note to one syllable unless that is the best way to do it.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet each set’s greatest weakness lies in its composer’s distinctive style. According to his proponents, Britten’s primary strength is the fluency with which he employs all manner of compositional techniques. *Five Flower Songs* is no exception. In each song Britten’s use of polyphony dictates the setting of its text. “The Succession of the Four Sweet Months” features a fugato that requires Britten to manipulate the text in order to support the entrance of each successive voice (Example 42).

The musical score shows three vocal parts. The Soprano part begins with a *dim.* marking and the lyrics "flowers,.... for flowers,....". The Alto part also begins with a *dim.* marking and the lyrics "more rich and sweet ar - ray,..... more sweet ar - ray,.....". The Tenor part enters with a *pp* marking and the lyrics "Next en - ters June and brings". The score is in G major and 4/4 time.

Example 42. “The Succession of the Four Sweet Months” Measures 10-12

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Once initiated this musical construct forces the composer to alter the poem’s original form thus increasing the potential for a muddled or confused rendering of the text.

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Palmer, *The Britten Companion*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 274.

“The Ballad of Green Broom” provides another fine illustration (Example 43). Britten’s setting of the fifth stanza includes two distinct two-voice cannons in which the second voice is delayed by only one beat. Although the text is left unaltered this technique obscures its meaning and provides another instance in which compositional procedure supersedes poetic considerations.

La - dy's fine house, And stood in the La - dy's fine room, fine room, fine  
house, And stood in the La - dy's fine room, fine room, fine room, fine

Example 43. “The Ballad of Green Broom” Measures 70-72

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These techniques also influence Britten’s ability to control syllabic and word stress within individual poetic phrases. The closing section of “The Evening Primrose” features a double canon derived from the melodic content of measures 5-7 (Example 44). In this instance Britten’s desire to develop and expand previously introduced melodies clearly overrides his concern for expressive text declamation. Additionally, the implementation of such a wide variety of polyphonic techniques weakens the set’s overall cohesion. Other than the general poetic theme of flowers there seems to be no element of musical connectivity between movements. As a result Britten provides the listener with a fine collection of twentieth-century part-songs rather than a unified aesthetic experience.

Example 44. "The Evening Primrose" Measures 29-31

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Likewise, *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* is not beyond reproach. In all seven songs Finzi meticulously sets each word and syllable being careful not to disturb the poet's original intentions. It is his devotion to entirely syllabic word setting, however, that presents the collection's greatest flaw. Although *Op. 17* provides the aesthetic unity lacking in *Five Flower Songs* it typically fails to capture the listener's imagination when presented as a complete set. Since all seven songs employ the same techniques they run the risk of becoming monotonous. This is due, in part, to the consistent use of imitative polyphony derived from a single recitation of each poetic phrase. Finzi's own restrictions regarding text setting caged his musical imagination, leaving moments of poetic rapture feeling stunted and musical concepts underdeveloped. He himself later referred to them as "old-maidish" and "finicky".<sup>13</sup>

Finzi's setting of the final line of "Nightingales" serves as a prime example (Example 45). How would Britten have set this phrase? We can never know for sure but it seems certain that Finzi's treatment could be vastly improved had he but allowed

<sup>13</sup>McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 77.





words of others. As a result these part-songs, while representative of each composer's unique perspective, reflect a common artistic impulse. In the words of Finzi himself, "The first and last thing is that a composer is (presumably) moved by a poem and wishes to identify himself with it and share it."<sup>14</sup> Their music is, therefore, highly successful. In both instances the musical structure of each part-song is inextricably linked to the words they set and effectively communicate the poem's form and meaning.

"Bright is the ring of words when the right man rings them."<sup>15</sup> These words, known by musicians primarily through Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* seem to perfectly capture the essence of both Finzi and Britten's compositional gift. Theirs is a music that consistently meets the needs of its chosen text. More often than not their vocal music carries a certain sense of inevitability in which the composer's setting seems the only plausible musical response. In the end I feel the aesthetic purpose of their music can be expressed in a single word: communication. To Finzi, "the question of idiom or style was of secondary value. He was more concerned with what was to be expressed than with the means of expression."<sup>16</sup> Britten's philosophy was nearly indistinguishable. "It doesn't matter what style a composer chooses to write in, as long as he has something definite to say and says it clearly."<sup>17</sup> The following passage serves as a fitting conclusion for although it was written in regard to Britten it eloquently conveys the artistic message of both composers. "[H]e writes music which it is easy to enjoy. He is not ambitious to compose great works or to say what never has been said before. He simply puts down the

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<sup>14</sup>McCoy, 16.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Louis Stevenson's *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*, 1896.

<sup>16</sup>McCoy, 10.

<sup>17</sup>Imogen Holst, *Britten*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 34-35.

ideas by which his mind is moved, and they happen to find response because they are sincerely human. His message is for everybody.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>David Ewen, ed., *The Book of Modern Composers*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1950), 522.

## APPENDIX

## LETTER OF PERMISSION TO REPRINT COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL



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